



# Ethiopian Girls' Manifesto 2024

**MALALA**  
**FUND**

SUPPORTER



EDUCATION  
CHAMPION  
NETWORK  
ETHIOPIA



NEWA



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# Introduction

We are a group of Ethiopian girls united by a shared commitment to advocating for our rights and the rights to access education across the country. Brought together under the auspices of **Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA)** and the Malala Fund, and we have taken trainings on human rights and the rights of girls enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia and international conventions. This followed a thorough understanding of the subject through taking experts' advice to examine our status at household, community and society levels in our respective regional states. We have discussed and identified our common agenda, we came together to reflect on our status in society, share our concerns, and articulate our demands and priorities across social, economic, political, and legal dimensions. Following regional consultations held across different parts of the country, our individual experience leverages us to produce this Girls' Manifesto.

This Manifesto captures our visions and aspirations. In order to validate evaluate our entire journey and find crucial inputs we held a national validation workshop in Addis Ababa, where we reviewed, validated and consolidated our agendas, ensuring that our collective voices were accurately represented in a unified national platform.

# Preamble



This Ethiopian girls' manifesto is our collective voice, speaking directly to and for ourselves. We have come from all corners of the country, representing various regions, sections of society, ethnic and religious groups. We are girls from rural and urban areas, from pastoral communities, girls with disabilities, and girls from internally displaced communities. This Manifesto outlines our goals and the advocacy strategies we will pursue to ensure our protection, our voices to be heard, and uphold our human rights. It is a call for meaningful representation and engagement in all matters that affect our lives. We demand safe spaces, legal safeguards, and inclusive platforms where our voices are not only heard but respected and acted upon. Through this Manifesto, we assert our right to live free from violence, discrimination, and harmful practices and to actively participate in shaping the future of our communities and our country. It provides a comprehensive framework to address the challenges, we, the Ethiopian girls face and reaffirm the respect and promotion of our rights and freedom to association. Apart from confirming our engagement in every level of decision-making process within the nation, we strive to have reliable access to education, sexual and reproductive health care and right, peace and security as well as safe and protected school environment. Furthermore, due attention has been given to networking and agency entitlement that could create opportunities for solidarity, mentorship, learning, and collective actions. By sharing our experiences, aspirations, and demands, the document serves as a powerful tool for our advocacy efforts and the social change we aim to achieve. To this end we put maximum efforts into engaging stakeholders and decision makers to design proper intervention mechanisms through policies, laws, budgeting and actions.

The girls manifesto aims to show our fundamental asks within the frameworks of the nation's constitution and international conventions. Thus, to create a better future for all Ethiopian girls, we commit to promote our rights and guide our advocate efforts in line with the institution and international convention.

# Call for Action and Change



# 1

## **Let our voices be heard and factored in the national democratization, development and governance processes!**

We, the Ethiopian girls, believe that our voices and demands must be heard and amplified to ensure our perspectives and needs are factored, in the public discourse and decision-making processes. This is especially crucial given the discriminatory social norms, existing legal and policy frameworks, as well as ongoing conflicts and crises which have significantly impacted our constitutional rights and privileges, including our access to education. As a result of crises there was and there still is prolonged school closure. This, in turn, has disproportionately affected girls by exposing them to severe physical and psychological risks such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy, child labor, and sexual exploitation.

Hence, we are highly dedicated to asking policy and decision makers to ensure that we engage and benefit from the national democratization, development and governance processes.

# 2

## **We demand an end to barriers hindering girls' education and the rapid rebuilding of our schools, allowing for the timely resumption of learning!**



We, the Ethiopian girls, recognize that education is a fundamental right that is crucial for our social and economic development. Particularly, due to cultural and financial crisis, we face systemic barriers that hinder our access to quality education.

# Call for Action and Change

To redress these challenges, we propose actionable steps that could enhance opportunities for all the Ethiopian girl's education.

We call for a continued commitment to free education, urging the government to reinforce policies that ensure all children, especially girls, can access education without financial burdens. We emphasize the need for increased investment in building, rebuilding, and maintaining schools in rural areas, and post conflict areas, ensuring that every girl can avail, access and afford educational services.

We demand to create safe learning environments that provide girls with adequate sanitation facilities and protect them from harassment and violences.

