

Building  
Youth Capacity to promote  
Reproductive Health



THE ADOLESCENT  
REPRODUCTIVE  
HEALTH PROJECT



Senena Primary  
School club  
members

*Acknowledgements:*

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# The Adolescent Reproductive Health Project



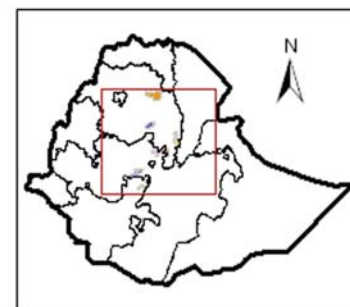
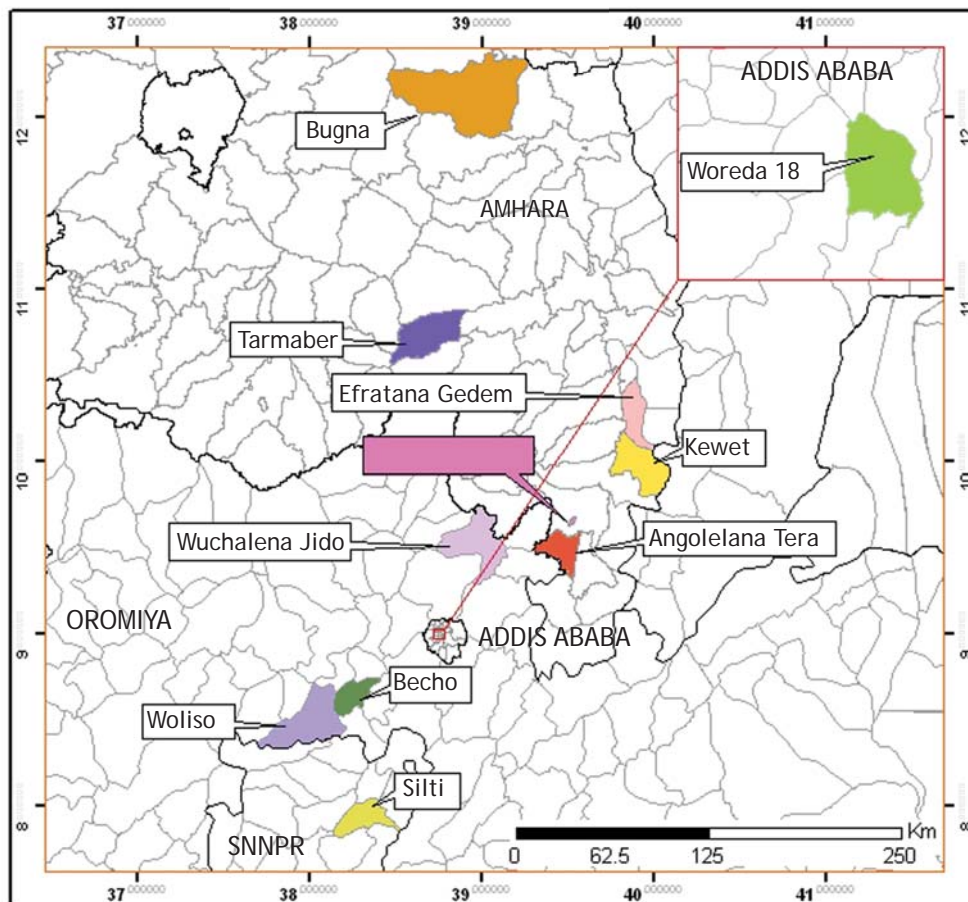
The Adolescent Reproductive Health (ARH) Project has been working for eight years to expand reproductive health education and services in urban and rural communities, with a special focus on youth. The project aims to create awareness and behavioral change among youth to improve young people's skills in the areas of sexual negotiation, mentoring peers, delaying early initiation of sexual relationships, and HIV prevention. ARH also works with female youth in urban and rural areas to promote economic empowerment for improved lifestyles, planned family size and better economic opportunities. To date, the ARH project has provided reproductive health education and services to 827,668 youth in the age group of 10-24 (45% female), as well as to 350,000 adults.

In order to empower youth, ARH grows the institutions that support youth. The project strengthens local NGO partners and community-based organizations' ability to ensure community participation in adolescent reproductive health activities in both urban and rural areas. These partners network and collaborate with different stakeholders to coordinate reproductive health services. One outcome of this coordination is a strengthened referral system to public and NGO clinical services, including the creation of linkages with contraception distribution by Community-based Reproductive Health Agents and Health Education Extension Workers. Many of the youth clubs and associations are also engaging in economic empowerment activities to sustain themselves into the future.

The ARH Project partners with: Addis Development Vision (ADV), Children Aid Ethiopia (CHADET), Epheson Anti-AIDS & Reproductive Health Association (EPHESON), Ethiopian Rural Self Help Association (ERSHA), Fana Reproductive Health and Anti-AIDS Association (FANA), Hawiboru Anti-Aids and Reproductive Health Association (HAWIBORO), Integrated Service for AIDS Prevention and Support Organization (ISAPSO), Naftalem Anti-AIDS and Reproductive Health Association (NAFTALEM), Nia Foundation, Professional Alliance for Development in Ethiopia (PADET), Save Your Holy Land Association (SYHLA), Tamsalet Anti-AIDS and Reproductive Health Association (TEMSALET), Tesfa Anti-Aids and Reproductive Health Association, and the Women Support Association.

The ARH project is supported by the David & Lucile Packard Foundation and is operational in West Shoa, North Shoa, South Wollo and Silti Zones of Amhara, SNNPR and Oromia regions.

# Project Coverage in Ethiopia



- Regions
- Districts
- ADV
- CHADET
- EPHESON
- ERSHA/TESFA
- FANA
- ISAPSO/HAWIBORO
- NAFTALEM
- NIANA-F
- PADET
- SYHLA
- WSO, TEMSALET

## Acronyms Used in the Publication

AIDS- Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome  
 ARH- the Adolescent Reproductive Health Project  
 HIV-Human Immuno Virus

FGM- female genital mutilation  
 NGO- non-governmental organization

# Courage to Go Against the Grain: Zenet Makes Family Planning a Reality

Zenet Mohammed comes from a poor family with fourteen mouths to feed. Her father's first wife has born nine children and the second wife has born three. When she was growing up, her father preferred to give the smallest children the best serving of food, which always created commotion and arguments between the other children receiving smaller portions. Zenet was always worrying and crying due to hardships in the house-- not having enough food for everyone, not having enough clothes and shoes for each child, and all children not being able to go to school.

One day, as she was walking down the street, at age 14, she saw a sign from the Fana Reproductive Health and Anti-AIDS Association publicizing a family planning message. She thought that family planning might be the answer to her family's problems. In addition, the first daughter to be married in Zenet's family had contracted HIV/AIDS after being wedded off to an older man, and she died shortly thereafter. Zenet knew nothing of HIV/AIDS, so this desire to understand her sister's death also motivated her to join the association and find out more. She became a member of the Fana Reproductive Health and Anti-AIDS Association and began attending youth events and training sessions on family planning, HIV/AIDS, life skills, and harmful traditional practices. She took the information home and began holding family planning discussions in her home.

