

2023

September 2022 – August 2023

Annual Report





Vision

We envision the growth and celebration of educated African girls and women who contribute to their family, their community and their country.

Mission

REAL transforms African communities by supporting the education of disadvantaged girls and young women through mentorship, strategic partnerships, and local involvement. The education of girls results in lower infant mortality and the attainment of longer life expectancy for both men and women.



Tsehay Girma

Medical Doctor (REAL Graduate from Hosanna)

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Governing Board

Olga Rodrigues, President
 Kathy Coskran, Vice-President
 Randy Hoversten, Treasurer
 Bontu Galataa, Secretary
 Heather Laubach
 Lidya Makonnen

Executive Director

Tsehai Wodajo

Country Manager

Seble Habtamu

Site Mentors

Lalistu Ebisa Abaku
 Zewditu Abose
 Kelemwork Benti
 Sintayehu Mulugeta
 Elfinesh Nemara
 Birhane Tafase
 Derebe Tesfa
 Shitaye Worku
 Pastor Mesert Zeleke

Site

Nedjo
 Ayira Gulisso
 Kotobe
 Nekemte
 Burayu Keta
 Bodji
 Begi
 Entoto
 Hosanna



Tsehai and Country Manager Seble Habtamu

Letter from Executive Director

Dear Friends of REAL:

I am so pleased to describe significant accomplishments in this annual report for the fiscal year ending August 2023. It was a year in which I was able to go to Ethiopia for the first time since the start of the pandemic, and to begin the process of becoming an international NGO in Ethiopia.

REAL Board Secretary Bontu Galataa and I traveled to Ethiopia in January 2023 to meet with all the mentors and representative girls from each of our 9 sites, in person, in Addis Ababa. Travel for the mentors and girls from our 5 sites in western Ethiopia was particularly challenging. We were so relieved that they all made it safely and were inspired again and again by the many stories of the girls' successes during the incredible political and health challenges of the previous two years. The gathering was part of REAL's on-going goal to connect the girls and mentors from all our sites so they know and inspire each other and realize what a powerful movement they are part of.

This gathering of REAL graduates and girls currently in the program was also celebration of their accomplishments, expanded opportunities, and bright prospects for the future. It was particularly powerful for the girls from western Ethiopia — their first visit to a big city and first experience to see themselves as part of something much larger than their group of 20 girls at their home site. It was exhilarating for all of us!

I am happy — and relieved — to report that the girls have done well, helped in no small part by the support of REAL sponsors, their inspiring mentors, the local committees that support them in so many ways, and the skill of Seble Haptamu, our In-Country Manager. Seble was a REAL girl herself in Nedjo, our first site and the first year of REAL. She is a shining example of what a REAL girl can accomplish if she is able to complete her secondary education and go on to college or university which Seble did, with the help of her savings account — another benefit of REAL.

The other highlights of the year was initiating and completing the process of becoming an international NGO in Ethiopia — a dream of mine for many years. Being recognized as an international NGO in Ethiopia allows us to expand our program there and to partner with other, larger NGOs working in Ethiopia. Our plans for the future include engaging graduates to be mentors, developing entrepreneurship programs for REAL girls who want to be in business for themselves, and, opening at least three new locations in the next two years. We plan to launch these projects to coincide with our 20th year anniversary, part of our celebration in Addis Ababa in the fall of 2024.

I am so thankful for our donors who made all of this possible and the many of you who believed in REAL from the beginning and who stayed with us these last 19 years. Not only have you made life better for one girl at a time, but your support and generosity have expanded opportunities for each girl's family, and, just as importantly, influenced local communities to support and celebrate the education of women.



Thank you!