Sanitary pads are essential products that help us manage our menstrual health. We would like to acknowledge and praise the government for making girls have access to sanitary pads in schools. Even though this is a major step forward, such initiatives are still limited in schools found in urban areas, while 80% of the population is found in the rural areas. We therefore urge that the insufficient supply of sanitary pads be addressed in all schools. We demand that other essential sanitary items be available to accommodate any unexpected needs during menstruation.

“ *Access to sanitary pads is not a luxury, but a necessity for me and my peers to maintain our health, dignity, and ability to fully participate in our education.*”

*- 11th grade student from urban area*

Improving school-based infrastructures is vital for full access and benefit of schools. We thus request for accessibility of clean water, hand-washing stations, sex- specific toilets and electricity to promote hygiene and dignity, in all schools as these are necessary for keeping hygiene and secure modern educational practices.

Increase the number of public schools particularly in rural areas, and build back schools demolished during the conflict; enhance the building of schools in the nearby villages to maximize safety and thereby protecting girls from abduction they often face while they travel to a school which is far from their villages.

We advocate for the construction of libraries, laboratories, and girl-friendly spaces within schools to meet our diverse educational needs.

### 3 Safety and security in and around, as well as all the way to schools are paramount!

We urge the presence of schools in areas where their security is permanently supervised. The development of strict anti-harassment policies that enable us report incidents confidently is crucial.

Community awareness programs that engage local leaders and families about the importance of protecting girls in education are essential for fostering a supportive environment.



“ *Representing my peers from Tigray region, I demand for safety above all things. My friend and I need to go to school and return to our homes without fear of being attacked by someone.*”

- 12th grade student from urban area

### 4 Eliminate barriers to enrollment and retention

- We call for comprehensive community engagement campaigns that educate everyone about the value of girls' education, challenging harmful cultural beliefs that deny the human rights of girls.
- Involve families in discussions about the importance of educating their daughters; in the same manner as providing support in domestic work and care responsibilities, to allow us time for our schooling and studies.
- We advocate for gender-responsive teaching methods that promote our participation across all subjects, thereby ensuring our success in our educational efforts.
- Establish mentorship programs that connect us with female role models that can inspire and guide us on our educational journeys.
- There is a feeding program in primary schools, but none in high schools. This support is just as important if not more for high school students, especially girls. We strongly demand for the introduction of a feeding program in all high schools to help keep girls in school safe and focus on learning.
- We also ask for programs that offer scholarships for girls and financial assistance for families to encourage and enable them send their daughters to school.

“ I want to get a chance to join university and to be a role model for my peers who are not getting the access to education. I advocate that education should be for everyone.

- 19 years old young girl from rural area<sup>1</sup>

## 5 Rights to Information and Health Services Mainly Sexual and Reproductive health (SRH)

We recognize that discussions around sexuality can be sensitive, yet they are critical for our well-being. The Ethiopian Constitution as well as the Family Law guarantees our right to education and health services, which include access to sexual and reproductive health information. Additionally, the revised Family Law, the National Youth Policy, and the National Adolescent and Youth Health Strategy guarantee reproductive health services and the need for age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in schools, recognizing the specific health needs of young people. Such information is essential to empower and equip us with vital knowledge about our bodies, reproductive health and rights, promoting informed decision-making and enabling us to advocate for our own health.

Hence,

- For comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education, we call that the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Regional Education Bureaus adopt culturally responsive curricula and policies.
- It is essential for us to have access to health services that provide information and support related to reproductive health, contraception, sexual transmitted infections (STI) prevention, and mental health. It ensures we receive confidential, comprehensive care that respects our privacy and addresses our unique health needs.
- Foster an environment where we can access accurate information and services that are relevant to our health and well-being.

## 6 End Gender Based Violence and violence against girls!

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious concern for us, the girls of Ethiopia, particularly as schoolgirls face increasing vulnerability to various forms of violence, including sexual violence. The ongoing conflicts in several regions have contributed to aggravate this issue, putting us at increased risk, especially when traveling to and from school. The threats of GBV, including rape, assault and harassment not only compromise our safety but also hinder our educational prospects.



- We urgently need stronger legal frameworks and support systems to protect us from sexual violence, ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable and that survivors receive necessary health, legal, and psychosocial support.
- Raising community awareness on the repercussions of GBV on girls and changing discriminatory social norms, cultural practices and gender attitudes.

