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ETHIOPIA

SUCCESS STORY

Taking Control of the Future

A woman gains confidence and independence through her small business



Photo: Pathfinder-Ethiopia

Tenaye Mekonnen is a now confident owner of a successful small-scale business.

“Women have the capacity to help and contribute to family wellbeing, as long as they are encouraged to do so,” said the husband of Tenaye Mekonnen, who used training and a small loan to transform her family’s life.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

A typical day for Tenaye Mekonnen used to be spent working at a glass factory, where she carried heavy loads of glass and earned no more than 50 cents a day. She would return home late in the evening, pick up her daughters from her neighbor’s house and start preparing dinner for her husband. When

Tenaye’s husband was injured in an accident at work, she knew she needed to find a better alternative. She decided to take out loans from local merchants to commercially prepare and sell Ethiopian bread known as *injera*, but prospects for her business to grow were slim.

Then Tenaye was selected to participate in a small-scale business training and support program funded in part by USAID. After attending training on business management, which also included a reproductive health and family planning awareness and skills workshop, she received a \$231 loan to begin her business again. Now the business is thriving. “My niece used to work as a maid in people’s houses, but now she stays with us and I pay her \$6 every month.”

With increased income, Tenaye purchased 30 chickens for her husband, Minyichil, and advises him on how to run a solid poultry business. “I would like to tell all husbands that they need to openly communicate with their spouses and involve them in making all decisions,” says Minyichil.

Tenaye’s life has improved dramatically. The chicken coop is full, and she has added an extra kitchen for baking the bread, a telephone line, and water pipe to her home. She also finds free time to visit her neighbors and share the life skills she learned through her training about family planning and good reproductive health practices. She explains to them how important limiting family size is to attaining a better living standard both for women and their families. Tenaye wants to teach her daughters all that she has learned so that they too can live better lives.

“I may be uneducated but I think I have a lot to contribute,” says Tenaye. “Both of my children can do very well with their education and with encouragement from us.”