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entrepreneurship individual assignment
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Biography of Bethlehem Tilahun Alemu



Early Life and Background

Bethlehem Tilahun Alemu, one of Ethiopia's most renowned entrepreneurs, was born in 1980 in the Zenabwork neighborhood of Addis Ababa. Growing up in a humble household, Bethlehem witnessed firsthand the economic challenges her community faced. Her parents emphasized the importance of education, and she went on to graduate from Unity University in 2004 with a degree in Accounting.

However, what set Bethlehem apart from many others was her ability to identify opportunities amidst challenges. She saw immense potential in Ethiopian artisanship and the global demand for ethically made products. This vision would later become the foundation of her entrepreneurial journey.

Founding of SoleRebels

In 2004, Bethlehem founded SoleRebels, a footwear company that reimagined traditional Ethiopian craftsmanship for a global audience. Inspired by the *selate* shoes worn by Ethiopian farmers, SoleRebels began creating eco-friendly, hand-crafted footwear made from recycled tires and other sustainable materials.

Bethlehem's vision was not only to create high-quality products but also to provide sustainable jobs for her community. She trained local artisans, empowering them with fair wages and opportunities for growth. Unlike many businesses that rely on

imported raw materials, SoleRebels emphasized using locally sourced inputs, showcasing Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage.

Global Success and Recognition

What started as a small workshop in Zenabwork quickly grew into an internationally recognized brand. SoleRebels became the first African footwear company to sell its products on platforms like Amazon and Zappos. Bethlehem leveraged e-commerce to reach customers worldwide, positioning SoleRebels as a leader in the global ethical fashion movement.

Under her leadership, the company expanded into over 50 countries and established retail stores in cities like New York, Barcelona, and Tokyo. This made SoleRebels not just a footwear brand but a symbol of African innovation and sustainability.

Other Venture

Bethlehem's entrepreneurial spirit didn't stop with SoleRebels. In 2015, she launched *The Republic of Leather*, a luxury leather goods brand that promotes Ethiopian leather craftsmanship. She also founded *Garden of Coffee*, an initiative to bring Ethiopia's world-famous coffee directly to consumers without intermediaries. Her vision was to celebrate Ethiopia's status as the birthplace of coffee while empowering local farmers.

Achievements and Awards

Bethlehem has received numerous accolades for her contributions to entrepreneurship and social impact:

- Named one of *Forbes'* "100 Most Powerful Women in the World" in 2012.
- Featured in *The Guardian's* list of "Top 10 Female Entrepreneurs in Africa."
- Recognized by the World Economic Forum as a "Young Global Leader."
- Honored with the African Leadership Network's "Entrepreneur of the Year" award.
- SoleRebels became the first World Fair Trade Organization-certified footwear brand in the world.

Bethlehem's achievements are a testament to her commitment to creating a sustainable, inclusive business model that uplifts communities while preserving cultural heritage.

Impact on Ethiopian Entrepreneurship

Bethlehem Tilahun Alemu's success has inspired a new generation of Ethiopian entrepreneurs to think globally while addressing local challenges. By building brands that celebrate Ethiopian culture and resources, she has changed global perceptions of Africa's potential in business and innovation.

Her story underscores the power of entrepreneurship as a tool for economic empowerment, particularly in developing countries. Bethlehem remains a vocal advocate for creating opportunities for women and young people, proving that with vision and determination, it is possible to transform challenges into opportunities.

Legacy and Vision for the Future

Bethlehem continues to expand her ventures while mentoring aspiring entrepreneurs. She believes in the importance of creating self-sustaining business ecosystems that rely on local resources and talent. Through her initiatives, she has shown that Africa is not only a source of raw materials but also of innovation, creativity, and world-class products.

Bethlehem Tilahun Alemu's journey from a small neighborhood in Addis Ababa to global recognition is a remarkable example of how entrepreneurship can drive social and economic change. She remains a beacon of hope and inspiration for millions across Africa and beyond.