



Stories of Inclusion!

Disability Inclusion in the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at University of Gondar, Ethiopia



Scholars Program



Starting in 2017, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Gondar in Ethiopia has taken significant steps to include young people with disabilities in the Program.

Stories of Inclusion! is a photo-narrative containing stories from Scholars with disabilities and their peers, Scholars Program staff and the wider university community, on their experience participating in the Scholars Program in their varied capacities and the impact they have felt or witnessed.

This is a product of the Process Evaluation conducted by [Light for the World](#), an international disability and development organisation and the Disability Inclusion partner of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program.



Scholars
Program



Stories of Inclusion!

#1

About the Scholars Program at University of Gondar





The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at University of Gondar was established in 2016 providing scholarship opportunities in undergraduate and postgraduate programs, for Ethiopians and nationals from four other East African countries (South Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea). For undergraduate programs, all recruited will be persons with disabilities: 60% female and 40% male.

DR. SOLOMON MEKONNEN
Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program
Director, University of Gondar



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At the time of the evaluation, 122 Scholars had been enrolled by the Scholars Program, of whom 111 were Scholars with disabilities and 11 young women without disabilities. The majority of the Scholars with disabilities have visual impairment (69), 34 have physical impairment and 8 have hearing impairment; 58% of all Scholars enrolled in the Scholars Program are young women.

DR. MIKYAS ABERA

**Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program
Manager, University of Gondar**



#2

**Getting into the
Scholars Program**





“

I was having a conversation with a man sitting next to me on the bus. We were talking about our education background and he told me about the scholarship opportunity for students with disabilities at University of Gondar. That's how I found out about the Program.

I heard about the scholarship from our school director. He is the one who guided me and showed me all that I should do to get the scholarship.

”

“

I got the form and processed the application through my high school. I had a challenge with filling the form but my friends who were already part of the Scholars Program helped me with clarifications.



“

During the application process, I used to call the local Scholars Program staff to get clarity on a few things.

They were very helpful.”

SINIDU

Law Student, visual impairment

“

I heard that I was accepted by phone through a Scholars Program staff.

I was ecstatic!

I believed it was the first big step forward towards achieving my aspirations in life. I knew the scholarship will open doors that will take me to the goals I have dreamt about.

TIBEBU

Law Student, physical impairment



Stories of Inclusion!

#3

An inclusive and enabling learning environment





We used to talk with friends a lot about going to a university, and I pictured it as something difficult, and this elicited fear in me.

In high school, we all came from the same background, but the university community is quite diverse. I had very poor communication skills, and I didn't connect with people fast. I also didn't know senior students at the university. These made me develop some fear. The good thing was I didn't experience any major challenges as I expected.

Things went smoothly.

SINIDU

Law Student, visual impairment





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Since the learning environment at University of Gondar has improved dramatically over the last few years, the university is now home to the biggest population of students with disabilities in Ethiopia. Accessible facilities and the support packages improved the environment for students with disabilities.



“

I got a wheelchair from the Scholar Program. I move around the university, go to class and library using it. Some places are not too suitable for the wheelchair – they require a lot more energy or I get help from other students.

—

SCHOLAR
Law Student, physical impairment

“

More ramps have been made at the university, mostly after the Scholars Program was introduced. These (ramps) help me to move safely and comfortably to the cafeteria, dormitory, library and class.

SCHOLAR

**Sociology student, physical
impairment**



“

I needed to change my old cane and I got a new one from the university which helped me to move around the campus with little difficulties.

SCHOLAR

Amharic language student, visual impairment





“

My laptop computer and voice recorder are both very helpful. I can read, study, and do my assignments without needing to go to the library because most of the teaching materials are available in soft copy. The voice recorder helps me to revise the class lectures.

SCHOLAR
**Sociology student, visual
impairment**



“

Three sign language interpreters have been assigned for us in classes recently.

