

# Learning, sharing and planning

**On the reduction of HTPs in Tulla sub-city 12 kebeles**

**Berhan Lehetsanat Hawassa project office**

<b>Objective-</b>	<b>To Measure how the intervention on HTP which is in progress in Tulla sub city has changed practices and attitude in the community</b>
<b>Target Participants</b>	<b>Community members, religious leader, elders, men, women (including former HTP Practitioners) and girls</b>
<b>Conducted by</b>	<b>Women Teacher from Tulla High School</b>
<b>Arranged by</b>	<b>Berhan Lehetsanat (BL)</b>
<b>Facilitated by</b>	<b>Women and Children's office, BL and Tulla High School</b>
<b>Period conducted</b>	<b>From September to December 2017</b>

## **Introduction**

Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) have been universally social problems which have a very long history in Ethiopia. Due to their adverse impact on the people's lives, government and non-government bodies have made various collective efforts to end them. Even if changes have come, here are still serious situations that require serious work. Berhan Lehetsanat (BL) has been implementing a project to end HTPs in collaboration with government bodies at Tulla sub city of Hawassa administration in 12 kebeles. This report addresses sharing, learning and planning session with different project stakeholders held at Tulla sub city: community members' representatives, community conversation facilitators and groups, schools' community such as female parent teacher associations' members, school girls club, female students and primary and secondary school principals, community representatives, kebele leaders, religious leaders (1 per kebele), and girls' forum from 4 schools.

Berhan Lehetsanat aimed at reducing social problems, and promoting the welfare of various societies, and working to improve the lives of every members of a given society through a program of eradicating HTP and promoting education, especially for girls. Thus, it has been operating with different influential community members, different stakeholders, government officials, health extension workers and the community at large, to create awareness among the residents of the 12 kebeles of Tulla sub city. The organization held awareness raising sessions, gives basic trainings, refresher trainings and mid-term and annual multi stakeholders review meetings, offers girls various sanitary supplies, and hears the complains of students within the school of the target sub-city of Tula through anti-HTP girls club and girls' forum in 4 selected schools organized by sub-city women and children office. BL works closely and inclusively with community members, government bodies, school principals, religious leaders and working with the general population of the sub-city through different activities.

**Participants of the sessions-:** stakeholders, teacher parent associations' representatives, girls club representatives, school principals, girls' forum from 4 school, CC facilitators, CC group representatives, community member representatives, kebele leaders, religious leaders, former HTP practitioners in IGA groups, government officers.

**No. of participants-:** about 500 participants in each learning and sharing session - total 1620

**Male-:** 40%

**Female-:** 60% (including 500 girls)

**Venues-:** Tulla High School, Tulla primary school and Tulla Girls and Women Resource Center.

The sessions were characterized by question-based discussion, raising different cases which are practicing in the community during implementation period and techniques used to implement the program; which enabled participants to learn from each other, share their experience and skills, and forward their plans for their further actions against HTPs within the target sub-city. They were moderated in the local Sidamic language, especially the sessions with CC facilitators because the community members mostly use the Sidamic language. As a result, participants were actively and emotionally engaged in the sessions. 2 Groups of 25 people (approx. 50 in total) came from each kebele, and each group attended a different session, in order to better engage with participants from other kebeles.

### **Summary of Observations and Community Feedback**

The main HTPs practicing in the sub-city they mentioned are:-

- ❖ FGM
- ❖ Early Marriage
- ❖ Inherited Marriage
- ❖ Multiple marriage (having different wives in different communities)
- ❖ Abduction
- ❖ Traditional stroking of pregnant woman's belly/stomach in the belief that the unborn baby would be fortunate when this is done.

The understanding of the impact of these HTPs expressed during the learning session are that they are a form of domination of women, because almost all HTPs are practiced on women and break up the rights of women. The HTP in the Tula sub-city that has greatest consequences on women is FGM. The consequences women face from FGM, as stated by participants are:-

- ✓ Excessive bleeding /haemorrhage before, after and during birth

- ✓ Many girls are circumcised with the same blade which would cause disease transmission as the blade would not be disinfected/sterilized
- ✓ Potential possibility of fistula which causes social isolation or/and huge psychological crisis due to its severity/seriousness and disgusting impacts
- ✓ Prolonged and uncontrolled pain during labour
- ✓ Big stress on them
- ✓ Lack of/reduced sexual desire with their marriage partners which could end the marriage in divorce
- ✓ Lethal/deadly condition could occur and take the life of the women
- ✓ Death of unborn babies

By raising those issues, they gave a sense of how their awareness has been raised through the project and showed that they now know how to handle such issues when they arise in their community.

