Building Skills for Life
An E-FACE Case Study
About MEDA

Since 1953, MEDA has been designing and implementing market-driven economic development programs that improve the welfare of millions of people around the world. As a leader in financial services and market development, MEDA collaboratively creates business solutions to poverty by working in partnership with the poor and the institutions that serve them.

About E-FACE

Ethiopians Fighting Against Child Exploitation (E-FACE) is a four-year project, funded by the United States Department of Labor, and implemented in collaboration with World Vision, MEDA, and the Mission for Community Development Program (MCDP). Within this project MEDA works to improve the livelihoods of 7,000 vulnerable families and 3,250 youth. Components of this project targeting youth include: provision of training programs and business incentives to business owners and their youth employees to improve working conditions and safety for youth engaged in the traditional textile industry; facilitating access to finance through village savings associations for youth; linking youth interested in alternative livelihood creation with appropriate formal and non-formal education programming and financial services; training and engaging rural youth in income generating activities; and training vulnerable urban youth in life skills, entrepreneurship training and financial literacy.

Abstract

This report is one in a series focused on MEDA’s E-FACE project developed towards the end of the project to assess the impact of MEDA’s youth-oriented interventions and learn from and strengthen them for future interventions. This report explores the results from the project’s Building Skills for Life (BS4L) program for young girls and boys engaged in the traditional textile industry in Addis Ababa. The other case studies include:

- Youth Savings: Assessing Village Savings Associations for Youth in the E-FACE Project
- Improving Occupational Health and Safety for Young Workers
- Youth Agricultural Sales Agents

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Introduction

An estimated 18 million Ethiopian children aged 5-17 engage in some form of work—almost a fourth of the population.\(^1\)

Although the country's policies and legislation protect children from exploitative labor and support their education, the incidence of child labor still remains very high in the informal sectors, making it difficult to enforce safe and reasonable labor practices.

Ethiopians Fighting Against Child Exploitation (E-FACE) is a four-year project, funded by the United States Department of Labor, and implemented in collaboration with World Vision, MEDA, and the Mission for Community Development Program (MCDP). Within this project MEDA works to improve the livelihoods of 7,000 vulnerable families and 3,250 youth. MEDA’s work is focused on reducing exploitative labor and increasing incomes for families and young people primarily engaged in agriculture and the textile sector by linking small-scale artisans and weavers to markets, enhancing their production techniques and linking them to appropriate technologies, improved input supplies and financing.

The E-FACE project has distinct components targeting different sets of youth, depending on their geography or life circumstance. Working through local partners, and ensuring youth savings for all, MEDA implemented the following youth-focused interventions:

1. Keep Safe and Occupational Health and Safety for young weavers and their employers, focused primarily on youth working for their families in urban environments;
2. Building Skills for Life (BS4L) Training, focused on both youth in rural agriculture communities and trafficked working youth in urban communities;
3. Youth Agriculture Sales Agents, focused on youth in rural agriculture communities;
4. Village Savings Associations for Youth (VSAY), which focused on youth benefiting from all E-FACE youth interventions.

![Diagram 1: Overview of all E-FACE youth-focused interventions](image)
BS4L is an integrated training and asset-building program offered to young boys and girls, aged 14 to 17. The program includes learning on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and life skills, as well as practical skills development, such as improved weaving techniques. Upon completion of the BS4L program, the project facilitates access to finance for youth clients by grouping them into Village Savings Associations for Youth (VSAYs).

Curricula and training materials for the BS4L Program were partly informed by MEDA’s “100 Hours to Success” methodology, which was used in MEDA’s YouthInvest project in Morocco and Egypt. The “100 Hours to Success” subject areas were chosen after extensive research with youth and employers, as well as MEDA’s experience from previous projects. Financial education, life skills, business and entrepreneurship skills were identified as the most significant gaps, and those most important for young people’s future success. Employers found that most young people they hired lacked ‘life skills’ – including time management, communication skills and appropriate workplace behavior – and stated that young people who had been trained in these areas had a much easier time transitioning into the workplace. Financial literacy and the knowledge and behaviour associated with such, including increased savings behavior and improved budget management, equip young people with the ability and confidence for long-term planning and increased engagement in the larger economy. Business and entrepreneurship skills were found to be valuable whether a young person ultimately becomes an employee or an entrepreneur.

