

Improve Adolescent Girls' SRH & Nutrition Practices



KNOWLEDGE

ATTITUDE

PRACTICES

ADOLESCENTS

PARENTS

Good Practices



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AMHARA DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION



FOREWORD



Feyera Assefa Abdissa
Country Director
DSW Ethiopia

Four years in development term might not sound a lot, but it is still practical to bring contributions toward the long-term impact on the community. The objective is, thus, attaining what is possible to do that makes a difference for those in need. This is why we believe that the needs for community developments do not halt to evolve and grow, much as do our abilities to address them.

Based on the prior experiences piloting a project akin to the one we have just concluded, DSW has been technically supporting the Amhara Development Association (ADA) in implementing the four-year project themed: “Improve Adolescent Girls' SRH and Nutrition Practices” in Amhara region. Financed and supported by BMZ, German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation & Development, this intervention has brought strong grassroots partnerships between DSW and ADA.

DSW and ADA have enjoyed a long history of partnerships. Their concerted efforts to address the SRH and adolescent nutrition practices by adolescent girls cover about ten rural districts within which 100 schools (both in-and-out of schools) as well as 100 kebeles (localities) were sought to be reached out. The integration of nutrition with SRH issues has been the key approach of this project. Using three pillars of strategies, this project reaches the youth particularly adolescent girls through in-and-out of schools clubs and the community via change agents and community-based structures. Whether we intend to reach the youth using the club-based approach or address the community by deploying change agents, the whole efforts revolve around three key results of the project, which include creating awareness/knowledge, changing attitude and bringing the practices of adolescent nutrition.

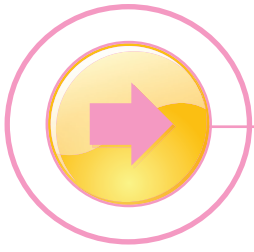
Increasing knowledge in SRH issues in line with the changed attitudes that impact the nutritional practices among adolescents and the community is part of the success stories this documentation is all about. Both the beneficiaries and other stakeholders who were directly involved in the implementation of this project have testified. This document presents the good practices and supported with facts, figures, testimonies, anecdotes, graphs and photo captions. In-school youth, teachers, parents, health extension workers, model health development army and other relevant key stakeholders were all participated as each was cooperated to be interviewed in person. It is my pleasure, on behalf of DSW to thank ADA and other government stakeholders for owning the project, executing and supporting its implementation all along. I would like to conclude my foreword by expressing gratitude to the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation & Development (BMZ) for financing this project.

WHO WE ARE

Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW) is a global development organization that focuses on the needs and potential of the largest youth generation in history. We are committed to creating demand for and access to health information, services, supplies, and economic empowerment for youth. We achieve this by engaging in advocacy, capacity development, and reproductive health initiatives, so that young people are empowered to lead healthy and self-determined lives. With our headquarters in Hannover, Germany, DSW operates two liaison offices in Berlin and Brussels, as well as maintaining a strong presence in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Established and officially registered in 2000, DSW Ethiopia was the first to go operational among the three other DSW country offices in Africa. In the course of the past twenty years, the country office in Ethiopia has been able to diversify the intervention of its thematic focuses by integrating nutrition programs with SRH issues. Its target demographic groups further extended to benefit working youth in industrial parks, flower farms and micro and small enterprises.



Youth dialogues are the key sessions to engage in-school adolescents as well as those out-of-school for dissemination of SRH and nutrition related information. Questions & answers, peer-led discussion, among others, are some of the most frequent activities.



THREE Pillars of Strategies

Pillar 1

STRATEGIES FOR INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

- Tailored IE-SBCC Messages
 - Peer Education
 - Youth Dialogue
 - Questions & Answers (Q&A)
 - Audio-Video Contents through Mini-Media
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Pillar 2

STRATEGIES FOR CREATING ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

- Mass Media
 - Community Mobilization
 - Engaging Influential People
 - Community Dialogue
 - Household Level Dialogue
 - Enhancing Capacity for Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)
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Pillar 3

STRATEGIES FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

- Outreach Health Services (by Health Extension Workers)
 - Capacity Building
 - Referral Links
 - Youth-Friendly-Service Provision & Counseling
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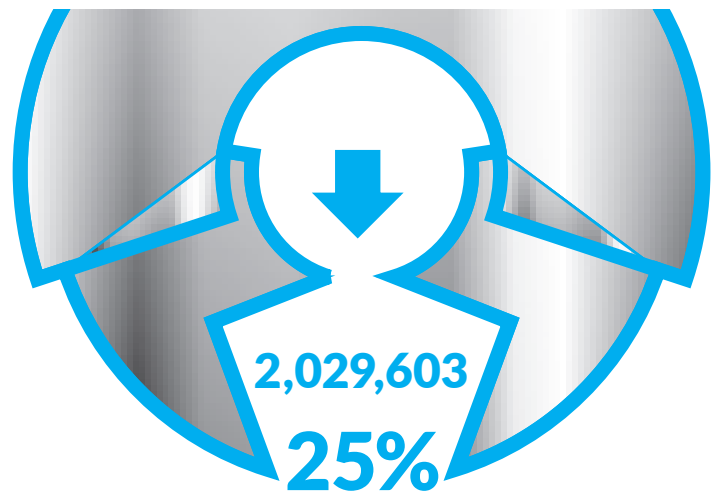
AREAS COVERED BY THE INTERVENTION

1  Number of Districts (Woreda)

1   Number of Schools

1   Number of Kebeles

TOTAL POPULATION IN THE INTERVENTION AREAS

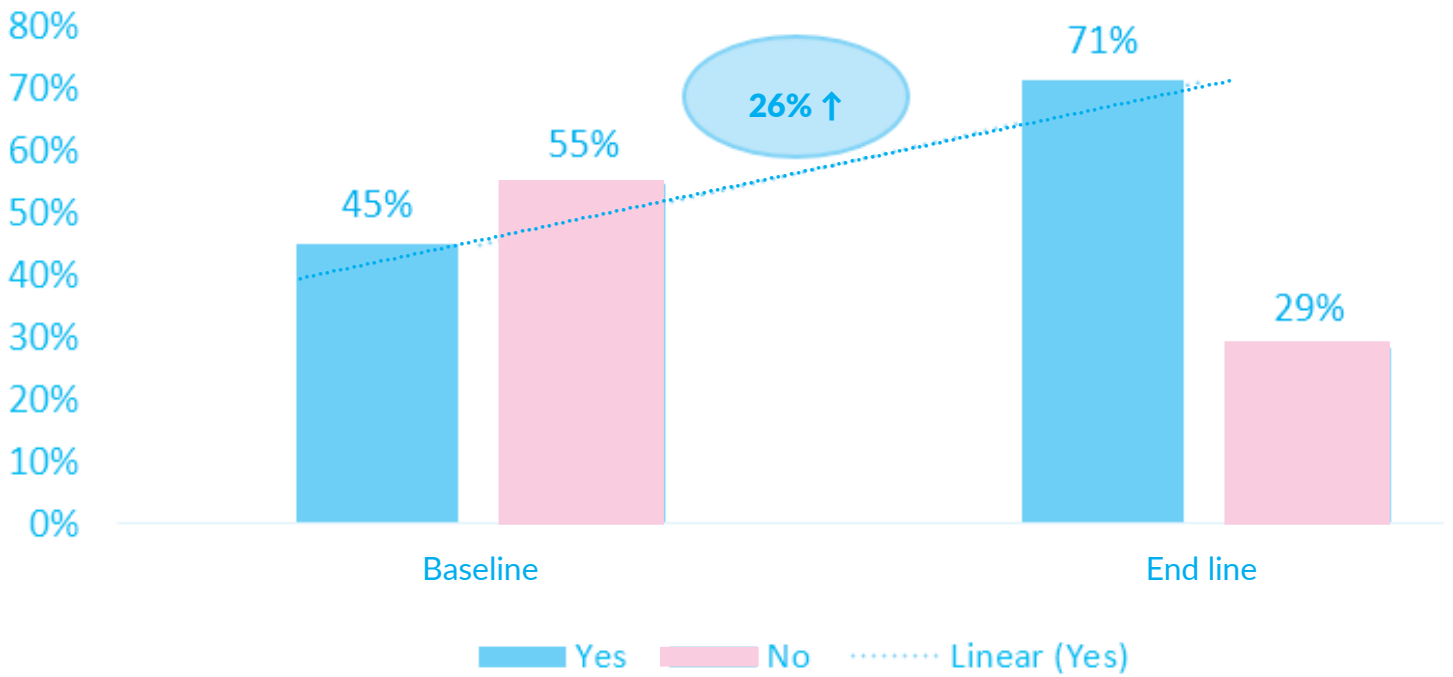


PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS CONSTITUTED IN THE INTERVENTION AREAS

