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## **Biruh Tesfa ('Bright Future') program provides domestic workers, orphans and migrants in urban Ethiopia with social support, HIV education and skills**

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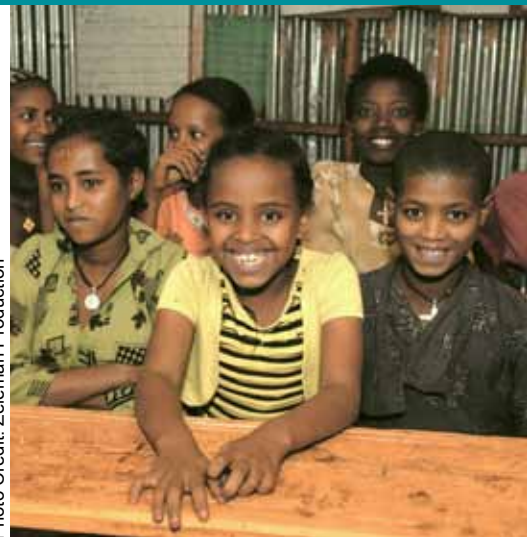
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## Biruh Tesfa ('Bright Future') Program Provides Domestic Workers, Orphans & Migrants in Urban Ethiopia with Social Support, HIV Education & Skills

Prepared by Annabel Erulkar, Herma Gebru, and Gebeyehu Mekonnen

Photo Credit: Zeleman Production



In Ethiopia, the HIV epidemic is increasingly urban and female. An estimated 7.7 percent of the urban population in Ethiopia is HIV-positive compared to less than 1 percent of the rural population,<sup>1</sup> which suggests a generalized urban epidemic and a rural epidemic concentrated among high-risk groups.<sup>2</sup> Nationally, the female-to-male ratio of HIV infection is 3 to 2, reflecting the heightened vulnerability of girls and women to HIV. The imbalance between rural and urban epidemics underscores the need for attention to migration and short-term rural-urban exchanges in HIV prevention efforts. Furthermore, girls who migrate from rural to urban areas may be less protected, more vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse, and less equipped to avoid these abusive situations—all of which may increase HIV risk.

A study in low-income areas of Addis Ababa found that 45 percent of adolescent girls had migrated to the area. Among these migrants, 87 percent were in low-status jobs, especially domestic work, which is characterized by poor working conditions, low-pay, and is dominated by girls and women.<sup>3</sup> Domestic workers participating in Population Council research in Addis Ababa reported working an average of 64 hours in the week prior to the survey with an average monthly salary of 52 Birr, or about US\$6.00.<sup>4</sup> A more recent Council study of adolescent girls in urban slum areas of Ethiopia found that domestic workers are more likely to be victims of sexual abuse, including non-consensual sex.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, domestic workers' long working hours and social isolation precludes many from benefiting from mainstream youth programs.<sup>6</sup>


### 'Biruh Tesfa' (Bright Future) Program

The former Ethiopia Ministry of Youth and Sports (currently Ministry of Women, Children and Youth) and its Regional Bureaus established the Biruh Tesfa (Amharic for 'Bright Future') program for out-of-school slum-dwelling girls aged 10 to 19, including rural-urban migrants, domestic workers, and orphans. The Population Council provides technical



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assistance. Biruh Tesfa aims to address the social isolation of adolescent girls, by building their social capital and participation and giving them access to basic literacy, life skills, and HIV and reproductive health information. Implemented by the Bureaus of Women, Children and Youth in Addis Ababa and Amhara regions and kebele administrations (lowest administrative unit in Ethiopia) in respective cities, the program was initially pilot tested from 2006 to 2008, in the low-income area of Mercato in Addis Ababa—home to the largest open market in Africa and the city’s main bus terminal, the arrival point for many migrants. Biruh Tesfa was ultimately expanded to four urban areas in the Amhara region: Bahir Dar, Debre Markos, Dessie, and Gondar. It has also recently, been implemented in the region of Tigray, in Mekele.

### ***House-to-house recruitment to reach the most marginalized and invisible***

Biruh Tesfa mobilizes out-of-school girls into groups that meet with adult female mentors in community spaces. Female mentors and supervisors are recruited by the kebele administration and local leaders. Mentors range in age from 20 to 40 years, have a minimum of 12 years of education, are residents in the project site, and are known and respected members of the community. In addition, preference is given to those who have previous experience in programs related to youth, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, literacy, or other development programs. Mentors are trained for one week using a curriculum that includes life skills, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, and gender issues—including gender-based violence. Additionally, the Ministry of Education provides materials on basic literacy and numeracy.

Following training, mentors systematically identify out-of-school girls who are eligible for the program. Using maps from the Central Statistical Agency, the project area is divided into smaller geographical areas, and each mentor is assigned an area of operation—preferably an area in which she lives. Mentors then go house-to-house and conduct an informal listing of household members, including sex, age, and schooling status. Mentors also ask about members of the household who may be non-relatives, including domestic workers.