The purpose of this case study is to share information with donors and development practitioners on how MEDA delivered a capacity building program to affect positive changes in youth’s lives and their abilities to generate an income.
Methodology

The BS4L training was delivered to different youth populations in two regions of Ethiopia: Addis Ababa and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region (SNNPR). This case study however, only captures changes as perceived by youth who participated in the program in Addis Ababa. Information was collected and analyzed through document reviews and field visits. A desk review of existing data, including field staff monitoring reports and client testimonies was undertaken. A field trip to collect primary data was conducted in February 2015. Information was collected through participant observation, interviews, and focus group discussions with youth clients and project staff.

Two focus group discussions were held: one with 12 youth (one girl and 11 boys) who are working in a government workspace; and one with 14 youth (all boys) who are waiting to gain access to a government workspace. Both groups have gone through BS4L training. In addition, questionnaires were administered to six youth (one girl and five boys) working in a government workspace. Two individual interviews were conducted: one with a young man who is waiting to access a government workspace, and another with a young woman who is already working in a government workspace. Interviews and focus group discussions took place at a government centre in Addis Ababa in which the young entrepreneurs have workspaces.

This report is not meant to be a quantitative study or an evaluation. The findings and observations in this report are based on changes as perceived and experienced by project participants. This case study thus relies on respondents’ perceptions of change over the course of their participation in project activities.

It should be noted that low levels of literacy among most clients may have limited the depth of questioning and discussion, and that translation from English to Amharic, and vice versa, may have also impacted the nature and depth of questioning possible.

A list of interview questions and the questionnaire can be found in Annex I and II.
Building Skills for Life

Description and background

BS4L is an integrated training and asset-building program offered to young working boys and girls, aged 14 to 17, in two different areas: in Addis Ababa, the program focussed on youth working in the traditional textile industry; whereas in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region (SNNPR), the focus was on youth in the agriculture sector. This case study only looks at the program as it was implemented in Addis Ababa, where it focussed on youth who have been trafficked into the city and are working for employers other than family members.

The program was designed to address the specific needs and circumstances of working youth who were either independently fending for themselves or working under employers not willing to cooperate with the E-FACE project’s other interventions, such as improving occupational health and safety conditions for working youth. A sample of representative youth were assessed to ensure that the program’s design and training content was tailored to their specific needs.

BS4L is thus designed to empower youth and to help them create further opportunities for themselves in the future. The entire program totals 72 hours of training: two-thirds (48 hours) is dedicated to business and life skills training, while the remaining one-third (24 hours) focuses on technical training in traditional weaving.

1. Life skills training includes improving self-awareness, goal setting, and communication skills.

2. Business skills, financial literacy and savings training includes managing money and setting saving goals, budgeting and borrowing wisely.

3. Practical training on traditional weaving includes skills acquisition and product design, as well as access to government workspaces for interested youth and improved weaving tools.
The program encourages young people to better understand themselves, to develop decision-making capacities, improve their communication skills, and to develop effective business skills. Together, these skills and abilities increase the young person’s opportunities for a more equitable and prosperous future.

When selecting youth participants, the project team tried to ensure equal opportunity for both girls and boys, and included the following criteria:

- Aged 14 to 17 years
- Must be a weaver
- Has no access to regular education, or is at risk of dropping out due to a vulnerable economic position
- Must be working as an employee to someone with no blood relation, which usually means they have been trafficked
- Not receiving support from another NGO or government program
- Working for more than seven hours a day

The last step of BS4L involved facilitating access to government workspaces. This step was possible due to a special arrangement between the local government in Addis Ababa and the E-FACE project. The project was able to facilitate access to government workspaces through working with government officials, including the provision of names of youth who had completed the BS4L program. This ensured that the local government processed the registration of the youth and their businesses, after which they were eligible for a government workspace.

Diagram 2: Integrated training for youth in the traditional textiles sector
Achievement by Numbers

E-FACE planned to target 200 youth for the BS4L program in Addis Ababa, however the project managed to train more than its original target. As of March 2015:

212 youth have graduated from the program in Addis Ababa

144 youth have been organized into VSAYs to engage in savings, financial management, and effective communication

100 trained youth have received hybrid looms

Despite trying to ensure equal opportunity for both girls and boys, more boys benefitted from the BS4L program and subsequent access to looms and government workspaces. This was due to a combination of factors. Due to the project’s limited resources for the BS4L program, priority was given to youth who were good weavers and had the potential to become entrepreneurs. This priority setting landed in favour of more boys benefiting from the program, because weaving is more common among men than women in the traditional textile industry. Weaving is typically considered a man’s occupation, whereas the women and girls usually work on the winding and spinning activities, providing inputs for weavers.

