



Our Stories of Change





A Mindset Shift: The Making of a Brighter Future

In Ethiopia, there is an entrenched cultural emphasis on going to school and receiving a degree. However, the concept of career readiness prior to graduation is still a nascent concept.

Eyob Addisu, 21, is a fourth year Electronic Mechatronics major at Dire-Dawa Polytechnic College. While he is looking forward to graduation, he also worries about life after school. He tells a painful and familiar story of his peers who worked hard to get a good education, only to languish in a world of non or under-employment. He is aware of the hopelessness this creates and the difficulty in remaining motivated.

"For four years, all I focused on was how to be a student. I had not thought ahead of holding my degree. In hindsight, I realize that my lack of action stemmed from the fact that most of the students that graduated before me are unemployed," reflects Eyob.

Kefeta initiated a series of trainings on campus specifically focused on developing life skills, effective work habits, and the art and science of looking for and landing gainful employment. Eyob was one of the first-round trainees.

"The training exposed me to ways of looking for work. I understood that it is not about sitting and waiting or applying for just one job and waiting for a response. This has been a major shift in how I think about my future. I learned how to strategize."

Eyob is now well versed in goal setting, dynamic approaches to looking for a job, entrepreneurship, and managing emotions. "I feel like this training is as equally important as the degree that I am receiving," he adds.



Building New Footholds: A Two-Way Street

Nothing disenfranchises young people more than illiteracy. The impracticality of coming of age in the digital era without being able to write one's name or read a sign soon gives way to the impossibility of a viable and secure future. The crisis is further compounded by the stigma of being young and illiterate, forcing these youth further underground or remain on the fringes.

At 27, Serke Hamedis is a single mother of two who is also physically challenged. She grew up in a rural town without access to primary education. When she moved to the city of Dessie, she ended up homeless and unemployed. Living on the generosity of the community, school was the furthest thing from her mind.

That is, until she was referred to Kefeta's functional literacy training in Dessie. Focused on providing instructions in reading, writing, calculation, and basic problem-solving skills required to live an effective life, the program has been steadily attracting youth between the ages of 15 and 29.

Bravely overcoming her self-doubt, Serke enrolled in class for the first time in her life. "I couldn't think of where to even begin. Not being able to even write my name and having to rely on using my fingerprint as my signature used to be difficult and embarrassing," she says. Now, she invests her time and happily pays 60 ETB for transportation that brings her to the classroom. "I have not missed a single session because of how important I think this opportunity is. It has



made me equal with everyone. I have always been confident, but education has given me what I needed in order to feel like I am like everybody else despite my circumstances."

The Dessie literacy program is more than a place designed to help tackle youth illiteracy. The instructors are new graduates who need to gain classroom experience and practical training to jump start their careers. Kefeta hires these new teachers who then gain much needed training in teaching, lesson planning, and classroom management—increasing their employability in a competitive job market.





Nur Eshete, 26, is one of the instructors who is now proficient in theoretical and practical approaches as a new teacher. He is passionate about his career. "I have seen many changes in my students. One of them had never even stepped foot in a school building. Now he can differentiate the letters and is able to write his name and has started reading." He notes that the center also serves as a pipeline for students to enter the world of formal education.

Serke is sentimental about the investment her teachers made in her. "I didn't even know how to hold a pen when I first came here. Our instructor went as far as holding my hand to teach me the proper way."

This Kefeta initiated program in classrooms around Dessie has now engaged two teachers as Kefeta interns and has a student body of 70. In Dessie, education is slowly healing many layers of complex wounds.





At Their Doorstep: Bringing Healthcare to Young Women

Beyonce Abera, 21, is one of the many young women who work in one of the garment factories dotting the Debreberhan Industrial Park. The work is demanding but fulfilling.

As a young woman contemplating career growth, Beyonce is especially interested in sound family planning. However, employees of the industrial park –predominantly young women in the garment industry—have access only to very basic healthcare such as emergency burn treatment. Additionally, due to work-hours, it is difficult for Beyonce and her counterparts to take time off to visit other clinics which provide more comprehensive care.

To address this growing gap, Kefeta established a youth-friendly healthcare outpost right in the industrial park. Among the services provided is sexual reproductive health (SRH) counseling, an important and vital need for this demographic.

“This is essential because this is what we need in order to fix our tomorrow. We are equipped to do what we need to do to ensure that we plan our future. Because of what we are provided at the clinic, I use the services without feeling embarrassed,” states Beyonce.

It is important to Beyonce to have agency in her health and when to start a family. “I have a boyfriend who lives back home; and when he comes to visit, I would always be very worried because I had never used any contraception. After getting counseling and weighing my options, I chose the three-month injection for my family planning.”

For one young woman in Debreberhan, the only person controlling her future is her.





