CCRDA
NEWS-STORY

Recomitted to Prevention and Care

HIV/AIDS - Prevention and Care Advocacy
for Change, Special Edition

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CCRDA

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MINISTRY OF HEALTH - ETHIOPIA

The Global Fund

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The Editor’s Note

Silence does not mean a full absence of voice. A quite after a storm does not mean a storm has gone forever. We usually fade up before a long journey ends or blissfully carried away with false ends, ready to be deceived than facing the painful reality. Our national fight with HIV was heavy. Nobody at any moment had said our fight is over, and yet the false end is everywhere. The aggressive resistance is no more with us…

The quite is heard, the voice subsided. The storm smoothed out, the darkest days are behind us, however, it was not a promise that it will not come again. It is flowing, we seat still feeling the intermittent tide. HIV is with us...

The quite is disturbing, the voices are muffled or subdued. Our higher education institutions are places of struggle and hope. When the tide was sweeping, we have lost a generation. The suffering was a large-scale horror, the deaths too tragic. When the storm started to be died down, it just died down, the aftermath of the tragedy followed in another form.

Mother to child transmission of the virus was a critical challenge some two decades ago. We won some of the battels, and now we have HIV+ youngsters in higher educations. They are fruits of an arduous struggles. They are living models of successes against the odds.

The extreme bad memories are probably behind us. But not over. Many CSOs are still fighting the spread, the stigma, the discrimination still to date. CCRDA’s HIV forum member organizations are active in all they are active. They are working to maintain the level of awareness as high as possible, working to make the prevention effort fruitful, making an effort to make care services accessible and inclusive. Despite the effort some challenges are persisting.

Among the critical challenges, the fate of HIV+ students in higher education shows us all silences are not peace, there are muffled voices amidst broader success. New infections are deceased nationally, medications are better, general awareness is good, but none of them are good enough to stop the ongoing pains. This special edition will give you a glimpse of what life looks like for HIV+ students in higher education particularly, living life as HIV+ young adult generally.

This special edition is part of CCRDA’s effort to advocate for more understanding, more care, more preventive and supportive measures through stories. Let us discuss the challenges more openly and find as much solutions as possible.

Wish you an enjoyable reading.

"A Renewed Commitment, that's What We Need…"



Nigussu Legesse (PhD)
CCRDA Executive Director

Nigussu Legesse (PhD), CCRDA's Executive Director, is our guest for this Special Edition News-Story. Dr. Nigussu is also Co-Chair of the Global Fund's Country Coordination Mechanism-Ethiopia (CCM-E) (national committees which works with the Global Fund and supervise funds on behalf of their respective nations) and President of the Ethiopia Civil Society Organizations Council (ECSOC).

The Executive Director shares his view on CCRDA's advocacy efforts in higher education institutions, as well as other initiatives the organization has undertaken to combat HIV/AIDS.

What are the CCRDA's HIV/AIDS advocacy initiatives in higher education institutions?

Nigussu Legesse (PhD): CCRDA held two high-level discussions with representatives from higher education institutions, revealing alarming research findings about HIV+ prevalence that require immediate attention. The HIV prevalence among adolescent girls and young males at National level has risen to 1.7%, (adolescent girls and young males within schools and outside school has 1.3% and 2.2% prevalence rate respectively). In contrast, the nationwide HIV/AIDS prevalence, which is at 0.87%, highlights the need for targeted initiatives to tackle these issues.

Peer learning, awareness creation, and testimonies from HIV+ adolescents were key components of the high-level policy discussions and workshop. HIV+ university students shared their experiences, including how they discovered their status, ways to protect against HIV/AIDS, and their main challenges. The sessions highlighted youth in higher education who are living with HIV/AIDS often do not receive adequate attention.

Our research indicates that many higher education institutions, particularly the newly established ones, lack HIV/AIDS prevention policies and manuals. Regular awareness is needed to educate teenagers about the virus. We are collaborating with universities to address this gap in HIV prevention advocacy.Our finding also shows that the lack of leadership commitment is an additional obstacle for HIV/AIDS prevention efforts at higher education institutions.

