

POWERED BY PSI ETHIOPIA

15th edition



"USAID IS COMMITTED TO REALIZING AN ETHIOPIA WHERE NO GIRL MISSES SCHOOL BECAUSE OF MENSTRUATION, WHERE EVERY PARENT HAS ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER NEAR THEIR HOME, AND WHERE NO CHILD FALLS ILL SIMPLY FROM TAKING A DRINK."

- MR. SCOTT D HOCKLANDER, MISSION DIRECTOR TO USAID ETHIOPIA AND USAID/DJIBOUTI



MESSAGE FROM

THE COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVE OF PSI ETHIOPIA

Dear PSI Ethiopia Partners, Donors, and Friends,

As we approach the end of the year, it is my pleasure to share the 15th edition of the Powered by PSI Ethiopia newsletter. This edition celebrates the extraordinary progress we've made together in advancing health equity and transforming lives across Ethiopia.

From launching the USAID Markets for Sanitation Activity to scaling the innovative Smart Start digital counseling tool, these stories reflect our unwavering commitment to innovation and collaboration. Our participation in global platforms such as the Global Digital Health Forum and the 8th Global Symposium on Health Systems Research demonstrates our dedication to driving change locally and globally.

We are deeply grateful to our donors, government partners, and all stakeholders whose support and collaboration have been instrumental in achieving these milestones. Your trust and partnership



empower us to bring person-centered care, sustainable health solutions, and lasting impact to communities across Ethiopia.

As we celebrate these accomplishments, we also look ahead with hope and determination to continue building a healthier and more equitable Ethiopia.

On behalf of the entire PSI Ethiopia team, I extend our heartfelt gratitude and warmest wishes for a joyful holiday season and a prosperous New Year. May this festive season bring you peace, happiness, and renewed energy to continue driving meaningful change in the year ahead.

With gratitude and best wishes,

DR. DOROTHY BALABA
COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVE
PSI ETHIOPIA



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NEWSFLASH

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UNITE TO END VIOLENCE: CHANGE STARTS WITH US!

On December 10, 2024, PSI Ethiopia participated in USAID's Learning and Action Forum on GBV Prevention and Response, marking the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Continuing the momentum, on December 11, 2024, we hosted a dynamic panel discussion and interactive daily quizzes to reflect on how GBV is addressed within our programs and to strategize for greater impact.

With the theme "Unite to End Violence," we reaffirm that real change begins with us. Together, let's take action—because united, we can create a world free from violence.



PSI ETHIOPIA AT THE GLOBAL DIGITAL HEALTH FORUM 2024

PSI Ethiopia participated in the Global Digital Health Forum 2024 under the theme "Accelerating Digital Health Transformation."

At the forum, PSI Ethiopia showcased its Smart Start digital counseling tool, designed to enhance sexual and reproductive health services for married adolescents and youth in rural areas. Efforts are now underway to integrate this tool into the national eCHIS platform, aligning with Ethiopia's digital health strategy to expand access and improve community health outcomes.



A NEW DAWN FOR SANITATION IN ETHIOPIA: USAID MARKETS FOR SANITATION ACTIVITY LAUNCHES.

On November 26, 2024, PSI Ethiopia launched the five-year USAID Markets for Sanitation Activity in Jijiga. The initiative aims to revolutionize gender-inclusive sanitation practices across eight regions. USAID's Mission Director highlighted its potential to transform lives by improving access to clean water and sanitation.

“USAID is committed to realizing an Ethiopia where no girl misses school because of menstruation, where every parent has access to clean water near their home, and where no child falls ill simply from taking a drink,”

- Mr. Scott D Hocklander, Mission Director to USAID Ethiopia and USAID/Djibouti



PSI ETHIOPIA AT THE 8TH GLOBAL SYMPOSIUM ON HEALTH SYSTEMS RESEARCH.

From November 18-22, 2024, PSI Ethiopia shared insights at the symposium in Nagasaki, Japan. Presentations emphasized Ethiopia's SRH scale-up, which has reached 700,000 adolescents, underscoring the importance of youth-responsive health systems.



CO-DESIGNING THE FUTURE OF HPV VACCINATION IN ETHIOPIA!

On November 12-13, 2024, PSI Ethiopia hosted a workshop to integrate HPV vaccination into community health services. Stakeholders collaborated to identify barriers and strategies, aligning with global and national health policies to prevent cervical cancer in adolescent girls.



By vaccinating adolescent girls, we take a critical step toward preventing cervical cancer and protecting future generations.



PSI ETHIOPIA WINS THE 2024 USAID WATER-SECURE WORLD PHOTO CONTEST!

The winning photo, capturing sanitation entrepreneur Desta Abo installing plastic slabs, exemplifies PSI Ethiopia's market-based approach.



PSI ETHIOPIA REPRESENTED AT UNC WATER AND HEALTH CONFERENCE 2024.

PSI Ethiopia actively participated in the UNC Water and Health Conference, co-facilitating a side event on sanitation markets and contributing to discussions on smart subsidies for WASH services. Stories from Transform WASH highlighted PSI's impactful contributions to global WASH conversations.



USAID MULU KP ACTIVITY: ETHIOPIA'S FIRST HIV SELF-TEST SOCIAL MARKETING INITIATIVE!

On September 30, 2024, PSI Ethiopia trained 20 private pharmacy professionals on HIV Self-Testing. This preparation lays the foundation for Ethiopia's first national HIVST social marketing campaign in FY25.



PSI ETHIOPIA HANDS OVER LIYU CLASS TOILETS TO PRIVATE ENTERPRISES IN ARBAMINCH.

On September 25, PSI Ethiopia transferred management of three Liyu Class Toilets to private enterprises in Arbaminch. Located in busy marketplaces, these toilets aim to reduce open defecation and improve sanitation. Dr. Dorothy Balaba praised the initiative for supporting job creation and urban beautification, aligning with Ethiopia's TSEDU campaign for a cleaner environment by 2030.



