

DECEMBER 2022

An illustration of three women in traditional Ethiopian attire, including headwraps and long dresses, holding hands in a circle. The woman on the left wears a yellow headwrap and a light green dress. The woman in the center wears a blue headwrap and a blue dress. The woman on the right wears an orange headwrap and a light green dress. The background is dark.

# Addis POWERHOUSE

A FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION PLATFORM

ISSUE NO. 22

የክትትል አድራሻ



# CONTENT



Photo credit - The Lutheran World Federation

## **INTRODUCTION**

004  
Contributors  
006  
Letter from editors

## **EDITORIALS**

007  
Back story  
008  
Feminism 101  
009  
News and Opinion  
011  
Yours truly

## **INTERVIEW**

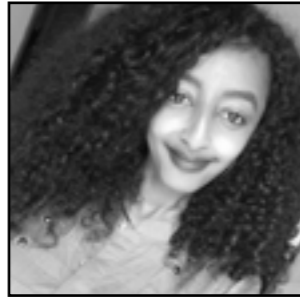
012  
Ask a Feminist  
TEKI PAPER BAGS PLC



# CONTRIBUTORS



**Hannah Lemma**  
Founder/ Director



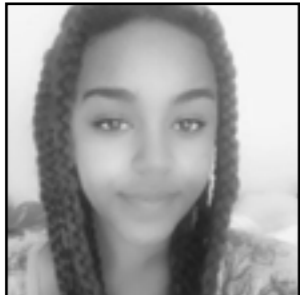
**Mahlet Addisu**  
Digital Marketing  
Manager



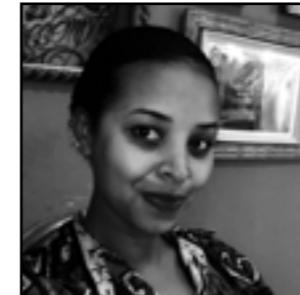
**Mahlet Birhanu**  
Sketch Artist



**Liya Daniel**  
Creative Director



**Ephrathah Assefa**  
Digital Marketer



**Selamawit Admasu**  
Writer / Contributor/  
Editor



Photo from - Swiatoslaw Wojtkowiak

# “ FEMINIST ORGANIZING ”



One of the topics we dreamed of discussing since the start of the Addis Powerhouse Feminist Newsletter was the concept of beauty. As young girls who have received privileges or gotten excluded from spaces (sometimes both) because of how we looked, we could not help but indulge in how our lives (whether we liked it or not) were affected by how we are perceived in our community. As young feminists who wanted to be valued for our essence, we wanted to discard of beauty standards that do more harm than good to women all over the world - but more so to African women who have to align to standards built and upheld through culture, capitalism and colonization.

In time, through feminist advocacy and general societal progression, beauty standards seem to be evolving and becoming more inclusionary of different types of women and different types of features. This is evident from the inclusion of plus-size, dark skinned, and other marginalized groups of women in global beauty standards. This brings us to the following question: Can beauty ever be an inclusionary concept? Or is it a commodity being utilized by the capitalist system to exploit a never ending demand to feel enough in this society.

Beauty, as defined by Google is “a combination of qualities, such as shape, color, or form, that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially the sight”. However, this begs the question of who are we here to please - and what makes (who decides) certain qualities (are) aesthetically better than others. If you are among the many who have attempted to logically dissect beauty, much like us, you have also probably come across the statement that “beauty is in the eyes of the beholder”. If you go a bit deeper, you realize that beauty has (for long) been in the eyes of the colonizer - or those with

recognizable power.

Despite current evolution in beauty standards, certain qualities and alignment to them, still continues to have an appreciable value. Although it is made to seem as though this move towards inclusionary beauty was designed for the good of the people, the beauty industry clearly profits from the increased market share brought about by inclusionary beauty standards. While no two people are created the same, can we even make beauty so inclusive that it speaks to each and everyone of us? Even if this concept of “inclusionary beauty” gets realized through some miracle, how will the sharks who benefit most from and monetize “a woman not feeling pretty enough” within the beauty industry ever make their peace with it.

