

Minute 16

**Gedam Sefer Community and University Partnership
Children's Discussion about Community and Children's Strengths and Gaps
In the presence of Community Leaders as Observers**

Place: Bethlehem Public School

Date: Saturday February 9th 2008

Time: 9:00 AM- 11:45 AM

Present:

1. Mulu Yeneabat Gedam Sefer Community University Partnership
2. Betemichel Markos Gedam Sefer Community University Partnership
3. Mawura Buchi Gedam Sefer Community University Partnership
4. Elias Debebe School of Social Work MSW 2nd Student
5. Ephrem Belay School of Social Work MSW 1st Student
6. Tsion Tefera School of Social Work MSW 1st Student
7. Yenenesh Tadesse School of Social Work MSW 1st Student
8. 56 children from the Gedam Sefer Partnership project
9. 8 Technical Committee Representatives

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I wish I had a video camera to record the children's discussion. Ninety percent (80 minutes) of this discussion was recorded with an audio recorder. The children discussed theirs and their community's issues with full commitment and devotion. It was so amazing and unbelievable to observe how they assess theirs and their community's situations. They lead the discussion forum with my little assistance by sharing the agenda in to three; community and children strength, gaps and possible solutions.

They suggested that the discussion is a continuation of their previous discussion of 26th January 2008. They agreed to include and also add issues that were not mentioned previously. Accordingly, the newly added ideas are written in *italics* and **bold**.

A. Strengths

- *Children have commitment to attend schooling properly*
- *Parents are investing in their children's education from their meager resources*
- *There are teachers who have commitment to their duties, love and affection to their students*
- *There are community elders and other members who encourage children to attend their schooling*
- *There are excellent students who are willing to share their knowledge to their classmates with lower capacity and devotion to their schooling*

- *When community members forbid us not to play on the road, roadside or in someone's compound; we children accept their instructions and stop playing even if we do not have any alternative*
- *There are recreation parks within the neighborhood (even though it is very little)*
- *There are gymnasiums and drama trainers using small rooms*
- *We believe that if we conduct knowledge increasing conversations among ourselves we could bring a difference for ourselves and to our community*
- *Previously some of us (children) have collected used clothes, contributed coins and distributed to the street children to show our concern*
- *There are women who respect work and involved in petty-trading, even if the place that they display their commodities are not good and risky to their health*
- The youth has a motivation to work. As an example youths who were involved in different unhealthy activities are organized in groups and some work individually in car washing and parking.
- Youth are establishing association to be productive citizens and are looking for meanness their vision, but if someone could not assisted them will crumble.
- Group fighting and other criminal activities are decreasing.
- Youth and children respect each other.
- There are youth engaged with productive activities as daily laborers, shoe shine boys, etc. and they are showing us that we should give respect for work.
- Youth who were involved in gambling, chat chewing, etc. have quitted such activities and are giving respect to production activities.
- Youth and children are willing and some are members of scout, Red Cross and other clubs in schools.
- Youth and children are attempting to organize football clubs.
- Youth and children are willing to be trained in different sports.
- There are youths and children who have different talents and are willing to give training for the youth and children in drama and painting if the community could facilitate them places within the community or in school compounds.

Gaps (weakness)

- *Presence of broken sewerage and ditches within the neighborhood*
- *Drug smoking neighborhoods have some sort of attracting odors for us (children), which could attract some of us*
- *The neighborhoods air is polluted by the smoke and odor from the drug houses*
- *There are drug addicts who breathe the smoke on children and girls who pass nearby them. This breathed smoke makes children and girls dizzy and sick*
- *Community members who are living near by the drug smoking houses are not that much concerned about the effect of the drug, assuming that it is none of their business since they are not directly affected by it. But in actual fact they are directly affected by consuming the affected air*
- *Some children make fun by smoking a cigarette in groups and try to make art by the smoke (making smoke circles, smoke chains, etc.)*
- *Pick pockets and gagsters are attacking our parents in evenings when they came back from work places*
- *Gagsters are forcing us (children when we are sent by our parents and elders to purchase items) to give them all or part of the money or commodity to them; and if we refuse will snatch all what we have. Indirectly they are encouraging us to be pickpockets.*
- *Some of the parents did not check their children's exercise books and school bags*

