

Together for Change (T4C): Enhancing Paternal Involvement and Economic Resilience

Hiwot Ethiopia

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1. Background

In Ethiopia, more than 50% of the total population comprises of children under the age of 18. Approximately 5.5 million children are categorized as orphans and vulnerable children, which is almost 12% of Ethiopia's total child population (CSA, 2011). Particularly in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, the situation of children has been worsened by slum proliferation, a high prevalence of HIV, exploitive labour, conflict among family members, violence and abuse, and severe economic poverty. The low living standards coupled with limited access to education, child protection and development services, increases the vulnerability of these children, and increases the likelihood of scenarios involving labour exploitation, child prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse, and sexual violence (Hiwot Ethiopia, 2012).

As well as being responsible for the positive development of their children, parents are also the first of many actors with the task of providing adequate protection for their children, and making sure children remain safe and free from violence, abuse and exploitive labour. Parents thus play an important role in the positive development of children and being a parent means more than being the biological parent. Parenthood is mainly established through a certain degree of interaction, availability and responsibility (Denise, 2007). Within Ethiopian societies, families are traditionally patriarchal and the father holds the power to make decisions regarding the household, including child rearing, discipline and education. However, sometimes fathers might be dominant, oppressive, neglectful and violent towards their family. All these characteristics can increase the vulnerability of children.

In order to tackle the issue of vulnerable children and to encourage the positive development of children, Hiwot implemented Together4Change (T4C): Engaging Fathers in Parenting and Engaging Families in Economic Strengthening. The project was launched in January 2013, and is scheduled to end in December 2015. This progress brief is a summary of the T4C's midterm evaluation report, conducted in July 2014.

2. Hiwot Ethiopia and its experience

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 began as a youth club where people could freely meet and discuss issues related to HIV/AIDS, and 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 initiative was eventually re-registered as an NGO and as a charity organization with the Charities and Societies Agency. Hiwot'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.

Hiwot also has a long history of implementing projects with a gender-focused format as an effective strategy to stimulate change. It first decided to focus on the engagement of men and boys in 2005, when it was used to help address the issue of gender equality and SRH rights. Before, issues of gender equality and SRH rights were dealt with solely by focusing on the empowerment of women and girls as change agents. Hiwot realised the importance of men and boys engagement in grass-root projects. As a result, Hiwot Ethiopia launched a new program in Arada and Gulele, two sub-cities of Addis Ababa, entitled *Engaging Boys and Young Men*. Over the past eight years, and through the development and implementation of strategies focusing on men and boys engagements, Hiwot and its beneficiaries have come to understand boys and young men as both victims of and agents to promote solutions for gender inequalities, sexual abuses, rights violations and other forms of social issues, instead of drawing general stereotypes/perceptions of them as the cause for female disempowerment. Thus boys and young men are now perceived as beneficiaries, facilitators and development agents of the improvement of gender issues, including child rights, SRH rights, gender inequality, and HIV issues.

Engaging men and boys is also a highly relevant strategy in enhancing parenting, strengthening families

and encouraging the positive development of children. Promoting the engagement of men and fathers will bring about a change in the knowledge, attitudes and practices of men regarding gender relationships and children. Encouraging the engagement of men is therefore an effective strategy to impact and improve communication among men and women, parenting skills/styles, and enhance the protection of children. Engaging boys and men thus also provides an opportunity to change the cultural norms through socialization - by shifting the views of the powerful decision makers within the society, instead of imposing norms from outside.

3. Set up of the T4C Project

The overall objective of T4C is to contribute towards the effort in improving involvement of fathers in parenting and foster care. The program has two main strategies, namely strengthening families and building quality child care and protection systems at all levels.

4. Progress Review

This progress brief is based on the midterm evaluation conducted halfway through the project implementation period in July 2014. Data was collected through conducting interviews, focus group discussions with project beneficiaries and stakeholders in the project and document review.

