

A HIGHLY ABRIDGED HISTORY OF PROFESSOR GETNET TADELE'S "GIVING BACK TO COMMUNITY" PROJECTS

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Professor Getnet Tadele

INTRODUCTION

Professor Getnet Tadele, son of the Azena community from rural Dogen village across the Ayo river, in the Amhara region, is currently a Professor of Medical Sociology and a member of the Ethiopian parliament residing in Addis Ababa. He is a crusader and a special friend with a singular mission; a mission to make a difference in the lives of others, especially that of the community that raised him. Friend? Oh yes, Getnet and I have been friends ever since we worked on a book project titled "Giving Back to the Community: Community Development Projects Implemented by Academics in Ethiopia".



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laboratory, altogether benefitting thousands currently, and with the potential to serve a million or more long-term.

This article starts with a brief introduction to Getnet's early life and then delves into an abridged version of his fundraising prowess in giving back to the community that raised him. The story begins with the building of a bridge between communities, literally and figuratively, with a multiplier effect of a dozen new schools, a library, and a laboratory, altogether benefitting thousands currently, and with the potential to serve a million or more long-term. With the reader's permission, I would like to dwell on the literal bridge a bit longer.

Pained and traumatized by the loss of lives swept away in a simple act of crossing a river, the idea for a bridge across the Ayo River was planted early in Getnet's young mind. Distressed to his core by routine occurrences of unsuspecting neighbors and relatives being swept away by the sudden gush from torrential downpours on nearby hills, young Getnet resolved to do something about it "when I grow up". The news of lost lives, including that of a baby plucked right out of his Ankelba (traditional baby carrier made of goat skin) securely fastened to his mother's back, was perennially haunting and remains unforgettable even today in Getnet's professional mind. Professional? Oh yes, he is now a Professor of Medical Sociology at Addis Ababa University, winner of numerous prizes for academic excellence, and innovative research methods in neglected tropical diseases (NTDs – for example, Podoconoiosis and scabies), working on equity issues for fringe communities including street children, sex workers, and a member of the Ethiopian parliament to boot. He joined parliament in October 2021 having accepted with humility his community's wishes to represent them in the national body responsible for making laws that impacted the daily lives of everyday people in villages, towns, *Woredas*, and Zonal administrations such as

theirs. Why would an eminent academic and community organizing project builder who facilitated international grants and fellowships for numerous Ph.D. and Masters students so they can get free high-quality education abroad join politics and parliament? Why would a literal bridge builder, a prolific fundraiser for elementary and high schools as well as a library and laboratory join politics and parliament? The answer is simple: greater public service made urgent by a plea from his community and the wider public in adjacent Woredas. Although he represents two woredas - Ayo Guagsa and Ankesha Guagsa – his transformational organizing and fundraising assisted in building schools and other activities at the Zonal level. He supported the Zone Administration by sharing available funds and mobilizing resources for the Zonal hospital as well as through two rounds of COVID support fundraising, and translation of textbooks to Agewigna (his mother tongue).



THE MAN, THE BRIDGE, SCHOOLS, LIBRARY, AND LABORATORY HE HELPED BUILD OR UPGRADE

THE BRIDGE

An estimated 60,000 villagers on both banks crossed the Ayo River during the *Kiremt* (rainy season), and an estimated 11,000 people did so every Saturday to get to Azena market - the only



market in the area. As many as 600 youngsters made the trek across it on weekdays to attend elementary schools and the only secondary school (grades 9-12) in Azena Town. Before the construction of a bridge courtesy of Getnet's resolve to fulfill his childhood dream, an estimated 20 and 30 individuals drowned trying to cross the Ayo River each year and many more lives were lost during

emergency transportation of patients who didn't make it to a care facility. Students missed exams and repeated grades when the river overflowed its banks and a considerable number drowned. Women in labor and people with serious illnesses could not access medical care on the other side

of the river. Attending burial ceremonies and important church services, visiting family members and friends, or accessing government services such as the courts and police, were fraught with danger and often impossible during the rainy season.

