

Semi-Annual Global Programs and Policy Report

February 2022

FY22

April - September 2021



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Children Believe, 2021

Front cover image: A girl wearing a mask in India makes a heart sign for the camera. In spite of the damaging effects of COVID-19 and the myriad other challenges our program communities faced, with the support of Children Believe and our local partners, communities are recovering and building back better.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-Based Organization
COE	Centre(s) of Excellence
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FY22	Fiscal Year 2021-2022
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SHG	Self-Help Group
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pursuant of our refreshed global 2022-2024 fiscal year strategy, our programs and policy work during the semi-annual reporting period of April to September in fiscal year 2021-2022 (FY22) focused on supporting communities to build back better. Underlying the initiative was a need for a people-centred recovery based on resilience, well-being and reduced inequality.

In line with our conviction to create access to inclusive, quality education for children, we continued to address the critical barriers for girls and boys in the COVID-19 context.

In this regard, we helped sustain access to education for over 454,071 young people.

Technological barriers became glaring during the pandemic, and we responded by striving to close the digital divide in education and improve learning outcomes. Children Believe also began to explore new technologies and digital solutions while enhancing our private sector partnerships to propel this work forward.



A computer lab in Paraguay. To contribute to breaking barriers to education, Children Believe worked to incorporate technology and develop digital solutions with private sector partners.

Health was a critical area of focus and during the reporting period, we worked hard to continue supporting the well-being of 210,435 children, young women and mothers. Our work promoting gender equality enabled 250,412 children, youth, parents and caregivers to promote the rights of girls and women, and help mitigate child marriage and other forms of gender discrimination. We promoted spaces for girls and women, and extended capacity-building efforts to improve their life skills and self-care. Further, we worked with families and community leaders to strengthen favourable attitudes and social norms related to gender role transformation, violence prevention and positive parenting.

In addition, we supported 72,269 children and youth to meaningfully participate in community actions and decision-making processes. We served as a catalyst among like-minded, child-focused organizations, reviewing and strengthening the capacity of 26 local development partners to address child rights issues in fragile and underdeveloped contexts.

Children Believe worked with government technical departments to improve their ability to execute key policies, legislations, plans and programs related to preventing and responding to violence, including gender-based violence (GBV), with an emphasis on sexual violence.

We also worked with our local partners to facilitate the participation of 251,021 young people, families and community members in awareness creation and behaviour change interventions.

Through the interventions, participants were able to develop harmonious and protective family and community environments that promoted positive behaviours and prevented violence, abuse and exploitation.

Support was extended to over 11,531 at-risk children and youth (80 percent girls) to continue their education. Children

Believe raised the awareness of teachers to understand and practice GBV-prevention actions in school environments, and equipped over 50 schools with recreational spaces for students. These efforts were pursued to support female students in particular, so they could enjoy a safer and more conducive environment to learn in.

We continued to work with over 28,600 young people to prevent irregular migration and protect them from trafficking. As a part of this effort, we extended skills training for employment and supported entrepreneurship and small business development opportunities to encourage youth to

remain in their communities rather than migrate. We also created access to the proper information needed for them to make an informed decision about migrating.

Overall, in this reporting period, our integrated and holistic capacity-building initiatives directly reached 1,063,736 vulnerable young people, families and other socially marginalized community members.



A young boy has access to reading materials in a Ghana classroom. Photo by Juris Kornets.

I – INTRODUCTION

This semi-annual report presents the key results and achievements of our programs and policy work during the first half of FY22 (April-September 2021). It highlights the impact of our programs, influence of our policy work, lessons learned and the challenges that we worked through in supporting communities to build back better after the initial waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to impact the lives and livelihoods of children, their families and communities in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Nicaragua and Paraguay.



The pandemic forced communities to shut down their local economic activities, eroded the livelihoods of impoverished households and curtailed the capacity of already fragile social services. India was especially devastated by a ‘tsunami’ of COVID-19 outbreaks. For Burkina Faso and Ethiopia, in addition to COVID-19, they experienced deterioration as a result of armed conflict, violence and displacement, while Nicaragua and Paraguay grappled with severe hurricane-induced damage. The layers of challenges experienced in each country reversed decades of hard-won development gains for children and jeopardized the accelerated progress needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to realize the rights of vulnerable children.

The impact of COVID-19 in Burkina Faso, coupled with armed violence, pushed more than 3.5-million people in the Sahel, North, Centre-North, Centre-East, East and Boucle du Mouhoun regions to become dependent on humanitarian assistance.

Of these people, 1.3-million were internally displaced persons (IDP), 60 percent of whom were children and 23 percent were women. The continued displacement and insecurity led to the closure of more than 2,300 schools and a disruption in education across these fragile communities.

The situation in Ethiopia remained highly alarming as COVID-19 prevention measures were further exacerbated by the civil war, violence and drought, notably in the northern (Amhara, Afar and Tigray regions), western (Benishangul-Gumuz, West Wellega), southern (Borona Zone) and eastern (Somali region) parts of the country. Although the situations across many of Children Believe’s operational areas in Ethiopia were more peaceful than other conflict-affected areas, still, over 23.5-million people in Children Believe-supported areas were subjected to urgent humanitarian assistance. The human cost of the conflict has been devastating. About 7,000 schools were reportedly damaged or looted, some even becoming occupied by fighting forces, pushing more than 1.4-million children in the Afar, Amhara and Tigray regions out of education.

In Ghana, the unprecedented economic impact of the pandemic, school closures and inadequate government assistance have disrupted the education of many children and put them at risk of dangerous child labour and other forms of exploitation and abuse.

Loss of access to school meals and nutrition-related initiatives, such as school feeding programs in public primary schools, resulted in over 2.9-million children struggling with food insecurity.

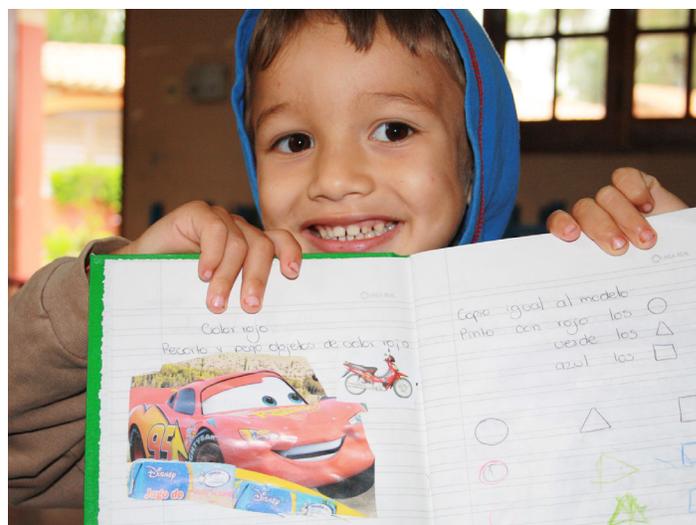
The health system continued to be challenged by weak coordination mechanisms, a lack of or inadequate quarantine and isolation facilities, and an irregular supply of laboratory and other medical supplies. For children and their families with pre-existing vulnerabilities and deprivations, notably in the northern region of Ghana where Children Believe has been operating, the effects have been especially detrimental.

The pandemic in India, with its first and second waves together affecting over 30-million people, caused colossal disruption and shocked the world. India’s large informal workforce was the worst hit, as it made up 75 percent of the 122-million jobs lost. The closure of 1.5-million elementary and secondary schools impacted 247-million children who were enrolled. This is on top of the over 6-million girls and

boys who were already out of school before the COVID-19 crisis began. During the reporting period, there was a significant increase in the number of working children, particularly in Tamil Nadu (Children Believe, India Country Update, 2021), jumping from 28.2 percent to 79.6 percent. It was noted that a long disruption of school doubles the risk of school dropouts, especially among the poor.