Sincerely,

Tsehai Wodajo
REAL Executive Director

A Bit of REAL History

Two Extraordinary Young Women



Two extraordinary young women made possible the transformative power of REAL to help young girls complete their education. In 1970 **Tsehai Wodajo** was a 13-year-old 8th grader in Nedjo, Ethiopia, when she met **Eva Nordin**, a 20-year-old university student from Västerås, Sweden. Eva was in Ethiopia as the result of a Rotary scholarship for a study trip any place in the world. Her father had a connection in Ethiopia, so she spent six months as a volunteer at the Teacher Training Institute of Nedjo, Ethiopia, where she taught history, biology, geography and English to the prospective teachers, and she also taught at the elementary school there.

Phys Ed was a particular challenge for her female students because they had no shorts or pants — only dresses. There was no access to electricity, so, with a Singer treadle sewing machine, Eva made trousers for the girls, so they could play volley ball and other ball games.

One of her students was 13-year-old Tsehai. Tsehai's entrepreneurial father had sold what he

had so Tsehai's older sister, Agitu, could continue her education at the secondary school in Gimbi, 52 kilometers from their home. Tsehai's sister walked to Gimbi and stayed with relatives in the countryside there, but when Tsehai's time came, there was no opportunity for her. Tsehai wrote a letter to Eva, explaining her situation and her fervent desire to continue her education. "Can you help me?"

Eva was impressed with the letter from the determined young Tsehai, particularly her impressive strength of character and focused ambition to get an education. "She had a lot of will power," Eva said. Tsehai was persistent: in her letters to Eva she explained how urgent it was for her to go to secondary school. (Not every Ethiopian town had a secondary school.) Eva checked with the Swedish missionaries connected to the school, who confirmed that Tsehai did indeed need and deserve support. Eva was at University herself, but because of generous financial support from the Swedish government, she felt she had sufficient resources to help Tsehai stay in school and sent her 5 Swedish Krona, about 25 Ethiopian birr every month.

Eva's support enabled Tsehai to begin secondary school in Gimbi. At that time there was a hostel for boys, but nothing for girls, so Tsehai rented a kiosk (a shack), to sleep in. After several weeks Tsehai's father journeyed to Gimbi, discovered her poor living situation and approached the pastor who managed the boys' hostel and also directed the school for the deaf in Gimbi. The money Eva sent made it possible for Tsehai to pay the pastor, who allowed her to stay with his family, and also to buy what she needed for herself.

Tsehai says, "That 25 Birr made a huge difference for me and my family." Young Tsehai was smart, entrepreneurial, and, as Eva had

noted, persistent. She bought what she needed — soap, toiletries, and school supplies — then sold a few of her purchases on the side to make a small profit to increase her resources.

Eva's monthly contributions made it possible for Tsehai to complete secondary school in Gimbi, and the two young women continued to write each other.

Tumultuous events in Ethiopia threatened that long-distance correspondence. Eva lost her connection to the Teacher Training Institute in Nedjo, when her Swedish colleague there died in 1973. Then, in 1974, the turbulent Ethiopian revolution that deposed Emperor Haile Selassie made foreign correspondence nearly impossible, and the letters between Eva and Tsehai stopped.

Fast forward 30 years. By 2005 Eva had moved from Linköping to Strängnäs, Sweden, but Tsehai found Eva through her daughter-in-law (who is Swedish) and called Eva. They had a lot to talk about. Tsehai filled Eva in on the story of her life and described the founding of REAL that year, inspired, Tsehai said, by the help Eva gave her so long ago.

"It was wonderful," Eva said. "Tsehai is the only student I had kept in contact with. It was great to be in touch with her again."

By then Eva was working at Thomasmgymnasiet, a senior high school in Strängnäs. The headmaster there had initiated a Global Issues program and, in their 3rd year of high school, students were encouraged to travel through a field study program somewhere in the world. To prepare for this, Eva, with a colleague and two students, made a preparation trip to Ethiopia. Tsehai arranged for the group to visit REAL's Burayu Kata site, where the group was welcomed by Headmaster Amanuel Muse and his wife Elfinesh Nemera, who served as the REAL girls' mentor.