As building a bridge across the Ayo River was beyond the financial and technical capabilities of



the then Ankesha Guagusa *Woreda* and Azena community, Getnet - a newly minted Ph.D. degree holder from the University of Amsterdam - wrote a project proposal and entreaties for funds in English and Amharic to 250 potential funders, mostly non-governmental organizations. This, in addition to knocking on physical doors in personal pleas to make his childhood dream a reality. He received no positive responses after three years of trying. But he pressed on undeterred. His final success had to wait until 2008 and the good graces of the World Wide Web

that connected him to a Canadian non-profit organization known as Partners in the Horn of Africa (PiHA) - the sole funder of 48 meters -long all-weather bridge over the Ayo bridge. Finally!! In testimony by the PiHA's country director, Getnet's unrivaled tenacity and tireless dedication to his community in Azena village were described in the ensuing words paraphrased by me: I have been in the



development sector for over 16 years and have been fortunate to work with many communities in different regions on a wide range of worthwhile projects. I have come to know many great community leaders and mobilizers. My experience of working with Getnet is very unique. In other communities, people initiating project ideas and approaching us for support were residents who lived in the community itself facing the challenges they rallied against daily. In the case of Azena village, the driving force was Getnet who left long ago - an extremely busy academic supervising Ph.D. students, leading research projects, publishing in reputable journals, traveling extensively to present papers at international conferences, grabbing opportunities here and there to augment his income, and discharging family responsibilities – and yet making equal time to do this.



A MODERN LIBRARY/LABORATORY AND THE NEW SCHOOLS GETNET HELPED BUILD OR UPGRADE

Having tamed a natural menace by way of a shining new bridge over the Ayo River, the Azena community, with the organizing leadership of an indefatigable son in Getnet Tadele, turned its



attention to upgrading the elementary school he attended to general secondary school so that low-income children could complete grade ten. The next project for the community was performing substantial renovations, building a new library and toilet facilities for the Azena elementary school. This cost 1,834,000 Birr raised by Getnet, of which the contribution from the community was Birr 441,500 (25%) and PiHA's share was 1,392,500 Birr (75%).

He did not stop there. He pressed hard for his 4th project, i.e. upgrading the general secondary school to a preparatory school so that poor children like Aselef who dropped out of 10th grade could complete grade 12th grade. The *woreda* and zonal education departments approved the project and agreed to assign teachers if and when the community could build, furnish, and equip the school with the required amenities. The immediate goals were to upgrade the existing general high school to the preparatory level, improve the quality of education, and reduce income-induced dropouts in grades 11 and 12 by enabling students from Azena Town and its surroundings to attend high school straight from their parent's homes. It also included increasing the proportion of students passing the national exam



and joining public universities. The project cost Birr 2,008,000 Birr, of which Birr 602,400 (30%) was covered by the community, and the remainder - Birr 1,405,500 (70%) by NGOs. The modern preparatory school opened its doors in September 2014. At its opening, it enrolled 105 male and 135 female students including Asselef who was 20 years old at the time and in 11th grade because she started school late. The sex balance favoring females was unheard of in Ethiopia's secondary schooling system and sent a powerful message of equity from the get-go thereby challenging the nation to do the same for young females everywhere. Nearly 150,000 people from 16 peasant associations in the then Anekesha Gugsu *Woreda* and two urban kebeles in Azena and Ayo (almost half the population of the *woreda*), benefited from the upgrades directly and indirectly. Parents who no longer incurred accommodation and meal costs enjoyed the newly-earned double advantage of their children's assistance on the farm during non-school hours and days. Inauguration Day was special for children, parents, and officials alike. Zonal, *woreda*, *kebele* administrators, and community representatives made marathon speeches in appreciation of Getnet's priceless contributions not only to the Azena community but also to the *Woreda* and Zonal population at large. Students read poems, played music, and showed off mesmerizing Taekwondo moves. Parents, horsemen, and the clergy from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church expressed happiness in sundry ceremonial rituals with the biggest



praise and applause moments reserved for my friend Getnet Tadele who was described as a one-of-a-kind leader, fund-raiser, and community organizer.