The program was able to train a larger number of girls (70 girls or 33% of total trainees), but it was not able to provide as many with hybrid looms (six girls or 3% of total trainees) largely because priority was given to the best weavers – most of whom were boys.

The numbers on their own do not convey the complete picture of the changes that have occurred in the lives of these young people. The sections below therefore discuss some of the changes from the perspective of the youth participants interviewed for this case study.
Changes Experienced by Youth

All the youth who participated in the BS4L program in Addis are young employees who were working for an employer who was not a blood relation. This means that these youth were most likely trafficked into the city and living far from their families. These youth were identified by the government’s Child Protection Committees (CPC), who worked with project staff to ensure that only youth fitting the project’s criteria were targeted for training. Most, if not all, were approached to register in the program by CPC members or by woreda-level (district-level) government officers. During interviews and discussions with the youth, it was clear that many saw the BS4L program as a ‘way out’, an opportunity to get out of a bad living and working situation. It was clear to the researcher that the motivations of the youth who participated in the BS4L program versus the other E-FACE interventions (such as the Keep Safe program) were different because these youth were largely trafficked and all living in very poor and exploitative conditions.

“I have hope now. I feel I can plan for a future. That it is possible. Before I didn’t think I could do anything to improve my situation”

Youth

1. Access to workspaces and improved working conditions

Perhaps the most evident and substantial changes have been in the physical workplaces for the youth who are now working in government workspaces. This access, which was facilitated by the project, has resulted in a number of improvements in working conditions. Those most clearly apparent included:

- Better air quality due to concrete structure, cleanliness of spaces, and large windows that could be opened or closed;
- Improved lighting from both natural light (due to windows) and ceiling lights;
- Improved posture and hand/foot care due to metal hybrid looms that allow youth to sit upright and use foot pedals. Youth no longer have to work on traditional weaving looms that could have leather straps twisted around their foot and toes, which resulted in deformation over the long term. Traditional looms also required sitting with their feet in a dug-out hole all day long, which resulted in them suffering from skin irritations and infections (attacks by worms like mujale/jiggers) and chronic back pain from having their backs bent in an awkward position.

“I want to work for myself and break away from my employer. I never thought I could do it but I believe I can do that now”

Youth
The youth also cited an improved overall environment due to shared spaces with other young weavers/entrepreneurs and a sense of comradeship and understanding with one another. Indeed, this aspect was very apparent during the field visit. The youth seemed happy. They were truly interacting with one another – joking and supporting one another – while sharing weaving techniques and ideas on product design. It was a working environment that was bright, clean, cheerful and supportive.

There was only one girl working in the workspace and she seemed at ease among her fellow male weavers. She confirmed that she feels very safe in the workplace – safer than when she was working for her sister’s husband in his home.

Since the field visit was limited to government workspaces, it is unknown if such changes occurred in the working conditions for BS4L clients who are not yet working in government workspaces, such as private homes or rented spaces.

Of the youth who are not working in a government workspace, there are some who are either waiting to access government workspaces or some who are still working for their employer. For the youth who are still working under employers, the transition to independent living outside of an employer’s protection or resources has been more challenging. The BS4L program does not provide additional support or resources to the youth, such as housing allowances or schemes to cover the cost of residential and food items – support that could boost these youth to make that final break from their employers. Hence, there are some youth who are still working under an employer because they are not yet ready to live and work independently.
2. Improved business skills and increased incomes

Improved productivity and access to markets for their weaving products was facilitated by the project through training on improved weaving techniques, designs, and linkages to market segments (including local designers and wholesalers). Access to finance and basic financial literacy through VSAYs has also contributed to better business and income for the youth who have gone through the BS4L program.

Although there is no empirical data to support the income changes for every BS4L client, based on the interviews and field visits, it would be fair to assume that most have seen income increases. In conversation with youth now working for themselves, it seems that, on average, incomes have gone up almost 2,000%, from ETB 10-15/week (USD 0.50 – 0.75) to ETB 200/week (USD 10). However, with the increased incomes have also come the need to pay for rent and meals, as most were previously living with and being fed by their employers.

The youth have a sense of pride in their work as young weavers, and the training has given them an appreciation of their work and the possibility of a better future in traditional textiles.

Based on a better understanding of the textile market and possible profits, most now consider traditional textiles to be a viable future business for themselves. A few youth talked about how the BS4L program positively changed their mindset and perceptions about being a weaver and an entrepreneur.