"It was so fantastic!" Eva said. "In talking with the girls there, I could see what Tsehai had accomplished."

Eva returned to Ethiopia again in 2008 with 15 students and met Tsehai near the REAL Entoto

site. Tsehai told the Swedish students the story of her life. "It was so inspiring to hear what could happen with just a little help," Eva said. "What I did was very little, but look at Tsehai!"

"As Eva helped me," Tsehai said to the visiting students and to the assembled REAL girls, "you must do the same, and give back to others."

Eva has frequently used Tsehai as an example of the power of generosity when she teaches global issues focused on emerging millennium goals and creating sustainable environments. Eva's generosity to Tsehai was life changing for them both, and Eva's experiences in Ethiopia were also transformative. She never expected to be a teacher, but because of her time in Nedjo, she ended up training teachers in Sweden, and also worked as a teacher herself, and later, became a school principal.

Eva and Tsehai are inspiring examples of two lives enriched by fortitude, commitment, and generosity that became a gift to hundreds of other young women worlds apart. Since her reunion with Tsehai in 2008, Eva has also been a regular sponsor of REAL girls. Giving back to the community continues to be an expectation for all girls invited to be part of the REAL community. Eva inspired Tsehai, who has inspired hundreds of girls to improve their lives, their families, and their community. What a difference Tsehai and Eva have made!



Tsehai, Eva, and Rev. Etafa Goban, a partner with REAL, in Ethiopia in 2008

REAL Results and Impact

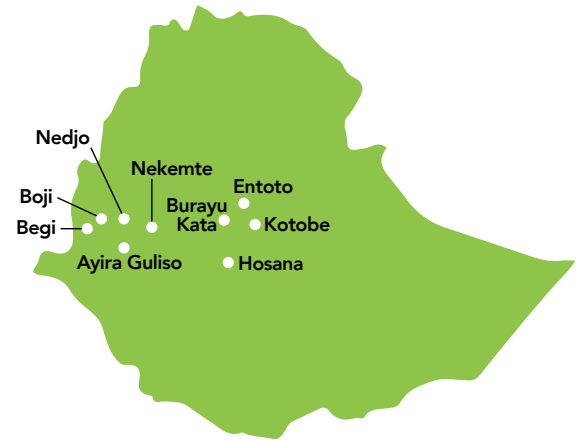
Highlights Through the Years

In 2004 Tsehai and former board member Ann Jensen traveled together to Nedjo and Bodji, Ethiopia and started the first site at Nedjo. We started modestly with 15 girls, the youngest just beginning the 2nd grade and the oldest entering grade 8, with Mentor Magarse Hailu and the enthusiastic support of the local community.

As of November 2023, 558 girls have continued their education because of REAL, and their many successes fueled our recent expansion in both adding sites and creating a permanent office in Addis Ababa as we become an official NGO in Ethiopia. It's a big step ... and a stepping stone to our long range goals of serving 2,000 girls in Africa during the proposed 4 year project.

550+

girls have continued their education



9 sites in Ethiopia

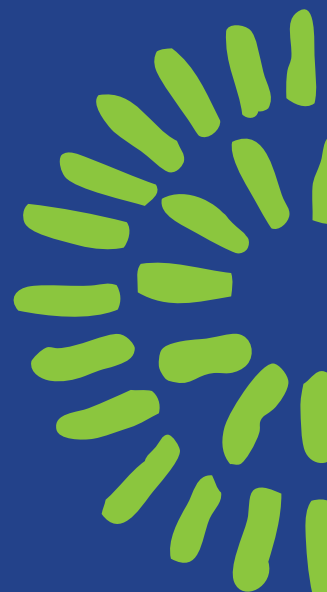
REAL is Growing Thanks to You!

