

## ***Together against early marriage***

The Nega SAA group is one of 10 SAA groups established in Wotenbe *kebele*, Fogera *woreda*. It has been conducting monthly discussions, facilitated by community members Moges Mulat and Shewaye Yeshanew.

One day, the SAA facilitators heard that “Haimanot Admas, a 14 years old girl, living in Kitkat village (Wotenbe *kebele*) is about to marry. The wedding arrangements have already



started, even though she is only 14 and still going to school. She is a grade 5 student”.

When the facilitators received this information, they decided to address the matter in the SAA group. The group discussed how to cancel the proposed marriage and save the girl. The SAA facilitators, together with some of the influential group members, then went to the girl’s village to discuss the matter with her family. The SAA team used their skills to clarify and reflect on the harmfulness of an early marriage and the group was able to convince her father, who stopped the preparations and promised to send her back to school.

## ***“BERHAN opened my eyes”***



Banchamlak Amsal Hailu is a 13 year old girl, who lives in Este *woreda*, Komets Abeja *kebele*. Banchamlak irkie loves her school life and envisioned being a doctor. Her father Amsal Hailu is one of the community leaders in the *kebele*. He strongly believes in early marriage. He has openly been saying, “girls should get married at an early age, otherwise they will not be called a woman when they are older”. His other children were

married before the age of 15 and he is proud of that. To continue this tradition and norm, he planned to marry his daughter, Banchamlak, to one of his friends' sons. Moreover, he wanted to force her to drop out of school, the thing she loved most.

We asked him how he changed his mind to cancel his daughter’s proposed marriage. He spoke honestly on how he got engaged with the BERHAN project and through the project, got the opportunity to learn about the harmful impacts of early marriage. “BERHAN started in our *kebele* by gathering the public to select members for SAA groups. The team setting up the SAA groups told us, the selection criteria also included persons with a disability. Therefore, I became a member of the SAA group as one of the people with a disability.”

He then told us what happened after he joined the SAA group. “After the SAA group was established, 30 of the members started to discuss many issues, especially on the impact

of early marriage and female genital cutting. At that time, I was preparing and arranging the wedding of my little daughter. One day, when we discussed early marriage, one of the members and a facilitator asked me about the wedding arrangements. At first, I refused to cancel the plan, but after some back and forth discussions with the other members, I learned that I was about to “kill” my daughter, and her vision to learn and grow. So I assuredly canceled the wedding and re-enrolled her in school. BERHAN has helped me to open my eyes and see the right and bright future of my daughter.

## ***Back to school***

Bosena Asmamaw is a 16-year-old girl, who lives in Komets Abeja *kebele* in Este *woreda*. She is a grade 6 student. Komets Abeja *kebele* has one of the highest rates of early marriages as the baseline and secondary data showed. Before BERHAN started to operate in Komets Abeja *kebele*, there was a high prevalence of early marriage, and the dropout rate of girls in school was high.



BERHAN started to operate in this *kebele* via engaging influential persons and norm holders, who have the power to influence and decide. Bosena’s father, Asmamew, told us that he was ready to arrange his daughter's marriage ceremony, while she was 16 years old. Fortunately, he is one of the SAA group members in their village. For this reason, he has been exposed to clarifying and discussing norms related to early marriage in their discussion sessions. These discussions helped him to think about the negative impact of early marriage on his daughter’s destiny. Consequently, he decided to cancel the proposed marriage and let his daughter re-enroll in school. Now that Bosena has started school again, she is doing great in grade 6, receiving high marks.

## ***“When I found out, I stopped at once”***

Lemlem Sinshaw, a Female Genital Cutting (FGC) practitioner who participates in the BERHAN SAA group in Komets Abeja *kebele* shared an interesting story with us.

Lemlem is a 36-year-old women, who lives in Komets Abeja *kebele*, in Este *woreda*. She is a member of the SAA group established in her nearest village. FGC practitioners had been invited to join the SAA group. That is how Lemlem Sinshaw got the opportunity to join the SAA group.



The SAA group has been discussing many topics from the provided manual, and among those was FGC. In the first two or three sessions, Lemlem was reluctant to stop practicing FGC. However, the specific session on FGC provided her with information that started to change her mind. Through further group discussions and reflections on the topic, Lemlem was able to grasp how FGC is harmful and the need to stop it immediately. Hence, she promised to stop and teach others to stop as well. Since then, she has formally started to work on outreach to teach other practitioners as well.