*The experience of my family has shown me that getting married without good income means giving birth to many children a plan.*

*- Zenet Mohammed*

However, her father was against the new ideas. Yet, her mother, who had already born nine children, knew how difficult it was to try and provide for each child. She was open to learn more about family planning.

Zenet secretly took her mother to the hospital to receive free contraceptives. Zenet's mother began using family planning on a regular basis. One year became two years, and Zenet's father began complaining to his wife that he wanted "a small baby in the house, someone who will run here and there". He became suspicious that his wife might be using family planning. After much nagging, Zenet brought the pills and displayed them to her father.

Zenet described how the older children were going to sleep without food and how there was not enough money to take them to health center when they were sick or provide them with food or shoes. She

explained how her mother was feeling like she finally was able to care for the twelve children in the house, without fear that another was on the way.

Knowing that each child was getting only a small fraction of the food they needed, her father finally acceded to Zenet's request. Her mother took on the responsibility of keeping the pills and administering them herself, without the air of secrecy that had preceded. Zenet's actions were bold compared to the culture around her, where children are expected to obey and acquiesce to parents, especially fathers.

Through the period of this family ordeal, Zenet had become very active in the Fana Association. She took leadership and club management training and became a peer educator, assisting many youth and different clubs to implement adolescent reproductive health programming. The association offered a special opportunity for youth from poor economic background to be trained in vocational skills. Zenet was able to take typing and computer operation courses, while continuing her secondary schooling. When Fana opened a vacancy for the position of secretary, priority was given to youth with a long history of volunteering for the association. Zenet's many years of volunteering then turned into full-time professional employment with the association.

Yet Zenet's father did not leave her in peace. He wanted to marry her off for a sizeable dowry. He was 85, while Zenet's mother was 38, so he himself came from a tradition of early marriage. He gave her hand in marriage to a wealthy, older man and accepted a sum of money without informing her of the marriage or introducing her to the man. When she found out, she protested the marriage. He tried again with two other wealthy men. Zenet spoke with the members of the Fana Association office and they counseled her and tried to convince her father to understand Zenet's position and the need for her to work and become educated before marrying.

Despite these efforts, her father continued in his ways and Zenet refused to appear when her father invited



*Zenet Mohammad, an advocate for family planning*



*Zenet in her office at the Fana Youth Association*

a prospective fiancé to the home. After her conspicuous absence at the occasion, her father accused her saying, “You did this because you don’t respect me. You didn’t give me the prestige I deserve from a child. You didn’t obey my orders. I don’t want to see you again.” With boldness in the face of dire circumstances, Zenet gathered all the members of her family together and made a formal apology to her father. “It is not because of not respecting you. I do respect you. I simply don’t want to get married to a person who I don’t love.” Finally, Zenet told her father that if he persisted in trying to marry her, she would die of HIV/AIDS like her sister had. But if it was money he wanted, she volunteered to go to an Arab

country and work as maid, sending her wages to him. Because of the protests of her mother, brothers and sisters, who did not want her to leave and the continuing dialogues with the youth association, her father finally accepted that Zenet would make her own decision.

Tears well up in her eyes, as Zenet tells the story of her struggles and remembers her sister who died of HIV/AIDS after being married off. Now that she is a secretary, she is using her income to support the fourteen members of her family. At age 21, Zenet doesn’t have plans to marry for the time being because, as she recounts, “ the experience of my family has shown me that getting married without good income means giving birth to many children without a plan.” The Fana Association is supporting her to continue her accounting studies at night. Zenet plans to develop her career and professional skills, and to support her family before she makes any decisions about her future plans for marriage.

# Rural Youth Clubs Overcome Village Resistance to HIV/AIDS Education

Through the Adolescent Reproductive Health project, the Fana Reproductive Health and Anti-AIDS Association supports four youth clubs located deep in the rural areas outside of Debreberhan, Amhara region.

Each club is supported with basic office equipment, a tape recorder and traditional music instruments needed for “edu-tainment” programming, and football and volleyball for sports activities. These youth clubs receive training in life skills, reproductive health, club management, leadership, HIV/AIDS, harmful traditional practices and a host of other topics.

The clubs then engage in peer education and community ‘edu-tainment’, in which important messages are communicated in engaging ways. The youth clubs also facilitate Community Conversations in which they convene key representatives of the community to meet and discuss pertinent issues, like early marriage, voluntary testing and counseling, and others. After meeting repeatedly for over a year, the youth clubs encourage these Community Conversations groups to adopt by-laws prohibiting harmful traditional practices in their village.

One of these remote rural clubs, the Genet Anti AIDS Club, operates in



*Remote rural areas that must be traversed on foot in order to reach the youth clubs*

rural farmlands outside of Debreberhan town. Youth must walk two and a half hours on foot to reach the project site, while project staff must use motorcycles to traverse paths that are not accessible by car. The club members range from ages 14 to 26 and include Grade 4 students and above, as well as out-of-school youth.

Genet Club members have taken training on adolescent reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, harmful traditional practices, abduction, early marriage and related topics. After training, the youth have organized their peers into groups of five, bringing together neighbors, school mates, and those with whom they fetch water. They have then shared what they learned during the training with their peer groups.

Many of the youth have encountered mixed responses from the youth in their areas, and have had to work hard to overcome resistance to new information. In remote rural villages where little outside information reaches, many youngsters crowded around the newly arrived trainees and were eager to hear what they had learned and even wanted to join the club. Family members queried the youth, asking if they would catch HIV/AIDS if they had greeted an HIV-positive person with handshakes and kisses.



*Genet Youth Club meeting on the steps of a remote rural church*

However, others resisted new information, asserting that HIV/AIDS cannot be contracted after 10:00 pm, and that massaging the belly of a pregnant woman with butter could not do any harm to the infant.

When the youth have encountered resistance, they have corrected misinformation and asserted the new knowledge they have learned. In one instance, certain youth in the village refused to join the peer groups, but when they saw the positive effects it had had on others they changed their attitude and wanted to participate.

The clubs have also encountered initial resistance from parents of



*Zegeye Habtayes, Youth Club Facilitator  
and reformed addict*

prospective club members. In order to allay fears, the youth clubs organized coffee ceremonies where parents could learn about the kind of activities their youth would be involved in. Parents were shown how club activities could provide a recreational alternative to chewing chat, drinking and smoking. Coffee ceremonies helped to decrease resistance not just to the clubs that the Fana Association supports, but for a whole group of youth clubs in the area.

The youth have also used key community stakeholders to overcome resistance. Each club has an advisory committee composed of village representatives, religious leaders, Ministry of Agriculture staff, *Idir* (traditional funeral association) officers and other influential individuals at the local level. When these individuals introduce the work of the club or reference them in their speeches, club members have encountered greater acceptance.