After preparatory school, the next project was a new elementary school in Azena (later renamed Dr. Getnet Tadele Primary School or GTPS in recognition of his contribution) completed in 2016. This work was made necessary by overcrowding and the need to ensure equitable access through geographic centrality for five villages, as well as reduce dropout rates while diminishing traffic accident risks. This was followed by the 2018 completion of Gimjabet High School with a new library and laboratory, all made possible by Getnet's leadership in raising over six million Birr, again to alleviate overcrowding and modernize the learning-teaching-environment. Gezehera High School would soon follow (2020) with a central goal of equitable geographic access,

especially for female students facing the safety risks of walking 11 miles alone and often dropping out due to those fears. At its opening, the school served 1,500 students with a rare greater 50/50 gender mix in favor of females. Next up were upgrades to Dr. Getnet Tadele's primary school in Azena from 1-4 to K-8 (including special needs education), completed in 2021 at the cost of more than 2.3 million Birr. This expanded services to nearby villages and to the increasingly growing share of migrants and civil servant employees' children following the upgrading of Azena town to a district capital.

A BRAND NEW HIGH SCHOOL NAMED AFTER PROFESSOR GETNET AND A MODERN LIBRARY

Having accomplished all of the above, my friend Getnet's focus turned to his most expensive project yet – the building of a brand new high school completed in October 2022. The Ethiopian Deputy Minister of Education used these words at the October 30th, 2022 inauguration of the new high school named unanimously by the community as Professor Getnet Tadele High School in recognition of his leadership in raising 25 million Birr: “ፕሮፌሰር ጌትነት ታደሌ ‘‘ ትምህርት ቤት ብቻ የሚገነባ ሳይሆን የራሱ ህይወት ት/ቤት ነው ፤ እሱ ላይብራሪ ወይም ቢደንብ መነበብ ያለበት መጻህፍ ነው ‘’ . This loosely translates as “Professor Getnet Tadele is not only a builder of schools and institutions of higher learning, he is himself a school, an institution, a library, and a must-read book”. See a Google Drive link below for the culturally rich and delightfully colorful inauguration ceremony and festivities. The addition of the school, complete with library and laboratory facilities will drastically transform the educational environment by raising quality and providing easy access to post-middle school education for thousands of local adolescents, including those that are not yet born, and for a million more long term.



A modern library built at the cost of more than 1.6 million Birr through funds raised by my friend Getnet was inaugurated in January 2023 representing the last project so far made possible by his leadership and organizing prowess and in collaboration with international donors as well as local non-profit organizations, in this case, the Wondim Foundation, Wild Ganzen Foundation, and Partners for Education in Ethiopia. In speeches made at the opening ceremony, community members described Getnet as a diplomat and ambassador for the district and Zonal community at large but pressed him more with pleas for additional services including the provision of clean water, sanitation facilities, and fencing. His own to-do list for 2023 and beyond includes these requests from the community as well as plans for building many more schools, enhancing the quality of education, and establishing an educational foundation. He believes that education is a special gift that changed his life and something millions, in his community of birth and beyond, should have access to, for free.



I would like to conclude this (highly abridged) essay about my friend Professor Getnet Tadele's work by saying that his story is a uniquely inspiring case of an individual with exceptional commitments to bringing about fundamental transformations in the lives of current and future generations in his community of birth through leadership in raising the funds necessary to finance the construction of new educational institutions as well as upgrading existing ones. And let's not forget the linchpin project that made it all possible – the construction of a bridge over the Ayo River - made possible by Getnet Tadele's first fundraising success. Getnet's life is a highly inspirational story of an ordinary barefooted and often hungry kid who overcame the adversity that being born in a rural village in Ethiopia threw at him. The child grew up with a number one self-assigned priority: to raise lots and lots of funds from a variety of sources both foreign and domestic. Funds that financed a dozen educational projects which are transforming his community of birth and changing the lives of thousands now and will do so for a million or more long-term. All of this, while raising a family, rising to the academic rank of a Professor in record time, and winning an election to parliament in fulfillment of his community's wishes. Professor Getnet Tadele is changing the world in which he grew up and those surrounding it.



