

Emawayesh: You Share My Feelings

PEPFAR-funded Urban Garden Program provides a mother and her daughter the opportunity to go to school



Photo: Emawayesh in her garden

“The school garden allows both of us to go to school as well as to eat vegetables every month.”

- *Emawayesh*

“My oldest brother told me about the day they came to kill my mother. He said I was six months old, and my village was attacked by violent men. I have no memory of ever having a mother. My brother told me my father disappeared as well, but nobody knows how or where. When my mother was killed, my brother named me Emawayesh, which in Amharic means ‘you share my feelings’.

When I was six years old I was forced to marry an older man. In a way, my four brothers were relieved to see me go, thereby reducing the burden on my already shattered family.

Life as a six year old bride was never beautiful. I did not have the opportunity to go to school like other children my age. My husband forced me to work all day in the house and spending the night with him was a very painful experience.

When I was 12, I gave birth to Almaz, my beautiful daughter. It was a natural birth that lasted for several days. I never believed creating a new life could cause so much pain. I was going to give birth in my village when a group of foreign aid workers found me and took me to the clinic in Gonder, a city in Northern Ethiopia.

Shortly after returning to my village my husband left me because of my post-childbirth condition. My fragile body was rattled by the experience, I was no longer useful to him, and he left me for another woman, that is, another child. My only choice was to migrate to the city of Gonder with Almaz, where I lived on the street and begged for food to feed my infant daughter.

I worked as a daily laborer for over two years, keeping my child alive by the grace of God. When I could not find work, I resorted to begging. One day I was approached by a social worker from Wogen, an association that assists orphans and street children. In January 2011, the association enrolled me in the USAID Urban Gardens Program in an elementary school garden in Gonder.

Today I am 19 years old and in the 5th grade, and my 7 year old daughter is currently in the 1st grade. The school garden allows both of us to go to school as well as to eat vegetables every month. In my free time I wash clothes, sell *injera* (Ethiopian flatbread), and roast coffee beans to pay the monthly rent.

Every day I work alongside more than 100 children from the school, ranging in ages. We each have individual garden plots. In addition, as a group we raise and market vegetable seedlings to sell to other farmers, earning enough money to pay for clothing and school materials.

My dream is to be a doctor. I don’t want to see children suffer the misery and pain that I went through. I will not allow my daughter to marry until she is at least twenty years old.”