In addition to higher education institutions, what other initiatives has CCRDA taken to tackle HIV/AIDS?

We have established seven forums with our 469 members, including the HIV/AIDS Forum. HIV/AIDS Forum consists of approximately 104 member CSOs actively engaged in HIV/AIDS issues, providing training, workshops, and panel discussions. Our members are engaged at the Woreda levels across the country. In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, we focus our efforts on high-prevalence areas, such as Addis Ababa and Gambella cities, as well as cities located close to Addis Ababa-Djibouti Road line.

In HIV/AIDS prevention efforts there are many stakeholders from government such as the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education. With these institutions and other stakeholders how is your collaboration and partnership?

At the national level, the Ministry of Health headed the effort to protect citizens from the virus. As CSOs, we collaborate with government and international organizations in efforts that focus on protecting our community from HIV/AIDS. In this regard, the Global Fund is a significant grant provider for prevention of HIV/AIDS programs. Since the Global Fund's establishment in 2002, CCRDA has been an active member of the CCM-E.

For the past five years, I'm serving as co-chair of the CCM-E, which is overseen by the Ministry of Health. In the CCM-E, I represent not just CCRDA but also CSOs engaging in HIV/AIDS prevention and control efforts. The government offers provides updated data and information sourced from their networks. We work together and in collaboration on the Global Fund project. Global Funds further provide crucial exposure for CSOs. We additionally work together with international organizations that concentrate on HIV/AIDS prevention, such as UNAIDS.

What challenges does the CCRDA encounter in its HIV/AIDS prevention and control efforts?

When considering the demand for addressing these issues, and the severity of the problem, available resources for initiatives are very limited.
Persistent HIV stigma and misinformation hinder effective prevention, testing, and treatment. Stigma prevents students from seeking critical help, while misconceptions about the virus perpetuate harmful behaviors and attitudes. Consequently, school dropout rates among these students are alarmingly high.

Additionally, a lack of policy and commitment is a significant challenge. Many higher education institutions lack comprehensive and effective policies for HIV prevention and management. We need to develop and enforce clear policies on HIV prevention, testing, and treatment within these institutions, integrating them into broader health and wellness strategies. All in all, we need a renewed commitment, that's what we need…

What is the CCRDA's focus area on HIV/AIDS prevention in the forthcoming years?

Last June, we concluded the three-year Global Fund Grant on HIV/AIDS. Our research assessment also helps us to prepare us to identify our next focus areas for the next phase of the project (2024 – 2026 HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria grant financed by the Global Fund).

The rising prevalence of HIV among students, particularly adolescent girls and young women, highlights the urgent need for effective responses from higher education institutions. In addition to university students, we will focus on Key Priority Populations (KPPs) such as Female Sex Workers (FSWs), prisoners, and young people who inject drugs, as they are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. We aim to promote peer support and advocacy to encourage student-led initiatives and foster a culture of understanding and inclusivity.
Additionally, successful advocacy hinges on all stakeholders fulfilling their roles effectively. The media is crucial in promoting our activities to a broader audience. They must amplify our efforts and report both successes and shortcomings to the public. It is essential for all of us to collaborate to protect our community better and better.

A Confident Stride.....

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What do you hope to see from your organization's HIV prevention and control initiatives?

The organization's major aim is to put its efforts to work towards building a more promising next generation. By taking part in advocacy efforts, we hope to help HIV+ students accomplish their goals while also protecting future generations from the virus.
We seek to contribute to efforts put forward by the government and stakeholders to prevent and control HIV, partners such as UNAIDS' 95-95-95 treatment targets (95% of people living with HIV should know their status, 95% of people aware of their HIV-positive status are on antiretroviral treatment (ART), and 95 % of people on ART are virally suppressed).

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge the former Southern Nation and Nationalities Regional state different sector offices, private health institutions, and the CCRDA which created the opportunity for us to voice our concerns to the wider public.