PSI ETHIOPIA HOSTS LIBERIAN DELEGATION FOR COLLABORATION AND LEARNING!

From September 2-6, 2024, PSI Ethiopia hosted a Liberian delegation led by Hon. Ellen O. Pratt. They visited Transform WASH initiatives and market-based sanitation efforts in Sidama and Aleta Wondo. Engagements with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Water and Energy, and One WASH National Program emphasized the value of intra-African collaboration.



Intra-African collaboration and knowledge sharing from each other and working together can enhance our efforts and drive significant progress across the continent.



PSI ETHIOPIA'S YOUTH INNOVATION CHAMPIONS SHINE AT THE 5TH NATIONAL ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH HEALTH FORUM!

From September 1-3, 2024, PSI Ethiopia's Youth Innovation Champions contributed to the National Adolescents and Youth Health Forum, themed "Access and Quality: A Responsive Health System for All." The event spotlighted PSI's commitment to advancing youth health and addressing sexual and reproductive health challenges.



A SHOWCASE OF HEALTH SYSTEM INTEGRATION: PSI ETHIOPIA HOSTS DELEGATION TO SHOWCASE RISE INITIATIVES!

PSI Ethiopia welcomed delegations from Somalia, Somaliland, and Nigeria to showcase RISE initiatives. Visitors engaged with health facilities, the Ministry of Health, Oromia Regional Health Bureau, and community leaders. They directly interacted with married girls, couples, and Women Development Army members, gathering valuable insights. Delegates praised RISE's integration into PHCUs and its impact on reducing teenage pregnancies through community health interventions.

“

Smart Start empowers young married girls in Ethiopia by providing family planning information and financial guidance, helping them make informed health and life decisions.



USAID MARKETS FOR SANITATION ACTIVITY

Project Brief

USAID Markets for Sanitation (M4S) Activity is a five-year initiative awarded to PSI and its consortium partners: IRC WASH, Organization for Women in Self Employment (WISE), and Vision Fund Microfinance Institution (VF-MFI). This project aims to support the government, private sector, and civil society in advancing towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6.2 by 2030.

Aligned with the Government of Ethiopia's vision to achieve SDG Target 6.2 by 2030, M4S is dedicated to promoting gender-inclusive and equitable access to improved sanitation and hygiene products and services.

The M4S team will assist the government in operationalizing its new strategy for implementing Total Sanitation to End Open Defecation and Urination (TSEDU).

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

M4S will follow a unified approach called Market-Based Areawide Inclusive Sanitation and Hygiene (MBAWISH).

APPROACHES

Gender equity, transitioning to local leadership, fostering private sector-led growth with connections to government systems, and emphasizing learning, coordination, and accountability.

GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

M4S will be implemented in Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Sidama, Southwest, Central, South and Tigray regions.

In Year 1, M4S will directly support 30 woredas and in Year 2, an additional 30 woredas will be added. In Year 3, 100 additional woredas



EXPECTED RESULTS



5,441,800 people

Reaching 1,183,000 House Holds, resulting in an estimated 5,441,800 people gaining access to basic sanitation.



180,000 women & girls

Ensuring 180,000 women and girls have access to affordable and hygienic MHH products.



4014 BUSINESSES

M4S will support businesses to engage in provision of Hygiene and Sanitation products and services.

INTERMEDIATE RESULTS

IR 1: Inclusive sanitation and hygiene sector governance strengthened.

IR 2: Demand for gender-inclusive basic SH products, services, and behaviors increased.

IR 3: Equitable supply of diverse, affordable basic sanitation and hygiene products increased.

IR 4: Coordination and learning among sanitation and hygiene actors improved.

(and potentially more) will be reached through government lead scale-up with lighter touch of M4S technical assistance support.

For 60 of the 160 woredas, M4S will provide more targeted support through Collaborative Impact Platforms (CIPs) and local partners.

TRANSFORMING HEALTH TOGETHER: EMPOWERING LOCAL CHAMPIONS.

1.

GRASSROOTS CHAMPION: 60-YEAR-OLD ADE DEBU'S ROLE IN FAMILY PLANNING ADVOCACY.

By *Abduselam Ibrahim*, Program (AYSRH Integration) Advisor & *Yonatan Tamiru*, Communication Specialist, PSI Ethiopia

"Maybe when you see my face, you think I'm too old to make a difference in my community, but that's not true. I still feel motivated to help the young girls in my community access the health services they deserve, which I lacked," says Ade Debu, a 60-year-old Women Development Army (WDA) member and Smart Start advocate in Gengeleta Kebele, Sokoru Woreda, Jimma Zone, Oromia Region.

Her motivation stems from deeply personal experiences. Growing up in an environment where health services were inaccessible, Ade knew the cost of being uninformed about family planning. Determined to change this for the next generation, she stepped up to become a leading voice for the Smart Start initiative in her community.

This is the story of Ade Debu Aba Mecha—a mother, WDA group member, and committed advocate for family planning through the Roadmap to Integrating Smart Start (RISE) Program. *Smart Start empowers young married girls in Ethiopia by providing family planning information and financial guidance, helping them make informed health and life decisions.* Inspired by the program's benefits, Ade Debu pledged herself to the cause after learning about it during a kebele kickoff session. Despite knowing that some elders and religious leaders might oppose



Ade Debu, Women Development Army

her efforts, she courageously chose to promote family planning services to married adolescent girls and young women in her community.

Gengeleta Kebele, home to 4,625 people, includes 1,018 women of reproductive age. When it was selected as one of the RISE implementing kebeles in 2023, Ade knew she faced an uphill battle. Family planning was largely misunderstood, and demand for these services were low.



Women Development Armies

Many community members held deep-rooted beliefs—viewing children as a blessing from God and seeing family planning as a challenge to God’s will. *“I heard comments like, ‘Who are we to interfere with God’s plan?’”* she recalls. Yet, with patience and persistence, she helped families see family planning as a way to secure healthier futures for their daughters.