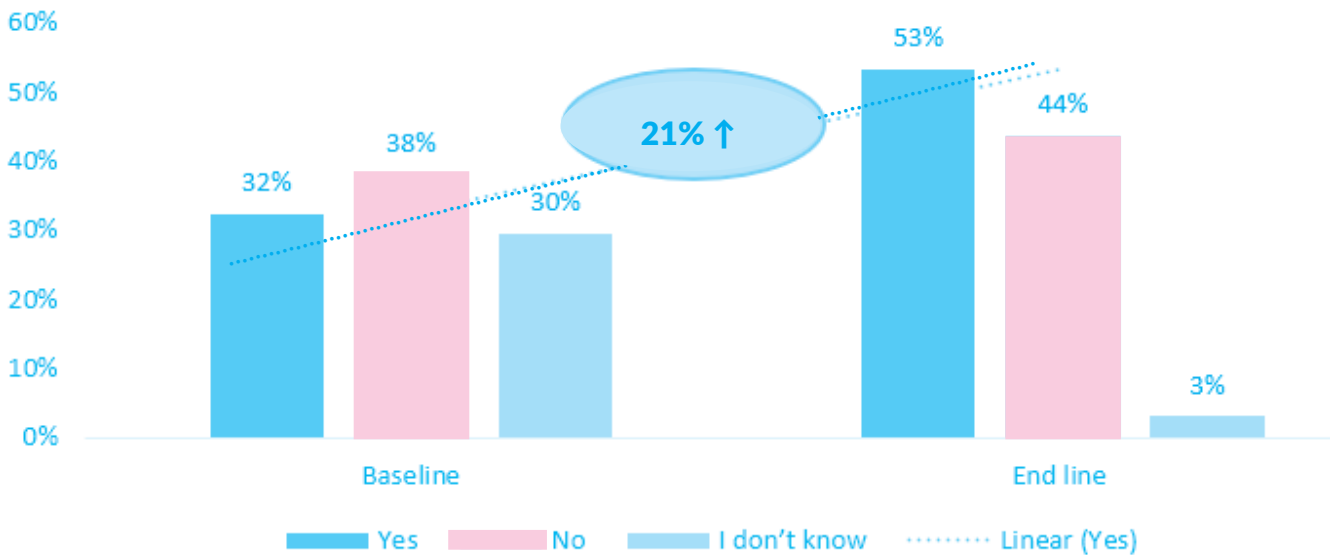


On average, a rural primary school such as Enashenifalen enrolls 1,200 adolescent students.

Received Information / Education on Adolescent Nutrition



Youth Activities on SRH and Nutrition



Adolescent girls' awareness and knowledge on nutrition and SRH increased





Often accompanied by mini-media activities, youth dialogues are the key events no one adolescent in the school would want to be left out. The effect ripples.

RIPPLE Effects of the Project

In-school youth who in their adolescence aged 10 -19 were the focus of this project. As the project progressed through its four-year life cycle, some students left the school after graduating being still in their adolescence and other grew up to their teenage being promoted from lower schools. This is how the intervention of the project impacts widespread benefits. Therefore, the ripple effects of this project have been measured by the opportunities it brought in, the benefits it offered and the limitation it was restrained by. The integration of SRH with nutrition practices is one element in the intervention that makes this project different in many ways to address the malnutrition cycle more effectively. The cycle of malnutrition can be prevented best when the intervention kicks in early in adolescence stage and integrating the SRH issues addresses the vulnerability of adolescent girls. It is evident that the in-school youth clubs approach tailored by this project involving adolescents to engage in peer education activities has already empowered many among them in terms of impacting their health-seeking behaviors. For instance, the menace caused by the practices of child marriage is better understood among school youths who are now able to speak against. Some openly testify their experiences how they turned down offers from their parents for early marriage. This project has created a sense of ownership and positive excitements among the school community and encouraging initiatives being taken by some schools to allocate budgets in order to support of the project as it phases out. This project has brought DSW and ADA to come together in partnerships and undertook implementation over the past four years.



Abeje Desta Wubshet

TESTIMONIES BY IN-SCHOOL YOUTH

Awareness Makes a Difference

Primary schools in typical rural Ethiopia are located in the middle of an area of land devoted for agricultural activities. Past a few hundred yards through narrow trekking on the edge of expanse farmlands, there lies a primary school called Enashenifalen. It is named after the very locality where the school is found and itself being called Enashenifalen. “We shall prevail” is an English equivalence to the Amharic word of Enashenifalen. There are about 1,200 students enrolled during the current academic year at the Enashenifalen Primary School. The number has slightly dropped after schools’ reopening following the one year long closure at the first spike of the pandemic in 2020. Abeje Desta Wubshet who is an eighth grader at the school will turn seventeen in a few months to come. Born into a family of five siblings, Abeje is the fourth child. “Both of my parents are farmers and most of the agricultural produces my parents harvest from their farming lands were used to be taken to the market,” says Abeje, noting that “the most nutritious food items such as eggs, meat, fruit and vegetable would have been sold in an exchange with salt and sugar,” Abeje wonders. Abeje and his peers in school have been actively participating in peer discussions as members of the peer groups being formed by in-school club since four years ago following the launches of a project known as improving SRH and adolescent nutrition practices. “Peer discussions in the school have always been good sources of inspiration for me and so many of my schoolmates to change the attitude in a way we perceive nutrition practices,” Abeje said. Parents whose teenage sons and daughters attend at Enashenifalen Primary School have observed a lot of changes in attitude nutrition practices at home. Easily accessible food items in abundance and yet often being neglected unaware of their essential nutritious benefits to the health of their adolescent children are no longer being taken for granted. No open spaces in their homesteads of this rural community would leave untended for gardening to grow variety of vegetables and fruit trees for consumption nowadays. “We used to eat our daily meals as if for the sake of filling up the tummy and all we were eating was the same type at all times. We understand now what and why different minerals are required for our body in our everyday meals. Our knowledge of nutrition changed with it the attitude of our parents and the community at large has also changed, the practice of adolescent nutrition became widespread,” says Abeje who will graduate from middle school next year.



Leyousew Nibretu Kassie

“The Project Changes Our Attitude on Nutrition for Good,” asserts Leyousew

Leyousew Nibretu Kassie is the fourth born in the family of six siblings. She turned seventeen the other day and as an eighth grader she will sit for national exam later this year. Both of her parents' farm for living and various types of grains are harvested from the large scale farmland twice a year in this rural community. Leyousew's parents like the cases in many others in the community, the chunk of grains after harvest primarily taken for market elsewhere and the rest either being stored or saved for seeds. Meals for family would not be important consideration as they were served insufficient in terms of quantity and varieties. “We never used to be served meals at home different types from what we eat in the previous day,” Leyousew compares the poor eating behavior and the progresses being made after the change in attitude about nutrition practices. Four years ago when DSW's project was launched, Leyousew was a fifth grade student at Enashenfalen Primary School, back then she was only thirteen. “The first time I heard of an in-school club was some four years back when invitation for volunteers was extended by the school administration,” she recounts her membership role in the school club began. The peer group discussions in which I participate include topics such as the sexual and reproductive health information and adolescent nutrition practices that would continue for the next four years all within our school compound between the peers, Leyousew recalls.