The results of these clubs can be seen in their products. Many youth who were addicted to chat, shisha, and other addictive substances have demonstrated behavioral change and have become leaders of their peers.

Zegeye Habtayes is one example. At age 22, he now serves as Youth Facilitator supporting four different youth clubs participating in the ARH project. When he was in eighth grade, he was able to earn a large amount of money as a trader. He didn't see the need for school, so he dropped out and moved to Nazaret with the intention of investing his capital in contraband goods. While there, he start chewing chat and smoking cigarettes, and he ended up spending the entire sum of money on addictions without ever starting any business activities. Broke and disheartened, he returned back to his village. One of the club leaders approached him and invited him to join the local youth club. He went on to become an active member, then a peer educator and later a facilitator of multiple clubs.

Zegeye and members of the Genet Club note a decrease in the prevalence of harmful traditional practices

over the course of the clubs' operations. Abduction was previously common in the area. A girl was at risk each time she had to walk long distances to fetch water, go to market, or attend school. Even parents were complicit in many abductions. If a boy approached their daughter for marriage and she refused the proposal because she wanted to continue schooling, the parents would scheme with the boy, arrange a fake appointment, sending the girl to fetch something or appointing her to wait at a certain place, where the abductors would be lingering, and she would then be abducted, raped and married by force. However, since youth clubs have become active in the rural areas, club members note that the prevalence of abduction has decreased.

In order to fund its future community education activities, the Genet Club plans to innovate an income generation plan to support club activities. They will open a shop and sell sugar, coffee, soft drinks, and oil.

The long term investment of the youth clubs and the Fana Association is manifesting itself in youth who have become leaders, a decrease in the prevalence of harmful traditional practices, and the maturation of clubs into longer term institutions that are working at the village level to empower youth and give them an alternative to addictions.

*Mefekr Wolde Emmanuel  
discussing how club members  
overcome resistance*



# Community Theatre Speaks Louder than Words

Youth clubs and associations across Ethiopia are using community theatre to portray powerful messages. The youth groups have found that their awareness-raising efforts are more effective when people see an idea, rather than just hear about it. Drama enables youth convey the subtleties of local realities, triggering bursts of laughter when community members see themselves and their communities reflected in the skits. Theatre is also capable of attracting a wider audience and captivating the attention of a diverse array of community constituents.

At performances of the Boze Out-of-School Youth Club in Silti Zone, the youth first draw an audience by setting up a loud speaker and sound system. They borrow benches and desks from the local schoolhouse and place a mat in the center to form a stage. Club members set up a traditional coffee ceremony, replete with the traditions of popcorn and incense to add formality and hospitality to the event.

At first young children and a few older members of the community gather around the performance area. Club members present puzzles, jokes and comedy skits, impersonating a news broadcaster who is stationed in the remote rural community and has to grasp to find news stories. "News Updates: Two rats have demanded that a shop be opened for them. Alert! Latest Breaking News: A cat slept on a porch for eight days straight." As the drama progresses and the laughing resounds, additional groups of adolescent girls and boys crowd in around the makeshift stage.

When the youth commence traditional dancing in Siltinya style, the colorful event increases the size of the crowd. Drawing on local customs and using the local language spoken in the zone ensures that messages are fully understood. After the dance has riveted the audience, the youth group presents a series of poems that they themselves authored, rallying the community to fight against HIV/ AIDS. In order to maintain attention, the youth vary the presentation modes, delivering a musical duet sung in traditional Siltinya language by two male and female teenagers.

*Youth across Ethiopia are using the power of theatre to communicate messages to the community that mere words fail to convey.*



*Husband, threatening and degrading his wife, during theatrical performance in Silti Zone*

All of these events build suspense in advance of the upcoming drama. In the first skit, a man comes home ordering his wife to obey him and threatening to beat her up or kill her if she does not obey. As he swaggers around, using typical local Siltinya expressions, his threats draw peals of laughter from the audience. The wife explains how this kind of treatment is no longer legal, and asserts, "I have the right not to be treated this way. I'm going to report this harsh treatment to the concerned bodies. She defiantly waves her hand, saying, "Tchau!", as she walks out the door.

The second skit resembles an odyssey of the range of prototypical characters in the rural Siltinya community. The play opens with a young man searching for food. Without work and education, he is unable to find money to eat. As the Muslim feast of Arafa approaches, he remembers that men who have migrated from the area in search of work will come home for the feast, with money in their pockets and a lust to hook up with local girls. He decides to try his hand as a broker connecting the ravenous men to fresh young girls.

He goes to the bus station and waits for laborers retuning from the city. When he sees the first two men descending from the bus, he greets them like long lost brothers, kissing them three, four, and five times, eliciting snickers from the community watching on. He tells them, "You look like you came from America. Have you got a car?" "Oh, we've got big cars. And we've got long trucks!", they respond. He tells them of the Siltinya girls who have grown into beautiful teenagers since the time the men left the town. The men invite him to a local restaurant and he eats and eats, slurring to the men about the girls while stuffing handfuls of bread into his mouth. The men are interested and invite him to chew chat leaf with them. They ask the broker to bring the girls. "And be quick. Tell the girls we have a lot of money and three long trucks each." After telling the men how wonderful they are, he mutters to the waitress, "Give tea to those stupid people."

He goes in search of women and encounters two secondary school girls studying. He tells them, "some men have come from Addis and they are looking for you."

They respond, "We don't want to go to Addis. We are busy studying."

"You are studying and getting an education so that you can get money. These men can get you money without all that work. Throw out your exercise books!"

"Why should we throw out our exercise books? We want to study!"

"These men can take you to Addis to study! "You should feel lucky that you are girls and you are getting this chance. I'm a boy. The only chance I get is to chew chat with them."

One of the girls firmly believes they should not see the boys, but the other girl convinces her to not miss the opportunity. The broker delivers the girls, gets his money and quickly slinks out the back door, before waiting to see whether the girls accept the proposition.

The two men tell the girls, "We want to get married to women from our own culture, from our own community. It's no problem if you need money. We can give you money."

They respond, "We should consult our family first."

"No problem, we can give money to your family and to the community. What are the problems in your family?" he asks one girl.

"What my family needs most is an ox."

"Wonderful. We'll get you an ox. Let us go and spend the night together."

"Wait, we should..." calls one girl, but the other girl convinces her to follow.

In the middle of the night, the two men emerge from the hotel. "We have done all we need to do. Let's get out of here and disappear."

In the morning, the girls hold their head in their hands, languishing in



*Broker convincing school girls to meet men from Addis, with adolescent girls in the audience looking on*

remorse. "They left us! We have exposed ourselves to people we don't know well. It is you who did this," one girl accuses the other. She retorts, "but I thought all that they said was true."

The first girl responds, "I have heard about HIV/AIDS over the radio. I feel sick. I want to go to get HIV/AIDS testing."