Ade worked closely with Health Extension Workers (HEWs) to deliver comprehensive health education tailored to the community’s needs. This collaborative effort gradually shifted attitudes, increasing the acceptance of family planning services.

Seeing the transformative impact of Smart Start, which offers family planning support, financial stability, and promotes well-being for married girls aged 15–19, Ade’s passion for advocacy deepened. Since joining the Smart Start team, she has identified seven married adolescent girls within her got (neighborhood), ensuring they received the necessary health services. Her work was not easy, as the kebele’s dispersed geography and some community members’ initial resistance created additional barriers. *“At first, people thought I was bringing in outside ideas that didn’t belong in our culture. It took patience to help them understand that this is about giving our daughters a choice,”* she says.

“I’m not only promoting family planning services to the married adolescent girls in the community but also within

my own family,” says Ade Debu. She adds, “Now, one of my granddaughters has started using family planning through the Smart Start approach, even before having her first child. I want her to delay pregnancy because she’s too young, and I want to see her healthy and productive even after becoming a mother.”

Ade Debu’s advocacy has had a ripple effect. Other WDA members have joined her after witnessing the economic, social, and health benefits that Smart Start brings to married adolescent girls. *“When others saw that these girls could balance marriage with education or work, they began to understand that family planning could offer a stronger future for all of us,”* Ade explains.

The results of RISE community-driven effort are beginning to show. Since the program’s implementation in Gengeleta Kebele, family planning uptake among married adolescent girls has increased by 40%, with more families supporting their daughters in making informed choices.

Ade’s story is a powerful example of how grassroots leadership and persistence can transform attitudes and improve health outcomes. PSI Ethiopia is committed to working with communities like Gengeleta to scale such efforts across Ethiopia. By supporting initiatives like Smart Start, we can empower local champions and create lasting change for generations to come.

2.

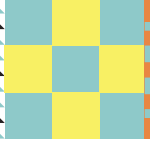
A DREAM DELAYED: A YOUNG BRIDE'S BOLD PURSUIT.

By Mesfin Tesfaye, Quality Assurance and Training Manager, Rediate Wujra, Corporate Communications and Public Relations Manager, & Sando Sagne, Quality Assurance and Training Officer, PSI Ethiopia

At just 15 years old, Dinknesh faced a decision that could determine her entire future. In her quiet village of Gerese in Southern Ethiopia, early marriage was more than a tradition—it was an expectation. For many adolescent girls, it meant the end of their education and the beginning of a life defined by limitations. Though married to Seid, a supportive and understanding young man, Dinknesh yearned for more. *She dreamed of learning, academic success, and a future that extended beyond the boundaries of her village.*



Dinknesh



In Ethiopia, early marriage remains a significant barrier to education and independence for young girls. UNICEF reports that 40% of girls in Ethiopia are married by the age of 18. This statistic reflects a reality that forces many to abandon their studies and perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality.



Dinknesh and Seid, Couple

¹<https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-latest-trends-and-future-prospects/>



Nurit Mohammed, HEW, conducting counseling using C4C to Dinknesh and Seid

Yet, Dinknesh, with unwavering determination, refused to let this societal norm define her. *Driven by hope and a thirst for knowledge, she sought guidance from Nurit Mohammed, a local Health Extension Worker, who understood the unique challenges faced by girls like her.*

Through PSI's **Counseling for Choice (C4C)** approach, which is part of the broader Sexual and Reproductive Health and Quality Improvement (SAHQI) initiative, Nurit provided information about family planning options. After careful consideration, Dinknesh selected Jadelle, a contraceptive method that would allow her to delay pregnancy for five years and pursue her education.

Returning to school was not easy for Dinknesh. Adapting to a classroom environment while navigating societal expectations required resilience and courage. *Yet, inspired and supported by her husband, she re-entered the 8th grade with renewed focus.* Today, she is determined to complete high school and, if fate allows, attend university.

¹<https://www.psi.org/c4c/>

Dinknesh's story is a testament to the power of informed choice, the significance of support, and the transformative impact of education. *She is not just a young wife; she is a determined student, a hopeful dreamer, and an inspiration to countless adolescent girls in her community.*

Her journey highlights the importance of initiatives like SAHQI and C4C in empowering young girls to make informed decisions and reclaim their futures. It is also a reminder that, even in the face of adversity, the human spirit can rise above tradition and embrace a future filled with possibility.

Support programs like SAHQI and Counseling for Choice to ensure more girls like Dinknesh have the opportunity to achieve their dreams. Together, we can create a world where every girl has access to education, choice, and a bright future.

3.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE OF EARLY MARRIAGE: HALIMA'S JOURNEY WITH SMART START.

By **Abduselam Ibrahim**, Program (AYSRH Integration) Advisor & **Fana Abay**, Marketing and Communication Director, PSI Ethiopia

At just 19 years old, Halima Aba Temam from Gengeleta Kebele faced the daunting challenges of early marriage and motherhood. Once a high-achieving student with dreams of becoming a nurse, her life took a drastic turn at 16 when she fell in love with Nazif Siraj, a boy from her community. Without informing their parents, the young couple eloped to Sokoru and formalized their marriage soon after.

Suddenly, Halima found herself burdened with the responsibilities of marriage and, shortly after, motherhood. Just months into her marriage, she learned she was pregnant—with twins. At only 17, she gave birth to twin boys while grappling with financial instability, living with her mother-

in-law, and her husband's struggle to secure stable employment. The pressures of young motherhood and limited resources left Halima feeling overwhelmed.

Her story began to change when she encountered the Jalqabbii Gaarii initiative, also known as Smart Start, introduced by local Health Extension Workers. This innovative program provides young couples like Halima and Nazif with essential counseling on family planning and financial literacy. By connecting reproductive health with economic planning, Smart Start equips young families to make informed decisions for their well-being and future stability.



