

FROM CHILD BRIDE TO CHANGEMAKER: HOW EDUCATION EMPOWERED BILUMA TO ESCAPE MARRIAGE AT 14



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Ethiopia was once one of the countries for high rates of child marriage. While years of awareness campaigns and educational efforts have led to a reduction in child marriage rate, the number of girls still victimized by this problem remains significant. The story of young Biluma is a powerful testament to this reality. Biluma Adem is from a pastoralist family in the

Bi’o Hara Kille Kebele, Sawena Woreda, East Bale Zone of the Oromia region. As her parents prioritized household chores over her education, her schooling journey was challenging from the start.

To make matters worse, Biluma was made a target for marriage when she was only 14 years old child and a third grade student. Her family didn’t hesitate to accept the offer and marry her off to a 60-year-old elder, setting a wedding date. This was due to the local belief that “if a girl doesn’t marry early, she will be exposed to unwanted pregnancy, damaging the image of the family. Lacking awareness on the harm of early marriage, the parents felt had made the right decision.

Realizing that this decision could affect her physically and psychologically, as well as limit her educational and career opportunities, she ran away before the

planned wedding date, and took shelter in her brother’s house, in town. This provided her with at least a temporary relief from the family pressure, where by enabling her to continue her education.

Action For Development (AFD), in collaboration with Save the Children International, is implementing a project aimed at making inclusive education accessible in 15 schools across five Woredas in Bale and East Bale Zones. Biluma was a student in one of these schools and also an active member of the gender Clubs established for the purpose of protecting and safeguarding children, and enhancing their all-rounded rights.

Membership in the clubs raised awareness and empowered her to take the right decision that enabled to her to avoid the abuse of child marriage.

Recounting what she went through, Biluma has the following to say;

"Being a member of the gender Club strengthened by AFD at our school helped me clearly understand the value of education for empowerment. I had already received awareness on how to report to the PTSA issues like early marriage and other problems that disrupt education, I therefore lost no time in reporting my case to the PTSA.

The PTSA then went to my family and held a broad discussion and awareness session on the value of education. They explained to them how education helps girls to become self-reliant and empowered. They also explained to them the physical and mental harm early marriage causes on girls. Luckily, they managed to convince my parents, albeit with difficulty. My parents, then, reluctantly entrusted my safety and security to the PTSA. Thanks to the intervention of the PTSA I am now pursuing my education without worrying about early marriage.



Young Biluma has now advanced to the fifth grade and is attending school at Melk'a Dare School. As part of project activities, the students of the school were supported with organizational and technical inputs for the school and clubs, strengthening of the PTSA, availing some facilities and providing stationaries, and educational supplies. These inputs have provided a better teaching-learning environment for Biluma and her fellow students.

This story of one girl highlights the pressure many children face, and demonstrates how a change in mindset gives a child the opportunity to build his/her future with strength and confidence, escaping complex problems that compromise their health, and future.

Finally, Biluma says, "I will continue to strengthen my active membership in the gender club and be a voice for girls going through a similar experience as myself. I am very grateful to Action For Development and Save the Children International, which

is strengthening the PTSA and gender clubs with training and material support. I have now broken through complex pressures and am building my future."

This testimony demonstrates that the collective effort of AFD/SCI, the PTSA, school clubs, the school administration and other stakeholders has made a significant contribution to ensuring that the enrollment of girls and other children is enhanced, school drop out is reduced, gender parity is maintained, a healthy, safe and productive teaching and learning environment is in place. It moreover, affirms that, thanks to the project, the schools have now become centers of community engagement and empowerment for a better future.

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NEWS & DEVELOPMENTS

SCHOLASTIC SUPPORT REACHES 2,471 STUDENTS ACROSS 15 SCHOOLS

Action For Development, in partnership with Save the Children International, successfully completed the distribution of educational materials to 2,471 (1214F) low-income family students across all 15 target schools.

The items which were distributed between September 17 and 26, 2025, ensure that vulnerable students have the resources needed for learning. This effort involved the distribution of:

24,710 Exercise Books, 4,942 Pencil Sharpeners, 750 New School Bags, 12,355 Pens, and 9,884 Pencils. Providing this support contribute to reduce student absenteeism, by directly addressing the barrier caused by the lack of essential educational supplies.



AFD ENHANCES PTSA SERVICE QUALITY WITH IN-KIND FURNITURE SUPPORT

Essential in-kind support to Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) offices as part of the BOE project.

The donation included school renovation materials and essential furniture comprising of: 135 Chairs, 15 Tables, and 15 Shelves. From one of the beneficiary school principal noted the impact: "Having a properly furnished office makes a huge difference. It shows our community that the PTSA is a professional, coordinated, and dedicated body that works for the improvement of our school. This investment goes beyond furniture; it builds trust."



Equipped with these resources, PTSA offices are now better positioned to support the BOE project's goal of improving access to inclusive & equitable education.



A BACK-TO-SCHOOL CAMPAIGN MOBILIZES FIVE WOREDAS

An advocacy campaign mobilized communities to ensure every student is back in school.

From August 27 to September 07, 2025, a focused effort across the Rayitu, Dawe Kachen, Sawena, Lega hidha, and Gura Damole woredas brought together key local leaders for one common goal, i.e enhanced students enrollment.

This campaign contributed to efforts of ensuring that no one is left behind from accessing inclusive and equitable education.

It involved different stakeholders, including Members of the PTSA (Parent-Teacher-Student Association), the Woreda Administration and Communication Offices, the Women Affairs and Education Offices, and all local school principals.

EMPOWERING TEACHERS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

A significant professional development initiative was recently conducted involving 45 teacher (5 F), who teach Afaan Oromo and Mathematics in grades 5 through 8.

Held from May 1st to 3rd, 2025, this training was conducted in collaboration with the Robe Teachers Training College, with a view to empowering educators to strengthen foundational learning and improve student performance across school grades.



BUILDING A SAFER PATH: TRAINING TO PROTECT WOMEN AND GIRLS

AFD delivered a three-day training aimed at strengthening local referral pathway mechanisms, to establish a coordinated system that directs to services, like legal aid, healthcare, and social support, quickly and effectively.

The program trained 42 participants (22F), drawn from Gender Clubs, Teachers, Police, Health, Education, and Women and Child Affairs. The training focused on the key steps for mapping and promoting a comprehensive referral pathway mechanism. This professional development initiative establishes a coordinated system, ensuring that women and girls can access essential support services without complication.



This streamlined approach minimizes the time, cost, and psychological harm associated with seeking help, primarily by preventing victims from having to report their stories to multiple agencies.



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