

# THE KNOWLEDGE TO SUPPORT THEMSELVES

## Healthier futures for women and girls in Ethiopia Summer 2017

In our fourth update, we learn about how adult literacy programmes are giving women the skills they need to control their lives, and some of the fantastic successes the project has seen since the last update, in spite of the food crisis in Ethiopia.

### Happy to help shoulder the burden

Jeju Mulunesh, 27, lives in Wohaminch in a village in the highland. Married at 15, she is mother to three boys and two girls and had her first child at the age of 10. Jeju didn't have the opportunity to finish her education and was determined for her children to have a better life. However, dependent on her husband, Anteneh Atuma, who works long hours as a labourer to provide for the family, she struggled to feed them and cover the costs of their education.

Last year, things began to change for Jeju. She was given the chance to join one of the local self-help groups called 'Melkam' (which means 'happy') organised by the ASURE project. Despite not having her husband's blessing to attend, Jeju started to go to the group's weekly meetings and received guidance on reproductive health and other socio-economic issues, as well as how to generate income. It gave her confidence and she successfully managed to get a seed loan of 1,000 Birr to start her own business – although she had to persuade her husband it was a good idea. Jeju started selling 'borde' – a locally made, non-alcoholic, fizzy, malt-coloured beverage made from grain.



Jeju's first business venture, selling borde, was a success.

**'If every woman got an opportunity like the one I did through this project, we could bring about great changes, let alone overcoming worries about feeding our children.'** Jeju Mulunesh

### A happy business!

Using the profits from her sales of borde, and with her husband now firmly onside, the family opened a kiosk stocked with useful small items and generated a good level of profit, enabling them to quickly repay the loans given to them by the self-help group.

Jeju said that while the loans from the group were essential to kick-start her successful businesses, it was the confidence and knowledge she gained that provided the motivation she needed. The group also supported in winning her husband over; now he, too, is benefitting from his wife's increased independence and her contribution to the household income. Jeju's dream is to one day open a big restaurant in the city centre.

### Functional adult literacy: a brilliant tool to improve community health

Jeju's education was cut short at the age of 10 with the birth of her first child. This meant she didn't have access to the knowledge she needed to contribute to household expenses or to protect her health. Other women in the community have found themselves in a similar position; hamstrung by not being able to read or write well. The staff of the ASURE project have set out to tackle this, training 30 community facilitators in adult literacy teaching techniques.

In conjunction with the government, they have distributed blackboards, chalk, pens, pencils and exercise books to village centres, giving women the skills they need to read



**Jezu inside the kiosk she set up with funds from her self-help group.**

medicine packets, and prices, do their own bookkeeping, and support their children in their studies. Additional literacy training has made it easier for self-help group attendees to learn about topics such as environmental hygiene, HIV, business management and other issues.

## Successes despite national food crisis

Kalkidan Yimer, the Community Health and HIV Programme Officer for Christian Aid in Ethiopia, has reported back on the outstanding success in the last monitoring period. The community campaigns started by the project have reached nearly 5,000 people, educating them on sexual health and family planning.

**'With the information I got from my self-help group, I visited a clinic and became a family planning user. A five-year gap between having any more children will improve my health.'** Jezu Mulunesh

As part of the sharing and learning forum for Youth Action Kit (YAK) groups, question and answer competitions were organised. 1,157 students participated in debates on reproductive health and HIV.

Other successes include a conference of senior church leaders, set up by the ASURE project to try and improve the environment for teaching about sexual health. 180 leaders from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Ethiopian Catholic Church, Ethiopian Evangelical Church, and Ethiopian Muslims' Relief and Development Association came together to make sure their congregations knew how important this work was. They renewed their commitment to the project and to overcoming the religious and cultural boundaries that might still stand between their congregations and better health.

Kalkidan says: 'This quarter, we have been encouraged by a visit by government representatives to the self-help groups in the Kemba area. They were so impressed with the changes in the area that they presented the staff with a certificate of appreciation! We've had plenty of challenges including some staff leaving, but by working proactively and planning well, we know we can achieve our goals. Thank you to everyone in the UK for your steadfast support. Our gratitude is with you all.'

### Please join us in our prayers for the project, and for the whole of Ethiopia:

- Pray for the teenagers supported by the guidance and counselling services run by the project; that they have the strength and courage to stand up for their rights, and become healthier, safer, and more productive members of society as a result.
- Strengthen the marriages of those who have participated in these self help groups – that the new power dynamics and different responsibilities deepen their bond, making them a shining example to others in their villages.
- Pray for the religious leaders heading out into their communities with a message of change; that it will not fall on deaf ears, and that the respect and dignity they command will be the catalyst for a fairer, more just society.
- Pray that those who have lost their livelihoods because of severe drought are able to rebuild their resources and do not suffer from hunger for too long; that their communities are able to rally round in support and fellowship to care for each other.



If there is any way we can help your group, please contact your local Christian Aid office, email [partnership@christian-aid.org](mailto:partnership@christian-aid.org) or visit [christianaid.org.uk/partnerships](http://christianaid.org.uk/partnerships)