Halima Aba Temam with her twin babies

Through the Smart Start approach, Halima learned about the importance of birth spacing and its impact on her family's economic situation. She also gained critical insights into saving and managing finances, which empowered her to plan for a more secure future. With the support of the program, Halima chose to use Implanon, a long-acting reversible contraceptive (LARC), allowing her to manage her reproductive health and focus on building a stable life for her growing family.

The financial planning component of Smart Start also had a profound impact on Halima's family. With newfound financial discipline, she and Nazif began saving small amounts from their earnings, gradually working toward building their own home and securing a brighter future for their children. *"My husband works as both a farmer and a daily laborer, and I support the family by making local snack known as Asanbusa," Halima explains. "We are currently building our own home. Though raising our children has been difficult, my husband has been a supportive partner and friend throughout this journey."*

Reflecting on her experience, Halima shares a message of hope for others: *"I advise girls to focus on their education and goals, rather than following the path I did. I am grateful to the Health Extension Workers who helped me make informed decisions about family planning and financial planning."*

Halima's story is a testament to how Smart Start's holistic approach, combining family planning and financial literacy, can transform the lives of young couples facing the challenges of early marriage.

PSI Ethiopia is working with the Ministry of Health to take Smart Start national, ensuring more young couples like Halima and Nazif have access to this life-changing program. By scaling this initiative, PSI Ethiopia aims to empower thousands of young families across the country to build stable and hopeful futures.



Smart Start Counseling session

“PSI Ethiopia is working with the Ministry of Health to take Smart Start national, ensuring more young couples like Halima and Nazif have access to this life-changing program.”

4.

PERSON-CENTERED CARE IN ACTION: TRANSFORMING MATERNAL, NEWBORN, AND CHILD HEALTH

By Fana Abay, Marketing and Communication Director & Eba Kebede, Coordinator, MNCH Quality and Training, PSI Ethiopia

In Ethiopia's remote regions, where access to quality healthcare has long been a challenge, a transformative shift is underway. Through the collaborative efforts of PSI Ethiopia (PSI/E) and the Ethiopian Midwives Association (EMwA), healthcare workers are gaining the tools and knowledge needed to provide better care, empowering women and adolescents to make informed health decisions. The Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (MNCH) program highlights how capacity building and collaboration can bridge healthcare gaps and improve outcomes.



Basic Postpartum Family Planning Training for midwives

COLLABORATION: THE FOUNDATION OF SUCCESS

Collaboration has been the backbone of the MNCH program's success. Government stakeholders, from the Ministry of Health (MoH) to regional health bureaus (RHBs) and district health offices (WoHOs), played a pivotal role. For example, in the Amhara region, the RHB promptly allocated a budget to train 119 HEWs who had been previously excluded. This government

support, combined with the expertise of PSI/E and EMwA, strengthened healthcare systems to meet the specific needs of young women.

Mr. Abebe, Deputy Head of the Amhara RHB, reflected on the program's collaborative approach, saying, *"The integration between PSI/E, EMwA, and our regional staff shows the strength of what we can achieve when we work together. This partnership has equipped us with the tools and capacity to improve healthcare in our communities."*

With a 99% participation rate among healthcare workers, the program's success is evident. Training materials, tailored to local contexts and languages, resonated deeply with healthcare providers, ensuring that knowledge transfer was both effective and sustainable.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR PERSON-CENTERED HEALTHCARE

At the heart of this initiative lies a Human-Centered Design (HCD) approach, ensuring that training and tools are tailored to the needs of healthcare workers and the women they serve. PSI/E's comprehensive training program targeted Health Extension Workers (HEWs) and healthcare workers (HCWs), enhancing their skills and knowledge in postpartum family planning, Counseling for Choice (C4C), and maternal health services such as antenatal and postnatal care.

More than 1,298 HEWs were trained on the Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (MNCH) continuum of care, enabling them to deliver integrated, high-impact care to mothers and newborns in their communities. Additionally, 130 midwives received training on postpartum family planning (PPFP), with a focus on the Counseling for Choice (C4C) tool, which simplifies contraceptive counseling, reduces information overload, and fosters empathetic, client-centered services. Further, 128 midwives were trained in maternal health services, including Smart antenatal care and postnatal care, ensuring women receive essential support during and after pregnancy.

Training sessions combined hands-on practice, role-playing, and locally tailored materials to ensure



relevance and engagement. As one HEW in Chiro Woreda shared, *"We haven't received basic training for a long time, but now, thanks to PSI/E and EMwA, we gained the knowledge and practical tools that truly fit our community's needs."*

Tools like C4C, co-developed with healthcare workers and adolescent clients, showcase how tailored innovations can strengthen routine healthcare, empower providers, and improve decision-making for young women.



At the heart of this initiative lies a Human-Centered Design (HCD) approach, ensuring that training and tools are tailored to the needs of healthcare workers and the women they serve.



HEWs Training

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Despite its successes, the program faced challenges. Security issues in certain regions disrupted training efforts, while delays in finalizing training materials slowed the program's initial rollout. Additionally, limited infrastructure in remote areas sometimes constrained access to health facilities and resources for hands-on practice.

However, through close collaboration with local governments and flexible planning, PSI/E and its partners mitigated these disruptions. Training schedules were adapted, and local facilitators played a crucial role in ensuring the program remained on track. These efforts allowed healthcare workers to continue receiving the knowledge and tools needed to deliver life-changing care.

THE PATH TO A HEALTHIER FUTURE

The MNCH program demonstrates that addressing gaps in healthcare delivery through capacity building and collaboration leads to lasting change. By equipping healthcare workers with the skills and tools they need, and co-developing person-centered solutions with the people they serve, barriers to care are breaking down. As one healthcare worker noted, *"Counseling for Choice (C4C) makes counseling easier for us and helps young women feel more confident in their decisions. It's a huge improvement from the old methods."*

Empowering healthcare workers and fostering collaboration aren't just strategies—they are pathways to a healthier future. With these efforts, PSI/E and its partners are ensuring that every adolescent girl and young woman in Ethiopia has access to the care they need, when they need it.



