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About Amref Health Africa

Amref Health Africa is the largest African-based and led international health development organization serving over 30 million people annually across 35 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Amref has been active in Ethiopia since the 1960s and became fully operational as of 2002. We have been partnering with the Ethiopian government and local communities to co-create solutions and implement diverse health and development project portfolios throughout the country for over twenty years.

Our organization is driven by its vision to bring lasting health change in Africa and its mission to catalyze and drive community-led and people-centered health systems while addressing social determinants of health. Amref strives to ensure that health systems are functioning at an optimal level and communities are empowered to hold these systems accountable for the delivery of high-quality and affordable health care. Our programs are designed to support community level interventions while strengthening health systems at the regional and national levels.

With 'Youth Development' as one of the key program areas, Amref maximizes youth engagement by integrating young people as equal partners in designing, implementing and leading youth-led, youth-friendly solutions. Through initiatives like Power to You(th), Amref reinforces its commitment to empowering young people.



Power to You(th) Stories

A quiet shift is underway in the sun-scorched plains of Afar, where tradition runs deep, and opportunities for girls often run thin. Through the Power to You(th) program, adolescent girls and young women are finding their voices and using them to reshape their futures.

Since 2021, this initiative has worked with communities in Ethiopia to address the everyday barriers that hold young people back: early marriage, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), teenage pregnancies, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), lack of information, and limited access to services.

In Afar and Amhara regions of Ethiopia, the Power to You(th) program empowers adolescent girls and young women to increase their agency, claim their rights, address gender inequalities, challenge gender norms and advocate for inclusive decision-making on the issues that affect their lives. The program supports adolescent girls and young women to take the lead in advocating for their rights, shaping community norms, and co-creating solutions to the challenges they face. Whether addressing Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs), improving access to sexual and reproductive health services, or fostering inclusive decision-making spaces, young people are not just involved—they are driving the change.

What makes this movement powerful is the collaboration behind it. Led by Amref Health Africa, Youth Network for Sustainable Development, and Hiwot Ethiopia, the project is about more than service delivery, it's about shifting mindsets, building community champions, and influencing systems from the ground up.

This booklet captures stories of resilience, change, and hope. Stories that show what is possible when young people are trusted, supported, and empowered.

A Helping Hand to other Girls

My name is Zahara Ahmed. I reported the case of my friend Asiya Yahya, who was about to be forced into early marriage. At the time, stopping the marriage felt almost impossible, but I was able to find the right support with the help of Abdu Jemal who coordinates the Power to Youth project intervention in Afar Ethiopia. He guided us on where to seek help, who to talk to, and how to take action. In the end, through collaboration, we successfully prevented the marriage."

"That experience was life-changing. It not only strengthened us but also opened the door to more training and knowledge on issues like early marriage, FGM/C, SGBV, and teenage pregnancy. Now, we are equipped to educate our friends, families, and the community, working to eliminate these HTPs from our society. We empower girls by teaching them what to do and how to report when they face such situations. This experience has taught me a valuable lesson and made me even more determined to keep fighting, supporting, and protecting girls in every way possible."

When I learned my best friend was to be married off, I acted. Thanks to the Power to You(th) sessions, I knew early marriage wasn't our fate. I reported it, and the intervention stopped the marriage. My friend will return to school next year. This project empowered us to protect each other.



A Sister's Keeper



"When my marriage was called off, I felt so happy and motivated to help other girls going through similar situations. I share my experiences and advise my friends on how to protect themselves and avoid early marriage. My main goal is to continue my education, develop my skills and achieve my dreams. I want to help girls suffering from early marriage because I understand the struggles they face. I aspire to advocate for women's rights and support vulnerable groups and my family once I finish my education. I am determined to share my story with girls in similar situations, guide them to find solutions and offer the support I once received."



Asiya Yahya and her friends are working together to guide young girls in their community. They share advice on how to stay safe from forced marriage and speak up for women's rights, offering support, strength, and hope.



Asiya, her friends, and fellow community advocates are dreaming bigger. With a shared vision, they are working to protect vulnerable girls from forced marriages and boldly speak up for women's rights; one voice, one girl at a time.

