

Minute 26

Gedam Sefer Community and University Partnership

Place: Bethlehem Public School

Date: Saturday March 8th 2008

Time: 9:15 AM- 11:45 AM



Present:

Children's Committee Members (6)

Children's Parents (15)

First & Second Group of Children (70)

GS-CUP Staff (3)

Idir Leaders (4)

Kebele Education Desk (1)

Social Work Students & Faculty (10)

Women Leaders (3)

**Project Coordinator, Mulu Yeneabat, MSW
shares photos of children's presentations**

**Second Group Children's Presentation to Their Parents about
Community / Children's Strengths and Gaps**

The children presented to their parents about their community and their strengths, gaps and possible solutions. Their parents were impressed by the children's presentations and expressed their admiration. This meeting was particularly important in bringing parents to the meeting who had not participated in the first children's discussion meetings. In particular, two women who refused to participate with the children in the GS-CUP meetings, made public comments about their wrongful attitude and behavior regarding their children's participation.

One of the mothers admitted that, she has warned her son not to attend any meetings fearing that such meetings might be either political or with religious motives. But her son has informed his mother the objective of the Gedam Sefer Community-University Partnership (GS-CUP) is different and has read and heard from his colleagues (First Group of Children) and he has also attended two meetings. Despite all this the woman said that he should not go and rejected his and the community worker's invitation to attend this meeting. This old mother said that:

Today, early in the morning I instructed him not to go to the meeting and if he insists to go he should not take his breakfast. He said: "I will not eat my breakfast and would go to the meeting." His elder sister closed the door and slapped him. Despite all this, my son who has never defied my orders, came to this meeting. After that I went to check why he insisted to attend the meeting; that is why I came late. Thanks to my son's insistence, I realized that these small children are thinking great and are discussing the issues that we elders should have discussed. I regret what I said to my son and the community workers, here after I will go and tell my neighbors who have ordered their kids not to attend this meeting to send their children.

The other woman, a mother of a girl from the first group, said that she has refused to come and attend this meeting because she thought that these kids are just chatting here with no motive. She said:

My daughter and the community workers have informed me that I should attend to what my daughter and others are discussing, but I rejected all. Today, early in the morning my daughter told me that she has asked one of my neighbors to attend the meeting replacing her as her mother. I went and asked my neighbor if she is really going to this meeting. My neighbor said to me: “If you can not please her and attend the meeting that she is going to attend, I will be her mother during such a meeting.” Being ashamed, I came to this meeting by saying let me waste this day for my child. I expected that it is just wasting time. But after I came and listened what the kids are saying, I regret and will ask my daughter for her forgiveness.



Children report on community strengths, gaps, and solutions

Another lady who does not have a child was gossiping within the neighborhood about the partnership as if the activities are of religious and political motives. We (the community workers and the Project Coordinator) agreed that if she is willing to come, she should be invited. With reluctance she agreed and attended the meeting. She was so astonished, but was not ready to give her hand to help. She was trying to find fault with the children’s presentation. And she just picked one point that the children mentioned positively about the hardship on the local alcoholic beverage producers and the negative impact on the youth and elderly customers. The children said that, it is better if the local beverage producing and selling houses be closed and changed to other means of income generating activities. But this “negative-minded” lady just said that “... this is a means of living for

the poor ladies and you are just pushing a wood on these old women’s throats.” The children expressed that they are not saying that “... local alcoholic drinks are not bad. But, insisted that it should be consumed with limits. Not only that, the profit and the labor invested to prepare the local beverage is not beneficial, and is very tiresome. They wish these old women should get training and credit to change their living conditions.” The community members also supported the idea of the children. They asked the lady, “Do you know someone who has improved her living condition and status by preparing and selling the local alcoholic drinks except to the deterioration of the health of both the producer and the customers?” For this, the woman had no answer.

It is after observing all this presentation, the kebele 03/09 Education Desk head appreciated what the children presented and the way they defended their presentations. Ato Sisay of the kebele Education Desk promised the children to invite all of the school principals in the kebele (13 schools principals) so that the children can share their concerns with them.

Professor Alice Butterfield appreciated both the children and their parents for the constructive discussions and the method and the courage the children have to discuss theirs and their community’s issues. She briefed the attendees on the motives of the partnership and the future plans, the books that will come to Gedam Sefer libraries and schools, and the summer children program that will be discussed and planned with the children and the community members.



Children and youth attend meeting with parents