"If you want to know your HIV status, you can go because you are sick. I'm not sick so I don't need to go."

As the first girl enters the Voluntary Testing and Counseling center, children watching on suck in their breath and squeal, when the health clinician pulls out a real syringe and pretends to extract a blood sample. While she waits for the results, she returns to her friend and tells her, "It's not true! People say they take a lot of blood out of you, but they have taken just a tiny amount."

"How do you feel?"

"Well, if I am negative, I will give thanks to God. If I am positive, I will live and teach others."

She returns to the clinic, and the health worker explains to her that her result is positive. The community gathered around cries out and she throws her head into arms and collapses on the bench in despair.

The skit touches on a host of issues affecting young people living in the remote village: the pressure to discontinue education, the phenomenon of rural-urban migration, the insidious role of brokers, sexual exploitation, resistance to HIV/AIDS testing and the ultimate fate of girls who are duped by false promises.

The skit also explores the role and stereotypes of various kinds of actors involved in the process of transmitting HIV/AIDS. The drama allows the community to emphasize and laugh at things that are all too



*Health worker, administering voluntary HIV/AIDS testing, while children in the audience cringe at the sight of a syringe*

familiar to them: the fear of needles, the hunger of the unemployed broker, and exaggerated bragging of daily laborers whose cars have become trucks. By making the skits entertaining as well as realistic and engaging, the actors bring a series of “development messages” close to home, conveying them in an excruciatingly real manner. During the morning after scene, tears were seen welling up in the eyes of one teenage girl in the audience, as she watched the girls languishing in despair.

~ ~

Youth across Ethiopia, in primary school clubs, out-of-school youth groups and associations are using the power of theatre to communicate messages to the community that mere words fail to convey. Young people are also building human resources that will benefit them in their future careers, including planning mass public events, composing poems and scripts, rehearsing theatrical skits, and mobilizing the community. The youth demonstrate maturity, commitment and articulateness both in the presentation of their shows, as well in the determination to travel to distant rural areas and perform under hardship. In areas where unemployment is high and little forms of recreation exists, participating in community theatre and club events gives the youth an alternative to becoming involved in addictive habits like chewing chat and drinking alcohol just to pass the time. Small children also crowd each event, and look up to the youth as role models, learning positive reproductive health messages early in the course of their formation.

Community mechanism that is all corners of an environment become blasé development

*Makeshift village stage, arranged with school desks, logs, and a woven mat*



theatre is a spreading across Ethiopia and, in where some have about ‘hum-drum messages’, these youth are succeeding in raising awareness about the true effects of harmful cultural traditions and the real importance of reproductive health & gender empowerment.

# Females Strengthen their Assertiveness & Negotiation skills

One of the goals of the Adolescent Reproductive Health Project is to enable teenage girls to develop the skills to negotiate their needs and rights when it comes to their own bodies. In the Ethiopian context, women, and in particular girls, have traditionally had little say over their own destinies. Fathers were considered to be the owners of the house and of the household. Parents decided who girl-children will marry and the girl's role and destiny was to perform household work in the husband's household. In male-female relationships, boys are usually the ones to initiate sexual contact, giving girls little ability to negotiate, and often harassing, abducting or raping them when they refuse.

The Yekatit Association conducts a number of education and awareness-raising activities on HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, rape, abduction, female genital mutilation and other practices common in their area. However, club members believe that gender inequality is a root cause of many of the harmful traditional practices that affect youth's reproductive health, so they give priority to teaching about the rights of both women and men.

In order to learn the skills needed to carry out the work of the association, members participated in the Youth Action Kit training. Two of the members initially took the training at then central level and then cascaded it to other club members at the local level. Through the training, youth learn about HIV/AIDS prevention, gender, reproductive health, and communication skills, including how to negotiate their rights.

The Youth discussion of their beliefs male student thought men and shy. They don't have the energy of men." One female participant from a rural area raised her hand and agreed with the young man saying, "I am not equal because I am shy and I cannot express my ideas."

*"I was incapable of expressing myself when so many people were gathered. However, as time went on, I developed the ability to express myself, and convey my message."*

*-Elfinshish Tesfaye*

Action Kit provides forum for honest ideas, allowing youth to frankly put on the table. During the training, one raised his hand and stated that he women were not equal. "Females are have potential like men. They don't

The comments provoked a lot of debate among the association members. The final outcome of the discussion was that the club decided members needed to practice the skills of being assertive and speaking out. "We are learning to control our emotions of shyness. Repeated exposure to different people will enable us to become less shy and more assertive," says 17-year old Ajaiba Mohammed.



*Muhaba Radin, with her peers, discussing how she is overcoming shyness and developing assertiveness skills*

Female members are now working on these skills by addressing audiences at club events like public gatherings, dramas, and door-to-door education. Youth emphasize teaching that men and women are equal. The association members have also begun

boldly and frankly communicating with community members on issues that were previously considered taboo. Whereas menstruation was a subject never to be discussed, members like Muhaba are now able to discuss menstruation and its relation to reproductive health with her family, neighbors and other community members.

The focused effort on developing these skills is bearing fruit. Says Elfinshish Tesfaye, "I was incapable of expressing myself when so many people are gathered. However, I participated, and as time went on, I developed the ability to express myself, and convey my message."

As they have grown stronger in asserting their messages, the young women have had to persist amidst challenge, insult and rejection. When they conducted a home visit with a mother on the subject of female genital mutilation, the woman almost threw them out. Instead of acquiescing, the youth calmly and patiently discussed the side effects of FGM.

In another instance, the vice-chairperson of the association was carrying condoms to the project site. While she was walking, a youth drinking coffee in a local shop, called out to her and said, "Hide those

condoms. I don't want to see them." After she had learned assertiveness skills through the training and club activities, she did not keep quiet. "Condoms are useful. You are a youth. You have to have a vision for the future. You will be responsible to take over and run the development activities of this town and this nation. Other people are utilizing condoms and find them useful. Why do you make such comments?" His other male friends criticized him, saying, "You made that comment because she is female. You wouldn't have said anything if she were a male." The youth finally apologized and that very evening, he came to the youth association office to collect condoms.

The young females are willing to put their beliefs to the test. In the almost 100% Muslim community, the issue of equality between men and women has often encountered opposition. "We are committed to pay any sacrifice while teaching the women about their rights. When there is opposition especially from males, even if they attempt to beat us, we are ready to sacrifice up to that extent," says Elfinish Tesfaye. Fortunately no beatings have yet occurred, but the young women certainly have encountered verbal sparring.

Increased assertiveness and negotiation skills among female association members is leading to greater confidence and a more profound understanding of the concept of gender equality. Says Elfinesh, "Through this process, I have learned that females are equal to men." Mifta Mohammad agrees saying, "we women have the potential to negotiate equally with men. We can do anything that men can do."