Peer discussion is one of the key activities has, at least, a session every week. The students within their school organize food bazaars and parents, health extension workers and members of the health development army take part. “Much as I remain active in every peer discussion, I also used to enjoy so much the food bazaar events,” she added. Noting that, Leyousew confirms the impact this project brought in that has seemed changing the attitude of the community for good. “The perception of adolescent nutrition practices by our parents and the community is now different than what was back three years. I also have learned that iron is an important nutrient particularly for female adolescents. At home, we make and take a lot of funs discussing about the food items in terms of their nutritious contents. We argue which ones contain better iodine and protein,” she enthuses. If there is anything more this project contributed to the community, parents are being influenced by their adolescent children who have developed various life skills and nutrition knowledge because of the in-school club activities. “We have seen how our parents get convinced and changed their attitude first by our efforts and the HDA who would come down home and create the awareness about adolescent nutrition practices,” Leyousew says. “This time around, it is very hard to observe backyards attached to homesteads in the neighborhoods left without being tended for growing food items. It is also true that lately there aren't as many stunted look children and adolescents in our neighbors as there were a few years back,” Leyousew testifies.



“What I mean is...?”

Food Bazaar



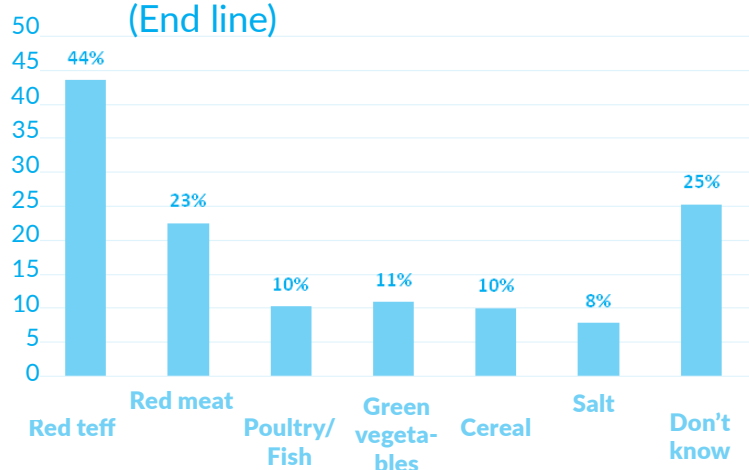
Food bazaar is taken very seriously. Both parents and their adolescent children convened together in the school compound where food items enriched with essential nutrients based on the lessons and the guidance being given are selected for demonstration. Each exhibitor competes and explains the nutrition values of the food on display. It looks very much like a food festival bringing an atmosphere of lasting enthusiasm and excitements. During such occasion, stakeholders representing multi sector offices, including agriculture, education and women, children & youth are invited. During the intervention period, there were 116 food bazaars and demonstrations involving adolescents both from in-and-out-of-school. Adolescents

Leaped by 12%

Adolescent girls have access to various SRH and nutrition related services. Access to such services was compared between the baseline and end line data. What was standing at 50 percent during the baseline survey, the end line confirmed owing to the impact of the intervention that the SRH and nutrition related access to the services has increased to 62 percentage, the difference is 12 percentage.

Adolescents can be able to identify variety food items for their nutrients at the demonstration sites and during the food bazaar events.

Can You List Food Items Rich in Iron? (End line)



Awareness in SRH and Nutrition Issues Make the Practices Relevant

Helen Bishaw Debas has been a teacher for the past eight years, four of which were spent at Enashenfalen Primary Secondary School. She is now twenty-eight. “I was just transferred to this school and being fresh at the time when DSW’s project was launched”, recounts Helen who has been a focal person for the project at the school. Helen who earned her first degree in biology has a lot of interests in youth empowerment efforts. “Following my first contact with DSW to be at project sensitization workshop, I went camping for a week at DSW Youth Development Training Center and being trained there in nutrition concept, SRH issues, life skills and in-school club management. The trainings were very inspiring and practical. I had to cascade the skills over to the school youth who have roles in the club activities. Given my pre-professional life exposure to peer discussion, I was familiar with some of these key activities I happen to oversee as a focal person of the project. The life of this project was tied to three thematic interventions, which include about creating awareness on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and adolescent nutrition, changing attitude and bringing the practices of nutrition. The SRH issues are particularly very challenging to discuss in a school setting. Because many students had no sufficient awareness and some do not have any knowledge about SRH issues, let alone discussing the topics in an open platform, Helen said”



Helen Bishaw Debas



Each in-school activity related to the project has to be explained in diagrams and graphs.



This project has enlightened us not to take anything for granted. For every activity was worth our efforts. Their records kept straight both in books and on the walls right over here.

CHANGES

"Through time, there have been tailored messages published and shared by DSW, key activities at in-school club rehearsed and acted upon in real times. As a result, awareness and knowledge on SRH issues and nutrition being gained by students and the changes in attitude led to the practices. The number of in-school club members who become proactive in taking roles grew and the peer discussion on SRH issues and nutrition drew both boys and girls competitively engaged. A growing number of households not only preserve nutrition-rich food items produced from their farms but also fetch in the market for more essential nutrients for consumption at home. This is a new trend and apparently a change in attitude manifested owing to the project's effect. Other changes being made as far as SRH issue goes remained very interesting to see the rural female household buying sanitary napkins for her teenage daughter. When this mother was asked who she bought if for, she said that it was for her thirteen-year-old girl who actually asked her to do so. The peer discussion and roles in-school club set a practical platform for openness between parents and their teenage daughters. Because mothers and daughters also freely discuss on SRH topics at home and built mutual trust and confidence. The ripple effect goes on and this project tells another tale:

"Dawit Melese is seventeen and his younger sister, Hale Melese is only fifteen. Both siblings are active members of the in-school club. For some reasons at some point, Hale did not have the courage to confide to her mother of the need for sanitary napkins and instead told to her older brother. Dawit did bypass the story for which he needed some money from his parents and once he was able to secure it anyway, he went buying the sanitary napkins for his sister who sees her period for the first time. Thanks to the combination of the in-school activities endowed by the project, our students became empowered with life skills. So to speak, Dawit and Hale are excellent students in academic performances," Helen told the story during the interview.

IE-SBCC MATERIALS

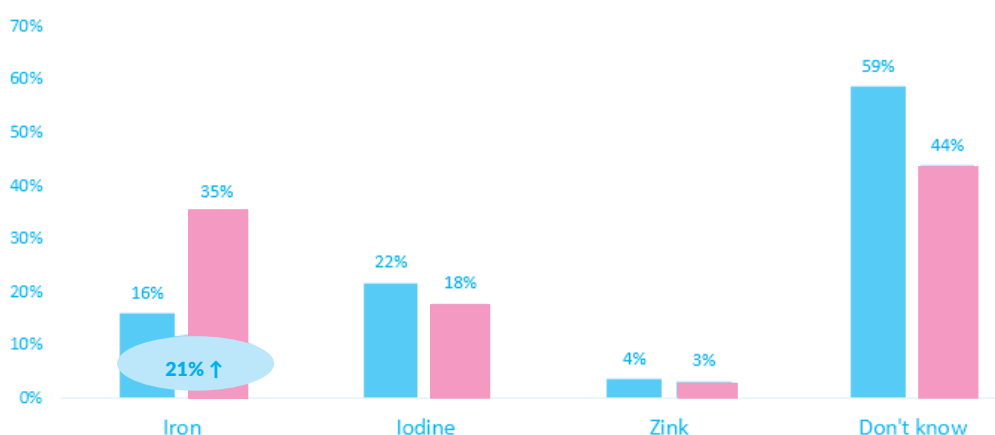
DSW published and disseminate for us various types and formats of IE-SBCC materials, which are tailored for in-school youth purposes. We keep them in the library and some are giveaway items as many students as we could possible reach out with. Those kept at the resource center are being made available for students on lend, so that the materials remain accessible to more and more students until another edition with different youth-friendly contents sent for us by DSW.