From the Horse's Mouth



Ayano Berasso (PhD)
Former President of Hawassa University

Hawassa University is praised for its support of HIV+ students and their efforts to combat HIV/AIDS. According to Zenebech Tirore, founder of the Beras Metemamen HIV+ Youth National Development Association, the university has welcomed 32 HIV+ students from Hawassa and nearby areas since 2017, fulfilling the association's request to bring students closer to home. Zenebech notes that nearly all the reassigned students have successfully completed their education.Former President of Hawassa University, Ayano Barasso (PhD), gave his remarks on this and related issues. Here are the excerpts.

CCRDA: HIV+ university students claim, it is tough for them to get enrolled in universities nearby. Hawassa University is noted for welcoming these students, who are often initially assigned to distant institutions. Can you tell us more about this?

Ayano Barasso (PhD): Hawassa University is taking proactive steps to support HIV+ students. We have admitted students who are HIV+ who live near our campuses. This approach recognizes the importance of having a support system in place, which can significantly impact their health and academic success.

HIV+ Students living far from home often face challenges in accessing healthcare and adhering to their medication regimens, which can lead to increased vulnerability. By creating an environment where these students can stay close to their families, the university is helping in mitigating some of those risks. Moreover, the university's focus on providing emotional, psychological support, and counseling services which is crucial. This holistic approach can empower HIV+ students to thrive both personally and academically.

What efforts does Hawassa University is undertaking to keep on supporting HIV+ students?

Each academic year, the university welcomes new students assigned by the Ministry of Education with a comprehensive orientation program. For many, this is their first experience away from home and trying to acclimatize themselves in one of Ethiopia's major cities. We know Hawassa University could expose them to a range of influences and opportunities. Understanding the high prevalence of peer pressure, we aim to implement various initiatives to support these students.

The orientation includes a half-day life skills training session facilitated by the Gender and HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office, where HIV/AIDS is a key topic of discussion. I take pride in being one of the trainers for these sessions. To enrich the experience, the university invites professional coaches from across the country to offer their expertise and guidance.

The Gender and HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office at Hawassa University is dedicated to supporting students living with HIV/AIDS. Due to their ongoing efforts, HIV-positive students have successfully completed their studies at our university. This office remains committed to helping with resources to ensure that all students thrive on their educational journey.

What universities should do further to support HIV/AIDS prevention and control efforts?

Reflecting on past decades, it's clear that we've made significant strides in the fight against HIV/AIDS, and awareness has greatly improved. However, it's crucial that we educate the younger generation about the ongoing risks associated with the virus. We have a responsibility to do much more to safeguard our teens from this concern

We must unite in our efforts to safeguard the next generation from HIV/AIDS and intensify our initiatives. Recently, we have observed concerning levels of recklessness among young people regarding their protection against HIV/AIDS. Some even argue that HIV is no longer a significant threat, which underscores the urgency of our mission. Clearly, we have much work ahead of us to raise awareness and maintain our records clear and on the spot on par with the resurging multifaceted challenges.

Bridging Distances : Cutting Physical Distance and Stigma



Tesfa (his real name changed for this story) is a fourth-year university student. Tesfa has contracted HIV through mother-to-child transmission. He was born in Jima City. His mother died when he was three years old. He doesn't know whether his father is still alive or not. He grew up with his aunt. According to Tesfa, his aunt had no formal education, but she knew the value of education. As a result, she has been assisting him to focus on his educational goals since he was a child. When he was seven years old, His aunt informed him that he's living with HIV.

According to Tesfa, in addition to his immediate surroundings, his aunt's husband discriminates against him. But now he says, “When I stated the hardships, I had endured from childhood are now behind me, people took it lightly what used to happen in my life was extremely challenging”.

In 2020, he traveled to Addis Abeba seeking for employment. However, his closest family weren't ready to accept him. So, for three months, he lived on the streets and worked to get some money to continue his 12th grade education. Surprisingly, despite the odds, he passed the national exam and went to university.