“ We suffered from various forms of stereotypes that should be changed, for example, ሴት ሲበዛ ጎመን ጠነዛ! ፣ ሴት ብታውቅ በወንድ ያልቅ! ፣ ሴት ተምራ የት ትደርሳለች! All these stereotypes should be changed. I want to be the voice to change this norm.”

- 19 years old girl from Urban area<sup>1</sup>



- We call for campaigns that engage community leaders to foster a culture of zero tolerance for violence against girls. We also recognize that we are particularly vulnerable during our daily commutes to school, which underscores the need for protective measures such as secure transportation options and community patrols.
- We advocate for the elimination of harmful traditional practices that rob our opportunities to education.
- We demand protection against child labor and exploitation that prevents the exercise of the right to education.
- We call for law enforcement agents (the police, justice,) to implement laws that safeguard girls, create safe and secured spaces and ensure their responsibility to bring perpetrators to justice.



# Amplify our Voice and Agency!

We believe that our perspectives are often overlooked, and this context compromises our agency and voice. The presence of safe spaces within schools and communities will allow us to be together, share our experiences, and discuss issues that impact on our lives. Such supportive platforms encourage self-expression and open dialogue on matters that matter to us.

We urge that we speak for ourselves and be heard. Hence, having a space to voice and play our agency role timely and appropriately is crucial.

We ask for leadership development and empowerment programs, including capacity-building training that focus on public speaking, advocacy, and organizational skills.

We seek opportunities to engage in national programs and planning initiatives that empower us to take on leadership roles, fostering a sense of agency, confidence, and active participation in shaping our futures.

We also ask for the importance of involving teachers, mentors, role models, community leaders, and parents in supporting our initiatives, ensuring our ideas are heard and valued.



# 1 | Establish strong networking and platforms!

Collective action is essential for our empowerment. By seeking solidarity, sharing resources, and working together, we can overcome common obstacles and address the unique challenges we face. It's crucial to establish strong networks across schools and communities to foster collaboration and create positive change.

- We need for our association, space in different structures, movements, networks, (Workshops and networking events will facilitate collaboration and idea exchange among us, fostering a sense of community.)
- Creating digital platforms specifically for girls, along with utilizing technology and social media, strengthens our organizing efforts by enabling us to connect, collaborate, and mobilize on a broader scale. It creates opportunities to report our experiences, stories and engage with relevant topics, thereby enhancing our visibility and influence.
- Facilitate gender transformational change and its effects.



## 2 | Create advocacy platforms and interface dialogues

- It is vital to ensure that our concerns are heard by policy and decision-makers by organizing advocacy platforms and interface meetings.
- It is crucial to have inter-generational dialogue with women leaders and role models to take lessons from their lived experiences and forward insights to achieve our goals.
- Celebrating our successes and achievements will inspire our continued engagement and highlight our impact, that encourage culture of support among peers, allies, and community members.
- We advocate for the involvement of male peers and community members as allies in our efforts, in order to promote understanding and a sense of collaboration to create a more supportive environment for our rights.
- Equipping us with digital literacy skills is essential to navigate online spaces effectively, advocate for our rights, and engage with broader audiences.

## 3 | Inclusivity of marginalized and vulnerable girls





We, girls, are not all the same; and our needs differ, and we demand different approaches and strategies in addressing our asks and needs. Though we do share a lot in common, our questions and demands could vary depending on the economic, regional and cultural conditions of the community where we live in. For instance, the immediate needs of girls residing in IDP camps could not be the same as others who live in a relatively peaceful social setting.

We have learned that we are disproportionately vulnerable to violence, including sexual abuse and economic exploitation, with inadequate support systems to help us recover from trauma.

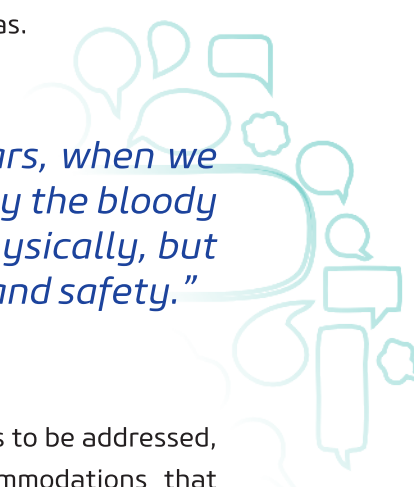
Those of us living in IDP camps experience heightened risks to our safety and stability, requiring urgent access to educational resources and psychosocial support. Girls with disabilities face additional barriers to education due to a lack of accommodation and societal stigma, while those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds struggle to pursue education without financial assistance.