At the end of the day, if we continue to treat beauty as a political subject with social values (as opposed to a personal value/ perspective), we will continue to serve as prey to harmful culture, capitalist exploitation, and colonized thinking. So, if we are to free our minds from the shackles of beauty, be it inclusionary or colonial - we need to deconstruct our internal as well as cultural biases. It is time to ask ourselves who we find beautiful and why? In the meantime - we will pass on the Pandora’s box that is the “concept of beauty” to you.

As always, we hope you enjoy this edition of our Powerhouse and leave us your comments [here](#).

## BACK STORY

For this Issue of Addis Powerhouse, we have held a very insightful discussion with a feminist/ social enterprise in Ethiopia made-up of and led by deaf women. With a goal of creating a sustainable employment that empowers deaf women - as well as build a sustainable environment through the production of paper bags to replace plastic, Teki is the first Deaf run Paper Bags company in the world. In this Issue of Addis Powerhouse, we will be looking into the realities of living with disabilities in Ethiopia, through the lens of feminist organising - and the future we want to create. We find this topic particularly pertinent as people living with disabilities in Ethiopia, and the world at large, continue to be excluded from society due to stigma and lack of access to different basic services.

People living with disabilities are only one-third less likely to have completed primary school, and half as likely to be employed as their non-disabled peers. The high likelihood of social exclusion, illiteracy and unemployment is, unfortunately, quite indicative of the opportunities that are open to them and the quality of life they can generally obtain. In discussing persons with disabilities, it should also be noted that they are not a homogenous group as most reports and interventions portray them to be. They face multiple and compounding forms of discrimination, on the basis of disability but also on other grounds, which may lead to further situations of exclusion. These situations range from socioeconomic status to peace and security, and in most cases, to identities like sex. Due to these intersectional identities, disadvantaged groups such as women living with disabilities face multiple discriminations.

In addition to being excluded from socioeconomic opportunities, women living with disabilities are also disproportionately abused physically and sexually. According to a WHO report, persons with disabilities are 1.5 times more likely to be victims of violence than those without disability, while those with mental health conditions are at nearly four times the risk of experiencing violence. The study also shows that children with disabilities are 3.7 times more likely than non-disabled children to be victims of any sort of violence, 3.6 times more likely to be victims of physical violence, and 2.9 times more likely to be victims of sexual violence. Overall, the data in relation to persons with disabilities, although limited, shows the hidden experience of discrimination, neglect, and abuse faced by the group.

In countries like Ethiopia, where disability is often wrongfully tied with harmful traditional beliefs and false religious narratives, they face an even bumpier road to participate in and become part of society. Parents refrain from sending their children with disabilities to school because they feel ashamed or guilty and take the frustration out on the isolated children. Children with disabilities are raised to internalize these negative feelings, even as adults. This is indicative of further under reporting of sexual abuse cases of persons living with disabilities. Despite social exclusion faced by such marginalized groups, particularly women with disabilities, we see feminist organising as an inclusionary vision being adopted by some. Through this Issue of Addis Powerhouse, we want to highlight a different experience of women living with disabilities by narrating a success story of Deaf feminist organising in Ethiopia to create a more sustainable future.





# FEMINISM

## 101

### “GENDER EQUALITY IS SO IMPORTANT, IT IS THE FUTURE.” MIMI LEGESSE, CO-GENERAL MANAGER OF TEKI PAPER BAGS

The fight and advocacy for gender equality and a fair and just world for women takes different forms. For this Issue of Addis Powerhouse, we look into a better and clean future as it is envisioned by deaf women in Ethiopia through feminist organizing and enterprise. Here is feminist a reality where jobs are created by deaf women for deaf women

In addition to economic empowerment and sisterhood, this initiative creates a medium for marginalized women, particularly those living with disabilities, to have access to information about health, environmental pollution and disability rights. At the core of their values is also a strong conviction that empowering women is crucial, mainly because women are better at solving problems together.

