

MY CHOICE FOR MY LIFE

**End Child Marriage
in Ethiopia, Year 4**

Yekaba, 13, stopped her wedding and is pursuing her dream to become a doctor.

21,300+ ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND BOYS

received information on gender equality, child marriage and sexual and reproductive health rights.

77,400+ PARENTS, CAREGIVERS AND OTHER ADULTS

received information on gender equality, adolescent sexual and reproductive health rights and harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation.

2,500 ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

participated in economic empowerment initiatives, like village savings and loan associations.



Zeynesh's mother, Ayalnesh (right), protected her 14-year-old daughter from a forced marriage. She had escaped one after years of abuse, and she didn't want the same fate for her daughter. After participating in a Plan International project, Ayalnesh says it's her mission to combat child marriage in the community.



Contents

The First Word 4

The Scene 6

Confronting Gender Inequalities 8

The Rundown 10

SPOTLIGHT

Community Allies Change Minds 12

The Last Word 14

The Path Out of Poverty

Poverty puts children, especially girls, and young women at risk for forced early marriage and poor health outcomes.

WE BELIEVE THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO ERADICATE POVERTY around the world is to promote gender equality and empower girls and women. With your support for the My Choice for My Life project, we help empower girls in the Amhara and Sidama regions of Ethiopia so they can access sexual and reproductive health services and exercise their right to choose when to marry. In this report, you'll learn how Bereket, 20, avoided female genital mutilation and early marriage.

IN ITS FOURTH YEAR OF FIVE, THE PROJECT CONTINUES TO ACHIEVE THESE OUTCOMES:

- 1 Increase the confidence of adolescents, especially girls,** so they can access sexual and reproductive health services, like family planning, and delay marriage.
- 2 Improve sexual and reproductive health rights and child protection services** that are offered in safe spaces like schools and community health facilities.
- 3 Enhance government and community responsiveness** to the sexual and reproductive health rights and protection needs of adolescents, especially girls.



ADOLESCENT GIRLS ATTEND AN ANTI-CHILD-MARRIAGE CLUB IN SCHOOL.

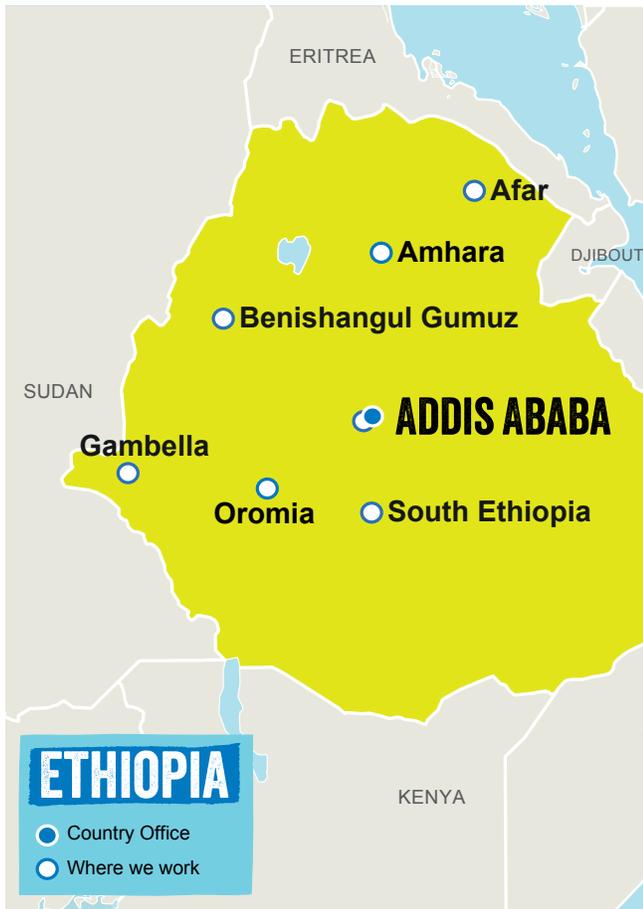
In rural Amhara, where these girls live, 75% of girls are married before the age of 18, and many are married off as young as 12. Poor families arrange child marriages as it means one less mouth to feed and generates income as the parents receive wedding gifts. With support from projects like My Choice for My Life, girls are able to access resources that help them stop their marriages.