He is one of the unsung heroes. CCRDA invited him to be a special guest, for this special edition and share readers some insight on his examined life. Here are some of the excerpts.

CCRDA: What are the main challenges that HIV+ university students facing during their stay at university?

Tesfa: Discrimination and stigma remain among the most critical challenges. The best friend I had while I was in the university is no longer a friend. We used to share everything. Life was easy, when sharing was possible. The saddest thing happened when he found out that I’m living with HIV. He severed our friendship abruptly. It was hard to accept that we would no more be friends because of my status.

The other hurdle comes from financial concerns. This year, I'm working part-time jobs around the university compound to secure some income and alleviate my financial problems at least to some extent. In the university, we dine at about 5:00 p.m. For instance, I would take my medication each night around 9:00 p.m., four hours after I had my dinner. As we all know, HIV medications require a timely and healthy diet. It was hard to get adequate food. As a result, I spent the earnings I made on additional meals at night before taking the medication. You can see how many students would miss on the chance to feel healthy and face the educational challenges with clearest head.

What information and knowledge do you think is needed most to support HIV+ adolescents to achieve in their life?

During my stay in my hometown, I had no guidance on how to handle my conditions. On a monthly basis, I use to go to a nearby hospital where I got a medication with no additional knowledge beside the bare minimum of how to take the pills. I kept my hospital contacts; they told me a sustained education sessions had begun. It was late but better than never.

Another visible challenge is distance. On average I spent more than two days on the road to reach my university from my hometown. In this regard the Ministry of Education has to carry out a reform to minimize difficulties students face by going ways far from their families and facing complicated physical, psychological and social challenges. The next generation should not face what we had faced, HIV+ students should not be assigned far from their hometown.

When I was assigned to the University, which is too far from my hometown, I thought a lot about how I would overcome the challenges that I dreaded deeply. How would I take my medicine? The fear was debilitating. When I travelled to where I was assigned to, I put the medication inside my sock. I didn't believe my locker. While traveling to my assigned university as a transiting traveler, I stayed in Addis Ababa.

It was a sleepless night. Thinking of what would happen if guards found out the drugs? What if they asked me Infront of students? said to myself, I'm finished, I will be finished. It was hard.

How did you join Beras Metemamen HIV+ Youth National Development Association?

When I went in for medical treatment to the hospital in 2022, the Doctor told me that he had scheduled a meeting for me with someone. Then he connected me with university students who are members of the association. Then they introduced me to Zenebech, and I joined the association.

As a young university student, you would require considerable financial and psychological support. I have got more than I had hoped from Zenebech. She told me when we first met that she would support me in whatever I needed and that I should just focus on studying.

Now, I advocate for HIV/AIDS control and prevention efforts, and I share my own story with others. My confidence is back. To be honest, before meeting with Zenebech, I had never spoken in front of a new person. When I share you this story, it brought tears to my eyes. She encourages me in plenty of ways.

We need a lot of individuals like Zenebech; she alone cannot do everything we need more people who could advocate for the HIV/AIDS prevention and control efforts. I would also say HIV/AIDS advocacy, preventive, and control activities need to begin at the Kebele and Woreda levels, with many partners. Most of the training, support, and life skill coaching of HIV+ people occur in urban places. Many HIV+ adolescents do not have the fair chance to achieve what I accomplished. They lead unhealthy living because of discrimination and other challenges, we should help more, do more in rural areas to feel ok and rightly said "I gave back".

"Inspired to Dream"

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After attending social groups and visiting the hospital for my medication, I met another HIV+ young person, who filled me with hope for the first time. I realized I wasn't alone and formed friendship with other HIV+ teenagers.At university, I met Zenebech, who helped me overcome my lack of confidence. I began to believe in myself and work toward my goals. I started speaking openly and benefiting from Zenebech's training sessions. If I hadn't met her, I'm not sure if I could manage in the manner I did now. Before knowing her,
I often stayed hidden at home, after I joined Beras Metemamen HIV+ Youth National Development Association friends from across the country gave me hope.