# NEWS AND OPINION

### UNFPA launches \$113 million appeal for drought-impacted women and girls

The unprecedented drought in the Horn of Africa is affecting whole communities, but it is women and girls who are paying “an unacceptably high price”, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) said on Wednesday, launching a \$113.7 million appeal to meet their needs. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund, the worst drought in 40 years is reversing decades of progress made in combating child marriage across swathes of Ethiopia. In the first four months of this year, child marriages nearly tripled in Ethiopia’s Somali region compared with the same period a year ago and, on average, more than doubled across three regions. Impoverished families are exchanging female children for dowries and because “it’s one less mouth to feed for the family,” Andy Brooks, Unicef’s child protection adviser for.

Girls as young as 12 are being forced to marry men five times their age and there is also an increase in female genital mutilation, which he said is a prerequisite for marriage. The funding will be used to scale-up life-saving reproductive health and protection services, including establishment of mobile and static clinics in locations such as displacement sites.

[1]

### Iranian judiciary has confirmed two individuals have been sentenced to death

Iranian judiciary has confirmed that two individuals have been sentenced to death in cases linked to the protests.

The protesters in question have been on the streets nearly every day since the September 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman who was arrested by the country’s morality police in Tehran for allegedly not complying with Iran’s dress code for women.

According to a letter signed by 227 parliamentarians in Iran, as reported by state media, they have called for the following response to the protests, which potentially could include the death penalty:

“We, the representatives of this nation, ask all state officials, including the Judiciary, to treat those, who waged war [against the Islamic establishment] and attacked people’s life and property like the Daesh [terrorists], in a way that would serve as a good lesson in the shortest possible time.”

[2]

### Taliban banned women from gyms

The Taliban has banned women from using gyms in Afghanistan, according to a senior Taliban official, in the latest edict by the group cracking down on women’s rights and freedoms since they took power more than a year ago.

The latest curbs come months after the Taliban ordered access to parks to be segregated by gender.

Since coming to power in August 2021, Taliban has banned girls from middle school and high school, restricted women from most fields of employment, and ordered them to wear head-to-toe clothing in public.

[3]





Photo from - foto\_morgana

# YOURS TRULY

## ሴት እኮ'ናት

“የማናት! ሴት አይደለች እንዴ! ምን አቀባጣት?!”  
“አርፍ ብትቀመጥ ምን አለ በዚህ ሰአት”  
“አንዱ ጎረምሳ አግኝቶ እንዳይጨውትባት”  
“የእሷ ነው እንጂ አይደል የእሱ ጥፋት “

“አጎትሽ ይመጣል ፣ቡና ታፈያለሽ”  
“ ቁምጣሽን ወድያ ጣይ፣ ድረያሽን ልበሽ”  
“ነጠላም ጣል አርጌ፣ ይሸፈን ደረትሽ”  
“ለራሰሽ ብዬ ነው!፣ ኋላ እንዳያስከፋሽ”

ሰባል ስላደኩኝ ከልጅነቴ  
ሁሌም ያሰጋኛል ደህንነቴ

ታች ካለው ሰፈር ልሄድ አስብያለው  
ከቲሽርቴም ላይ ሹራብ ደርብያለው  
ከቀሚሴም ስር ሱሪ ታጥቅያለው  
ብርድ እንኳን የለም፣ ያው ለሰው አይን ነው

“በሰላም ተመለሽ!” አለችኝ አያቴ  
ወደ ጦር ሜዳ ይመስል አካሄዳ  
ከቤቴ ወጥቼ መንገድ ጀምራለሁ  
ሀሳቤ ግን ያለው መመለሱ ጋር ነው  
ኸረ! ያ ሰውዬ እየተከተለኝ ነው  
አፍኖ እዳይወስደኝ ብቻ ነው ምፈራው

ከደምቢ ዶሎ ተማሪዎች እኔንስ ምን ለየኝ  
እኔም እንደነሱ ሴት እኮ ነኝ!  
ሴት እኮ ነኝ ልክ እንደ ካሚላት  
‘ካሚላት! ካሚላት! ባሏ ተናዶ አሲድ ደፋባት’  
ካሚላት! ካሚላት! ሴት እኮ ናት!