Nicaragua is unique for not having lockdown measures implemented. The country was not spared from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic severely impacted Nicaraguan families who lost their livelihoods due to unemployment and a decline in remittances. Additionally, the aftermath of hurricane Eta and Iota caused disastrous damage to homes and community infrastructure along the Caribbean Coast and northern Nicaragua, affecting around 1.8-million people.

Nearly 700,000 children and youth lost their homes or were in desperate situations.



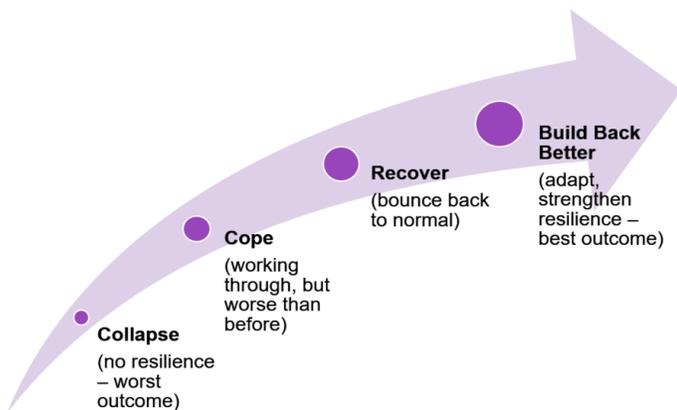
Learning materials helped children continue their studies at home during the pandemic.

In Paraguay, the national government’s first response to the pandemic was to close all schools and change the learning modality to distance education. However, the strategy did not succeed in safeguarding education for children as most public schools did not have sufficient technological

equipment and resources for virtual learning, and there was inadequate Internet connectivity in most communities. Even more, teachers had a very basic understanding of information and communications technology (ICT), and they required much training, especially in educational applications, to support the shift to virtual learning. Families were also unprepared and lacked resources to support educational activities for their children at home.

Children Believe focused on supporting communities, families, children and women to not only cope with the COVID-19 outbreak, but also adapt to the new normal and build back better. Our Building Back Better (BBB) approach is an umbrella concept using our post-COVID-19 pandemic reconstruction and recovery efforts as an opportunity to strengthen communities’ human, social, economic, physical and environmental conditions, to surpass their original state and reinforce resilience (Diagram 1).

DIAGRAM 1: RELEVANCE OF CHILDREN BELIEVE’S BUILD BACK BETTER PROGRAM APPROACH



Source: Adopted from Adekola, J., et.al. (2020). Inherent Complexities of a Multi-stakeholder Approach to Building Community Resilience. *Int J Disaster Risk Sci.* 11, 32–45. <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13753-020-00246-1>>

In this regard, Children Believe prioritized the strengthening of education to safeguard against inequalities and for the common good. We worked to address inequalities in access to education and reverse the trend of rising dropouts during the pandemic. We specifically focused on the inclusion of girls and marginalized children in education, and reinforced the importance of the role of teachers and collaboration between teachers and parents. Children Believe nurtured the creativity of educators to engage with families and

communities, strengthening their resilience to cope with their given situations, and helped foster the conditions to enable front-line educators to work flexibly and act collaboratively.

As well, we promoted innovations that could help provide broader options for delivering virtual learning, and worked with education stakeholders for the renewal of the sector by improving access to digital devices and the connectivity needed for remote communication, collaboration and virtual learning. Furthermore, we invested in resuming the delivery of soft skills and vocational skills training, and small business development initiatives for youth, especially young women.

With our partners, Children Believe promoted the participation of children and youth in establishing the trajectory of change for our “new normal” circumstances.

We also supported youth- and women-led collectives to improve their employment-creation opportunities and business development initiatives.

To further the impact of our work, we strengthened collaborations with multiple past and new stakeholders. The pandemic galvanized new actors such as youth volunteers, private business owners and community-based organizations (CBOs) in our operational communities to support children’s learning. Alongside increasing recognition of the essential role of education, the pandemic stimulated a cross section of communities that, traditionally, were not proactively involved in children’s education. We capitalized on the engagement and new collaborations among community health and social welfare organizations, as well as media and technology companies, to support children’s learning.

Through these initiatives in the first half of FY22, Children Believe’s country teams worked effectively with our local partners to optimize new and existing opportunities to help communities build back better.

II — BUILDING BACK EDUCATION BETTER

While the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced vulnerabilities and increased inequalities across our countries of operation, it simultaneously made visible positive features within our operational communities. Most notably, the pandemic prompted solidarity and a strong, persevering response to challenges in many communities, especially among youth. We also learned about the resourcefulness, dedication and creativity from many teachers, families and students who collaboratively built remarkable learning experiences. More and more, people became aware of the multiple roles schools play in supporting the well-being of children and youth, including ensuring good health and nutrition, alongside the provision of education. The rise in awareness and appreciation is now serving as a new foundation for the revival of public education in our operational areas.

With that said, it must be underscored that the upheaval to education was severely damaging.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed grave challenges, fragmenting schools and, in the process, losing teachers and students who may not return even if schools reopen.

The situation for the girls was even more critical, as they were pushed into early marriage or exploitative labour. The pandemic also exposed how communities were unprepared for long-term closures or a massive shift to digital and distance learning. As a result, the quality of education and opportunities to learn were badly affected, especially in marginalized communities and among hard-to-reach social groups who were without alternative learning resources.

In FY22, Children Believe and our partners continued to take advantage of every opportunity to address the re-emerging barriers to education.

The following section presents the educational program achievements made over the April to September 2021 reporting period.



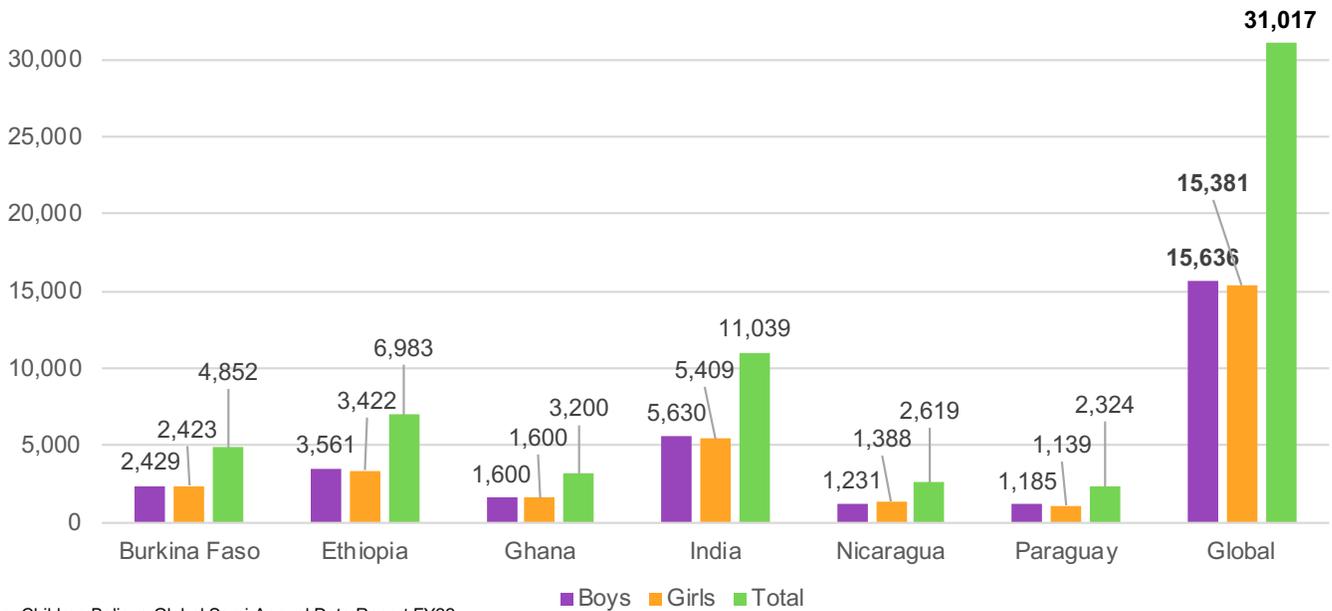
A teacher in Burkina Faso smiles as she prepares lessons for children.