As a final word, let me add one thing. Currently, university HIV+ prevention units are inactive except on World AIDS Day. Universities need to advocate for a safer place and a healthy society in which we all can dream. They should continue to teach HIV/AIDS is a significant concern. a personal level, I will do my level best. My goal is to become a health professional and support HIV+ youth in achieving their dreams.

"Pleaded not to be Humiliated …"

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From my personal experience, HIV-positive university students need immediate support. I propose creating a designated area at the university where they can safely store their medications. If providing a separate room is challenging, at least having a dormitory section specifically for HIV-positive students would encourage mutual support.
Additionally, HIV/AIDS awareness and advocacy service should extend beyond teenagers to include academic staff, why? I saw even some health professionals and instructors hold questionable attitudes about HIV. There is still much work to be done to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS.

"Pleaded not to be Humiliated …"



Mignot (her real name changed for this story) is a college student. She had lost her mother before her first birthday. When she was two years old, she had lost her father too. She believed HIV had been transmitted to her from her mother during breast-feeding.

Mignot was raised by her stepmother. She was alone throughout her formative years due to wide-spread discrimination. She explained that she does not play with anyone and does not have any friends.

Despite numerous hurdles, she joined university but failed the remedial exam after she had a good-bad time for one academic year at university. She couldn't manage to stay longer than that "passing through all the challenges were insurmountable" she quit. Now continuing her study in another collage.

We had a brief stay with her. Here are the excerpts.

CCRDA: Do you remember your first experience learning that you were HIV positive?

Since childhood, I hesitated to take my medication properly because I questioned why I needed it. My stepmother often told me I was too young to understand the truth, so she never explained it to me directly. I remember one day when she kick my younger sister and said, "How do you dress her cloth? She's sick. you know she is HIV+?" Discrimination began with my own brother, in addition to the challenges I face from classmates and my surroundings, that is how I know.

How did you join Beras Metemamen HIV+ Youth National Development Association?

After learning about my condition, my stepmother arranged for me to meet other HIV-positive youths in town who were also taking medication. Meeting them made me realize I was not alone.

Initially, I felt nervous about introducing myself to the group. However, I recognized that challenges make me stronger and wouldn't hold me back. Then I met Zenebech, who dramatically changed my life. I remember how I was so excited on our first training session that I was too shy to share even my name during introductions.

Zenebech has been one of my strongest allies. Before meeting her, I often felt lonely, but she made me feel empowered. Many HIV-positive adolescents lack the same opportunities I have, and some take their medication in secrecy, hiding in bathrooms. With Zenebech's support, I was able to transfer to a university near my hometown instead of attending the one I was assigned to by the Ministry of Education.

During my remedial education, several significant events occurred. Tragically, my stepmother passed away just three days after I started my studies. Despite our challenges, she had played a crucial role in helping me develop my abilities.

What are the main challenges that HIV+ university students facing during their stay at university?

While I was a remedial student at university, there was a dorm inspection. During this inspection, the proctor took my medication and questioned me about it in front of my dormmates. I explained that it was a tuberculosis medication, but she refused to believe me and harassed me instead, even asked if I was trying to commit suicide with it. Eventually, I showed her my medical documentation from the health institution confirming that I was on HIV medication and pleaded with her not to humiliate me in front of others. After several discussions, she finally apologized, but it felt too late.

In your personal experience what is needed to support HIV+ university students?

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A Confident Stride



Zenebech Tirore

Founder of Beras Metemamen HIV+ Youth National Development Association

Zenebech Tirore lives in Sidama Region, Hawassa City. She has been living with HIV for the past 24 years. During the early years, recounting her bitter memory, she said “my very personhood seemed to be considered a deadly virus, nobody would come to share meals, even closer member of the family”.