They mention that everything began with the intervention of Berhan Lehetsanat; that BL started the project in the sub-city through different activities including awareness creation among the community. Different groups said how they were given training and based on that started teaching the community and creating awareness among the villagers on a regular basis through all occasions, holidays, places, organizations and any meeting in the community, The Anti HTP committee representatives said that as a result, potentially big changes have come, they estimate that HTPs have reduced by over 80% according to their observation and reported incidences. However, they still have much to do since there are gaps to fill. The school community added about one particular positive change here: by encouraging young married women to stay at school or come back after marriage, they can complete their education, but that is not enough, still we need further improvement, they added during the discussion.

The participants said that they took a mission to stop HTP from government, so they make their maximum effort to fulfill their mission. In each kebele there is an organizing group of 1-5 people which meets every 15 days and is formed by government mainly to share to share information about security and related issues but is also able to raise issues like HTP. Group representatives at the event, said that since the issue was discussed in the community, people started to change, and FGM has significantly reduced, almost stopping.

From the Tulla level forum of girls in girls' clubs (already established by the government) the responsible teachers had selected 22 non-victim students (un-cut girls) from project schools as role models to give training to others, and said because of this FGM and early marriage are highly reduced.

According to the participants, even if there a lot of changes are registered, the main HTPs that have not still been brought to an end are FGM, early marriage and abduction. They said that they still found it a bit challenging to end some of HTPs very common in the target sub-city of Tulla even if there are huge changes through the project interventions.

### **Challenges that hampered their efforts**

In the learning, sharing session participants raised the various challenges, especially on FGM, that include factors from girls; factors from parents; and from the community at large.

#### **Girls' factors:-**

- ✓ Girls really want to perform FGM through fear of stigma from their fellow villagers.
- ✓ They fear their husbands might reject or divorce them if husbands despise the girls' parents as too poor enough to buy a blade, *"your parents didn't even have a penny to buy a blade for your circumcision? What a poor family are you from!"* the husband often says.
- ✓ They are driven by their fellow girls in the village (peer pressure)
- ✓ Girls were willing to undergo FGM, fearing that it is a necessity to circumcise before marrying, but after marriage, they are thinking 'why did we do that before marriage?'

#### **Parents' factors which support FGM**

- ✓ Parents' wrong perceptions about girls that they would misbehave by breaking household materials, even disobey them if they did not undergo FGM.
- ✓ Fear their daughters would go for extra marital sexual affairs
- ✓ Fear that (uncircumcised) girls might rebel against their families
- ✓ Consider failure to do FGM as a sign of bad luck in the family and in the community.
- ✓ FGM supported by domination of their culture, even if their own awareness on the issue is raised.

## **Community feedback**

- ✓ Mothers said former HTP practitioners who practice HTP move to other neighboring woredas and kebele where they still practice HTP with the collaboration of the families, so it makes implementation more difficult that they choose to be silent in some cases.
- ✓ The night market around the sub-city plays a vital role in promoting early marriage - men coming to sell chat attack the girls who came to the market to sell coffee and false banana leaves. (Tulla Police have now provided a night market team to protect girls.)
- ✓ Women take babies born outside marriage to leave them in the forest, sometimes buried underground, to avoid detection by the authorities
- ✓ Another group said that girls came from a neighborhood woreda to give birth and then threw their babies into the forest and hot spring area, where they were eaten by hyenas and the community covered it up.
- ✓ FGM even if it is minimized is still practiced secretly: community members know the HTP practitioners, but they don't want to give them up to the police and lose their neighbours' goodwill.
- ✓ In society some men still believe they are better than men, ladies' first ideology still not fully accepted.