Local Civil Society Organizations Lead Change when Supported and Equipped

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are locally rooted, community-driven institutions that play a vital role in fostering learning, leadership, and advocacy. Deeply embedded in the social fabric of their communities, they serve as trusted voices and first responders to local needs. Through the Power to You(th) program, grassroots CSOs are not only supported, they are empowered to claim, protect, and expand civic space especially for youth. The Program prioritizes capacity building to ensure these organizations can deliver impactful, sustainable services to young people and the wider community.

One such partner is Dinber Yelesh (Borderless) Charity Association, a local CSO based in the Amhara region. Established in 2006 by a group of 15 dedicated volunteers. under the motto “Let’s Think Good – fostering community support, charity, and empowerment,” the organization has grown into a cornerstone of hope for marginalized populations. Dinber Yelesh focuses on uplifting vulnerable children, youth and the elderly through a variety of initiatives, including access to education, social welfare programs, and substance abuse prevention.

As a Power to You(th) partner, Dinber Yelesh has benefited from targeted support in organizational capacity building, enabling the organization to grow not only in strength but in influence. With enhanced skills in lobbying and advocacy, Dinber Yelesh has taken bold steps to amplify the voices of underserved community members, particularly adolescent girls and young women, and to drive meaningful change at the local level.



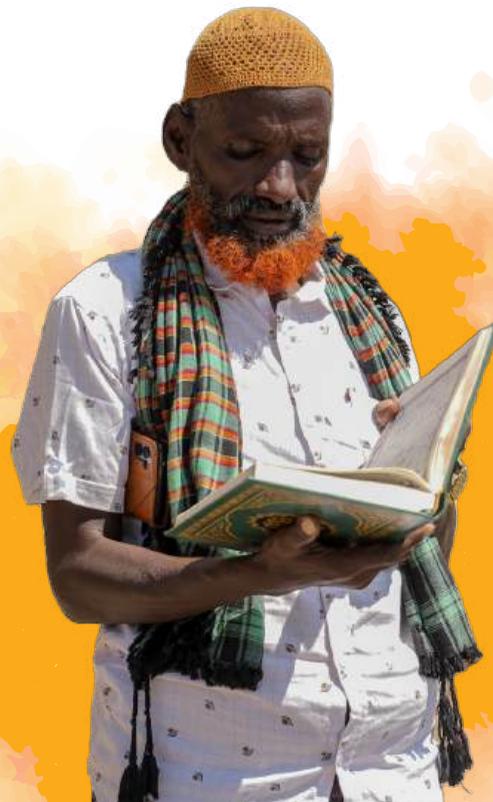
As one of its impactful initiatives, Dinber Yelesh collaborated with other local CSOs, engaged the Bahir Dar City Education Office to address the growing concern over the presence of alcohol and substance-selling kiosks near school environments. Their coordinated lobbying efforts led to a city-level commitment to regulate these spaces, creating safer and healthier surroundings for students. This advocacy initiative not only helped protect young people from exposure to harmful substances but also encouraged broader community and government action on youth wellbeing.

Another significant achievement came through sustained engagement with the Bahir Dar City Administration, where Dinber Yelesh successfully lobbied for a plot of land to construct a permanent office, an important milestone that will help establish a stable base for continued service delivery and community engagement.

These successes demonstrate the critical role local CSOs can play when they are supported and equipped to lead. By building strong partnerships, taking initiative, and standing up for the needs of young people, Dinber Yelesh is showing what’s possible when community voices are empowered to shape their future.

A Religious Leader's Fight Against Harmful Traditional Practices

In Mille Woreda, one man's faith became a force for justice. Religious leader Mohammed Gumhed is breaking silence and challenging HTPs from within the very heart of his community. Armed with conviction, compassion, and the courage to speak up, he is protecting girls from early marriage and violence. With training and support from Power to Youth, his voice has grown louder, his reach wider. His story is proof that change doesn't always come with noise; sometimes, it begins with a quiet voice that refuses to stay silent.



*Sheikh Mohammed Gumhid,
Religious Leader.*

"As a religious leader and advocate I stand against HTPs like early marriage and FGM/C. Guided by the teaching of the Qur'an, I work to protect girls through faith and collective efforts, breaking these practices for a better future."

In our tradition-bound community, practices like child marriage and FGM/C were seen as normal. Since its inception, I have participated in regular discussion platforms, using my voice to highlight the dangers of early marriage and FGM/C. Additionally, I have joined a woreda sharia that collaborates closely with the community to put an end to these HTPs. I now advocate against early marriage and FGM/C within our community, emphasizing that faith can guide change.