"Here it goes....This is an empowerment."

Which micronutrient is essential during menstruation? (End line)

Various IE-SBCC materials help in-school adolescents gain knowledge about micronutrients. They also use the questions & answers sessions to exercise and memorize their knowledge by identifying the differences and benefits of iron, iodine and zinc.



Peer-Discussion Empowers In-School Adolescents

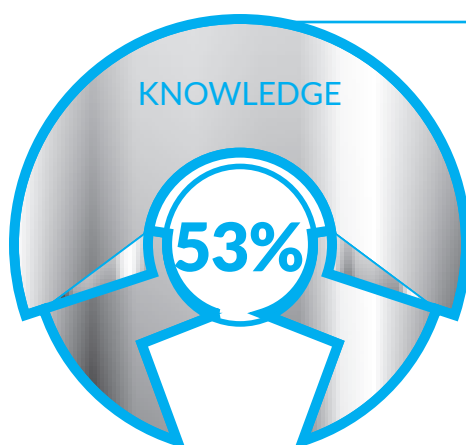
In 2019, a 12-year-old Hilina Mastawal Zeleke was a sixth grader at Enashenfalen Primary School. Back then, she was one of a few female students of her batch had volunteered to become member of the in-school club. Every year since the launches of the project, some members graduate to high school and had to leave the primary school and there are those others being promoted to the primary level with the right age group to be part of the project beneficiaries in the school. Hilina did not take long before she became as active as those members who already spent a few more years in the club. "After the second session of the peer discussion I attended, I was already on talking terms with everyone in the club and the topics of discussion, which include SRH and nutrition issues make me feel very curious to know more about them," says Hilina. Most students in the school become inspired by their peers who take various roles at club activities using the mini-media programs to create awareness on SRH and nutrition. As a result, the students insist and pursued their parents to tend gardening so that they practically experiment growing nutrition-enriched vegetables, carrots, potatoes and other fruit trees for consumption. "Once what we grew in the backyard gardening bear fruition, we harvest from each item and take some to school for demonstration and food bazaars to inspire others," Hilina said. She further explains that "it not only the knowledge we get but the practice we accustomed that makes all the differences. What we know about nutrition is one thing and how we put it into practice is quiet another one," says Hilina.



Helen Bishaw Debas



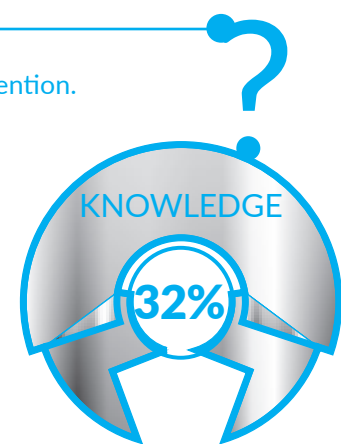
"This time, I am conscious of my SRH and nutrition needs."



End line

A **21%** growth in four years of intervention.

Knowledge by adolescents on their SRH and nutrition needs increased to 53% (end line), up from 32% based on the baseline survey conducted prior the launching of the project.



Baseline



Senayt Misganaw Asnakew



“I am not worried, because I now know all the rich sources of vitamins.”

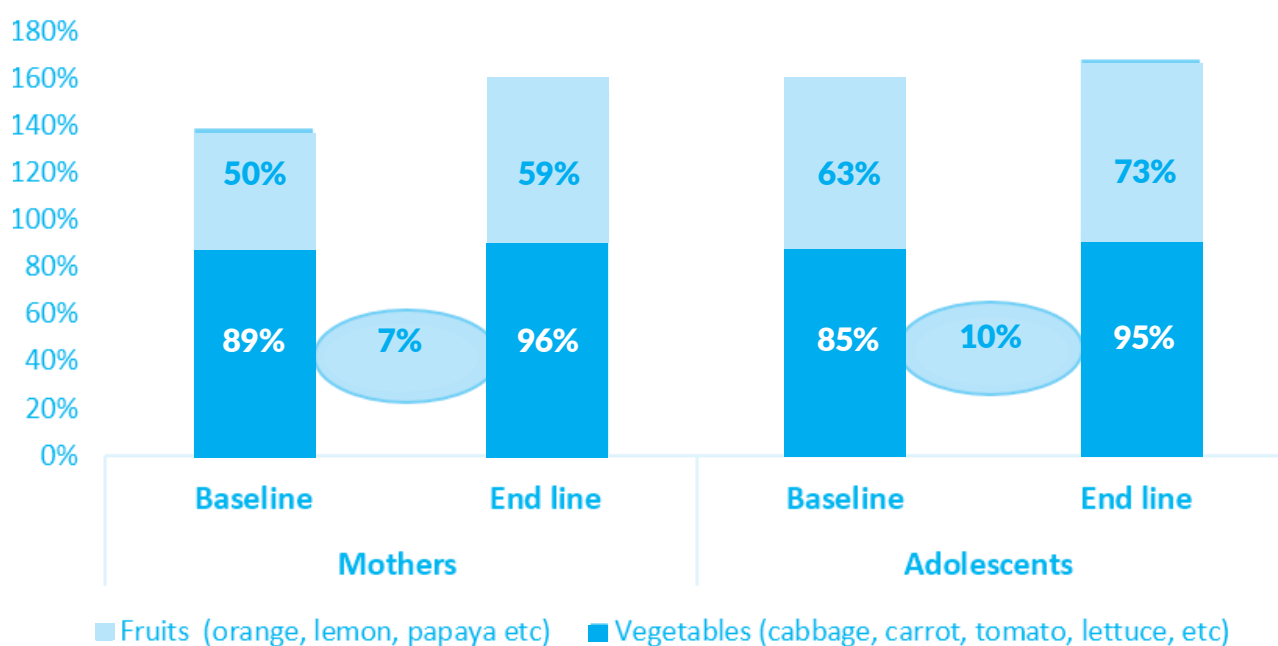
In-School Club Activities and Adolescent Nutrition Practices

To bring up five siblings by a family who owned several hectares of farmlands in a rural Mecha would not be beyond their minimum means to keep everyone well taken care in terms of accessing well-nourished foods each day and every day. Lack of awareness caught up with many rural households who had inadvertently bypassed their own adolescent family members to feed variety nutritious meals would have been easily accessible. The arrival of a project named “Improving SRH and Adolescent Nutrition Practices” had opened up the opportunity for many rural households to change their attitude toward nutrition practices, thanks to their teenage family members whose activities in the school club started to pay off as parents convincingly become aware. “Before even I became an active member in-school club, I was reading materials on SRH and nutrition topics which were prepared by DSW,” says Senayt Misganaw Asnakew who is the last born in the family of five siblings. “None of any my elder four siblings were in primary school by the time I started active role at the school club. I used to bring them new information about nutrition from my peer discussion. Although the HDA come home for demonstration, my siblings and I were the ones who convince our own parents get changed their attitude toward nutrition practices. My parents eventually became curious and prepare meals at home considering their contents of nutrition. The taste of foods and their availabilities aside, the benefits each food items prepared for consumption is already the first priority,” Senayt explains. Seeing several stunted kids who on and off get sick and being taken for medical care weren’t uncommon in the neighborhoods where Senayt live in. “Even in our own family, most of us myself included were all born tiny but a little short of being fully stunted. The condition in which we had lived for quite sometimes without being aware whatever went wrong about us until DSW’s project changed what we need to know about nutrition practices, added Senayt.



