WHAT WORKS: BENEFICIARY PERSPECTIVES ON DROPOUT PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS IN TIMOR-LESTE

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What Works: Beneficiary Perspectives on Dropout Prevention Interventions in Timor-Leste

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**DEC Submission Requirements**

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>COTR</td>
<td>Contract Office’s Technical Representative</td>
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<td>ECA</td>
<td>Extracurricular Activities</td>
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<td>EWRS</td>
<td>Early Warning and Response System</td>
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<tr>
<td>HR teachers</td>
<td>Homeroom teachers</td>
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<td>SDPP</td>
<td>School Dropout Prevention Pilot</td>
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Executive Summary

The School Dropout Prevention Pilot (SDPP) Program is a five-year multi-country program, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, aimed at mitigating student dropout. Its objective is to provide evidence-based programming guidance to USAID missions and countries in Asia and the Middle East on student dropout prevention by piloting and testing the effectiveness of dropout prevention interventions in four target countries: Cambodia, India, Tajikistan and Timor-Leste.

This report on the qualitative data gathered toward the end of the SDPP project focuses on Timor-Leste, where the project was implemented in Grades 4, 5 and 6, in schools where students were at the highest risk for dropping out. Two different interventions were conducted in schools: (1) an Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) in which teachers identified the students most at risk of dropping out, contacted their parents if their child was missing school or falling behind, and discussed the child in regular “case management” meetings of staff; and (2) a Extracurricular Activities (ECA) program of extracurricular activities offered at the end of the school day.

To gather information on the effects, successes and difficulties with these interventions, SDPP sent teams of staff into sampled schools in November 2014, asking them to set up focus groups of at-risk students who stayed in school, parents of at-risk students, homeroom (HR) teachers and members of the community who participated in the intervention. Individual interviews were conducted with at-risk students who dropped out during the intervention, and with school directors. The focus group leaders used semi-structured interview guides with these groups. Initial questions on a topic asked for yes/no answers (e.g., Did you participate in training?); follow-up questions requesting opinions or specific descriptions of events (What was most helpful to you about the training?).

The findings suggest that the interventions were implemented and successful in schools. HR teachers, supported by school directors, tracked at-risk students, arranged for contacts with their parents, gave extra help to students who were struggling, and participated in case management meetings. Community members usually delivered the Warning Cards from teachers to parents and talked with the families about the importance of children attending school. Though many parents were initially angry, embarrassed, or surprised to learn of their children’s absences, they did send their children more regularly to school. The major difficulties with the EWRS included an increased workload for teachers, the problematic responses of some parents to the Warning Cards, community members being too busy to deliver the cards, and students living so far from school they were hard to reach. However, school staff had suggestions for improvement, including the teachers delivering the Warning Cards, improving the communication links between parents/community and school, and providing further training for teachers. They wished to continue the intervention, hoping that CARE will maintain some oversight.

The extracurricular activities also seemed successful to the students, school staff and parents. Students said they enjoyed the activities and found them helpful for their regular classes. The adults agreed that students liked the activities, and added that students were more motivated to attend school, were learning new skills and behaved better in the classroom. Teachers said they have applied the newly-learned methods of a child-friendly school and provide individual attention.
to children in their regular classes. Eleven of the 12 school directors said they would continue the activities with the teachers taking the responsibility for them.

SDPP did have positive effects on at-risk children: students said they liked school more, were less shy, attended more often, paid attention better in class, and learned more. Along with school directors and community members, teachers reported that attendance improved, the dropout rate decreased, children’s performance improved, and children paid better attention and studied harder in school.
I. Introduction

For the past two decades, children’s access to basic education has been the major focus of national and international education development efforts. However, as more children enroll in school but fail to complete the full cycle of basic education, school dropout has been recognized as a major educational challenge both in developed and developing countries. Reducing dropout is key to improving access to basic education, particularly in countries with relatively high enrollment rates where most school-age children who do not currently attend school have previously been enrolled in school.

The School Dropout Prevention Pilot (SDPP) Program is a five-year multi-country program, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, aimed at mitigating student dropout. Its objective is to provide evidence-based programming guidance to USAID missions and countries in Asia and the Middle East on student dropout prevention by piloting and testing the effectiveness of dropout prevention interventions in four target countries: Cambodia, India, Tajikistan and Timor-Leste.

In Timor-Leste, SDPP targeted grades 4, 5, and 6 in five districts—Liquica, Manatuto, Viqueque, Bobonaro and Emera. Two dropout mitigation interventions were implemented and assessed: the Early Warning and Response System and the Extracurricular Activities program.

The Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) provides a framework, process and activities for schools, teachers, and communities to (i) identify students at-risk of dropping out of school, using school-level data for major predictors of dropout, (ii) respond to and address these early signals of probable dropout, and (iii) raise awareness of dropout and strengthen partnerships between schools, parents and communities to prevent it. The EWRS was implemented in 100 schools with the appropriate grades; an additional 100 schools served as controls.

The Extracurricular Activities (ECA) program aims to make school a more welcoming and receptive place for pupils, creating strong interactive bonds between pupils, and teachers and pupils, to aid learning and make school more attractive. Comprising extracurricular activities, it builds on pupils’ interests to broaden their skills and capacities, increase their social networks and advocate for greater student empowerment. The activities, offered once a week out of school hours, are also expected to broaden their views on possibilities for the future, particularly for professional careers, thus enhancing the value of education in their eyes.

The remaining sections of this report describe the design of this qualitative research and its findings. The Qualitative Research Design section includes the research questions addressed, methods used, instruments employed, the sample of respondents included and the data collection process used. Within the section of Qualitative Analysis Findings are the presentations of data concerning first the EWRS and then the ECA, addressing each of the research questions. The final section summarizes the impact of these interventions.
II. Qualitative Research Design

In each country, SDPP has designed, implemented and rigorously assessed interventions to keep at-risk students in schools in the most acutely affected areas. It has conducted multiple types of research, including:

- **Situational Analysis**—to investigate factors associated with dropout prior to the implementation of any intervention. Such studies ensured that the design of the SDPP interventions was appropriate to the circumstances within the target country;

- **Impact Evaluation**—to measure whether the interventions have reduced the dropout rate and affected related outcomes, such as student attendance, performance and behavior in school;

- **Fidelity of Implementation**—to measure the extent to which the interventions were implemented according to the design; and

- **Monitoring and Evaluation**—to collect information on the level of effectiveness of program operations and implementation.

Together, these four types of research provide a picture of what has happened, how well it has happened, and to what extent the SDPP interventions have affected dropout rates and student and teacher behavior and attitudes. They are one part of a picture of a program, but there is more to learn.

The SDPP Qualitative Research studies were conducted in each of the four countries as a complement to the Impact Evaluation studies, which used randomized control trials and quantitative methods, such as data extraction from school records and interview surveys of students and teachers, to measure changed behaviors and attitudes. The Qualitative Research studies aim to provide an understanding of why changes in student and teacher behaviors and attitudes have (or have not) happened, and how beneficiaries and targets (students, teachers, school directors, parents and community) have responded and reacted to the SDPP interventions. In contrast to the large-scale Impact Evaluation, which collected data from thousands of students and teachers to generalize the results to a population, the Qualitative Research studies involved small samples to allow researchers to probe deeply for stakeholder reactions to the dropout mitigation interventions and activities. This in-depth information, in particular, can inform improvements in SDPP intervention designs for future use by government and others, and indicate what is sustainable and what is not.

