INTRODUCTION
In 2014, Fierro Consulting and JaRco Consulting conducted a study on attitudes towards girls’ education among pastoralist communities in the Afar region of Ethiopia. This brief presents findings that emerged through the capabilities of the SenseMaker® approach.
The Afar region has historically performed poorly on education indicators and in 2012 had a Net Enrollment Ratio of 32%, compared to the national average of 85%. Challenges in the education sector include inadequate school infrastructure, a lack of trained teachers, inconsistent attendance, and poor educational outcomes for students.

METHODOLOGY
Sample and respondent characteristics

- 100 girls aged 10-19
- 100 female caregivers from the same households as the girls’ sample

Respondents came from four woredas (administrative districts) in Afar: Chifra, Mille, Hadillella and Semurobi.

WHAT IS SENSEMAKER®?
SenseMaker® is a narrative-based research methodology that involves the collection of a mass number of stories. In this study, each respondent shared a story in response to a prompt that asked ‘Tell me about a girl who did or didn’t go to school and how that made her situation or those around her better or worse’. After sharing her story, each respondent then answered a set of pre-determined analytical questions about the story, in essence conducting the primary interpretation of her own narrative and reducing the potential for interpretive bias. Responses to the analytical questions were aggregated and further analysed using SenseMaker® Explorer software.

“What is your story about? Select up to 3 options” (n=200)
Using SenseMaker® was an opportunity to enhance the voices of girls and to understand challenges and experiences in the education sector from the perspective of girls themselves. The study aimed to incorporate a more girl-centred approach to evaluation in seeking to understand outcomes for girls.

With SenseMaker®, it was possible to administer the tool to individuals with very low literacy, as young as age 10, by allowing additional time and making adjustments with the use of kinesthetic tools, for example allowing respondents to draw their responses in the sand before putting them on paper. The SenseMaker® approach elicited a range of stories that both reflected daily experiences and that were unique and intimate, told from the perspective of girls and women themselves.

The narratives collected for this study shared some common themes: the linkage between early marriage and girls leaving school; community challenges such as the need for survival under harsh conditions (especially drought); and girls’ domestic work burden and their role within the household, particularly in herding goats and fetching water.

SENSEMAKER® CAPABILITIES & EMERGING FINDINGS

DYAD RESPONSES: TESTING HYPOTHESES

In SenseMaker®, dyad questions consist of two responses that are placed at opposite ends of a spectrum. The storyteller places a mark somewhere along the spectrum to show how strongly the two responses relate to the story that they have told. This response modality helps reveal complexity in attitudes and provides more nuance than “either/or” multiple choice answers.

The Afar study used dyads to test two hypotheses: 1) That marriage was perceived as more important than school to help a girl have a better life; and 2) That a family’s views on education were more important than access to a quality school nearby in making the choice to send a girl to school. As shown below, the first hypothesis proved false because in terms of beliefs, most respondents indicated that education was the more important factor in improving girls’ lives.

The data did not support the second hypothesis either, with responses fairly evenly divided across the two drivers of family views and proximity of a quality school, as illustrated in the dyad graphic below. SenseMaker® can thus quantify the extent to which narratives confirm or challenge hypotheses.

Your example shows that girls can have better lives by… (n=198)

In your example, the choice to send the girl to school or not depended more on… (n=181)

“CHILD MARRIAGE”

I’m currently married. I’ve stopped going to school, it was my mother and father who married me off. The reason I quit is because the school was too far away. But because a really nice school has been built in our neighborhood, I have decided to start again next year. Even though my husband doesn’t go to school, he will not stop me from doing so.

—Girl, Chifra, Age 14
TRIAD RESPONSES: THE DEGREE TO WHICH DIFFERENT CONCEPTS CONTRIBUTE TO A STORY

Triad questions provide a way to explore how relevant three concepts are in relation to the story shared and in relation to each other. Participants were asked to place a mark inside a triad closest to the concept(s) most relevant to her story. Unlike a multiple choice question, a triad question allows a participant to indicate that all three responses may be valid to varying degrees. The triad shown explores the importance of different actors in decision-making about girls’ education. As clan and religious leaders play an important role in Afari communities, it was surprising that a very small number of participants thought these leaders had influenced decisions about a girl’s school attendance. Instead, one cluster of participants said men and women in the family were involved in equal measure, another cluster said it was predominantly men making the decision, while another third said it was primarily women. This indicates that clan and religious leaders may influence the enabling environment within a community, but decisions about education are mostly taken at the household level. Further research and community sense-making could examine the relationship between community members and household decisions.

