

## Kality Female Prisoners were the guests of honor for World Breastfeeding Week 2014 celebrations

By Heran Demissie, ENGINE

When thinking of awareness campaigns, correctional facilities might not be the first place that pops into mind for targeting a health and nutrition message. Kality Federal Prison Administration for Women was chosen as the venue for this year's World Breastfeeding Week celebration now in its 6<sup>th</sup> year here in Ethiopia. Although this was quite surprising for me at first, I soon began to understand the motive behind choosing such a location to deliver this year's message of 'Breastfeeding – A winning goal for life.'



*Above: Prison mothers as guests of honor for Ethiopia's 6<sup>th</sup> World Breastfeeding Week celebrations*

On arrival to the facility, all my preconceptions of the tension and impersonalized interactions that I expected from both the staff and inmates evaporated. What actually greeted me were prison guards full of smiles and a group of about 30 female prisoners who lived at the correctional facility with their children who seemed paradoxically timid and upbeat.

They listened intently to speaker after speaker stressing the importance of breastfeeding their children and a clear message that every mother matters underscored all the speeches and the event itself. It gave me a warm feeling to see the fact that this group of women was not any less of a target for the campaign than any other vulnerable group, all of whom want happy, healthy children.

The event targeted prisoners currently serving time who are all mothers of children under 5 years of age. The Federal Ministry of Health along with its partners USAID and Save the Children through the ENGINE project and UNICEF it seemed had an intention to make the inmates feel valued and cared for by the wider society from which they have been excluded for various reasons. They were all informed about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the duration of 0-6 months and the message was delivered in a variety of entertaining ways which included a song and dramatic performance by a group of young children.

The children who lived at the prison facility joined in the singing and dancing as if they did not have a care in the world and the general atmosphere resembled a festive gathering rather than an educational bombardment of prison inmates.



One of the inmates, Tigist Asnake, who breastfed her child while serving time in prison spoke about the health of her baby after taking advice to exclusively breastfeed. She seemed grateful to have been granted this time with her child and even scooped him up onto the stage with her so the audience could see her remarkable achievements.

*Left: Tigist Asnake shared her experience of breastfeeding while in prison and its positive impact on her child*

The message was clear: every mother and child's life matters. "Breastfeeding – a winning goal for life" is relevant to mothers everywhere who all share the goal of raising healthy and happy children.