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## The burden of WASH-related NTDs on women in Ethiopia and what CARE Ethiopia is doing about it

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Thanks to: Abebaw Kebede, Gardachew Tiruneh, Emebet Achalef, Yakob Belay, and Stephanie Ogden

In Ethiopia, approximately 75 million people are at risk of infection with at least one of the Neglected Tropical Diseases<sup>1</sup>, most of them preventable with adequate access to water, sanitation, and hygiene. Women are particularly vulnerable to infection in Ethiopia, in great part as a result of gendered roles and responsibilities that expose them more consistently to transmission. NTDs affect women's health overall, leading to a range of problems from anemia (¼ of women aged 15-49 in Ethiopia are anemic)<sup>2</sup> to blindness and increased susceptibility to other diseases.

The NTDs:

- Affect women's fertility, pregnancy, labor, delivery, and neonatal health - a serious burden in a country where maternal death represent 25% of all deaths of women aged 15-49.<sup>3</sup>
- Are more prevalent among women. Women's roles as caregivers are directly related to their increased risk of trachoma infection and, ultimately, blindness. Trachoma disproportionately affects women, in part because women are exposed in the course of caring for infected children. In Ethiopia women have almost twice the risk of trichiasis (on average 1.8 times more)<sup>4</sup>.
- Increase women's risk of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and sexual dysfunction
- Cause exclusion and stigma, and affect women's economic health by limiting women's ability to work.

### Addressing the challenge

While women are disproportionately affected, they are also the key champions and change agents in altering WASH behaviors that are essential to reducing and controlling the NTDs. Increasing women's knowledge and practice of good hygiene and sanitation has been shown to impact the health of the entire household, and that of children especially. WASH behaviors, such as consumption of clean drinking water, constructing and building latrines, hand-washing, face washing, bathing, washing clothes and wearing shoes, are predominantly influenced by mothers and girls.

In Ethiopia, CARE is implementing the "Testing of Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Implementation Models for Neglected Tropical Disease Prevention (I-WASHNTD)" program in South

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<sup>1</sup> WHO PCT Databank, 2013

<sup>2</sup> Ethiopia, Demographic & Health Survey Key Indicators ,2016

<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> The Carter Center (2009) Women & Trachoma Achieving gender & Equity for the Implementation of SAFE



Gondar, Amhara, with support from Johnson and Johnson. The program was initiated in 2015 in order to increase government and community capacity for effective prevention and comprehensive control of NTDs, as well as influence sanitation and hygiene behaviors essential to NTD prevention, at scale. CARE and local governments together use multiple channels of communication to create awareness and change behaviors related to WASH and NTDs at the community level.

The I-WASHNTDs program aims to maximize the impact of existing government systems in prevention of NTDs, including health extension services and schools. In both settings, women and girls are key leaders. In CARE's four program woredas, Health Extension Workers and school clubs have been especially trained to highlight the links between hygiene and sanitation messages and NTDs.

Health Extension Workers provide training on NTD and WASH-related prevention in churches, schools, committees for expectant mothers, at health posts, and during house to house visits or face to face discussions with mothers. They personalize messages, demonstrate skills, and provide encouragement during home visits, support group meetings, and sessions at health centers. They also train Women's Development Armies – community structures of female volunteers in charge of cascading key health and



Emey Nega and Asrat Bikesew are mothers working as Health Extension workers in Farta woreda, Amhara Region Ethiopia. They are in charge of creating community behavioral change on 16 health packages/issues



Female sanitation club leader monitoring shoe-wearing status of school students at Amijaye school, Farta woreda.

development messages to their neighbors.

School sanitation clubs are composed of female student health ambassadors elected by their peers, who have responsibility for overseeing the hygiene and sanitation status of the school and its students, facilitating WASH and NTD promotion, and disseminating preventive messages via skits, poems, songs

and posters. They also reach out to the wider community, promoting WASH and NTD messages at parent meetings, mothers groups, and family days.

## Achievements

As a result of this work, the I-WASHNTDs project has achieved significant changes in behaviors related to WASH and NTD prevention.

- *83% of households (9,908 households) have constructed or improved a household latrine*
- *86% of school students are washing their hands and faces more than once a day, up from 13% from baseline*
- *77% of school students are using soap for hand and face washing, up from 27%*
- *Daily shoe wearing among school students has increased from an average of 53% to 98%.*
- *Within the wider community, shoe wearing while outside of home has increased from 30% to 60%.*



Students wearing shoes at Selam primary school, Andabet woreda.

More broadly, the I-WASHNTD programs has:

- Galvanized interest and commitment among regional and local governments for NTD prevention, and for WASH as a key element of that prevention.
- Strengthened the existing government structure and not created parallel structures
- Built local government capacity for WASH and NTD prevention, joint implementation and monitoring
- Helped woreda and zone government to formulate WASH and NTD Action Plans.
- Increased availability and enhanced messages for social behavior change materials: leaflets, posters, training manuals that include key hygiene messages, including messages related to shoe wearing, face washing and foot washing, for use by Health Extension Workers
- Encouraged the use of the Health Extension Program reporting format to monitor changes in WASH-NTD indicators
- Conducted cost studies demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of integrating WASH and NTD prevention

***Call to action: Women and girls should be at the center of planning and implementation for WASH and NTD prevention in Ethiopia***



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While women suffer disproportionate impact from NTDs Ethiopia, they also play an essential role as the change agents and champions in the fight to eliminate the NTDs in one of the world's most endemic countries. The above are essential elements of the change that will ensure that Ethiopia overcomes the NTDs, and women are driving them.