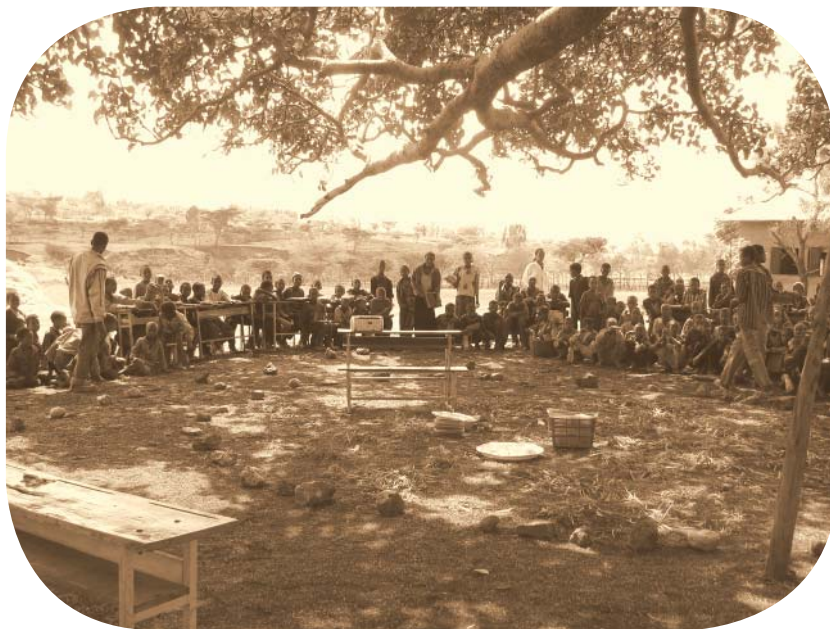
*Telila Kori, Vice-Chairperson of the Yekatit Association, discussing how she responded to a man who rebuked her for transporting condoms to the club office*

# Clubs Work to Stop Female Genital Cutting

One of the issues that affects women's reproductive health in Ethiopia is female genital mutilation (FGM). Cutting the genitals of females is widely practiced in many regions of Ethiopia. Cultural beliefs that have given rise to FGM are diverse, according to the area. Many believe that if a girl goes uncircumcized she will become clumsy and break household utensils, as well as develop a voracious sexual appetite and become unable to please her husband. Many community members fear insult and the inability to get a girl married off if she is not circumcized. Some also point to a religious justification for FGM, and a few groups believe that a female's sexual organs will grow into male organs, if she is not circumcized.

Nevertheless, FGM makes women more vulnerable to contracting infection, disease and HIV/AIDS; causes complications during childbirth and intercourse; leads to higher infant and maternal mortality rate; and raises questions about the rights of young girls to make choices about decisions that affect their own bodies and future health.

In the Silti zone of SNNPR, female genital cutting has been officially prohibited by the government, and clubs and schools have been active in raising awareness about curbing this practice. However, community members continue to practice this age-old tradition in secret. They travel to remote and distant areas, circumcizing girls during ceremonies, and then bringing them back to their home community after they have already



*Club members gather the entire primary school body under an enormous tree to reenact their FGM performance*



*Younger sister screaming, as the police arrive on the scene.  
At the last moment, she is rescued from circumcision.*

been cut.

Because of the high prevalence of this clandestine practice, members of the Senena Primary School Anti-HIV/AIDS & Reproductive Health Club decided to enact a drama to underscore the necessity of halting both the open and secret practice of FGM. The club developed and rehearsed skits, put together creative costumes and then performed the dramas in front of audiences of school children, teachers and school administrators, and community members.

The drama portrays a mother and father at home discussing the impending marriage of their daughter. The white-bearded father proclaims, "We must have her circumcised before

we can get her married off". The girl protests, relaying how she learned in school that FGM is not good for women, and that, above all, the practice is illegal. The mother and father do not heed her words, but instead begin searching for a traditional cutter who can perform the ceremony.

One day, while the girl is attending school, the parents arrange a ceremony for her without informing her. The mother invites all the female neighbors and her father gathers all his male acquaintances. They prepare an extravagant feast and brew local alcoholic beverage to accompany the ceremony.

While at school, the girl hears of the preparations and commotion occurring in her house. She hesitates to go home, and instead decides to approach the police and report her situation. In the meantime, her parents, neighbors and relatives have assembled at her house and are ready for a feast. They have hired a skilled cutter, who proclaims that he is so accomplished he can cut ten girls with a single blade.

When time drags on and the girl does not arrive home, the parents decide not to waste the feast preparations and use the auspicious occasion to circumsize her younger sister instead. Just after they have

captured the younger sister, who is struggling to leap away, the police arrive at the house, barging in the door and sending the crowd running. The police arrest both the traditional cutter and the parents, carrying them off to the police station.

Primary school students scream in surprise when the cutter lunges for the younger sister, and cheer on the police when they halt the ceremony and take the culprits into custody.

~ ~

When primary school members have enacted the drama in front of various audiences, they have found that it has provoked community members to question. 'When they see the role of the police, they ask one another, "is it really all that bad? Is it really a crime?"', says Shimeles Lulseged, a 20-year old 2nd grader.

Primary school club members are raising awareness not only through dramas, but also through peer education, poetry and coffee ceremonies. Their activities have convinced community members of the harmful effects, as well as legal consequences of FGM. Some traditional cutters have come forward and admitted that the practice is harmful, and have publicly committed themselves not to practice it thereafter. Club members are attesting to a decrease, both in the open, as well as the covert incidence of FGM in the area.

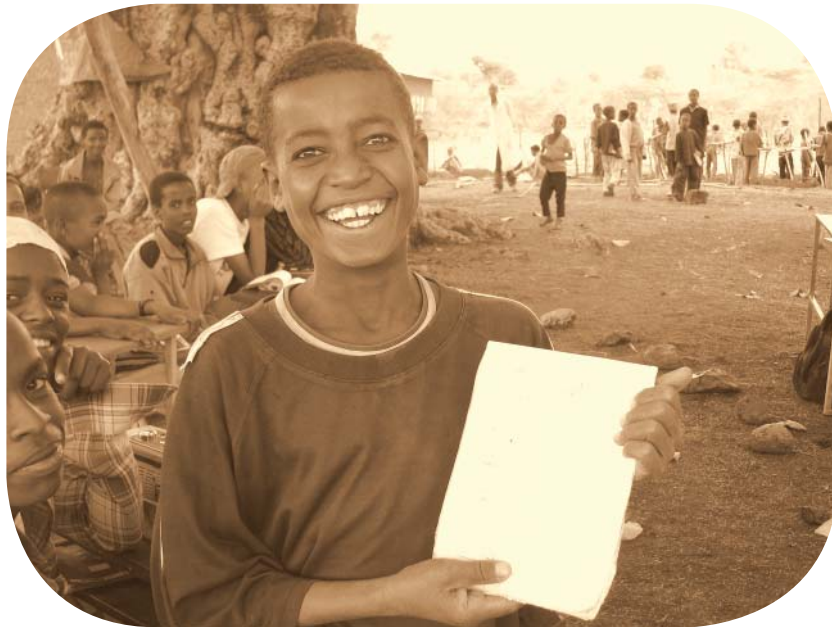


*Primary school students of diverse ages, from 10 to 20, participate in club activities*

# Senena Primary School Club Confronts Wife Inheritance

Many school clubs address issues that commonly affect adolescent reproductive health in Ethiopia such as HIV/AIDS, early marriage, abduction and addictions. The Senena Primary School Club also addresses one issue specific to their zone: wife inheritance.

