

Empowering Children to Ensure Their Meaningful Participation in Local Level Economic Governance, 2016

1. Background:

Within the framework of international child right agencies, governments are obligated to budget for children since investment in children and youth contributes to economic development, democratic governance, and social stability. Policy makers are aware of these imperatives that are reflected health, education, and protection improvements. Even so, such statements must be unpacked to explain stark variances between countries in terms of commitment and readiness to translate promised political rhetoric into concrete budgetary allocation for children's benefit.

Resources, specifically in terms of proper budget allocation and expenditure, are crucial instruments for advancing children's survival, protection and development. This is true in Ethiopia, as the capacity of most families to finance and provide for their children is limited and there are huge unmet needs for access to basic services, especially for vulnerable children.

While the Ethiopian government ratified the United Nations Child Right Convention (UNCRC) and the African Charter and on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), there is still a long way to ensure the changes in the four pillars of the CRC are fully addressed in planning and implementation. The Ethiopian constitution outlines government commitment to children, stating, "The state shall accord special protection to orphans and shall encourage the establishment of institutions which ensure and promote their adoption and advance their welfare and education."¹ Moreover, the Criminal Code of Ethiopia, an important legal instrument to ensure safety of children from abuse and exploitation, has a number of protective provisions. The Ethiopian family law also supports children living safely, especially those with divorced parents.

However, within such efforts, there are challenges in ensuring adequate budgetary commitments to child related services. In the child friendliness index ranking of African governments, Ethiopia is in the less child friendly category.² Children's issues often receive less attention and are given low priority in the state budget.

More importantly, even when adequate money is allocated to children programs, it delivers less than expected. Most children do not participate in family issues, let alone in local governance issues, that affect them, other than accepting their parent's decision. Children have the right to meet and join organizations, as long as it does not prevent others from enjoying their rights. This right as stipulated in article 15 of the Convention of the CRC is the backbone of the formation of child led initiatives (CLIs) and groups.³

2. Experiences of Hiwot Ethiopia

Hiwot Ethiopia was established in 1995 by a group of young people who wished to make a difference. From its small beginning, Hiwot has grown and developed into an association, then a registered NGO, and is now re-registered with the Charities and Societies Agency as an Ethiopian Resident Charity. It envisages a future where children and youth in Ethiopia live healthy, happy and productive lives. Accordingly, Hiwot is running different projects under child development, livelihood, SRH/FP and youth employment programs in Addis Ababa, Amhara and Oromia Regions. All the projects are working for the better life of children and youth in the area of protection, prevention and capacity building so as to minimize the number of children and youth vulnerable to any hazard.



Children while discussing

3. The initiative/Intervention

Hiwot Ethiopia, based on its past experience of working on CLIs, has designed an intervention which aims to

¹ Constitution of the FDRE, article 36(5).

² The African Report on Child wellbeing, 2011.

³ UNCRC, 1989.

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Empower target children and enhance their capacity to meaningfully participate in district budget allocation and to advocate child responsive budgeting, through which sufficient resources and/or finances can be allocated for essential basic social services that address children's basic needs.

The project has targeted child led initiatives (CLIs), CRCs (Child Support Groups), government structures, council members and community based organizations (CBOs). The project has focused on establishing and strengthening the capacity of child led initiatives and child supportive structures to improve children's situations. The project has been implemented since 2013 at the three woredas of Gullele -woreda 5, Yeka-woreda 5, and Arada-woreda 9 sub cities of Addis Ababa where children live in difficult circumstances.

Why children need special attention.

Children need "psychosocial developmental priming mechanisms" to develop normally across a range of competencies. These include activities that support development, such as encouraging exploration, rehearsing new skills, and guiding and limiting behavior. When children in low-resource environments lack these experiences, their development suffers.

Attitude of duty bearers and adults towards children is one of the greatest barriers to meaningful children's participation. Limited understanding about investment in children (IiC) and its potential returns, child friendly and participatory budgeting, and lack of capacity and experience have also been challenges among stakeholders working with children's groups as well as reluctance of government offices, service providers and community leaders to engage with children and children's groups.