If mentors identify eligible girls in the household, they request their participation in the program. In addition, mentors discuss participation of interested girls with their parents, guardians, or—in the case of domestic workers—with their employers, who frequently are not initially in favor of their participation. Mentors are responsible for following up the girls they enroll in the program. If a girl is absent for three or more group meetings, mentors visit the girl’s household to learn the reason for her absenteeism. Frequently, the girl’s employer has denied her participation, in which case mentors attempt to re-negotiate on behalf of the girl.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Health (MOH) & Federal HAPCO, “Single Point HIV Prevalence Estimate,” Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: June 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Myrick R, Cassell M. 2007. “Meeting the prevention needs of high-risk populations in Ethiopia,” presentation at CDC-Eth, Apr. 26, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF. 1999. *Child domestic work*. *Innocenti Digest*. Florence: UNICEF. Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2006) Swept under the rug: Abuses against domestic workers around the world. Human Rights Watch, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Erulkar A and Mekbib T. 2007. *Invisible and vulnerable: Adolescent domestic workers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*, *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, December; 2(3): 246-256.

<sup>5</sup> Erulkar A and Ferede A. 2009. *Social exclusion and early or unwanted sexual initiation among poor urban females in Ethiopia*, *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 35 (4): 186-193.

<sup>6</sup> Erulkar A, Mekbib T, Simie N, Gulema J. 2006. *Differential use of adolescent reproductive health programs in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 38, 253-260.

I first registered when mentors came door-to-door to register girls. When I first heard about it, I didn't think it would happen. Since my employers are very strict and don't allow me to go out, I thought I would not be able to participate... [At first] my employer was not willing to let me attend. She wouldn't even let me leave the house because she said that when you let maids go out they would get spoiled and stop working hard. She said that maids would meet to talk about their salaries and begin asking for more money. When I didn't come, my mentor came and asked me why I didn't attend, and I told her. She discussed it with my employer and finally convinced her to let me attend. But I am still not able to come regularly since I have so much work to do.

*-Bahir Dar girl, age 19, double orphan, never been to school, domestic worker*

In the beginning my employer was not happy or supportive about me attending the program, but the mentor convinced her. The mentor is my neighbor and she is always encouraging me.

*-Addis Ababa girl, age 16, never been to school, domestic worker*

**My employers were not happy. They didn't want to let me out of the house because they thought that I would not do my job properly. But I insisted, and the mentor also spoke with them. I am now attending, and my employers finally allowed me because they realized that I would quit the job if they stopped me from going.**

*Gondar girl, age 17, never been to school, domestic worker*

**More than information and skills: An identity and affiliation**

Girls groups meet at existing community halls and facilities, donated by the local administration/kebele, at a time that is convenient for them. Meetings are generally held three to five times a week. Groups are formed for girls at different ages, such as 7-10, 11-15 or 16-24 years, and various educational levels including those who have never been to school, those with some reading and writing ability, and those with good reading ability. Literacy and numeracy training is tailored to each group's levels and all groups receive life skills/HIV/AIDS/reproductive health education.

**Contents of mentors training manual**

- Non-formal education (Ministry of Education materials)
- Psycho-Social Life Skills
- Self Confidence
- Gender and Gender-Based Violence
- Reproductive Health
- Personal Hygiene
- HIV/AIDS Transmission & Prevention
- Disabilities
- Financial Literacy & Savings
- Entrepreneurship

When they first join the program, all participating girls receive a project identification (ID) card with their photo. For many girls, this simple ID card is the only form of identification they have, and frequently the only picture of themselves. They also receive roughly four exercise books per year, totaling about 24 Birr or US\$2, and about 22 Birr (US\$1.75) worth of pens and pencils. Because of their dire poverty, many beneficiaries lack even basic commodities such as soap or sanitary napkins. Girls are receiving approximately four bars of soap a year, worth 24 Birr (US\$2), as well as locally produced re-useable sanitary napkins (25 Birr; US\$2). In total, each girl receives 95 Birr/US\$7.75 in material support per year. While seemingly small, these resources are otherwise out of reach of Biruh Tesfa beneficiaries.





Photo Credit: Zeleman Production

**I once registered a girl with polio. Her parents were very poor, and she didn't have a wheelchair or crutches... After coming to the program for a few days, she stopped coming because her parents said she couldn't come on her own.**

Addis Ababa mentor, age 25

### ***Providing medical support and support to victims of violence***

As many participants are migrants from remote rural areas, they have often never visited a health facility. Project beneficiaries receive 'wellness check-ups,' or basic health screenings, at local government clinics. Girls in need of basic curative services are provided with medical care free of charge through an arrangement with government health facilities. In addition, the Council is currently building a network of referral facilities from both the public and private sectors in each project site. These facilities will provide subsidized or free services using a coupon referral system, provided by mentors to girls in need of services.