- We call for the recognition of our unique vulnerabilities and marginalization in conflict-affected areas, where many of us endure various forms of violence and psychological abuse. It is essential to implement targeted support programs that provide mental health services and trauma recovery resources.
- We advocate for initiatives that encourage girls who have dropped out of school due to conflict to return to education. We also strictly act to make those who perpetrate violence against girls legally accountable for their deeds.
- We call for the rehabilitation and reopening of schools in disputed areas.

**“We did not go to school for more than two years, when we get back to school everything were destroyed by the bloody war. The war demolishes not only our school physically, but also our aspirations. We need to get protection and safety.”**

*- 19 years old girl from recent conflict area<sup>1</sup>*

- We relentlessly voice the needs and concerns of girls with disabilities to be addressed, for inclusive policies and practices that ensure necessary accommodations that facilitate their access to education and services and avoid stigma and discrimination.



# Call for Action and Change

“Sometimes it is difficult for me to sit for exam because there is no enough facilities for girls with disabilities. I want to have all girls with disabilities to get more attention to achieve their goals.”

- 20 years old girl with disability

- We advocate for the expansion of Alternative Basic Education for girls of pastoralist community to provide us with flexible schooling options that meet our needs.

“I come from pastoralist community, and I believe that expanding Alternative Basic Education will give us the chance to learn in a way that fits our lives. We need flexible schools that understand our daily realities and help us build a better future.”

- 18 years old girl from pastoral area

- We advocate an end to harmful traditional practices especially child marriage and female genital mutilation and we call for equal access to quality education for every girl in pastoralist communities.

“I want to see the abolishment of harmful traditional practices especially child marriage and female genital mutilations which are very rampant in the pastoral area and all girls in the pastoral community need to have access to education”

- 18 years old girl from pastoral area

- We demand special attention and protection, especially for those of us girls who have lost parents or guardians, especially those of us girls living in IDP camps, including support for our education.

<sup>1</sup>The 19 years of age is because of girls lagging behind for different circumstances, ex war, conflict and crises.

“ I suffered a lot because I am not able to understand the new school environment where I should learn because I was displaced from the place I live. We IDP girls are suffering; we should get access for education that considers our social and economic situation.”

- 19 years old, girl from IDP camp<sup>1</sup>

- We strongly advocate targeted financial support and vocational training programs to help us achieve economic independence for girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- We implore the government to amend existing policies that obstruct our access to education and safety, ensuring that gender equity and protection for all girls are prioritized.
- It is necessary for the Ministry of Health to integrate health services into our education settings, addressing both our physical and mental health needs. We call for the development of comprehensive support programs that are tailored to our unique challenges.





## Call on Stakeholders to Join our Movement!

We call upon all stakeholders, including local civil society organizations (CSOs), Women Organizations (WOs), NGOs, INGOs, and human rights groups, to join us in this critical movement for girls' empowerment and the execution of this manifesto. Such joint efforts and collaboration will strengthen our advocacy and ensure that the needs and rights of girls are effectively addressed across all levels of society.

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Influence policy and decision makers, sectoral government ministries, bureaus to implement existing policies and programs and initiate revision to address our needs and challenges.

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Commit experience and technical assistance as well as allocation of resources to support our efforts and drive meaningful change.

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Empowering local leaders and families to prioritize our education and advocate against harmful practices is essential for fostering a cultural shift that values and protects girls.

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The implementation of policies and plans targeting girls can lead to significant improvements in education, health, and social empowerment; however, we need robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating their impact to ensure that these initiatives are truly effective and address the real needs of girls. Accountability among all stakeholders is crucial for promoting transparency and trust within our communities.

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We call for your help and support in taking these collective actions, to build a brighter future for all Ethiopian girls.



**We have risen,  
and our voices  
be heard!**

<sup>1</sup> The 19 years of age is because of girls lagging behind for different circumstances, ex war, conflict and crises.

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