The people of the Silti zone comprise one ethnic group, speak the Siltinya language (a close relative of Guraginya language), and are 98% Muslim. In Silti, the practice of wife inheritance is common. When one brother dies, his elder or younger brother marries the wife of the deceased. When he inherits her, he also inherits his brother's property, responsibility for all the children, and sexual rights to the wife. Voluntary HIV/AIDS testing and counseling is rarely undertaken before the wife is inherited. Though wife inheritance has been formally outlawed in the legal code, it continues to be practiced across Silti zone.



*Merdia Hussein, displaying his poem on wife inheritance*

Though some cite that the tradition earlier had benefits of ensuring that orphans and widows were cared for, the practice has evolved into a custom that fans the flame of brotherly avarice. Community and club members bear witness to a phenomenon in which many brothers have seized property and taken the fruits of the agricultural harvest back to their own homes. Brothers have used the harvest to benefit only their own children and his first wife, while disregarding the inherited wife, as well as nieces and nephews. Many brothers have chased their nieces and nephews off of their birthland, in fear that their brother's children

will try to seek rights to and ownership of the land when they grow older.

Members of the Senena Primary School's Anti-HIV/AIDS and Reproductive Health Club cite various instances in which orphans were cast off their land and forced to migrate and plough other people's lands as virtual indentured servants. Other orphans have migrated to towns and become street children. Some of them have died due to hunger. Widows have also been forced to leave the area in search of work and have ended up in rural towns, begging on the streets. Many widows who were married to their brother-in-laws either contracted or transmitted HIV/AIDS.

The Senena Primary School has taken up the issue of wife inheritance as one of the traditional harmful practices that affect the physical and reproductive health of youth in their area. The project has trained youth about the side effects of the practice, after which the youth have performed dramas, composed poems, and conducted coffee ceremony awareness-raising sessions in their home communities.

Primary school students, who range from ages 11 to 21, participate in club activities to combat wife inheritance. Merdia Hussein, an 11 year-old 3rd grader, and Kadir Mustafa, a 12 year-old 4th grader, have composed poems about the practice.

Kadir recites his poem in his native Siltinya:

*Inheritance Marriage.... Please Wait, Wait!*

*Inheritance marriage, wait, wait!*

*It takes it all your property*

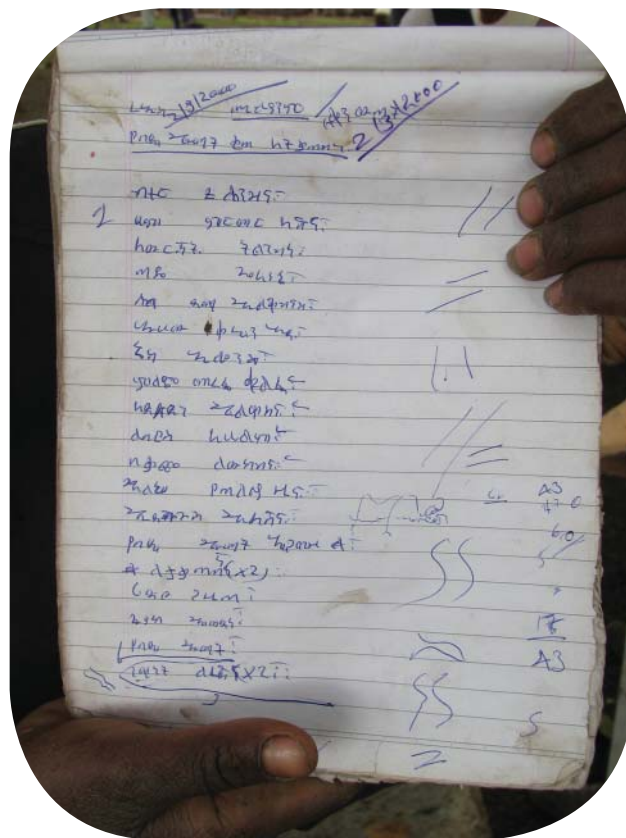
*It leads you into poverty.*

*The inheritor takes all the property--*

*The brother is running after her to convince her.*

*But when the goats see a fox,  
they squeal and shout with fright.*

*So do the children squeal like fearful goats*



*One of the clubs poems on wife inheritance,  
written in Silti language*

*when they see their uncle.*

*All the uncle's haste  
is a rush to grab the property of the father,  
not for the love of the orphans' mother.  
All the uncle's haste  
is a rush to take all the property  
back to his own house—  
back to his own wife.*

*There will be shortage of food.  
There will be killing of orphans with hunger.  
The inherited wife exclaims,  
"I was ignorant of this:  
that I would become household property."*

*The uncle is like the parasite that bites  
and lays his eggs inside the skin.*

*That parasite, in the end, deforms the legs  
and leaves the victim unable to walk or work.*

*Alhamdulillah! Shokrollah!  
Praised be to God, thanks be to God,  
things are getting better.  
A wife can now exclaim,  
"Now I am treated like a person!"  
We are now giving training  
which gives women the freedom and capacity to say  
no to such dangers.*

*I have come to know that  
women and men are equal.  
I have begun to participate  
in community development affairs.  
Now I am saved from the dangers  
that come from wife inheritance!*

Kadir feels that the community has reacted to his message well, since he received a lot of applause and encouragement after presenting his poem in a public community forums. Club members have found that community members were initially not interested to gather and pay attention to the awareness-raising activities of the club, accusing the youth of being HIV-positive themselves. However, over time, after implementing activities, setting a positive example and role modeling for other youth in the community, the club members gained the trust and respect of the community.

The ARH partner NGO, Addis Development Vision, works with two complementary projects to confront wife inheritance in an integrated fashion. The Women Enhancement and Democracy and Human Rights Project works directly with adult women and community members to relate the issue to HIV stigma and human rights, while the ARH project targets adolescents through prevention education and awareness-raising. Through these efforts, the NGO is working to effect coordinated change. After initiating these activities and working collaboratively, both the NGO and Senena's club members are witnessing a gradual decline in the practice of wife inheritance in their area.

# Young Male Farmers Drop Alcohol & Redirect Energy to Community Service

The youth club's meeting room in Sholameda is spilling over with guests. People are squeezed on the benches, peering through the windows, and piled up outside the door. It's time for the Selam Development and Anti-HIV/AIDS Association's weekly coffee ceremony.

The youth club's events have become quite popular. Older men and women, as well as young adults, attend the coffee ceremony. One of the more intriguing discussions involves discussing how a man should handle the situation if he is working in another area for six months and finds that he has HIV/AIDS. How should he tell his family when he comes back? How should he protect them?

