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“I prevented my daughter’s early marriage”

Gubal Jaro (35) has become a role model in her community. “After everything I’ve learned, I prevented my 15-year-old daughter from undergoing female genital mutilation and cancelled her wedding,” she recounts. “Now, I am advocating with other women in my community to do the same.” Together with other like-minded mothers, she is fighting for the eradication of FGM and informing her community about the harmful impacts of this practice on girls’ and women’s health. Quite successfully so: more and more families oppose FGM for their daughters.

For two years, Gubal has been participating in CARE’s RESET Plus project in Ethiopia, which works towards empowering women and girls and improving access to family planning services. Local village savings and loans associations’ (VSLA) meetings serve as a platform for discussing topics like savings, diversification of income, but also family planning, decision-making in the household, FGM or hygiene issues in relation to water and sanitation.

Little by little, Gubal has seen her community’s attitudes towards women change. Men started engaging in household activities, taking over chores traditionally performed by women, like collecting firewood or fetching water. Women’s voices are being heard, and their opinions taken into account in community or household decisions – family planning included. “There was this widespread belief that for three years after giving birth, women were not supposed to engage in sexual activities, because this would negatively affect the quality of the breast milk, and therefore the child,” remembers Gubal. “Now people know that there are different options of family planning that can be used while breastfeeding, with no negative implications for the baby whatsoever. And husbands support their wives in taking this decision.”

Apart from these societal changes, people in the region diversified their income by participating in VSLAs. Gubal Jaro and her husband started some agricultural activities on the side to increase their financial resilience. “I used the loans I took from my VSLA to invest and generate additional income. I was hesitant at first, I thought taking a loan might be too risky. Trainings helped the group to familiarize themselves with the concept, and they invested wisely. However, she says the skills she acquired in her VSLA group comprise so much more than how to achieve financial resilience. “Now that we share the household duties, I have time to take care of my other income generating activities”, says Gubal. “In community meetings, but also conversations with my husband, I am more confident sharing my thoughts and concerns and expressing my opinion. Our relationship has improved a lot! And women are respected and taken seriously in our community now!”

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