Mohammed uses his faith as a guide in his fight for girls' rights. He shows his community that true Islamic teachings stand for dignity, fairness, and protection, not harm. By grounding his advocacy in religion, he has been able to challenge HTPs in a way people trust and understand. His message is clear: faith and justice walk hand in hand. By grounding his message in religion, Mohammed has been able to challenge HTPs without losing the trust of those around him. It is this balance of belief and bravery that has made his voice so impactful.

Empowered Through Health and Life Skills Education

Hilina Simachew, a 17-year-old Grade 11 student at Shumabo High School in Bahir Dar City, recently completed a two-month Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and Life Skills training based on the Meharebe curriculum, facilitated by the Power to You(th) project. Initially hesitant due to community taboos and fear of family disapproval, she later realized the value of the program, which empowers adolescents with SRH knowledge in a fun and engaging way.

“We often see young girls and women experiencing challenges like teenage pregnancy,” she observed. “I believe many face such issues because they lack proper SRH education and life skills.” Hilina noted that challenges like teenage pregnancy often result from a lack of SRH education and life skills. The training helped her understand SRH, manage peer pressure, and develop skills like public speaking, communication, and self-confidence. Once shy, she now feels more capable and informed.

She hopes all young people can access similar education to make informed decisions and prevent SRH related challenges. Hilina expressed gratitude to her teachers for creating a safe, supportive environment and thanked Power to You(th) for addressing the SRH needs of in-school adolescents. “Their commitment to our growth and well-being is truly commendable,” she shared. “They created a safe and supportive environment where we could discuss sensitive topics openly and without judgment.”



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Youth for change: Kibala Youth Club

“We believe in empowering youth to raise their voices, ask questions and advocate for their own concerns, as active participation in decision-making enables us to solve our own problems. Who understands our struggles better than we do? The solution lies in the hands of youth. Peer-to-peer discussions, forums, trainings and experience sharing are essential in this journey. As Kibala Charitable Organization, we have come a long way, inspiring others and driving change, but there is still much more to achieve. We seek continued support to push forward, create more opportunities and break the barriers holding us back. Together, we can eliminate HTPs like FGM/C, child marriage and SGBV paving the way to a brighter future.”



Social Accountability Committee: The High Stakes Step in Fighting Child Marriage Action

A 14-year-old girl in South Mecha district, once at risk of forced marriage, shared: “I am so delighted to confirm that the marriage was officially cancelled.” Like many areas in Ethiopia, South Mecha faces deeply rooted norms and systemic barriers that enable HTPs like child marriage. To address this, the Power to You(th) project established Social Accountability Committees (SACs) to strengthen governance and oversight.

The SAC in South Mecha consists of 15 representatives from the government, religious institutions, and the community. After receiving capacity-building training, the committee introduced early child marriage screening mechanisms, most notably, anonymous information boxes in schools for reporting sensitive issues like child marriage, sex, and SGBV.

Within just two months in 2022, 27 planned child marriages were identified. SAC successfully cancelled 81% (22 out of 27) through community lobbying. In 2023, the committee partnered with the police and judiciary to enforce a new law: attempted rape now carries a sentence of three years and six months, unprecedented in the district’s history. As a result, 25 out of 30 child marriages were cancelled, and 6 of the district’s 15 kebeles were declared free of HTPs by the district council.



How Could I Sit Back Without Contributing: The Making of a Local Influencer Against Harmful Traditional Practices

Estibel Waleign is a farmer in Yemekat kebele, Bahirdar Zuria district, and a trusted, active community member whose opinion carries weight. Amref partnered with Estibel through its Power to You(th) project, which identifies and trains local leaders to empower youth. His training focused on combating early marriage, unintended pregnancy, and FGM/C. He grew up hearing stories of young girls dying during childbirth or developing Fistula and other chronic illnesses, forcing them to drop out of school.

After training, Estibel mobilized local authorities, religious institutions, schools, health centers, police, and relevant government offices to form a committee for community awareness. Estibel brought advocacy to schools and youth spaces. Young women even sought his help to cancel arranged marriages.



