

## Empowering Female Students through Gender Office Development -Woreta ATVET in Ethiopia

### Challenges faced by female ATVET students

Female students at ATVET colleges in Ethiopia can face challenges with full participation in their

education, missing school from issues including lack of sanitary support and issue of intimidation, lack of safety when going to classes or the library. Financial constraints are also one of the major reasons why female students drop out of college.

For Behiwot, the Gender Focal Person at the Woreta ATVET college, one of the greatest challenges for young women is self-belief. They can believe that they are not equal to male students and can't succeed as well as male students in their careers, even though this is demonstrably not the case. They can also find it challenging to visualize others, especially self-employed career opportunities.

The COVID-19 Pandemic in Ethiopia has exacerbated this situation, especially for women. Research carried out by Dalhousie University during the pandemic showed that female students who returned to the family home faced an inability to continue education in the home, developed mental health issues, financial constraints, and had an increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence. This led to an additional need for student support and resources when they returned to college.

The staff have also completed many trainings in gender awareness, gender-sensitive teaching methodologies, counselling and life skill support

The gender office over the last five years has been empowering female students through financial grants, provision of educational and sanitary materials, leadership training, awareness-raising facilities and student mentoring programs

### ATTSVE Gender Office and Achievements

The Agricultural Transformation Through Stronger Vocational Education (ATTSVE) Project supported Woreta and other ATVET colleges in Ethiopia with these challenges by opening gender offices staffed with college instructors or staff who were trained to become Gender Focal People. The gender office over the last five years has been empowering female students through financial grants, provision of educational and sanitary materials, leadership training, awareness-raising facilities, and student mentoring programs. Instructors and staff have completed many trainings in gender awareness, gender-sensitive teaching methodologies, counselling, and life skill support. The gender office now provides counselling and advisory services to female students that build female students' confidence to openly speak about any type of challenges involving gender, report SGBV cases and receive support.

Female leadership positions have jumped from 25% to a wonderful 50% engagement



Woreta ATVET Gender awareness- Left: female students' Sports competition on March 8 Celebration, Right: Yellow movement towards Gender Equality

## Impact on students

Momina (F) and Alemu (M) are Level III Plant Science students in the second year of their studies, who have benefitted substantially from the Woreta gender office through awareness-raising, leadership training and financial support through grants.

Both have noticed a substantial improvement from two years ago regarding gender sensitivity on campus and credit ATTSVE for its success. Alemu is now seeing many male students respect female students these days because of the continuous awareness-raising programs about gender equality and leadership.

Momina says, "I observed improvement in awareness on gender equality among the students, club members, and male and female students being equally represented." She is overjoyed at the fact that female students are now exercising their rights to participate in club leadership positions and freely sharing their good as well as bad experiences with their peers. Female leadership positions have jumped from 25% to a wonderful 50% engagement. Female staff in leadership positions has also increased from 0% to 29% which is a very significant improvement. Momina suggests that if the ATVETs could increase the financial support provided to students until their graduation date, it would be highly encouraging as financial constraints are the major reasons why female students drop out of college.

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She said, "Female students should focus on their education and should always think about upgrading themselves to the next level of their careers. The knowledge I got from gender activities has helped me understand a lot about gender roles and the leadership capacity of females and in the future in my work, I will share this information with female farmers."



Left: Step up for gender equality slogan at Woreta ATVET. Right: Female-only computer lab at Woreta ATVET

## Impact of the gender office on the institution

Since its establishment, the office has increased awareness of gender and the need to empower women, among female and male students. As a result, female students' confidence in harassment case reporting and fight against gender-based violence has significantly increased, thereby increasing active participation in the learning process. The teaching and learning process for instructors is becoming increasingly gender-sensitive.

Behiwot, the appointed Gender Focal Person is extremely grateful for the work ATTSVE has done for the college. The ATTSVE project has supported the college in the provision of sanitary materials to students, financial support, better access to healthcare and provision of educational facilities.

Behiwot has participated in counselling and life skill trainings which have benefitted her by changing her perception of gender, "Previously I assumed gender was more a political tool, but now I understand that gender is so important. I am also inspired to change the life of the female students and encourage them to achieve more by participating in student leadership as well as in classes."

Financial support was provided for 1611 students (1409 Female and 202 Male). Sanitary as well as educational materials were provided to more than 1700 female students over six years.



*Gender Training for female students*

Financial support was provided for 2291 students (2089 Female and 202 Male). Sanitary, as well as educational materials, to more than 1400 female students over three years. The gender office also provided training for more than 800 female and male students with more than 2000 students attending awareness training over the course of the project.

#### **Looking to the future**

The college is raising money through income generation including photocopies, but Dean believes that for the college to sustain the gender office to the best ability after the ATTSVE project ends, an annual budget should be provided by the region, along with a full-time gender focal position.

“The structure to support these activities on our campus is already well established, and this will ensure the implementation of gender strategies and activities in the college for the future.”

An important next step in Alemu’s opinion is to expand its support outside the college community by providing awareness-raising on gender and gender-based violence in local areas and focusing on diversity by including disabled females and males as much as possible in all activities.

Momina and many other students feel indebted to the project and its work in championing gender sensitivity, ensuring that students receive respect, and do not feel threatened or receive bias or judgement because of their gender.

Gender Focal Persons have successfully created an environment which enables students to feel secure and encouraged to share their challenges and to ask for support.

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