With few friends, family, or other protective structures, domestic workers and other migrants are vulnerable to exploitation and sexual abuse. Domestic workers are particularly at risk because they often rely on their employers for basic sustenance and a place to live. Victims of exploitation and abuse typically have no source of assistance or support. Biruh Tesfa partnered with the Organization for the Prevention, Rehabilitation and Integration of Female Street Children (OPRIFS), which offers shelter and support to children who are victims of sexual violence. With shelters in Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar, OPRIFS gives lodging to girls who are victims of violence, frequently by an employer or family member. Victims receive counseling and legal support and benefit from the friendships of other girls in the shelter. Counselors from OPRIFS also visit the Biruh Tesfa groups to teach girls how to reduce their risks and to publicize its services.

### ***Building bridges to safe and productive livelihoods***

With low levels of education and limited support networks, domestic workers face challenges in transitioning to safer and more rewarding forms of work. In partnership with Nia Foundation, each year 40 Biruh Tesfa beneficiaries, mainly domestic workers and orphans, are offered skills training in the beauty industry (e.g., hair dressing, skin care, and nail care). Given that girls who want to leave domestic work and receive skills training frequently live with employers, beneficiaries of the Nia program are given lodging near the training center and placed in part-time jobs to earn money for food and other necessities. Following completion of the training, graduates are placed in salons so they can start earning money immediately and not have to further resort to domestic work.

### ***Increasing the involvement of girls with disabilities***

In the early stages of the program, mentors determined that recruiting girls with disabilities was as challenging as recruiting domestic workers. Some parents or guardians do not allow their disabled children to socialize, and are reluctant to let them leave a protected home environment. In addition, once recruited, many disabled girls faced logistical problems, such as transport or accompaniment to the program.

I became disabled about 6 years ago. Life has been very difficult because both my parents are disabled, they are both blind. I have an older brother and he's always busy so it's difficult to find someone to take me to the program. I can only come if someone from the community is willing to push my wheelchair to take me there and bring me back.

-Addis Ababa girl, age 15, disabled, 3 years education

As a result, Biruh Tesfa previously partnered with Ethiopia Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA) to engage its staff as mentors, serving as role models for girls and their families and facilitating recruitment. In addition, EWDNA helped make meeting spaces



accessible to disabled participants, by constructing ramps, and provides participating girls with crutches, wheelchairs, and/or accompaniment to and from the sessions. Biruh Tesfa also currently formed a partnership with Handicap International, to help continue providing assistance for disabled program participants. About 400 disabled girls are currently participating in Biruh Tesfa.

### **Serving the most vulnerable girls in urban Ethiopia**

By March 2011, more than 31,000 girls had benefitted from the Biruh Tesfa program in Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar, Debre Markos, Dessie, Gondar and Mekele. Participants are extremely vulnerable: nearly half (46 percent) have lost one or both of their parents; nearly 49 percent have no education, and 83 percent have fewer than 5 years of schooling. Thirty percent are domestic workers, and 27 percent are daily laborers

### **Characteristics of Biruh Tesfa membership (percent distribution), March 2011(n=31,590)**

Age group	7 to 10	12.2
	11 to 14	18.4
	15 to 19	54.0
	20 to 24	15.4
Orphan hood	Both parents dead	14.3
	Father dead	22.5
	Mother dead	8.8
	Both parents alive	54.4
Educational attainment	None	48.8
	1 to 4 years	33.9
	5 to 8 years	14.0
	9+ years	3.3
Occupation	Domestic worker	30.2
	Daily laborer	27.4
	Unemployed	22.3
	Other	20.1
Migrant to the area		64.3
Disabled		1.3

Source: *Mentors' registration format, Population Council*



Photo Credit: Zeleman Production

I had some friends who were living and working in Bahir Dar. Whenever they came to visit their parents I saw that they were wearing nice, clean clothes and I always felt angry and jealous because I was poor. I wanted to be like them, so I ran away and went to the town by myself. Once I arrived there, I begged the bus driver to take me to Bahir Dar. When I arrived at the bus station in Bahir Dar, I became scared because I had no idea where to go. A broker found me crying and he offered to find me a job. He took me to a woman living in the city who hired me as a nanny with a monthly salary of 5 birr [US\$ 0.30] per month. At that time I was only seven years old. Ever since I came here [Bahir Dar], I have worked as a domestic worker for different people. Currently, I am working as a waitress in one cafe.

*-Bahir Dar girl, age 18, waitress, no education*

When my husband became sick, my family took me back home and began arranging another marriage. I refused to get married again, so I escaped and went to Gondar City, with a man who was living close to my family. He took me to his relatives in Gondar to work as domestic worker,

but I was not satisfied with that job. They were paying me 25 Birr [US\$ 2.00] per month but the hardship was unbearable. So I came back to Bahir Dar and began to work as a commercial sex worker.

