



## “A New Zest for Life”

**W**orkinesh Birago, a mother of five children lives in Adolla, approximately 500 Kilometres south of Addis Ababa. She scrapes together a living by selling Injera (traditional Ethiopian bread) and charcoal. Due to poverty, only her younger children still live with her; the two eldest left school some years ago and are on their own

Workinesh used to live in a hut that was in a bad condition and was almost falling down. “During the rainy season, insects were dropping from the roof into our food or when we slept. I used to put plastic covers to protect my children from the vermin and the rain that was coming inside the house”, she said.



*Photo: Workinesh making coffee in her house*

Chekole, a trained social service volunteer from Oromia Development Association (a local implementing partner of Yekokeb Berhan Program for Highly Vulnerable Children) explained how she first found Workinesh, “About a year and a half ago, when I was out at night, I saw a faint light inside the hut. I thought that a thief has entered, so I got near. The hut was in a very bad shape and completely flooded with water. I saw Workinesh put plastic covers on her children and she was standing inside carrying an umbrella. It was a heart breaking for me to see children sleeping under such terrible conditions. I immediately spoke with staff at the Oromia Development Association (ODA) to let them know about her situation”.

Right away ODA’s Chekole conducted an assessment and then enrolled Workinesh’s children in Yekokeb Berhan. Initial support came in the form of 14 iron sheets and 4 kilograms of nails to rebuild the house. Chekole mobilised the community to contribute labor and local supplies (see the picture below). The rebuilding of the house improved not only the physical condition of the family, but also the children’s self-esteem and psycho-social wellbeing.



*Photo: Ashenafi, Workinesh’s son*

Within one year after the house was renovated, Ashenafi Tesfaye’s, Workinesh’s son, school rank also improved from 25th in the class to 5th.

“My story doesn’t end here”, said Workinesh, “Some 8 months back, I got really sick. Though I knew for the past five years that I was HIV positive, I had been in denial. It was due to the same reason that I left my place of origin, Welayita Sodo. My husband died 11 years back from the same disease and when I knew that I was positive; I took my children and ran away. I was afraid of discrimination. In the place where I used to live, people had negative attitude towards HIV positive people.”





She continued, “I had thought I was going to die and hoped for the government to take and raise my children. When Chekole came to visit me, he was shocked by the sudden change in my situation. I was unable to get out of bed. He communicated with ODA and informed them that I am critically ill. ODA advised me to go to hospital but I could not go because I was too sick even to stand. So neighbours carried me and took me to a hospital.”



*Photo: Workinesh's renovated house*

Workinesh was treated and put on anti-retroviral therapy (ART). She says the best part is that her children never had to suffer. ODA continued supporting them with uniforms, school materials and enrolled them in school for free. Workinesh was also provided with supplementary food because she is taking ART. And now, she said, she is feeling stronger than ever.

Workinesh said that Yekokeb Berhan changed her thinking about the future. She said, she expresses this hope by saving money. She started saving 20 birr per week. She hopes to take a loan from her group and buy a cow in the future for profit.

Workinesh concludes, “I believe that God sent me Chekole from Yekokeb Berhan and this saved my life. Today, my spirit is revived and I don't feel ashamed. I know that I am not going to die and in fact I am in a pretty good health. I am stronger, more confident and have a new zest for life.”