

Agar: Promoting Peace Through a Youth Mentorship Website

Ethiopia

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The goal of this project was to build a youth mentorship website that connects and matches young Ethiopians with mentors in various fields. The aim of the project is to create a culture of collaboration and giving back, aimed at increasing youth employment and social unity.

The rise in the number of people who have access to phones, as well as the dire need of seasoned mentors who can guide and support the next generation of Ethiopian leaders, lead us to do this project. Our mission was to help Ethiopian youth, especially university students, find mentors and opportunities in various sectors, with a goal of equipping them with tools to better themselves and their country. Through youth mentorship, we hoped to tackle youth unemployment and help create vibrant and energetic young people joining hands to better Ethiopia.

We had no other fund-raising efforts for our project, besides our grant. This was because since our project was dependent on having a functioning website and making sure it was indeed doing what we hoped it to, we had to hold off other efforts to fundraise. We are hoping to host some fundraising events in the coming few months, since our website is now live and ready for mentors and mentees.

Ethiopia is a country that is currently facing many problems such as poverty, a significant number of unemployed youth, lack of skilled professionals...etc. The country has a population of 100 million, out of which 42% are those under the age of 15. This shows that not only is it a country that is in desperate need of transformation and betterment, but that its transformation is highly dependent on that 42% of young Ethiopians. The only way my country can go forward and tackle challenges head on is if it invests in the youth, who are its future. Oftentimes, many young Ethiopians have trouble finding people who can provide them with guidance and support as they navigate the difficult world of academia, or career. They also have trouble finding opportunities, since most face financial challenges or don't even know where to begin. That is why we strongly believe that youth mentorship is the key in giving these young Ethiopians the confidence and support they need to grow personally, professionally and academically. As a young Ethiopia who comes from an underserved community and had to get a lot of support to get to where I am today, I know how mentorship can tremendously transform one person's life. I want others to experience and benefit from mentorship just like I have. We hope that our website can be a hub for young Ethiopians who want to better themselves and their country and need a little help to do so.

Over the summer of 2019, our team had successfully built the youth mentorship website, as planned. Our project, now named Misale Initiative, is now live at misale.org. **Misale** in Amharic, our official language, means someone who is a role-model or example. By joining our platform, we want mentors to be role models for their mentees, and others who are interested in giving back to their community.

We faced some challenges in working back home, mainly with the internet connection. Our project timeline was at the same time as the Ethiopian National Exams. During national exams, the internet in Ethiopia gets shut down, in order to avoid the possible leak of the exam questions. Due to the internet shutdown, our project faced delays. Another problem we faced was our initial partner organization, Ethio-Jobs, pulling out from the collaboration, last minute. This meant that we had to go back to square one and look for new partnering organizations. Though this process was quite tough and at times felt hopeless, we were able to get responses from various organizations such as **Youth to Youth, British Council, Goethe Institut, DOT**

Ethiopia, Yellow Movement AAU...among others in support of our project. In order to follow up with these and other organizations, I had to recruit two volunteers to help with outreach and promotion. The volunteers have done an amazing job at promoting our platform at two events so far; one at the **Mella Monthly event**, and the other at the **Colonel John C. Robinson American Center**. We are planning to recruit more volunteers, once the school year starts in Ethiopia, this September.

I define peace as the presence of social unity, collaboration and giving back. My project aims to embody these three values, as they are crucial in building peace in my country. We cannot have social unity if issues like poverty, human rights abuses, ethnic tensions and other disruptive forces are at play. The way we can address these issues is through collaboration with one another and giving back. If we promote a culture of working together to problem solve and help each other go further in life, then I strongly believe that we can address the issues above, collectively. I want my youth mentorship website to be a bridge between young Ethiopians who want to solve these problems and work towards change, and between those who are now in a position in their lives to act as a role-model and help those young individuals achieve their goals.

This project was an eye-opening experience in many ways, as it taught me how to work with others, how to not give up despite unforeseen challenges, and how to engage individuals and organizations in various sectors, in the conversation about the future of our youth. Though this is simply a website for now, I see Misale Initiative growing into a non profit in the next year or so and having a presence in universities across Ethiopia. The future of Ethiopia depends on the youth, who now more than ever, need all the support they can get. We can collectively build a better future by investing in young people and providing them with the support they need. I cannot wait to see where this project goes and how it will impact the lives of young Ethiopians.

Nani Detti

Founder, Misale Initiative

