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Aging in the Land of Origins: Mekedonia's impact on the Ethiopian Elderly

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Ethiopia – one of Africa's fastest-growing populations and economies – is home to a long and colorful history spanning thousands of years. Throughout its many tribes and ethnicities, there is a deep-rooted culture of respect for the elderly. Ethiopian social beliefs, customs, and community-based lifestyles greatly value the wisdom and perspective that elderly people provide. They are given the role of preserving history, they help to preserve the customs and identity of the Ethiopian people, they serve as mediators and conflict resolvers, especially in rural areas where the legal systems may be less trusted or accessible, they also play a role as spiritual leaders in both Christian and Muslim communities because of their deep understanding of religious practices. These roles make them a crucial part of the social fabric of Ethiopia.

Despite the cultural emphasis on respecting and valuing older adults, we see a major disconnect between the cultural ideal and the reality of how they are treated and cared for. The unfortunate

reality is that they are often marginalized and left out. This is due to many factors such as poverty, recent ongoing conflicts around the country, inadequate safety nets, rapid socio-economic changes, and lack of advocacy or awareness of elderly care. Makedonia home for the elderly and disabled was established as a way for the community to address some of these issues. Founded by Biniam Belete, a lawyer by training from the Ethiopian diaspora, Makedonia was founded as a response to the lack of formal care facilities and social safety nets in the country. It serves as a vital resource by offering shelter, healthcare, community integration, and challenging societal neglect and stigma associated with aging and mental disability. It has offered practical solutions to the issue of elderly care in the country but still has many challenges to overcome. This presentation will highlight the important work that Makedonia does in the care and advocacy for the elderly population of Ethiopia and examine some of the challenges faced.