Varieties of food items get displayed for young married women and each item bears their names and nutritious contents. A nutritionists going through item by item and explains the health benefits of nutrients contained in the food eaten by adolescents and those of young married women. Demonstrations and nutrition information like these ones support many households to change their attitude in adolescent nutrition practices in the course of the intervention. As a result, young married women who became knowledgeable about the balance diet and in terms of consumption meals enriched with varieties at home grown to 64 percent, according to the end line data. This figure hiked by 18 percent compared to the time when the baseline was conducted, which then stood at 46 percent.

What Are Rich Sources of Vitamins?





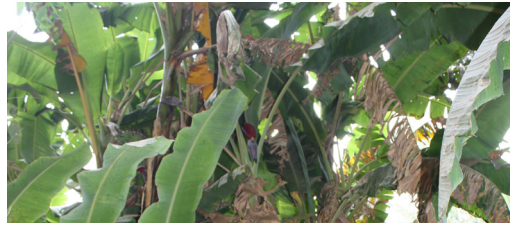
Senayt Misganaw Asnakew



You bet, I don't fail my SRH needs. Nutrition is part of my child's and my own health wellbeing.

Nutrition is Way of Life

Married in her early teen-age, Muluwork Gedfe Gedamu is already a mother of four-year-old girl. Muluwork is one of the rural households benefited from a project called “Improving SRH and Adolescent Nutrition Practices” in Kurt-Bahir locality of Mecha District “I am twenty-two and married when I was only seventeen,” says Muluwork. She furthered her schooling up to the secondary level and had to dropout from 10th grade after she got married more than four years ago. “Once I left school, I became a house wife and managing domestic chores and care after my daughter,” Muluwork recounts how life was like after leaving school for marriage. For several months after she gave birth, Muluwork was one of the common faces visiting the health post seeking medical treatment for her new born child. It was reported that the child had suffered undernourishment. According to Muluwork, “a few years back, my infant daughter had hardly spent a full week before she felled ill and I used to bring her at the health post every now and then.” She further said that “following my frequent contacts with members of the health development army who visit us at home and the health extension workers; I started to participate at the food bazaar in the schools. I also read various nutrition-related materials prepared by DSW and gardening near our homestead various types of vegetables and fruit trees, including mango and avocado. I am very well aware now about how and what to feed notorious meals to my daughter who for the past more than eighteen months hasn't shown any illness. In fact, she became energetic and playful, thanks to DSW's project that has changed our community for good, Muluwork testifies about the changes in attitude that this project made in terms of adolescent nutrition practices and even the growing backyard gardening by model households, including herself.

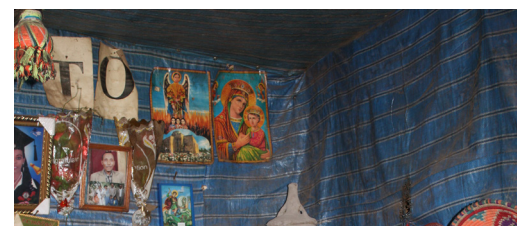
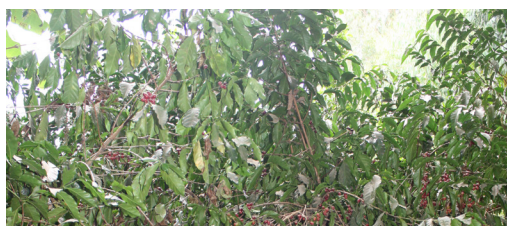


Likie Mekonnen Nigussie

Model Households

Since the launching of this project, gardening has increasingly become a common practice to produce nutrition rich vegetables, fruits and grains, including coffee beans among many households. The gardening is also a demonstration site and being tended and cared after in the backyards of model households who received training, seeds and seedlings from relevant sector offices supported by the project. A 45-year-old Likie Mekonnen Nigussie is part of the health development army closely working with DSW's project. She is also a model household who demonstrates various types of food items grown through her gardening.

This project has supported vegetables and other fruit trees to be gardening in the backyards. There are also demonstration sites in the premises of schools and other places where households have access to. Demonstrations sites help inspire students and the school community at large to draw lessons from the practices of a household gardening. This project has impacted a 14 percent growth since the baseline survey was conducted. According to the end line data, more than 38 percent of households regularly gardening their backyards, up from 24 percent fewer than four years ago.





Aregnesh Lemaw Acheneff



Being member of the health development army, Aregnesh Lemaw Acheneff, 29, is also a model household gardening her backyards. Thanks to the gardening, animal feeds such as fodder and forage are sufficiently accessible from the bi-products of grains and plants grown in the backyards. A mother of two, Aregnesh also keeps and fattening sheep for generating extra incomes and domestic consumption. This project has supported more 157 vegetable gardening and demonstrations sites to be established. Each of all the 100 schools reached out with the project have received supports to establish demonstration centers. At the launching phase of this project it was observed (baseline) that 80 percent of the households and 67 percent of adolescents did not have knowledge about how goiter occurred. A 27 percent improvement in knowledge about goiter was established among female households through end line assessment. Among adolescents, improvement in knowledge about goiter has been made up to 23 percent. More specifically, the baseline data indicated only 20 percent of the households knew about the lack of iodine as a cause of goiter compared with the end line assessment that identified as 47 percent.

STAKEHOLDER'S TESTIMONIES

In-School Intervention

Four years ago, a new project was launched to address hundred primary schools in ten woreda of the Amhara region. One of those schools was Kurt-Bahir Primary School located in Mecha district. The project was intent on improving the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and adolescent nutrition practices particularly focusing on adolescent girls. Parents whose teenage daughters and sons enrolled at this school reached out by the project. These parents take roles in the project, so were other members of the school community, including teachers and principals of the school. A father of two daughters himself, Tirusew Minale Semalign, age 34, has already spent three years as a director at Kurt-Bahir Primary School in Mecha district of the Amhara region. "The year I was transferred to this school, the project had already run into its second year implementation phase," the director of the school, said, adding that the objective was to "transfer knowledge, change attitude and bring about the practice of adolescent nutrition. I observed that students seized the opportunities brought by the project to develop their life skills."



Tirusew Minale Semalign,
school director.





Even if the project terminates, we will keep running the key in-school activities as much as we can make the best out of them.



Kurt Bahir Primary School is one among 100 other such schools reached out by the project to address Adolescent Girls' SRH and Nutrition Practices.

OPPORTUNITY

This project has been a platform for many students in our school. They become enlightened in a way they behave and take nutrition seriously. The more proactive roles they play in managing the in-school club activities, the greater their life skills grew to engage in issues. Questions and answers contests are very interesting ones in a school setting where no one among the adolescent students would want to be left out of attending. Parents, teachers and students come along under common platform for open discussions and together we were able to create enabling environment that can address challenges with regard to adolescent nutrition practices.

BENEFIT

Food bazaars were the most commonly adhered activities that this project has been benefited from. As key stakeholders of the project, our school oversees the bazaar events at which our students take part. The adolescent students learn from food bazaars not only the essential nutrition but also how to prepare nutrition-rich food. These adolescents became curious enough to take their new skills home. The practice ripples across the community. Gardening vegetables and planting fruit trees at the backyard farms improved the livelihoods of many households whose teenage children from our school playing key roles. This project benefited our school with installing the solar panel system. The off-grid solar power system we have installed is used for mini-media activities and school lighting. The solar power empowers our school as the activities to promote and practice SRH and adolescent nutrition keep phasing in even after the project has phased out. Every benefit accompanies a certain limitation, though.

LIMITATION

The fact that this project had to end only after its first phase being undertaken, it slows the momentum of changes observed in adolescent nutrition practices that were triggered throughout the four-year period of active project implementation. As good a project such as this being designed to be implemented within a single phase suffers a limitation to attain far greater outcomes, given its impact. The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic seriously limits our ability to stay put in action. The only time in my three years tenure at the school I observed inactive situation among adolescents whose movements were restricted by COVID protocols.