Selam Development and Anti-HIV/AIDS Association has 64 members, two thirds of whom are young males. Most of these males are farmers. Some farm full time and support young families, while others tend to their land while attending class or generating other types of income. Addictions are a great problem among young men in the area. After earning a large sum of money from the harvest on market day, many men linger in the rural towns and spend their earnings on alcohol, chat leaf, and shisha water pipe. These activities often co-occur with "bar ladies", who earn their living through the sex trade.

Many of the club's most active members are young males who have dropped their addictions. Some of these young men decided to join the association when they saw club members addressing the local funeral association. One member, Mesfin, used to chew chat leaf and tell club members to 'get lost' and stop nagging him. However, when the day came that he ran out of money for chat and he could no longer fund his addiction, he decided to join the club.

Dereje is another young male who used to hoard all the earnings from his family's yield of teff grain. He would then take this money, passing his time in the rural towns, drinking alcohol, spending 40-60 birr per day, until the money was finished. He often quarreled with his wife, due to his alcoholism and rapid expenditure of the family's income.

One particular experience was crucial to helping him understand the danger of alcohol. He was walking home one day, after having drunk alcohol, but not to the point of intoxication. Three other youth came toward him, who were fully intoxicated. In their hands, they were carrying knives with double-edged

blades, as well as a heavy stick. He also had a knife in his pocket. As they came toward him, they told him to stop. He wanted to quarrel with them, but when he saw their weapons and the fact that they outnumbered him, he decided to run away. The aggressors were not able to catch him.

Dereje reflected and realized that, had he been more intoxicated, he would not have had the sense to run away and could have been killed. He had seen many youth who had joined the club, left their addictions, and become upstanding community members. He thought if he joined the club, he might be able to get over his alcoholism.



*Dereje, member of the Shola Meda Youth Club*

Through the club activities, he learned about HIV/AIDS and how alcohol increases one's vulnerability of being exposed to the virus. The club education has helped him to radically change his behavior. Now, when he feels a headache coming on, he drinks tea instead of alcohol. He has been able to develop a much more peaceful relationship with his wife and young child, and regrets the money he lost through the purchase of alcohol. He says, "Nowadays, I think that HIV/AIDS and alcohol are similar, because they are both killers."

As more youth have become free of addictions, they are redirecting their energy into a number of activities that are benefiting the community. These include: house-to-house family planning visits, mass education endeavors, coffee ceremonies, voluntary testing and counseling promotion, support of the elderly, among many other activities. The club has conducted education and awareness-raising at post-funeral condolence gatherings, at Farmer Association meetings, during communal farming efforts, and to groups of disabled person, street beggars, and church-goers.

Before going and preaching to others, the members agreed that they should get tested for HIV/AIDS

themselves. The club has thereafter succeeded in getting 35 members to engage in voluntary testing and counseling in 2006 and 50 in 2007.

The club has made special efforts to support 44 orphans, donating food and their own clothes off their back. The club is cognizant of providing not just material support, but psychological support to the orphans as well. Club members follow up on the orphan's education, discuss with teachers and help them to stay in school, when they are in danger of dropping out. When the orphans are sick, club members raise funds from their own pockets, as well as from the community. Through these sacrifices, medical service has been provided to two orphans who were facing health crises. The association also works on preventing early marriage. It has taken the cases of three underage girls to court, found an attorney to represent the cases, and landed three successful court rulings in which the early marriage was averted.

In addition to activities around the themes of reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and harmful traditional practices, the club has contributed to maintaining roads and protecting the spring water source in the village. These efforts have built the trust and respect of the community and have engendered broader community participation in the club's awareness-raising and educational activities. Older farmers have even requested the club to teach them through the weekly coffee ceremony. The club has also moved into income generation, by selling bread, tea, soda, and other drinks at the club's center in order to fund its many activities.

As the chairperson cites member after member, who has changed and left his addictions, he remembers how he endured insults from these same youth before they had changed their ways. Those who delivered the strongest insults are now the ones arising to serve, bringing relatives to coffee ceremonies, and actively volunteering their time and energy to the club.

*Weekly coffee ceremony and educational session, conducted at the request of local farmers*



# Asefa Changes his Mind about Family Planning

Asefa Ingida is an elder living in a rural area outside the village of Sholameda. His son is a member of the village's Selam Youth Club. Whenever he comes to visit, he attends the coffee ceremony and vocalizes his opinions. During today's ceremony, he discusses how his views on family planning have changed.

"Time passed without me having all this information, and yet I already have six children. I also have brothers and sisters living in town, who have only one or two children. I used to insult my siblings, saying, 'You greedy people. You only give birth to one or two children. That is because you want to eat alone.' One day, one of my family members came from Addis to visit me. He told me, 'You are happy that you have so many members in your family, but...' and he stopped. I provoked him, 'but what?!'

'But you don't have the capacity to provide all the things they need.' He took out a photo of his child, and I compared it to a photo of my own child. Though my child was older, he was visibly smaller than his child. And the two children were dressed very differently. When I compared those photos, I realized I had made a mistake. Had they gotten the nutrition and things they needed, my children would have grown more.

I went home to my wife and I said to her, 'I told you that we should have a lot of children, but this was a mistake. As time has already passed, the best thing we can do now is to use family

planning and support our children to get information on family planning.'

*"I used to insult my siblings, saying, 'You greedy people. You only give birth to one or two children. That is because you want to eat alone.'"*  
- Asefa Ingida

The club members organized a coffee ceremony in my village and invited my wife. What we learned in that coffee ceremony was similar to what my relative from Addis had told me. I shared this information

with all the members of my family. Now, one of my children has become a member of this youth club. And my wife is also using family planning. No, that's not a secret. There are no more secrets in our community after these coffee ceremonies!"



*Asefa Ingidi attending a coffee ceremony sponsored by the youth association*

# ARH Helps Youth Clubs Mature into Full-fledged Associations

The ARH project began its activities in 2000, working with relatively strong, national NGOs that supported and subgranted to youth clubs. These clubs implemented ARH activities at the grassroots level. Through long-term involvement with the project, many of these youth clubs have graduated from clubs into legally recognized associations. Six of these nascent associations are now receiving grants directly from the ARH project and implementing activities without the assistance of a larger NGO.

One such association is the Fana Reproductive Health and Anti-AIDS Association, situated in Debreberhan of Amhara region. The Fana Association seeks to empower youth with the life skills they need to lead and make change in their communities. During phase 1 of the Packard project activities, Fana started out as a youth club. With the support of the NGO, Save Your Generation Ethiopia, , Fana graduated from a club into an independent association. It received its first tranche of funds directly in 2006, then graduated from working on one project to three. The association now has five full-time staff, and a corps of 45 professionals and experts who donate their time to make the association successful.

