

## USAID Transform Primary Health Care Activity: Ensuring a Brighter Future for Girls through Early Marriage Prevention

Although early marriage among women in Ethiopia has declined over time, it remains high in rural areas. According to the Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey, the percentage of women marrying before age 18 declined from 63% in 2011 to 58% in 2016. However, there remains much work to be done to educate society about the consequences of early marriage.

Dinsis Fikad is a high-performing 17-year-old student in the sixth grade at the Arota Michael Kebele School in Amhara region. Without her knowledge, her parents arranged for her to be married. She later found out about the arrangement from a close neighbor. The neighbor disclosed that her parents arranged for her to marry a boy in the neighborhood. “When I heard about this, I talked to the school director. He reassured me that the agreement made between my parents and the boy’s parents would be canceled,” Dinsis recounts. The school director informed the district’s early marriage prevention committee about Dinsis’s situation.

USAID Transform: Primary Health Care supports early marriage prevention committees at the woreda (district) and kebele (ward) level; mobilizes communities to shift attitudes that perpetuate the practice of early marriage; and builds the skills of health workers to respond to gender-based violence. These committees meet twice a month and are comprised of health extension workers (HEWs), agricultural development agents, primary school directors, representatives from the Women and Youth Affairs Office, and the police.



Dinsis Fikad, 17 years old, 6<sup>th</sup> - grade student. Photo: USAID Transform Primary Health Care Activity

After learning about Dinsis’s story, a few members of the committee approached her father, Fikad Salilew, about ending the arranged marriage. After a series of discussions, the committee members advise Fikad not to proceed with the arranged marriage. Fikad finally agreed that Dinsis was not age-appropriate and needed to continue going to school. “When the school closed because of the [COVID-19 pandemic], her mother and I decided to arrange the marriage, but now I am convinced that she has to continue with her education and complete it,” said Fikad. Thanks to the early marriage prevention committee supported by USAID Transform: Primary Health Care, Dinsis can continue her education, with hopes of completing high school and attending university.