

# *Education for Change (E4C): building the capacity of girls to end child marriage*

Hiwot Ethiopia

November 2015

## 1. Background

UNICEF defines child marriage as “formal marriage or informal union before age 18.” In Ethiopia, child marriage is illegal but the median age for a woman to get married remains 16.5 years. Moreover, this number indicates that there are also many girls who get married before reaching the age of sixteen: 8% of young women (currently 15-29) were married by the age of 15 (EDHS, 2011). In Ethiopia, marriage marks the moment in a woman’s life when child bearing is socially accepted. Consequently, child marriage often results in an early sexual debut and child pregnancy. Also, child marriage and/or consequent child pregnancy drastically limits a girl’s chances at future education and employment. However, the relation between education and child marriage works both ways: whilst 27% of uneducated girls were married by the age of 15, only 2% of girls with secondary or higher were married by the age of 15 (EDHS, 2011). Therefore, educated girls are less vulnerable to child marriage and married girls’ access to education get severely limited. Moreover, education delays the age of a girl’s first childbearing and her ideal number of children drastically (EDHS, 2011).

Additionally, information about family planning and contraceptives are most accessible for girls with higher or secondary education (EDHS, 2011). In accordance with the general trend in Sub-Saharan Africa, the median age of first marriage is gradually increasing from 16.1 in 2005 to 16.5 in 2011 (EDHS, 2011). However, progress is slow because in Ethiopia strong socio-cultural institutions protect the tradition of child marriage. Nevertheless, there are clear differences between areas of residence, education status and region.

Hiwot Ethiopia has been working with Wereldkinderen on the E4C, a project building the capacity of girls to end child marriage, since 2013. Hiwot chose to implement its “Education for Change” project in the Amhara region since this it has the highest rates of child marriage in Ethiopia: half of the women are married by the age of 14.7 (CSA and ICF international, 2012) and over 53 % of them have given birth before the age of 18 (EDHS, 2011). More specifically, Hiwot Ethiopia implements the E4C project in the Siya debir wayo woreda with a population of approximately 72,477 people. The overall objective of the project is to enhance girls’ education and to reduce child marriage in the target wereda by 2015. Firstly, Hiwot links education and child marriage, because education enables girls to say “no” to early marriage. Thus, Hiwot strives to increase the girls’ school enrolment rates, decrease the dropout rates and improve the academic performance of girls. Secondly, Hiwot Ethiopia builds the capacity harmful traditional practice committee to mobilize the community to discard the tradition of child marriage and to support the girls. The community must be made aware of the negative consequences of child marriage in order to decrease the number of arranged marriages and increase the number of reported cases of abused girls to the police and concerned offices.

This brief will introduce the Education 4 Change project in order to spread awareness on the remaining practice of child marriage and its negative consequences on a girl’s life and identify the progress made by Hiwot fighting this pressing issue.



## 2. Hiwot Ethiopia

Fourteen peers with a similar set of mind founded Hiwot Ethiopia in 1995 in Addis Ababa: they wanted to make a difference in the battle against HIV/AIDS. The organization started off as a youth club where people could freely meet and discuss issues related to HIV/AIDS but also other related topics. In this way, the youth club facilitated discussions about topics that used to be taboo subjects and visitors could help each other to find solutions. The initiative became a great success and began to grow: the youth club was eventually re-registered as an NGO and as a charity organization with the Charities and Societies Agency. Hiwot Ethiopia's main objective is to work with the community to help children and youth develop themselves towards a healthy, productive and happy way of living. They work towards this main goal by raising awareness amongst actors, capacity building of the youth and children and providing practical support. Therefore, the organization does not only spread the knowledge but also tries to effectively change the behaviour of their target group.

## 3. Hiwot Ethiopia's Experience

Hiwot also has a long history of implementing projects related to youth, education, child marriage, gender issues, and SRH/FP. From these previous projects, it has become clear how effective it is to link these issues because they are very much connected.

*Delaying Marriage and First Birth - David and Lucile Packard Foundation:* Since 2008, Hiwot has implemented community based adolescent sexual reproductive health program in three

woredas (districts) of the North Shewa Zone to delay marriage and to promote family planning in newly married couples. Hiwot was able to establish a safe house for the victims of child marriage in each woreda and to provide the girls living in the safe houses with educational material and economic support. Currently, 96 girls are living in the safe houses.

Secondly, youth and especially young girls were provided with RH/FP information and access to RH/FP services was improved and this enabled young people to start using them. Furthermore, Hiwot found 52 Community Action Teams (CATs) or Harmful Traditional Practice Teams (HTPs) to raise awareness and mobilize the community but also to increase the number of reported cases of child marriage and allow for direct cancellation (and prosecution). These CATs proved highly motivated committees and has cancelled 1250 marriage arrangements already. Finally, Hiwot Ethiopia established GIGA (green income generating activity) clubs of which the members were enabled to support themselves but also, fight for the project's cause. The members make use of edutainment to raise awareness and together develop skills in performing arts. Moreover, they are growing vegetables together for their own income but part of the harvest is donated to the safe house.