The same overall research design was used in each of the four SDPP countries, although some adjustments were made to tailor the instruments and samples to the country context. These are described below.
A. Research Questions

Five questions guided SDPP’s qualitative research:

1. How did SDPP interventions affect at-risk students’ decisions to stay in school versus drop out?

2. How did students react to SDPP interventions—did they notice them, like them, feel helped and supported by them, or would they have preferred something else?

3. How did teachers, school directors, parents and community members interact with the SDPP interventions—did they notice them, understand them, use them, like them and believe they were effective?

4. What kinds of difficulties did SDPP beneficiaries (students) and targets (teachers, school directors, parents and community) experience with SDPP interventions and how would they like them improved?

5. What aspects of the SDPP interventions will the school continue to use?

The remaining pages of this report describe the methods used to collect the qualitative data, the instruments used, the sample from which data were gathered, the process of data collection and the findings.

B. Research Methods

This data-gathering effort was small and intensive in order to allow respondents to talk at length and discuss with others their experiences with the interventions. It included two research methods: focus group interviews with students, teachers, parents and community members using semi-structured interview guides with open-ended questions; and (2) one-on-one interviews and discussions with school directors and at-risk students who dropped in the course of the intervention using a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions. These two similar methods allow the interviewer to ask broad questions and then follow-up the initial answers with more detailed questions. They encourage all participants to offer opinions and, thus, helped SDPP staff to understand the level of participation of students and teachers, the quality of their experiences in the program and the effects of the program on behavior.

C. Research Instruments

The data were collected through the use of semi-structured interview guides. In general, the interviewer began with a yes/no question (e.g., Did you participate in the SDPP training on extracurricular activities?) and followed up with open-ended questions (e.g., What aspects of the training were most helpful for you as a teacher?) The data for the initial questions were coded as yes/no. Responses to the open-ended questions were recorded as fully as possible and then the interviewer summarized the three major reasons mentioned by participants. It is the lists of “major reasons” that form the central data set for this report.
Six semi-structured interview guides were used, aimed at the following groups:

1. At-risk students who stayed in school
2. At-risk students who dropped out in the course of the SDPP implementation
3. Home-room teachers
4. School directors or deputy directors
5. Parents of at-risk students who received home visits
6. Members of a volunteer Stay in School Community Group who participated in SDPP

Also, the teachers and school directors filled out an information card summarizing background information, including gender, age, highest level of education, years of experience in education, SDPP training sessions attended, and whether or not they had SDPP manuals.

D. Sample

The qualitative study in Timor-Leste took place in 12 schools, two in the SDPP districts of Liquica, Manatuto and Viqueque and three in Bobonaro and Ermera. Within each district, the sample schools included at least one high and one low SDPP take-up school. “Take-up”—referring to the extent to which the school had implemented the intervention—was based on the Fidelity-of-Implementation research results. Each of these schools had to have a sufficient number of students and teachers involved in SDPP to conduct focus group interviews.

Six groups of people were interviewed at each school, two of fourth, fifth and sixth grade children and four of adults associated with the children. The children were either at-risk students who stayed in school (N=100) or at-risk students who dropped out of these grades in the two years of the SDPP intervention (N=11).¹ In subsequent reporting, the former group is labeled “at-risk students” and the latter “dropouts.” The adults included homeroom (HR) teachers (N=35), school directors (N=12), parents (N=86), and community members involved with the school (N=48).

A description of the sample of school staff shows that the average age for HR teachers was 41 years and for school directors 48 years (Table 1). The majority of each group were men. The largest group of HR teachers had finished their education with upper secondary school, while the largest group of school directors had achieved the Bacharelato². In terms of overall teaching experience, the mean for HR teachers was 14 years and for school directors, 15 years. For the HR teachers and school directors, most of those years were spent in the role of homeroom teacher and in their current schools. The mean number of years with SDPP was two for HR teachers, and was split evenly between two and three for school directors. On average, the school staff attended two SDPP training sessions for the Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) and two for extracurricular activities (ECA). More than 80 percent of both groups had weekly visits from the SDPP facilitator

¹ Note that more than 11 students had dropped out of school during the time of SDPP. However, many of them had moved away and could not be located; some refused to be interviewed.
² Short undergraduate teaching course offered by the Ministry of Education as part of the in-service training program.
with additional explanations of the EWRS and ECA. All of the HR teachers and most of the school directors had their own manuals for both interventions.

Table 1: Description of the Sample

<table>
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<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>HR Teachers (N=37)</th>
<th>School Directors (N=12)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age (mean)</td>
<td>41 years</td>
<td>48 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender (% of respondents)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- Male</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- Female</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highest level of education completed (% of respondents)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-- Upper secondary</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- Pedagogical institute/college</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- Bacharelato</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years of experience (mean)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- In education overall</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- As a homeroom teacher</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- In current school</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- With SDPP</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of training sessions attended</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- On Early Warning &amp; Response System (EWRS)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- On extracurricular activities (EAC)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of explanations of EWRS from SDPP Facilitator (% of respondents)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- Weekly</td>
<td>86%</td>
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<tr>
<td>-- Monthly</td>
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<tr>
<td>-- Not at all</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frequency of explanations of ECA from SDPP Facilitator (% of respondents)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-- Monthly</td>
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<tr>
<td>-- Not at all</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have copy of manual (% of respondents)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-- EWRS School Manual</td>
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<td>-- EWRS Teacher and Facilitator Guide</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>83%</td>
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<tr>
<td>-- Guide for Extracurricular Activities</td>
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<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- Extracurricular Activities 1-40</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>92%</td>
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Of the 86 parents in the focus groups, 47 (55%) were male and 39 (45%) female. Of the 48 community members in the qualitative study, 41 (85%) were male and 7 female (15%).

E. Data Collection

The data were collected by five three-person teams, involving a total of 15 researchers. All were members of the SDPP staff. The data collection process took two weeks toward the end of the second year of project implementation. Each team spent two days at a school and visited two schools per week.
III. Qualitative Analysis Findings

Two SDPP interventions were implemented in Timor-Leste: an Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) to notify school staff of the likelihood of a student’s dropping out and send staff into action; and an after-school Extracurricular Activities (ECA) program to enrich their social and academic skills and build a sense of community. Since students, parents and community members may not ever have heard of the EWRS by name, the questions posed to them about this intervention asked about the actions that were a part of that system, including adults counseling students who seemed likely to drop out and contacting parents about the child.

The findings are divided into two parts. First are the results from the EWRS; second are the findings from the ECA. Within each of these parts, the data are organized to answer the research questions, beginning with the important issue of whether the SDPP interventions made a difference to students staying in school. The next two questions concerned (a) student understanding of and opinions about the interventions and (b) adult views of the interventions. The fourth question asked about difficulties each group of respondents had with the interventions; and the fifth about the aspects of the interventions that the schools will continue to use after the project has ended.