Projection

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Girls in Program	120	155	175	180	240
Growth		29%	13%	3%	33%
Sites	8	9	9	9	12

National Exam Update

Due to the ongoing conflict only 3% of students who took the Ethiopian National Exam for the 21-22 school year passed — but REAL girls were an exception. **7 out of 16** or 44% of REAL girls passed! A testimony to their hard work and the support of their mentors and sisterhood of girls.



Thank You

Sponsors and Donors who Make REAL Possible

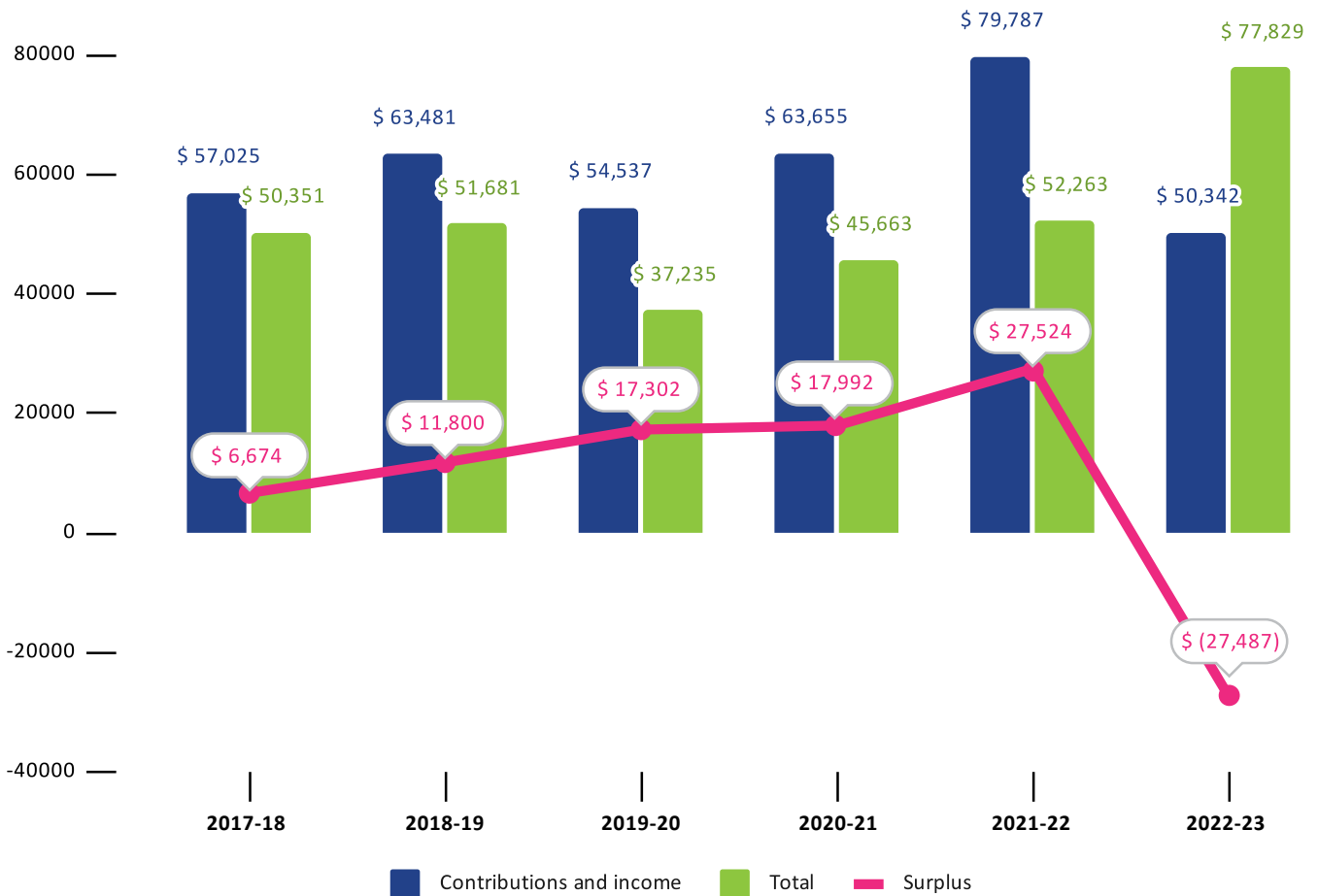
Fiscal year September 2022 to August 2023