Program achievements

Increased access to inclusive, quality early childhood development

Early childhood development (ECD) is key to our work upholding the right of every child to survive and thrive. Based on the conviction that creating a solid foundation for children at an early age (36 to 59 months) gives them the best advantage, Children Believe continued to invest in ECD and education in FY22. Access to good quality care and education at an early age contributes significantly to cognition, social competency and emotional development, and increases children's desire to continue their education. Chart 1 presents the number of boys and girls under the age of five who accessed our ECD program in each of our operating countries.

CHART 1: DISTRIBUTION OF BOYS AND GIRLS UNDER AGE FIVE WHO ACCESSED EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN BELIEVE’S COUNTRIES OF OPERATION

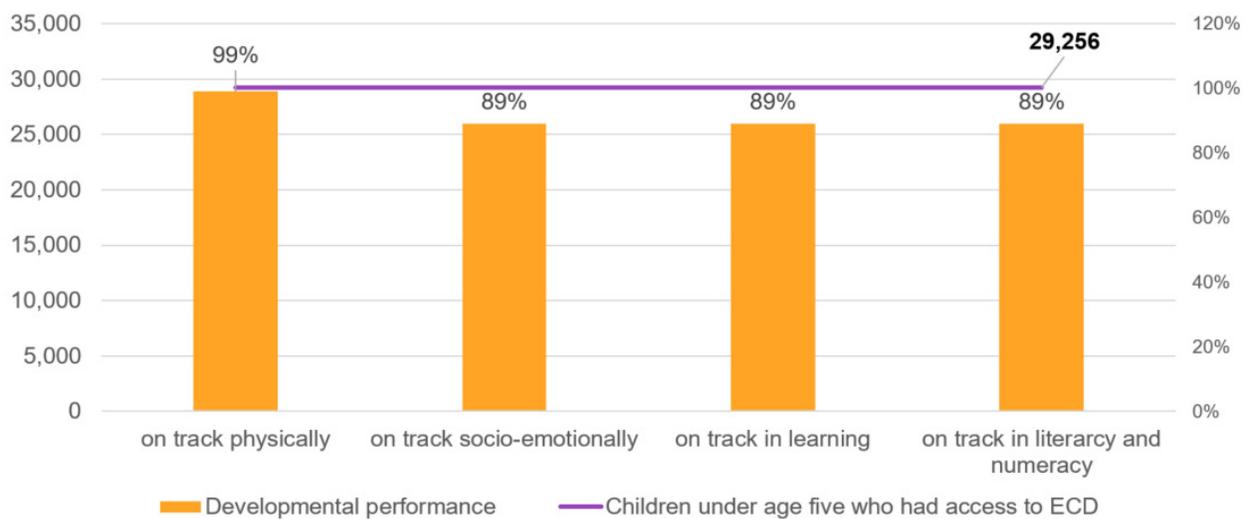


Source: Children Believe Global Semi-Annual Data Report FY22

In FY22, Children Believe supported 517 ECD centres. Through this effort, the centres were able to create critical early development opportunities for more than 31,017 children (15,381 girls) across our operating countries. Chart 2 further shows the positive impact on the development of

children who had access to the ECD centres we supported. For the children’s physical development, 99 percent were found to be on track, while 89 percent were on track in socio-emotional development, learning and literacy and numeracy.

CHART 2: DEVELOPMENTAL PERFORMANCE OF CHILDREN UNDER FIVE WHO ACCESSED ECD CENTRES SUPPORTED BY CHILDREN BELIEVE



Source: Children Believe Global Semi-Annual Data Report FY22

Increased access to inclusive, quality primary education

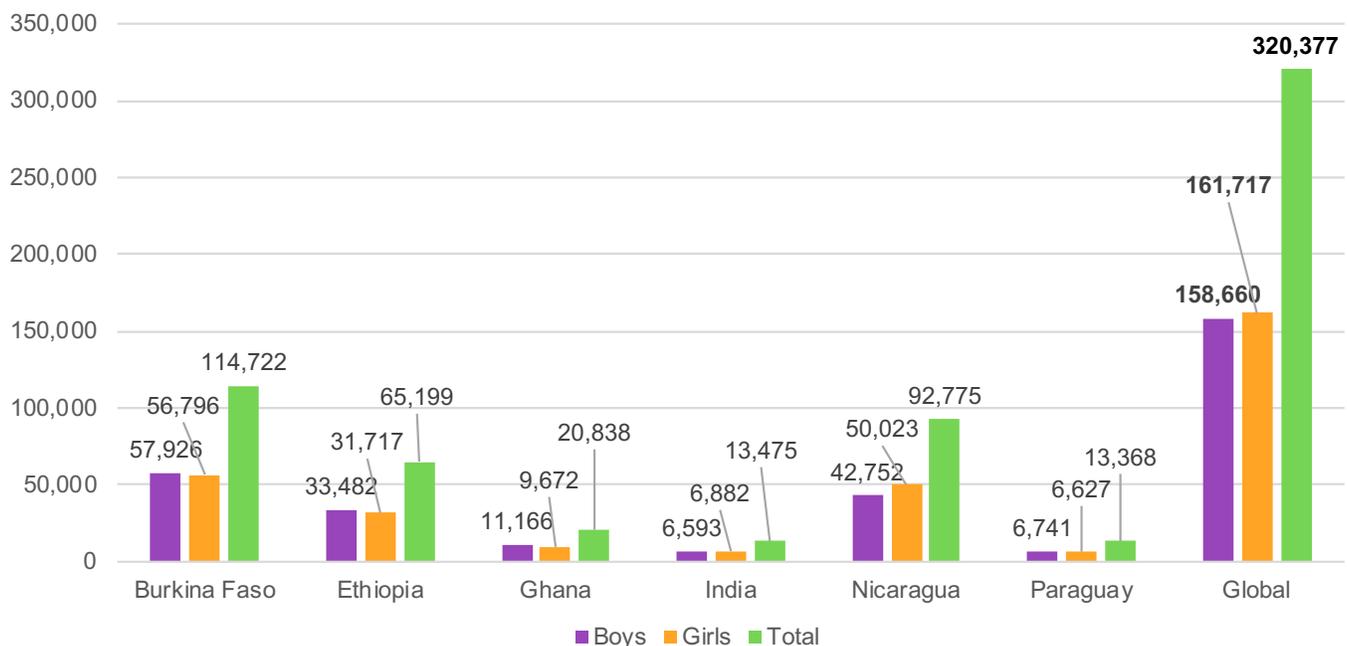
To promote broader access to primary education, Children Believe and our partners continued to apply an ‘inclusion lens’ to identify and then dismantle exclusionary barriers. Our approach is based on equity, that is, recognizing that each child is different and may need different types of support and resources to realize his or her education rights.

During the reporting period, our activities following the smooth re-opening of educational establishments included working with education departments and building the capacity of teachers, such as integrating child safeguarding into teacher training. We also promoted gender and social

inclusion in learning environments by working with schools to become instrumental in transforming the way children think, learn and act, grounding them in fairness and justice. We contributed further by supporting children and their communities to engage in common platforms to advocate for and demand their rights from the government.

A total of 405 primary schools were supported in providing inclusive, equitable and quality primary education in Children Believe’s operational areas. The number of students across our operational countries that were enrolled in primary education during the 2020/21 academic year reached 320,377 (161,717 girls), as presented in Chart 3.

