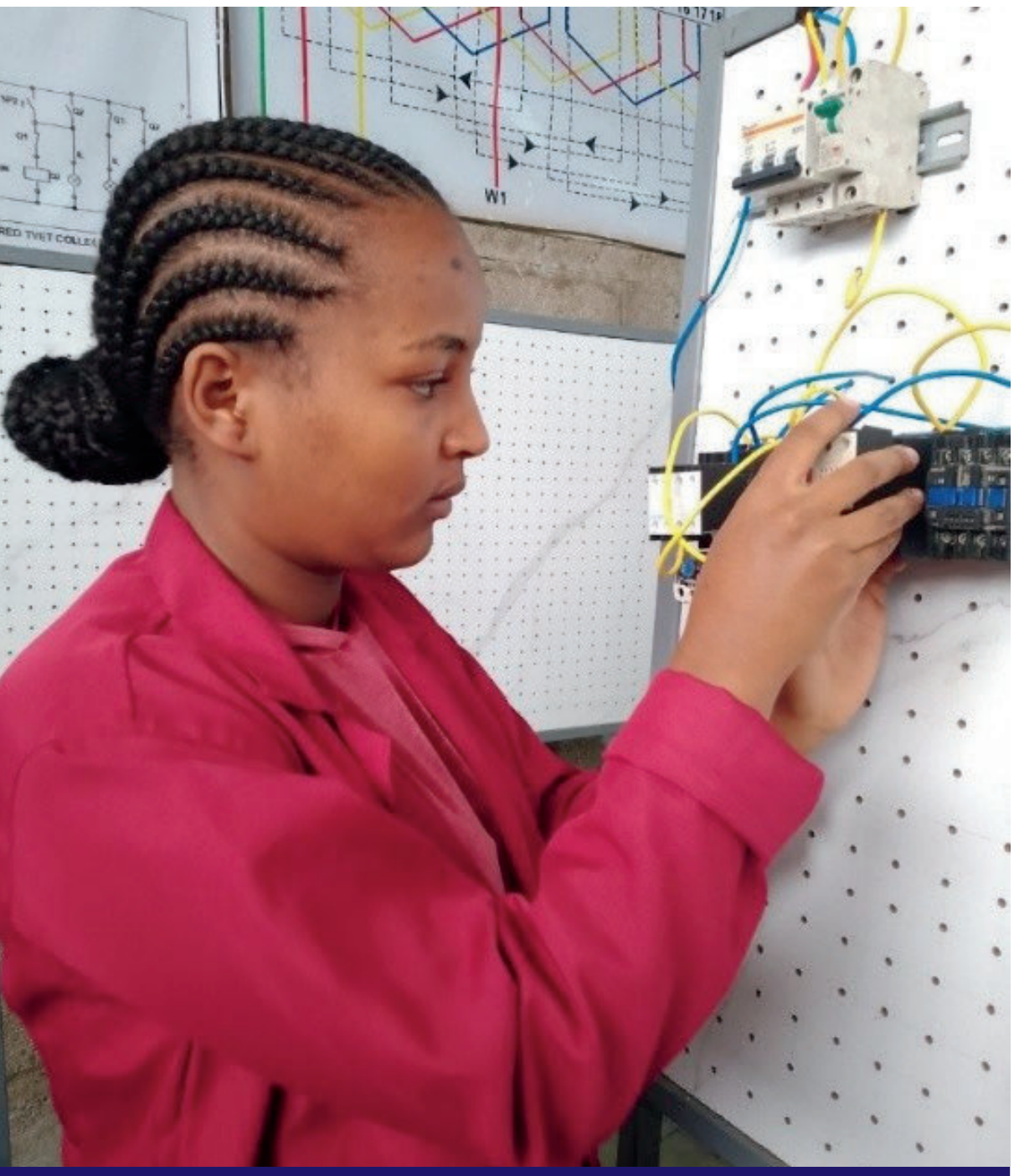
From Spices to Sparks: Kalkidan's Path to Empowerment



Kalkidan Birhane setting up a control system during a practical session in her class.

At just 20 years old, Kalkidan Birhane is shaping a future powered by courage, skill, and the drive to uplift others. A student of Electro Technology at Hawassa Tegbared Polytechnic College, Kalkidan is not only mastering the science of electricity — she is becoming a spark of inspiration for her peers and community.

Growing up in the Hawassa region, Kalkidan faced her share of life's uncertainties. After losing her father and experiencing periods of separation from her mother, she had to find ways to support herself. With quiet determination, she began selling spices in the local market to cover her basic needs. Her entrepreneurial mindset kept her going and her passion for learning never faded.

