

ድር ቢያብር

Dir Biyabir 2020 Annual Report

January 03, 2021

OVERVIEW

Message From The Chairperson

It is impossible to describe 2020 in mere words! COVID-19 has caused death and human suffering in every nation on the planet. Given how much even the wealthiest countries have been struggling to contain COVID, one can only imagine the extent of the struggle for poor countries like Ethiopia. And if that was not enough already, add to the mix a locust invasion of biblical proportion, Egypt's attempt to block the Nile dam, outright horrific genocide (mostly against Amharas but also including others like Gurages and Gamos,) stoked by a brutal ethnic mob (aka TPLF), a military law enforcement operation to control the aforementioned mob, more genocide and you will see how dire the situation in Ethiopia has been in 2020. It's been no picnic in America either with endless incidents of police brutality against innocent black citizens. It is encouraging to see the collective outrage of American and indeed global citizens against this injustice. Sadly such collective outrage has been largely missing when it comes to the horrific genocide in Ethiopia, and most disheartening has been the silence of many Ethiopians themselves.

It is easy to lose hope when we are faced with an endless parade of tragedies and calamities. It is hard to maintain any faith in humanity when, as we saw in Ethiopia, in the face of immense challenges, some people intentionally decide to spend every ounce of their energy creating more problems rather than solutions, and when they choose to act more like savages than human beings. It seems impossible not

to lose hope. But then we remember all the horrible things humanity has survived and overcome: the flu pandemic of 1918, world wars, genocide in Rwanda, the Holocaust.... and we realize that humanity can survive all the tragedies if we maintain our faith and hope, and choose to work together and take action to make the world better one small corner at a time.

Indeed 2021 has the potential to be the year of the healing of all wounds inflicted and exposed by 2020. The focus and hard work of scientists all over the world has brought us a promising COVID vaccine. The law enforcement operation in Ethiopia has finally dismantled the brutal ethnic mob TPLF that has terrorized Ethiopia for over 45 years, the horrific waves of genocide in Ethiopia are slowly and painfully coming under control.

In our much smaller way, Dir Biyabir and its partners in Ethiopia have been quietly implementing a few projects that have real impact. In 2020 we funded three projects: the purchase of books for a small community school in the Gulele neighborhood of Addis Abeba, the building of a bridge in the small rural community of Weyniye in Northern Shewa, and the purchase of books for a community library in Debre Birhan founded by a local school teacher.

For the last 3 years the momentum and the communication at Dir Biyabir had slowed down due to major personal commitments. For the first time we were unable to keep our cadence and publish annual reports. We thank all of our members who stuck by us anyway and enabled us to fund these projects. We hope to return with new vigor in 2021!

Leadership Team

The current Dir Biyabir Executive Team and Board includes : Chairperson - Haeran Fisseha, Secretary - Seena George, Treasurer - Ksenia Siegel. The Board consists of: Dr. Tadesse Wolde, Sam Smith, and Dr. Asrat Tesfayesus. All Dir Biyabir positions are voluntary and uncompensated. The Executive team

continues to cover 100% of Dir Biyabir operational expenses, so that all membership fees and donations are directly utilized to fund projects in Ethiopia.

We do expect some changes the Executive Team in 2021 with likely transitions in the Secretary and Treasurer roles.

MEMBERSHIP

Dir Biyabir membership levels are as follows:

- Diamond: \$1,000 per year
- Platinum: \$500 per year
- Gold: \$200 per year
- Silver: \$100 per year

Membership fees are our only reliable and consistent source of revenue to fund projects in Ethiopia so we very much appreciate all of our members.

Membership is a mechanism to fund our projects in Ethiopia via membership fees. There are no additional responsibilities or obligations for being a member.

In 2020 we had 25 members, a significant chunk of our members did not renew their membership over the last couple of years and this is likely due to lack of regular updates from our team. We look forward to welcoming back our non-renewing members in 2021 and we invite new members to join us as well. An increase in membership revenues allows us to fund more projects. As always 100% of membership fees and donations are allocated to fund one of our grassroots projects in Ethiopia.

Reminder to Members: Membership is annual and can be renewed simply by paying membership fees within the calendar year. Members are strongly encouraged to renew their membership as early in the year as possible.

For those of you who prefer the convenience of auto-renewal we remind you that we have a **PayPal Auto-Renew feature** on our website: <http://dirbiyabir.org/page/become-a-member> so do make use of it so you don't have to worry about remembering to renew your membership every year.

