

## Background

According to the FDRE Ministry of Education, out of every 100 children enrolled in first grade (usually at age 7), 50 drop out by the time they reach fifth grade (at the age of 11); 30 more fail to complete eighth grade. Thus only 20% of children who begin first grade complete the full eight years of primary education and the rate of school dropout is higher among girls than boys (Ministry of Education, 2014). This trend also dominates secondary education. To further explore obstacles to girls' education in particular, Hiwot Ethiopia, International Child Development Initiative (ICDI) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) jointly conducted research in two rural and semi-rural districts of North Shewa Zone of the Ethiopian Regional State of Amhara so as to implement a project based on a findings. Focus group discussions and in-depth, semi-structured interviews were held; while the majority of respondents were adolescent girls, there were also boys, teachers, parents, community leaders, policy makers and civil servants. Altogether more than 100 respondents participated.

When respondents were asked to identify obstacles to girls' education, they first responded with expected answers but as discussions and interviews continued, more contextualized and complicated answers emerged. Poverty was mentioned as a major barrier to girls' and boys' education, since poor parents can't afford to pay for educational materials or rent and food if they have to send their child to a nearby town to continue their education. What affects girls disproportionately are attitudes towards girls' education that cause parents to prioritize boys' education. Parents may believe it is better to marry their daughter than to continue her education. One factor is sexual harassment, such as abductions that lead to early marriages and rape, girls face when walking long distances to school. In addition,

both boys and girls work in the household and in the field, but many (including boys) have testified that the girls' load is heavier. Working at home can lead to high levels of absenteeism and this, combined with low education quality, guilt about the financial burden on the family, and priority given to boys, makes it difficult for girls to succeed and can lead to voluntary school leaving. Early marriage was also named as a barrier, since girls leave school after getting married in an overwhelming number of early marriage cases. The opinion of the mother is another issue, as it is often mothers who push for girls to drop out, either to help with household work or get married. Unwanted pregnancies by rural girls learning in towns, caused by lack of reproductive health knowledge and pressure to adopt an 'urban lifestyle', receive negative publicity in rural communities and discourage parents from sending their girls to school.



*Girls playing in a rural, primary school compound*

Recommendations from the focus groups and interviews included social and awareness work with mothers, involving boys in supporting girls' education, educational support for girls, mobilizing community support using creative edutainment approaches, involving teachers in educating the community and parents, and economic support to struggling schoolgirls. Using finding and



recommendations from the research, Hiwot Ethiopia developed an intervention package in collaboration with beneficiaries and stakeholders to address girls' education at 5 kebeles in the districts of Moretina Jiru in North Shoa Zone, Amhara Regional State. Hiwot Ethiopia and ESD implemented the education matters, especially for girls with technical and financial support from ICDI. This brief will focus on Hiwot Ethiopia's project implementation. The overall goal of the project was to ensure that girls in Ethiopia attend and complete primary and secondary education by removing barriers that block them from doing so and was implemented from August to February 2017.

## Accomplishments of the Project

The project targeted schoolgirls and directly reached 1000 primary and secondary schoolgirls at high risk of school dropout, as well as indirectly reached 1500 schoolgirls' parents, siblings, extended family members, their teachers, and community leaders.

### I. Economic Barriers

Project committees identified schoolgirls struggling to attend school due to economic factors as direct beneficiaries. One hundred girls were given school material support and 15 girls were given economic support. As a result, schools have reported a decrease in girl dropouts. Schoolgirl beneficiaries no longer engage in income generating activities that take time and energy away from studying.

### II. Attitudes towards girls' education

Attitudes towards the role of girls as only good for domestic work and marriage are dangerous to the success of girls' at school. To counteract these attitudes, project committees were established and community awareness activities were conducted.

