

Nurture for a healthy future:

School and household support for improved adolescent nutrition

Aberu Muleta is an 8th grader at Halemariam Primary School in Woliso Woreda of the Oromia region, Ethiopia. An outstanding student who is also active in school club activities, she aspires to be a medical doctor which she says is “a profession that enables to me help people with their survival.” She adds, “Mathematics and Science are my favorite subjects and Physical Education is fun, too.”



Aberu (left) leading a mentor-mentee discussion at her school on improved adolescent nutrition practices

When [Alive & Thrive's](#) adolescent nutrition intervention was introduced to her school a year ago, Aberu was among the students who fast embraced the initiative and started to actively engage in club discussions, mini-media programming, and peer group discussions on improved adolescent nutrition practices.

“The adolescent nutrition activities in my school let me know many things about healthy feeding impacting my future. Before, I knew little about diversified diet and never thought of carrying healthy snacks to school. Even if I sometimes bought something to eat during the breaktime at school, I would go for sweets and oily pasty which I now understand are unhealthy for my growth and development,” explained Aberu.

Aberu leads one of the peer groups of six in her class, discussing ways to keep improving their dietary practices and ensuring family support in providing them with foods from at least the five groups cited in the adolescent nutrition passport, a learning tool A&T prepared and disseminated for target schools to guide students' nutrition awareness and practice. *“I love the passport. It guides us into how we can diversify our diet easily by consuming varieties that are available at home and affordable for our parents to buy from the local market. Our science teacher meets up with our peer discussion group and helps us reinforce messages we take home*

to discuss with our parents on how critical it is for them to support us to meet our nutrition needs so that we can grow to be healthy women and future mothers.”

Aberu considers herself lucky to have parents who have shown support “not long after I started to discuss my nutrition needs as an adolescent girl.” Tirunesh Kaba, Aberu’s mother, admits that she did not immediately understand her daughter’s new demands. “I first thought kids should not dictate what we should provide for them to eat. We let them eat what is at our disposal. Her continued talks with me on the importance of varying her food for her to grow healthy and strong enabled me to understand her needs. Then I and her father have been doing our best to make sure that she eats healthy breakfast and carries snacks to school, varying her foods as much as we can.”

Equally supportive, Muleta Dessie, Aberu’s father, was convinced that “She needs our full support. We sell some of our produce to buy her milk and other foods that we do not have at home. I also started to grow vegetables such as kale in our backyard. It is not as difficult as it initially looked to meet our daughter’s new demands. In fact, our younger kids including the boys are benefiting from all this.”