*-Bahir Dar girl, age 18, commercial sex worker, no education*

### Evaluation of Biruh Tesfa shows early success

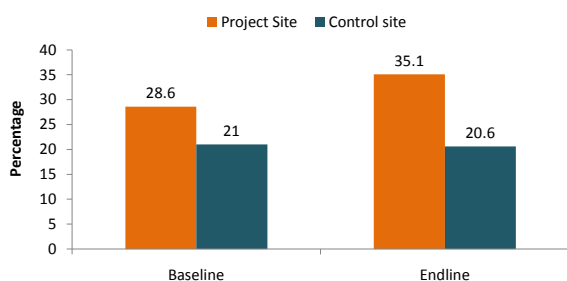
The Population Council evaluated Biruh Tesfa in its pilot site in Mercato, Addis Ababa. Before implementation, baseline surveys of girls aged 10 to 19 were undertaken in experimental and control areas in Addis Ababa, with follow-up surveys taking place two years later. Surveys measured changes associated with the project, in particular, changes in social participation and social safety nets. Service statistics tracked participation and provided a profile of beneficiaries.

At baseline, 29 percent of girls in the project site reported having ‘many friends,’ while at endline 35 percent reported many friends. In the control site, there was no change in the percentage of girls reporting many friends (21 percent at baseline and endline). At baseline, only 7 percent of eligible girls in Mercato said they had a ‘safe space’ in their community to meet female friends. However, at endline, 25 percent of girls reported having a safe space, a statistically significant difference.

The evaluation included a composite variable reflecting social participation, as measured through friendship networks, making new friends, or participating in girls’ groups. At endline, girls in the Biruh Tesfa site were significantly more likely to be considered ‘socially participatory’ compared to girls in the control site. At baseline, girls in the project site were significantly less likely to report social safety nets, such as having a source from whom to borrow money or an alternative place to stay. At endline, there was no difference in social safety nets between girls in the two sites, suggesting that Biruh Tesfa improved the status of girls in that area. At endline, girls in the project site were significantly more likely to have undergone voluntary counseling and testing for HIV, compared to girls in the control site.

## Social networks & participation

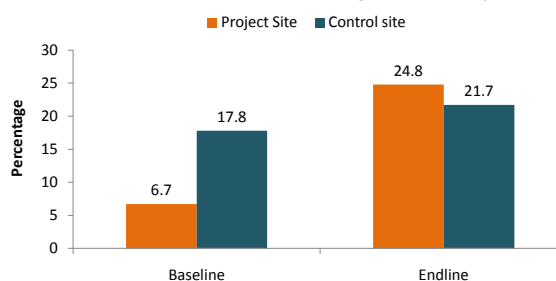
Reports having many friends in their neighborhood



Note: Preliminary Population Council analysis, based on weighted data

## Safe spaces & safety nets

Reports having a place in the community outside of home to meet other girls (safe spaces)



Note: Preliminary Population Council analysis, based on weighted data

Interviews with girls highlighted the difference Biruh Tesfa made in their lives.

My parents died when I was a child ... I don't remember that time very well. I lived with my aunt until I was 12, and then I came here [Gondar] to live with my uncle and go to school. There was also another relative living with my uncle. One day, that man raped me when I was at home alone, and I became pregnant. When my uncle found out I was pregnant, he threw me out of the house. Then a lady found me and my child and took us to live with her. I help her with household work... After I started this program, I learned how to protect myself from violence and what to do if I am victimized. I think that if I had attended this program earlier, I may not have been raped by that person...

*-Gondar girl, age 15, double orphan, never been to school, domestic worker*

I came here [to the program] with interest and determination. I developed confidence here and now I know that I can face my problems and solve them. I believe that, no matter what, if I work hard, I will make it.

*-Addis Ababa girl, age 16, double orphan, migrated from Amhara region, 1 year of education*

Participation, in the program, has grown tremendously, almost doubling in the past year. In addition, given the overwhelming demand for the program, Biruh Tesfa now recruits participants' in a broader age range, aged 7 to 24.

**My employer gave me permission to leave my work and attend the program. She has started respecting my ideas and opinions.**

*-Gondar girl, age 19, single orphan, never been to school, domestic worker*

### **Partners**

Ethiopia Ministry of Women Children and Youth

Addis Ababa Bureau of Women Children and Youth

Amhara Regional Bureau of Women Children and Youth

Tigray Regional Bureau of Youth and Sports

Kebele Administrations in Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar, Debre Markos, Dessie, Gondar and Mekele

Handicap International

Nia Foundation

Organization for the Prevention, Rehabilitation and Integration of Female Street Children (OPRIFS)

Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)

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## References & Resources

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