WAY FORWARD

We have the responsibility to keep up with the good work this project brought in, the opportunities gained among adolescents in school and the benefits upheld by the community. The key activities kept in-school club active during the project implementation period will continue to be the platforms for adolescents in our school to promote nutrition practices.

Home-to-Home Outreach by HDA

The Health Development Army (HDA) is a community-based structure and it was established as part of Ethiopia's Health Sector Development Program implemented through four phases. This phase by phase implementation has been reported by the government to have made improvements both in the health service coverage and utilization of services at all levels of the health care system in Ethiopia. It had continued to be implemented up until the Health Sector Transformation Plan was introduced in 2015. Yeserash Emagnaw Bayfers has three children and she is a single mom in her late forties. Being a member of HAD for many more years, Yeserash knows almost every household in Kurt-Bahir, a locality about fifteen miles away from the nearest town called Merawi. As she goes from home-to-home, she encourages and demonstrates for households the better ways of preparing nutritious meals for their adolescent children at home from accessible food items grown in the backyards. "We mobilize community to attend every food bazaar event organized in our district and encourage them to tend gardening. Model households receive seeds for growing vegetables rich in vitamins and other nutritious minerals. Today, many female households are able to generate incomes from vegetables and fruits they tended for demonstration."



Yeserash Emagnaw Bayfers

The number of community leaders volunteered to promote the integration of SRH with adolescent nutritional practices. As a result, the contribution of this project together with other interventions helped **25 percent** increase in the level of information and knowledge about adolescent nutrition, according to end line evaluation conducted after the conclusion of the project implementation.





Netsanet Agegnehu Wondmeneh

Community Mobilization by HEWs

Netsanet Agegnehu Wondmeneh, 32, has been appointed and reappointed at different health posts for the past twelve years. All but only one health post she is based in that directly involves in the project that intervenes in-school youth to address the SRH and adolescent nutrition practices. Two years ago, when Netsanet was assigned at the health post found within Kurt-Bahir locality came in contact with the administration of the Kurt-Bahir Primary School. “I am thankful that DSW has facilitated relevant training programs that enhanced my ability to support and engage in this project throughout the past two years,” says Netsanet who benefits from the capacity building efforts DSW afforded. “There hasn’t been such active interaction between school youth and health posts in the other health posts I have been working with in the past,” says Netsanet who compares her engagements in project activities. The first exposure Netsanet has had to the key project activities in implementing the SRH and Adolescent Nutrition Practices came about at the food bazaar demonstration hosted by in-school youth. “Since my first observation the level at which awareness about nutrition by the adolescents in school, my roles as health extension worker to support the households were focusing on awareness creation and the change of attitude in ways adolescent nutrition is practiced by the community.” The health extension workers (HEWs) like Netsanet are thirty thousand being deployed across all rural localities in the country. They closely work with members of the health development army (HDA). While the HEWs are usually expected to operate from their health post, members of the HDA routinely do home-to-home community mobilization effort related to health issues. According to Netsanet, “we coordinate with the HDA to reach out the households and increase their knowledge of nutrition in a manner they could change attitude and begin to practice adolescent nutrition.” Most households whose adolescent children participate and take roles in-school club activities have taken part in every single food bazaar. With the close monitoring and supports of HEWs and HAD, the gardening in their backyards flourished with various edible vegetation and fruit trees plentiful for the household consumption in line with the guideline of the adolescent nutrition practices and for extra up keeping generated by female households. Tended and looked after by female households and their adolescent sons and daughters, whereas the male spouses engage in farming at larger scale for the mainstay of the household’s incomes. “This project is a unique one in terms of integrating the SRH issues with adolescent nutrition practices and has since its launching changed our community’s perception and practice of nutrition and would have wished the project be extended for more years to ripple the patterns of its impacts in wider community,” Netsanet urges DSW to reconsider in future intervention of similar undertakings.

During the baseline survey in the intervention areas, 85 percent of the targeted population had access to information about SRH and adolescent nutrition, the end line confirms that schools courtesy of teachers and mini-media activities took the lion’s share. This means that after the four years intervention came to close out, it stood at 51 percent.

Change is Visible, says a Health Extension Worker

“Four years ago, barely a month passed by I was then reposted at the Kurt-Bahir Health Post when DSW invited the key stakeholders myself included for launching workshop of this project, which has now at its closing out phase, Hule Minyichel Fekade recounts how it all began. Married with one child, Hule was in full-term pregnancy at the time she had this interview with DSW sitting in her office. At 30, she already spent thirteen years working at different health posts. Four years went by now since she was reassigned at the very health post as a health extension worker engaged in implementing DSW’s project in collaboration with in-school youth club. I haven’t seen an engaging project like one called “Improving SRH and Adolescent Nutrition Practices,” Hule appreciates her role in the project from the get go. She further said that “I was closely following it up and actively take roles in reporting and measuring the impact in many different ways.” Consistent to Hule’s account, there are a number of visible changes brought about by this project and to be more precise the nutrition issues among adolescents, the record at the health posts speak volumes. “My four years stint at this health post and in a few others I worked at in the past has given me evidences for evaluating the practice of adolescent nutrition and its impact on SRH issues, Hule said.

Are changes visible in terms of the impact of the project through benefiting adolescents?

“I was only seventeen when I started working at health post and for the past thirteen years at various health posts I was able to observe mostly adolescents and other married women frequently visit the health post for nutrition related health problems, anemia being one of the most common. Some married women who might have been undernourished during their adolescence and others at their prime adolescence not only appeared stunted and underweight for their ages but also the fact that the children they bore were far more frequently being brought to the health posts for treatments than others who didn’t show symptoms of malnourishment. I also observed many more adolescents who either lost interest in education or dropping out all together due to incapacity to comprehend the subject matters as much as do the their other peers.” In my a little more than a decade long experience, since the past three or so years I took obvious notice of the numbers of adolescents who come for the treatment of nutrition-triggered health problems at the health post doubly declined. It is also very common, these days, to see in our community how fast adolescents grow taller and well-fed they appear. Because of this project, I closely associate with in-school club activities and have enough knowledge of the students’ improved academic performances. No dropouts as such are reported that I know of in the past few years. We also have recorded We also have a record increment on visitation of our health center by young pregnant women for follow ups.”



Hule Minyichel Fekade

WAY FORWARDS

It is unfortunate the project has ended. But the benefits will have a lasting impact on our community by my impression and measure. I wish DSW finds ways to extend this project and widespread the benefits, for there are many people like me who were trained by DSW and have seen how the differences this project has made. Members of the HDA were the ones at the household level mobilize community in partnership with HEWs. If they receive trainings and enhance their capacities, they can be able to continue supporting the community using the guideline as far as adolescent nutrition practices is concerned.

*Visit of health facilities during pregnancy hiked by **20 percent** after the project was launched. Visitation grew to **86 percent** at the end line, up from **67 percent** during baseline survey.*

STAKEHOLDERS' TESTIMONIES

Knowledge and Attitude Impact on Nutrition Practices

Minwuyelet Biresaw Kassa's sixteen years experience in teaching profession, seven of which were spent as a school director at Enashenfalen Primary School. "I was able to oversee this project for the past four years from the get go," recalls Minwuyelet who is 49 and have been the school director for the past seven years. Minwuyelet has the following observed:

"Most of the students in our school have families who earn their livelihoods from farming. Their daily breads are effortlessly accessible both at home and from the farms. The challenges lurked in the habit and attitude of the households in the manners nutrition is practiced. How poorly they eat, what types they eat and when the meal is consumed particularly expose the gaps in nutrition practices. With all these, their adolescent children became vulnerable to the development of their sexual and reproductive health and the nutrition needs for their growth. Meat and wheat might be the only varieties in their food items served all the time. Other essential minerals and vitamin-rich in their meals can be overlooked all year long and beyond. Vegetables, fruits and grains are the most common ones to be looked down upon for consumption. The hygiene issues particularly the manner in which meals are kept and prepared are also the key challenges in nutrition practices. As a result, most parents let their adolescent children eat whatever immediately or easily available however the condition in which they are found at the time of need. These are some of the factors caused many adolescents in our school and community to become undernourished. The arrival of DSW's project, which was implemented for four years in our school under my watch, has impacted huge changes in nutrition practices and health-seeking behaviors among our community. One important emphasis. One important emphasis I would like to make is how community fast enough came to term about preventing early marriage practice, which was one of the key objectives of the project. As a member of school community, I strongly believe that we have come fairly a long way through achieving this".