SCHOLAR

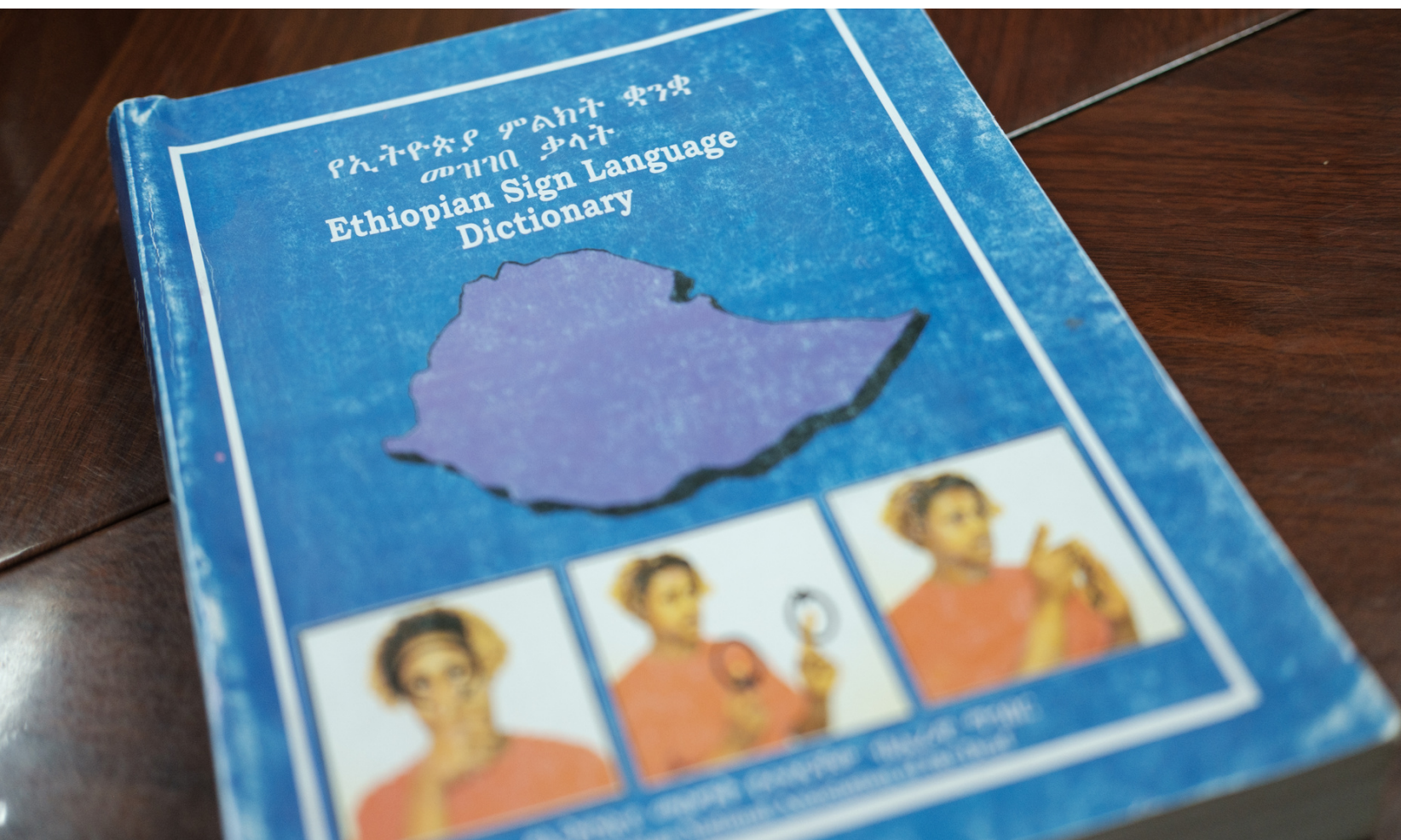
Social sciences student, hearing impairment

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Having more sign language interpreters would help us communicate more with teachers and students.

