

## ‘Our life is no longer a battle for survival’ *How a woman turned her family’s life around*



Biruk Hamsalu stands in her farm in Horo Guduru Welega Zone Jardega Jarte Woreda

**Burke and her husband went from ‘surviving’ day to day to inspiring neighbors.**



Meskerem Tilihun (left) and Genet Tilihun (right), Bule Woreda, SNNPR, Ethiopia

***“I am collecting an average of 20 eggs per week for the past year and we have been consuming eggs at least three days a week.”***

– Burke Amsalu  
Mother of two in the Horo Guduru Welega Zone

Thirty-year old Burke Amsalu lives in Horo Guduru Welega Zone, Jardega Jarte Woreda Sago Kebele. She and husband Temesgen Gerba have four children, with two under two years of age. Before their participation in the Growth through Nutrition Activity, they had only a small plot in their backyard and no livestock except two local breed chickens.

“Our life was a battle for survival,” shares Burke. “I was making and selling local alcohol while both of us worked as a daily laborer - harvesting and plowing on others’ farms for a daily wage. The earnings from the daily wage were not enough to cover the cost of our family food and most of the time we eat one to two times per day. Due to a lack of adequate food, hygiene and sanitation problems - we were visiting clinics frequently.” With so little money to spare, they were unable to buy seeds to plant in their small plot, except for maize which is common in the area.

Burke’s family was one of the thousands of households targeted by the Growth through Nutrition Activity in year two of the project. She was pregnant when she was selected in September 2017, and was trained in home gardening, animal husbandry, and saving.

“The project has solved lack of access to vegetable seeds,” according to Burke. “We received carrot, Swiss chard, kale, cabbage, haricot bean, and Irish potato. In addition, we have got a spade, watering can, and flat hoe.” Temesgen Gerba, Burke’s husband, explains that “in September 2018, the project has provided us three female sheep of our choosing, two of which were pregnant. Also, we received six chickens (five pullets and one cockerel).”

“I had never planted vegetables such as carrot, cabbage, Swiss chard, and Irish potato,” says Burke. “After being selected by the project I have planted vegetables for consecutive two years. My children have been consuming carrot, Swiss chard, cabbage and Irish potato for the past two months and I have stored potatoes which will suffice for more than two months.” Indeed, they have preserved haricot bean seeds and Irish potato tubers for the coming season.

Burke’s six chickens are in good condition and live in a coop constructed separately from the sheep shed. “I am collecting an average of 20 eggs per week for the past year and we have been consuming eggs at least three days a week.”

Burke has been attending her savings group’s Enhanced Community Conversation (ECC) sessions and graduated on September 24, 2019. “Now, I am Haadha Biqiltuu (the mother of Sprout - a child aged 0-6 months) and am breastfeeding my child,” she proudly states. I am preparing complementary food for my child which will be started after a month.” She has also taken iron folate supplements for three months.

Burke has Social and Behavior Change Communication materials posted in her house and has been practicing what she learned in the past 10 sessions. Since she started participating in ECC sessions, she has been practicing exclusive breastfeeding and joint decision-making with her husband. The household is investing the income they have



Biruk Hamsalu Stands in her farm in Horo Guduru Welega Zone Jardega Jarre Woreda

***“This is my life responsibility, to support my family.”***

– Burke’s husband Temesgen is proud to support his wife’s efforts by taking on work around the home.

earned primarily in nutrition. Because Burke has shared what she’s learned, her husband has been supporting her in childcare, house cleaning, fetching water and fire-wood collection.

Temesgen’s brother and neighbor has taken note of this new development, saying, “as a result of livelihood support integrated with ECC sessions their situation is completely changed; the neighbors are asking for explanation about the posted SBCC posters and she has been trying her best to explain.” Since they started vegetable and egg production and consumption, Burke says, “our kids are healthier, and we didn’t pay a cent for health-related problems.”

The household’s herd size has grown to 15 sheep. Three months ago, Burke says, “we have sold six sheep and currently have nine. In the coming month we are planning to sell some of the Rams to buy a heifer. From these exchanges as well as the sale of surplus carrot production, I have bought three quintals of maize, oil, salt, butter, improved seed of maize and a quintal of fertilizer using the income we have earned.”

Her husband adds, “for us, this was a luxury realized as a result of support from the project.”

Now they are selling fertile eggs to their neighbors and the local market. “I am using some amount of the income from the sale of eggs for saving at household level and Iqub (a traditional savings group),” says Burke. “Currently I’m paying Iqub, which is 20.00 birr per week.” Burke is a member of her village’s saving and lending group and has so far saved 250 birr; the savings group also has started credit services for its members.

Burke also learned about couple’s communication during the ECC sessions and she discussed the concept of *Donkey and Lion* and *Honey and Water*<sup>1</sup> with her husband. Of their relationship, Burke says that, “after discussion we have agreed to be Honey and Water. He collects firewood, fetches water, cleans the house, washes our cloth.”

Neighbors have also taken notice how supportive Temesgen is of his wife. Due to socially constructed gender roles, men are not expected to undertake activities such as childcare, fetching water, house cleaning, and firewood collection. Because Temesgen started supporting his wife with these perceived ‘female tasks,’ a few of his neighbors laugh when he helps her. But Temesgen’s response is, “this is my life responsibility, to support my family.”

---

<sup>1</sup> **Lion and Donkey:** An approach in which ECC session attendants learn the behavior of individuals (for instance, husband and wife). The lion represents an aggressive and bossy character (men), where men are dominant, and the donkey represents a character which is submissive and servant-like without questioning.

**Honey and Water:** This approach initiates dialogue between husband and wife about joint decision-making and equitable intrahousehold allocation of food, division of labor (in-house and farm chores), and family income and ways to use it to improve the household’s nutrition and the most nutritionally vulnerable.