

Children's Presentation about Community and Children's Strengths and Gaps



A total of 33 adults who are parents/guardians 39 children attended the meeting. There were 45 children, 3 Idir leaders; four PhD 1st Year Students, 4 Gedam Sefer Project staff and 1 MSW 2nd Year student were present. The three Idir leaders attended the meeting, considering the issue of children is their priority.

The children's presentation was supported by flip chart and also drawings illustrating their understandings of the community's strengths, gaps and solutions. They were bold and firm while presenting, explaining and defending their findings.

Their presentation was similar to their last week's presentation to the Idir and Community elders, but with more passion and in a more systematic ways. The participants were supplied with the Amharic version of the following findings and a brief introductory note about the partnership's objectives and tentative plans.

As per their decision on Wednesday February 13th the children presented their findings as follows:-

A. Gedam Sefer Community's and Children's strengths: by Frichiwot Bezuallem and Belen Girma

- 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 group 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

**B. Gedam Sefer Community's and Children's gaps:
by Sentayehu Anley and Temesgen Mewuded**

- 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 group 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 pick pockets.
- 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.

C. Possible solutions to the gaps: by Endale Amensisa and Shemelis Mekuriya



- 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
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- 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 drug 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 role of different clubs in schools and within the neighborhood

The missing points were also raised and elaborated by the other children. The parents were astonished in the way their children identified theirs and their community's findings. One of the mothers admitted that all the points raised by the children are true. She also testified that she is one of the community members who discharge water over the children when they try to play around her house in order to protect her clothes and gains being spoiled by the dust from the ball. The other parents expressed their admiration for their children. It was only two of the parents who tried to blame the children and entered into a long debate. Of the two parents, one was so hot and tried to argue that the parents are fair, but the children are rude and impolite. Some of the children (seven of them turn by turn) wanted to speak baldly that this mother is one of the residents who is involved in the chat and drug selling and wanted to tell her that she should stop this. But, I convinced them that if they tried to attack individuals directly without the support of the community members, it will hamper the smooth relationship. They were satisfied that her furiousness by itself is a beginning of the psychological community-war.



There was also an argument on the scale of excessive punishment by parents and teachers. Some of the children accept light beating, while others argued that it is better to be taught about the dangers of committing faults first and then to be forbidden to have access to what we like most. One of the children argued that if a child is not taught about 'the danger of fire' and if he/she is burned, then it is of no use to punish him/her since he is already harmed. Committing excessive punishment has two fold

1. Chat chewing and selling houses
2. Local liquor houses
3. Parents bargaining and conflict
4. Film shops
5. ditches
6. Gagsters snatching property from children and elders late in the evening
7. Discrimination between boys and girls
8. Girls engaged with housework, while boys play outside
9. Teachers punishing students

disadvantages to the parents, according to the children. They said that the child punished excessively will look for revenge or will hate his parents and go out of the house and be a street child. And/or if harmed; the parents will have to hospitalize the child, which is an additional burden (expense) to the family.

The other striking point is that the children were using Amharic traditional proverbs and cited a proverb that ridicule women and try to bring convincing argument against those proverbs.

They said that “when there are plenty of women in a house, even cabbage will not be cooked properly.” In the Ethiopian traditional cooking, the simplest duty of a woman is preparing cabbage since it will not demand a thorough training. The women should cut the cabbage into pieces and just put it into a pot filled with water and burn the fire. But if there are many women within a household, then they will forget it while chatting and neglecting their duty. This proverb is the famous proverb used to undermine women. But the children said that, this is false and **“there is nothing more important and valuable than women and water in this world.”** They asked their parents to give priority to the women and girls. If the community gives the first opportunity to females then we can be sure that our world is on the correct path of development.



1. The children tried to demonstrate that elders are showing their love and affection by advising children wherever they get them.
2. Youth are organized and work as car washers
3. There little recreation parks
4. Presence of schools within a short distance
5. There are few books within a library and students are using them

The other striking argument by one of the children is that in order to come out of poverty, we should accept that we are poor. But if we could not accept our poverty, then we will not improve our livelihood. Accepting our level of poverty will only be expressed if we could work hard by not choosing and discriminating people involved in low paying jobs. This boy argued that most of the youth and adults are just dreaming to be wealthy without being involved in income generating activities.

They asked their parents to work hand in hand with their children, local authorities and traditional civic associations to find solutions to the children and communities problems rather than looking for some excuses.

The two Idir leaders asked the parents to discuss these issues with their neighbors and find ways to solve theirs and their children’s problems being united rather than expecting the government or other NGOs to find solutions to these serious child well-being problems. These Idir leaders urged the parents to tell those parents who did not come to this meeting that there is nothing that should be prioritized than their children’s issues. The Idir leaders and the School of Social Works PhD students further asked that it will be best if there are possibilities of making such arrangement to the parents, so that they could identify their strengths, gaps and find solutions to their own problems. The PhD students appreciated the children’s ways of analyzing their community’s strengths, gaps and possible solutions.