By equipping healthcare workers with the skills and tools they need, and co-developing person-centered solutions with the people they serve, barriers to care are breaking down.

5.

HEALTHX PARTNERS: A BOLD NEW STEP IN GLOBAL HEALTH.

By Fana Abay, Marketing & Communication Director, PSI Ethiopia

Imagine a world where health organizations unite to achieve the impossible—this is the vision behind HealthX Partners Incorporated (HXP). In today's complex world, no single organization can tackle the vast challenges of global health alone. Recognizing this, Population Services International (PSI) and the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF) are joining forces to create HealthX Partners Incorporated (HXP), a new parent nonprofit company set to launch on January 1, 2025. This partnership brings together the unique strengths of both

organizations to make a bigger impact on health services worldwide. Under HXP, PSI and EGPAF will operate as wholly owned subsidiaries, each keeping their individual identity while benefiting from shared resources and strategic direction.

Karl Hofmann, President and CEO of PSI, expressed, *"People's needs go beyond the services PSI offers, just as EGPAF's work goes beyond pediatric HIV. To fully meet our shared goals, we need stronger collaboration and integration, which HealthX Partners will provide."*



HealthXPartners Incorporated Signing



HXP is part of a global trend where health organizations are teaming up to increase efficiency and broaden their reach.

RESPONDING TO A GLOBAL TREND IN STRATEGIC HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS

HXP is part of a global trend where health organizations are teaming up to increase efficiency and broaden their reach. For example, the Global Fund and [Unitaid*](#) have improved access to treatments for diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria in low- and middle-income countries by sharing resources and aligning strategies. This collaboration has expanded healthcare access and introduced innovative treatments, especially in resource-limited areas.

Similarly, PSI and EGPAF are coming together through HealthX Partners to answer calls from donors and communities for greater efficiency and new approaches in health services.

As Dr. Dorothy Balaba, PSI Ethiopia's Country Representative, says, *"Our partnership with EGPAF under HealthX Partners is a bold response to our sector's evolving needs—more impact, less overhead, and a stronger foundation for future growth."*

THE STRATEGIC GOALS OF HEALTHX PARTNERS

Through HXP, PSI and EGPAF aim to:

- **Enhance Impact:** Combining strengths will allow more effective health programs, using EGPAF's expertise in pediatric HIV alongside PSI's wider health services.
- **Expand Reach:** HXP will help serve more communities by broadening the geographical reach of both organizations.
- **Optimize Resources:** By sharing services like IT, finance, and HR, HXP will reduce costs and direct more funding to community health programs.

A PHASED TRANSITION FOR LONG-LASTING IMPACT

The first phase of HealthX Partners in 2025 will focus on aligning shared services to improve efficiency, starting with IT, finance, and human resources. Both organizations are committed to ensuring that these changes do not disrupt existing projects or donor commitments. Instead, this streamlined structure will make PSI and EGPAF stronger and better prepared to respond to health challenges around the world.

With HealthX Partners, PSI and EGPAF are taking a new approach that aims to expand access to essential health services and make a lasting impact. This bold partnership sets the stage for other like-minded organizations to join, creating a broader alliance dedicated to transforming health outcomes.

PSI and EGPAF envision a future where HealthX Partners not only enhance the efficiency of existing programs but also paves the way for innovations in global health—delivering life-saving services, empowering communities, and creating a healthier world.



*<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.H2O.BASW.RU.ZS?locations=ET>

6.

TRANSFORMING RURAL HEALTHCARE WITH DIGITAL INNOVATION

By Fana Abay, Marketing & Communication Director, PSI Ethiopia

Digital health tools are revolutionizing healthcare access globally, and Ethiopia is no exception. Inspired by innovations such as India's [Swasthya Slate*](https://innov.afro.who.int/emerging-technological-innovations/swasthya-slate-4012#:~:text=Swasthya%20Slate%20is%20a%20powerful,is%20available%20only%20in%20India) mHealth platform—which enables on-the-spot health diagnostics in remote areas—Ethiopia is adopting similar solutions to transform healthcare delivery in underserved regions. At the forefront of this transformation is PSI Ethiopia's Smart Start digital counseling module.

In rural Ethiopia, this digital transformation is taking shape with PSI Ethiopia's Smart Start digital counseling module. Developed with the MOH, the module has been integrated into eCHIS. It represents a big step forward in providing accurate, personalized, and engaging sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services to adolescent girls and young women in remote areas.

“The eCHIS platform offers an easy and effective way for me to provide counseling.

*Alange Chogire
Health Extension Worker
Dalibansa Healthpost,
South Ethiopia Region*



“I wish that this type of counseling and service provision had been available during my adolescence. It could have changed my life significantly.

*Beza Mekonnen
Health Extension Worker
Kuni 01 Health post,
Oromia Region*



BRINGING TECHNOLOGY TO RURAL HEALTHCARE

The Electronic Community Health Information System (eCHIS), led by Ethiopia's Ministry of Health (MOH), is central to this effort. By digitizing patient data, eCHIS enhances healthcare delivery, making it more efficient and responsive. PSI Ethiopia's Smart Start module, integrated into eCHIS, is a game-changer for reproductive health services. This tool enables Health Extension Workers (HEWs) to provide accurate, engaging, and personalized sexual and reproductive health (SRH) counseling to married adolescent girls and young women in rural areas.

EARLY SUCCESS: TURNING INNOVATION INTO IMPACT

During initial testing, the Smart Start digital module achieved remarkable results: a 78% contraceptive adoption rate, compared to 53% with the traditional paper-based module.

*<https://innov.afro.who.int/emerging-technological-innovations/swasthya-slate-4012#:~:text=Swasthya%20Slate%20is%20a%20powerful,is%20available%20only%20in%20India>



“All HEWs don’t counsel in the same manner—some may excel at explaining concepts unlike others. so, I believe the digital Smart Start counseling tools will ensure that HEWs can provide additional information they might have missed, enhancing the quality of counseling for all clients.