CHART 3: DISTRIBUTION OF BOYS AND GIRLS ENROLLED IN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN CHILDREN BELIEVE’S COUNTRIES OF OPERATION



Source: Children Believe Global Semi-Annual Data Report FY22

Chart 3 further reveals that with the contribution of our primary education interventions, the overall gender parity in primarily level enrolment across the countries in which we work has very little disparity between the number of female and male students. Comparing the gender parity results, on one end we have Nicaragua with a gender parity of 1.17 in favour of girls, while on the other, Ghana has a parity of 0.86 in favour of boys.

Children with disabilities or those struggling with poverty are vulnerable populations that are often deprived of education. Children Believe supported 924 schools to improve this situation. Of the educational establishments helped, 94 percent were found to be inclusive and accessible to the most vulnerable social groups, including children with disabilities, impoverished children from excluded social caste/ethnic minority groups or children in other difficult circumstances.

Increased access to affordable and inclusive, quality technical, vocational and higher education

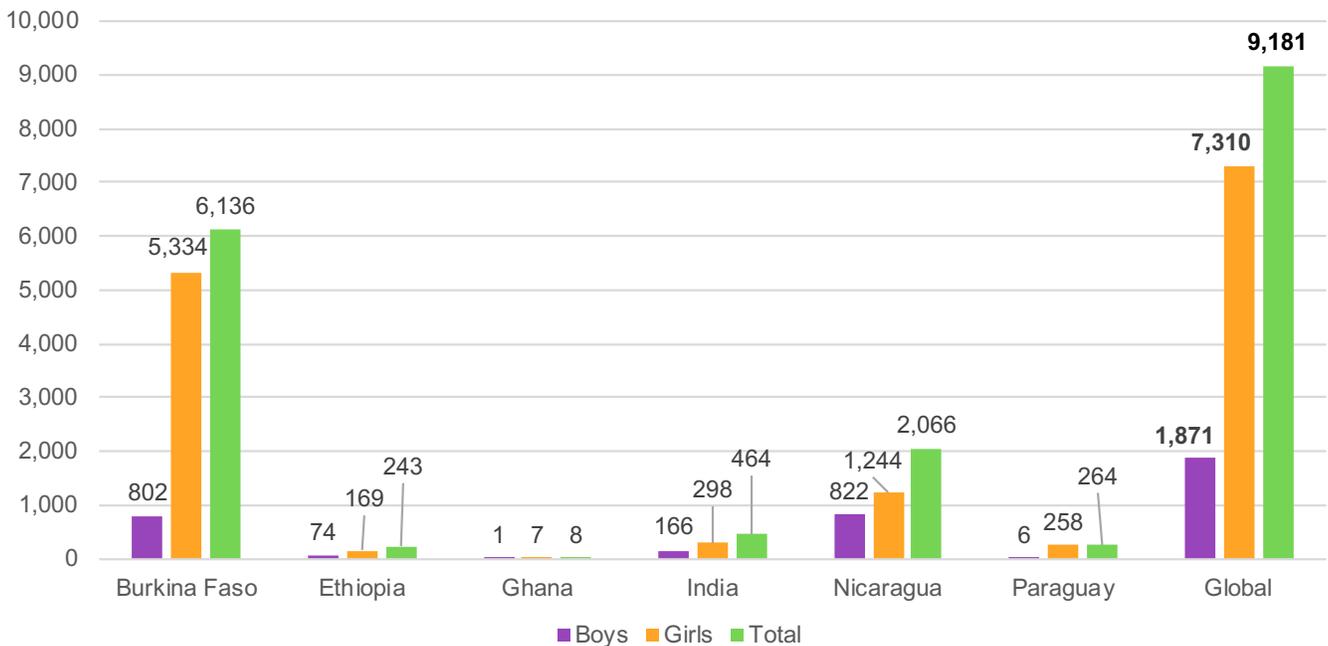
Children Believe recognizes the importance of increasing access to technical and vocational skills training for young adults (15 to 24 years) to help deter them from delinquency, addiction, unemployment, irregular migration and violence.

We worked with key stakeholders, notably government vocational and technical centres, to ensure better facilities and technical capacities to host online vocational and soft skills development.

Over the reporting period, along with host governments, Children Believe collaborated with 20 local organizations and four like-minded international organizations to support 9,181 young people aged 15 to 24 (7,310 or 80 percent females).

The youth, primarily from low-income and indigenous families, were assisted to develop the necessary skills to find employment or generate self-employment (Chart 4).

CHART 4: DISTRIBUTION OF YOUNG WOMEN AND MEN WHO RECEIVED TRAINING SUPPORTED BY CHILDREN BELIEVE TO IMPROVE THEIR EMPLOYABILITY, DISAGGREGATED BY OPERATIONAL COUNTRY



Source: Children Believe Global Semi-Annual Data Report FY22

III — BUILDING BACK BETTER HEALTH

Children Believe promotes maternal and child health programs informed by human rights approaches and principles. We are committed to reducing maternal and child mortality through a holistic strategy that seeks to strengthen health systems, reduce the burden of diseases and improve nutrition.

We work with regional- and district-level health departments and local government administrative bodies to promote integrated and holistic health care approaches, primarily targeting mothers, pregnant women, newborns and children under the age of five.



In Burkina Faso, a pregnant woman with her husband visit a local clinic for a check-up. With our local partners, Children Believe has continued to work on improving the quality and use of essential health services for mothers, newborns and children under age five.

Our program interventions in the first half of FY22 focused on improving community health services shattered by the pandemic, addressing vaccine hesitancy and increasing the delivery and use of essential maternal and child health care.

We supported our local partners, including local government health offices, strengthened their technical capacity through training, and equipped health workers with the necessary skills and materials to provide quality care and services to children and mothers.

Program achievements

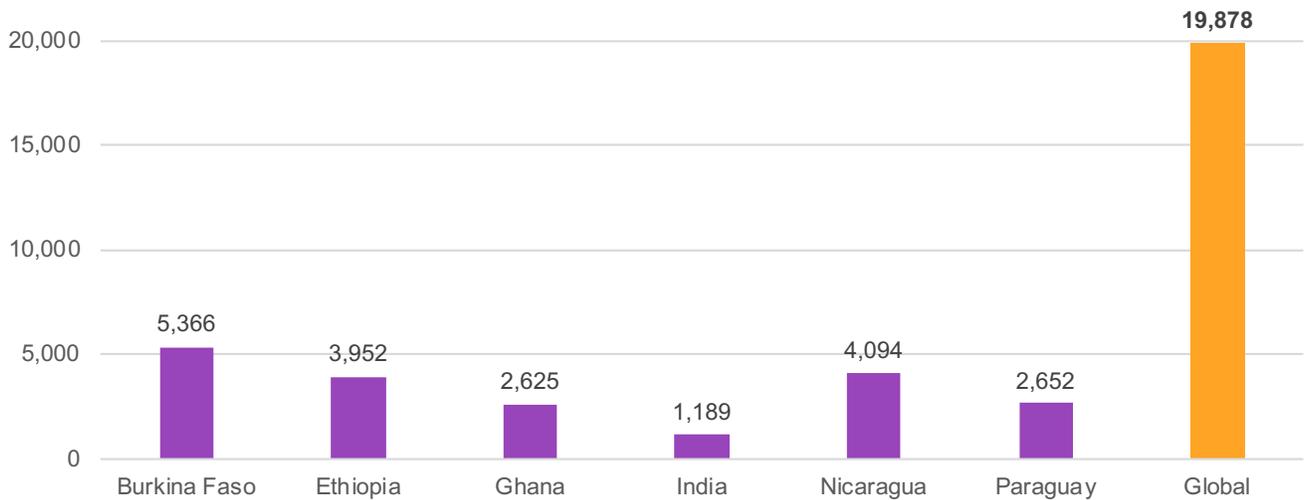
Improved delivery and use of essential maternal and child health services

As we embarked on implementing our programs at the beginning of FY22, we inherited a fragile health sector with poor capacity to deliver essential maternal and newborn care.