“The training I received was an eye-opener. I came to deeply understand the challenges faced by our youth. It mainly focused on how we can educate, sensitize, and change our society, especially young people who will be advocates against SGBV, child marriage, and female genital mutilation. How can I sit back without contributing after receiving such useful training?” he says.

From Possibility to Power: The Rise of Arami's Youth

In the heart of Afar, young people are turning resilience into real change. What began as life skills and leadership training through Power to You(th) has become a movement, one that's rewriting the future. Arami's youth are not just escaping the grip of early marriage, FGM/C, and substance abuse; they are building businesses, managing farms, running recreational centers, and daring to dream of becoming a full-fledged CSO. They are no longer waiting for change. They are the change.

"The youth in my region have come a long way. Despite many challenges, our hard work has rewarded us economic opportunities that allowed us to be financially independent, reducing reliance on our families and helping us avoid migration and substance abuse. Through different life skill trainings and trainings from Power to Youth (PTY), we are empowered with the ability to communicate effectively with higher officials and raise our voices on important issues such as early marriage, FGM/S and SGBV. We are actively working on job creation and have learned how to use our free time by generating income. Today we manage a recreational center and an agricultural farm, benefiting both ourselves and the youth in our community. We have a dream of becoming a CSO and doing even greater things expanding our impact even further in the future."



*Ali Sahlal Mohammed -
Aramis Youth club leader.*

"We youth are the driving force of change, the backbone of our community and the architects of the future. With the right opportunities, guidance and empowerment we have the potential to transform societies, break cycles of injustice and lead movements for progress. When we raise our voices, take action and support one another we become a powerful source for change. Investing in the youth through education, leadership trainings and skill development not only secures our future but also paves the way for stronger, more resilient communities. When given the tools to succeed we don't just dream of a better world we create it."

Farming Land

From advocacy to action, this farming land is the result of Aramis Youth Club's determination to create opportunities. Given by the government, the farm provides valuable skills and income to the youth who work the land, helping them build a stronger future for themselves and their community.

Aramis Youth Club started as a small idea among friends but has now become a source of home for many youth. Today, the club is an active space offering civic education, youth rights awareness, and advocacy that has led to real wins, including government-supported farmland, a recreational center, and a DSTV house that brings together over 150 youth. Beyond helping themselves, these young changemakers are uplifting their entire community proving that when youth take the lead, communities grow stronger.





Recreational Center

Aramis Youth Club owns a recreational centre and an income-generating DSTV house that serves 150-200 youth.

Breaking the Cycle: Youth Leading the Fight Against Harmful Traditions

Yenguse Getenet is a passionate youth advocate and an active member of the Wondata Kebele Youth Club in Bahirdar Zuria woreda. With support from Amref Health Africa's Power to Youth project, she has been working tirelessly to raise awareness and empower her peers to stand against early marriage, FGM/C, unintended pregnancies, and SGBV.

Through the life skills and youth empowerment training she received, Yenguse gained the confidence and knowledge needed to educate other young people in her community. Her mission is to ensure that youth avoid HTPs and make informed decisions about their futures. She regularly trains young people in her village, teaching them about the dangers of early marriage and substance abuse, the risks of unwanted pregnancies, and the devastating effects of FGM/C.

"The Power to Youth project helped me become confident, self-reliant, and connected to my community. I now use that connection to educate others and to do my best to make positive change," Yenguse says.



One of the most harmful traditions Yenguse and her club are combating is early marriage. The youth club maintains a vigilant presence, following up on potential cases and intervening where necessary to protect girls from being married off at a young age.

Their efforts extend to prevent the practice of female circumcision, which traditionally occurs just seven days after birth in their locality. When a woman gives birth, neighbors will gather, a traditional circumciser will be called, and the procedure takes place. Aware of these customs, Yenguse and her fellow club members closely monitor their community. They know who is pregnant and make it a point to visit expectant mothers, offering education about the health risks and lifelong consequences of FGM/C.

Community involvement has been crucial. Leveraging the influence of religious and spiritual leaders, the youth club has fostered a system of accountability. Religious figures have pledged not to bless or officiate ceremonies involving girls subjected to early marriage or FGM/C, reinforcing the message that these practices are unacceptable.

Yenguse's work represents the growing strength of youth-led movements across Ethiopia. With the support of initiatives like Power to You(th), young leaders like her are not only changing narratives, they're shaping a safer, more empowered future for the next generation.