Please note that many of the findings show the rankings of the top three answers, as judged by the focus group leaders, where “1” is the top or major answer, generally the one given by more focus group participants than any other answer. For example, among the 12 interviews of school directors, the “top” answer to the question “What were the benefits of the EWRS for your school?” was “reduction in absenteeism.”

A. The EWRS

1. How did the EWRS intervention affect at-risk students’ decisions to stay in school versus drop out?

To answer this question, this section begins with a discussion of the reasons students gave for dropping out and how the decision to drop out was made. Then the data turn to what school staff had done to potentially prevent the student dropping out and whether the school’s actions had made any difference.

Of the sample of 100 at-risk students who stayed in school, none admitted to a consideration of dropping out. All 50 of the girls and 45 of the 50 boys (90%) said they had not thought of dropping out. The other 5 at-risk boys did not answer the question or elaborate. Among the 11 dropouts (5 girls and 6 boys), the major reason given for not continuing their studies was economic (e.g., no money for the required baptism certificate, pens and books, uniform). Girls then added factors such as verbal violence from the teacher and high absenteeism. The boys included illness, parents needing them to work in the fields, and “didn’t want to go to school” (Table 2).

Table 2: Reasons for Dropping Out

3 Because the data on students and parents are coded separately for males and females, the data will be reported separately in this qualitative analysis.
Reason for Dropping Out | Ranking by Girls Who Dropped Out (N=5) | Ranking by Boys Who Dropped Out (N=6)
--- | --- | ---
Lacked the money for school expenses | 1 | 1
Illness | | 2
Verbal violence from teacher | 2 | |
High absenteeism | 3 | 3
Needed to help in the fields | | |
Didn’t want to go to school | | 4

On their part, most parents of at-risk children (72%) thought that their children were not at risk of dropping out. Those few who thought dropout was possible, agreed with the children that the major reason was a lack of financial capacity in the family.

A follow-up question to the children asked whether their parents had ever told them to drop out of school in the past year. Among the at-risk students, all who answered said “no.” Five of the boys chose not to answer. Among the dropouts, the same pattern occurred: all who answered said “no,” and one boy did not answer the question. Dropouts were then asked who made the decision for them to leave school. All of the girls answered they had made the decision, as did 5 of the 6 boys (83%). The other boy said his parents had decided.

When asked if there was anything the school might have done to prevent them from leaving, 80 percent of the dropout girls said “yes,” but only one explained her answer (i.e., move the teacher who was so “violent” to another school). Similarly, 80 percent of the boys said “yes,” and the one who explained said, “During the time I missed school (more than a month), nobody from the school or the Community Group came to visit me, gave me a Warning Card, or gave me motivation.”

The children were then asked, “When you had problems in school, did anyone from the school help you?” In response, 94 percent of the at-risk girls and 91 percent of the at-risk boys answered “yes,” as did 100 percent of the dropout girls and 67 percent of the dropout boys (Figure 1).
For the at-risk students, the people who helped were primarily homeroom (HR) teachers (Figure 2). However, for the dropouts, the largest group providing help was friends or classmates. The second largest group for at-risk children was friends or classmates, and for dropouts, HR teachers.

School directors and members of the volunteer community group were cited only by a few at-risk girls. Children reported that their teachers explained how to do the work and helped children to study; classmates offered support, explained the lessons and advised the children to attend regularly.

A follow-up question of dropouts asked if the actions of those who helped made them want to stay in school. All of the girls and 60 percent of the boys said “yes,” they wanted to stay in school. None of the boys who said “no” explained why.
So, these qualitative data suggest that SDPP did have some positive effects on at-risk children. The effects on dropouts are not as clear. Most of them said someone tried to help them, but the most frequent helpers were friends, which suggests that teachers may not have been as pro-active as possible in encouraging children who were likely to drop out or convincing their parents to send the children to school. The dropouts did say there were things the school might have done to prevent them from leaving (i.e., remove a teacher, send a community member to the home) and that many regretted not going to school, but most of them said that economic reasons did not allow them to return – or the fact that they didn’t like a teacher, had been ill, had missed a lot school, or didn’t like school.

2. How did students react to the EWRS—did they notice it, like it, feel helped and supported by it or would they have preferred something else?

The findings in this section describe how the EWRS operated, from students’ points-of-view, and how students reacted to the intervention. The interviewers began by asking if the children had ever thought about missing school and did actually miss days, and then asked about any follow-up contacts from the school and the reactions of students and parents to those contacts. Only 2 percent of at-risk girls and 19 percent of at-risk boys admitted to thinking about missing school, but 60 percent of dropout girls and 67 percent of dropout boys said they had thought about it (Figure 3).

For all four groups, the major reason they thought about missing school was that they were needed for work at home or in the fields. This was the only reason supplied by at-risk students. One dropout girl added that she wanted to avoid the physical punishment administered in school. A second dropout girl said she was living with her father who needed her to help with household chores; she also added that she lacked a baptism certificate and the school would not allow her to stay without one. One dropout boy said he was sick.

When asked if their parents had ever told the children to stay home from school, all of the at-risk students said “no,” but one dropout boy said “yes.” When asked if they ever missed school and
didn’t tell their parents, most at-risk students said “no” (60% of girls and 79% of boys). Most dropout girls (60%) also said “no”, but only 17% of dropout boys said “no.” That is, 5 of the 6 dropout boys had missed school without telling their parents (Figure 4).

The follow-up question was “When you missed school, did anyone share information with your parents or guardian?” Most children said someone shared information (88% of at-risk girls, 67% of at-risk boys, 80% of dropout girls, and 83% of dropout boys), which came from a variety of contacts. The group cited for the most contacts of at-risk children was “friends or classmates,” whereas the group contacting dropout children was most often “HR teachers” (Table 3). School directors and family members rarely shared information, and at-risk girls were the only group with three or more members having been contacted by community members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person Who Shared Information</th>
<th>At-Risk Girls (N=44)</th>
<th>At-Risk Boys (N=33)</th>
<th>Dropout Girls (N=4)</th>
<th>Dropout Boys (N=5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friend/classmate</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR teacher</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community member</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School director</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note that multiple responses were possible from a child.

The next more intensive step within the EWRS was for concerned adults to visit the home or send a Warning Card (generally delivered in person to the child’s home). Less than half of the at-risk children (30% of girls and 47% of boys) were aware of any home visits or Warning Cards, but most of the dropout children (60% of girls and 100% of boys) knew one or both of these had

4 It is possible that use of the EWRS captured the absences of the dropouts and spurred the HR teachers into action. It is not clear why community members were mentioned so rarely, as they are the individuals tasked with delivering the Warning Cards to the homes of absent children.
occurred. To gauge the children’s reactions, the interviewers showed the children pictures of different emotions, asking the children to point to the one that best represented their reaction to this form of contact (Table 4). The most frequent reactions of the students’ themselves were fright about what their parents would do or what the school staff were going to say. Other frequent negative reactions included unhappiness, anger, embarrassment or sadness. Some children in all four groups described their reaction as “normal,” or not being particularly upset. The most frequent parental response, as described by at-risk students, was anger. At-risk boys added that their parents sent them back to school, asked why they hadn’t gone to school, or were embarrassed by the contact. The most frequent responses from dropouts were similar, as dropout girls all said their parents were angry, but dropout boys said some were “normal” and some “angry.”