To mitigate or minimize the effects of the disruption caused by COVID-19 and to improve the delivery of health services to pregnant women, newborns and children under-five, we focused on building, upgrading and equipping health facilities, especially in underserved areas, and increasing the knowledge and skills of health professionals.

We renovated two facilities and equipped existing ones with medicine and equipment to strengthen their capacities to deliver much needed services. By the end of the reporting period, over 19,800 childbirths were attended to by skilled health professionals across our operational communities (Chart 5). The number of reported deliveries in Burkina Faso was the highest (5,366), followed by Nicaragua (4,094) and Ethiopia (3,952).

CHART 5: NUMBER OF CHILDBIRTHS ATTENDED TO BY SKILLED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN CHILDREN BELIEVE’S OPERATING COMMUNITIES, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY

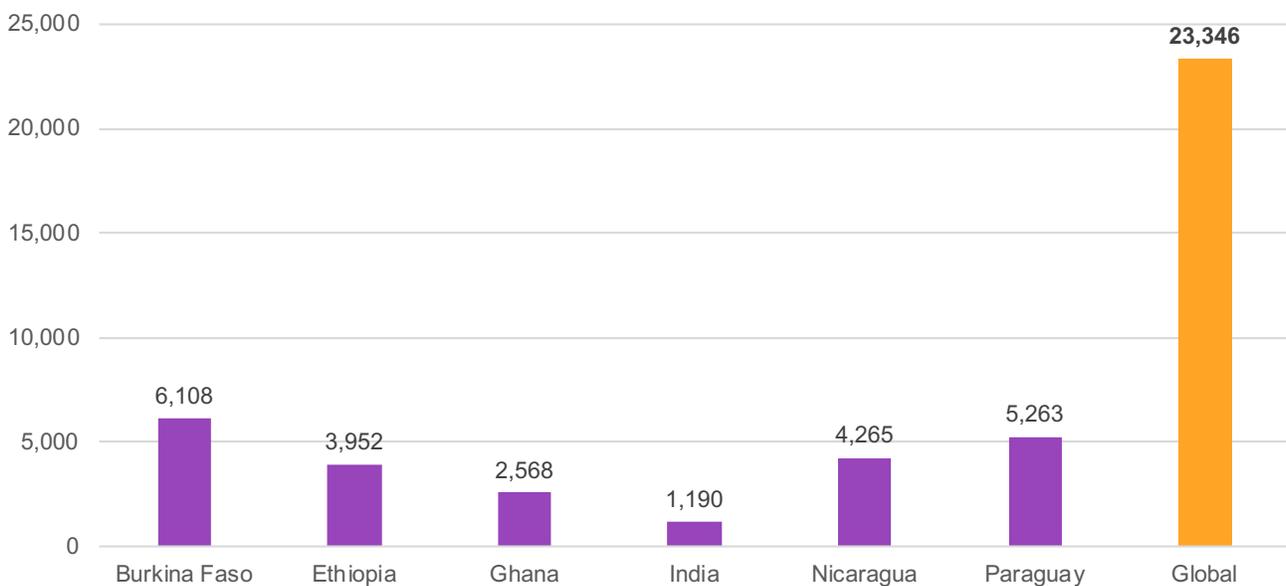


Source: Children Believe Global Semi-Annual Data Report FY22

Furthermore, Chart 6 shows that over 23,300 mothers, adolescent girls and young women received reproductive health and postpartum care, with the highest number

once again reported in Burkina Faso (6,108), followed by Paraguay (5,263) and Nicaragua (4,265).

CHART 6: NUMBER OF WOMEN WHO RECEIVED REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND POSTPARTUM CARE IN CHILDREN BELIEVE’S OPERATING COMMUNITIES, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY



Source: Children Believe Global Semi-Annual Data Report FY22



A poster with COVID-19 prevention information being put up in a community in India. Disseminating critical information about COVID-19 was an essential activity Children Believe and our partners pursued to help communities stay safe and healthy.

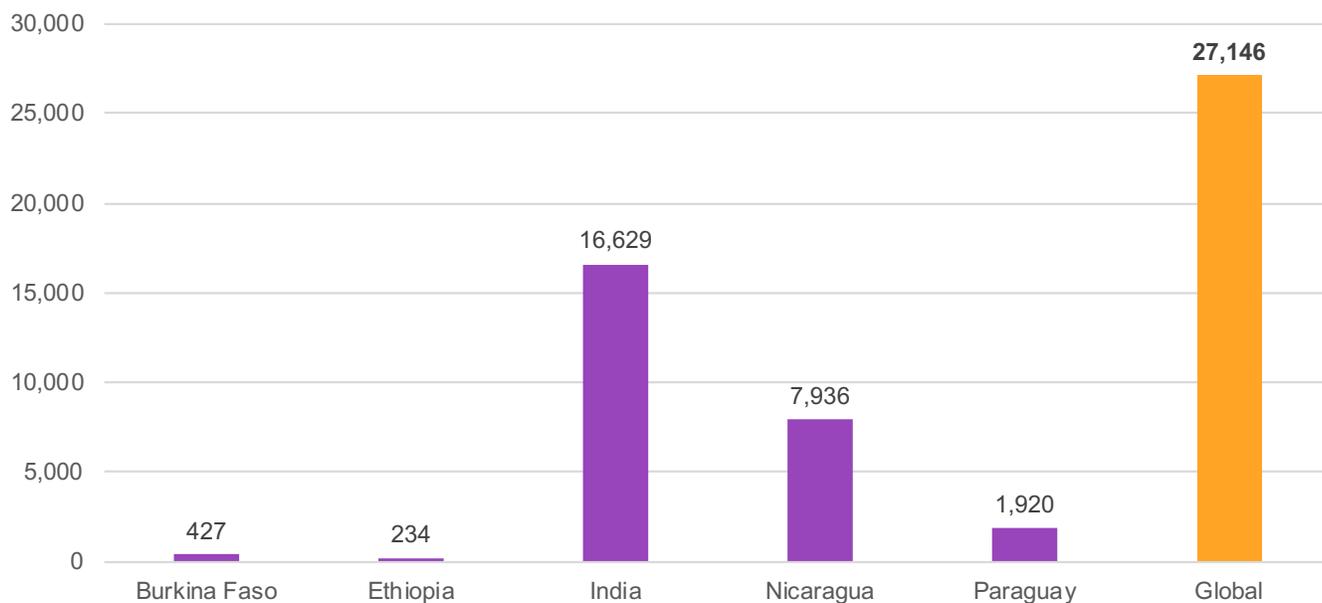
In addition to maternal and child health efforts, Children Believe’s partners across our countries of operation, and most significantly in India, organized a series of vaccine awareness campaigns and supported the extension of numerous vaccination camps. The intention was to address vaccine hesitancy, increase access to vaccines and change the negative attitudes associated with COVID-19, particularly in hard to reach communities and social groups.

Provision of emergency food/cash assistance

During the reporting period, many families continued to struggle with food insecurity from the ongoing effects of the pandemic. Children Believe worked with local partners to provide urgently needed food assistance (rice, wheat flour, oil, pasta and other supplementary food), which benefited over 27,100 people (51 percent female) over a three-month period (Chart 7).

The relief distribution in India and Nicaragua were comparatively larger in their coverage, benefitting 16,629 and 7,900 people, respectively.

