

Mesfin, Ethiopia

Mesfin, 16, is from Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. He has one younger brother, Asmera, who is 10. Mesfin's father is a weaver. He weaves and sells traditional cotton clothes for girls and women in the market. Mesfin's mother is a housewife.

Mesfin started working at home with his father as a weaver at age 11. When he was a child, Mesfin told his father that he wanted to attend school, but his father did not understand the value of education. Despite this, Mesfin kept asking his parents, especially his father, to allow him to go to school. It was his mother who was first convinced of the value of education. Eventually, Mesfin convinced his father to value it as well. In turn, his parents taught Mesfin's younger brother to value education.



Mesfin (right), 16, Children's World Congress on Child Labor and Education, New Delhi, India, September 4-8, 2005

Mesfin now attends school four hours a day in the morning from 8:00 a.m. – noon. After school he eats lunch and then weaves 7-11 hours every afternoon from 1-8:00 p.m., sometimes as late as 11 p.m. Mesfin has an eye problem due to poor environment in which he works. He works on a loom in a big hole under the mud floor of their house.

After work, Mesfin does his homework late at night, sometimes at 11:00 p.m. in his bed. He often goes to bed at 3:00 a.m. He gets up at 6:30 a.m. to walk about half an hour to school. Mesfin's brother Asmera, 10, works in the morning and attends school in the afternoon.

Mesfin's mother is very happy that he is attending school. While his father also values education, he still wants Mesfin to work after school. He has a sight problem arranging the threads for weaving. He thinks that Mesfin can see better (now) and is faster. Unless Mesfin helps, his father cannot produce outfits quickly, affecting their income. His father earns \$5 in the market for each outfit, which takes 3 or 4 days to make.

Mesfin is a child leader of his community's Anti-Child Labor Club, which is affiliated with the non-governmental organization Multi-purpose Community Development Project (MCDP). This project is supported by Save the Children, Norway. Nearly 1,000 children from three districts meet for two hours every Sunday to participate in making music, drama and poetry about child rights. In September 2005, Mesfin attended the Children's World Congress on Child Labor in India, where he shared his story with the media.

Mesfin passed the national exam for grade 10, which qualifies him to attend preparatory school for university studies. Mesfin will attend preparatory school for two years (grades

11 and 12) before taking the university entrance exam. He plans to study history and law at the university. Mesfin wants to be the President of Ethiopia one day and he will always work to eliminate child labor.