Before the project implementation, children often were not able to participate in budget planning; therefore, the budget did not fully reflect their voices and interests, if at all. This lack of child participation as well as limited availability of information on child budgeting implies that the government has neglected child participation in budget planning, approval, implementation and monitoring, as well as in the budget cycle in general.

This project has aimed to enhance child participation in local level budget processes and budget analysis/tracking. It focuses on supporting child led initiatives and child school clubs to become model child clubs that prioritize and promote children's issues among children and other organizations in Addis Ababa. The project builds the capacity of children, CRCs and community representatives (council members) to lobby at the community and local government level for improved participation in budgeting for child health, education and social protection. They also lobby members of child right committees, NGOs and other community based institutions to promote and ensure children participation and access to essential services for vulnerable children.

Focus of intervention:

The targets of the project have been child led initiatives, woreda level Child Right Convention Committees, council members, decision makers, and respective government offices. Activities have been implemented in line with the intended objectives. The project provided capacity building trainings and financial, material and technical supports to clubs in order to achieve empowerment of children through meaningful participation. Different awareness raising trainings such as child budgeting or IiC, child participation, advocacy, leadership and social accountability, peer to peer discussions, experience sharing and learning visits, and material, financial, and technical support were the major activities implemented by the project. In the year 2016 only, 91(m-55, f-36) children, 48 (m-21, f-27) members of CRCs, 43 (m-27, f-16) woreda and sub city level decision makers and 51(m-31, f-20) woreda level council members participated in the trainings. Twelve child peer to peer (P2P) discussions were conducted on monthly bases by each CLI and a total of 180 (m-89, f-91) children attended the session every month.

Major Achievements by the project

The project has contributed to the empowerment of children and facilitated their meaningful participation in local level governance, including budgetary processes. Therefore, as the result of the supports provided by the project, children have been able to actively participate at woreda level budget planning sessions, advocacy and community

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support programs. For instance, in the year 2016, fifteen children participated in annual budget planning and approval sessions organized by the respective woreda's Finance and Economy Offices. As a result of the intervention, many children, especially those who have been active members of child led initiatives, enhanced their communication, leadership and advocacy skills, life skills, drawing and art skills, financial management skills, skills necessary to participate in government budgetary process, and academic performance skills.

Children's participation has been mainstreamed and practiced by woreda government offices along with budget allocation to vulnerable children. Children have participated in different platforms, discussed with woreda level government administrators and influenced the decision of their respective local governments. Children voiced their own opinions and interests to be included in the budget and project plan of their respective woreda administration and the project. The work of the CLIs has created opportunities for children to speak out about their views and concerns in the presence of decision makers. As a result, the target local governments have started to plan activities with the allocated budget for children in their annual plan. In the year 2016/17, the target woredas' official reports indicated that a total budget of 92,000ETB has been approved and allocated to support basic needs of vulnerable children. Specifically, woreda 5 (Yeka sub city) allocated 50,000 ETB, woreda 5 (Gulle sub city) allocated 22,000 ETB and woreda 9 (Arada sub city) allocated 20,000 ETB. The efforts of CRCs (child support groups), council members, CLIs and woreda and sub city level decision makers have gone beyond budget allocation and they shared and scaled up their success to other woredas.

Woreda level council members had a significant role in their district budget cycle. Their involvement focused on advocating child budgeting to influence decision makers through organizing interface meetings, awareness raising platforms, and directly engaging in the budget planning and approval process. As a result, in 2016/17, each target woreda level council member formally advocated for child budgeting during annual budget approval and General Assembly meetings. In their periodic meetings, child budgeting issues

were one of the main agendas discussed by council members. Six children (three from Yeka and three from Arada sub cities) and one representative from Hiwot Ethiopia were officially invited to attend the meeting.

HANA¹ : A child who is an agent for change!

Hana is 16 years old and an 11th grade student at Yekatit 12 secondary school. She lives with her parents, three sisters and brother in Wereda 5, Yeka sub-city in Addis Ababa. Hanna lives in Kechene Medihanialem, where most community members are engaged in weaving and pottery. Her mother assists her father in weaving work. Hana joined Yedget district child led initiative in 2013. This initiative is one of three established by Hiwot Ethiopia since 2009. She described how her participation helped develop her personality. "I heard a lot about the club activities at my elementary school. Being convinced by the works and importance of the club, I expressed my interest to join the child led initiative. In 2013, I formally joined the club. Before I joined, I was a very shy girl, not daring even to speak and express my feelings in front of my parents and friends. I knew I had a passion of writing literature and poems but I didn't know how to orally communicate and present my written ideas.