**PROJECTS BUILT WITH PROFESSOR GETNET'LEADERSHIP IN FUNDRAISING
AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZING**

Project Name	Inauguration Manoth/Year
The Ayo River bridge	May 2009
High school in Azana	January 2010
Azena elementary school (k-8 including special needs education)	November 2011
Azena Preparatory	October 2014
Another elementary school (1-4 including special needs education) The local community and the local government later renamed it <u>Dr. Getnet Tadele elementary school</u>	October 2016
Gimjabet High School	December 2018
Gezehara High School	November 2020
<u>Dr. Getnet Tadele elementary school expansion or upgrading</u>	May 2021
Another high school in Azana. The local community and the local government later renamed it <u>Professor Getnet Tadele High School</u>	October 2022
Ambella high school Library	January 2023

IMPORTANT WEBSITES DEDICATED TO PROFESSOR GETNET'S WORK

Giving back to the community:

http://www.azena.info/Giving_Back_Presentation_25_May_2023.pptx

Amhara Television (@24 minutes 21 seconds):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtaQLVCnRNs>

Facebook report by Amhara Education Bureau re: Inauguration of expansion project:

<https://www.facebook.com/106469466135085/posts/4183908151724509/39>

minutes Video of the inauguration of a brand new high school:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1pSDAv0tzvG1jJ7TU3rloIX9hQBci9Hi>

Amhara Television (AMCO) - Inauguration of a brand new high school (October 2022)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRW09wSbhV0>

Facebook report re: Inauguration of a brand new high school (October 2022). In the Amharic language

<https://www.facebook.com/380156499467073/posts/pfbid0tjv7ACkQfcpXvQdnx6U3KuVDpJdimRGfp6LqpeqsJXMzFanfPVWbGX24r3BWNz1Al/?sfnsn=mo>

Inauguration pictures <https://bit.ly/3FYVSMv>

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Q2oF5urBcuEkPadpfvPKBPIH5BO4moSe>

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1w3tJWyREANXRMSH9c_2wckIN5mra79wK

Inauguration of a brand new library (January 2023)

Amhara Television (AMCO) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzCDmfJKQGA>

<https://www.youtube.com/live/GtaQLVCnRNs?feature=share>

25 minutes interview with EBS Television: <https://youtu.be/JnIbY8d7-JY>

26 minutes interview with Amhara Television: https://youtu.be/Y_LPdzWQRNo

My Reflections: By Getnet Tadele

http://www.azena.info/Dr_Getnet_Bridging_Gaps_and_Building_Opportunities_Experience_of_Engaging_in_Azenas_Community_Development.pdf

Biography: Getnet Tadele

[Bio_Getnet_Tadele_May_2023.pdf](http://www.azena.info/Bio_Getnet_Tadele_May_2023.pdf) (homestead.com)

Schools in pictures I: <http://www.azena.info/AzenaInPics3.html>

Schools in pictures II: <http://www.azena.info/AzenainPictures1.html>

Schools in pictures III: <http://www.azena.info/AzenaInPics2.html>

Schools in pictures IV:

https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipNehZWY8BOZ8s6jQ_DXO8CUJ-REghjhgtf8hexNFrHMLHuGwYKwOHEOThralozLA?key=eUN0WG15UDJC MFdpVzl6bE0yU01kNUgyTXNGNXln

Taking the research to the public and engaging the public in research:

<https://ntdsresearch.org/2023/05/09/linking-the-research-with-the-public/>

His personal website: is www.azena.info