Fana's story is not unlike many of the other associations working with the ARH project. In Debresina, the Naftalem Youth Club organized itself as a club in 2002 through its own efforts, without the guidance or encourage of any outside group. In 2004, the club began working on ARH project activities, in collaboration with the Women's Support Association. The club was able to renovate its office, acquire basic office operating equipment and assemble a small library. The club trained its members and embarked on a host of reproductive health activities.

By 2006, Naftalem felt become an association. current chairperson his group to want to are a club, many act as this, don't do this.' When become independent. You own authority. You can discuss with your members and plan your own activities." Secretary, Solomon Amare, elaborates how becoming an association widened their opportunities and enabled them apply

*We share the same vision and mission and there is lot of love of love and trust among the members. This is our greatest asset."*

*-Negussie Negussie*

it was strong enough to Negese Negussie, Naftalem's explains what motivated change its status. "When you your boss. 'Go this way, do you are an association, you have your own power, your own authority. You can discuss with your members and plan your own activities." Secretary, Solomon Amare, elaborates how becoming an association widened their opportunities and enabled them apply

for funding directly. “Operating as a club, you need someone to assist you like a nanny, you are dependent on someone else. We thought that if we grew into an association, we would be independent, and would have the ability to provide multi-faceted services to the community.”

However, registering was not without its challenges. First, getting registered as an association with the government incurred costs. The 22 youth members raised funds by working as shoe shiners and daily laborers, with each adolescent contributing from 20-30 birr to finalize the registration process of becoming an association.

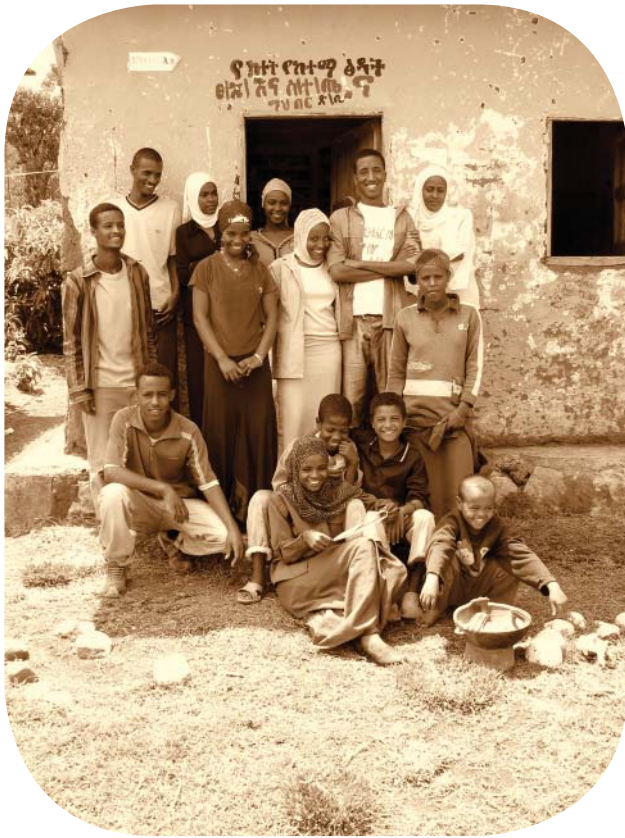


*Officers of the Naftalem Association in Debresina*

Another challenge was that becoming registered required them to spend a lot of time following up with government offices. The government registration office was located 60 km away in a nearby rural town and the group feared it did not have enough money for public transport costs needed to repeatedly go back and forth in the process of finalizing the paperwork trail. Luckily, one of the club’s members earned the opportunity to study in the town, so the group sent the paperwork with him and he was made the focal person for liaising with government offices.

After receiving their license, Naftalem began sponsoring activities and conducting coffee ceremonies, using funds from their own contributions. When community members became aware of these sacrifices, villagers also contributed to the coffee ceremonies. Naftalem also pioneered creative fundraising strategies. Any time that a member was invited by an organization to participate in a training and received a per diem to cover their food and travel, that member was obliged to contribute 10% of the per diem to the Naftalem Association. The association also raised funds by renting their space to other local offices for training events.

Becoming a legal entity attracted other youth to join the club. Youth saw that the organization had



*Members of the Yeketit Association in Silti zone*

longevity and was able to engage in activities that were more attractive. As its membership and organizational capacity became stronger, Naftalem began supporting five other youth rural clubs through the ARH project, delivering Youth Action Kit and club leadership training, implementing coffee ceremonies and conducting Community Conversations. Naftalem has grown and matured, so that it now works with three different donors on youth reproductive health interventions, including the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

In the rural town of Showarobit, the Tamsalet Association has also overcome a number of challenges in the process of establishing itself. After becoming legally recognized and earning local respect because of its efforts, the Tamsalet Association was granted a dilapidated house by the local government administration. The association raised its own funds, pooled its own labor and renovated the house to make it useable. After several years, the local administration wanted to repossess the house and grant it to another organization. Tamsalet protested and won the case. The youth association was awarded an empty plot of land and Pact contributed funds toward construction

of an edifice. In order to raise the full amount of funds needed to construct a building, they began to pinch pennies by hitchhiking to distant rural project sites so they could save the cost of the bus fare, and donate the savings to the construction. They were able to build their own edifice, using their own labor, on a plot of land donated by the local government.

These new youth associations have conducted experience sharing visits to learn from one another's activities. Tamsalet Association learned how its Debresina neighbors packaged kolo grain snacks, placed small anti-HIV messages inside the plastic packaging, and then sold the snacks to travelers to generate income and spread anti-HIV/AIDS messages simultaneously. Tamsalet learned from another neighboring association that education sessions attracted a much wider audience when the traditional dance was performed at the commencement of the sessions.

Many of these newly formed associations received their first direct funding from the ARH project, in tiny amounts. Tamsalet Association began implementation with a grant of 7000 birr (\$777). After they demonstrated their implementation capacity, they have grown to manage up to 97,000 birr (\$10,777) in grants, and have diversified into working with three different donors. Other newly independent associations are managing grants of up to \$20,000.

Naftalem Association has found that the major change of moving from a club to an association is that participating youth have gained self-confidence. Members are able to travel deep into rural areas, teach community members and have become role models for others. The Tamsalet Association also notes an increase of confidence among its members. They compete and win academic competitions, when they apply for positions they are selected, and many of the club members have gone on to work for the government.

The creative and low-cost strategies of the association are helping them maintain longevity and continue supporting reproductive health activities into the future. Says the Naftalem chairperson, Neguse Negussie, "The unique thing about our association is that we are able to accomplish a lot of activities with limited resources. We are able to give service to the community. Even if we do not get funds to continue a particular program, we will be able to maintain our sustainability." Above all, "we share the same vision and mission and there is lot of love of love and trust among the members. This is our greatest asset."



*Members of the Tamsalet Association in Showarobit, in front of the building which they constructed themselves*



*Member of the Tamsalet Association in Showarobit,  
serving the coffee ceremony during an educational session  
and challenging traditional gender roles*