Girls and Women Affairs: The Right of Choice

“Every girl deserves the right to choose her own future. I am dedicated to working towards ending SGBV and HTPs. Together, we are building a future where women are empowered, their rights are protected, and they can aspire to live free from harm and discrimination.”

Before the Power to You(th) project, our efforts lacked coordination and community voices. Now, local youth groups are more engaged. Last year, we prevented over 20 child marriages through improved youth participation. The project has transformed our approach, fostering closer collaboration with young people, strengthening enforcement against HTPs, and enhancing links between community initiatives and social norms.



“We youth are the driving force of change, the backbone of our community and the architects of the future. With the right opportunities, guidance and empowerment we have the potential to transform societies, break cycles of injustice and lead movements for progress. When we raise our voices, take action and support one another we become a powerful source for change. Investing in the youth through education, leadership trainings and skill development not only secures our future but also paves the way for stronger, more resilient communities. When given the tools to succeed we don't just dream of a better world we create it.”

A Voice for Change in the Fight Against Harmful Traditional Practices

Hermela Azerefegn, 24, holds two Bachelor's degrees and a Master's in Global Studies and International Relations. Her journey with Power to You(th) began in 2021 when she was selected as a youth representative for North Shoa Zone in Amhara. That day marked a turning point in her life.

Hermela had been volunteering since age 13. Through Power to You(th), she became truly aware of the persistence and severity of HTPs in Ethiopia, such as FGM/C, child marriage, and SGBV. Power to You(th) provided her with training, including advocacy training, aligning with her mission to stand up for the vulnerable.

After training, Hermela adopted a more strategic and effective approach. She became confident in her ability to influence change and carries a strong sense of responsibility. One of the most powerful lessons she learned is the importance of empathy and collective action: "Just because I or you may not face a certain issue," she often reflects, "does not mean others are not suffering from it."

As a youth representative, she participated in meetings and forums on adolescent and youth issues, including annual planning and mid-term evaluations. One story that remains with her is of a 24-year-old woman who survived FGM/C and said the pain remains with her every day. That testimony drives Hermela's dedication. She expressed profound gratitude to Power to You(th) for recognizing her potential. While some may assume the project impacts only one person, Hermela believes every empowered youth contributes to broader social change. She remains committed to using her voice, knowledge, and lived experience to advocate for meaningful change.

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Lucy Integrated Development Association (LIDA): Strength of a Woman

"There is so much that can be achieved when women are empowered. Women are valuable resources with immense potential. Even in the most challenging situations, women have the strength and intelligence to break through and succeed. With the right guidance and an understanding of their abilities, they can accomplish remarkable things. HTPs have long held women back in our community, but we have witnessed significant change. Today, more women are stepping into influential roles, proving their impact in decision-making and leadership. My peers and I stand with confidence, knowing that by creating opportunities for others, we can drive even greater change. As a strong member of a women-led CSO and a speaker in an advocacy group where fifty percent of board members are female, I believe that together, we can reshape the future."



Aysha Hamed, Executive Director of LIDA.



Before joining the Power to You(th) project, I was a quiet member of LIDA, unsure of how to make a change. The project's mentorship and sessions boosted my confidence, enabling me to lead an initiative addressing SRHR issues for young women. Power to You(th) provided me with purpose and tools, and now I mentor others, building networks to amplify our voices in regional women's structures.

Empowered Youth Empower Youth

My name is Nuhamin, 27, from Bishoftu, Ethiopia. I hold a bachelor's in public health and am pursuing my master's. Before joining Power to You(th) in April 2022, I worked as a data collector in a national survey conducted by the Ethiopian Public Health Institution. I was uncertain about my career path, though passionate about helping young girls overcome HTPs. While working in rural areas, I met a 14-year-old girl married to an abusive 30-year-old man. She was forced to drop out of school. "Now I feel hopeless," she confided in me. That's when I knew I had a mission, to do what I can so that no other young girl will ever be a bystander in her own life.