SCHOLAR

Social sciences student, hearing impairment





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“Students with visual impairments use a voice recorder and JAWS (screen reader software). The transition from braille books to learning through recording and JAWS was challenging. Listening to the recording was difficult and sometimes tedious. But those difficulties have not impacted my education. It didn’t take long to get used to it. ”

SINIDU

Law Student, visual impairment

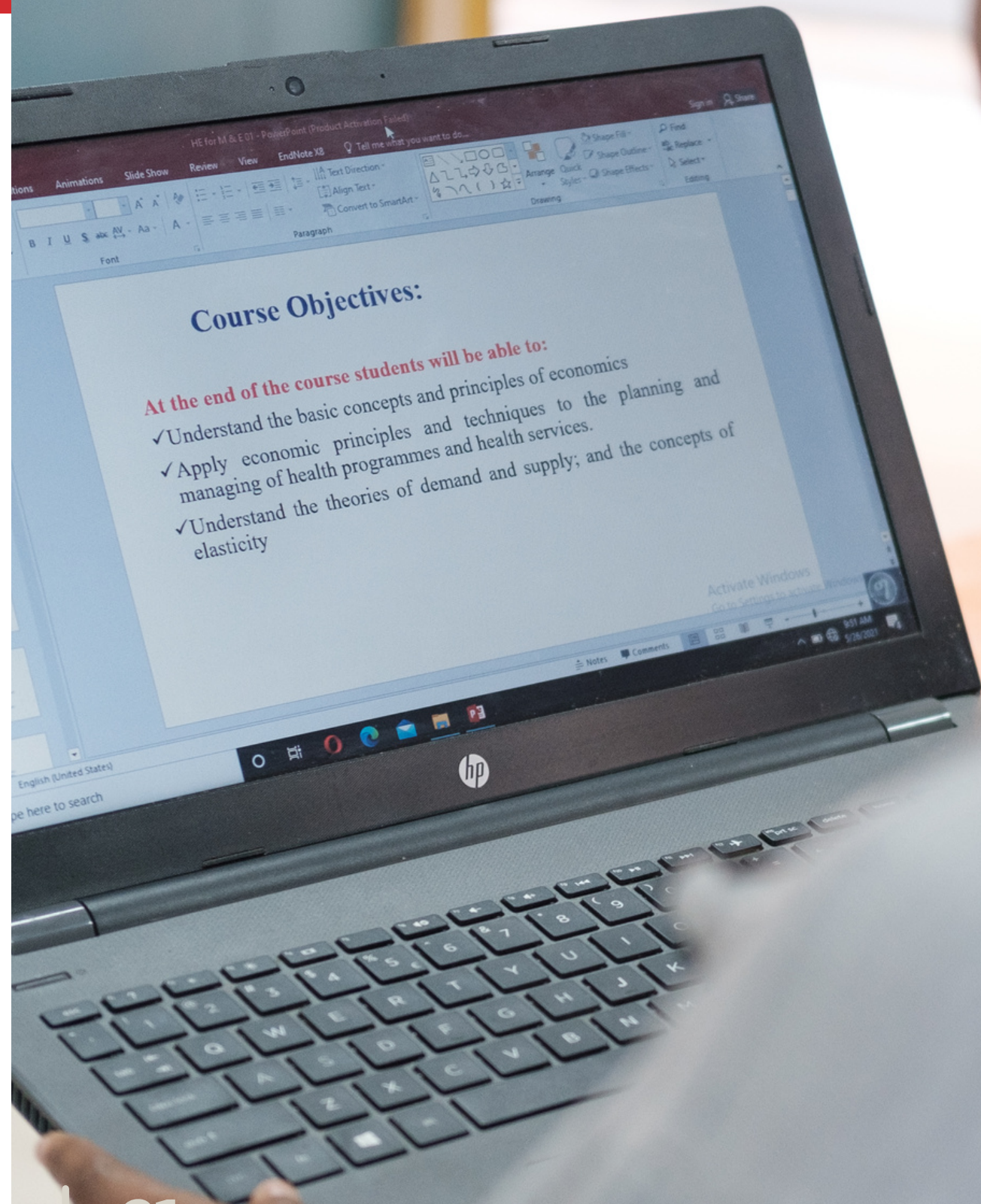
“

I try to provide the content in line with what the students can understand. For (students with) visual impairments, it is a bit of a unique teaching style. I have to provide the content clearly in the classroom, and I have to present loudly and say my words clearly because students have to rely on listening to learn the material. I also organize special reading material, that is very comprehensive, clear and understandable for them.

GETACHEW

Social Work Department





“

The teachers in my department were so helpful. I couldn't take notes in class, but the teachers gave me their notes in a soft copy, and other reading references.

SCHOLAR

Law student, visual impairment



“

Our peers are making us participate better in every aspect of the university.