5. Key findings

Strengthening Families

Successes

In total, 18 months into the program, 160 individuals were reached in the model parent promoters group (MPPG) and fatherhood groups, 78 parents received positive child disciplining and 66 fathers received fatherhood training. Through the MPPG discussions, a total of 1322 individual were reached, and via way of the fatherhood peer group discussions a total of 1883 fathers were reached. As a result of the public awareness events, 20,180 individuals were directly reached.

By the end of 2013, 27 children were financially supported to get medical treatment, 120 children received educational materials in the form of exercise books, pens and pencils and 260 in the form of school uniform. In total, by mid 2014, Hiwot provided 65 households with economic support to get involved in income generating activities. Fathers and mothers who participated in the MPPG and fatherhood group, and who were interviewed by the assessment team,

spoke positively of the discussion groups and reported significant improvements in their family, and in the lives of their children. More specifically, the majority of project beneficiaries reported an increase in positive child disciplining, an increase in father involvement, the implementations of open discussions, an increase in community awareness and great gratitude towards Hiwot for the positive changes in their lives. The beneficiaries of IGA support also reported that they were able to establish successful and sustainable businesses, that they were able to provide for their children's basic needs, and that they were able to enhance the foster care they were providing. All project beneficiaries reported they had increased their economic resilience, and once again, all beneficiaries reported great satisfaction with Hiwot's support.

Parenting Training Beneficiary - Wede Shawol



Wude Shawol (39) is married and takes care of her 3 sons (19, 16 and 8) and her step-daughter (21). Wude's husband works as a security guard and Wude works as a janitor but they arrange their schedules in such a way that one of them is always at home to take care of the children. Now, Wude and her husband always take on equal responsibility towards household tasks and their children's development. However, this was not always the case, and the couple used to have fights about how to discipline their children: the father used words, whilst Wude used force. But these fights are now part of the past: both parents have participated in discussion

sessions of the T4C project of Hiwot Ethiopia. During these sessions, Wude learned about child abuse, child rights and child disciplining. Now, instead of becoming angry and violent, she tolerates bad behaviour of her children, counts to ten and then, talks with them. She says that a good parent is honest, respects their children and talks to them regularly. Hiwot taught her these important aspects of parenthood and now, Wede is aware and her husband is even more concerned: parents and children are all happily living together.

Father involvement

Besides, disciplining their children, the fathers also learned that positive attention on their side is also very important. In some families traditional gender roles were established firmly and for that reason, the father could not truly adopt the role of a family man. Fathers reported to be unconcerned before they took part in the discussion groups. They used to not be concerned about their wives and children and therefore, they also did not assist their wives and children. However, the discussion groups have taught them that they should be concerned and ask after their family's needs. The fathers stressed that their unconcerned attitudes belong to the past and now a father states "I advise my wife on every issue (1.6)." Also, fathers repeatedly expressed that they found it very important to check upon the schoolwork of their children and their attendance. Furthermore, some fathers also report to be increasingly involved in the household chores. They report that previous to the project they did not care about food preparation or cleaning but now, they want to help their wives. A father with a working wife shared: "now I feed my wife when she comes home and she is tired (1.6)." The male facilitators report a similar change: "I am also changed: I wash, I feed my children, and I clean the house (1.7.11)".

IGA Beneficiary – Rahawa Abay



Rahawa Abay (37) is a single mother who looks after two children, her own child (19) and the child of her deceased sister (7). Before Hiwot provided Rahawa with capital for income-generating activities, Rahawa worked in Dubai for four years as a housemaid. However, due to chest problems, she was no longer able to work as a housemaid and had to leave Ethiopia. She returned to Addis Ababa unable to work because of her chest pains, and was thus also unable to pay medical costs for treatment. After the government selected her as a beneficiary for Hiwot IGA program, Hiwot gave Rahawa initial capital to start a business. More specifically, Rahawa was given 6700 birr, which Rahawa used to establish a little café, selling coffee and tea, and a mini-shop. As a result of this IGA, Rahawa now makes enough money to pay her medical costs, to provide her family with three meals a day. She is now running her own mini shoe shop.