ሴት እኮ ናት!  
እኮ ናት!  
እኮ ናት!  
እኮ እናት!  
ሴት እኮ እናት።



## ASK A FEMINIST TEKI PAPER BAGS PLC

For this Issue of Addis Powerhouse, we interviewed a feminist social and environmental enterprise developed for and by the deaf community. The organization's goal is to create sustainable employment to empower deaf women while building a plastic bag free Ethiopia. Here to tell us about all the wonderful things they are building are Mimi Legesse (Co-General Manager), Tsega Legesse (Head of Communication), and Getayawekal Girma (Production Manager). This interview was conducted in Ethiopian Sign Language on the 9th of November 2022 in Gotera Condominium at the Teki Paper Bags office.

### 1. Tell us about yourself and Teki paper-bags

**Mimi Legesse:** My name is Mimi Legesse. I am Deaf and we are Teki Paper Bags. For this interview I am together with my colleague Getayawekal Girma and Tsega Legesse who will reply with me in Sign Language.

**Tsega Legesse:** Yes, Teki means replacing in Amharic. We are the first Deaf run Paper Bags company in the world. We use our hands and Ethiopian Sign Language to fight against plastic

bag pollution and it works.

**Getayawekal Girma:** Tsega and Mimi signed it very well, nothing to add for me. Happy to be here.

### 2. What inspired your vision of working with Deaf women to replace plastic bags with paper bags in Ethiopia (Produce eco-friendly paper bags)? And what motivated you to work with Deaf women?

**Mimi Legesse:** At Teki, we not only create jobs for Deaf women to make paper bags. We believe the Deaf community and persons with disabilities can do a better job to fight against plastic pollution than what is done now. Here in Ethiopia no one likes plastic-bags, but we are all using them everyday. So, the problem is not about plastic bags. The problem is how to convince people to change and stop using it.

**Getayawekal Girma:** Yes I agree. Also many people want to support women with disabilities like us but don't know how to do it. By making paper bags and fighting against plastic pollution we contribute to something important. We set an

## Interview

example and this changes the way people see our disability.

**Tsega Legesse:** Exactly, by taking part in a global movement and doing it in Sign Language, we create magic. For me, who is hearing and grew up with 2 Deaf sisters. Using Sign Language everyday to communicate and to do something positive for the world feels amazing. This makes me feel proud and so useful.

### 3. How does environmental pollution and climate change relate to gender? How does this affect women in poor/ resource limited countries?

**Getayawekal Girma:** Us women, we often care a little bit more than men about the environment and nature. Nature is part of us. So, I think we can lead the fight against plastic bags. If we don't do it, men won't start.

**Tsega Legesse:** It is nature, this is who we are. I am sure if more countries were ruled by women, climate change and pollution could get fixed much faster. We are better when it comes to working together. We don't do competitions.

### 4. What are some of the challenges faced by people with disabilities in Ethiopia? Especially the Deaf community, any specific challenges faced by Deaf women?

**Mimi Legesse:** Exclusion is the biggest challenge. When you can't find work, you become lonely and depressed. You lose your confidence and think it is your fault but it is not. With our paper bags we try to change this. With the support of USAID, we now plan to open branches and teach youths with disabilities to produce paper bags.

**Tsega Legesse:** Unemployment is the biggest problem for Deaf youths in Ethiopia. There is no adapted work for us and companies don't want to hire Sign Language interpreters. When you are Deaf staying at home can be very depressing because you can't watch TV or listen to the radio. It is very boring. When a Deaf stops to have interaction and practice Sign Language their life is very hard. Social interaction and friendship is so important. This is what gives you the self confidence to move forward in life and overcome the handicap.