THANK YOU for helping support important conversations, training and economic empowerment opportunities that encourage adolescents, especially young women like Bereket, to discover their power and potential.

The Scene

ETHIOPIA, the largest and most populated country in the Horn of Africa, is also one of the world's oldest countries. Among the first nations to sign the Charter of the United Nations, Ethiopia acted to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all – independent of sex, race, language or religion. However, progress for gender equality, adolescent sexual and reproductive health and child protection is being set back due to ongoing social and economic crises, including:



Conflict:

Fighting in the northern part of the country has claimed thousands of lives and left millions displaced from their homes.

➔ More than **50%** of internally displaced people are girls and women; **57%** are children.

COVID-19 + emergencies:

In both instances, girls and women experience different challenges compared to boys and men. These differences in needs are often overlooked, as highlighted in a research report by CARE and the European Commission titled “A Study on the Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Girls in Ethiopia” (2021):

➔ **55%** of girls and women say they are losing access to health care, like sexual and reproductive health services.

➔ **50%** of girls and women say gender-based violence, like domestic violence and child marriage, is rising.

➔ Approximately **25%** of girls and women report food insecurity due to rising food prices, especially for high-protein foods.

➔ **32%** of girls and women believe education is a top priority – and concern – and say it's been disrupted.

Currency devaluation and inflation:

Throughout the reporting period, the country continued to experience devaluation of the birr (Ethiopian currency) and an increased cost of living.



A girl returns to her village in rural Amhara carrying water.

Confronting Gender Inequalities

In four years, we've successfully challenged unequal power relations. Here's how we did it.



A wall mural that symbolizes the fight against child marriage.

The My Choice for My Life project supports gender equality, adolescent sexual and reproductive health rights and child protection in order to:

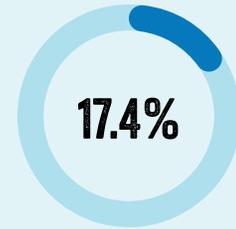
1. Engage adolescent girls and women to become leaders of change.
2. Engage adolescent boys and men to become partners of change.
3. Strengthen government and community responsiveness to the needs of adolescent girls and boys.

The progress to date is promising! Through training, advertising campaigns and broadcasts, significant shifts have occurred. Here's a comparison of the results of some surveys we carried out at the start of the project and more recently:

The percentage of adolescents who said their parents will determine who they marry or have already determined who they will marry.

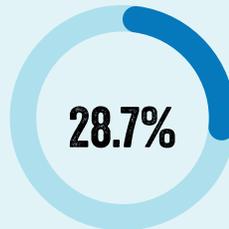


Then

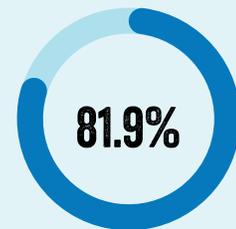


Today

The percentage of parents who said they would try to prevent an early marriage in their community.

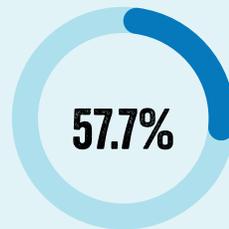


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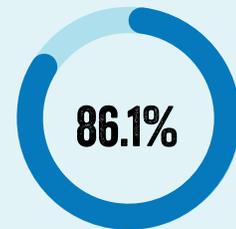


Today

The percentage of adolescents who know how to obtain condoms.



Then



Today

We also established **village savings and loan groups** to address the gender-based barriers women face, like less access to education and employment, so they can achieve the following:

1.

Build economic security and increase their financial assets.

2.

Be involved in managing the household budget.

3.

Have increased decision-making power in the household.

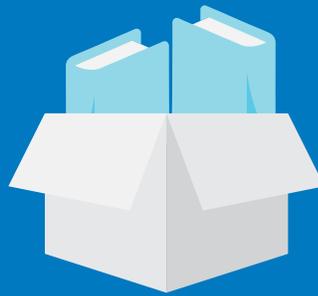
4.

