

PROJECT

Her Future Her Choice in Ethiopia

May 2024

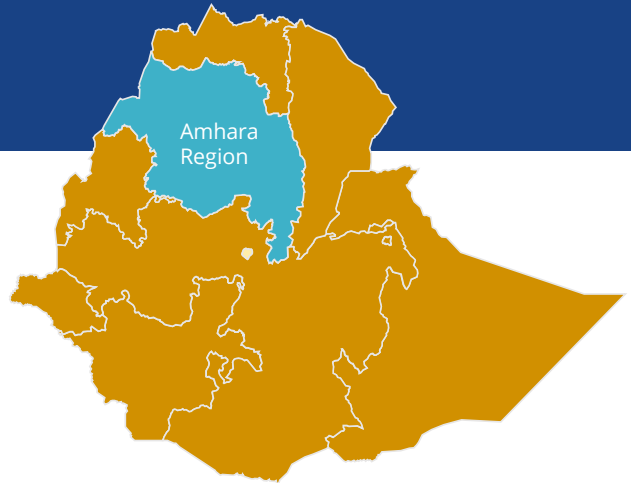
Since 1993, Pathfinder has partnered with the Government of Ethiopia to bring quality sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services to millions of people. Pathfinder has worked to strengthen health infrastructure, train and mentor the health workforce, and ensure that all people get the care they need.

In the Waghmare Zone of Ethiopia's Amhara Region, the Her Future Her Choice project works to remove barriers to critical sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services for adolescent girls and young women, ages 10–24. Pathfinder aligns service delivery with country priorities, strengthens linkages between supply and demand, and ensures that providers respect and uphold the rights of girls and young women to access services without stigma or discrimination.

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SELAMAWIT'S STORY

Building Peer Networks for SRH

Selamawit, 18, is the oldest child in her family. Growing up in the town of Sekota in the Amhara region of northern Ethiopia, she did well in primary school and gained a pass to secondary school.

When her parents separated, she went to live with her mother and little sister in Hamusit, where she enrolled in high school. When her family pressured her to marry to alleviate their economic stress, Selamawit was devastated.

"I wanted to continue with school, but couldn't, so I went to another town and [worked in a] café to escape from child marriage and to relieve my economic burden," she remembers. "I felt bad about this, but I had no choice."

Selamawit tried to study in the evenings, but her work schedule did not allow it.

1. Selamawit's name has been changed to protect her privacy.

In January 2023, her employer and another man entered her home, and the man sexually assaulted her. Devastated and unsure of what to do, Selamawit returned home to her mother.

In March 2023, Selamawit ran into an old school friend, who was a peer educator with Her Future Her Choice. Her friend referred Selamawit to Hamusit Health Center and accompanied her there during her pregnancy, STI, HIV, and hepatitis screenings. Although Selamawit tested negative for HIV and hepatitis, she was devastated to learn that she was pregnant.

Youth-friendly service provider, Yibeltal Yihune, provided Selamawit comprehensive counseling. After considering her options, she chose to terminate her pregnancy and adopt Implanon as a long-acting reversible contraceptive method.

Yihune and the peer educator also invited Selamawit to join other young people during peer-educator-led SRHR discussion sessions at the Hamusit youth-friendly services unit. Selamawit accepted, and after participating in the peer education activities, she has gained a sense of belonging in her community:

“The main thing I’ve got since I joined with peers is confidence. I used to look at the floor when people talked to me. Through the exercises I have been able to mix with anyone and network.”

Armed with this confidence and her new SRHR knowledge, Selamawit now reaches out to other young people contending with similar positions to the one she was in.

“I have been helping to educate other girls. I teach them about family planning, how to use condoms, and about other methods [of contraception],” she says.

She also encourages them to visit the health center to access services. In this work, Selamawit sees a new beginning for herself:

“I’m happy to be in this project. My dream is to continue my education next year[...] and to be able to depend on myself.”



REDIET'S STORY

Fostering Positive Behavior Change through Peer Education

Rediet Getawi is a 10th grade student at Wagshum High School. She lives with her family in the town of Seqota, in Kebele 02. Before the Her Future Her Choice project was implemented, Rediet says she did not have detailed knowledge about SRH and related issues.

After the project began implementation, Rediet had the opportunity to participate in a six-day peer education training program conducted at Wagshum High School. After completing the training, Rediet's SRHR awareness increased, and she became a model facilitator in the school's girls' club. Not only that, but she also effectively led the team of trained peer educators at her school.

In addition, Rediet facilitated referral linkages for her peers to the Seqota Health Center. She also served as a valuable information source, helping her peers combat shisha and other substance abuse. Currently, Rediet has produced numerous poems focused on the effects of substance use, the importance of time, and other harmful practices related to SRH.

Rediet is a proactive, positive, and respected student among her peers. She uses her knowledge and skills to facilitate peer education dialogue sessions and on-the-spot peer training sessions with confidence.



Rediet's behavior change efforts have motivated other students to engage in Seqota Health Center's peer education discussion sessions and volunteer activities.

Rediet appreciates the program for providing her the opportunity to improve her knowledge about SRH and foster behavior changes that have significant impact on adolescent girls.

Rediet and her peers effectively led high-level meetings at school and in their community to advocate for the importance of adolescent and youth SRH programs.

As a result of her achievements, the school community has given Rediet the nickname "Expert." Rediet reports:

"The peer education discussions helped me identify and properly utilize my potential and excellence."

