WEEMA was founded as Mudula Water in 2011 with the mission to bring clean water to over 10,000 people living in the Ethiopian town of Mudula. In February 2013, we changed our name to WEEMA International to reflect the growing scope of our work. Today, WEEMA employs more than 80 people in our offices in both Addis Ababa and Mudula.

The name WEEMA is an expression of wholeness in the local Ethiopian dialect, and that is our goal; to bring wholeness to communities. Our focus areas are represented by the letters of the word WEEMA: Water, Education, Economic Empowerment and Medical care all while working in Alliance with local partners and communities. This issue of our newsletter focuses on aspects of our work in all of these categories.

MOTHER’S DAY 2018

On Mother’s Day we honor all the mothers involved in WEEMA’s work. That includes the mothers who attend our Self Help Groups, those who work in our beekeeping cooperatives, as well as more than 30 mothers who work in our offices in Ethiopia. We also salute all the moms who support our programming by serving on our board, donating to our efforts and volunteering.

This Mother’s Day we hope you will send your mom a card through WEEMA International to celebrate moms around the world. When you purchase a card this Mother’s Day, you are supporting Self Help Groups that provide job training and a sustainable source of income to moms and families in southwestern Ethiopia.

Each $27 donation provides a year of business and finance training for one Self Help Group member. This training includes vision building, loan management, leadership, and financial recordkeeping.

Honor the mom in your life with a donation in her name and we will send her a custom-designed Mother’s Day card, either online or in the mail. We have a limited number of printed cards, so order soon!

FALMOUTH ROAD RACE AUGUST 19TH

In 2017, 17 runners clad in orange and white ran seven miles and raised more than $25,000 to support WEEMA’s programming in southwestern Ethiopia. There is limited room for a few more runners to join our team in 2018. Sign up for your bib number at WEEMA.org. Runners and their families are invited to stay in an inn we have rented in Centerville, MA from Friday the 17th to Sunday the 19th. Runners also receive a fundraising page on the WEEMA website, a running singlet, and invitations to parties throughout the weekend. Each runner is required to raise a minimum of $1,500. If you have questions, please email kate@weema.org.
WEEMA has nearly completed our Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) latrine building project, which will dramatically improve community health by promoting hygienic habits. We have partnered with local community members to build three public latrines and four school latrines in Tembaro. WEEMA is installing male and female latrines at both Gaecha School and Gedira School, and is building a latrine inside a Mudula Town bus station and near a church, as well in a public location in North Ambikuna.

There are two stages to building latrines: the first is construction and the second is community education. As we conclude the construction stage, all 57 Health Extension Workers (HEWs) have been training community members to free their kebeles of open defecation as part of the program. This training has been so successful that it has inspired community members to construct their own latrines with readily available materials.

The local Woreda Health Office will closely supervise HEW activity and monitor changes in community hygiene and sanitation levels. WEEMA staff will meet with the head of the Tembaro Woreda Health Office to discuss progress in the five impacted kebeles to date and to collaborate on a strategy that will strengthen the kebeles who need further assistance.

WEEMA goes mobile to expand library services in rural areas

Tembaro woreda is home to five high schools and to the Degale Public Library and Computer Center. Degale Library is easily accessible to Mudula’s high school students, but the other four high schools are located in rural areas with limited access to library services and reference books. WEEMA is increasing access by bringing these resources to students in the form of a mobile library.

Librarians began by identifying student interests and selecting books that are not available in school libraries. Every two weeks, WEEMA staff member Mengesha delivers new books which are loaned to rural high school libraries for one month.

Students who are too far away to access Degale Library are very happy with the mobile library service. High school directors, teachers, and librarians provided feedback on the program and stated that the mobile library service has positively impacted student achievement. WEEMA is working to expand the program and deliver even more books to the library at the request of students and teachers.
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT
The Impact of Self Help Groups

Thirty-five year old Lidet has lived in North Ambukuna kebele for fifteen years. Her home has seen the birth of five children, a marriage, and the hardships she faced in raising her family after her husband left.

For the last twelve years, Lidet has done everything in her power to support her children on her own. Sometimes this meant depending on the assistance of others, searching for food, and taking on day labor jobs in the village when they were available. If there was no food or work to be found, Lidet was forced to return home with nothing to give her children.