Table 4: Ranking of Student Reactions to Contacts from the School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Ranking by At-Risk Girls</th>
<th>Ranking by At-Risk Boys</th>
<th>Ranking by Dropout Girls</th>
<th>Ranking by Dropout Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afraid</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whatever the student and parental emotional responses, most of the students said their parents did act on the information from the school (Table 5). At-risk students reported that their parents advised them to go – or sent them – back to school, punished them for being absent, and/or talked with them about why they didn’t want to go. Parents of dropout girls also advised their children to go to school, but the first ranking response of parents of dropout boys was “took no action,” followed by advising their sons to go to school. Parents of dropouts also told girls to be good in school, and asked boys why they didn’t want to go.

Table 5: Ranking of Parent Follow-up Actions to Contacts from the School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Ranking by At-Risk Girls</th>
<th>Ranking by At-Risk Boys</th>
<th>Ranking by Dropout Girls</th>
<th>Ranking by Dropout Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advised me to go to school/sent me back to school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punished me</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told me to be good at school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asked me why I didn’t want to go</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took no action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To summarize, the student responses suggest that the EWRS was being used, though not necessarily as intended. HR teachers or the student’s friends shared information with the families about student absences, but the design of the program had community members delivering Warning Cards to families, not HR teachers. Most dropouts and some at-risk children did receive a home visit or Warning Card, which often had the effect of frightening the children and making parents angry or unhappy. However, the children reported that parents most often responded by
sending the children back to school. Parents of at-risk children were also likely to punish them for absences; in contrast, parents of dropout boys sometimes took no action.

3. How did teachers, school directors, parents and community interact with the EWRS—did they notice it, understand it, use it, like it and believe it was effective?

HR teachers, school directors and community members were all trained in the techniques and implementation of the EWRS, with (a) HR teachers tracking the at-risk students in school, (b) school directors leading the case management discussions and backing up the HR teachers, and (c) community members visiting homes to deliver Warning Cards when children were absent and taking on an educational role in the community around the importance of education. This training led to specific actions.

HR teachers said they followed the EWRS steps of checking attendance and issuing Warning Cards when students were absent twice; supported at-risk students by encouraging them to study, checking their homework, visiting their homes, and counseling them not to drop out; participated actively in case management discussions; and advised parents on how to motivate their children to stay in school (Table 6). School directors followed up on the issuance of Warning Cards, led the case management meetings, worked with the community groups that visited the families with those Warning Cards, advised parents, and supervised the teachers to make sure they kept good records and paid attention to the at-risk students. Members of the community (who volunteered to be part of the EWRS), including village chiefs, Suco chiefs, parents and other concerned adults, reported that they took those Warning Cards to families, advised parents in home visits and public meetings to send their children to school and encouraged the children to stay in school and study.

Table 6: EWRS Actions Taken by HR Teachers, School Directors and Community Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>HR Teachers (N=33)</th>
<th>School Directors (N=12)</th>
<th>Community Members (N=48)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Checked on attendance; issued Warning Cards when students were absent twice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported at-risk students by encouraging them to study, checking homework, visiting the home, counseling them not to drop out</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in/led case management meetings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked with community group to follow-up on students who were absent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advised parents on motivating their child to attend</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminded teachers to pay attention to at-risk students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most parents (94%) verified that school staff and community members had taken actions to encourage their child to stay in school and do well, reporting that the teachers and community members had checked on children’s attendance and issued Warning Cards for absences, counseled parents and students against dropout, and encouraged students to stay in school.
All of the parents agreed that teachers or community representatives had helped their child do well in school, citing such actions as giving them homework and telling the child to study hard, providing good explanations and individual attention in school, and encouraging the parents to follow-up at home to make sure the child attends school and completes schoolwork.

In addition, 60 percent of parents said they received notification through postcards, home visits or meetings about how to help their child stay in school. The largest group of these parents (65%) was notified by Warning Card, and the next largest group (31%) by a home visit, a few by letter (4%) or phone call (4%) and many (51%) by another unspecified method (multiple responses were allowed to this question). When asked if there was more, less or about the same amount of communication between the school and parents this year compared to three years ago, 58 percent of the parents said “more” now, 39 percent said “about the same” and only 3 percent said “less” (Figure 5).

HR teachers were asked if the EWRS made their jobs easier or harder. Seventy-three percent said the job was easier and the remaining 27 percent said it was sometimes easier and sometimes harder. No one said, “It was harder” (Figure 6).

In general, the job was easier because:

- Teachers could take immediate action when a child was absent,
- The procedure and forms were easy to follow, and
- Communication with parents has improved a great deal.

After the community member delivered the Warning Card, the parents usually came to school and right away the parent and teacher could agree to work together to ensure the child attended school.
On the other hand, there were a number of ways in which the job was harder: teachers had an increased workload and already busy schedules; and it was “difficult to do the case management.”

Figure 6: HR Teachers Evaluation of Job Difficulty with EWRS

Answers to a follow-up question to HR teachers about support from the school director showed that the director reminded them to complete the EWRS paperwork, gave them advice and encouragement and enforced punctuality in issuing those Warning Cards.

Answers to a similar question of community members about the support they received from the school for their activities showed that 67 percent of the community members did feel supported. They described teachers as preparing the Warning Cards and organizing their visits, following up with them about parents coming to the school, and reminding the community members to do the visits and keep an eye on the students. All but one of the community members felt the teachers appreciated their activities.

SDPP staff were also helpful, in that they provided guidance on the EWRS process and filling in the forms, reminded the teachers of the importance of tracking attendance, issuing the Warning Cards and doing case management and encouraged the teachers to come to school every day.

Most of the HR teachers (79%) said the EWRS correctly identified at-risk students, though most (77%) were also initially surprised by the children who were so identified (Figure 7).

The reasons were because some “at-risk” students (1) did well in school or (2) came regularly; and (3) there were so many students on the list. The first two reasons are perfectly possible outcomes of a scoring system that looks at a variety of factors (i.e., attendance, performance, distance to school; behavior in school) to determine who is at-risk. One factor may not represent a problem while the others do, and the student will still be identified as at-risk. Those teachers
who were not surprised said they had known before that attendance and performance issues existed.\textsuperscript{5}

\textit{Figure 7: Homeroom Teachers’ Reactions to the EWRS}

![Graph showing homeroom teachers' reactions to the EWRS](image)

As required by the EWRS, all HR teachers who had children absent two days or more said they notified parents through the delivery of Warning Cards. Most (77\%) of the time the cards were delivered by community members, though 15 percent of the time students delivered them and 8 percent of the time the teachers themselves (Figure 8).

\textit{Figure 8: Teachers’ Perception of Who Delivered Warning Cards}

![Graph showing teachers' perception of who delivered warning cards](image)

From the teachers’ perspective, parent responses varied. Beginning with the most frequently expressed reaction, parents were:

5 It is worth noting that one of the rules of the at-risk scoring process included all students in small classes (<20) as at-risk. The sample included teachers from small schools, who are likely to have been surprised at seeing students with good marks and regular attendance being classified as ‘at-risk’.
• Surprised, as they didn’t know the child had been absent,
• Afraid of the consequences (e.g., that they or the child would be arrested),
• Angry or nervous, or
• Confused, not understanding why they got the card.

