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## “My daughter won’t be a child bride”

“All of my five children go to school,” Kula Garbole (30) announces proudly. This includes her 6-year-old daughter Xume. In her home region in Ethiopia this is all but the norm. Kula herself was not allowed to go to school and receive an education. She was married at a very young age. “I am happy that the next generation does not have to go through what we have gone through by marrying during our childhood years,” she says.

The RESET Plus project implemented with CARE has contributed to this change in Kula’s community over the past years. The project contributes to empowering women and girls and improving access to family planning services. Local village savings and loans associations’ (VSLA) and Social Analysis and Action (SAA) meetings serve as a platform for discussing topics like savings, diversification of income, but also family planning, decision-making in the household, FGM or other harmful practices. The SAA is one of CARE’s approaches through which individuals and communities explore and challenge the social norms, beliefs and practices that shape their lives.

“I now believe that men and women are equal. My husband and I work together in handling the household chores,” says Kula. “Before, people used to think that women were supposed to take care of the household chores and men were responsible for the outside activities.” More and more men in her community started engaging in the household, taking over responsibilities traditionally held by women like caring for children, cooking for the family or collecting firewood. Kula also supports activities in her community to abandon harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriage, and advocates for reproductive health services and family planning. “Marriage proposals are cancelled, and FGM almost stopped in the community,” says Kula. “Boys and girls are sent to school equally, and the school dropout rates for girls have significantly declined.”

Participating in the local village savings and loans groups has also benefitted women like Kula considerably. Like most families in the region, Kula and her husband are pastoralists and engage in farming during the rainy season. “I didn’t know anything about saving, but over the past two years I realized that even if you start small, you can build something,” Kula explains. “During the drought season, we had the problem that our livestock was dying, and we had to sell livestock at the lowest price. Now, with our savings we are capable of buying medication and food for our animals.”

But her greatest success: “I no longer have to ask my husband for money,” says Kula with a smile.

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