



“I was very happy when I got a pad for the first time from Link. It’s much better to use than a piece of cloth and easy to change frequently.”
Birtukan, age 15, Grade 7

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.**

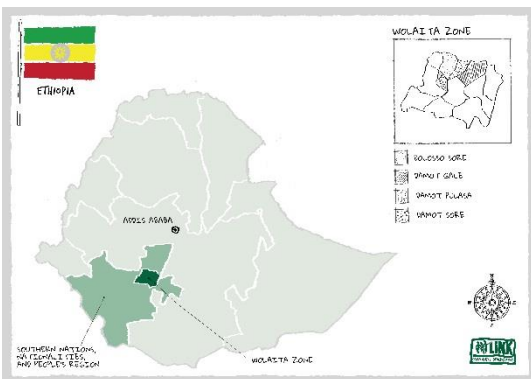
Summary

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 and rates of HIV/AIDS infection are high. 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. Dealing with menstruation is one of the six major factors identified by girls as a reason for dropping out from school in Wolaita Zone. Other challenges include: attitude towards girls’ education, domestic chores, lack of awareness about reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and early marriage.

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.

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**

The story of Aster and Birtukan



Aster and Birtukan are 15 year old seventh grade students at Shashagale Elementary School, Wolaita Zone in south-west Ethiopia. As menstruating girls they have both received sanitary packs from Link. These packs consist of four locally-made reusable sanitary pads, two pairs of underwear and a small monthly soap allowance.

Girls typically miss up to five days of school per month due to menstruation, equal to around 40 days a year. In Ethiopia they often do not receive any education on what menstruation is. Often they have no-one to discuss their transition to adolescence with. Along with the sanitation packs, Link has also trained female teachers to give guidance and counselling sessions to the girls so they understand what

menstruation is and has provided a 'Growth and Change' manual for these girls. Link has encouraged schools to build simple 'sanitation areas' with a bed and clean water where girls can rest when experiencing menstrual pain.

Aster says about her first period "I knew about it as some of my friends talked about it. When I saw it the first time I told my friend. I didn't tell my mother. I was scared to tell her. Then my friend told me to use a piece of cloth to protect it from showing on my skirt." Sadly Birtukan's mother passed away. She said "There was no-one to tell at home. I didn't want to tell my father – we've never talked about it."

Before receiving Link's sanitary pads Birtukan and Aster both used bits of cloth. "I provided excuses for my father to give me some money to buy a pad. But he couldn't always give me any so I used to buy one only when I went to church and the market. I prepared pieces of cloth for the rest of the days" said Aster.

Both girls say receiving the pads and underwear has made a big difference to their lives. "Now I can use sanitary pads all the time!" exclaimed Aster, "The pieces of cloth I used were not comfortable and I was always scared of it slipping out." Birtukan agrees "I was very happy when I got a pad for the first time last year from Link. It's much better to use than a piece of cloth and easy to change frequently as I have four. The underwear is also very nice."



Gender Mainstreaming Coordinator for the SNNPR Aster Hankamo was delighted with the quality of the reusable sanitary pads through this project. The Regional Education Bureau has already sourced funds to provide similar pads for 11,000 girls in other zones of the region. Link is also exploring how local women and girls can make their own pads within the Girls Clubs or Mother Groups.

Delivery Partners



The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
Ministry of Education



Funding Partner