Parents generally verified these reactions to contacts from their child’s school. In rank order, the fathers described themselves as surprised, angry with the child, embarrassed/ashamed or disappointed in the child and “normal.” Mothers had a slightly different ordering, with the largest group of them saying “angry,” then afraid or embarrassed, then surprised and, finally, sad.

Community members also verified the gamut of reactions, though their most common answer was that parents received their visit well, once they understood the purpose of the visit. Some examples of their comments include the following:

• “We know each other well when we make home visits. We sit and chew betel nut together while talking about their child being absent and why a Warning Card has been sent. So, the parents are aware of it and address it in a good way.”
• “They accept it well and they feel worried when they receive a Warning Card, because according to the rules in our village, if a student is absent, we will call his/her parents to clean up the grass for a week.”
• “At first, they did not welcome the presence of the community group. But then, after receiving the information, they understood our presence, and now we are working together with parents to prevent our children from dropping out of school.”
• “They were upset and asked, “Why are you here?” but then I explained that I was here for my child, your child, our child, who is absent from school, and that it is our obligation to send them back to school. I explained it that way and they accepted it.”

Other reactions included parents being upset and uncooperative, feeling afraid of the consequences (particularly mothers), and not being surprised, as they knew the child didn’t like school. However, parents said they changed their behavior after the notification: they talked to their children and motivated them to attend school (which they did), supported the child by buying necessary supplies and materials, and monitored attendance. One parent said he imposed a fine on his child for missing school. All of the parents said they were convinced that when a child misses school, it has an impact on his future in that the child won’t be able to get a good job and may only be able to work in the fields, and may become a delinquent or even a vagrant. Two specific comments are shown below:

• “Before we only sent our sons to school, not our daughters. We didn’t go to school ourselves; we just went to the traditional ceremonies. Now we plow the land, don’t have
chairs, struggle even to get enough food to eat. If our daughters don’t go to school, they will be like this, too.”

- “My son had many friends in this school, up to Grade 6, but then he dropped out. His colleagues stayed in school; they went to pre-secondary school, secondary school and up to university and got good jobs. As a dropout, he works in the fields, and at last he regrets it. ‘Dad, now they have good jobs and I’m like this.’”

Following the parents’ initial reaction, all of the teachers also noticed changes in parental behavior, mostly that parents made sure their children attended school. The text box below holds one teacher’s description of the changes.

“I see that there are changes because when parents get a Warning Card, they change their attitude and start sending their child to school. Every day at school now all the chairs are full. Student absenteeism has been reduced. When students miss school, teachers call the parents to come and talk.”

All of the teachers also noticed changes in student behavior; 85 percent noted changes in the following:

- Improved behavior/better discipline in the classroom,
- Better attendance,
- Better grades,
- Completed homework, often checked by parents, and
- An improved appearance in that they were now following the school’s dress code.

In describing the changes, teachers said,

- “There are no longer any students who are naughty in the classroom. They are now hardworking, rather than naughty.”
- “Students are not shy now, and do not disturb or disrupt each other.”
- “Students now pay attention to the subject material. Before they were lazy and sleepy. The Warning Card is one way of waking the students up.”
- “One student from Grade 4 in 2014 was very lazy and had already left school. I called him back and used approaches to help him, and now he is really hardworking. His grades have risen, he can read and write, and he understands everything.”

All but one of the HR teachers (32 of the 33 who answered the question) participated in case management meetings. These teachers reported that the meetings initiated the following actions: HR teachers

- Gave additional attention and encouragement to at-risk students, including giving them more homework, spending time getting to know them, and pairing them with another student who was doing better in school;
• Met with their parents to discuss any issues, often calling the parents to the school to remind
them how important it is to send their children to school; and
• Sat with the school director or deputy to discuss the options for helping the student; he/she
might then meet with the parents or ask the community group to talk with the parents.

When asked about the EWRS as a whole, teachers, parents, school directors and community
members agreed it was an effective intervention (Table 7). All of the HR teachers said they thought
it was effective in that it (1) improved attendance and decreased tardiness, (2) decreased dropout,
(3) improved children’s performance, and (4) improved children’s behavior. Students were no
longer shy, were more interested in school, and doing their homework regularly. Among parents,
83 percent said that since SDPP began, children have been dropping out less often than before (the
only effect parents were asked about).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Effectiveness</th>
<th>HR Teachers (N=33)</th>
<th>School Directors (N=12)</th>
<th>Community Members (N=48)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving attendance, decreasing tardiness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreasing the dropout rate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving children’s school performance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving children’s behavior in school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating parents to send children to school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving the teachers’ tracking of attendance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing the way teachers deal with absent students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving coordination between school and community</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing teacher absenteeism</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing students’ enjoyment of school</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making students afraid to miss school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The school directors extended the list provided by the teachers. They agreed with the top three
reasons provided by teachers and added that EWRS motivated parents to send their children to
school and improved the communication between school and parent, led to better tracking of
attendance and attention to students who were absent (because the data were now complete and
useable), and changed the methodology school staff used for dealing with absent students. Said
one director, “I don’t hit them anymore.”

The community members also agreed with the teachers’ four indices of effectiveness and with the
school directors’ comment that EWRS changing the way teachers dealt with absent students, and
then added several new items: improvement of coordination between the school and community,
a reduction in teacher absenteeism, an increase in students’ enjoyment of school and a new fear
in students of missing school because they knew there would be consequences.

In sum, school staff, parents and community members not only noticed and understood the EWRS
but also said they fully embraced it. HR teachers, supported by school directors, tracked at-risk
students, arranged for contacts with their parents, gave extra help to students who were struggling,
and participated in case management meetings. Community members reported that they usually
delivered the Warning Cards to parents and talked with them about the importance of children
attending school. Though many parents were initially angry, embarrassed, or surprised to learn of their children’s absences, they came to understand the reason for the contact – and did send their children more regularly to school. HR teachers gave more time and attention to at-risk students in school and saw the positive results. Along with school directors and community members, teachers reported that attendance improved, the dropout rate decreased, children’s performance increased, and children paid better attention and studied harder in school.

4. What kind of difficulties did SDPP beneficiaries (students) and targets (teachers, school directors, parents and community) experience with the EWRS and how would they like it improved?

Respondents had a variety of difficulties with the EWRS (Table 8). As discussed above, teachers said they had an increased workload with the intervention, which was built into an already busy schedule, and that community members did not always follow through with the timely delivery of Warning Cards. Some teachers would have preferred to do more of the delivery of Warning Cards themselves. Given the negative reactions of many parents to the presentation of these cards by community members, it is not clear that teachers would make the same request after a year of delivering the cards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>HR Teachers (N=33)</th>
<th>School Directors (N=12)</th>
<th>Community Members (N=48)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers had an increased workload in an already busy schedule</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents were not responsive or difficult and didn’t seem to value education</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community members were busy and couldn’t be relied upon to deliver Warning Cards</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students lived far from school, so it was difficult to deliver the cards and hard for parents to come to the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students were not motivated, even after cards were delivered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School is not always working collaboratively with the community members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms were difficult to fill out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A difficulty described by school staff and community members was that the community volunteers, like the teachers, had busy lives and could not always respond in a timely manner to requests to come to the school and get Warning Cards to deliver. Since some students lived quite far from school, it was difficult for the community members – often farmers – to take the time to walk to the student’s home, and it was also hard for that student’s parents to take time off to walk to the school for a meeting.