Power to You(th) saw my potential despite limited experience. Amref hired me as a program officer, and I was trained to engage youth, communities, and government. I gained confidence, communication, and problem-solving skills. I now see empowered girls resisting child marriage and SGBV. With guidance from experienced mentors, I've grown professionally. Nuhamin is currently serving as a Project Assistant for Amref Health Africa's Power to You(th) initiative. In her role, Nuhamin plays a pivotal part in the day-to-day operations of the project, ensuring the effective implementation of activities that fosters a generation of empowered youth ready to advocate for their rights and contribute to sustainable development. Power to You(th) proves the power of investing in youth. When passion, potential, and profession align, anything is possible.



The Dividends of Investing in Young Women

Dr Rediet Nigussie, 26, is a medical doctor and advocate for adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health (SRH), passionate about meaningful and inclusive youth participation in decision making, policy, and programs. As a Power to You(th) ambassador, she engaged in panel discussions, meetings, trainings, international conferences, and national SRHR strategies.

The game changer was participating in Ethiopia's first-ever youth-led research. Her cohort of 20 received intensive training, wrote proposals, collected data, and finalized a write-up to advocate for youth health using data-backed findings. Power to You(th) meaningfully involved youth in research, not just planning or monitoring.

Findings showed that while young people have the potential, they lack the opportunity, especially in rural areas. "Throughout my involvement in the Power to You(th) project, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative nature of young people when we have the opportunity to be decision-makers," says Rediet. "If we remove the barriers of limited access to education and health care, seriously address gender inequality, and methodically disassemble prevailing social norms such as HTPs, the sky is the limit for young people!"

Having grown professionally as a youth advocate, Dr Rediet is currently assuming an executive assistant position at Youth Network for Sustainable Development (YNSD), a national NGO that serves young people in many parts of Ethiopia.



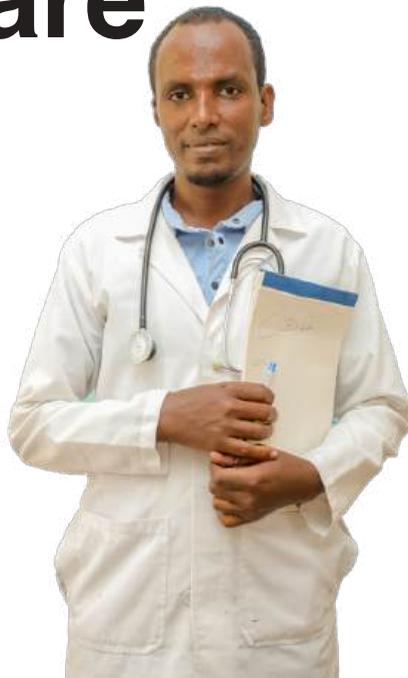
Power to You(th) connects the dots and nurtures homegrown talent, especially young women.



Restoring Women Through Health Care

I have witnessed the devastating impact of SGBV and HTPs on women's lives and I know that this fight requires action, not just words. As a health care worker, I am committed to provide medical care and advocate for stronger policies to protect girls and women they deserve. I believe that raising awareness, training health care professionals, engaging with policymakers and empowering young people with knowledge, we can break the cycle of harm. My mission is clear. I will continue to stand on the frontlines, giving for better health care services and doing my part to ensure that girls suffer less.

Ahmed Indris, a Health Office Expert from Mille District Hospital.



Ibrahim Mohammed (Dubti Youth Club at Dubti woreda).

Dubti Youth Club: The Bridge Between the Youth and the State

This youth club is driven by strong, knowledgeable members who understand the importance of communication and advocacy. We are equipped to engage with the government, raise our concern and use our voice to advocate for our needs. Through our hard work and dedication, we have successfully secured a farmland, unlocking such valuable resources for our financial independence. This achievement shows the impact of active involvement as well as the importance of getting the proper trainings of life skill and resource mobilization from Power to You(th) that empowered us to get to our goals.

Faith in Action: A Church Leader's Fight Against Early Marriage and Violence

Priest Lealem Getahun serves as a manager at the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and the chairman of religious institutions in Bahirdar City.

As a respected religious leader, Priest Melake-Selam Lealem has taken a firm stand against HTPs, particularly those affecting women and children, such as sexual violence, early marriage, and rape. Recognizing the moral and spiritual responsibility of the Church, he and his colleagues developed a note and teaching guideline that directly addresses these issues through the lens of biblical teachings.