Minwuyelet Biresaw Kassa

OPPORTUNITIES

"We used the whole project as a platform to sensitize SRH and adolescent nutrition practices not only our students in the school but also the community. These days, the issues of SRH and nutrition are the most discussed topics and awareness reverberates fast enough. Mini-Media activities open up opportunities for more and more female students to become outspoken in the public forum".

The end line reaffirmed a six percent increase in recognizing the legal age limit (18 and above) to marriage. It stands at 96 percent, up from **90 percent** during the baseline survey. In practice, about 69 percent girls below legal age had married before the launching of the project and this figure has declined to only **55 percent** after the intervention. This project has impacted by **14 percent** reduction in early marriage practices.

BENEFITS

"Rather than taking everything being produced to the market for monetary and other none edible items, keeping and setting aside from their production varieties of food items for household consumption have become the newly changed attitudes in terms of nutrition practices. The SRH issues are strongly related to the adolescent nutrition practices from the healthy growth perspectives. Nutrition status of more households got improved"

LIMITATIONS

"The conclusion of this project has come about at the point when community made an early progress in nutrition practices in line with the objective of the project. The support needed from the project, should it be continuing, would have meant an important trigger factor for sustainability."

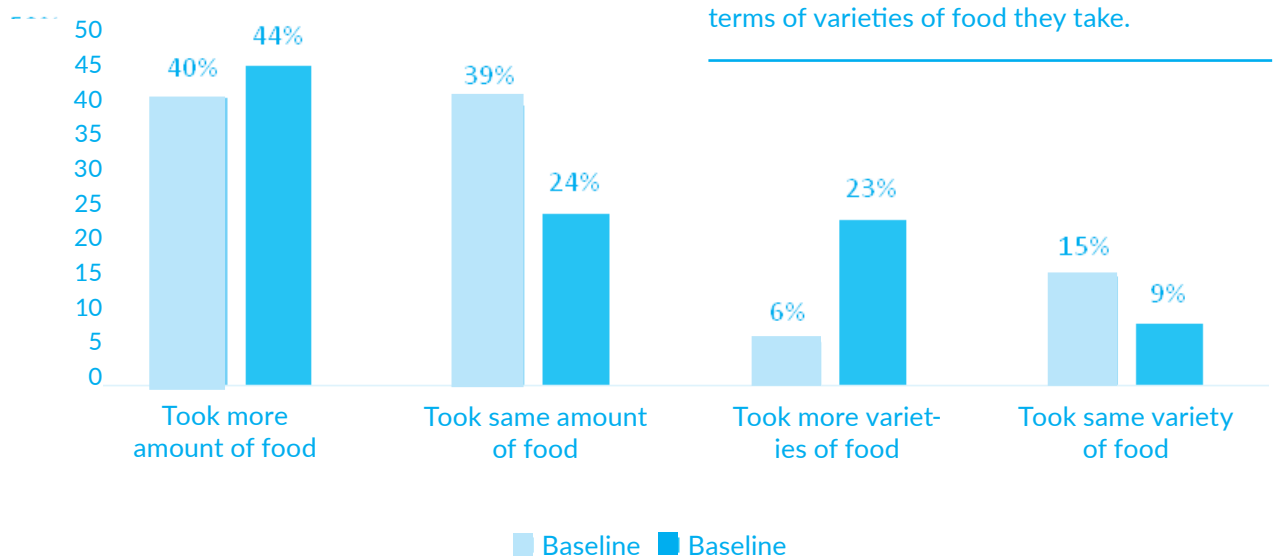
WAY FORWARD

"Putting every good effort to ensure the legacy of this project is being upheld and sustainably progressive. We should find ways to strengthen the partnerships with local government offices and other youth-focused community-based organizations to replicate the SRH and Adolescent Nutrition Practices in the most cost effective manner within our localities".



There you go.... Benefits, limitation and way forward are key words to conclude my testimonies.

Nutrition Status

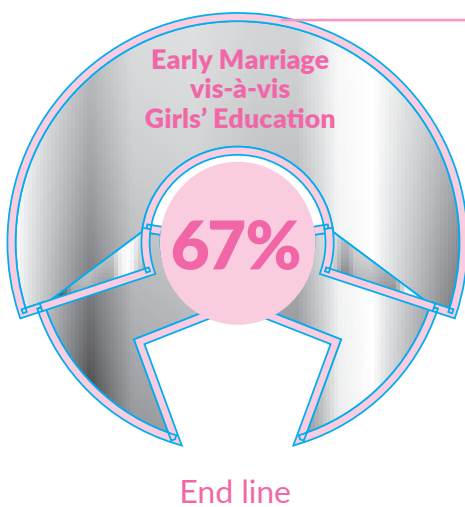


Many households with adolescent family members have fairly changed their nutrition status in terms of varieties of food they take.



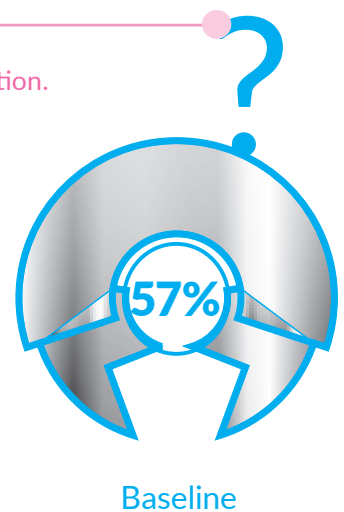
School girls at Enashenfalen Primary School eagerly waiting during the breaks for the youth dialogue to kick-in.

The risks are higher in the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents who become subjugated into early marriage than those of the peers who remain in-schools to further their education. This includes their vulnerability to menace of fistula. In this regard, attitude steadily changed when compared prior and after the project implementation. The baseline survey indicated 56 percent and this has grown to 61 percent at the end line study.



10% growth in four years of intervention.

Early marriage has been considered and conceptualized by the community and adolescents as a barrier to girls' education. When this change of attitude compared to during the baseline survey that stood at 57 percent, it has leapt by 10 percent improvement.





Kumlachew Genet Tiruneh

PARTNERS' TESTIMONIES

The Relevance of Integrating SRH and Adolescent Nutrition Practices

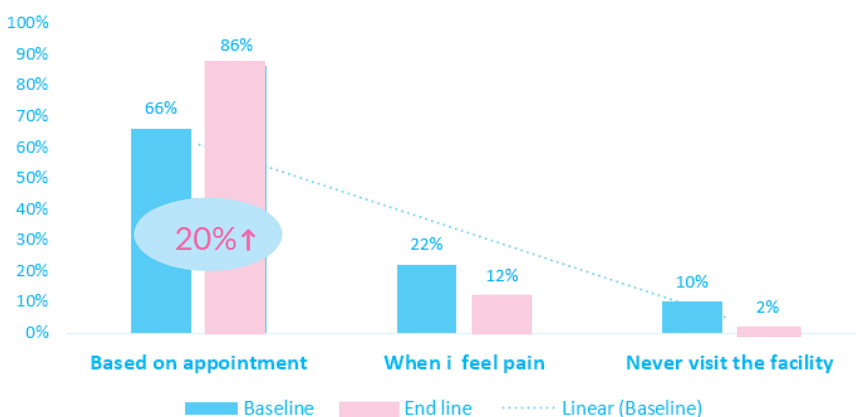
DSW and the Amhara Development Association (ADA) have a long history of partnership. When a four-year project called “Improving SRH and Adolescent Nutrition Practices” was conceptually developed, DSW had ADA in mind to partner during the implementation phase. Since 2017 and the four years that followed had brought expertise and cooperation between DSW and ADA together. “For ADA, every project, be it big or small, matters a lot as long as it is beneficial to the community development,” asserts Kumlachew Genet Tiruneh who is an ADA staffer overseeing this project in the capacity of project coordinator. He added that “the practicality of this project has proved its worth in more ways than one.” Much as there has been opportunities and benefits from this project, there were also some limitation described by the project coordinator:

Contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) has increased to 65 percent exceeding the average EDHS 2019 rate by 15 percent. EDHS 2019 (Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey) CPR stood at 49.5 percent. Various family planning methods utilization to prevent unintended childbirth grew to 81 percent, according to end line data.