CHART 7: NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO DIRECTLY BENEFITED FROM EMERGENCY FOOD, NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT OR CASH RELIEF IN CHILDREN BELIEVE’S OPERATING COMMUNITIES, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY



Note: These services were not provided in Ghana during this reporting period. Source: Children Believe Global Semi-Annual Data Report FY22

IV — BUILDING BACK CHILD PROTECTION BETTER

Children Believe works to prevent all forms of violence, abuse and neglect of children. We put particular emphasis on protecting children from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).¹ SGBV often manifests as sexual abuse and harassment, verbal abuse, deprivation of resources, human trafficking and harmful social practices, such as early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM).

Our approach focused on listening to and working with boys and girls to improve their safety. We intentionally included orphans and other vulnerable children in our sponsorship program to help them attend school, have nutritious meals and receive health care. We also worked with schools' systems to ensure learning environments were safe and free of violence.

During the reporting period, Children Believe worked with local partners and supported them in their collaboration with local governance mechanisms to implement progressive laws and policies, increase public awareness and improve the capacity of community-based child protection systems.

The strengthening of community-based child protection programs aided in reducing the vulnerabilities of children facing discrimination, whether due to caste, gender, ethnic identity, disability, forced migration/displacement or difficult circumstances like homelessness.

Our major interventions include the completion of a consortium-based project to mitigate irregular child migration,

child trafficking and youth displacement in Latin America (El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Mexico). The project received funding from Global Affairs Canada.



A young woman learning about her rights and the risks young people, especially girls, face. The PICMCA project, a consortium-based project, worked not only with young people, but families, the broader community, authority figures and a variety of organizations to strengthen child protection and violence prevention. Photo by Juris Kornets.

Program achievements

Protection of children and women from violence

Working to reduce and mitigate violence against children and women is an important priority for Children Believe. We activated and enhanced the capacities of local protection mechanisms to protect children and women from violence, regardless if the actions stemmed from the loss or separation from primary caregivers, disruption to family income, social isolations, fear or anxiety. Most

¹ *Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) refers to any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. Gender-based violence is considered to be any harmful act directed against individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of their gender. It may include sexual violence, domestic violence, trafficking, forced/early marriage and harmful traditional practices. It encompasses threats of violence and coercion. It can be physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual in nature, and can take the form of a denial of resources or access to services. It inflicts harm on women, girls, men and boys. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), retrieved August 28, 2020 from https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/OnePagers/Sexual_and_gender-based_violence.pdf*

of the reported violence was committed by families or intimate persons to the family and manifested in the forms of early marriage, early pregnancy and sexual and labour exploitation.

To address these forms of violence, Children Believe, with our partners, collaborated with local governance structures to strengthen community-based child protection programs to reduce the vulnerabilities of children facing discrimination.

Further, all of our community education programs included GBV prevention messages and guidance on how community leaders, caregivers and children should be equipped to prevent and report GBV.

Our country teams and their partners collaborated with local law enforcement bodies to help communities enter agreements for zero tolerance to child marriage and other forms of sexual exploitation. As well, we worked with communities to bring abusers to justice, while making psychosocial counselling services and other supports available for victims.

For sponsored children and their families, we closely followed up and monitored their situations to ensure their safety and well-being. In total, our work benefited 252,021 children, youth, parents and other duty-bearers across 383 communities in our six countries of operation.

Preventing irregular child migration

During the reporting period, Children Believe continued to mitigate the increasing outflow of young migrants from Central America and Mexico. We led and completed the implementation of a consortium initiative² aimed at improving the living conditions of at-risk girls, boys, youth, their families and communities across El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Mexico.

In these countries, our interventions over the first half of FY22 included strengthening partnerships and improving the capacity of policymakers and practitioners to promote actions to end violence, and design and implement effective child protection systems. We increased the employment prospects of young people by providing skills training to help them find a job or start a small business and we created opportunities for employment in their home countries.



Ledys Osorto, 19, pictured with her family in Nicaragua. Through her participation in the PICMCA project, she learned about the risks of irregular migration and gained support to start her own local business called Delicias Caf'Arte.

We also adopted digital technology platforms/services and increased the use of e-learning infrastructures to encourage the continuation of learning during and after COVID-19 lockdowns, such as offering online skills development programs in entrepreneurship.

We supported youth associations by equipping them with information about child trafficking and the risks of irregular migration. We further contributed to the reduction of irregular migration by improving the knowledge and capacity of duty-bearers from government, public institutions, municipalities and local organizations, so they may better respond to the needs of young people.

² *Preventing Irregular Child Migration in Central America (PICMCA) was implemented by a consortium led by Children Believe and included ChildFund International, a US-based affiliate, and EDUCO, a global NGO based in Spain. The project was carried out in Central America and Mexico from March 2017 through to October 2021, with a total project budget of CDN \$15.2 million. Global Affairs Canada provided a grant of CDN \$12.6 million towards the project.*

Supporting orphans and vulnerable children

Education and health services from the government are free in most rural villages where Children Believe works. However, they are not always of good quality or in close proximity for families. Even where Children Believe constructs or rebuilds school facilities, thousands of poor and socially excluded children are still unable to attend school because their families cannot afford the additional cost of books and uniforms. Some children go to school hungry and are gradually forced to drop out in order to earn money for the household and help around the home or farm. Girls face additional barriers that limit their attendance, such as the lack of separate sanitation facilities for girls in schools, poor menstrual hygiene and family expectations for girls to do domestic chores like fetching water.

Children Believe’s sponsorship program identifies and supports orphans and other vulnerable children, helping them access/stay in school and address some of the above challenges.

Our program brings together individual Canadian donors with children in need, and we work in partnership with local

civil society organizations, school administrations and community leaders to break barriers to education.

During the reporting period, with the involvement of 26 local civil society organizations across 466 communities in our operating countries, our sponsorship program aided 36,599 sponsored children in greatest need of child-centred, family-focused community development interventions (Table 1).



A girl in Ethiopia writing to her sponsor. Children Believe’s sponsorship program connects Canadian donors with vulnerable children around the world to help them access school and overcome the barriers they face. Photo by Philip Maher.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF ENROLLED SPONSORED CHILDREN IN CHILDREN BELIEVE’S COUNTRIES OF OPERATION WHO BENEFITED FROM OUR CHILD-CENTRED, FAMILY-FOCUSED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS*

	BFASO	ETH	GHA	IND	NIC	PAR	GLOBAL
Enrolled sponsored children	5,875	6,145	6,537	4,322	7,047	6,673	36,599

Source: Children Believe Global Semi-Annual Data Report FY22

*Enrolled children are children who are screened and selected on the basis of their vulnerability to participate in and benefit from Children Believe programs. A child qualifies as a 'paid' sponsored child when they get an individual sponsor who is committed to extend financial support and establishes a one-to-one relationship with them through a supporter number assigned by Children Believe.

Children from our child sponsorship program indicated that the support they received allowed them to cover the basic cost of school attendance. Further, the program gave them the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of improved school and health facilities, adequate water and sanitation facilities, and income generation opportunities for their families.

Most of the children in our sponsorship program also reported that they received regular health check-ups, assisted study time in the evening to finish their homework or prepare for exams and opportunities to participate in after school activities (i.e. recreational and life skills development) and attend creative learning centres.

V — BUILDING BACK GENDER EQUALITY BETTER

A cornerstone of Children Believe’s work is to ensure that women, men, girls and boys enjoy the same rights and equal access to resources, opportunities and protections. Our programs identify and respond to the different needs, abilities and contexts of all stakeholders, particularly women and children. When women’s rights are respected, women are healthier, better educated and better paid. As a result, children thrive and so do communities, organizations and societies, creating lasting benefits for future generations.

Our programming is designed to address gender inequalities—such as a cultural preference for boys, stereotypes about gender roles and control over resources—that create barriers to girls’ education, deny women equal opportunities and prevent them from contributing to and benefiting from sustainable development in their communities and countries.