**5. Recently, Teki paper bags has collaborated with Yetena Weg where SRH training was provided by volunteers from this social organization for the women working at Teki and disability inclusion in healthcare services was discussed. Later on the Teki team also participated in a blood donation campaign. Tell us more about such collaborations and organizations with different actors and how these collaborations have allowed Teki to raise awareness about environmentally sustainable products but more importantly about Sign Language and the sisterhood that is present/ found in Teki for Deaf women? ?**

**Mimi Legesse:** Yes, these training sessions are part of our USAID TEKI Activity. For the Deaf, the main problem is the communication gap. Because of this, we are often unable to get precise information in Sign language about important subjects like health and disability rights. During those training, we can ask questions in Sign Language to the trainers, and this helps us a lot to learn or protect ourselves better.

**Tsega Legesse:** This is very true, often, simple information is not accessible for the Deaf. Hearing people can listen to the radio or watch TV, but the Deaf can't. Only very few programs include Sign Language. So, those training sessions are so important for our team. We thank USAID-Ethiopia for supporting us and making those training possible. They are so important for our team.

**Getayawekal Girma:** Yes, the training was amazing. I learned a lot myself. For the Deaf, it is always challenging to speak to a doctor even in the hospital. There is no Sign Language interpreter. So sometimes the doctors don't understand our problems and they can't treat us well. This time it was different.

### 6. How does having policies and / or strategies that are inclusive of persons with disabilities enable society to be fair, just, and equal?

**Tsega Legesse:** Persons living with disability have so much to teach us. For example, they are always helping each other out. Helping others is what we need nowadays in the world. We are forgetting to support and love each other like before. When you help someone you feel better and this is the message we try to send with our hands.

**Getayawekal Girma:** When we work hard and show good examples, we can become unstoppable. It is our right to be included and with paper bags we can create our own solution.



## Interview

### 7. What is your understanding of gender equality? Is Teki a feminist enterprise?

**Tsega Legesse:** Yes we are a Feminist enterprise. We empower women because we believe we are better at solving problems together. Men often tend to think first about themselves before helping others. For us women, it is different, we are all mothers inside and this makes us more able to unite and understand each other.

**Mimi Legesse:** For me, as a mother, gender equality is so important. It is the future. It is our time as women to shine.

### 8. How does Teki contribute to a better society?

**Getayawekal Girma:** I don't know. It is hard to count but we try our best. We are doing a lot of different things at the same time. We try to be an example.

**Tsega Legesse:** You are right, we do a lot. We fight plastic bags, we create jobs, we conduct training and we are starting school activities for children next month too. That is why we need to create more jobs. It is not enough for us. We also need to produce more bags. Our goal is to create 200 jobs now.

**Mimi Legesse:** We also teach Sign Language on social media. We are famous on TikTok (Laughing). Seeing all the comments and likes on our Sign Language teaching video is wonderful. We are bridging the communication gap and everyone loves it.

### 9. Any additional messages for our readers?

**Mimi Legesse:** Yes, we might be small but our dreams are big. One day we hope to convince the Ethiopian Government to reserve the entire paper bag sector to empower persons with disability. So, the day Ethiopia bans the use of plastic bags, we can create more than 50,000 jobs for persons with disabilities to produce paper and tote bags to replace plastic. So, we are counting on everyone.

**Tsega Legesse:** I don't know we have mentioned a lot. Please be our voice and support our cause. For the rest, we will use our hands. Soon, Ethiopia will be Plastic Bag free and more inclusive. We pray to god.

**Getayawekal Girma:** Please stop using plastic bags. They are very bad. Using paper bags is much better and it helps us create jobs for youths with disabilities. We are counting on you!



# STAY TUNED

There is more Addis Powerhouse  
on the way !

#### Follow us on

Twitter : [@AddisPowerhouse](#)  
Instagram : [@addispowerhouse](#)  
Facebook : [Addis Powerhouse](#)  
Youtube: [Addis Powerhouse](#)

Visit our website on  
[AddisPowerhouse](#)