The majority of youth interviewed felt that the business skills and practical training on weaving techniques and product design were the most useful aspects of the BS4L program. Many valued the program’s approach to market linkages and the exposure to markets for their products, especially linkages to some local designers who now give them regular contracts for specific woven pieces. These young weavers had never independently interacted with markets, but their increased ability and confidence in doing so is now apparent. Most have improved the quality of their weaving due to the program’s practical training. In fact, some are producing such high-quality materials that they are now able to demand premium prices for their products. The training and exposure has made them realize that they can get the same price for one high quality piece as they could for four or five poor-to-mediocre quality pieces. This realization has also helped with time and resource management in their enterprises.
Most confirmed the value in financial literacy training and subsequent VSAY formation in improving their incomes and savings behaviour. Most are now saving part of their income or wages with VSAYs, whereas none had saved anything, previous to their participation in the program. Most of the youth interviewed wanted to use their savings to grow their weaving businesses, including opening their own shops someday.

3. Personal growth and positive future orientation

All youth interviewed and surveyed confirmed increased self-confidence in their ability to build a better future for themselves. On average, surveyed youth changed their ‘feelings about their future’ from ‘unhappy’ pre-training to ‘very happy’ post-training. When asked about their interpersonal abilities, such as their ability to speak with others and express themselves, most youth rated their comfort in this regard as ‘unhappy’ pre-training to ‘very happy’ post-training. The teamwork and group exercises has equipped them with better communication skills and improved self-confidence.

Better time management and discipline were key learnings highlighted by the youth. The modules on planning and budgeting have given them a sense of responsibility and many said they now better understand their responsibility as young adults to earn, save and build their own futures. Some even talked about wanting to send money back to their parents in the rural areas.

Previous to the BS4L program, the youth lived with and were fed by their employers. They normally slept in the same place as where they worked, which was usually cramped, untidy and dirty. This contributed to a lack of independence and personal space for the working youth, as well as reduced opportunities to learn how to manage a household or cook a meal for themselves. Since leaving their employers, most of the youth live in rented group accommodations and are making their own meals and paying for their other needs. It would seem that the BS4L training helped the youth to transition into early adulthood.

4. Unintended benefits for the youth – nutrition and education

There have been significant changes for the youth in areas that the project did not plan to influence or measure. Most of the youth talked about meals and how they were eating three or more times a day now, as compared to one or two meals when they were working for their employers. They have control over their meals and satisfying their hunger as a result of having incomes and independent working environments. Improved nutrition was certainly not one of the program’s intended objectives but it is an extremely positive outcome.

Some youth have also gone back to school after receiving the training, while still weaving on the side. The importance of education and the ability to pay for their own school supplies with income from better weaving are also positive results that the program had not intentionally set out to achieve.
Conclusion

The field visits identified a number of positive changes for youth participants of the BS4L program. It was encouraging for project staff to see and hear about some of the changes to their living and working conditions, as well as to their personal growth and future orientation.

Although the number of youth positively affected by the BS4L program is small in comparison to other E-FACE interventions, the BS4L program may have resulted in the most significant changes in the lives of these young Ethiopians. It is truly amazing how 72 hours of training can change a young weaver’s life.

Despite the program’s successes, it is important to note that BS4L still has room for improvement, especially to ensure that the benefits to youth are sustained. For example, some trained youth have gone back to living and working for their employers after not being able to effectively manage their finances – both their business and personal budgets. Some youth require on-going mentoring and more capacity building to make a sustained effort at becoming independent. In addition, ensuring access to government workspaces is crucial to ensuring that the youth remain motivated and able to work on their own. There are still many youth who are waiting to access government workspaces and they are beginning to get disheartened due to the long registration process.

The lack of appropriate registration and documents (such as birth certificates) and identification cards has hampered access to government workspaces and business registration for many youth. Although access to these spaces or business registration is beyond the control of E-FACE, it is crucial that the project continue working with the local government for these youth.

Many youth asked that training be extended to others in their communities, as there are still many who could benefit from business and financial skills, as well as access to markets and government workspaces. Clearly there is ongoing demand for programs such as BS4L, especially in communities where young workers are engaged in exploitative work or do not have access to appropriate training that leads to income generating opportunities.
Mengistu Kebede

...is 18 years old and remembers roaming the streets of Addis after leaving his parents in Gamo Gofa, a zonal area approximately 500 kilometers away from the capital.

He was picked up by a weaver who took him home and taught him how to weave. He worked for his employer for many years but cannot remember how long specifically. His working conditions were poor and he didn’t get much to eat – he remembers being hungry often.