—

SCHOLAR

Law student, visual impairment

“

I do group assignments with my peers and they encourage me most of the time.

—

SCHOLAR

Social sciences, hearing impairment



“

Some classmates inform me about upcoming events and exam schedules.

SCHOLAR

Social sciences, hearing impairment

“

My best friend has been so supportive in explaining some lesson topics during online sessions during the lockdown.

SCHOLAR

Social sciences, hearing impairment





Through mentoring, I have taught the students leadership skills. Among the methods that I use, is selecting some issues and having role model scholars present them and have the other scholars provide feedback. The whole activity is mostly run by the scholars. It helps them develop their leadership and learn how to guide and to manage the interests of others.

ABESHA

**Mentor and Lecturer, Psychology
Department**





“

The mentors supported me to be a successful student. They gave me guidance on how to study, how to manage my money and live with others peacefully. Their guidance helped me in a lot of ways.

SCHOLAR

Sociology, physical impairment



I have been a lecturer in the department of social work for the last four years. I have also been working with the Scholars Program as a mentor for the last year and a half. As a mentor I work with the students with disabilities to empower them in different dimensions.

I work with students to identify their social problems at the university, identify their psychological challenges, and environmental barriers in the university. According to their challenges, I work with them in as individuals and in groups with a common agenda that is important for all of them.