Project committees addressing girls' education and barriers to girls' education were established at the woreda and in the five kebeles. These committees included representatives from government offices (education, health and police), schools, religious leaders, CBOs, and parents. A familiarization and sensitization workshop about the project and girls' education was given to 27 project committee members, 6 female and 21 male. In addition, 97 parents (69 males and 28 females) and 41 CBO

members (29 males and 12 females) were trained on the importance of girls' education.

To address the community as a whole, edutainment activities were conducted, using drama, poems and more, at market places, schools, and public gatherings. These activities reached 2,330 people, 1,352 male and 972 female. A 'no child marriage campaign' was organized to convince villages to pledge themselves as a 'child marriage free' village. Consequently, the community, including the police and the woreda office, has started to act together to stop dropouts and has shown commitment to girls' education. These dedicated community members and the project committees have created effective and functional response networks to girl dropouts. Local project committees, in collaboration with the Women and Children's Affairs Office, canceled 29 child marriages.

### A Second Chance



Azeb Imaye is 17 years old and a 9th grade student living with relatives in Enewary. Two years ago, when she was in 7th grade, she started living at the Girls' Safe Home. She is economically supported by the Education Matters, especially for girls! project, in addition to receiving trainings and participating in peer-to-peer education. About her experiences, she says, "I have faced many challenges. My mother died, my father disappeared and I was living with my grandmother. I didn't have a house in Moretina Jiru Woreda, no close family, and I wanted to continue my education. In grade seven, my grades started dropping and I was ready to drop out of school. My teacher asked me what was happening. I told him and he recommended I join the Safe Home. Now, Hiwot Ethiopia provides me with education materials and 200 birr a month for food and other



essentials. I don't worry anymore because I have a safe home and support. I was part of the Girls' Club and learned how to be prepared and unafraid of menstruation. When my period comes, I am ready and know how to ask for help and advice. I have told my friends not to be afraid of menstruation and how to ask for help. In my community, girls have gotten many things from this project. They have improved their confidence and self-esteem. Now, community attitude has changed and they see that girls can be confident and educated. In the future, I want to continue attending the Girls' Club and keep learning. I want to contribute to this project after I graduate."

### III. Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment was addressed by involving men and boys in the project. By encouraging men and boys to help their female counterparts, sexual harassment can be reduced and behavior that supports and protects girls increased. Men and boys were involved in tutorial classes, boys' clubs, and peer education.

Boys were involved in tutorial classes that supported 200 students, 160 schoolgirls and 40 schoolboys. Girls' and boys' clubs addressing girls' education were established at each project site. Seventy-four peer educators, 39 males and 35 females, were given training and refresher training on girls' education and early marriage. Before the intervention, many boys didn't know the meaning of harassment or how to support female peers at school. Now, as a result, boys involved in the project and the boys' club have started to support their sisters with their studies as well as taking measures to protect them from harassment. Girls' club representatives have said that as a result of the peer-to-peer discussions, girls and boys are reporting early marriage arrangements without shame.

### IV. Opinion of the Mother

Usually, mothers pressure girls to drop out of school, either to help with domestic work or to get married. To address this, mothers were given trainings to create awareness about the importance of continuing education, as well as the importance of discussing vital information with daughters such as

menstruation and SRH issues. Ten mothers were trained as discussion facilitators and conducted mother-to-mother discussions with 297 mothers from five districts. As a result, mothers have started to assist in canceling child marriages (in collaboration with the project committee, parents canceled 11 child marriages) and supporting their daughters in their education.

### V. Negative Peer Pressure

Rural girls attending school in a bigger town and living alone face peer pressure to engage in risky behaviors and most don't have the necessary skills and knowledge to protect themselves.

Schoolgirls and boys were given life skills, sexual health and reproduction (SRH), locally made sanitary pad, child marriage and girls' education training. The capacity of 10 female girls' club representatives (teachers) from the five target schools was enhanced through social worker/para counselor training. Girls' and boys' clubs were established and discussed girls' education issues and addressed needs of club members, including counseling sessions for vulnerable youth.

