



It is Our Victory Day: Girl Superheroes for Change in Ethiopia Youth Champions Initiative Case Study



Tibeb Girls is an animated television series about three young girls who use their superpowers to fight injustice and harmful practices towards girls.

ABOUT YOUTH CHAMPIONS INITIATIVE

[Youth Champions Initiative](#) invests in powerful young leaders ages 18-30 who are leading the sexual and reproductive health and rights movement in Ethiopia, India, Pakistan and the United States. In collaboration with the Packard Foundation, this externally validated model enables young leaders to create large-scale change through leadership development, technology, innovation, and advocacy.

ABOUT RISE UP

[Rise Up](#) advances health, education and equity for girls, youth, and women everywhere. Since 2009, Rise Up's powerful network of over 500 leaders has directly impacted 7 million girls, youth, and women in addition to advocating for the passage and implementation of over 100 laws and policies impacting 115 million people globally. We invest in visionary leaders, local organizations, and innovative solutions to achieve large scale change through leadership development, advocacy, funding, and storytelling. Rise Up unifies the power of [Let Girls Lead](#), [Champions for Change](#) and the [Youth Champions Initiative](#) to create a better future for girls, youth, and women in Africa, Central America, South Asia and the United States.

“Today is a new day. It is our victory day. Come with me my friend, stand by me, stand beside me. I will pass everything with Patience. With Justice and with Love I will stand tall. I will shine bright despite the darkness.”

These are the words we hear sung in Amharic as the Tibeb Girls, Tigist (Patience) Fikir (Love) and Fiteh (Justice) fly through the air helping girls navigate the challenges they face by drawing upon the virtues embodied by each girl superhero.

Tibeb Girls is the brainchild of [Tinbit Daniel](#), a graduate of the [Youth Champions Initiative \(YCI\)](#). Tinbit is passionate about nurturing and empowering girls in Ethiopia so that they can reach their potential and create an environment where they can fully enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Tinbit developed the innovative Tibeb Girls project at the Ethiopian design studio Whiz Kids Workshop, after receiving training and funding from YCI. The animated series follows three young female superheroes and highlights issues pertinent to girls and youth, like early marriage, access to family planning, and sexual and reproductive health information and services.

The series innovates in a number of ways: animation is in its infancy in Ethiopia, and media in Amharic, rather than English or Arabic, is rare. Female protagonists are even rarer, and the series' focus on girls has been a source of pushback from some television executives. According to Tinbit, “Even in the most elite groups, people who are heads of organizations who are men are resistant to change. When we tell them that we're putting girls in the lead of an animation series, they're like ‘Why not boys? Why are they all girls?’” It's this traditional mindset, as well as the overwhelming representation of men and boys in media, that makes the emphasis on girls so crucial.



“We’re trying to empower girls by giving them information and role models so that they can ask questions and negotiate their way out of things and understand themselves better. Most of the women they see are mothers or wives...in traditional roles. So we’re trying to create role models for girls that they can relate to. Girl characters that are strong, independent, and part of the solution.”

**-- Tinbit Daniel
Ethiopian Youth Champion**

While there are other media outlets that focus on sexual and reproductive health information, Tibeb Girls is unique in its target audience of young girls and its visual medium. On one level, using animation for a superhero series is purely practical, says Whiz Kids Workshop CEO Bruky Tigabu. Animation makes the girls’ superpowers more believable than a live-action series. In addition, animation taps into youth visual culture in a way that radio and other media cannot. Tibeb Girls integrates multiple issues – such as bullying, child marriage, family planning, early pregnancy, and gender equality – into the storylines, thereby holistically addressing the complex challenges facing girls in Ethiopia. As Tinbit maintains, “There are programs on the radio and on TV that talk about sexual and reproductive health along the way, but when parents hear it, when the father hears someone talking about menstruation on the radio, they turn off the radio. It’s not something that we’re used to openly talking about, SRHR issues. Parents tend to avoid the whole conversation... rather than talk to their children and help them understand, and that’s what we’re trying to avoid.”

At the outset of the project, Tinbit hypothesized that an animated series would create a space for girls to grapple with important issues by themselves or with their peers. Parents wouldn’t be interested in a cartoon aimed at youth and therefore wouldn’t watch the show and potentially censor its sexual and reproductive health-related messages. However, as the team developed the pilot episode and conducted focus groups with girls, it became clear that the girls actually wanted to watch the series with their parents as a way to share their experiences and begin difficult conversations about the issues they face. Parents were also surprisingly interested in viewing the animated episode for many of the same reasons that the girls were drawn to it—they enjoyed watching culturally relevant characters speaking in Amharic on complex issues.