New or Renewing Membership can be paid by:

1) Sending a check (please include your email address for receipts) payable to Dir Biyabir to:

Dir Biyabir, P.O. Box 391532, Mountain View, CA 94039

2) Via Pay Pal on our website: <http://dirbiyabir.org/page/become-a-member>

PROJECT STATUS

Books for Siblings Academy

Having watched a short Al Jazeera documentary on the talented director of the hit Amharic satirical sit com “Min Litazez”, the Chairperson of Dir Biyabir set out to track down the director Behailu Wassie and learn more about the community school he and his family had founded in Addis Abeba. On a personal trip to Ethiopia at the end of 2019, thanks to the help of some friends she was able to connect with Behailu and learn more about the inspiring school he had founded.



Ashenafie with new books purchased

2014. It was started as a kindergarten in Gulele neighborhood in the area around Addisu Gebeya . The intent is to give children access to low cost but high quality education. Given the utter lack of reasonably priced quality schools in Addis Abeba, there is a dire need for such schools.

The school started with 37 students at a kindergarten level, and after a successful 8 years the school has grown to 304 students. It has also expanded from kindergarten level to a first cycle level (i.e. up to grade four). During the 8 years the school has been one of the top contenders in competitions hosted by the sub city. Prizes won by the school in competitions include: student bags, books, and certificate of recognition for the school.

Siblings Academy works closely with the local community so that parents feel a sense of ownership for the school. The school provides assistance for

families that cannot afford the tuition and there are currently 13 students that get free tuition. The standard tuition is 650 birr per month (about \$17). The school is founded on property owned by the family and thus has no rental costs which enables the school to lower school fees while paying competitive salaries to teachers. All revenue from the school is invested back into the school. Currently the school has 27 employees and is managed by Ato Ashenafi Wassie. The school has a goal to expand to the elementary level in the coming year.

In January 2020, on speaking with the Chairperson, Behailu confirmed that, like most schools in Ethiopia, his school lacked sufficient books. He was thus invited to submit a proposal to Dir Biyabir including the specific list of books the school needed to purchase. Behailu was very swift in submitting a detailed proposal including a list of a total of 535 books covering Math, Science, Amharic, and English. On February 6 2020, Dir Biyabir wired \$980 to the Siblings Academy to fund the purchase of these books. As a testament to the commitment and efficiency of the Siblings team, by February 14 all the books had been purchased and photos and videos as well as a receipt had been sent to Dir Biyabir.

We congratulate the Siblings Academy staff and wish much success to the bright and eager students!



Kids from Siblings Academy with their new books

Ras Abebe Aregay Library

Ras Abebe Aregay Library was founded in the city of Debre Birhan in 2016 by Mezemir Girma, an English teacher from Debre Birhan University. Mezemir’s goal was to encourage reading especially among the youth and support local student by making key reference books readily available to them for free. To better support students the library has extended hours and is open 7 days a week until 7pm.

In December 2016, the Chairperson of Dir Biyabir had visited the library while on an extended self-funded trip to Ethiopia. She saw first hand that the library was providing much needed service to the



Ras Abebe Aregay Library - Dec 2016

community which suffered from a severe lack of availability of books. An assessment undertaken by Mezemir and volunteers in 2019, found that the library had 800 readers in a week. Of these, 62% were youth students from the local High School and University and 38% were children or adults. The library had about 2,000 books.

The assessment also revealed the usage of the library by the different groups: children usually read folktales/stories and school supplementary books. The library helps the children with language development training to read Amharic folktales using projectors and to recreate/refresh them at the play ground with various materials outside of the library. The library plays a pivotal role in the community providing a safe and educational place for local youth who would otherwise have no place to go.

Mezemir had been soliciting donations to purchase more books for his library and so he was invited to submit a proposal to Dir Biyabir via our project implementation partner [ADHENO](#). He requested: supplementary educational books, as well as history, poetry folktale fiction books. Dir Biyabir wired \$1,062 for this project in June 2020. A total of 257 books were purchased at a cost of \$885 and



ADHENO handing over books to Mezemir (right)

delivered to the library by ADHENO. ADHENO’s administrative and logistical fees for purchasing and transporting the books was \$177.

Mezemir reiterated that with this project, children who would otherwise be unable to access such expensive reference books will now be able read them in the library or borrow and take them home. Each book has been stamped and there is agreement that they will never be sold or donated to third parties. He requested a bookshelf so as to create a “Dir Biyabir” corner in the library with these books. ADHENO arranged for a shelf to be built for him by a local carpenter.

Dir Biyabir is proud to support Mezemir’s vision of a community library that expands horizons through reading. We look forward to hearing about the impact of this library in the community.



Ras Abebe Aregay Library - Oct 2020

Rural Bridge Construction

In August of 2014 based on the urgent request of the community, Dir Biyabir has funded the construction of a rural bridge over the Beressa River in Northern Shewa connecting the kebeles (neighborhoods) of Meskele Iyesus and Tid Amba.