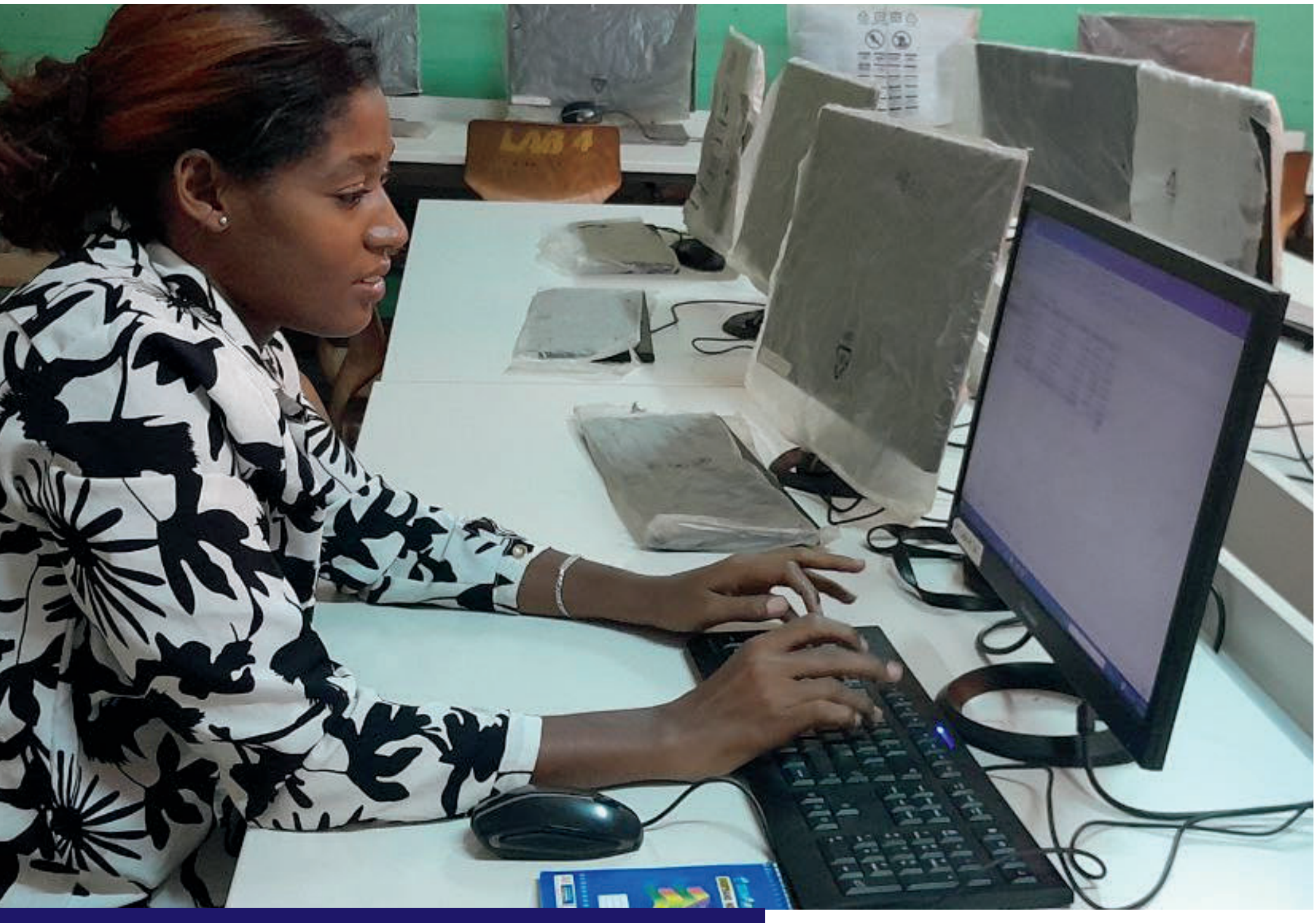
Kalkidan excelled academically, passing her national Grade 12 exams with distinction. Still, the path to higher education seemed uncertain. That changed when she came across a post on social media about the FAWE Ethiopia bursary program under the Mastercard Foundation's Second Chance Pathways Program. Among more than 900 applicants, Kalkidan was selected — and everything shifted.

"Before FAWE Ethiopia, I was only surviving," she says. "Now, I can think calmly, dream freely, and build my future with purpose. This opportunity is not just support — it's a blessing."

With access to housing, mentorship, learning materials, and financial support, Kalkidan is fully focused on her studies and future plans. Her confidence is growing, and so is her sense of responsibility to others.

Kalkidan's dream goes beyond personal success. She wants to use her skills to empower other disadvantaged young women and children passing forward the spark that changed her life. Her journey is a shining example of what happens when opportunity meets determination, and when education becomes the bridge to lasting impact.

Walking Toward Dreams: Werkitu's Journey of Determination



Werkitu working on a computer task during the ICT workshop.

At 24, Werkitu Dechasa is steadily building the life she once dreamed of. A student at Adama Polytechnic College pursuing a diploma in ICT, she is focused, ambitious, and determined to become self-reliant by starting her own business.

Werkitu lives with a physical disability and uses crutches to support her mobility yet she moves forward each day with remarkable strength. Living alone in Adama, far from her parents who remain in a rural part of Oromia affected by security challenges, Werkitu has faced moments of uncertainty. But what defines her is not her circumstance , it is her unwavering commitment to creating a better future.

