



SUCCESS STORIES

Rising Up: One Woman's Story

Access to health care services helps an HIV-positive woman gain strength to start a business.



Daniel Debebe

A USAID-supported HIV/AIDS program helped Almaz become one of her community's most productive workers.

"I once barely survived on their help, but now I feel like my neighbors depend on my hard work."

— Almaz Minota

All women deserve access to quality health care and the chance at life. Yet there are more than 600 million women in the developing world who struggle to gain such access. Twenty-five-year-old Almaz Minota, who lives in Jimma, Ethiopia, used to be one of these women.

Infected with HIV, Almaz could not get out of bed in the morning. She had little energy and depended on the charity of her community to eat. Falling into a deep depression, she felt that she was a burden to her neighbors and struggled to hold onto hope.

Almaz's life turned around when she was referred to two HIV/AIDS programs funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Response Mechanism Project, which is implemented by the International Orthodox Christian Charities and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, was one of these programs. It conducts outreach to communities, identifying people who need support and then providing them with psychological and social services and medical treatment referrals. The other program, the HIV/AIDS Care and Support Program, administers antiretroviral therapy and is implemented by Management Sciences for Health.

Through these USAID/PEPFAR-supported programs, community volunteers work household to household, delivering much-needed basic health care to people who otherwise would not receive help: bed-ridden HIV/AIDS patients. With assistance from the programs, Almaz was able to get out of bed and back on her feet. Soon after, she began to surprise the volunteers. On arriving at her home, they would find her busy cooking breakfast, with the room cleaned around her.

Almaz continued to make progress and is now one of the hardest working women in the community. She started her own cleaning business and helps many of the same neighbors who used to give her meal leftovers. "I once barely survived on their help, but now I feel like my neighbors depend on my hard work," said Almaz.

Many are amazed by the improvements in Almaz's health, spirit, and productivity. Watching her work with fervor in the neighborhood, it is easy to forget she is living with HIV/AIDS. But if you speak with her, she will tell you her story and about the difference access to health care services has made in her life.