When the Dir Biyabir Chairperson visited Ethiopia on a personal trip in 2019, the [ADHENO](#) team (our largest project implementation partner in Ethiopia), had presented a petition signed by hundreds of villagers requesting the construction of a second bridge over the fast flowing Beressa river, a tributary to the Blue Nile (Abay) river. This second bridge was to connect the kebele (neighborhood) of



Original Bridge at Weyniye

Weyniye with the kebeles of Moy and Kasset. The current wooden bridge is very unstable and unsafe. The local government stated they

have no funding for constructing a bridge and requested help from ADHENO and passed on the petition from villagers.

As background, 90% of travel in the area is by foot and the absence of a safe bridge greatly increases travel time required for critical tasks such as carrying goods to and from market daily, fetching water, and accessing basic social services. Women especially bear the brunt of the burden as they are responsible for fetching water, and transporting goods (usually on their back and head). In addition to extending travel time, lack of a safe bridge had also resulted in lives lost as people tried to cross the difficult gorge with fast flowing river.

A bridge at this location was expected to have significant impact for the community including: uniting the villages across the 3 kebeles and allowing easy passage for pedestrians and livestock, as well as attracting back villagers who had left the area for bigger towns and cities.

In June of 2020 Dir Biyabir wired \$5,510 to ADHENO to manage the construction of this bridge. The ADHENO team leveraged their working relationship with the local wereda (district) offices to implement this project. As in the first bridge, the local Wereda Rural Road and Transport Office provided the design and specification for the bridge. They also selected the required skilled construction workers experienced in masonry, carpentry, blacksmithing, etc. ADHENO held a workshop to train 12 members of the community who had been identified for the Bridge Management Committee. The main task of the committee was to mobilize villagers to participate in the construction of the bridge, and to manage and maintain the bridge after construction. Construction of the bridge began just as the rainy season was starting, and was completed in just 2 weeks due to the passionate engagement of



New Bridge at Weyniye

local villagers. The Woreda Rural Roads Office monitored and supported the construction process and finally took over the construction of the bridge per the agreement. The

bridge is 12 meters (39.4 feet) long and 3.1 meters (10.2 feet) wide and has been in operation since July.

The local community has repeatedly expressed their happiness and gratitude for the new bridge. We are grateful for the opportunity to make the lives of these hard-working folks a little easier, and we pass on their thanks and blessings to our members!

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

January 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020

Revenue		
Membership Fees		5,150.00
Donations from Individuals		600.00
Corporate Match		2,700.00
Amazon Smile Donation		67.63
Donation from Dir Biyabir management team for operating expenses		1,000.00
Total Revenue		9,517.63
Expenses		
Grants Paid Out		7,552.00
Books for Siblings Academy	980.00	
Books for Ras Abebe Aregay Library - ADHENO	1,062.00	
Bridge Construction - ADHENO	5,510.00	
Operating Expenses		339.84
PO Box		
Bank/Wire Fees	135.00	
Paypal Fees	99.50	
Web Hosting Fee	105.34	
Total Expense		7,891.84
Total Revenue Less Total Expense		1,625.79
Ending Balance From 2019		47,073.74
Total 2020 Revenue – Total 2020 Expense		1,625.79
2020 Ending Balance		48,699.53

GOALS FOR 2021

- Provide emergency grant for COVID relief food distribution for those living in extreme poverty in Addis Abeba (via our partner [Grace For All](#))
- Re-start Northern Shewa school sponsorship program that was interrupted due to school shutdown to prevent spread of COVID-19
- Identify new funding partners for Dir Biyabir or ADHENO
- Fundraise from individual donors and supporters of Dir Biyabir
- Identify new and compelling projects to support in Ethiopia with existing partners
- Identify new and compelling projects to support in Ethiopia with new partners
- Grow 2020 level of membership
- Successful transition of a new Treasurer and Secretary
- Re-establish regular reporting and Website/Social Media updates

Thank You To Our Members !



Villagers on the new Weyniye Bridge

Most of Dir Biyabir's projects are funded by the membership fees and donations of our members, so a very special **Thank You** goes to all our members. By renewing their membership year after year, our long-time members has been especially critical in giving us a continued stream of revenue to fund our projects, so we are always gratified and encouraged by their support. If you like what we do, the best way to support us is by continuing to renew your membership and by encouraging friends and family to join Dir Biyabir. For our part, we will continue to commit that 100% of your membership fees and donations will be allocated to projects in Ethiopia.

“Dir Biyabir Anbessa Yassir” - “When Spider Webs Unite, They Can Tie Up a Lion”. Our name is inspired by a popular Ethiopian proverb that highlights the great strength inherent in people working together. “Dir Biyabir” means “when spider webs unite”, and the more webs we have the stronger we are. Thank you for being a part of our web!

2020 is finally over, here's to all the wonderful things 2021 will bring to us all. Happy New Year!