



# Our Stories of Change

Amref Health Africa-Ethiopia

2024

## Early Life and Education - Meet Woinishet Reda

Woineshet Reta completed her first degree in Civic and Ethical Education at Wachamo University and her second degree at Mekelle University in Pedagogy.

At first, Woineshet believed that passing exams was the sole key to educational success. Over time, she realized that developing additional skills was just as crucial for career and personal growth. Through the life skills training she received from Kefeta, Woineshet began to explore her passions and potential. She learned about self-awareness, resource mapping, active citizenship, and entrepreneurship, each training leaving a lasting impact on her life. The training has inspired her to pursue entrepreneurship. She began to envision creating income-generating opportunities not just for herself, but for others as well.



Woineshet decided to venture into goat farming. She and her friends banded together to buy 30 goats and establish their farming operation. Their determination paid off when government officials were impressed by their initiative and granted them a suitable plot of land in Shashemene. With their

herd growing to 50 goats, they are also exploring opportunities in the untapped goat milk market, believing it to be vital for health.

Aiming to secure a loan to expand their business, Woineshet joined Kefeta's youth SACCO (Savings and Credit Cooperative), and with her sisters, started saving.



## Empowered Women Create Healthier and Resilient Community

In the dramatic landscape of Wolaita in South Ethiopia, with its rolling hills, rocky terrains, and meandering roads, a remarkable transformation is taking place. In Bedewoyde Kebele, a small community in Wolaita, 50 women have come together to form, women economic group (WEG) that aimed at empowering women through financial independence and enterprise management training.

One of these women is Adanech Mogiso. By borrowing from the savings of the group, Adanech was able to start her own shop, a venture that not only supports her family but also contributes to the local economy. This initiative is more than just a financial opportunity; it is a lifeline that enhances the health and well-being of mothers and children in the community.

Empowering rural women financially has profound implications for access to healthcare services. In regions Empowering rural women financially has profound implications for access to healthcare services. In regions like South Ethiopia, financial independence can significantly impact health outcomes. Women like Adanech, who can generate their own income, are better positioned to afford healthcare services for themselves and their children.

This economic empowerment translates directly into improved maternal and child health, reducing the risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth and

ensuring that children receive the necessary care and nutrition for healthy development.

The Bedewoyde Kebele's WEG is a beacon of hope in this picturesque yet challenging environment. The rocky hills and winding roads of their village symbolize the obstacles these women face and overcome. By fostering a sense of community and mutual support, the savings group enhances financial stability and promotes health and well-being.

In the larger context of South Ethiopia, empowering women through financial independence is a critical step towards achieving broader health goals. Women who control their own resources are more likely to prioritize healthcare, family planning, education, and nutrition for their families, leading to a ripple effect that benefits the entire community.

Initiatives like the Bedewoyde is WEG are essential. They provide women with the tools to overcome economic barriers, ensuring that the health needs of mothers and children are met. Empowering rural women is not just about financial independence; it is about fostering a healthier, more resilient community for generations to come.



## Bridging the Gap and Transforming Health

Alemetu Betcha, a health extension worker in rural Wolaita, South Ethiopia, has been pivotal in transforming the health and well-being of women and children in her community.

Trained by Amref Health Africa, Alemetu has played a crucial role in the success of the Amref's European Union Funded RESET Family Planning services project, focusing on enhancing access to sexual and reproductive health services among rural populations. Through her efforts, Alemetu has provided crucial support to mothers, helping them access vital services and knowledge for their family's health and well-being.

Genet, a mum of two boys, like many women in her community, faced barriers to accessing essential health services due to the remote nature of her village and limited availability of healthcare facilities. But with Alemetu's guidance and support, Genet learned about sexual and reproductive health, maternal and child health, and the importance of keeping her children healthy. Alemetu provided her with information on how to protect her children from prevalent diseases such as malaria and other water-borne illnesses.

Health extension workers like Alemetu play a critical role in the health of mothers and children in rural areas of Southern Ethiopia. They are often the first point of contact for women who may not have easy access to healthcare facilities. These workers

provide education, support, and sometimes even basic medical care, ensuring that health services reach the most vulnerable populations. Their presence in the community fosters trust and encourages women to seek help, leading to improved health outcomes for both mothers and children.