OPPORTUNITIES

The mini-media is one of the platforms created opportunities for adolescents in school to become as much active in project related activities as they are in their academic performances. For instance, the questions and answers sessions draw most students into active engagement and learn a great deal in the subject matter. The learning activities took place between peers have also enhanced their ability to perform in schools. Finding their unpolished poetic literary slightly being edited and published in the newsletter tailored based on their needs, the in-school youth would feel inspired and enthusiastic. This is one of the key motivating factors found among the beneficiaries that this project offers opportunities for. Beyond the school setting, the project presents another opportunity for social interaction among households focusing on their common needs of adolescent nutrition practices. After all, we have been able to observe the frequency of maternal visits of health facilities have increased.

Frequency of Visit at Health Facilities During Pregnancy



Maternal visits of the health facilities both during pregnancy and after delivery have significantly increased in the intervention areas.

What are the benefits this project brought, opportunities, limitation and way forward suggested and observed by Kumlachew Genet Tiruneh, project coordinator with ADA:

BENEFITS

The change in attitudes by our community at large on SRH issues along with their nutrition practices is visibly observed. The practices are increasingly become widespread. Almost every household that the intervention reached out in its four years life cycle has been able to tend and gardening the backyard spaces with nutritious food items ranging from fruit trees and vegetables to essential grains. This project has endowed the direct project beneficiaries and other community members with installments of fifty nine solar panels. These are alternative electric power generating sources will be in good use long after the project phased off. The referral services created sustainable linkages with health care providers. By the same virtue, the sexual and reproductive health needs are beneficially addressed. So are the services for the HIV testing and counseling.

LIMITATIONS

The turnovers of focal persons at the project sites were the perennial challenges and they remain so for the most part of the project life without properly being addressed. There have also been insufficient numbers of focal persons with proven expertise on nutrition subject matter. Some in-school club leaders who were trained in life skills and club management complete their primary school education and they leave for high school without being replaced by other equally trained.

WAY FORWARD

Since the very concept of this project initially impressed many at its launching stage and it remains so fluid and easily acceptable when implementation began. A pilot intervention, as it appears, this project has exceeded the expected level of its impact in terms of community ownership. I personally oversee so many other projects and nothing like this one, among a few others, I really enjoy as a project coordinator seeing what how much the impact being felt by the community. Therefore, I don't see the logical consistency for the project to be closed out at the time when community demands for its expansion. The way forward is to strengthen our partnership with DSW and find ways to continue supporting some of the promising beginnings this project impacted,



Kumlachew Genet Tiruneh who is a project coordinator at the Amhara Development Association (ADA) has also served in the capacity of a focal person to this project. ADA devoted an office room exclusively for the management of this project.



In-school activities are being recorded by school focal person of the project.



Yeniegwad Estibel Bishaw

"I have got detailed information about this project here.... I would like to narrate it in terms of opportunities and benefits gained as well as the its limitations and way forward as we conclude the main activities at this point of our discussion."

Unique Project Uniquely Benefits Community

Addressing the prevalence of malnutrition was at the center of this unique project that integrated the SRH issues with adolescent nutrition practices in Amhara region. The region registers the stunted rate a slightly above the national average. The effort to ensure a healthy growth of adolescents embraces three zones within which ten woreda (districts) and as many as hundred kebles (counties/localities). In each country/locality there is one school being addressed by the project. This means, there are hundred primary schools in each of which the average student population stands at 1,500. Although out-of-school youth are also part of the intervention, the most important and measurable impacts this project reports are on those of the in-school youth. "Knowledge, Attitude and Practice, are the core elements of this project went through achieving its objective," says Yeniegwad Estibel Bishaw, a program director at ADA. Adolescents were served with the leftover meals from adult members of the families. Hence they become both undernourished and malnourished. So were their growth and development. This is the attitude that this project focused on for four years to change about. Yeniegwad further noted that "fruits, vegetables, eggs and milk or most dairy products were stoked for market and never were served at home for consumption. This project brought the opportunities to mobilize adolescents through in-school clubs and community members via the health development army (HDA) home-to-home campaigns. HAD in collaboration with the health extension workers (HEWs) ensure households are aware that there are food items affordable and accessible at their disposal. The food bazaar events and demonstration site visits help community not only to gain knowledge of basic nutrition but also how to produce and make them in practice at their homesteads. The fact that nutritious foods were perceived to be expensive and costly does not hold water any longer. The ripple effect that the project prominently created includes the support by the project of the HEWs to be trained and in return they cascaded the trainings over to the HAD so that the latter coached about nutrition at the household level being present right in the neighborhoods. The same goes in an in-school situation. Teachers who were trained cascade their skills to in-school youth club leaders, the effect ripples. IE-SBCC materials such as SRH Manual, particularly those prepared in newsletter formats are very much helpful. In-school adolescents basically find numerous nutrition and SRH issues from these serialized editions of newsletter and use them for peer discussion.

What are the benefits this project brought, opportunities, limitation and way forward suggested and observed by Yeniegwad Estibel Bishaw, a program director of ADA, long-time implementing partner of DSW:



"By the time we learned so much from this unique project, it goes away. But we will do all we can to good practices of this project replicated elsewhere," Yeniegwad enthuses.

OPPORTUNITIES THE PROJECT BROUGHT IN

Prior to the arrival of the project, there were in some forms student activities in an in-school club format. In-school youth and the school community have mastered how best they can manage and coordinate the club-based activities. They are considered to be replicated across several other schools outside the project intervention areas. As the project progresses, the number of volunteers among adolescents to play roles in-school clubs grew double.

BENEFITS GAINED FROM THE PROJECT

The practice of school gardening is flourished across the large expanse of the school compound. The compounds most of the schools benefited from the project are homes to various fruit trees and vegetables grown for sale or generating incomes. Solar-based power-generating panels are installed in fifty nine schools and they are meeting the most basic needs of the schools located in rural localities. Majority of those participated in-school clubs activities developed skills in coordination and mobilization of community. When the benefits measured by the scale at which the project empowered the number of in-school youth, it so great.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PROJECT

If we would start this project afresh, the number of local stakeholders would have been greater than others were at the higher level. Much as there should have been, proactive engagements in multisector approach can as well be considered as limitation. Education office, health office and women & children office were the ones and only sectors have been the signatories. Such sectors including agriculture should have been most relevant to include. The supplies of nutrition-related provision were very limited. For the project should have been able to supply such items for greater impact and outcomes.

WAY FORWARD

Though this project has been closed out, chances are there the community will likely carry forward some of the interesting activities, as this was a pilot intervention. The momentum is still set in motion and we should be able to continue our efforts for sustainability of the project. Come what may, the legacy of this project has many ways going forward. For instance, using the combined expertise produced by DSW and ADA, the government can be able to leverage concerted efforts and keep up with at the points where promising progresses being made. More so, the Amhara Development Association (ADA) must draw strong lessons from the good practices documented and the evaluation being made to find ways of scaling up this project.

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