We strive for gender transformative change, working with key stakeholders to identify and address the root causes of gender inequality in the local context, including social norms and institutions that perpetuate it.

We also undertake innovative policy influence work to challenge status quos and enforce the implementation of legislation and policies that promote gender equality or fill the gaps between policies and their implementations through evidence-based advocacy.

Children Believe integrates gender equality strategies across all of our programs and disaggregates monitoring data by gender. Thus, our programs contribute to Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. In particular, our work aligns with Target 5.3, eliminate all harmful practices, such as child,

early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; and Target 5.5, ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

The following section provides a summary of our program results in gender equality during the first half of FY22.



Young men participating in an activity to learn about gender discrimination (photo taken prior to COVID-19). The PICMCA project incorporated a gender-responsive approach in all of its initiatives to promote gender equality. Photo by Juris Kornets.

Program achievements

Building on the foundations laid by Children Believe’s programs in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Nicaragua and Paraguay in previous years, technical and financial support was extended for women and young girls who organized themselves either into women’s self-help groups (SHGs) and women’s savings and credit groups or cooperatives.

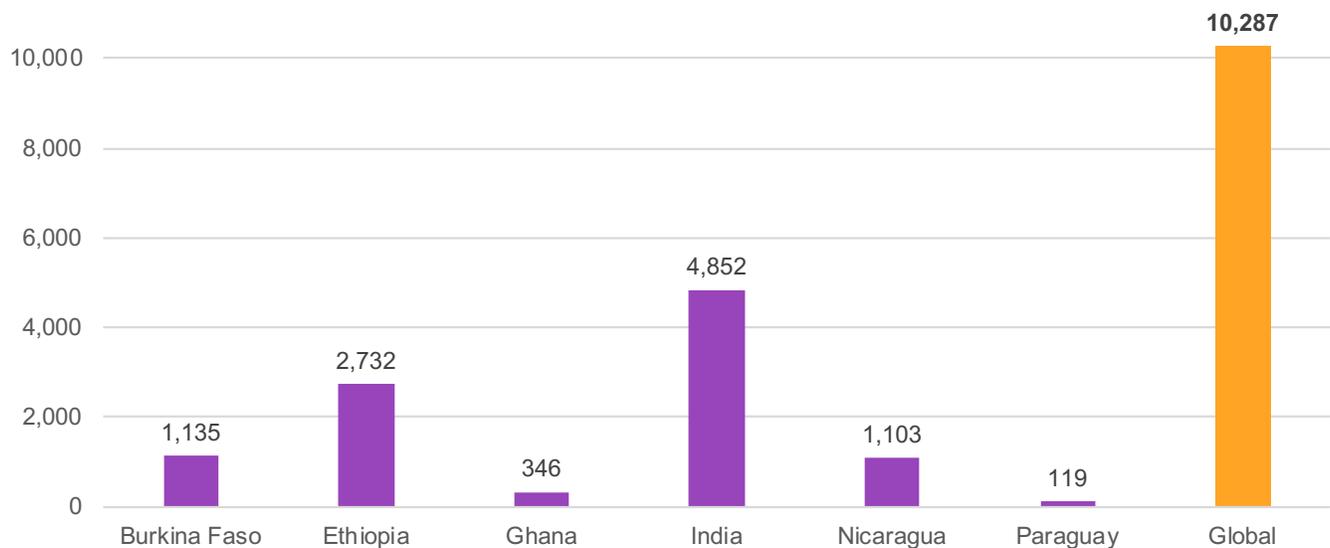
Over the reporting period, the rise in women's participation in these community-based organizations (CBOs), both as members and leaders, created greater spaces for women to exercise their social, economic and political rights. Children Believe's programs facilitated the creation of spaces for 10,287 young women and mothers, enabling them to exercise their leadership roles and ensure women's voices were heard in societal decision-making processes that affect their lives (Chart 8).

Overall, a total of 250,412 women and young girls benefited from capacity-building support in the form of awareness creation, training and improved adoption and enforcement of gender-sensitive policies, legislations, strategies and actions that give women and girls equal rights to economic resources, financial services, inheritance and natural resources.



A member contributes to her local Village Savings and Loans Association in Burkina Faso.

CHART 8: NUMBER OF WOMEN IN CHILDREN BELIEVE'S OPERATING COMMUNITIES WHO ASSUMED LEADERSHIP ROLES AND MEANINGFULLY PARTICIPATED IN SOCIETAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY



Source: Children Believe Global Semi-Annual Data Report FY22

VI – BUILDING BACK CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION BETTER

Children Believe aims to empower child and youth groups to be active partners and drivers of change in their own communities. In this regard, we engaged with young people, enhancing their meaningful participation across all program cycle management so that they could have a say in the programs and ensure the programs served their best interests.

Our programs strive to break social barriers and reach all children without discrimination, no matter their social identities.

In fact, children and youth from vulnerable social groups, such as ethnic minorities, caste groups, those in destitute circumstances and with special needs, were given special consideration to ensure their meaningful participation and contributions.

With our partners, Children Believe also supported child and youth groups to have the necessary institutional, technical and financial capacities to influence the change that they want to see in their future.

Program achievements

Youth skills development and economic empowerment

Children Believe and our partners recognize that youth are more likely to be safe, stable and healthy when they have the capability to make a transition to safe and decent work, and secure livelihoods.

In the reporting period, our youth economic empowerment programs in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Nicaragua and Paraguay continued to build the skills of young women

and men in leadership and advocacy, technical vocational fields, financial literacy, self-employment and entrepreneurship.

We facilitated business linkages among young people, communities, markets and governments, and created equitable, inclusive and safe work opportunities where young people had the space and tools to make economic decisions for themselves. We implemented actions to build youth economic participation and decision-making power, especially through the creation of supportive environments promoting young women as business champions and youth-led market assessments.

Overall, we supported 72,269 youth to improve their skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, equipping them to navigate work environments, attain employment or business opportunities and secure livelihoods.



Alima Abdulai, 17, smiling in her textile and garment kiosk in Ghana. With our partners, Children Believe has worked to deliver training and employment opportunities to help young people secure livelihoods.

VII — CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE INITIATIVES

In the first half of FY22, Children Believe consolidated its Centres of Excellence (COE) initiatives. The initiatives serve to leverage innovation, share knowledge, promote networking and advance thought leadership to maximize strategic impact. The five areas of focus are:

1. Child protection and participation (led by Paraguay);
2. Early childhood education, care and development (co-led by Burkina Faso and Ghana);
3. Child protection in disaster risk reduction/emergencies (led by Ethiopia);
4. Gender and social inclusion (led by India); and
5. Gender equality and economic empowerment of women and girls (led by Nicaragua).

The Ghana and Burkina Faso COE initiative continued to work with key stakeholders to create awareness and promote best practices from their ECD work using the Learning Through Play (LTP) methodology.³

In FY22, both the government of Burkina Faso and the Ghana education and health departments endorsed the replication of LTP and a revision of their national curriculum for primary/preschool teachers, health agents and education supervisors.

Currently, the Ghana team is engaged in a consultative process to review the national ECD policy of the Ghanaian Government.

In India, Children Believe consolidated its approach for gender equality and social inclusion, particularly taking into account the specific conditions of marginalized, indigenous and lowest social castes groups. The goal was to foster new positive gender norms to end the practice of child marriage, provide

inclusive education and secure the safety, security and dignity of girls and young women in schools.

Children Believe in Nicaragua continued to enhance the economic empowerment of young women. Based on the Nicaragua team's study on reducing gender gaps in economic development, a virtual platform was designed to support skills development and the employability of young women.