Other difficulties included complaints from school directors that students still were not motivated and that the EWRS forms were difficult to fill out. Community members said the school was not always working collaboratively with them to complete the process.
In terms of suggestions for improvements to the EWRS, the teachers had only two suggestions (Table 9). First, they thought it wasn’t necessary to have community members deliver the Warning Cards; teachers could do it themselves and then talk directly with parents. Second – an interesting juxtaposition of thoughts – the teachers said it would be good to improve their links with the community groups.

School directors also thought the system could be improved with better communication, but unlike the teachers, they focused on interactions between school and parents with the intention of reminding parents of the importance of education for their children. To this, the directors added: provide teachers with further training on teaching methods, with more sample lessons; and improve teacher attendance. The text box following the table explains this latter idea.

Table 9: Ranking of Suggestions to Improve the EWRS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>HR Teachers (N=33)</th>
<th>School Directors (N=12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask teachers to deliver Warning Cards</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve the links between school and community groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve communication between school and parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide further training for teachers on pedagogical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>techniques</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“**Student behavior follows teacher behavior:** If teachers are absent, then students will also be absent. If teachers arrive late, then students follow that example. We need to change and improve ourselves. Teachers need to improve themselves. Teachers need to change their attitude and behavior.”

In sum, the major difficulties with the EWRS included an increased workload for teachers, the problematic responses of some parents to the Warning Cards, community members too busy to deliver the cards, and students living so far from school they were hard to reach. However, school staff had suggestions for improvement, including the teachers delivering the Warning Cards, improving the communication links between parents/community and school, and providing further training for teachers.

5. **What aspects of the EWRS will the school continue to use?**

Ninety percent of HR teachers and all of the school directors said they plan to continue implementing the EWRS without the support of SDPP. The particular parts of the system that teachers said they were likely to continue, in order of frequency mentioned, were the following:

- Tracking at-risk students,
- Communicating with parents,
• Taking follow-up actions suggested in case management meetings, and
• Identifying at-risk students.

B. The Extracurricular Activities (ECA) Program

In this section, we review the answers to the last four of the five research questions with specific reference to the second SDPP intervention, the ECA, which offered extracurricular activities for students outside of the hours of regular school.

1. **How did students react to the extracurricular activities—did they notice them, like them, feel helped and supported by them or would they have preferred something else?**

All of the children questioned said they participated in the extracurricular activities (Figure 9). Among at-risk students, 78 percent of girls and 72 percent of boys participated once a week; 16 percent of girls and 23 percent of boys twice a week; and 6 percent of girls and 5 percent of boys more than twice a week. In general, their teacher led these activities (according to 90% of at-risk girls and 100% of at-risk boys). None of the dropouts answered these last two questions.

*Figure 9: Participation of At-Risk Students in ECA*

Those who participated listed the activities they enjoyed the most (Table 10). High on the list for at-risk girls and boys and dropout girls was singing songs and drawing. Dropout boys favored crafts and games. As one at-risk girl said of crafts, “[I] like cutting and folding, because some of our pictures are displayed in school, and some we can take home to show our parents.”
Table 10: Ranking of Enjoyment of Extracurricular Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Ranking by At-Risk Girls (N=50)</th>
<th>Ranking by At-Risk Boys (N=43)</th>
<th>Ranking by Dropout Girls (N=5)</th>
<th>Ranking by Dropout Boys (N=6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students also listed the activities they “would have liked to do” (Table 11). Most of the named activities were already a part of the program but extended the type of activity in a new direction. “Other games” were named first by at-risk students and dropout boys, and they elaborated by suggesting marbles, tops, hopscotch, Superman, and more traditional games. Dropout girls suggested more “drawing” as their first choice, giving the example of sacred houses. “Singing new songs,” particularly those with movement or drumming, was frequently mentioned, along with “sports,” “working in groups” (e.g., doing a survey of class members and presenting the results to the teacher), and “storytelling.”

Table 11: Ranking of Other Activities Students Would Like to Do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Ranking by At-Risk Girls (N=50)</th>
<th>Ranking by At-Risk Boys (N=43)</th>
<th>Ranking by Dropout Girls (N=5)</th>
<th>Ranking by Dropout Boys (N=6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other games</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing different things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing new songs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More sports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying in groups; giving results to teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At-risk children were also asked how many times a week they would like to have these activities. More of the girls (44%) favored “more than two times a week” over other choices, followed by “two times a week” (36%); more of the boys (42%) chose “two times a week,” followed by “one time a week” (39%) (Figure 10).

When asked if the extracurricular activities helped in their regular classes, most students (100% of at-risk girls, 91% of at-risk boys, and 100% of dropouts) said “yes” (Figure 11).
Children gave examples like the following to explain how the activities were helpful:

- Reading skills improved from cutting out letters, reading stories and putting the parts of stories in order;
- Math skills improved from using the spinning wheel in games, cutting and folding, class surveys, playing with numbers and board games;
- Drawing, singing and making masks helped improve knowledge of Arts and Culture;
- Tetum skills improved from singing songs in that language;
- Science skills increased from cutting out people and animals and doing activities about the environment; and
- The interactions meant children learned not to be shy in class.
At-risk children were asked to share a story or an example of things that have changed at school during the last year or so. The following are examples:

- “Last year I didn’t like school, but my Dad made me register my name and go to school. At first when I came to school I didn’t like it, but through playing together with friends finally I like school.”
- “In the past we weren't happy at school. There were no games, and there was no fun. School now makes us very happy because we can learn together. Now we feel happy, and we have fun. We feel sad when we are absent because we will miss the games that [the teachers] teach. Now we hope that even without the facilitators we can still learn.”
- “Now we are not shy. We always attend class. We can draw, we know many songs, and we learn to cut and fold.”
- “Last year we would play at the back when the teacher was explaining. The teacher would become angry. Now, when the teacher’s explaining in front we keep silent and stay calm and don’t make the teacher angry anymore.”
- “Before, I could not read. Now I can read. Before I could not write or count, but now I am much better. Now I can read, write and count. Friends helped me with writing so that now I can write my letters well. Before I didn’t like coming to school.”

Their stories show that they like school more now, are not shy, attend more often, pay attention better in class, and have learned more.

Much as they enjoyed the extracurricular activities, most at-risk students (66% of girls and 74% of boys) reported that they attended school at the same rate regardless of whether the activities were offered (Figure 12). Only 10 percent of at-risk girls reported that they came more often when the extra activities were scheduled, saying they really enjoyed the activities and learned new things. Among the dropouts, a majority of the children (60% of girls and 50% of boys) said they came more often on the days with normal classes only. Only 17 percent of the dropout boys (one child) reported coming more often when the extra activities were offered – because this child “liked them.”
All of the students except two at-risk boys said that they talked to their parents about the extracurricular activities, and most of the time parents of both at-risk and dropout children seemed in favor of them. Only 2 percent of at-risk girls and 26 percent of at-risk boys said their parents didn’t want them to go to the activities. None of the dropout parents discouraged such participation.