Together with other theology teachers, Priest Lealem prepared a short guide designed to create awareness amongst church community. Great care was taken to ensure that the teachings aligns fully with the Bible, without any contradiction. The goal was to show clearly that such HTPs are not only socially damaging but also go against the teachings of God.

While some communities had already received training on these issues, Priest Lealem focused on reaching rural areas where awareness remained low. The notes were distributed widely, and teaching efforts are ongoing. These materials have successfully reached many people who previously lacked access to this kind of guidance.



The results have been encouraging. In the past, child marriage was a common practice, especially for girls. The situation became even more critical when education was disrupted due to conflict in the region. However, thanks to these continued efforts, attitudes are beginning to shift. Communities are responding positively, and a greater understanding is growing around the importance of protecting children and girls maintaining biblical values.

Assalle Pastoral Multi Sectoral Development Organization

Assalle Pastoral Multisectoral Development Organization (APMDO) stands as a champion for women, girls, and youth in Ethiopia's underserved areas. APMDO is helping to break cycles of HTPs and uplift women, girls, and youth. What began as a grassroots effort has grown into a trusted movement for change, challenging HTPs like child marriage, FGM/C, and SGBV, while creating safer spaces for young people to succeed.

*Arayti Seid,
V/Director of AMPDO.*

*Adem Hussen, Project
Manager at AMPDO.*

Through the support of Power to You(th), APMDO received targeted technical training to strengthen its skills, essential office equipment to improve its daily operations, and vital connections to UN agencies and government networks to enhance its ability to mobilize resources. This support helped transform APMDO into a stronger, more capable organization ready to lead youth-centered programs and expand advocacy efforts against FGM/C, child marriage, SGBV, and unintended pregnancies.

Today, APMDO is empowering youth groups, driving community advocacy, and building lasting partnerships that will sustain their vision long after the project ends; a vision of a future where girls and young women can live with freedom, rights, and opportunity.

Power to You(th) Experience in Engaging Religious Leader

In Ethiopia's Afar region, women and girls have traditionally been subjected to the most severe form of female genital mutilation. To make progress in addressing this issue, Power to You(th) understood that the involvement of religious leaders is crucial in offering a counternarrative that FGM/C is mandated by the Quran.

Recognizing the need for a transformative shift, Power to You(th) partnered with influential leaders like Sheik Mohammed Deresa, a respected Islamic scholar and Deputy Head of the Afar Regional Islamic Affairs Office. He labeled FGM/C a dehumanizing act on girls and women. "You have the resources and the knowledge, and we have the people. Together, we can do transformative work. As Muslims, it is our moral obligation to mitigate the sufferings of adolescent girls and young women." Sheik Mohammed organizes regional and district-level workshops for other religious leaders. "The lack of religious teachings that categorically denounce these HTPs has been the major problem in the Afar region," he notes.

Other leaders are expected to disseminate the information, but not everyone stays on message. To solve this, Sheik Mohammed, with Power to You(th), standardized the religious manual and shared it with leaders in each target district. He also trained more than 300 leaders and followers to teach and transform their communities.



"After my discussion with Sheik Mohammed, I was convinced about the harmful effects of FGM/C. FGM/C isn't Sunnah but Haram. I use Jumah or Friday prayer to teach this. The workshops helped rescue three of my daughters, ages two, five, and nine, from FGM/C. I am proud of this! I show pictures of my daughters to the communities."- Shaik Mohammed Abdulkadir, local religious leader

From Harming to Helping: Changing the Narrative of Female Genital Mutilation

Caramba is one of the rural kebeles of Ensaro district in the Amhara region, plagued by HTPs like FGM/C and child marriage. In 2012, it ranked top among 24 districts still practicing FGM/C, according to the Ensaro district report. The Caramba Reproductive Health Club, with 46 members (23 female), was formed to promote reproductive health and raise awareness. Power to You(th) played a key role in supporting its growth and community engagement.

The club's most ambitious goal was targeting FGM/C practitioners and turning them into allies. Confident in this approach, youth leaders engaged the Social Accountability Committee (established by Power to You(th)), the anti-harmful practices committee, kebele authorities, and community reps. Consensus was built, and outreach began. Together, they identified 12 practitioners. The youth convened a meeting including the practitioners, health workers, and law enforcement, who shared the health risks and legal implications of FGM/C and child marriage. After a slow start, the district Women & Social Affairs Office confirmed that all 12 practitioners had stopped FGM/C. They now work with Power to You(th) as change makers.



