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PROJECT

SUCCESS STORY

SMALL STEPS TO BETTER HEALTH

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Practices Improve Health and Outlook of People Living with HIV



Photos: P. Mantey (AED)

Home-based care workers promote hand washing, among other hygiene practices, to improve the health of their HIV-positive clients.

When Bontu's family learned that she was HIV positive they no longer wanted her to live with them, so she left and began to live on her own. Now, five years later, this 60-year-old woman is healthy after being on antiretroviral therapy (ART) for more than a year and lives independently, earning income from rooms she rents out. She was able to turn her life around with help from the Alemtena Catholic Church HIV/AIDS Care and Support Project, located in the Oromia region of Ethiopia.

Bontu's home-based care worker, who was trained by the Alemtena Care and Support Project, taught her how to live healthier. "I learned good things," she said. "How to keep clean, how to keep my house clean, use clean eating utensils, and take my ART."

She also learned how to improve her health by adopting improved water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) practices, such as treating and properly storing her drinking water, using a latrine, and washing her hands with soap at critical times such as after using the latrine. With a loan of 2,000 birr (around \$150) from the project, Bontu had a small house built for herself and added some extra rooms to her compound to rent out. With this rental income she was able to pay someone to dig a pit for the latrine in her compound, which includes the washable latrine slab provided by the project.

The Alemtena Care and Support Project participated in research that the USAID Hygiene Improvement Project (HIP) conducted in Ethiopia in 2008 to identify small doable actions that people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) could adopt to improve their overall health. PLWHA are more susceptible to diseases related to poor hygiene so practicing good WASH behaviors is especially important to their health. Some Alemtena project staff participated in the training of trainers for WASH and HIV integration that HIP conducted in 2009, and these trainers have since trained 40 home-based care (HBC) workers. These HBC workers visit clients such as Bontu and follow up on their ART compliance and teach them how to take better care of themselves by improving their WASH practices—storing drinking water using the jerry can provided by the project and treating the water using Wuha Agar (a chlorine-based water treatment solution); using an improved latrine with concrete slabs provided by the project; and washing their



Clients such as Bontu learn how to use Wuha Agar to treat their drinking water.

hands with soap after using the latrine and at other critical times. Each HBC worker supports six to 12 clients who may be PLWHA or one of the orphans and vulnerable children the project works with. The HBC workers visit their assigned *kebeles* (neighborhoods) each week to hold coffee ceremonies with their clients and others in the community and reinforce the healthy practices they have been taught and provide reminders to patients on ART. The Alemtena Project receives support from CRS through PEPFAR, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

Emebet, who is Bontu's home-based care worker, has been working with Alemtena for over one and a half years. She supports 12 clients whom she visits each week. She travels as far as 70 km to visit some of her clients, two of whom are bedridden. "I hold a coffee ceremony in each village I visit," she said. "I eat with them and provide support. If they are sick I urge them to go to the clinic." Once a month she returns to the

Alemtena Church clinic and stocks up on supplies from the basic care package for her clients, including gloves, ART medicine, and Wuha Agar.

Bizunesh and her family, all HIV positive, live nearby Bontu and also receive support from the Alemtena Care and Support Project. They are making good progress toward adopting improved health practices and WASH behaviors they've learned from Emebet, who is also their HBC worker. While her husband and four-year-old son are both taking ART, Bizunesh does not yet need to take medicine and her viral levels are checked regularly. Her household learned how to store water properly in a jerry can and treat it with Wuha Agar, use a nearby communal latrine, and practice hand washing at critical times—after using the toilet and before eating and handling food. "Before learning the WASH practices we were sick more often," Bizunesh said, "but now we are almost never sick."



Home-based care workers Emebet (right) and Abeba (far left) have taught Bizunesh and her family small doable actions to improve their overall health.

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