Thus, the extracurricular activities seemed successful to the students, those still in school and those who have dropped out. The students said that they enjoyed the activities and gained skills that will be useful in their regular classes. When they suggested changes, they expanded on the list of current activities.

2. How did teachers, school directors, parents and community interact with the extracurricular activities of the ECA—did they notice them, understand them, use them, like them and believe they were effective?

HR teachers were the major school staff involved with this part of the SDPP interventions, with some supervision from school directors. However, SDPP facilitators generally led the activities once a week, with teachers often observing. The idea was that teachers would eventually take over the leadership of activities, scheduling them twice a week, but that did not always occur.

Parents were generally aware of the activities and could offer their opinions about them and comment on their effects on their children. Community members did not participate in this aspect of SDPP; their role was exclusively with the EWRS.

All of the 33 HR teachers present at the beginning of the interview had participated in training about introducing extracurricular activities. The three topics of training they found most helpful were:

- How to increase student motivation, including making the school attractive to them;
• Student-centered activities, including crafts and games, which used new methods of teaching; and
• Positive reinforcement and discipline.

“I was really proud in the training to develop my abilities to run games, so that I can attract students and motivate them to learn. I learned to speak gently to the students. Before we were all very fierce. We learned how to attract students so that they can learn well and feel that school is a safe place for them.”

All of the teachers said they had participated in the extracurricular activities, most (67%) by leading the activity by themselves, some (21%) by helping the SDPP facilitator, and the remaining (12%) by observing someone else (Figure 13). Those who led the activities (79%) usually did so once a week, though a few (18%) did so twice or less than once (3%).

Figure 13: Forms of HR Teacher Participation in ECA

Of the 35 teachers who rated the activities, 94 percent found them easy to implement; only 6 percent found them difficult. Teachers said the instructions were detailed and clear, the training was effective and gave them a chance to try out the activities in advance, and students could really engage in the activities. The two teachers who said the activities were difficult said they didn’t understand them.

The main things that the teachers learned through these extracurricular activities were (1) teaching techniques that were child-friendly; and (2) how to increase students’ participation and interest in a school setting. When asked if they used any of the methods or activities in their regular classes, all of them said “yes.” In particular, they said they paid more individual attention to students and made their classrooms more child-friendly.

Throughout the time the teachers were leading extracurricular activities, the school directors were supporting the effort. They:

• Reminded teachers of the schedule of activities and “motivated” them to do them,
• Sometimes conducted activities themselves,
• Created a schedule for the activities,
• Provided the materials for the activities, and
• Encouraged students to attend.

Nearly all of the parents in the focus groups (98% of mothers and 100% of fathers) were aware that extracurricular activities went on at the school. Eighty-six percent of the mothers and 98 percent of the fathers said they had observed the activities at least once. When asked for examples of activities the children had mentioned, parents talked about crafts, singing, drawing and painting, games, funny activities that made children laugh and storytelling (Table 12).

Table 12: Ranking by Parents of Activities Described by Their Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Mothers (N=47)</th>
<th>Fathers (N=38)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crafts (especially those involving cutting)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing and painting (which they brought home)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny activities that made you laugh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In commenting on the effects of the extracurricular activities all of the teachers said students attended more often than before, 88 percent said they performed at a higher level now, and 88 percent said they behaved better than before. No one said the children performed or behaved worse now than they had before the activities were introduced. In listing the major effects of the activities, teachers ranked them as improved attendance and punctuality, improved performance and better behavior, in the sense of more self-confidence, more hard-working and no more fighting with each other (Table 13). School directors reinforced these ideas in their list of the top benefits, including better attendance, improved performance and greater ability to speak out and participate in class.

Table 13: Ranking of the Effects of the ECA on Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Teachers (N=33)</th>
<th>School Directors (N=12)</th>
<th>Mothers (N=47)</th>
<th>Fathers (N=38)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivated the children to go to school; decreased absenteeism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided new skills that opened the mind; improved performance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped children to speak out and participate more in class</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved behavior</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave children examples of ways to interact</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowed for competition in class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers offered the following overarching comments:

- “Since CARE has worked with us there have been big changes. Before, many students missed school, and many arrived late or left early. Now their attendance and punctuality is good. Before CARE started, the students didn’t know singing, games, or cutting, and they were not very happy. Before, many students were scared and afraid, shy, and naughty. Now the students are not afraid to speak, are not shy, and are not naughty.”

- “The changes are that when in the past we asked the students to collect up rubbish on Friday, they all refused to come to school. Now when we say that we will also have ECA on Friday where we will learn cutting and folding, all of the students come to school. Other changes are that students now repeat the activities in their own homes. Another change is that the students’ attitudes have gone from lazy to hardworking. Another big change is that now we pay attention to the student’s attendance.”

All of the parents thought the children liked the activities and that the activities helped their children (Table 13). Specifically, the activities motivated children to go to school and reduced absenteeism, gave the children new skills that opened their minds, helped them to participate in class and speak out, gave them examples of ways to interact with each other (from the mothers) and led to competition in the class (from the fathers).

However, parents’ reactions were more mixed when asked if children actually went to school more often on days when there were extracurricular activities. Only 38 percent of mothers and 61 percent of fathers said “yes.” For those who thought children did attend more, the reasons echoed the effects described above in Table 13: children enjoyed the activities; and learning these new skills helped in children’s regular subjects.

Thus, the extracurricular activities were perceived positively by school staff and parents. Teachers said they have applied the newly learned methods of a child-friendly school to their classrooms and provide individual attention to children. They thought students enjoyed the activities, felt more motivated to attend school, were learning skills and behaved better in the classroom. It is interesting to note that, though students perceived the ECA positively, they argued that the activities did not increase their attendance. Perhaps they felt they should say they always attended school and so denied that the ECA drew them especially to attend. Since school staff have recorded data on attendance, their perceptions of attendance would seem more reliable.

3. What kind of difficulties did SDPP beneficiaries (students) and targets (teachers, school directors, parents and community) experience with the extracurricular activities and how would they like them improved?

When the teachers were asked if the extracurricular activities made their jobs easier or harder or about the same, 67 percent said “easier,” 12 percent “harder” and 21 percent “about the same” (Figure 14).
Their explanations of how the job was easier included:

- It’s easier to work with the students; now they are engaged and understand the lessons;
- Field Officers and colleagues help with instruction and support; and
- Class management is easier with better student discipline.

In the words of two teachers,

- “The activities enliven and energize the students and teachers, making the students creative and helping them to follow the school rules;” and
- “These activities make the teachers really close with the students, so that we can check on those that are naughty, those that are active, and can see who is not active. The activities make the students really happy.”