“It was a wonderful experience to have adults trust us to sit with us to deal with a serious social issue. Power to You(th) has really empowered us to have our voice heard.” “It was an ambitious undertaking, but we believed we could play a key part in the transformation of an FGM/C practitioner into a change agent. Changing the mindset of circumcisers would significantly contribute to the reduction of FGM/C in Caramba Kebele. They are now working closely with the Power to You(th) program as change makers and gatekeepers. What had seemed impossible became manageable.” - Kenimos, youth club leader

Stand Up for The Youth of Afar, Ethiopia

Hermela Asrat, 16, is a student at Asaita High School in northeastern Ethiopia and part of the Meharebe club, supported by Amref Health Africa through the Power to You(th) programme. Asaita is a small, dry town in the Afar region near the Djibouti border, 700 km from Addis Ababa.

"There is nothing as important as changing the thinking of people because human beings do everything in light of their thinking. Even though harassment is all around us, we are still here. We live under this threat with caution." - Hermela Asrat

Locals survive on small trades and pastoralism. The community is traditional, and girls face early marriage, SGBV, and FGM/C. Hermela and her friends Kadiga and Ahmed, all nearing graduation, remain hopeful. Hermela wants to inspire girls. Kadiga dreams of becoming a poet. Ahmed hopes to be a computer engineer. Through Power to You(th), teens learn about sexual and reproductive health and healthy relationships. In Meharebe, students explore emotions tied to gender and identity.



"We were asked to talk about things that make us happy and sad for being a woman. I have nothing to be sad about for being a woman. Because I am a woman, I am born, I will conceive, and I will go into labour and give birth, and I will get the love of motherhood. That child will love me more than anyone, will trust me more than anyone, I will give back the love of motherhood."- Kadiga



"I want to be a medicine to my community, and this group empowers me. In this group, we have laughed, cried, and talked about the violence that some of us have experienced in the community, but the Meharebe club helps us to seek justice, and guides us know how to seek justice, for women and girls."

Hermela Asrat, 16

"We all have worth of our own. We have a worth that we give to ourselves, one that we give to our country, and one that we contribute to our world. When we were talking about women on Mehareba."

Kadiga Hagobe, 16

Power to Youth empowers Ethiopia's youth to advocate for better youth services. In Afar, Amref Health Africa works with youth who have cleared high school, training them on sexual and reproductive health and linking them to government services. Kibale Youth Group in Dubti was trained and supported through the programme. Like Asaita, the area still has traditions that affect women's and girls' rights and choices.

"What the community has been adhering to, FGM/C, is only brought up by tradition and has no benefit whatsoever. It is the opposite, it harms the woman," says Hayat Yimam, a youth group committee member. The group runs a small office for daily operations, with schedules to raise awareness on disease prevention, drug abuse, and support for the elderly. "There is pressure." One focus is supporting the girls most affected in the community. Girls in Afar are particularly at risk of FGM/C and early marriages.

Power to Youth, through clubs such as Meharebe, empowers adolescent girls and young women to increase agency, claim rights, address gender inequalities, challenge gender norms, and advocate for inclusive decision-making. Meharebe is a two-month programme infused into the school curriculum. It builds agency, knowledge, and skills of teenagers, especially girls at risk of early marriage, unintended pregnancy, FGM/C, and SGBV. The programme also engages youth to have knowledge of key gender issues and advocate for themselves.

"There are several things that women face at home. They are married early, coerced to give birth early, and forced to mutilate their daughters' genitals. For such reasons, the responsibility of women in the Afar region is difficult," says Hayat.

The group meets several times a month and tackles emerging issues like early marriages. They once stopped a girl from being cut, protecting her future and rights. "We were able to attempt stopping sexual violence and also a genital mutilation procedure. Towards SGBV, we were able to file reports so the victims could get legal protection."

The training was eye-opening for girls like Hayat, from rural areas. "I used to think (these practices) were normal. I used to think it was a good thing for the woman. Our community has the belief that when a woman goes through genital mutilation, it's okay," she says. "They say that FGM/C will be good when the girl gets married, and I used to think like that," she sighs. "But after I joined Kibala Youth Group and completed several training sessions with Amref, I noticed a significant difference."



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