I started to change after I joined the club. The different trainings, peer to peer discussions, and other support given by Save the Children and Hiwot Ethiopia to the child led initiative created a new opportunity for me to have new experiences and helped me develop new skills such as communication, leadership, advocacy, planning and presentation. Among the services rendered by our child led initiative, I have most benefited from the library service.

The service has helped me obtain reference materials that enrich my classroom lessons. At the end of the academic year, I was promoted to grade 11 with a good academic result; I was first in my class. Above all, I made friends of same age with whom I freely share my feelings, expectations and dreams. The peer to peer discussions have helped me and our club members share information and freely discuss.

¹Hana's parents gave consent while her case story was developed.

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challenging issues in our lives. Currently, I am a treasurer of the club's executive committee and I am responsible for managing finances granted by Hiwot Ethiopia at a monthly running cost. As a member, I have benefited in many ways. Now, I understand and practice my rights and responsibilities and have the confidence to express ideas and opinions in front of my friends, my parents and government officials. My role as peer to peer discussion facilitator has changed me and helped me exercise my skills and develop the confidence to express my opinions. I believe peer discussions are far more valuable information sharing mechanisms than discussions with adults. The knowledge and skills I have acquired has enabled me to be a child leader. For example, I led and facilitated the platform during World Children's Day, which our club organized with support from the woreda administration and Hiwot Ethiopia. The executive committee members of our child led initiative are members of the Wereda Child Rights Committee and work closely with the CRC, woreda decision makers and council members. Participating in governance structures has created opportunities for us to present our priorities and influence the government to consider our issues in annual planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of sector programs and strategies. To this end, sectors offices have started incorporating our issues in their plans. For example, capacity building support to woreda level child parliaments, educational material support to vulnerable children, school feeding to vulnerable children and trainings to CLIs have been included in their action plans. The most significant achievement my club and I made was working with CRCs, woreda decision makers and council members to advocate budget allocation for children. As a result, in 2009 E.C our woreda administration allocated 22,000 ETB for child-specific activities, the first time in our community. Such budget allocation for vulnerable children is clear indication of government commitment to children.

I aspire to be a medical doctor. If I succeed, I want to help children with difficult circumstances."

Every month, Hana facilitated peer to peer discussions. In each monthly discussion, 60 (m-34, f-26) children participated. Hana inspired others, especially girls, to take facilitator roles. Due to her influence, many girls have joined the club and the club's management team.

Woreda 9 CRC(Child Support Group): Pioneer of Change

A key intervention component has been Hiwot

Ethiopia's integration of local LiC advocacy work with local government, communities and children. Due to rigorous capacity building support, district offices, such as the district 9 council in Arada Sub-City, started engaging CSO partners and children in annual budget discussion forums. This has given children the opportunity to raise children's issues for government authorities' consideration during annual budget preparation. Consequently, this district council has, for the first time, allocated 10,000 ETB for child focused activities (under budget code 6417-different humanitarian affairs), though there is no budget code designated for children in the budget preparation format. This is a big step taken by the local government towards making children visible in budgeting. Woreda 9 child rights committee has played a key role in advocating budget allocation for vulnerable children to the district government. With the allocated budget in the 2015/16 government budget year, over 160 vulnerable children received educational support and other basic services. This initiative continued the following year and 20,000 ETB was allocated in the 2016/17 budget year. As a result, this year the budget has provided educational material support (school uniform, exercise book, pens and pencils) and school feeding to 160 vulnerable children (60 from Arada, 50 from Yeka and 57 from Gulelle). These children are now able to continue their education.

Another result of Woreda 9 child rights advocacy work is that children are meaningfully participating in annual budget planning, approval and reporting in Woreda Council General Assembly meetings. This participation clearly indicates that children are seen as key stakeholders by the government and children's issues are becoming an agenda through increased sense of accountability by main duty bearers.



CRCs at Gulle (w-5), Yeka (w-5) and Arada (w-9) are holding discussions on a monthly basis

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