

The Teachers Making an Impact on Nutrition Education in Ethiopia

Basic teaching skills trainings are greatly valued by nutrition instructors.



Fekadu Reta, Human Nutrition Instructor, Hawassa University, SNNPR, Ethiopia

“Fekadu goes beyond transferring knowledge to us, he teaches us higher levels of thinking!”

– Bemnet Habtamu
Human Nutrition 3rd Year Student,
Hawassa University, SNNPR,
Ethiopia.



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Fekadu Reta lounges in the university cafeteria, a few blocks from his on-campus home, on a Friday afternoon and speaks fervently about his 12-year journey as a nutrition educator. His story is rich with experience and it's clear his students revere him as they interrupt him from time to time to ask for a piece of advice which he graciously offers. Yet, “Most of us are just ordinary people, you know,” Fekadu says candidly. “We’ve specialized in a given field but know little about the *skill* of teaching.”

Hawassa University, where Fekadu and his colleagues work, is among the more specialized centers for nutrition in Ethiopia, complete with its own Academic Center for Excellence in Nutrition launched with the support of USAID in 2015. Nonetheless, dedicated instructors like Fekadu struggled to engage their students and to shape their ways of learning.

“We used to transfer the curriculum directly to the students,” Fekadu states. “We had never heard of a course outline, or made a session plan.” He further explains exams were often disproportionately focused on a given topic, disorganized, and seldom assessed students’ competencies.

Growth through Nutrition Activity (2016-2021), USAID’s integrated nutrition project has made a number of developments at the university since 2016 by providing various trainings for nutrition instructors, revising curricula to enhance nutrition components, facilitating experience-sharing visits, holding nutrition fora for universities around the country, and providing internships for nutrition students.

Fekadu greatly appreciates the project’s support for instructors in general, but he raves about one training in particular: Gender Responsive Effective Teaching Skills. “It’s completely transformed the way I teach!” he exclaims. The training incorporates sessions on planning learning activities effectively, delivering interactive presentations, and using students’ test results to inform decisions about their mastery of the content.

Hailu Hailemariam, the Nutrition Department Coordinator at Hawassa University, echoes Fekadu’s sentiments in saying, “I used to walk into class and do all the talking. Now I have brainstorming sessions at the beginning of class and my lectures are enriched with case studies, illustrative diagrams, and interactive sessions.”

Nutrition students are showing a greater interest in their courses, better prepared for tests and quizzes, and more motivated to learn nutrition competencies. Bemnet Habtamu, a 3rd year nutrition student and Growth through Nutrition intern says, “Fekadu gives us detailed lectures. He revises previous lessons, and gives us continuous assessments. I’ve learned how to think critically in his classes.”

The Ministry of Science and Higher Education has since integrated contents of the training into higher diploma programs.

It’s difficult to imagine that influential, devoted instructors like Fekadu lacked such seemingly simple skills but this basic training is an immensely valuable asset for instructors who will continue to impact nutrition students for years to come.

Thanks to USAID’s support in building the capacity of instructors at major institutions like Hawassa University, Growth through Nutrition has provided Gender Responsive Effective Teaching Skill trainings for 834 instructors at 19 institutions. The project continues to support instructors through regular coaching visits and strives to inspire a competent generation of nutrition service providers, researchers, and innovators.