

Starting Everywhere at Once

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USAID's Yekokeb Berhan Program for Highly Vulnerable Children in Ethiopia didn't have the luxury of starting out small and slowly getting bigger. From the first year of this 5-year program that serves more than 500,000 children annually, over twenty thousand volunteers had to be selected, trained and supervised at the community level.



Volunteer Meseret, visiting a beneficiary household

Photo credit: WLP Film Production and Advertising PLC

The volunteers, mostly women, were selected by local Community Committees and screened by their local NGO affiliate, a sub-grantee of Pact/Yekokeb Berhan. Currently, these Community Committees and NGOs share the role of supervising the volunteers, who are paid a monthly transport stipend. Each volunteer must complete a standard 3-day package of training before deployment, which is followed by weekly learning sessions on different topics.

Detailed **Volunteer Management Guidelines** explain how volunteers should be organized into small groups with individual buddies – the latter in case one volunteer cannot attend to her duties for a while, or is low-literate and needs help filling out forms. Volunteers must pledge to uphold the program's child protection guidelines and serve 25 children plus their caregivers (usually clustered in 15-20 households) over at least a two-year period.

In addition to conducting an annualized assessment and care-plan and visiting weekly with their assigned households to share knowledge and provide support, every volunteer meets weekly with her group and NGO staff-liaison. Typically, meetings are divided into two parts – (A) Sharing and Administration (where volunteers share their experiences, complete their monthly data forms, and can ask for help), and (B) Training.

Except for the initial 3-days' intensive training each year, all training is divided into modular sessions of about two hours in length. This is cheap to implement and easy for volunteers to put into practice: after each session they have a week to try out what they have learned before the next session begins. Training modules reflect the Ethiopian Government's Standard Service Delivery Guidelines in accordance with the draft Level One training for Community Service Workers by the Ministry of Education.

Like cookbooks, Yekokeb Berhan's training manuals spell out all learning activities, timelines and key messages in great detail, thus standardizing both the content and delivery across the country -- albeit in different local languages. Training packages consist of:

- **Child Support Index and Care Planning** (3 day Program Introduction)
- **Volunteer Basic Training** (16 sessions)
- **Better Parenting** (5 sessions)
- **How to Care for a Child with a Disability** (4 sessions)
- **Life Skills** (4 -5 sessions)

Training is repeated annually, thus serving as a refresher for long-time volunteers and as first-time learning for new recruits. Sessions may be further interspersed by guest speakers from the local health clinic (for example on issues of HIV testing, hygiene and sanitation), or from the program itself (for example on PermaGardening, Early Childhood Development or Economic Strengthening).

In this way, the learning is never-ending. Most volunteers say that they love the training and some have already used it as a career ladder to formal employment in the NGO sector or community at large.

For more information, contact Sradeny@pactworld.org or see:

<http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/frontlines/extreme-poverty/investments-not-charity-provide-hope-ethiopias-most-vulnerable-children>