From the above explicit description, the sessions have learned that there are a number of factors that affect the implementation of HTP.

Generally, even despite those challenges happen in the sub-city, this feedback confirmed that the project has brought about big changes overall, including to health and retention in education. The participants told us they were working towards goals of the programme even if there were challenges. Most importantly, they expressed their strong belief that HTPs would come to an end if efforts continue. Therefore, they requested further efforts should be put to meet the objectives of promoting education for all and improving the lives of the community in general.

## **Cases**

- ❖ Tulla School Director told of a girl in Grade 10 who was keen to marry without completing matriculation exams at the year end, but he took measures to inform her father that she was good at her grade and it would be better to continue her schooling.

She had not yet reached the age of marriage (18) and so by creating awareness among her family that she was not old enough to marry a husband, eventually the girl came back to complete her academic year and pass her exams and continued to preparatory high school at Hawassa (Grade 11).

- ❖ A woman who came to Finchwa kebele secretly to practice FGM, but the community gave her up to the police, and other people learnt from this.
- ❖ The health professional from Finchwa kebele said that the village circumciser was arrested as she attempted to commit the crime of performing FGM. She said that after this, the circumciser became an anti-HTP activist in the community and so quit her first job (FGM) as her source of income. The other health worker stated there had once been many traditional midwives in Finchwa kebele. However, she said that she now saw pregnant women going to give birth at health stations/hospitals due to the maternal health lessons delivered by BL.
- ❖ From another part of the sub-city, one health worker mentioned abduction was practiced unstoppably in her kebele. She suggested that the victims needed legal support from the regional government, but the village/kebele police station would do very little about it. She shared her real experience of a case: “A boy abducted a girl and then the victim’s parents took the case against the abductor to a police station, however, the abductor was set free without suffering appropriate consequences.”
- ❖ Another case was from Hawela Wondo kebele, where the HEW had announced her mobile phone number to girls in her area and asked them to inform her of any HTPs; through this she came to know that one girl became pregnant and gave birth, but then buried her baby, with the support of her family. Hearing this, the CC facilitator together with other CC group members went to the girl’s home to ask the case is true. The mother of the girl denied that her girl had given birth and hidden it. After a long discussion the girl and the mother confessed. The girl’s mother said that her daughter was a victim herself as she gave birth to a dead baby, so we buried him. The community together informed the police and together they dug out the baby after he had been buried for hours. Fortunately, he was still alive, and they took him to Hawassa referral hospital but sadly after 7 days he died. Now the mother of the girl is in prison after the truth was known. The girl then confessed that she was obliged to bury her newborn baby because

of her mother's fears of the stigma of the community and neighbours if her daughter gave birth without marriage.

- ❖ A girl lived with her sister in Gamato Gale kebele, while her parents lived at neighbouring Wondo Genet woreda. The girl went to visit Wondo Genet but she was abducted there and became pregnant. She then came back to Gamato Gale kebele to hide herself, and she tried to commit suicide. The husband of the girl came to the CC facilitator to try to solve the problem. The facilitator asked the girl why she was hiding and trying to take her life. She told them she was ashamed of herself because she was pregnant without marriage. Then they discussed with her sister what could be done and advised that they should find the man who abducted her. He had vanished from the woreda. At last after long advice and consulting she gave birth and lives with her family. Her family have accepted her with her baby without any discrimination.

- ❖ **Conclusion**

- The efforts made by Berhan Lehetsanat in close collaboration of the Women and Children office show progress. However, the complicated nature of the issue has its own challenges in implementation. The good thing is the commitment of all individuals including previous HTP practitioners, CC facilitators, Women and Children office, school clubs at school, Religious leaders and others, which is exemplary and promising to continue their effort.

- Every stakeholder with knowledge and interest is making efforts to combat HTPs including FGM.

- All participants believe that government has ultimate responsibility to reduce HTPs by taking action, especially legal action.

- Teachers and parent association said the role of PTA enhanced the effort of addressing HTPs

- Religious leaders now consider combating HTP related issues as one of their main regular activities

- School principals commented how School clubs' role is effective addressing HTP issues

- Community members said they now have adequate information on how to take issues to law enforcement bodies.