GETACHEW

Mentor and Lecturer, Social Work department

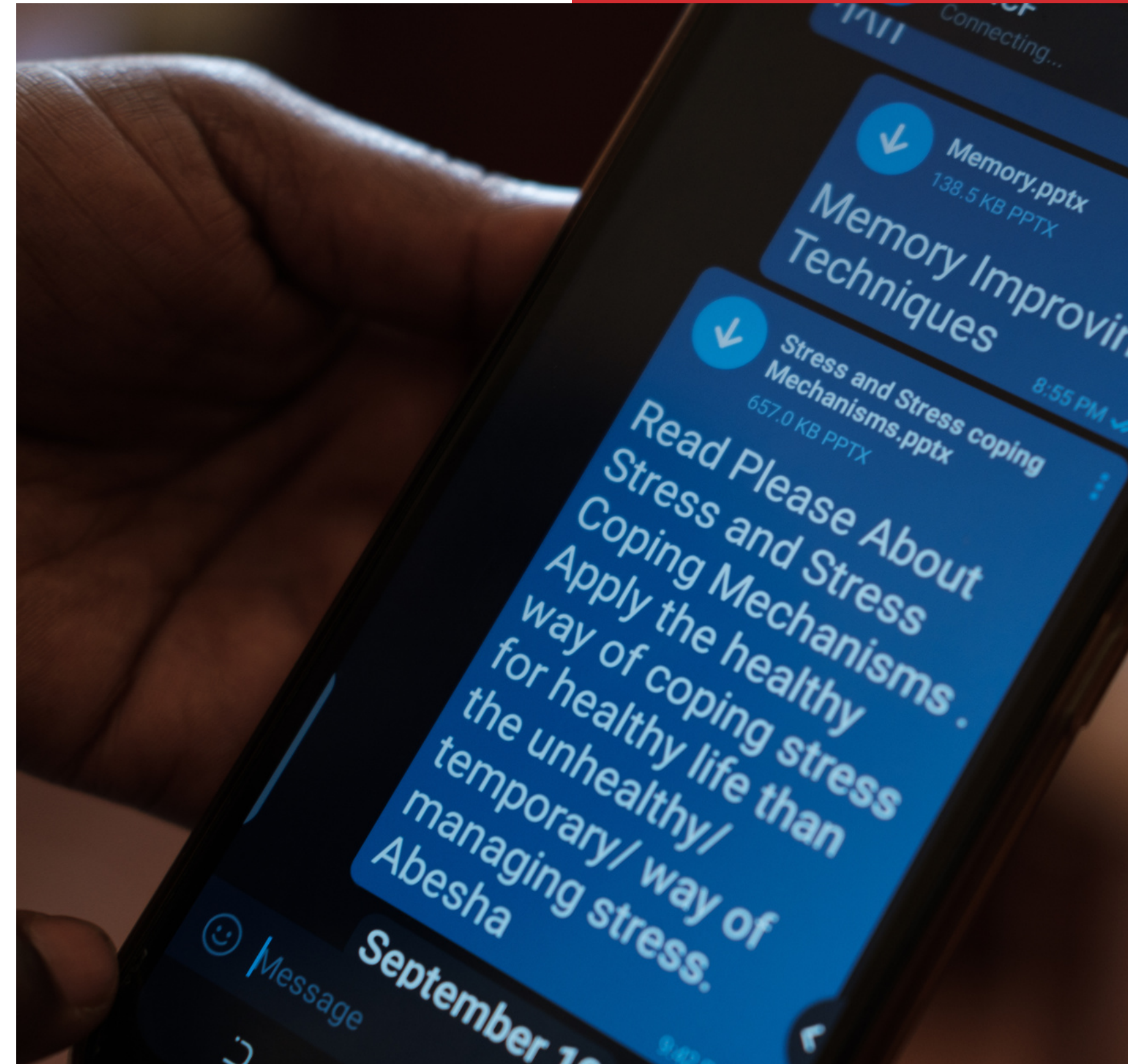


“

Last year, when I first heard about the coronavirus epidemic, I was petrified and refused to leave campus when the university was closed. I feared contracting the virus on the bus before reaching home as I did not have enough information about the prevention mechanisms. Then, the Scholars Program staff explained everything for me and I went home. They constantly communicated with us and supported us until we came back to school.

SCHOLAR

Social sciences, hearing impairment





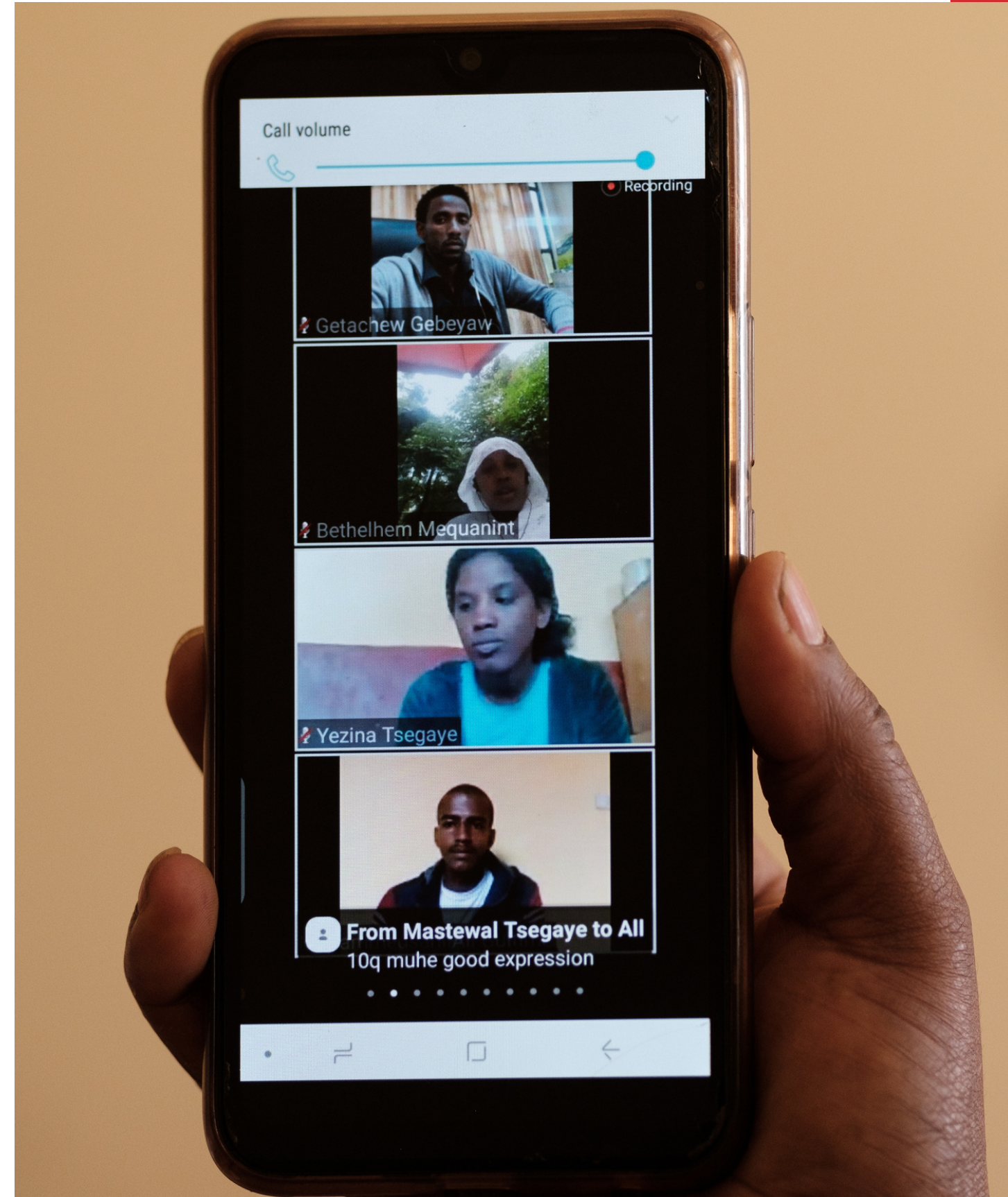
The school was closed because of COVID-19, and we couldn't learn online like other students. Before we left the university, they (Scholars Program staff) provided us all the information including protective measures.