This past year, Lidet learned of a WEEMA International Self Help Group (SHG) that was established in her village. She approached the WEEMA SHG facilitator for more information. After speaking with the facilitator and receiving encouragement from a SHG community volunteer, Lidet joined the Shanshame SHG.

“\text{I joined the group with nothing to give,}” Lidet explains. She now says that “\text{this Self Help Group’s approach has transformed my life.}” As a member of the Shanshame SHG, Lidet is saving money together with other group members as well as learning and practicing basic business development skills.

Before joining the group, Lidet had no bed, no dishes and very few clothes for herself or her children. Shanshame SHG has helped her to secure these basic necessities, as well as helped Lidet enroll her three school-aged children in classes.

WEEMA’s hundreds of SHGs are empowering nearly 2,000 women just like Lidet in communities throughout Tembaro and parts of neighboring Hadero Tunto.
MEDICAL

WEEMA supports all levels of the healthcare system

Selam is a generic example representing the experience of women navigating the Tembara district health system.

In the course of WEEMA’s maternal, newborn, and child health work we met mother-to-be Selam. Through her pregnancy she had many interactions with the Tembaro district health system and she has seen firsthand how WEEMA provides critical support to moms, children, and babies.

The journey through pregnancy and motherhood has been an exciting and anxious time for Selam. She is expecting her second child and is grateful that she is able to make monthly visits to a local health center after experiencing complications during the birth of her son. The health center, recently renovated and equipped through a collaboration with WEEMA, will allow her to deliver her child close to home rather than in the nearest hospital which is more than a day’s walk away.

In the health center she meets with midwives supported by WEEMA who help to make sure that her pregnancy is progressing normally. During a third trimester visit, the midwife identifies some possible complications that need the attention of a physician in a hospital setting. She refers Selam to Mudula Primary Hospital, a facility that WEEMA equipped with ultrasound technology.

Although a bit frightened, Selam is relieved that she only has to travel to Mudula to get such care, rather than venture the 50 kilometers that she would have previously traveled to Durame. During her visit, the specialist concludes that a C-section will be the safest delivery method for her. They schedule a C-section with the OB/GYN who provides direct care to patients in Durame, and who also travels to other primary care hospitals, including Mudula, to perform C-sections there on a rotating basis.

After her baby is delivered, Selam will be able to visit a Health Extension Worker (HEW) at the health post near her home. The HEW is part of WEEMA’s mHealth project, which means she has been trained and equipped with a decision support tool to treat children under five. Selam is already familiar with the HEW as she had attended a workshop that provided information on proper hygiene and sanitation within the community to help decrease waterborne disease. HEWs will be Selam’s first point of contact in providing frontline healthcare to her child, such as treatment for common childhood illnesses like pneumonia and malaria.

WEEMA is proud to support projects that positively impact multiple levels of the health system, improving overall access to and quality of care for all.

ALLIANCE

Celebrating WEEMA’s partnership with the community

The WEEMA International staff values the alliance we have built with our community partners throughout Ethiopia, from government officials to village elders to Health Extension Workers (HEWs). Our mission guides us to bring what the community needs through collective decision-making rather than the lens of outsiders. This is very apparent in our work with menstrual health.

International Women’s Day community festivities organized by WEEMA celebrated the launch of a new project, Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management (MHHM) in Kembata Tembaro Zone for School Girls at Saruma Primary and Middle School. The project aims to change the conversation surrounding menstruation. WEEMA’s alliance with the community was celebrated through poetry readings, testimonials, storytelling, performance of skits written by students and a presentation and tour of the new women’s menstrual hygiene and sanitation room at Saruma Primary and Middle School. After the tour, attendees held a discussion about the importance of menstrual health. Participants included both male and female students, parents and government officials.

This project aims to change mindsets of girls, boys, and parents concerning menstrual health. In Saruma, as in many similar rural schools, menstruation is a common reason for school absenteeism and leads many girls to eventually drop out. MHHM aims to break stigmas and keep girls in school. We will also distribute MHHM kits produced by Studio Samuel Foundation, an NGO whose life skills training includes teaching girls to sew high quality reusable pads using locally sourced materials through peer-to-peer learning. WEEMA is proud to be able to work with various stakeholders to implement and celebrate new projects that promote the wellbeing of women in Ethiopia!