He has not been able to access a government workspace yet due to lack of official papers and registration for living and working in Addis Ababa – a problem faced by many youth trafficked or sent to the city as children. While he waits for a free government workspace, he has rented a small workspace for 400 ETB/month (USD 20) where he has set a loom for his weaving. He weaves an average of two pieces per week, which he sells directly to the local market. He is also back in school and has just completed Grade 10.

The BS4L training and project support has completely changed his life. He is no longer dependent on his employer and is working hard to build his own future.
Client Story

Aragash Anja

...is 18 years old and one of the few girls who have participated in the BS4L program.

She is from Chencha, a town in Gamo Gofa, which is 443 kilometers away from Addis Ababa. She is a young single mother, with a son who is five years old.

She was brought to the city to live with and work for her sister’s husband when she was only three years old, and has worked for her brother-in-law until recently. She has been working in a government workspace for the last six months, to which access was facilitated by the program. On average, she produces three high-quality pieces per week, which she sells directly to the local market. She also produces pieces for local high-end designers, to whom she was introduced by E-FACE project staff. Aragash saves 10 ETB (USD 0.50) every week in a VSAY, and an additional ETB 200 (USD 10) every week in her own bank account at the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia. She is saving money to take care of herself and her son.

She has enrolled in night school and has just completed Grade 8. Although she is the only woman in the current government workspace, she feels safe and less vulnerable than before.

“I used to get only one meal a day from my employer, I used to work days and nights and got beaten by him sometimes. Now, I eat three meals a day and work on my own terms.”
Annex I:

List of Interview Questions

Questions for BS4L youth clients

1. What motivated you to participate in the training?

2. What part of the training did you enjoy the most?
   - Business Skills, Life Skills or the practical training?
   - Want would you improve about the training?

3. What changes have occurred in your life as a result of the training?
   - Wages
   - Living conditions
   - Number of meals
   - Personal confidence
   - Self-awareness
   - Relations with others/peers
   - Relations with Business Owners
   - Business relations
   - Weaving skills
   - Business skills

4. How have your savings changed since joining this program?
   - What are you saving for?
   - What is the greatest achievements of your savings group?
   - What have you learned from the savings group? Other members?
   - Do you prefer individual or group saving? Why?

5. What changes have occurred in your life as a result of saving?
   - Would you have become a VSAY member without the BS4L training?

6. What are your dreams for the future?
## Annex II:

### Questionnaire for BS4L Clients

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>If yes, how much per week?</th>
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<td>Age</td>
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</table>
| Did you go to school?                                                    | ![](emoji)
| Do you live with your parents?                                            | ![](emoji)
| Are you working right now?                                               | ![](emoji)
| How do you feel about the overall training?                              | ![](emoji)
| Before the training, how did you feel about your future?                 | ![](emoji)
| After training, how do you feel about your future?                       | ![](emoji)
| Before the training, how did you feel about speaking with others and expressing yourself? | ![](emoji)
| After the training, how do you feel about speaking with others and expressing yourself? | ![](emoji)
| Before the training, how did you feel about getting an income?           | ![](emoji)
| After the training, how do you feel about getting an income?             | ![](emoji)
| Before the training, did you save money?                                 | ![](emoji)  ![](emoji)  ![](emoji)  ![](emoji)  ![](emoji)  | If yes, how much per week? |
| After the training, do you save money?                                   | ![](emoji)  ![](emoji)  ![](emoji)  ![](emoji)  ![](emoji)  | If yes, how much per week? |
End Notes


2. The Center for African Leadership Development was hired to adapt existing training materials for context-specific content for the BS4L program.


4. The BS4L program was also delivered in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region (SNNPR) with 250 youth (45% female, 55% male) in the agriculture sector.

5. For this project, ‘trafficked youth’ are defined as those young employees that are not working for their parents; but are living with and working for someone other than their parents. These young employees are generally brought in from rural areas to work, and usually not of their own volition.

6. These numbers are indicative of reporting up to March 31, 2015.

7. Traditional weaving looms could lead to long-term health defects on the feet, toes and back. Hybrid looms are modern metal frames with wooden loom components and modern foot pedals, which makes it easier to work on.
Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the expertise, hard work and dedication of the MEDA E-FACE team, who implemented innovative programming and piloted new approaches in youth programming. We specifically would like to appreciate the efforts of the E-FACE Youth team in Addis Ababa, namely Meron Kidane, Tsekey Amare and Tsion Belda.

We would also like to acknowledge the United States Department of Labor (USDOL), who has funded this initiative; World Vision Ethiopia and the Mission for Community Development Program (MCDP) for partnering with MEDA on this project; and the Center for African Leadership Development for adapting the training materials for the BS4L program.

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