In Paraguay, Children Believe made great strides in promoting government accountability for child rights and youth participation issues. In collaboration with the Ministry of Children and Adolescents, the Paraguay team completed the preparation of the National Policy and Strategy for Child Participation, which is expected to shape the direction and set the priorities for promoting child and youth participation.



Youth in Paraguay organized and hosted a virtual talent festival. Children Believe has been working with governments, NGOs, communities, families and young people to strengthen the capacity and opportunities for children and youth to organize and raise their voices.

³ This innovative methodology was first developed by the SickKids Centre for Community Mental Health (formerly The Hincks-Dellcrest Centre) and the City of Toronto Public Health Department, and was piloted and implemented by Children Believe since 2014. The methodology takes a holistic approach to deliver early childhood care, education and cognitive growth, which are instrumental for the development of healthy brains and laying a strong foundation for children to thrive.

VIII — STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND HARNESSING POLICY INFLUENCE

Children Believe strengthened its strategic collaborations and partnerships with national, continental and global organizations to augment its skills and expertise, enhance its reach, increase its impact and broaden its spheres of policy influence.

In Burkina Faso, Children Believe collaborated with the European Union and led the Permanent Secretariat of Non-Governmental Organizations (Secretariat Permanent des Organisations Non-Gouvernementales, SPONG), which consists of 250 member agencies, to track and monitor Burkina Faso's progress in meeting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The review identified key achievements, opportunities and challenges in the efforts to meet targets for social protection, child protection, food security and water and sanitation.



A father and child engage in play in Ethiopia. Learning Through Play is an effective method Children Believe and our partners employ to support early childhood development.

⁴ A tech-oriented company that uses Navigated Learning, which is a data-rich approach rooted in the learning sciences and incorporates real-time information about each user's progress to construct personalized learning pathways. The organization believes technology can be a catalyst to unite communities and a linchpin to creating collective impact. It promotes technology that can give learners, instructors and schools real-time analytic tools, and unlimited access to engaging, effective resources for anywhere, anytime learning. Gooru Navigator is inclusive by design for all learners across geographies, disciplines and learning abilities in pursuit of ensuring no learner is left behind.

In Ghana, a regional ECD committee was formed in which Children Believe was positioned as the lead Agency in Northern Ghana.

Children Believe was given the great responsibility of advising the Regional Coordinating Council Members (relevant government departments, non-governmental organizations, local child rights associations and private education service providers) on ECD-related policy and practice issues.

In India, Children Believe entered into an agreement with the Generation Global Program (from the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change UK) to pilot the Generation Global Program in India for a period of six months and in two Indian regional languages. Strategically, this is a significant partnership as it will support Children Believe's work to advance and modernize the skills of young people (aged 13-17 years) to become 21st century global citizens. A partnership was forged with Gooru USA⁴ to pilot a web-based (on/offline) Learning Navigator application to improve learning outcomes, and an agreement was reached to replicate the pilots in at least two more Children Believe countries of operation (Nicaragua and Burkina Faso).

Additionally, a contribution agreement with Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) in India was signed to implement a youth-led initiative to influence young people to lead a low carbon lifestyle, increase tree/forest cover and reduce carbon emissions in 110 communities.

Children Believe in Nicaragua entered a collaborative arrangement with UNICEF to carry out an important initiative to prevent violence against children and women, and promote youth participation.

The partnership is valuable as it will improve the visibility and capacity of Children Believe in preventing violence against children and women in Nicaragua.

Children Believe also hosted a learning event on mitigating irregular child migration that was based on the results and best practices of completed projects. The event was attended by over 132 participants from Global Affairs Canada, the Secretariat of Central American Social Integration, UN organizations and private and public sector organizations. In addition, two webinars in collaboration with the Global Movement for Children (GMC) Nicaragua Chapter were co-led by Children Believe.

In Paraguay, Children Believe co-led the preparation and submission of the National Policy on Child Participation for

the Ministry of Children and Adolescents. Involvement in this critical project strengthened Children Believe’s relationship with the Paraguayan government and reinforced our position as an advocate and leader of child rights.

Due to the growing insecurity issues in Ethiopia, our team has worked with other stakeholders in the international humanitarian community to monitor the situation and make preparedness measures to do no harm and minimize risks to its program operations. Overall, Children Believe continued to build successful strategic collaborations with diverse organizations across our country program offices and in different contexts over the first half of FY22.

The relationships enabled us to maximize our program impact and enhance our policy influence at various levels for the purpose of serving our mission to create a future of hope for children, families and communities.

The screenshot shows a webinar slide with the title "PRINCIPALES RESULTADOS DE LA EVALUACIÓN A NIVEL REGIONAL" (Main Results of the Evaluation at the Regional Level). The slide features a photograph of a young woman and a young man standing outdoors, holding a red sign that reads "5 IGUALDAD DE GÉNERO" (5 Gender Equality) with a female symbol. The slide also includes the text "Preventing Irregular Child Migration in Central America (PICMCA)" at the top and the website "childrenbelieve.ca" at the bottom. A small video inset in the bottom right corner shows a man with glasses speaking. The bottom of the slide features a navigation bar with logos for Canada, Children Believe, ChildFund International, educO, and CONEJO PICMCA, along with a video player interface showing a timestamp of 39:51 / 2:07:01.

Results from our efforts to mitigate irregular migration involved an online webinar. Translated from above, the “main results of the evaluation at the regional level” were shared with partners, other stakeholders and public audiences.

IX — LOOKING FORWARD

Supporting communities to Build Back Better is highly effective when it is grounded in people-centred recovery initiatives, focuses on inclusiveness and addresses the underlying causes of inequalities.

Working in highly fragile contexts, such as war and drought-affected areas in Ethiopia, areas prone to terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso and shrinking civic spaces in Nicaragua, demands that staff and partners have ongoing security preparedness plans, flexibility in working modalities and resilience to work under difficult circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the importance of flexibility, specifically adapting to virtual learning, and created opportunities for Children Believe and our partners to explore new forms of collaborations with tech-focused private organizations or foundations.

Despite the challenges, we are happy about the outcomes we achieved in the first semi-annual period of FY22 and will continue to work to deepen our program impact and increase our policy influence.

We will continue to address critical barriers for girls and boys, and support them in having sustained access to inclusive, quality education. Further, we are committed to exploring new technology/private sector partnerships to help close the digital divide in education and improve learning outcomes.

In the area of child protection and violence prevention, we will continue to empower parents and caregivers, and nurture collaborations to broadly respond to violence, neglect and exploitation of children. As part of this work, we

will press on with our efforts to promote the rights of girls and women, supporting them in avoiding child marriage and other forms of gender discrimination and GBV.

Importantly, throughout our work we will persist in ensuring the meaningful participation of children and youth to amplify their voices and influence actions that affect their futures.

Further, Children Believe will serve as a catalyst among like-minded child-focused organizations and strengthen the humanitarian response capacity of local development partners working in disaster-prone, fragile operating areas to improve program agility in times of crisis.

Much work remains to be done to ensure all of our program communities Build Back Better, but our achievements from this reporting period have made deep inroads and set us on a promising trajectory.



Children Believe has continued to provide innovative ways to help sustain children's access to inclusive, quality education.



Children Believe works globally to empower children to dream fearlessly, stand up for what they believe in – and be heard. For 60+ years, we've brought together brave young dreamers, caring supporters and partners, and unabashed idealists. Together, we're driven by a common belief: creating access to education – inside and outside of classrooms – is the most powerful tool children can use to change their world.

Children Believe is a member of ChildFund Alliance, a global network of 12 child-focused development organizations working to create opportunities for children and youth, their families and communities. ChildFund helps nearly 23-million children and their families in more than 70 countries overcome poverty and underlying conditions that prevent children from achieving their full potential. We work to end violence against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and engage children and youth to create lasting change and elevate their voices in decisions that affect their lives.

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