Speed School, Ethiopia
An Education Program for Out-of-School Children

Background: Geneva Global, an international philanthropy advising firm, has operated the Speed School program in Ethiopia since 2011. The goal is to provide out-of-school children aged 9 to 14 a "second chance" at formal education, equipping them with core knowledge, skills, behaviors, and motivation to continue and thrive in primary school and beyond. As of the 2021/22 academic year, Speed School has benefited over 250,000 children and their families in Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Sidama, SNNP, Somali, and Tigray regions and Addis Ababa municipality. Speed School operates in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the respective regional, zone, and woreda education offices.

2011/12 – 2021/22

Over 250,000 out-of-school children educated in over 9,400 Speed School classrooms

96% transition rate from Speed School to formal primary schools

Over 230,000 mothers / guardians supported by Self-Help Groups

Around 35,000 formal teachers and headteachers trained

As of 2021/22, government operates about 65% of all Speed School classes

Program components: The Speed School Program comprises four components:

Speed School classes enroll out-of-school children aged 9 to 14 from a community's most disadvantaged families to cover the official Grades 1 to 3 curriculum in one year. In groups of 30, pupils acquire the knowledge and skills they will need to join Grade 4 and advance successfully and far in formal education. Instruction features activity-based, learner-centered methods, continuous formative assessment, peer learning, and other proven methods, linking lessons directly to the pupils' local context for greater academic, practical, and personal learning. Most classes are led by a para-professional facilitator with at least a Grade 10 certificate and whom the program trains and supports by combining practice-based workshops, dialogue-based supervision, and peer-driven reflective practice to help facilitators *become progressively better* in their roles.

Self-Help Groups provide the mothers of all Speed School pupils the economic and social capacity and commitment to support their children's schooling far into the future. The groups join mothers (or guardians) in income-generating activities and savings to cover the future costs of schooling. They conduct community-based actions to manage the many barriers to children's school participation and success, including poor health and hygiene, gender bias, insecurity, and more. The groups intervene directly in support of the facilitator by promoting regular attendance and helping maintain the classroom while also supporting the facilitator to link lessons meaningfully to the local context.

Primary School Capacity-Strengthening trains teachers in the core methods of Speed School both to ease the transition of former Speed School pupils into conventional classrooms and to decrease future dropouts. Focusing on schools that host Speed School classes and that will receive former Speed School completers, the component comprises three strategies. One, headteachers and select teachers receive direct training in the core Speed School methods. Two, teachers actively seek out Speed School facilitators to learn from them informally, motivated by the high quality of the pupils coming from Speed School classes. Lastly, the program encourages each school to operate a school-wide education community of practice as a formal structure and set of strategies for teachers to reflect and act alone and together with the goal of improving their professional practice and the learning outcomes of their pupils.

Government Adoption has evolved into a fourth program component over the past few years. Beginning in 2017, the regional education bureaus of Oromia and Tigray chose to fund their own Speed School classes, inspired by Speed School's independently validated success. Joined in following years by the other program regions, government now funds over half of all Speed School classes. The adoption agenda advanced further in 2021 when the Ministry of Education launched an official "Speed School Unit." Geneva Global now supports the unit along with many other key ministerial, regional, and local education structures—notably, school improvement, curriculum, teacher training, planning, and inspection—to achieve the program's full institutional appropriation as the foundation for a sustained national scaling of Speed School over the upcoming years.

Program impacts: Speed School's nearly ten years in Ethiopia have yielded many positive results. These appear in Geneva Global's own reporting, the testimonies of teachers, parents, and officials, and the findings of a few independent evaluations, including a six-year longitudinal study. Prominent among the findings are:

❖ Speed School pupils complete the year with higher scores than their conventional school counterparts in Grade 3 on tests of Amharic, English, and Mathematics.

❖ Over 95 percent of enrolled Speed School pupils complete the school year, and over 95 percent of these transition to formal primary classrooms, of whom over 75% enter Grade 4, where all routinely have better retention and attendance.

❖ Former Speed School pupils tend to occupy the top ten positions in their classes, performing better on tests, exhibiting greater learning skills, and serving as role models and leaders in class and at home.

❖ Parents are actively involved, readying classrooms, ensuring children's school attendance, paying their fees after their children transition to conventional classes, supporting lessons, and more.

❖ Many primary teachers in conventional classrooms now use the program's key pedagogic dimensions, encouraged by their directors to learn from the Speed School facilitators.

THE SPEED SCHOOL CLASSROOM …

… has highly engaged, active, supportive facilitators

… is creative, kinetic, noisy, & joyous

… uses stimulating, effective, low-cost & no-cost learning materials

… involves collaborative, active, fun, multi-dimensional learning

… engages students in practical & relevant learning

… produces children who are learning & persisting … often better than their peers!

Noteworthy accomplishments: Speed School in Ethiopia has been recognized in many ways, including:

❖ Two major international education platforms cited Speed School as an outstanding global education innovation, beginning with WISE, in 2017, and then HundrEd, in 2019, 2020, and 2021.

❖ Speed School is now included explicitly in both Ethiopia's *2030 Education Roadmap* and the new five-year *Education Sector Development Plan* as well as in the same documents for a few partner regions.

❖ The Ministry of Education launched in 2021 the Speed School Unit to encourage and guide schools and official structures across the system to adopt and implement the program's key technical dimensions.

❖ Speed School is featured as an exemplary accelerated education initiative in USAID's review of 2021 evidence, *Reigniting Learning: Strategies for accelerating learning post-crisis*.

❖ The *Speed School Toolkit* is translated into several local languages for use by many regions.

❖ Geneva Global also operates Speed School successfully in Northern Uganda since 2016.

Our partners: As the program's technical and operational leader in Ethiopia, Geneva Global implements Speed School with a group of important partners. The program is deeply grateful for its original funding from Legatum Fund and Luminos Fund and significant sustained financial support from a few private philanthropic clients. In recent years, UNICEF and Education Cannot Wait have also become granting partners, enlisting Geneva Global to lead the use of Speed School to bring children from internally displaced communities back to learning. Implementation has rested with over 20 Ethiopian NGOs, which have also contributed substantively to the model's continued evolution and the government adoption process. Even before the adoption process took hold, education and other government units from the district to the federal levels have also been vital to the program's functioning and success. Lastly, it is important to acknowledge Stromme Foundation, from which Geneva Global learned of Speed School when funding them to implement Speed School in West Africa.

Looking ahead: As Speed School quickly becomes a core strategy of the government's approach to provide high quality, relevant education to its out-of-school and other highly disadvantaged populations, Geneva Global is taking steps to be an essential technical partner in these efforts. The aim is to accompany government and its partners to introduce Speed School to new regions and woredas and to help embed the model's key technical dimensions within the key operational institutions, such as the colleges of teacher education, the school improvement and supervision structures, and planning units. The challenges are many, but the commitment is firm.

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