EASY IDENTIFICATION OF OUTLIERS

Analysis of responses to the dyad above by woreda found a distinctly different trend of responses from Hadilella. While in other woredas, participants were split in thirds on this item, in Hadilella more than half of girls thought the family’s ideas about education played a dominant role over access to a quality school nearby. These results were true only for Hadilella, indicating some aspects unique to this woreda: program staff suggested this may have occurred because of a new tendency of families to locate their homes near to very few existing schools. Further monitoring would be useful here to see if response patterns shifted as education projects builds new schools, increasing the accessibility of education.

OPENNESS TO AMBIGUITY

Dyads and triads allow space for participants to offer more nuanced and sometimes unexpected information than direct questions. In the triad below, many participants said that a girl’s education helped her, her family, as well as her community. During cognitive testing of the research tool, participants clarified that education was perceived to help the girl in the short-term and the family and the community only in the long-term. Making education more relevant in the short-term would thus be essential to shifting attitudes and behaviors. Parents held positive views about the importance of education in theory but were frustrated with inadequate school structures and poor learning outcomes.

OBSERVING DIFFERENCES

Another triad asked whether adults respected/accepted a girl’s decision, made a decision for a girl, or listened to a girl. SenseMaker® generates a ratio variable for each triad concept. The value of each variable is based on the distance a dot has from the concept in each corner. SenseMaker® triad data was exported to Excel and SPSS. Two Independent Samples Mann-Whitney U tests revealed that there was a difference in responses between girls and caregivers in regards to decision-making. Girls thought adults listened to a girl more than caregivers did, while caregivers thought adults

In your example, the girl’s education...
(N=186)

Helped her

Helped her family

Helped her community

Girls
Caregivers

“STORY OF AN EDUCATED GIRL”

[] is a 4th grader. She has been absent from school for the past two months due to problems. I asked her to take the animals to where there is water due to the drought and as a result, she hasn’t been going to school for the last two months. She will start school soon however, there are a lot of problems related to the quality of education in schools. Water, shortage of food is present in schools. This is hurting our children.

—Caregiver, Mille

In your example, the girl’s education...
(N=186)

Helped her

Helped her family

Helped her community

Girls
Caregivers
made a decision for a girl more so than girls did. There was no meaningful difference between girl and caregiver responses on respecting/accepting a girl’s decision, although this item was chosen less compared to adults making decisions for a girl [Median (Respected a girl’s decision)=7.74; Median (Listened to a girl)=12.28; and Median (Made the decision for a girl)=72.44]. This indicates that participants rarely felt the girl in the story made the decision alone. While adults often made choices for the girl, they also listened to a girl before making a final decision. It would be interesting to conduct the same study on men and leaders to see if similar trends persist.

EXPOSING CONTRADICTIONS

In welcoming complexity, SenseMaker® helps contradictions in beliefs or behaviours to emerge. For example, there were positive views of education vis-à-vis marriage in the dyad data, but when asked to rank the barriers to a girl’s access to education, marriage emerged as the most commonly cited barrier (combining response options ‘marriage’ and ‘absuma’ marriage, a practice particular to Afar culture). Chores, which are indispensable for meeting the family’s short-term, basic needs, such as fetching water and tending to cattle, also take high priority.

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**Rank the three biggest barriers for the girl in your example to face (n=200)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chores</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early marriage</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absuma marriage</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Household income</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favoring boys</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental attitude</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female circumcision</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion and culture</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**IN SUMMARY**

What findings around attitudes and behaviours about girls’ education have emerged using the SenseMaker methodology?

**Different people contribute to decision-making about her life:** This study shows that decision-making over a girl going to school can be a complex process. Women in the family are involved in the decision as much as men are, and the girl herself also plays a role. Clan and religious leaders have a role as well although this may relate more to regulating the community norms and practices rather than being directly involved in household decisions.

**Short-term and long-term decisions are not always obvious:** While overall there is an understanding that the long-term effects of education are positive, short-term choices often take priority. Unless education becomes relevant to the wider family and community in the short-term, issues such as access to water that have a more direct impact on survival will continue to take priority over educational attainment.

**Mutually reinforcing cycle of supply and demand:** Even if a family has a positive view of education, where quality of school structures, teachers, and the language of instruction are inadequate, the family is likely to not send the girl to school. At times, the building of a quality, well-equipped school can support even girls who had dropped out, to return to school.

**Insights and recommendations for programming on girls education:**

- It is important that girls’ education projects in the Afar region monitor and address the perceived value of girls’ education, particularly related to the tradeoff between education and early marriage.
- In this context, programme managers should devise both recruitment and retention strategies, such as modifying curricula, to be more immediately relevant to Afari life in order to improve perceptions of short-term benefits.
- Marriage is a significant barrier to girls’ educational attainment. Emphasizing the importance of continuous attendance in order to see rewards of girls’ education may make it easier for married girls to continue their education and for girls to delay marriage.

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