— **Workiye Solomon**
Sire Health Center Deputy Director
Arsi Zone, Oromia Region

This success underscores the module’s effectiveness in helping young women make informed health decisions. As one HEW shared, *“This new module makes it easier for us to connect with young women, and they’re more comfortable making family planning decisions.”* By bridging gaps in access and communication, the digital module empowers rural communities with tools that were once out of reach, demonstrating the transformative power of digital innovation.

SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH GOVERNMENT INTEGRATION

The true strength of the Smart Start module lies in its alignment with Ethiopia’s national health systems. PSI Ethiopia’s collaboration with the MOH ensures the module’s integration into government-led initiatives, fostering long-term sustainability. On November 2, 2024, intensive training sessions for HEWs were launched across pilot sites in Oromia, Sidama, and Southern Ethiopia. These sessions combined technical knowledge with hands-on practice, ensuring HEWs can seamlessly incorporate the module into their work. This strategic integration guarantees that adolescent girls in rural Ethiopia have consistent access to digital healthcare tools, empowering them to make educated decisions about their health and futures.



By bridging gaps in access and communication, the digital module empowers rural communities with tools that were once out of reach, demonstrating the transformative power of digital innovation.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

PSI Ethiopia envisions a future where digital health tools enable every young woman in rural Ethiopia to take control of her health. The integration of the Smart Start module highlights how technology can drive meaningful and sustainable improvements in healthcare access. By empowering HEWs and aligning with government systems, this initiative sets a new standard for equitable healthcare delivery.

However, challenges remain—limited infrastructure in remote areas and the need for extensive scale-up efforts are key priorities to fully unlock the program’s potential.

Digital health isn’t just about technology; it’s about transforming lives. As Ethiopia continues its journey toward universal health coverage, innovations like the Smart Start module will play a vital role in ensuring no one is left behind.



Smart Start - eCHIS Training for HEWs

TRANSFORMING HEALTH TOGETHER: HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING.

7.

MORE THAN HEALTH: CLEAN WATER UNLOCKS LIVELIHOODS.

By Rediate Wujra, Corporate Communications and Public Relations Manager, PSI Ethiopia

Across Ethiopia, nearly 43%* of the population lacks access to basic drinking water—a reality that stifles opportunities and traps communities in cycles of poverty. For generations, this struggle has defined daily life in Tehuledere, a rural district in the Amhara region, where health, economic stability, and quality of life have all been profoundly impacted.



Zubeda Ali

For Zubeda Ali, a widowed mother of two, the absence of clean water meant constant worry and restriction. After losing her husband in 2001 (1994 EC), Zubeda was left solely responsible for her children's future. With limited resources, she opened a modest coffee and breakfast shop in Tehuledere's town center—the only means she had to support her family and send her children to school. Every day, she was forced to rely on water from a single, contaminated well, built decades ago by Italian forces and now riddled with rust, debris, and insects. *"We saw insects and animals enter the well, but had no choice but to use it," she recalls. "I worried constantly about serving this water to my customers, but we had no other option."*

In 2016, Tehuledere was designated a conflict-affected area, making it eligible for USAID Transform Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (T/WASH) project, a collaboration by USAID, PSI, SNV, and local authorities. The project aimed to improve water infrastructure and reduce disease by providing clean and, reliable water access.

* <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.H2O.BASW.RU.ZS?locations=ET>



Small-scale Irrigation (SSI) project in South Wello Zone

The T/WASH project expanded the old well's capacity from 5 to 15 cubic meters, serving over 4,026 households across four villages and delivering clean water directly to homes and businesses. For Zubeda, this access to clean water changed everything. *"Now, I don't worry about contaminated water in the teacups I serve to my customers," she says. "Customers trust my business, and I've been able to expand and attract more people."* With clean water, her business has grown, providing her family with greater stability and security.

The project's impact extended beyond health improvements. During the construction, it created jobs, and, once completed, it helped reduce waterborne diseases and support local agriculture. Community leaders were trained in sustainable water use, ensuring long-term benefits.

According to Jemal Seid, Tehuledere's Water and Energy Office Manager, "The T/WASH project gives us water not only for drinking but for agricultural needs, even in dry seasons, supporting many local livelihoods."

For Zubeda, clean water has become much more than a health necessity—it's a foundation for growth. Today, her thriving coffee shop supports her family, providing stability and a brighter future. *"This is not just about water. It is about the chance to rebuild and grow,"* Zubeda explains. The T/WASH project has shown how access to clean water can unlock potential, fuel livelihoods, and transform communities.

For many in Tehuledere and across Ethiopia, clean water is more than a basic need—it's a catalyst for opportunity, resilience, and growth.



The T/WASH project's impact extended beyond health improvements. During the construction, it created jobs, and, once completed, it helped reduce waterborne diseases and support local agriculture. Community leaders were trained in sustainable water use, ensuring long-term benefits.



8.

FLOWING CHANGE: THE IMPACT OF IRRIGATION AND CLEAN WATER IN KALU WOREDA.

By Rediate Wujra, Corporate Communications and Public Relations Manager, PSI Ethiopia

In Kalu Woreda, South Wello Zone, Amhara Region, life has taken a transformative turn. For years, water scarcity and a lack of irrigation infrastructure hampered agricultural productivity and limited access to clean water. Today, thanks to an ambitious project, the fields are greener, harvests are fuller, and the future looks brighter.

Agriculture is critical to Ethiopia, contributing 46% of its GDP. Yet for communities like Kalu, where nearly every household depends on farming, water shortages have long stifled growth and opportunity. In 2021, the USAID Transform WASH (T/WASH) Activity was launched to address these challenges with a two-pronged approach: reliable irrigation for farmland and access to clean water for daily needs.