In 2000 she found out her status and struggled with it until she began taking anti-retroviral drugs in 2005. 24 years staying alive and helping many to keep going, living with purpose. She said, “nothing seemed what it looks, I lived these all years but have had a great deal of near-death experiences. Society’s opinions were not helpful for those who preferred to stood their ground and fight. Every metaphor that was widely in use in one way or another targeted to remind us of the lurking death. I still feel what most of us used to feel. Words like “Cobra”, አመንምኔ”፣ “የዘመኑ” and ተሸካሚ” either forced us to think of the imminent death or incriminating us for suffering a bad fate”.

Stopped, seem to recollect something. Went on telling the darkest hours of the soul. “By then I had two children, miserably hopeless and contemplating suicide on numerous occasions. My husband passed away; I thought I would follow him in no time.

The desire to live dissipated, resigned from everything normal, sad, who would I leave my children to in that harsh, blind stigma and discrimination; even though their status is negative”. It is obvious she was happy to reflect on how she braves it out.

In retrospect, with a sense of relief, added that there had been improvements in information regarding back then it was difficult. “Once you know, you started to melt in fear. Now everyone one is aware of how HIV/AIDS is transmitted”. She notes that there has been significant development in HIV/AIDS awareness over the past three decades. However, people continue to die from HIV/AIDS, and the number of children who have the virus from mother-child transmission are suffering the stigma, and the rate of new infection is on the rise, particularly in adolescent parenthood.

This fact had changed her attitude, and she unveils herself to the public and engages in initiatives that she believes might help HIV+ individuals, as well as the preventative and control efforts to sensitize communities and cure the rate of prevalence in the productive age groups. Herewith few add-ons from her personal insights learned from a bold public presence.

CCRDA: You are now an advocate for HIV+ students and support HIV prevention and control efforts. Why are you disclosing information to the public amid continuing stigma and discrimination?

Zenebech Tirore: I reveal myself to the public for two reasons: first, no one should pass through what I passed through, and if he/she is HIV+, they can live with the virus I can help them live. and second, everybody else should protect themselves from HIV.

How did you start helping adolescents who are HIV+?

Family members and other relatives of the HIV+ kids were obliged to look for orphaned kids when their parents passed away. More often, the relatives eventually fail to manage the children's medication and care. The children endure terrible humiliation and discrimination. The only option left

Since 2011, I have provided support to 32 HIV+ children who have been in my house. They were aged from one month to 14 years. On a very personal level I adopted three HIV+ children. The former Southern Nation and Nationalities Regional Health Bureau, as well as citizens, supported me throughout my work. I have provided so far various forms of support to 1331 HIV+ adolescents.

How was Beras Metemamen HIV+ Youth National Development Association was established?

Life skills instruction, treatment, monitoring their medical care, and shielding them from the influence of their peers were all important. We made the decision to start an organization that provides comprehensive support to HIV+ students in 2022. following the discussion with the governing bodies. A significant number of our organization's members have been actively involved in HIV/AIDS advocacy, prevention, and control initiatives. Since all our members are living with the virus which they have acquired from their mothers during pregnancy. They are aware the public, advocate and defend their own rights and others in disadvantaged conditions.

The organization looks to provide hope for HIV+ people to study and become successful. The number of HIV prevalence, particularly among people aged 15 to 24, is significantly high, hence we focused on communication methods for this age group. My goal is to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS, and I do not want to see any new cases.

Why does your organization want to concentrate on HIV+ University students?

First, I was inspired by a tragedy. HIV+ youngsters often facing successfully the ups and downs of life joined higher education, or better to say secured their chance to join. When they were assigned, the universities were far from their families and the support system that was available, like the medical services.

They tried to survive the conditions. They found it hard. Quitted. Eventually, passed away. That moves me to do something about the issue.

What did you experience regarding the lack of HIV/AIDS control and prevention efforts at higher education institutions?

Our members continue to notify us about the stigma, discrimination, and misconceptions regarding the virus among those in academia. Medications are now easily accessible. Even though there is still discrimination, and the virus is still the same as it was 20 years ago, I believe that medication accessibility has led to a reduction in the number of deaths and sick patients treated in hospitals. Nevertheless, the public needs to pay close attention to the virus and take preventative measures to protect themselves.