Yoseph Aga and Dunee Silga	Dureeti Gaga	Larry Lavercombe	Pamela Schweitzer
Deborah Anderson	Nancy Gaschott and Mark Ritchie	Heather Laubach	Sue Scott
Mesfin Ayele	Tadelech Gedfa and Regassa Oljirra	Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd	Kari and William Sifferle
Frank W. Babka	Martha Gisselquist	Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd Sunday School	Lori Simpson and Mark Dupont
Patricia Bachmeier	Jean Greenwood	Lidya Makonnen	Dana Sosa
Baisa Bashadu	Elizabeth Namarra, Haas Organization	Virginia McAninch	George and Betty Stein
Cheryl Bates and Stephen Kupetz	Carolyn Halliday	Linda Myers and Larry Shelton	Marcia Stevens
Dan Berg and Welcome Jerde	Robert Hamilton	Erta Namarra	Will Stockton
Adamu Betel and Turungo Gragn	Lisa Hannon	Yeshimebet Namarra	Grace Sulerud
Mulu Bogale Biftu	Dale and Linda Herron	Daniel Namarra and Woinitu Estifanos	Amanda Sykora
Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church	Janelle Hill	Eva Nordin	Rich Sykora
Cathy Bruer-Thompson	Deborah Holmstrom	Nokomis Heights Lutheran Church	Brita Taracks
Bashatu Bultum	Malinda Holte	Alley and Jeff Ohe	Deresu Teresa
Nancy Carroll	Aga Hora	Debbie Okerlund	Cathy and Art Thompson
Jacqueline Carson	Gloria Hovland	Jeffrey Paurus	Olga Tolle-Rodrigues
Carol Cline-Hedblom	Randy Hoversten	Elise and Andy Pokel	Linda Trummer
Anna Coskran and Jordi Morales	Robsan C. Itana and Hawi B. Dayo	Virginia and Walter Polley	Kathy Urberg
Chuck and Kathleen Coskran	Abbi Iticha	Joyce Prudden and Michael Shoop	Asefa Wakjura
Mary Daniels	Angela and Karl Jacobson	Quaker Hill Foundation	Robert and Kathy Wedl
Eunice Dietrich	Ann and Jon Jensen	D'Ann Ranheim	Lynn and Brian Weist
Roger Dirks	Rebecca and Jonah Jensen	Genevieve Ries	Melinda Wells
Marilyn Dodge	Ardes Johnson	Paul and Pat Sackett	Nora Whiteman
Cheryl Doering	Douglas Johnson	Abdulfutha Sameru	Robert Wilcox and Louise Miner
Taille Duresso	Ronda Kanne	Zabia Sameru	Antonia Wilcoxon
Elizabeth Dussol	Anne and Ed Kersten	Tom Saterstrom	Liz Wolsky
Pastor Fitenu Eticha	Kimberly Kokett	Dana Severson	Joyce Young
Eric Foster-Johnson	Aregash Kumbi	Nancy Schaefer	Zion Lutheran Church
Anne Frenchick and Ted Thompson	Nancy and Jon Larsen		
	Barbara and Dean Larson		

