



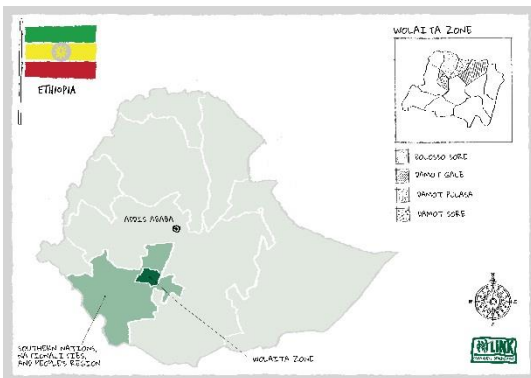
## Summary

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. Six major factors were identified by girls as reasons for dropping out from school in Wolaita Zone. These included: menstruation, 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.

**"The most important added value [of the Girls Education and Advisory Committee] is to increase girls' interest in education rather than marriage!"**  
GEAC advisor

## 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**

## Bethelhem Getachew - GEAC advisor



The Girls Education and Advisory Committee (GEAC) advisors play a major role in helping girls build self-esteem and important life skills. In the weekly Girls' Clubs, they hold advisory and discussion sessions on issues such as self-esteem, time management, peer pressure, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health. The GEAC also provides support to individual girls who come to seek advice and facilitates sanitation and rest rooms for girls during their menstruation.

Bethelhem Getachew has been an English teacher for five years in one of Link's target schools in Kindo Koisha district. During the last two years she has been supporting Girls' Club activities.

As a GEAC advisor Bethelhem understands well which activities are having the greatest impact on girls. She says the "Social and Emotional Learning, sanitary pads and tutorial classes have the biggest impact," and she has "learned that attitude is a very

important thing to have. If girls have the right attitude then they can overcome their challenges and attend school." Bethelhem has noticed that the girls have improved self-confidence and openness about their challenges.

Another advisor, Senait Bekele thinks that "Tutorial classes have helped girls improve their results in science subjects and equally change their negative attitude and fear towards science. I have already analysed the results of these girls before and after tutorial classes. Some girls have scored above 90% and the majority have improved their results from 30% to above 60%! The GEAC campaign has helped to create significant change in many parents' attitude towards their daughters' education and made our jobs easier! The books given to the girls during this event also helped them and their little sisters to read and to learn by themselves!"

Bethelhem loves being an advisor. "I see some changes in the girls' behaviour and see my own students who used to be shy participating in class. Late comers come early and some now have a goal in their life." But there are challenges. "At the beginning the support from the school management to GEAC was very low. I had to buy the mattress and materials for the girl's sanitation room from my own money. This has changed. Now we work hand-in-hand. Also there is slow attitudinal change among the girls and the community. Even today some girls get married and pregnant while still at school. The workload besides teaching is also difficult." Bethelhem thinks that Link needs to do more work on awareness raising with parents.



We asked Bethelhem what would have been different for her if she had received similar support when she was at school. She said "I would have joined university and become a lecturer. I wouldn't have missed any days during a month due to menstruation and I would have developed confidence to speak in front of a crowd. I would also have become a women's rights activist!"

### Delivery Partners



The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia  
Ministry of Education



### Funding Partner