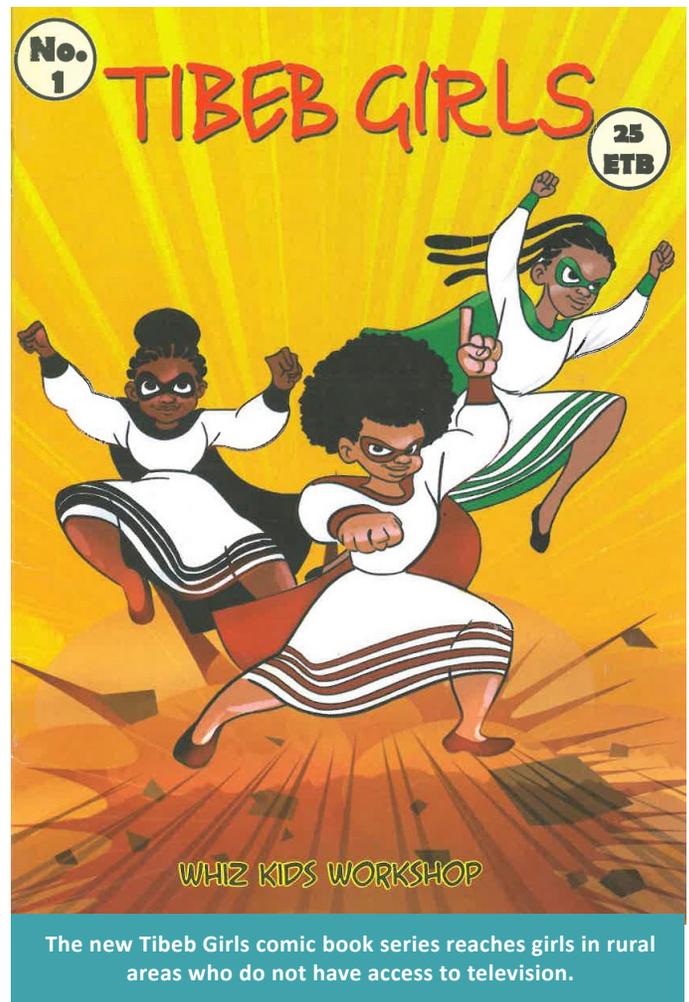
With short episodes (the pilot clocks in at 13 minutes), innovative animation, and the novelty of Amharic-language media, Tibeb Girls appeals to Ethiopian girls and their parents alike, and provides a nonthreatening avenue for discussions about sexual and reproductive health and other topics that are often taboo. Educating and creating dialogue are key goals for Tibeb Girls, along with encouraging youth and their families to think critically about traditional cultural beliefs and practices. Only through discussion and dialogue with parents and other decision makers can traditional attitudes about girls’ roles shift toward more equitable practices. As Tinbit says, “Traditions don’t die down in a few years... Ethiopia is a patriarchal society, a traditional cultural society. So it takes a lot of groundwork to create a network and change the attitudes of society to get the equality we would like see.”



Tibeb Girls’ pilot episode tackles the topic of early marriage in a creative and informative way.

Tibeb Girls has been screened for diverse groups, including girls' clubs and adolescent focus groups. Many girls in Ethiopia are not accustomed to being asked for their opinion or having their views considered valuable, but Tinbit and Bruky have engaged girls during the entire process, from character design and script testing through the production of the pilot episode. Girls have immediately grasped the overarching theme of Tibeb Girls – while these superpower girls are powerful, they have to work together to develop solutions to their problems and to create meaningful change.

This conclusion is exactly what Tinbit and Bruky set out to model. The Tibeb Girls' superpowers – Love, Patience, and Justice – were chosen intentionally as qualities that girls could emulate. Justice questions the traditional beliefs and practices around girls' roles, while Love serves as the starting point for engaging with one another and creating meaningful change for girls in Ethiopia and beyond. Even as these superheroes try to solve problems for others, they have their own issues to grapple with, requiring Patience, the series' third virtue. By making the Tibeb Girls relatable and flawed, they help girls discover the superheroes within themselves – as one girl noted during a focus group screening: “We are powerful, just like Tibeb Girls.”



The series has been transformative not just for girls, but for Youth Champion Tinbit Daniel as well. Tinbit completed the YCI Incubator in December 2014, where she had the opportunity to learn with other youth leaders from Ethiopia, Pakistan, India and the US South how to develop innovative approaches to advance SRHR across different cultural contexts. Tinbit credits YCI with her growth both personally and professionally, and for broadening her perspective on sexual and reproductive health. For Tinbit, one of the greatest benefits of participating in the Youth Champions Initiative was meeting young leaders from diverse backgrounds who were also trying to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights in challenging environments. In meeting the other Youth Champions, she says, “it gave me perspective that... we’re all working toward the same goals, and what we can share and learn really makes a difference.” In developing Tibeb Girls, Tinbit has found her purpose in creating lasting change for girls and young people in Ethiopia.

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