



“My children will not grow up illiterate. I will send them to school. I will make them big people!”

**Belaynesh
Toma, age 18,
Grade 4**

KEY FACTS

- **Our Girls Education Challenge (GEC) project reaches 62,777 marginalised girls in four woredas in rural Wolaita Zone.**
- **We have far exceeded our targets for literacy and numeracy outcomes.**
- **The cost per girl over the project life time is £47.**
- **Our project is sustainable – we work with government at all levels and ensure our interventions align with government policy.**

Successful interventions include:

- **Reusable sanitary pads, underwear and soap**
- **Tutorial classes**
- **Guidance and counselling for improved self-esteem**
- **Role models**
- **Girls’ clubs**
- **Gender responsive teaching**
- **Encouraging attitudinal and behaviour change within communities**
- **Upgraded latrines**

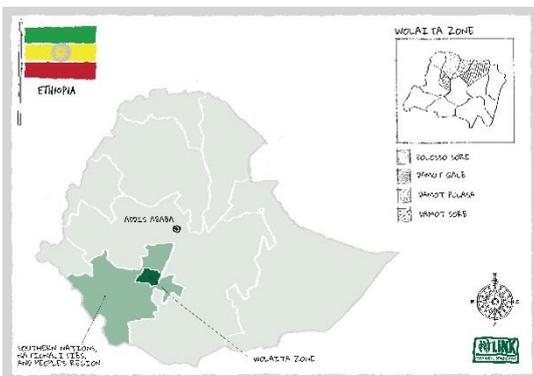
Summary

Link Community Development’s ‘Life skills and Literacy for Improved Girls’ Learning in Rural Wolaita’ project aims to improve girls’ enrolment, retention and performance in 123 elementary schools across four woredas (districts) in Wolaita Zone of south-west Ethiopia. The project has reached over 62,000 girls and addresses a wide variety of challenges girls face through holistic, low-cost, low-tech yet ambitious interventions.

Background

Rural Wolaita Zone has both high population density and absolute poverty. Subsistence farming is the prevalent livelihood in a context of limited agricultural land. Fertility rates are high as are rates of HIV/AIDS infection. Barriers to girls’ education consist of a culture where girls are part of the domestic work force and limited resources are rather spent on boys’ education. Girls therefore do not always attend school and their performance is significantly lower than that of boys. Early marriage is one of the six major factors identified by girls as a reason for dropping out from school in Wolaita Zone. It is a common phenomenon in many parts of Ethiopia. Other challenges include: attitude towards girls’ education, domestic chores, lack of awareness about reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and menstruation.

Project Information



Link Community Development in partnership with the Education Bureau of the Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples’ Region are raising awareness, changing attitudes and mobilising a variety of stakeholders to address barriers and to create a context to promote girls’ education. Activities include a community awareness

campaign on the major challenges that prevent their girls’ from attending, staying in and learning in school; facilitating tutorial classes to low performing female students; school leadership training and school improvement planning to better consider girls’ needs; and the provision of reusable sanitary pads and underwear to reduce class absence and drop out due to menstruation.

Belaynesh's story

This is the story of Belaynesh Toma, who was forced to marry at an early age and although pregnant, still manages to attend school.

Belaynesh was married five years ago at 13 years old. Before they were married her husband used to tell her that he would abduct her if she didn't agree to marry him. She thought she had no choice.

Most girls drop out of school once they are married even though they are still of school-going age, yet Belaynesh has continued to attend school. She always enjoyed going to school and fortunately, although her husband is illiterate, he respects education and encourages her to attend. He is also participating in an adult literacy programme.

Belaynesh believes that the attitude towards girls' education in her village is improving. She thinks that before the start of Link's project, parents thought girls would not achieve anything through education so would arrange marriages for them. Link arranged for successful women from the community to come to Belaynesh's village to relate their experiences and talk about how their education had helped them. Belaynesh says "I think Link should continue bringing these women in order to further change their [the communities'] attitude". She also said that community members see that girls are being supported at school and that this support is greatly appreciated.

As a result of the project Belaynesh attends tutorial classes and her results have improved greatly. She receives advice and encouragement from the Gender Education Advisory Committee (GEAC) advisor Aster Asale, a female teacher at Belaynesh's school. Aster Asale tells her to keep coming to school and provides support in the form of counselling and advice.

Belaynesh says she will have no more than three children. She hopes they will have the same access to education that she has "My children will not grow up illiterate. I will send them to school. I will make them big people!" When asked if she fears having children will prevent her from achieving her dreams she is adamant, "I will never drop out of school because of children. Even if I get the chance to join university I will leave my children with my husband and go to study!" She wants to be a teacher or health worker so that the knowledge and skills she has learnt at school will be passed on to future generations.

Delivery Partners



The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
Ministry of Education



Funding Partner