## 4. Inspiration for E4C

The E4C project format was designed in accordance with the lessons Hiwot Ethiopia learned during the implementation of addressing the SRH needs of adolescent and young people with special emphasis to girls. Thus, the two projects have a lot in common. The issue of child marriage is a specific aspect of SRH that in this



region particularly still affects the lives of many young girls. Looking at the EDHS statistics that indicate a strong connection between secondary education and SRH, plus making use of their own experience, Hiwot Ethiopia decided to focus on girls' education and child marriage and in its next project.

**Importance of Education:** The girls living in the safe houses of the E4C project have shared the same dream: finishing their education. Their secondary education has made them aware of their rights and their own talents: they hope to become a doctor or an engineer. Hiwot Ethiopia's projects that focus on education, whether implemented in Addis Ababa or the Amhara region, share the same goal: enable children to get a better life by developing themselves.

**Safe house:** The demand for safe house is very high and all established safe houses are forced to apply very severe selection criteria to the applications they receive. However, besides the extremely valuable protection the safe house offers, girls currently living in the safe houses are provided with economic support per month.



Safe house at Deneba

**The role of the mother:** Fathers are often identified as initiators in child marriage arrangements but Hiwot discovered that the role of the mother is underestimated. Usually, mothers arrange marriages with other families and have an

enormous input in the matter. Therefore, mothers must also be targeted through future projects because they could definitely make a big change by supporting their daughters.

## 5. Achievements of E4C

Entering the second phase, the E4C project has already made a great change in the lives of many girls.

**The safe house:** 30 girls moved into the new safe house in the Siyadebir wayo wereda. They reported to be satisfied with the facilities of the safe house and the provided economic support. Also, they did not suffer from negative attitudes toward the safe house in their woreda as people were aware of their situation. Finally they are free of fear.

**Mother 2 Mother discussion groups:** M2M discussion groups have been established and facilitators from the community have been trained by Hiwot. Progress was made especially regarding the reduction child marriage and improved knowledge regarding SRH/FP. Moreover, thanks to the groups families are starting to believe that instead of a waste of investment, "educating a girl, is educating the whole family."



Mother to Mother group in training



## 7. Recommendations for the Future

**Financial motives:** It has become clear that often parents continue to marry off their daughters at a young age due to financial reasons. The wealthier farmers demand a young girl and due to the difficult financial situation of the majority of the rural population, there is always a parent who is willing to provide him with a young daughter. Poverty thus partially underlies the problem of child marriage and in order to solve this issue the financial incentive must be taken away.

**Practice:** The revised family code of Ethiopia has raised the legal age to get married from 15 to 18 years but CATs report that prosecution remains difficult. Parents are aware of the illegalization and they seek legal loopholes. The current definition of marriage is too restrictive requiring a ceremony and legal union and does not cover the secret abduction of a girl over night.

**Awareness of the community:** It was very encouraging to notice that if awareness is established the community starts to actively support the project by, for example, providing material support for the safe house girls. If awareness is not raised successfully, the community makes implementation of the project more difficult for the direct reason that a safe house demands more financial support.

### The story of Etagegne Tamire – beneficiary of “the Education 4 Change” project

*Etagegne is 17 years old and currently in grade 10. As a victim of early marriage, this project has provided her with a safe place to live in their safe house in the Siya debir wayo woreda. When Etagegne was 13 years old, a sixth grader, her mother wanted to marry her off to a 25 year old husband. Her father had passed away when she was young, the family faced financial problems and her mother thought that this husband would offer Etagegne a chance at a better life. In grade 7, the threat became sufficiently serious and she reported the early marriage arrangement to her school. Her school directly took action and made an agreement with her mother in which she promised not to marry Etagegne off for five years. The future husband and his family were also made aware of this agreement but immediately started planning an abduction to force Etagegne into marriage. Whilst Etagegne was able to continue her education for the majority of her time during secondary school, it was continuously threatened by her future husband and his family who harassed her at school and made numerous attempts to abduct her. After a court case, her husband finally gave up, and married someone else (of his own age). However, when she enrolled in secondary school and her travel time to school increased to one and a half hours, the threat of abduction quickly returned. A new suitor decided he wanted Etagegne for his wife, and made repeated attempts to abduct during her long walks from school to home after the sun had set. After a serious confrontation, when her friends saved her last minute, she applied for a position in the safe house of this project .*

*Now, living in the safe house, Etagegne is able to continue her education, without fear of being abducted. The financial burden of her mother has also become less because Etagegne does not live at home anymore (but she does regularly visit). Meanwhile, the woreda has identified Etagegne and her experience with early marriage as making her the prime candidate to teach the society about the negative consequences of early marriage and abduction, and the importance of girls' education. Etagegne has since made several trips, including one to Lallibella, to inform communities about her experience and what her experience has taught her. Thanks to this safe house, Etagegne's dreams of attending university, becoming a doctor, and marrying someone she loves, are very much attainable.*

### Contact Address

Hiwot Ethiopia P. O. Box 27743 Code 1000 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia PHONE: +251 -11-655 02 38

EMAIL: hiwotethiopia@ethionet.et WEBSITE: www.hiwot.org.et

Hiwot Ethiopia P.O.Box 27743 Code 1000 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia