

Developing Families Together (DFT) was started in 2002 in Kidist Belete's living room in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with friends, relatives and colleagues in attendance.

Excerpt from a speech by Kidist Belete: My name is Kidist Belete and I am the founding Executive Director of *Developing Families Together*. For [18] years, our community-based organization has provided a range of support services to highly vulnerable persons and households in Ethiopia. We are working in five regional areas, providing care and support to over [40,000] adults and children.

I wanted to talk to you about one of our programs that has been making a considerable difference in the lives of one of the most vulnerable social groups in our society—namely, grandmothers who are burdened with the raising of their grandchildren orphaned by HIV and AIDS.

Because of the crippling poverty that sets in almost immediately upon the death of the bread-earners, grandmothers find the task of feeding their orphaned grandchildren, or of sending them to school, daunting. Things become a lot more complicated when the grandmothers themselves are advanced in age or have health problems.



A woman shares her story at a grandmothers' meeting at Developing Families Together.

Since 2007, with support from the Stephen Lewis Foundation, DFT has been implementing a care and support programme for grandmothers and their orphaned grandchildren in a small locality called Debre Sina, about 200 km north of Addis Ababa. When they started, all the women in these programs, about 300 of them, (*note: by 2015, DFT had already served 2000 grandmothers in this and a neighbouring locality*) were at the end of their rope. Many of them had several orphaned grandchildren left behind by more than one of their children. In many cases, the women themselves had been widowed, or had no one else to work the fields or engage in income-generating activities to help them. Many were reduced to begging in the streets or engaging in daily manual labour, often hard and painful at their age. Quite a few suffered from various kinds and degrees of trauma-induced psychological problems. In fact, in many cases the women had withdrawn from communal activities and become isolated, in part because they were unable to afford the little resources that were necessary to sustain active social engagement and in part because of the hopelessness that set in with the devastation of their households by AIDS.

The orphaned children themselves were in various conditions of stress. Many did not attend school, while some, particularly the older ones, had to engage in income-generating activities such as selling parched grains in the streets or engaging in hard daily labour to try to feed their younger siblings.

In Debre Sina and area, our interventions have two components—one component being what we do for the women to help them get on their feet, and the other being what we do with the communities in which they live. Over the years, hundreds of grandmothers have become self-reliant and have, perhaps more importantly, begun to feel more optimistic and hopeful.

Our work is with the poorest of the poor and, one by one, we can help them turn their lives around. Support one grandmother, and you are making a difference in the lives of generations. They are an inspiration to everyone who meets them, above all to their own families. There is nothing that gives me more pleasure than to see how one person's life has changed—and from that, how a whole family is uplifted—all because of our project's intervention. Together, we can change the world, one woman—one grandmother—at a time.

Developing Families Together information: <http://preventgbv africa.org/member/developing-families-together/>

This is an abridged version of the speech printed in the SLF Grassroots newsletter spring 2013. Here is a YouTube version of a similar speech given by Kidist Belete for the SLF "Ask Her" Talks in 2015: <https://youtu.be/LMOGABtrwBc>.