As a result of peer-to-peer discussions, trainings and counseling sessions, girls and boys are protecting themselves from dangerous behaviors and staying in school. The number of girl dropouts has decreased. None of the schoolgirl beneficiaries has faced unwanted pregnancy.

### VI. Lack of Knowledge About Menstruation

Menstruation causes most girls to miss school. Many girls lack the confidence and knowledge to properly manage menstruation and many boys view menstruation negatively, as something dirty to be ridiculed. To address this, girls and boys were given locally made sanitary pad trainings, including general menstruation information, and menstruation rooms were built or space appropriated for each school girls' club and stocked with menstruation materials, water, mattresses and pillows.

Due to locally made sanitary pad trainings, girls' clubs and menstruation rooms, girls are attending



school with confidence and absenteeism due to menstruation has dropped. Before the intervention, most boys didn't know how to support female peers during menstruation. Many saw menstruation as a negative thing and would ridicule the girls. Now, boys involved in the project and the boys' club have started to support their sisters during their menstruation and with their studies.

## Finding Strength

Indaseb Wendimteka is 15 years old and attends 5th grade in Yewollo Kebele, a five-hour walk from the woreda town. She says (translated from Amharic), "At the age of 10, my family planned my



marriage. They told me I was going to my godfather's house but instead, they were taking me to my future husband's house. When I arrived

there and realized what was happening, I escaped to the next house. But they found me. I threatened my parents and told them I would go to the police. My mother was angry and frustrated with me, but she let me go back to school. As soon as I got to school, I reported my family's plans to the school. Now, the school is helping me. If I miss class, school directors and administrators will go to my house to make sure my parents haven't forced me to marry. My intended fiancé is a farmer and keeps trying to convince me, telling me he will give me money if I marry him. I don't want money. Even if he gives me 10,000 birr, I want to learn. Now, the school is supporting me. I am a good student and second in my class. My parents think I have disgraced them and ignore me at home. I do everything myself and prepare my own food. I am selling firewood to support myself. I am a member of the Girls' Club at the school and I receive counseling support, such as how to communicate with my parents and other advice. I have been trained in peer-to-peer education and sanitary pads and menstruation. The only recommendation I have for the project is to provide money for sport clothes, since we must have different clothes for our physical education class and many can't afford this. In the future, I want to be an engineer and change everything. I want my family to see the value of

girls' education." In Yewollo, where Indaseb lives, the Education Matters, especially for girls! project has created community awareness on early marriage and local stakeholders, such as administrators and school leaders, are committed to ending early marriage. Indaseb's story is proof the project has created a reliable network of communication and quick action when it comes to ending early marriage and supporting girls' education.

## Best Practices

Awareness creation through creative approaches has been a best practice across all districts. Club members have used dramas, songs, poems and more to effectively disseminated information to rural areas, schools and community gatherings about girls' education, early marriage, and harmful traditional practices. It has been the foundation of this project and reached 2,330 people. In addition, the project has created a sustainable and community-owned network to keep girls in school and quickly and effectively respond to drop outs and early marriage arrangements. This network includes girls' club representatives, local project committees and parents. Material development of peer-to-peer, mother-to-mother and counseling manuals has taken steps to ensure the sustainability of the project and give the community the tools to continue trainings, discussions and counseling sessions. Another successful strategy has been the involvement of boys and men through boys' clubs and inclusion of male students in girls' tutorials, peer-to-peer education and locally made sanitary pad trainings. Boys and men have a big role to play in supporting their female counterparts, including helping girls in school and reporting drop outs and early marriage arrangements.

## Address:

Hiwot Ethiopia

Telephone: +251 11 655 0238

P.O.Box: 27743 Code 1000

Email: [hiwotethiopia@ethionet.et](mailto:hiwotethiopia@ethionet.et)

Website: [www.hiwot.org.et](http://www.hiwot.org.et)