After we left school, they followed up with us by sending text messages and information about our study. They encouraged us and used to tell us that we will return to school soon.



MIMI

Special Needs Education Student, hearing impairment





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I am not a Scholar but I am happy that the Scholars Program exists and is inclusive. I am excited to see the growth of students with disabilities in the Program. The changes in accessibility at the university made through the Program have made things easier for me too. Overall, attitude on campus has changed and I feel more accepted.

GETAHUN

**Fourth Year Law Student
President of the Disability Association**

#4

The Scholars' Community and giving back to our communities





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The program also has a unit called the Scholars' Community. The unit is mainly responsible for harmonizing the relationship between the Scholars and the Program coordinators.

In addition to this, it provides information to students and coordinates the Scholars' participation in community give-back and other related initiatives.

SINDU

Law Student, visual impairment

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Last year, the Scholars Community donated resources to a local charity for the elderly. As a member of the Community, I contributed to the fund raised to support the needy. We also visited the beneficiaries to encourage them. That moment has been the best experience of my life so far.

ANONYMOUS SCHOLAR





“

In my village, I met parents of children with hearing impairments and gave them valuable information to help their kids get support and educational opportunities. I encouraged a couple of children to be registered at a local DPO (Disabled People's Organisation) for youth with hearing impairments.

SCHOLAR

Social Sciences, hearing impairment

“

I made small donations to two schools with visually impaired students in my home town. I gave the school seven packs of braille paper and books. I also helped make toilets at one of the schools accessible to students with disabilities by communicating with local education officials and community representatives.

SCHOLAR

Law Student, visual impairment





“

During summer time, I participate in an environmental protection club with local youths. Every Saturday, we clean the city, plant trees and teach the local community about environment protection. People become inspired and motivated when they see me sitting in a wheelchair and picking up trashes and planting trees.

SCHOLAR

Law Student, physical impairment



“

I gave a training on braille writing to young students with visual impairments at the boarding school where I came from.

—

SCHOLAR

Social Work, visual impairment



“

"My friends and I initiated our community to raise money to construct a road to our village. We facilitated the process like getting a road construction permit and other authorizations. I feel very proud whenever I see my people using the road."

SCHOLAR

Medical Laboratory Sciences student, physical impairment

“

I participated in one summer camp program that lasted for two weeks. We shared experiences with one another and visited institutions working on disabilities and rehabilitation.

SCHOLAR

**Special Needs Education Student,
visual impairment**





“

The entire experience was amazing. We visited historical places, disability rehabilitation centers and Sodere park. We gained a lot of experience from the program, and it brought the Scholars Community closer. We took lots of pictures and had fun.

SCHOLAR

Sociology Graduate, physical impairment



Stories of Inclusion!

#4

Preparing for the world of work

“

I want to be a lawyer. I wanted to study law to give justice for all people with disabilities, and to change our society to develop a better justice system for our country, and also to give equal opportunities to all disabled and disadvantaged people.

