Reaching ever-married adolescent girls with family planning programming

Lessons from the TESFA project in Amhara, Ethiopia

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Recently Married Adolescent Girls

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Presentation outline

- Background
- Program Approach
  - Community groups
  - Girls groups
- Methodology
- Results/ key findings
  - What did we learn?
- Program implication/ lessons
Background

- Adolescent girls are a challenging population for both programmers and researchers
  - Adolescence is an important transitional phase
  - Adolescence is also a time of great vulnerability
  - Very different needs from both children and adults
  - Often disempowered, especially after marriage
  - Can be very hard to effectively identify, recruit and retain for programmatic interventions

- As a result, developing program models that reach this group effectively is critical
  - Especially promising, as interventions with this group may have long-term effects
The TESFA project launched in 2010 with the goal of reaching ever-married adolescent girls aged 14-19 in Amhara region, Ethiopia. Amhara region is characterized by high rates of child marriage with half married by their 15th birthday. The discontinuation of education, increased social isolation and greater disempowerment that accompanies early marriage means that these girls are largely invisible in terms of standard population statistics – hard to reach for program or research!
The TESFA project has programmatic and research goals:

- Programmatic: find the girls, enroll them in the program, and effectively deliver intervention on economic empowerment (EE) and sexual and reproductive health (SRH)?
- Research: Does combining EE and SRH programming result in improved EE and SRH outcomes compared to providing each alone?

Program delivery builds on successful group-based VSLA developed by CARE.

The project started with a six-month pilot phase which forms the basis of this presentation.
Program Approach: Achieving Community Buy-in

- Project intervention started out with community sensitization - get buy in, participation and support.
- Community/SAA groups formed with participation of ‘gate keepers’ of ever married adolescent girls – husbands, in laws, religious leaders, sector office
- SAA groups received training to reflect, challenge and act on HTPs in their community
- SAA group members were then tasked to identify eligible girls in their community to participate in the program
Program Approach: Reaching the Girls

- Girls were identified and recruited by the SAA groups through home visits and negotiations with family.
- Girls were then organized to form participant-led groups.
- Peer facilitators were selected by group members and trained on discussion curricula and facilitation skills.
- Comprehensive curricula are tailored to take into account both the age and gendered issues relevant to the community.
- Ongoing support was maintained from the social analysis and action (SAA) groups.
Methodology

- The pilot phase targeted 1000+ ever-married adolescent girls aged 14-19, lasted for about a year.
- Purpose – test feasibility of intervention and also potential impact
- Monitoring data, including information on program delivery and quality, staff and participant feedback and basic changes in behavior were collected throughout the period.
- Regular monthly meetings are held where group facilitators discuss challenges encountered and collectively suggest solutions
- Detailed qualitative data were collected from all stakeholders at the completion of the pilot phase, with a focus on lessons learned throughout the pilot phase.
What did we learn?

- Adolescent ever-married girls in this setting are even more isolated than anticipated.
- However, both program and impact have exceeded expectations:
  - Enrollment of adolescent girls into the program exceeded expectations.
  - Very high demand for program from community.
  - Very limited drop out and absence rates of project participants.
  - Girls have proven to be more receptive to SRH and EE messages than anticipated.
What did we learn (Continued)?

- The girls group setting has proven successful
  - Encourages participation
  - Creates supportive environment for discussion and taking action
  - Exceptionally high enthusiasm from girl participants
  - Training group members to deliver content has been very effective

- Clear evidence of change in both EE and SRH behaviors
  - Increased saving and income generation
  - Increased use of health facilities
  - Increases in self-confidence and improved family life
  - Girls are inspired, planning on their future, returning back to school, being involved in civic associations!
What did we learn (Continued)?

- Ongoing support and interest from SAA groups as a result of their own reflection and transformation process was key to the success.
- Diversity of members in the SAA group is reported to be comprehensive to tackle girls disempowerment issues,
  - “TESFA made all of us responsible for the challenges and solutions for the girls to come together for the cause” Elder
- SAA groups easily identify with the issues, publicly share their testimonials; inspired to be role models, and commit to change their community,
  - “The SAA made me remember exactly what I went through and I wished this was done earlier when I was younger” Mother in law
Program Implications and Lessons

- Effective programming with recently married adolescents is possible even in very challenging contexts.

- This requires significant buy-in and ownership from the community and that they trust the motives of the implementing organization(s).

- Creation of SAA groups has been an important reflection of this process, and has led to further social change beyond that envisioned by the project – 35 arranged early marriages were prevented during the pilot phase.
Program implication/ lessons

- Organizing girls into peer-support groups with commonly agreed on goals and codes of conduct has proven to be a successful way of expanding girls’ social networks and generating safe space for learning and sharing knowledge about family planning and other sensitive topics.

- Most vulnerable, invisible and hard to reach groups like married adolescent girls can be reached, transformed and inspired to change their lives and others’ through well contextualized approaches that are carefully linked with the wider community support systems.
Amesegenalehu!
Thank you!