HAWA'S STORY

Family Planning Empowers a Young Mother

Hawa Ebrahim, 20, lives near the Birbir Health Center in 013 Kebele, Sekota Zuria Woreda, Waghimra Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia. She is married and has two children. When Hawa was in the eighth grade, her education was interrupted by child marriage.

Hawa and her husband work as day laborers and engage in small-scale farming. Due to their limited income, their two children, ages 4 and 2, were malnourished.

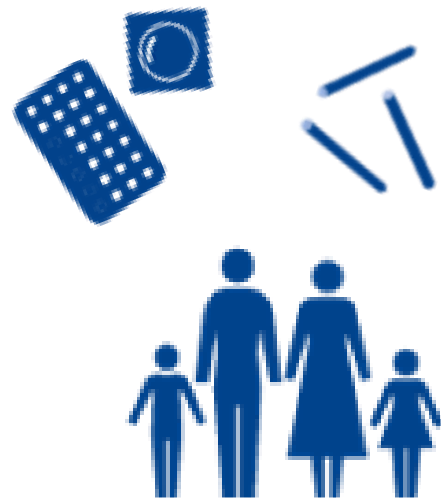
A peer educator in Hawa's village counseled her on the use of family planning and referred her to the Birbir Health Center on February 6, 2021. After a comprehensive counseling session where Hawa discussed her family planning needs, a service provider advised Hawa to use a contraceptive method to avoid unwanted pregnancy and improve her and her family's wellbeing. They also encouraged Hawa to involve her husband in discussions about the importance of family planning.

Hawa's husband agreed to participate in the discussions, and after thorough counseling, they decided that Hawa would adopt a contraceptive method.

The service providers presented the methods available, and Hawa chose the implant contraceptive.

The implant insertion was performed on February 10, 2021, and Hawa has been using it ever since. She expresses happiness and satisfaction with her choice of contraception.

Hawa expressed her gratitude for the Her Future Her Choice project and health center staff, asserting that they helped her take control of her life. She now works on her daily tasks without worrying about unwanted pregnancy.



TSEGANAT'S STORY

A Community Comes Together to Prevent Child Marriage

Tseganat Abebe, 14, lives near the Birbir Health Center in 013 Kebele, Birbir Got, Sekota Zuria district, Amhara Region, Ethiopia. She attends Birbir Elementary School and performs well academically.

In February 2023, when Tseganat was in the fifth grade, she learned that her grandparents were arranging her marriage to a 26-year-old man without her consent.

Fortunately, Tseganat was a peer educator with the Her Future Her Choice project, and she had received basic training on SRHR information and assertive communication in March 2022. Armed with knowledge and confidence, Tseganat knew how to approach this challenge.

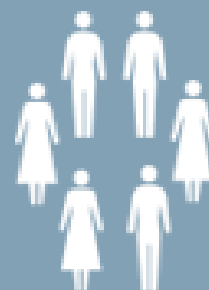
Tseganat immediately reached out to her SRHR club leader at school and the youth-friendly services provider at the Birbir Health Center. She also informed them that four of her school friends were facing similar forced marriage situations.

The school director then convened a meeting of the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Committee to discuss the issue and invited Tseganat's father, Abebe Mengistie, a religious leader.

The committee members worked tirelessly to convince not only Tseganat's father but also the other parents to cancel the scheduled marriages. The combined efforts of the health service providers, school teachers, police officers, and trained peer educators—including Tseganat!—led to the successful cancelation of all the forced wedding arrangements in the community.

Tseganat, her parents, and her friends are relieved that these girls can continue their educations at Birbir Elementary School in peace. Tseganat has been recognized for her role as a mobilizer, activator, negotiator, and advocate in preventing child and forced marriages, as well as other harmful traditional practices. In fact, the Sekota Zuria Woreda and Kebele GBV Committees have successfully canceled more than 30 attempted adolescent girl marriages this fiscal year.

This remarkable collaboration between the school, health center, GBV Committee, and community—through Tseganat's leadership—has demonstrated the power of collective action in preventing child marriage and empowering young people to take charge of their own lives.



WIRKA'S STORY

“I am now happy, and I can plan my future freely. My future is my choice.”

Wirka Woldu, 21, lives in a small town in the Waghimra zone of the Amhara region in northern Ethiopia. When she was in 12th grade, she met her boyfriend, who was from another kebele. Unbeknownst to Wirka, he already had a wife and child.

She and her boyfriend would meet on the weekends. They had a sexual relationship, and they did not use any contraceptive methods. After several months, she experienced some discomfort and informed her boyfriend, who was unconcerned. But when Wirka told her girlfriends, they took her to a private health facility at Sekota for a pregnancy test.

There, Wirka learned that she was two months pregnant. She inquired about terminating the pregnancy as soon as possible. Though the private clinic offered the service, it cost 5,000 birr—more than Wirka could afford.

Upon returning home, Wirka connected with a trained Her Future Her Choice peer educator, who provided a referral to the Birbir Health Center. Wirka went to the health center with her girlfriend and received comprehensive counseling on safe abortion and contraception.

With full understanding of her options and after thorough counseling and consent, Wirka decided to terminate the pregnancy via medical abortion.

As part of Wirka's post-abortion care, she was given contraceptive counseling. She opted for a contraceptive method and shared:

“I chose the [contraceptive implant] because I wanted to stop having children until I'm ready [...] I'm unemployed and not very literate, so I am dependent completely on my family [...] I [was] assured that any time I want to have child [with a] true friend, I can stop using the method and I will [be fertile] again.”

In July 2023, Wirka completed her high school education with good marks. She has since started her college education in the Wagshum Health Science College's Nursing department.



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Photo: Yimer Tegegn



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