That journey took a transformative turn in December 2024 when she was selected for the FAWE Ethiopia bursary program under the Mastercard Foundation's Second Chance Pathways initiative. The support she received — including housing, meals, transport, and tuition — has enabled her to focus fully on her studies and her goals.

"With the support I received, especially housing, I felt a huge burden lifted," she shared. "I no longer worry about where I'll stay or how I'll get to class. I can now walk to school and concentrate on my future. Thanks to FAWE Ethiopia, I'm hopeful again."Werkitu's story is a powerful reflection of the impact of inclusive education support. With courage and the right opportunities, she is turning her dreams into reality and showing that every step forward counts when you believe in what's possible.

A New Beginning: Meron's Journey from Displacement to Possibility



Meron Girma conducting a chemical experiment in a laboratory workshop.

At 21, Meron Girma is walking a path she once feared had closed forever — one that leads back to education, dignity, and purpose. Today, she is a student in the Physio-Chemical department at General Wingate TVET College in Addis Ababa. But her journey began far from the classroom in the uncertainty of conflict and displacement.

When violence erupted in her hometown in rural Eastern Wollega, Meron and her family were forced to flee. They found themselves in a crowded IDP settlement in Debre Birhan, where they lived in fragile conditions for over three years. As the eldest of seven children, Meron took on the responsibility of holding her family together. School felt like a distant dream.

"I couldn't afford to pay for my Grade 12 exams," she recalls. "I only managed because kind people helped me raise the money. Still, I thought that would be the end of my education."
But Meron's spirit never faded. When she heard about the FAWE Ethiopia bursary program under the Mastercard Foundation's Second Chance Pathways Program, hope returned. With encouragement from her community, she applied and was selected.

For Meron, the bursary was more than financial aid. It was a turning point. It covered her tuition, accommodation, learning materials, meals, and household supplies. Most importantly, it gave her the mental space to dream again — and the support system to help her rise."Before this opportunity, I was only surviving. Now, I am learning, growing, and planning for a future where I can support my family and give back."

Meron now navigates life in a new city, balancing academic demands and adapting to a new environment. But she walks with confidence knowing she is no longer alone, and her journey is part of something bigger."I want other displaced girls to know that it's possible. We can rise again. We deserve a second chance."

Her story is a powerful reminder that when we invest in resilience, we unlock potential. And when we open doors to education, we transform lives — not just for individuals, but for entire families and communities.

Roza Kifle: Crafting a Future Through Fashion



Roza Kifle sewing with a machine carefully following the stitching lines in a workshop.

Roza Kifle, a young woman from Adama, Ethiopia, is a Level 2 Fashion Design student at Adama Polytechnic College. From a young age, she was passionate about art, design, and beauty, dreaming of creating clothes that express identity and confidence.

Her journey, however, was filled with challenges; when she was just 11, her mother was forced to leave her due to economic challenges to search for better opportunities, leaving Roza to support herself and continue her education alone. Despite these hardships, she remained determined to shape her own future.

After her mother returned, Roza continued her studies, and although she was disappointed by her Grade 12 results, she did not give up. Through a social media channel, she discovered the FAWE/Mastercard Foundation Phase II program, and after successfully succeed the selection process, she earned a second chance to pursue her education.

Today, Roza is thriving in her studies, dreaming of becoming one of the best fashion designers, traveling internationally to learn and collaborate across cultures, and making her mother proud. As she beautifully reflects, “My journey is just beginning. I’m excited to see where my passion will take me.”

A Second Chance, A Brighter Future: Genet Damsew's Journey



Roza Kifle sewing with a machine carefully following the stitching lines in a workshop.

My name is Genet Damsew, and I grew up attending school in Adama. Losing my mother as a child was one of the biggest challenges I faced. "I remember that as the first-born, every responsibility fell on me. My plan was to continue my education and support my family."

Despite these hardships, I refused to give up, and through a social media channel, I discovered the FAWE/Mastercard Foundation Phase II program. After successfully completing the selection process, I earned a second chance to pursue my education.

Through my education, I have benefited greatly from FAWE/Mastercard Foundation Phase II program comprehensive student support." Today, I dream of completing my studies and, in her own words, she says: "My dream is to open my own company and employ vulnerable and marginalized communities to help them to overcome their challenges."

Betlhem’s Journey in Auto Electrics



Roza Kifle sewing with a machine carefully following the stitching lines in a workshop.

I am Betlhem Solomon, a 20-year-old from a small rural village in Arusi. As the first-born in my family, I took on many responsibilities from a young age, traveling long distances just to continue my education up to Grade 12.

Despite my hard work, my results weren’t enough to join university, and I had to stop my studies and try to work to support myself, but there were no opportunities. “I wanted to support my education through earning income, but I couldn’t.” When I heard about a scholarship, I was so excited and applied immidiatlly.

Today, thanks to the FAWE Ethiopia under FAWE/Mastercard Foundation Phase II program, I am able to continue my studies in auto electrics department. I dream of supporting my family, giving back to my community, and contributing to the development of my country. As I always say, “I will work hard to turn my dreams into reality and make my family proud.”