- *There are teachers who punish students very excessively*
- *Some parents discriminate daughters by favoring their sons.*
- *Girl students are engaged in household duties and do not have time to do their homework and study their lessons. Because of this their academic performance is low.*
- *There are families who bring children from rural areas with false promise to send them to attend schooling. But in actual fact engage them as house maids, babysitters, tearoom boys, dish and glass washers in local bars (Tej and Tella houses)*
- *Community members did not question people when they do not send to school their own children and those they brought from rural places with false promise*
- *Some excellent students are not ready to share their knowledge to their classmates*
- *We the children and the community members do not have an experience to share what we have to street children or to those who are needy*
- *Women and girls have a lot of housework responsibility*
- *Some elders, parents prefer to curse and insult us when we commit mistakes knowingly or unknowingly rather than advising and giving constructive advices*
- *Absence of enough space and books with the one small public library*
- *Our oral and written English knowledge is below average to our school level*
- *There are some youths and children involved in gambling, this is unhealthy for us.*
- *Some of the youth who are involved in car washing and other income generating activities are spending their income uneconomically and sometimes consume a lot of alcohol, chat and smoking, etc.*
- *Our parents, older brothers and sisters ask us to buy them chat, alcohol, cigarette, etc. This is not good for us since we may take these unhealthy activities as normal and we will be tempted to try it.*
- *Lack of sport facilities and football field, creates misunderstandings between community members and children. When we, children, try to play in a little open space within the neighborhood or in the road, people are insulting and hitting us, then we are forced to go to gambling places*
- *Chat selling and chewing shoes should be far from residential and school compounds*
- *Music and video shoes should also be far from both residential and school compounds*
- *Gambling shops, liquor selling shops should be far from residential quarters*
- *Different clubs who were active in schools are weakened. Previously, scouts clubs, HIH/AIDS clubs, etc were active, but now they are not active.*
- *There are many children who are forced to work beyond their age and capacity within our neighborhood.*
- *There are many children that their parents will not allow them to join their colleagues within the neighborhood.*

Solutions

- *Idirs should strengthen their support system to include more community development activities*
- *Community members within a neighborhood should create a mechanism to contribute both in labor and money to keep their neighborhood clean and healthy*
- *Give priority to girls and women education and other training and employment opportunities and reduce the discrimination*
- *Community members should question people who bring children from rural places with false promise to send them to schooling*
- *Families who do not send their children to school should also be questioned by the community members*

- *Community members should question people selling drugs within their neighborhood, and report this to the responsible city administration; being united*
- *Youths and others who are disrupting the healthy relationship of families by taking drugs and those gagsters should be advised by the community members. If not, should be reported to the police and the community members should be willing to testify to the police and to the court*
- *Families should be empowered and educated*
- *Facilitate tutorial classes for all lessons but more to our English language knowledge*
- To start with, children should have a small multipurpose training room for children. It can be within the neighborhood, or class rooms within schools to be used outside school hour (evenings/weekends)
If we have just a small room, then more will develop later, since alphabet starts from a then b. The training could be drama, arts, coaching, etc.
- Facilitate opportunities for the youth and children who have talents to share their talents to their peers through peer education in arts, sports, etc. These youth with talents could train us if different clubs such as painting, drama, etc. with little expenses.
- Awareness raising efforts on the rights and duties of families and children
- Bring back the roll of different clubs in schools and within the neighborhood

After they identified both the community's and children's strengths, gaps and solutions, the children agreed unanimously to invite their parents on February 15th 2008 and share their ideas to them. In addition to this they decided to conduct another through discussion session on Wednesday February 13th 2008 starting at 9:00 AM at Bethlehem Public School.

Remark

The *Idir* leaders, community elders and the Technical Committee members were so astonished by the way and the bravery of the children in expressing their community assessments. They all pledge to work with the children to bring change within the community and empower children the heirs and builders of the nation.