However, when asked to list their difficulties, teachers were quick to say that they have limited time in the school schedule for such activities because of courses the Ministry of Education requires them to take, student exams, etc. (Table 14). School directors had a somewhat different perspective and a longer list of difficulties. They were most concerned that the teachers had not mastered the activities, they lacked materials, students were absent, teachers were absent (and might feel that the ECA should be omitted before school subjects), and the school had insufficient space to conduct the activities.
Table 14: Ranking of Difficulties in Implementing of the ECA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>Teachers (N=33)</th>
<th>School Directors (N=12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited time in the school day/year because of Ministry-required meetings, exams, etc.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers haven’t mastered the activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of materials</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student absences</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient space for the activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The improvements that school directors felt were needed to strengthen the delivery of the ECA generally respond to the difficulties they cited above. When asked for suggestions for improving the intervention, they said:

- Develop more lessons for teachers to use;
- Provide more preparation and guidance for the teachers;
- Add more activities in the traditional arts, like drumming, wood carving, etc.;
- Do the activities more often;
- Supply more manuals; and
- Insist CARE keep monitoring the school.

Parents were asked just two questions relating to difficulties with this intervention. First, a question asked if it is a problem for students to stay after school for extracurricular activities. All of the mothers said it was not, but 29 percent of the fathers said it was a problem. (No explanation was provided of why.) Second, a question asked if parents would like to see more extracurricular activities, about the same number or fewer. Mothers were split, with 68 percent saying “more” and 32 percent “less.” Fathers were also split, with 95 percent saying “more” and 5 percent “the same” (Figure 15).
So, it seems that there may be some difficulty with these activities, from the parental point-of-view, but it is not clear exactly what. It may be that the parents have tasks they would like the children to do, and the differently phrased questions prompt somewhat different evaluations of the extracurricular activities. It is also worth noting that parents are often illiterate themselves and did not fully understand the question.

In sum, school staff and parents listed somewhat different difficulties with the extracurricular activities and suggested only a few improvements. Teachers were concerned about the limited time they had available, perhaps because of their perception about their workweek. Although required by law to work 40 hours per week, many teachers understand that they are only required to work 24 hours per week, essentially the hours that they spend in class. Other factors may include absences and administrative duties. School directors wanted more teacher preparation, lessons, manuals, guidance and monitoring for the teachers. Parents and school directors favored a possible expansion of the activities.

4. What aspects of the ECA program will the school continue to use?

The only respondent group asked about continuing the extracurricular activities was the school directors. Eleven of these individuals said they would continue; one said “no.” All agreed that the teachers would take the responsibility to implement the activities, but at least one person said that the success of this might be compromised by the teachers’ limited time for the activities and the fact of a shortage of teachers.

C. Overview of the Effects of SDPP as a Whole

School directors, teachers and parents were asked to comment on SDPP as a whole, with the directors asked a list of specific questions of its effects. Their answers describe a range of improvements:
100% of the directors said at-risk students attended more often and were more punctual; because of the reduced absenteeism, they believe children are happier at school.

100% believe SDPP has reduced dropout.

92% have seen changes in students’ attitudes and behavior in that they are less disruptive and more respectful, participate more in class, and seem more motivated to study.

90% see changes in teachers, with better record-keeping, better communication with parents, less use of physical punishment, more effort at motivating students to learn and less tardiness.

83% have seen changes in student performance, with improvements in grades, behavior, completion of homework, and understanding of the material.

80% reported changes in the behavior and attitudes of parents who are now addressing absenteeism, encouraging their children to attend and justifying any absences, preparing children for school in the sense of providing supplies and a place to study at home, reducing child labor and communicating more with the school.

Figure 16: The Effects of SDPP As Seen By School Directors

When asked to describe the biggest change as a result of SDPP, directors supplied the following stories:

“**In 2013 more than 15 students dropped out of school. Now, in 2014, only one student dropped out. Now, if students miss school they get a Warning Card. This helps their attendance, behavior, capabilities, and understanding, and makes a really positive impact on a situation that was previously really bad.**”
“Participation from parents is good, and many parents come to the meetings. The school keeps the documents safe about the number of students registered and the number of dropout students.”

“A bad atmosphere from the teachers can affect the students, but now there is no bad atmosphere. Even if there is rain, the students are all active in school now.”

“Before the SDPP program started, there was no Community Group, but now the Community Group visits the parents of students who missed school. Before, students were not active because there was no ECA. Now they have begun being active because of SDPP. The ECA has made the students happy, has reduced absenteeism and the number of students arriving late or leaving early.”

Teachers had similar heartening stories:

“Participation from parents is good, and many parents come to the meetings. The school keeps the documents safe about the number of students registered and the number of dropout students.”

“A bad atmosphere from the teachers can affect the students, but now there is no bad atmosphere. Even if there is rain, the students are all active in school now.”

“Before the SDPP program started, there was no Community Group, but now the Community Group visits the parents of students who missed school. Before, students were not active because there was no ECA. Now they have begun being active because of SDPP. The ECA has made the students happy, has reduced absenteeism and the number of students arriving late or leaving early.”

Parents, too, were very positive about the project:

“The change that I see is that in 2012, a lot of students missed school, and a lot dropped out of school. Since 2012, CARE started working together with the teachers and the Community Group to check on students' attendance so that students did not miss school. Now there are also no dropout students. My own child dropped out of school in 2012, but then when he saw lots of his friends continue at school, he wanted to go back. He is eager to go to school now, and when he comes home he always tells about how he learned singing and other activities.”
“In the past, too many students were absent from school. No one checked on them. Now we are afraid that the Community Group will call on us if our children are absent. Now our children like to go to school because they learn many new things and have fun.”

“SDPP develops children's motivation to learn reading, writing and drawing. We are really grateful because the SDPP program's activities help students to read, write, paint and draw. They [the children] are not shy or embarrassed to stand at the front of the class.”

“Children have become clever. When the children continue going to school they will become police officers and soldiers in the future.”

“The children are happy to go to school because they can play, and they can enjoy various activities. They are more eager as there are many new activities. The children are happy because of these new activities.”

“Don't give students lots of domestic chores to do. The big change is that now the school tells us that we should not give our children lots of domestic work like fetching wood, working in the rice fields, or working on the farm, but instead should send them to school.”

Parents also said they had changed their own behavior because of SDPP. Mothers and fathers said they sent their children to school regularly and monitored their attendance and supported the children’s schooling needs by buying materials and ensuring they had time to study. In addition, mothers encouraged their children to stay in school, and fathers advised them to show good behavior in school.

Thus, from all of these perspectives, the SDPP interventions of EWRS and extracurricular activities have made a difference in the dropout rate, attendance, student performance, behavior and attitudes, or at least knowledge of what they should be. They also have changed teacher behavior and attitudes in such varied areas as record-keeping, communication with parents, the use of physical punishment, encouragement of students and punctuality.

IV. Conclusions

This qualitative research report explored the effectiveness of SDPP interventions implemented in five different districts of Timor-Leste that targeted grades 4, 5 and 6. The two different interventions were: (1) an Early Warning and Response System in which at-risk students were identified and supported, and (2) an Extracurricular Activities (ECA) program. The findings from interviews and focus groups with various stakeholders suggest that SDPP positively influenced at-risk students’ decisions to stay in school. In addition, students said they liked school more, were less shy, attended more often, paid attention better in class, and learned more. Along with school directors and community members, teachers reported that attendance improved, the dropout rate decreased, children’s performance improved, and children paid better attention and studied harder in school.