Making the Great Even Greater: Investing in the Right People in the Right Places

It used to be that the youth center Hasina Mohammed, 21, worked in the city of Harar served just a trickle of curious youth who were not quite sure what to make of it. But exercising patience and shifting the training on youth friendly services she got from Kefeta into high gear, Hasina has transformed herself into a thriving health worker who is well trained and enthusiastic to provide health services to those in need at the youth hub where young people congregate safely, unleash their creativity, and freely exchange ideas and information.

A midwife nurse by training, Hasina is excited to be part of the planned transformation. She invested her talents and newfound knowledge into strategically building trust with the young patrons who now come seeking everything from recreational activities to sexual reproductive health services.

“This is the right place to provide high quality, youth-friendly services. The training I received was very well tailored and thorough. It has shaped the way I provide health services specifically to young people,” says Hasina,

who did not waste any time designing her own plan to incorporate what she learned. The center was already equipped with a gym, library, IT room, and venues to host different events, and the fact that it is located right by a school makes it accessible to many young people. New services at the center now include counseling on how to develop healthy work habits, life skills training, employment opportunities and psychosocial support.

“I used Kefeta’s youth intake form for first time visitors that helps me get to know them faster so I can provide personalized information that is relatable,” continues Hasina. “Their first impression they develop determines whether they trust me as a service provider enough to keep coming back.”

Empowered to do the planning and execution of her programs, Hasina knows how to curate the services she provides to her peers.

Partnering with community leaders who are part of the community is what sets Kefeta apart. Communities are built and made better from within.





Determination Meets Transformation: Mainstreaming Financial Freedom for Women Business Owners

Seven months ago, Aregash Meshesha was sleeping on the floor of an Internally Displaced People (IDP) camp in Debre Berhan. Today, she runs a popular and profitable eatery in the camp and is not just self-employed, but also an employer.

Aregash fled her home due to conflict and found her way to the IDP camp with her four-year-old son while waiting to be reunited with her husband. She was alone and penniless, but remained hopeful and resolute about finding a way out of a desperate situation.

Quickly drawing on her instincts, Aregash ingratiated herself and convinced people in the IDP community to invest 2,000 ETB in her idea to establish a coffee business. Within a week of opening her tiny storefront, she was able to pay back her debt. By the time Kefeta arrived on scene, Aregash was brewing more than coffee—she was incubating a grand scheme to grow her business.

She signed up for classes Kefeta was offering on financial literacy, banking and investing,

and job creation. Aregash applied for and secured a 7,500 ETB social grant based on her proven success and solid business plan for expanding her coffee stand into a café that served breakfast and snacks.

“I was able to purchase all my supplies with the loan and launched my new business. It didn’t take long for it to take off. So much so that I had to hire my sister to help me keep up with demand.”

Aregash makes sure to deposit her profit in a bank, thereby establishing credit. With marginalized and unbanked women unable to get a foothold in financial institutions, Aregash is not only breaking the cycle of poverty, but playing a sophisticated role in the world of finance.

“Not only do I tell my friends about the services offered by Kefeta, but we also try to work together.”

It is the making of business titan, one coffee cup at a time.





Kefeta: A Blueprint for Hope

Even before she joined the new Kefeta Youth Coalition at the Adama youth hub, Bethlehem, 19, was an enthusiastic advocate for young women. For someone like her with an already embedded sense of self, the Youth Coalition was a natural fit.

The youth hubs are carefully designed to implement youth-focused and youth-led programming that offer young interest groups space to form coalitions, learn from one another, and explore opportunities for a better life.

Bethlehem signed up for life skills training given at the hub. “I could feel from the onset that what Kefeta brings us is hope,” she says. “It empowers us to have our voices heard. I have met many young people from all walks of life, from different fields of studies and experiences. We learn from one another. I am already excited by what I see here at the youth hub training center.”

The trainings available cover aspects of communication, entrepreneurship, career counseling, and coalition building. One important discovery for Bethlehem was that there are like-minded people who energize her but also challenge her. “I have had the chance to engage with over 30 young people in our coalition who will in turn inspire other young people to form their own network. We are all advancing our civic engagement as well as social and economic opportunities. Young people coming together in a coalition means our collective voices could have weight and have a chance to be heard.”





The entrepreneurship and employment readiness services offered at the Youth hub especially draw a lot of interest at the Adama center. With upcoming Kefeta SACCO, the Kefeta supported saving, credit and cooperative, young people will learn the importance of saving and have access to competitive financial loans to grow or start businesses.

In order to provide a holistic support system to young people, Kefeta also works to increase access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services through youth-friendly health service corners, where members feel comfortable to seek specialized healthcare.

“It is exciting to know Kefeta works to address another one of our main concerns—sexual and reproductive health. I had never encountered this in other youth-focused initiatives I was involved in previously,” Bethlehem says. “Kefeta will elevate us.”

Kefeta is making sure that a bulging young population is no longer seen as a liability. A healthy youth population that has a personal stake in Ethiopia is no longer aspirational. In Ethiopia, it is happening.