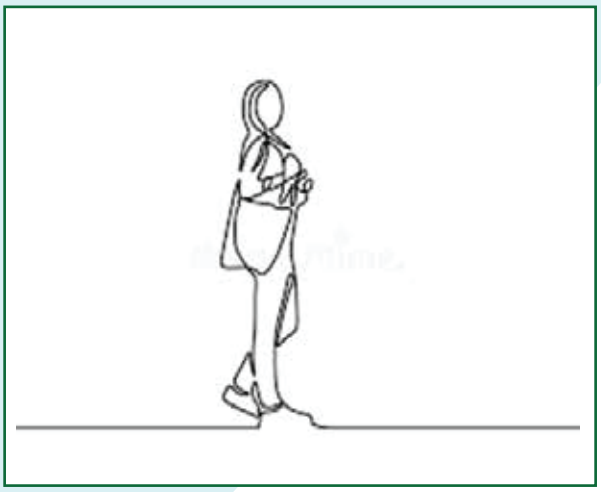
The public fear about HIV has dramatically decreased. Many seem to assume the virus is less consequential. The negligence rate is dangerous especially in the adolescence group.

What assistance do you give to university students who are HIV+ and have faced difficulties while enrolled at universities far from their hometown?

Since 2017, we have collaborated with ten universities from the former South Nation and Nationalities Regional State. In our efforts, we transferred 63 HIV+ students from distant universities to institutions closer to their families.

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"Inspired to Dream"



Hibret (her real name changed for this story) is a 22-year-old third-year university student. Now she lives with her parents. She said "I was consistently questioned my parents why I take drugs every day. I guess I gave them a hard time. Ultimately, they decided to notify me when I was in fourth grade, and that was how I am aware that I am living with HIV". Hibret recounted her school days she was alone. Bemused even today "I've have had that wonder of being alone and unique, why this occurred to me when my oldest and younger siblings are HIV-negative, therefore I've confronted my family since I was a young child"
.Let us give a glimpse to her world. Enjoy the candid interview we had with her.

What is the reason behind your becoming strong and joining University despite many challenges happening in your life?
My parents have always been supportive. At 18, I joined the HIV+ Adolescent Association, which profoundly influenced me and inspired me to dream. When I joined university, despite my parents' suggestion to register in a nearby college, I chose to challenge myself and pursue higher education, feeling ready to face whatever comes my way.

What is the challenge you face in the university?