Financials

Fiscal year September 2022 to August 2023

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Contributions and income	\$ 57,025	\$ 63,481	\$ 54,537	\$ 63,655	\$ 79,787	\$ 50,342
Expenses						
Program	\$ 47,729	\$ 49,128	\$ 33,992	\$ 39,876	\$ 48,495	\$ 64,588
Management and General Expenses	\$ 2,111	\$ 1,881	\$ 1,483	\$ 3,347	\$ 2,513	\$ 10,010
Fundraising expenses	\$ 511	\$ 672	\$ 1,760	\$ 2,440	\$ 1,255	\$ 3,231
Total	\$ 50,351	\$ 51,681	\$ 37,235	\$ 45,663	\$ 52,263	\$ 77,829
Surplus	\$ 6,674	\$ 11,800	\$ 17,302	\$ 17,992	\$ 27,524	\$ (27,487)
Ending Cash	\$ 104,391	\$ 117,771	\$ 133,271	\$ 157,584	\$ 184,325	\$ 172,174



A Word from REAL Board President

I continue to be so impressed and proud of the work, passion, and determination that the girls and young women supported by REAL demonstrate every day. They inspire me and the Board as we plan to expand and deepen the work REAL has done for the last 19 years.

Three years ago we set a course of growth for REAL, with the ambitious goal of supporting more girls per site and opening new sites. It then became clear that our work would have greater impact if we became a recognized NGO (Nongovernmental Organization) in Ethiopia which we have now achieved. Becoming a government-recognized NGO has allowed us to partner with Ethiopian ministries, particularly the Ministry of Women and Children (Or whatever the name of that is). This expansion comes at a financial cost and, as you can see in this report, our expenses have risen because Executive Director Tsehai Wodajo needed to increase her time in Ethiopia to lay the foundation for our growth. Most importantly, she has established a central office in Addis Ababa that will facilitate coordination between our In-Country Coordinator, the relevant Ethiopian Ministries, and the REAL Board in the United States.

Another key focus has been to shift our sources of revenue. During COVID times, we quickly adjusted to online fundraising and events, and contrary to expectations, we did very well. We also created programs like our Trailblazer fund that increased revenue in 2021-2022. Our post-COVID work has been more challenging than expected, as we re-invent how we increase support for REAL, engage new and younger donors, and increase our visibility to foundations and corporate donors. This is relatively new territory for us, but I am fully confident that we will see the results of our current efforts in the year to come.

Please join us for our 20th year celebration in September (details to follow), either in Minneapolis or Addis Ababa, to celebrate the remarkable achievements of these girls and to be proud and inspired by the difference your generosity has made in the lives of so many young women, their families, and communities. You have truly made a REAL difference.

Best,

Olga Tolle-Rodrigues
REAL Board President



Stories from 2022 – 2023

News from Bodji

Bodji, one of the first sites we established in 2005 gives a sense of the challenges of the last year and the ability of the sisterhood of girls to support each other during difficult times. The mentor writes “There was political unrest in our zone that resulted in the closing of all government services including the schools. Because of this all the schools in our area were closed for two months in late fall.” As a result, the mentor made house visits every two weeks to each of the girls to provide advice, and guidance for them and their families during these difficult times. When the situation improved, the mentor and girls worked diligently to catch up and to normalize their education in spite of ongoing challenges regarding internet connection.

They also celebrated this, the 18th year of REAL at Bodji, by preparing a day to give thanks for REAL and their many successes. The girls’ parents and the local REAL committee members were invited to the gathering and treated to presentations by the girls currently in the program. Iftu Bahiru presented a poem she had written for the occasion, while another girl,

Derartu Saketa, welcomed the guests and they all joined in giving thanks for the REAL project.

They also celebrated Mothers’ Day by visiting the home of Bikiltu, a REAL graduate who was very ill. Bikiltu had entered teacher’s training after graduating from 12th grade, but was unable to continue when she and her mother became seriously ill. (Her father had died some years earlier.) The REAL girls went to the family’s home to offer both loving support and financial assistance. They also brought a variety of food and tea to support Bikiltu and her mother.



REAL girls in Bodji celebrating Mother’s Day with Bikiltu and her mother.



Resources Enriching
African Lives

real-africa.org

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