Limitations

However, the midterm evaluation also brought to light some limitations of the current strategy. Lack of knowledge and awareness of the beneficiaries' family members, who have not received support from T4C makes it challenging for other family members to be open to receive the information that the project's beneficiary is trying to impart.

Building quality child care and protection systems at all levels

Successes

The project established and strengthened 4 child-led initiative (CLI) groups, and provided 80 CLI children with boys' engagement and life skill training. In total, 427 children participated in peer group discussions about child protection, and there were also 4 youth led initiative groups and trainings established, leading to 4 youth led initiative peer group discussions. The project has also established 1 linkage system, and through the hotline, over 900 individuals were able to receive information and counselling.

Preliminary discussions have been conducted with IDIRs to enhance their commitment to foster care, and each IDIR¹ has assigned a focal person to this project to serve as the principal channel of communication and to create a discussion forum. 40 IDIR members received a 3-day long training about child development, positive parenting skills and foster care. These trained IDIR members then formed discussion groups to cascade the training to reach community members and to contribute to the creation of community based foster care system both at family (private) and the community

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Community based organization

(public) levels. During the reporting period, a total of 8 discussion sessions were conducted and 80 members received information on the above-mentioned issues.

CLI members who took part in discussion groups and clubs all reported increasing their knowledge and awareness about child development, and reported significant positive changes in their personal lives. The establishment of a referral linkage system, a strong network and a good relationship between the local government, CBO's and Hiwot has also been successful and has led to the avoidance of redundancy and duplication support. Women's Association and IDIR members also reported significant increases in the level of knowledge and awareness of their discussion participants about key issues surrounding child development and parenting. They also reported seeing visible changes in the behaviour of the parents, and a reduction in child abuse and other negative parenting skills.

IGA Beneficiary Enhancing Foster care – Meselech Ambaya



Meselech Ambaya is a 28 year old mother and foster parent with a heart-breaking story. She lives with her mother and together they take care of the two daughters (age 12 and 10) of her brother, her sister's daughter (age 17), and her own

9 year old son who is mentally disabled. Her family has suffered a lot: her brother and his wife both died after being poisoned, Meselech's husband has been imprisoned after a fatal car accident and her sister is simply unable to take care of her child. Meselech has been working on several jobs to provide for her family: first, she was working as a soldier and simultaneously studying to become an accountant. Subsequently, she moved to Sudan to serve as a housemaid and she send her income home. Meanwhile, her mother always stayed at home to take care of the children. However, after Meselech had been in Sudan for two years, her mother became unable to continue taking care of the four kids. Meselech went home and she panicked; she did not know what to do and how to provide for her family. Then, she went to the Woman, Youth and

Children's Affairs Office and asked for help. After two months the WYC affairs office got back to her, they selected her as a participant for Hiwot's project and she received 5750 birr of Income generating capital. Now she has become a teff importer and is able to fulfil the basic needs of her family. Within one year, she has been able to save 1123 birr of her profits. In the future, she hopes to finish her accountant education and expand her business. However, her biggest wish is that one day, her son will also go to school: a special school for disabled children.

Limitations

Some limitations identified include the CLI members need additional support in order to meet their goals of teaching the community. Also, the hotline established by Hiwot Ethiopia wasn't successful as expected due to late telephone maintenance with the telecom company.

6. The Way Forward



Overall, T4C seems to be very successful in achieving its aims and changing and improving the lives of many beneficiaries.

1. It appears that still the majority of community members are not reached, and individual family members sometimes struggle to change their families and their communities single-handedly.
2. Many T4C participants reported facing severe economic problems, negatively affecting their parenting. Whilst it may be unfeasible to offer IGA support to everyone, T4C could increase economic resilience by offering information on savings, money management, microfinance and business development.

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