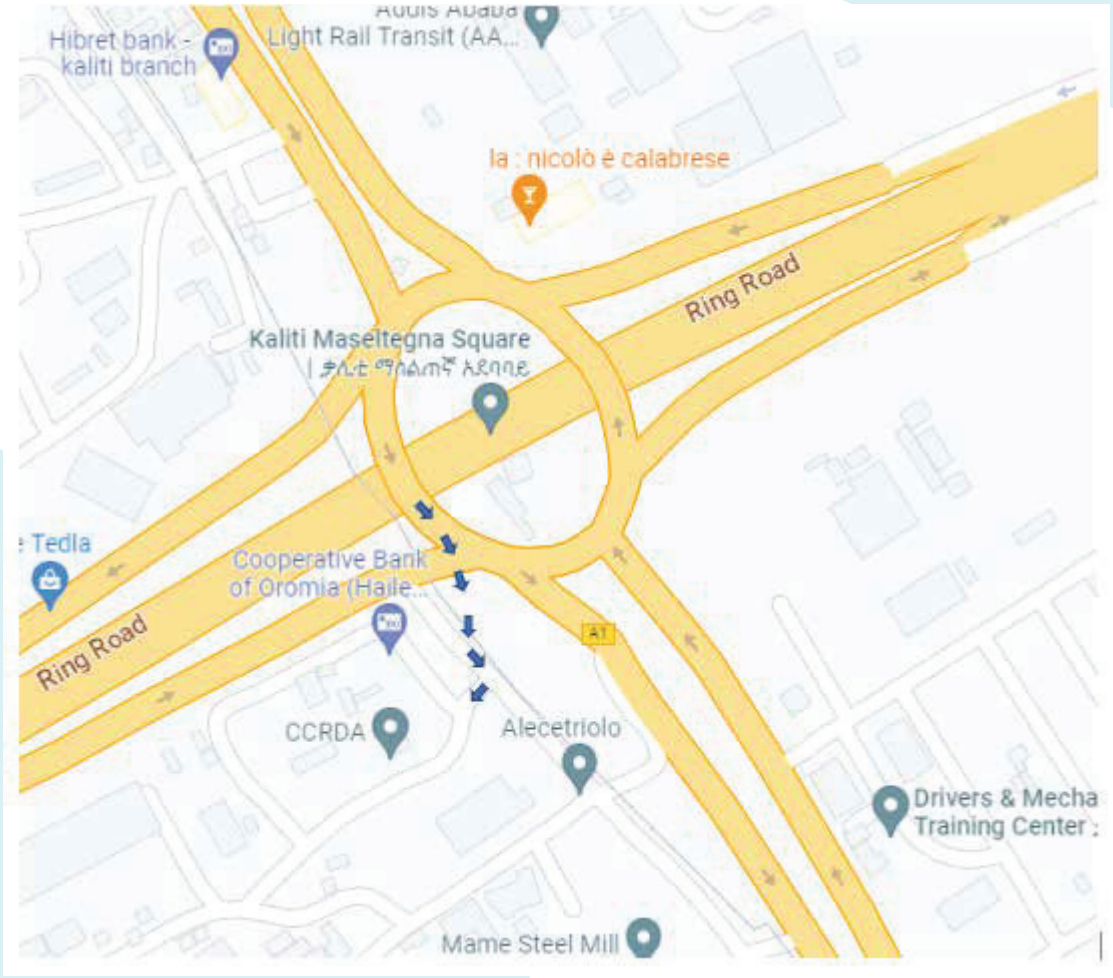
In 2020, I joined one of our country's government universities, over 1,000 kilometers from home. Initially, my parents were hesitant about my decision, but as I told you I chose to attend to my affairs far away from them. I believed that being HIV+ would not make me any less capable of completing my studies.

I began my education while receiving monthly medication from health facilities and kept my prescription hidden in my locker. However, one day during a dorm check, the proctor found my medication and publicly questioned me about it, asking if I intended to commit suicide and how I obtained it. I was shocked and explained that it was only a medication.
The following morning, the campus was rife with prejudice. Conversations in the café and classrooms made it unbearable to live there, especially without family or relatives for support. Ultimately, I decided to withdraw from my studies.
My personal experience has shown me that several elements must function effectively in higher education institutions. Awareness-raising efforts should target not only students but also university staff, including proctors and professors. My dream was to graduate with distinction, but due to the challenges, I couldn't complete my studies satisfactorily.
Fortunately, with my parents' support and their negotiations with officials at my hometown university, I transferred to a nearby institution and began studying again, after many ups and downs. Initially, I was reluctant to continue my education due to the impact of my previous experience, but my family insisted. For reasons not apparent for me, the university registrar and other officials were also not pleased with my transfer, making the process quite difficult. I still do not get it. Why it challenges people even to be a little bit supportive while the system allows them to be fair. It reminds me the bias level, even in people who have advanced education.

What is the difference after you transfer to a university which is near to your hometown?
I feel at home, I take my medication openly and don't hide it. In my previous institution, however, I took my medication in secret, often jumping at the sound of someone approaching my locker Student, if assigned closer to home, as they would be close to the support, these issues could be minimized. I can't tell you enough how proper medication management would help them. If educators understood, like any other young people, many would have realized their dreams with lesser hardships.

How did you join Beras Metemamen HIV+ Youth National Development Association?

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