In rural areas of South Ethiopia, where healthcare infrastructure is often limited, sexual and reproductive health is crucial to women and girls. Access to these services is essential for reducing maternal and child mortality, preventing diseases, and empowering women to make informed decisions about their health and family planning services. This is especially important in regions like Wolaita, where poverty and food insecurity are prevalent, and health challenges are exacerbated by difficult living conditions.

Alemetu's role highlights the need for more trained health extension workers to support mothers in rural areas. These workers are essential in bridging the gap between healthcare providers and the community, ensuring that women and children receive the care they need. By expanding the network of trained community extension workers, more families can access health services, improving health outcomes and contributing to the overall development of rural communities in Ethiopia.



## A Mother's Mission: A Fight Against Childhood Diseases

In the quaint village of Ningatom, amidst the hills of Nakrimano Kebele, is Tirga Lowosso, a dedicated mother of 35 years old. Her heart swelled with pride each time she gazed upon her children, knowing they were protected against the scourges of childhood diseases.

Through firsthand experience, Tirga had witnessed the devastating effects of preventable illnesses on infants and young children. Determined to shield her own children from such suffering, she had meticulously ensured that they received every recommended vaccine. Polio, measles, and other potentially life-threatening diseases held no sway over her children.

Tirga became a fervent advocate, sharing her knowledge and experiences with her fellow village women. With passion and conviction, she advised them to seize every opportunity to have their babies vaccinated. She tirelessly reminded them that vaccines were the safest and most effective way to protect their precious children from harm.

"It's a gift to have a healthy baby," Tirga would often say, her eyes twinkling with pride. 'By vaccinating them against polio and other diseases, we are giving them a chance to thrive and reach their full potential.'

Inspired by Tirga's, her neighbors made a conscious effort to attend vaccination programs and consult with health workers whenever their children exhibited any signs of illness. Tirga's unwavering advocacy had not only protected countless children but had also fostered a culture of health awareness among her neighbors. She was a symbol of hope and inspiration, reminding the people of Ningatom that even in the most remote corners of the country, access to healthcare and the power of vaccination could empower families and transform lives.



## Restoring Hope: Abdalla's Story of Recovery

Abdalla Hussen Saa'id, a 38-year-old father, lives in Sara village, located in the Qarsadula district. He is a farmer and the head of a family that includes his wife and two children. For years, Abdalla struggled with persistent pain in his right eye, caused by turned eyelashes that rubbed against the surface. This condition severely hindered his ability to work on the farm, which was his family's primary source of income. Feeling hopeless, Abdalla believed his eye condition could not be easily treated. The distance to treatment centers made it difficult for him to seek care, and he had lost hope that any medical help would ever reach his home or village.

In May 2024, Abdalla heard that a team from Amref Health Africa would be providing trachomatous trichiasis (TT) surgery as part of an outreach service at the Sara Health Post. He decided to seek help. Abdalla was one of the many individuals who received the eye care they desperately needed, and after the surgery, he returned home with his vision restored. Amref Health Africa has been implementing 'Accelerate, Resilient, Innovative and Sustainable Elimination of NTD – ARISE project in the Somali Region since November 2022. The project addresses the TT Surgical Backlog as its priority in

the region. This initiative aims to contribute to regional efforts to eliminate trachoma by clearing the TT backlog and strengthening the health system to combat both active trachoma and its later stages.





## Ending Sexual and Gender Based Violence: Meet Fatuma Mohammed

Fatuma Mohammed, a 19-year-old social worker, serves survivors of sexual and gender-based violence at the One Stop Centre in Dubti General Hospital, located in the Afar region of Ethiopia.

In her community, child marriage and gender-based violence including female genital mutilation/cutting are widespread, especially in rural areas. Rape remains rampant, particularly in the wake of the conflict in northern Ethiopia, with women and girls being disproportionately affected. These victims are often subjected to unimaginable trauma and violence.

The One Stop Centre, built by Amref Health Africa at Dubti General Hospital, is dedicated to supporting those impacted by sexual and gender-based violence. Fatuma's role involves offering emotional and practical support to survivors, helping them navigate the painful aftermath of such violence. She provides a safe space for individuals to share their experiences, receive counseling and therapy, and access medical care. The Centre's mission is to empower survivors, enabling them to regain control of their lives and move toward healing.