RECLAIMING THE LAND THROUGH IRRIGATION

For local farmers, the irrigation project has been nothing short of life changing. Carefully constructed canals now guide water to fields that were once dry and barren. With this reliable water supply, farmers can grow a wider variety of crops, improve their yields, and boost their incomes. *"Agriculture is the main source of income for most households here, and with the reliable water supply, we've seen productivity soar,"* shares Kassahun Alebachew Ahmed from the Kalu Woreda Agricultural Office.

The project, built with reinforced concrete construction (RCC) for durability, benefits over 162 households across two sections of the kebele, covering more than 91 hectares. Previously, farmers resorted to makeshift solutions like diverting water with plastic materials. Now, robust infrastructure ensures sustainable water distribution for generations to come.

“ *Agriculture is critical to Ethiopia, contributing 46% of its GDP.*



Zegura Nuru, Farmer



A NEW ERA OF CLEAN WATER

On the other side of Kalu Woreda, the Tekake village clean water initiative has brought similar transformation. Years of water scarcity following damage to the water system in 2021 left the community relying on contaminated lake water, increasing the risk of disease. With the installation of a new water pump, generator, and expanded pipeline system, clean water now flows directly to 783 households, while another 1,470 are served through central water points.

The results are evident: healthier families, thriving crops, and the peace of mind that comes with reliable access to life's most essential resource.

Building these systems was not without hurdles. Transporting materials over 100 kilometers to Woldiya for quality assurance was both costly and time-consuming. Seasonal rains posed additional delays, yet the community's determination and government support ensured the project's success. *Community members not only participated in construction but*

also played a vital role in educating others on water conservation practices.

A community committee now manages the operations of both the irrigation and clean water systems. Trained in water management, they are a crucial force in promoting sustainable use and protecting resources for future generations.

A MODEL OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The T/WASH Activity in Kalu Woreda stands as a testament to the power of partnership and community-driven change. With strong government support and active involvement from residents, this initiative has created lasting benefits for the community. It highlights how investments in infrastructure can foster resilience, improve livelihoods, and spark sustainable economic growth.

This is more than a story about irrigation and water supply. It's a story of renewed hope, a shared vision, and a future where opportunity flows as abundantly as the water now sustaining Kalu woreda's families and livelihoods.

TRANSFORMING HEALTH TOGETHER: INTEGRATED PROGRAM DESIGNS.

9.

POWER OF INFORMED CHOICES: HIRUT ABERA'S STORY OF CHANGE

By **Fana Abay**, Marketing and Communication Director, **Getahun Beyene**, Quality Assurance and Training Officer, & **Mesfin Tesfaye**, Quality Assurance and Training Manager, PSI Ethiopia

In the rural village of Ali Woyo Kebele, Ethiopia, Hirut Abera stands as a symbol of transformation. At just 20 years old, her journey from early marriage to becoming a community advocate for family planning is a powerful reminder of how informed choices can reshape lives and entire communities.

As the eldest of five children, Hirut's life was defined by responsibility from an early age. Like many girls in her village, she faced immense societal pressure to marry young, part of a longstanding tradition of early marriage that affects many rural Ethiopian communities. According to UNICEF, 40% of girls in Ethiopia are married before their 18th birthday, a practice that often limits their access to education and economic opportunities. Hirut's own future seemed uncertain when she married a local farmer, Gosaye Kefalew, at just 16 years old. By 17, she became a mother, and like many women in her community, the idea of family planning was foreign to her.

Her life took a pivotal turn when she met Fantu Tadesse, a local Health Extension Worker, who introduced her to the concept of family



planning. Fantu explained how spacing children could improve maternal and child health while empowering women to plan for their future. Initially hesitant, Hirut knew family planning was not widely discussed in her village. Cultural norms and a lack of education meant that married adolescent girls rarely considered contraceptives. But Fantu's patient guidance helped Hirut understand that family planning wasn't about rejecting tradition—it was about creating opportunities for a healthier and more stable future.



According to UNICEF, 40% of girls in Ethiopia are married before their 18th birthday, a practice that often limits their access to education and economic opportunities.

A LIFE-CHANGING DECISION

After learning more, Hirut decided to use Implanon, a long-acting contraceptive, marking a significant turning point in her life. With the ability to plan when to have her next child, she no longer felt weighed down by uncertainty. This decision gave Hirut and her husband, Gosaye, the chance to improve their financial situation. They saved money, built a home, and ensured their first child's needs were met without the constant strain of providing for a growing family.

This newfound stability allowed Hirut to focus on long-term goals, like sending her child to school. She began to dream again—something that had once seemed impossible. Family planning didn't just give her control over her body; it gave her the freedom to plan her future and imagine possibilities beyond daily survival.

What makes Hirut's story particularly powerful is how her decision to embrace family planning has had a

ripple effect in her community. Traditionally, discussions around reproductive health were often silenced in conservative rural areas like Ali Woyo Kebele. But Hirut's visible success began changing perceptions. As other young women saw her family prospering, they approached her with questions. Hirut, once a learner, became a community leader.

She encouraged these women to visit the health clinic and explore family planning options. Her story became living proof that by spacing children and focusing on family wellbeing, they too could lead healthier, more secure lives.

Hirut's advocacy grew beyond women. She began speaking to their husbands, breaking the stereotype that family planning is solely a "woman's issue." By involving men in the conversation, Hirut helped pave the way for broader acceptance of contraceptive use in her community.



Counseling Session



WDA introducing married adolescent girl to HEW

THE IMPACT OF FAMILY PLANNING ON COMMUNITIES

Hirut's transformation speaks to a larger truth about family planning in Ethiopia. Studies have shown that empowering women with reproductive health options can dramatically improve community wellbeing. In areas where family planning is accessible, maternal mortality decreases, child health improves, and women are more likely to pursue education or income-generating activities. However, cultural barriers and limited awareness remain significant obstacles. In rural Ethiopia, only about 25% of married women use modern contraceptives, according to the Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey, a statistic that underscores the ongoing need for education and advocacy in regions like Ali Woyo Kebele.