Reduce their risk of experiencing gender-based violence or entering into an early or forced marriage.

THE RUNDOWN

Here's what we accomplished during Year 4 of the project.

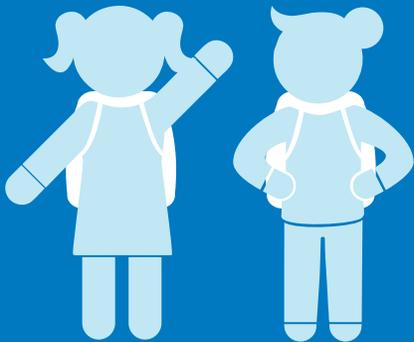
290,000+
EDUCATIONAL
MATERIALS



on sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality and child, early and forced marriage were distributed to adolescents.

192
BILLBOARDS

were erected to promote sexual and reproductive health services and to encourage delaying marriage.



9,885 ADOLESCENTS

attending school received training on gender equality, preventing child marriage and exercising adolescent sexual and reproductive rights.

30 RADIO MESSAGES &
16 SERIAL RADIO PROGRAMS

were created to teach adolescents about gender equality, sexual and reproductive health rights and the issue of child marriage.



295 ADOLESCENT GIRLS & YOUNG WOMEN

were provided with start-up money to support their small businesses.



1,500

members from 60 village savings and loans associations started savings groups and disbursing loans, allowing some members to start small businesses or expand already existing ones.



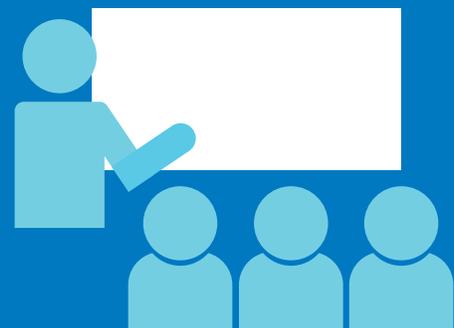
270+

ADULT SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATORS

helped 13,550 parents, caregivers and other adults create safe spaces for adolescents to access sexual and reproductive health information and services, like contraceptives and HIV testing.

775+ COMMUNITY LEADERS

were trained on how to challenge harmful social norms and practices, like child marriage and female genital mutilation, that threaten adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and rights.



Community Allies Change Minds

Stigma and superstitions about girls' bodies mean that young women like Bereket, 20, are often forced to undergo female genital mutilation.

IN ETHIOPIA, many people believe that a girl who has not undergone genital mutilation can't control her emotions and that this practice makes girls calmer and prevents them from behaving violently. As a result, 25 million girls and women in the country have been subjected to genital mutilation.

Bereket's parents approached a woman to perform this procedure on their daughter, but they didn't know that she had attended training from Plan International and no longer performed the procedure. In this training, the

former cutter had learned about the harmful social and gender norms behind the tradition. Now, she actively discourages others, including Bereket's parents, from participating in the practice.

Today, Bereket has graduated from business college and is a member of the village savings and loan association established by the My Choice for My Life project. She can now help support herself and her family by selling fruit and coffee beans. "I am saving money together with [other participants] like me who have joined the My

Choice for My Life project and established savings groups," says Bereket.

Her financial independence has also enabled her to make decisions about her sexual and reproductive health and rights and decide whom she wants to marry and when. It's a message she shares with others in her community.

"I teach girls in my locality to avoid genital mutilation," she says. "I am a full person and will marry when I want."



“

My family called a woman to mutilate me. She said she'd stopped mutilating practices because of training from My Choice for My Life. She taught my family not to insist on this practice. They changed their minds, and I was saved.”

– Bereket, 20





Thank you!

Your commitment has helped ensure that thousands of adolescents like Bereket can stand up for their rights and protect their health. As the My Choice for My Life project continues, Plan International aims to build on these incredible gains to create transformational and sustainable change for adolescents, especially girls.



Ayalnesh now lives with her three children: Mesfn (left), 13, Elamtsehay (middle), 8, and Zeynesh (right), 14



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