BAUSH

Law Student, visual impairment



“

Special Needs Education is my dream field of study. I, myself, have benefited a lot from Special Needs Education teachers. So, I also want to support deaf students in the future. ”

MIMI*

**Special Needs Education
Student, hearing impairment**

*Mimi is one of the first deaf students in Ethiopia to attend a mainstream university. She is studying in the Faculty of Special Needs Education with seven other students with hearing impairments.





I am a Career Services coordinator with the Scholars Program. In January, when some students were graduating, we delivered different trainings, for example, how to write a CV, how to write a good application letter, and job interview skills. We also conduct an internship program to enable Scholars to build their experience, and to also allow them to understand what the world of work is about.

MULUKEN

Career Services Coordinator





“

My internship was in a disability rehabilitation center. I received a good reception and induction session. I learned how to develop case stories of clients. I had the opportunity to share experiences with youth with disabilities at the center and at local schools.

The internship helped me to translate my knowledge into practice, and helped me develop important skills like project proposal development and case story writing.

FIKERTE

Social Work Graduate, visual impairment

Stories of Inclusion!



#5

**Impact and
Growth**



“

Earlier, I didn't believe that students with disabilities could make it in the university. Now I believe that they are very smart and they can make it, and they can have a better future. I believe that they are equal.

—

MITKU
Student Union Member



“

The Scholars Program changed my life in many ways. Before I was disadvantaged and couldn't meet my needs, but the Program has changed my attitude, and my lifestyle. Before, I failed to communicate with others. I felt ashamed of my disability. Now, I feel like others without a disability. My family is excited for me and feels happy. They appreciate me and see me as a great woman with a great future.

BETELHEM
Physiotherapy Student

“

Betty's personality is great. At first, she was a little shy, but now she feels free with me. I go around to the university and take her out for lunch. At one time, my mood was not good, and I talked to her about that. She would send me moral stories and give me a lot of advice. She is my best friend. She is amazing. I spend a lot of time with her. ”

SOLOMAN**Friend of Betty (Scholar)**

“

I am happy that there is a scholarship for Betty, but one thing I am worried about is after she graduates, finding work. There are some people with disabilities who work, but they are very few. I think she is brilliant. I feel like if she got the chance, people would feel confident hiring people with disabilities. People need to know about disabilities and how they can work with people living with them.

SOLOMAN
Friend of Betty (Scholar)



“

I always have exit interviews with graduate Scholars. During those exit interviews, I am always amazed by the way they react to questions, the way they express their future plans, not only Scholars with impairments but also those without impairments. We have Scholars without impairments in the postgraduate program. They are very motivated to contribute to the betterment of the lives of people with disabilities.

**MONITORING AND EVALUATION
OFFICER
Scholars Program**





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In three Strategic Plan periods, that is for fifteen years, the strategy of University of Gondar has included disability as one of the cross-cutting issues. Based on this Strategic Plan, underlying policies and directives are also inclusive and considered when planning for infrastructural improvements.



KEY INFORMANT

University of Gondar management



University of Gondar can be an exemplary university in providing inclusive services because in the university's 10-year strategic plan, one of the core values is inclusiveness. This is very powerful, it indicates the value that the university attaches to the life of people with disabilities. The organizational culture of the university is very amazing, the university top management is committed to making the university exemplary in this area of inclusiveness.

**MONITORING AND EVALUATION
OFFICER
Scholars Program**





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I feel happy and enthusiastic about the Scholars Program. In Ethiopia, persons with disabilities are not considered as people. Our country has more than 3000 years of history, but we are not part of that. Thanks to this Program, society's perception of us is on the way up. It is changing and I am happy for that.

Even though I am not a Scholar, the Program boosts my confidence. If people with disabilities have confidence, their confidence will be my confidence.

GETAHUN

**Law Student, President of the
Disability Association**

Associated Publications

Journey to Disability Inclusion: lessons learned from the Scholars Program at University of Gondar

Authors: Andera Delfyna, Erika Bojarczuk © Light for the World

Photography: Erika Bojarczuk © Light for the World

Design: Light for the World

For more information: Anneke Maarse, a.maarse@light-for-the-world.org