“*In areas where family planning is accessible, maternal mortality decreases, child health improves, and women are more likely to pursue education or income-generating activities.*”

CREATING CHANGE: HIRUT'S MESSAGE FOR THE FUTURE

Today, Hirut Abera is a role model in her village. Her decision to embrace family planning not only transformed her family's life but also inspired other women to rethink their options. Her message is simple yet powerful: *“Family planning gives you the power to plan your future and provide a better life for your children.”*

Hirut's journey highlights the transformative power of informed choices. Working alongside Health Extension Workers like Fantu, women across Ethiopia can gain the tools they need to take control of their reproductive health, leading to healthier families and stronger communities.

Her story calls for greater access to reproductive health services in rural Ethiopia, where tradition and limited awareness continue to hold many women back.

By supporting women like Hirut, we can overcome barriers, open new doors, and build healthier, more resilient communities—one informed choice at a time.

10. END THE EXCUSES: STOP JUSTIFYING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

By Yonatan Tamiru, Communication Specialist, PSI Ethiopia

"At first, I thought it was normal, something I should just accept as part of the job. But later, after testing positive for HIV, I felt deeply frustrated and even contemplated suicide," recounts Gari, a 30-year-old female sex worker from Addis Ababa, on her harrowing experience with workplace gender-based violence. Gari currently receives life-saving Anti-retroviral treatment at one of the PSI-led, USAID funded MULU Key Populations HIV program Drop-in-Centers (DICs).



Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive reality for countless women. It manifests in various forms throughout their daily lives, affecting their physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Many, like Gari, are left wondering if society even recognizes the violence they endure simply because they are women, and in sex work—and whether the community understands the many faces of GBV, including violence that occurs in workplaces. [Work-force related GBV](#),* though quite common, is often overlooked, and it disproportionately affects female sex workers. Globally, studies indicate that 41–65% of cis-gender female sex workers experience some form of violence during their lives,

which is significantly higher rates when compared to female counterparts in general population at 27.8% to 32.2%.

A cross-sectional study conducted across 11 major towns in Ethiopia reported; 17.5% of FSWs experienced physical violence in the past year, and 15.2% had been raped since beginning sex work ([BMJ Open](#)). Additionally, research in Mekelle City, Northern Ethiopia, found that 75.6% of commercial sex workers had experienced sexual violence. ([Reproductive Health](#))

Gari's story reveals the toll of gender-based violence on FSWs, majority of whom aren't willingly in sex work.

*https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-030-98711-4_140-1

*https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-030-98711-4_140-1

*<https://reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12978-015-0036-5>

After losing her father at 15, Gari married an older man hoping to help her struggling family. Abandoned by her husband after their divorce and left without any financial support, she moved to Addis Ababa to support her mother. However, the challenges of navigating life in the big city without a support network or stable income forced her to turn to sex work as her only viable option. After Gari entered sex work, she began having sexual encounters with multiple clients without proper protection, as she had little knowledge about available health services or where to access them.

First encounter with GBV: One night, Gari went with a client outside of her usual workplace and the client turned violent. He forced her into non-consensual sex, withheld payment, and physically assaulted her. She felt helpless and unsure of where to turn. Two days later, health outreach workers conducting HIV testing at her workplace neighborhood as part of the USAID MULU Key Population Activity, found her, and connected her to an FSW Drop-In Center (DIC) under the program for counseling. There, Gari tested positive for HIV, a diagnosis that shattered her. However, Gari recalls, the friendly services offered to her at the DIC in a stigma free, and non-discriminatory environment helped her find resilience in the face of adversity. “The past is behind me,” she says. “Now, I can support my mother through this sex work business. I urge others to seek help and report violence—it’s not something to accept as a way of life.”

In 2013, Population Services International (PSI) introduced the DIC model to cater for tailored HIV

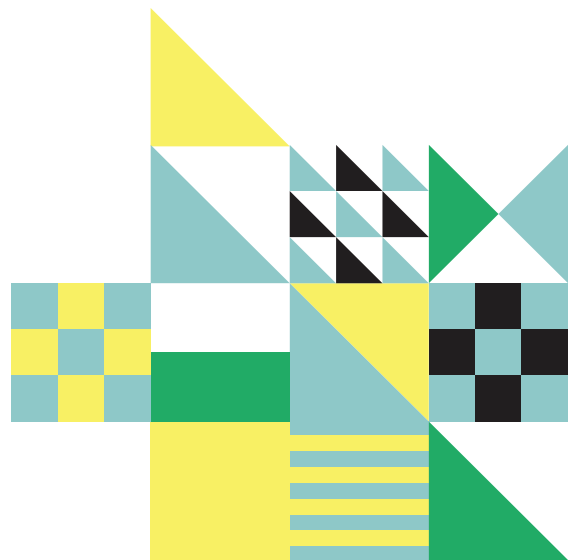


prevention services for Key populations. In 2016, these DICs started offering ART to clients they test within surrounding communities. These USAID MULU KP Activity’s Drop-In Centers, managed by local community-based organizations (CBOs) for sustainability of the response, have been critical to Ethiopia’s progress towards HIV epidemic control, and are also central to raising awareness about GBV among female sex workers. They also offer post-violence care and support services to GBV survivors and connect them to resources that can potentially empower them to speak-out and speak-up against GBV, along with other forms of economic sustenance.

As we come to the end of 16 days of activism against GBV, it’s important to remember that “None of us are truly safe from gender-based violence until all are safe.” Together, we must raise our voices, support survivors, and create communities that refuse to tolerate gender-based violence in any form. Ending this injustice requires us all.



USAID MULU KP Activity’s Drop-In Centers, managed by local community-based organizations (CBOs) for sustainability of the response, have been critical to Ethiopia’s progress towards HIV epidemic control, and are also central to raising awareness about GBV among female sex workers.





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