



Able to Live and Grow

Income Generation Schemes Create Means for Disabled People

Right in the heart of downtown West Belesa, Central Gondar zone, between a cafe and a shop, sits Fenta's shop where her sewing machine is front and center. When she sits behind the machine, one can hardly tell that Fenta Tamirat was left disabled in her left leg at the age of ten due to an accident that happened while she was playing. At the age of 20 now, the disability affects her mobility and overall motor skills, but she has no problem using the machine to make dresses of all styles that she's hung up around the walls of her shop.

Fenta was provided with the sewing machine by **SWEEP**, a project implemented by CARE through the financial support from the Austrian Development Agency. SWEEP, as part of its intended result, in collaboration with local government bodies, aims to **empower marginalized groups** so they contribute productively in the household and in the community. Prior to receiving the machine, about four years ago in late 2016, Fenta was recruited by University of Gondar's Community Based Rehabilitation Program, or CBR, to receive vocational training based on her desire to become a couturier. CBR has been in implementation in the Central Gondar zone since 2005 to enable the integration and full participation of people with disabilities in their communities.

The training which spanned the course of about six months provided Fenta with the necessary **technical know-how** as well as soft-skills needed to keep her business afloat. Once the training was complete, however, Fenta had no idea how to put her new-found skills to good use since **purchasing the sewing machine** herself was well **outside of her budget**. Because of this, Fenta, though grateful for the training, returned to her previous life of on-again, off-again income generation schemes including freelance hand sewing jobs, basket weaving, and brewing tela to add to the income of her household which consisted of her 3-year-old daughter and her boyfriend, Amare Adane. "Doing these jobs was uncomfortable for me; not only did it put a strain on my body, but it also caused me great anxiety. The shortage in stable income in our household was a continuous source of stress," says Fenta, reminiscing, "On a good month, maybe I would make about ETB 400 (EUR 8) doing odd jobs here and there."

SWEEP came to know of Fenta through its continued **collaboration** with the local Social Affairs Bureau of the *woreda*. Since Fenta was already provided with the training, SWEEP equipped her with the machine and other supplies to get her business off the ground. Fenta did not waste any time, she got to work quickly and hung up her sewed dresses around her shop to attract customers just like she was taught to do in her training. At the end of 2020, six months into having her machine, Fenta is now making over ETB 800 (EUR 18) per month through her shop and she is expecting that number to rise as she acquires more and more customers. She has dubbed her machine 'Daboye' to mean 'my bread' because the machine has helped Fenta **fast-track to self-sufficiency**. She no longer expects handouts from her family, and can consistently

contribute to the income pool of her household. Fenta and her boyfriend are working towards financial security by putting aside a percentage of their income as **savings**.

"The community does not ostracize disabled people, but since my accident, just like every other disabled person, I was told to stay home. I was painfully shy; I did not know how to interact with others. I never thought I would have a stable job let alone a shop of my own." Her family is thrilled to see her as a productive member of society. SWEEP shares that sentiment; after supporting 2,686 people from marginalized groups through its course, the project embodies the need for inclusion and encouragement for those disabled in the community.

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Fenta's boyfriend, Amare, encourages Fenta to go even further. He tells her that in order to make her dreams come true, she cannot be complacent. Fenta has taken this solid advice to heart because she does have lofty dreams for herself. In the short-term, Fenta is focusing on becoming the best seamstress in Belesa by **learning new stitches and techniques**; but her heart is focused on her **long-term goals** which consist of **getting appropriate medical treatment to increase the capacity in her legs**. She is already thinking of ways to **diversify her income** and to this end, she has started to put materials together for a small coffee stand near her shop.

"I tell every disabled person I meet to start thinking bigger. We are told to stay home and to stay quiet, but why? We are people too and we can contribute to society. **No disabled person should underestimate their potential,**" Fenta adds, admitting there's still ways to go as a community in encouraging disabled people to live and work as fully as they can.