



## Homosha Girls Reap The Rewards Of The Pharo Model of Education

The Pharo Foundation's pioneering project in Ethiopian education was the creation of the Homosha boarding school in the province of Benishangul Gumuz. When the Foundation started considering the project, the region's secondary gross enrolment rate for girls was only 45.7% and as low as 32% for girls from certain communities. The gender parity index was 0.8%, indicating more boys than girls were participating in education. Given this unfavourable context, in July 2017, the Foundation decided Homosha was the right place to start transforming 16 hectares of land into a state-of-the-art full boarding girls' school, which was established in 2018 and officially inaugurated in February 2020.

It seems that the Foundation's sizable investment has paid off. In the context of a 3.3% national pass rate for the Ethiopian National Secondary School Leaving Examination, in the BGRS province, only 135 pupils passed out of a total of 8325 who took it. Of those 135 pupils, 29 were girls and 10 of these girls were from Homosha school. Furthermore, our girls got the highest scores of all girls in both the natural science and social science streams in the region.

Nationally, six of the seven schools that saw 100% of their candidates pass the 2022/23 exam came from 'special', i.e. non-state schools like Pharo School Homosha. This suggests the growing role of non-state actors in delivering quality education in Ethiopia. In announcing the results, His Excellency the Education Minister Prof Birhanu Nega [praised these non-state schools for their extraordinary success](#). In fact, on 21 January 2022, in a move which seemed to anticipate the effectiveness of this alternative approach to education, the Ministry of Education announced its plan to build 50 unique schools, which would turn out the next leaders of the country. [The admission procedure outlined during the Ministry's announcement](#) was remarkably similar to that of the Pharo School Homosha. Many Ethiopian state [schools' facilities are sub-standard, overcrowded, in deplorable condition and often provide inadequate water](#). Involvement of non-state actors expands education opportunities and contributes to the spread of innovative teaching and learning methods ([UNESCO 2021](#)). According to UNESCO, 'many ideas that have transformed understandings of pedagogy emerged at the margins of public education systems or even outside them'. Increasingly many African countries are recognising the important role of non-state actors in education and have started acknowledging them as part of the national education system and as learning centres for quality education.

The Homosha girls' success is first and foremost their own. Their determination cannot be underestimated. But some part of their result must be ascribed to what is fast becoming the 'Pharo model of education', one where innovation is at the centre of teaching and learning.

Pharo School Homosha provides its students with a stimulating learning environment, quality teachers and opportunities to develop as a well-rounded individual. The exam results provide evidence of the opportunities it offers to those who are determined to succeed. Meet 2 such individuals below...



## How Did They Do It?

**Belaynesh (on the left in grey) and Elisabeth (on the right in white and blue) are the two amazing young women from The Pharo Foundation's Homosha Girls Boarding School who got the best grades in the natural science stream in BGRS in the national exam. Both are 19 and from large families in which they are the first to join university.**

Following their amazing achievement in the national exam, Elisabeth and Belaynesh have joined Addis Ababa University this week. With this big step in their education complete, both took the time to speak to us together and look back at their education from Homosha Girls Boarding School. They have shared their fondest memories with us, as well as detailing how their education led them to the success it has.

Belaynesh told us that Homosha was unique and said: "the school we attended up until grade eight didn't have much. It lacked the supportive learning equipment such as books and computers which students need. Everything was different at the foundation. We were given the tools we needed and were brought up to be a confident and successful women. We practiced on our language skills and were supported in our interest and hobbies."

Going back to her and Elisabeth's first day, Belaynesh recalled that "Mrs. Andrea was the first school director and she welcomed us with warm and motherly reception." Indeed, she pointed out that "Even if the curriculum was similar to the government school, the way the teachers conducted each classes was different. We were motivated to speak our minds freely and encouraged to present our assignments. The teachers were great and friendly."

Elisabeth added that just passing the entrance exam for Homosha had been a big moment for her. She recalled that even at their young age her and Belaynesh had been determined to make the most of their education. She said: "We had a goal to achieve when we joined the boarding school. We wanted to change our lives. We wanted to pursue higher educational institutions. We are the first to join university level education from both of our families. And we wanted to be role models in our community."

School is never smooth sailing though. Elisabeth recalled a couple of challenging times in her journey to becoming valedictorian. She said: "I had a minimum standard score when I passed grade eight. So I wanted to do better. I did not know how to focus on my readings. Since joining the foundation that is when I started to use my full potential. I have developed outstanding study habits and learned how to manage my own schedules and requirements."

Furthermore, Elisabeth brought up how well they were looked after during the pandemic and how the school managed to create a positive atmosphere.



She said: "During the Covid-19 pandemic, we remained within the school. We did not join our families for Ethiopian holiday celebrations like we used to. The school made sure that we were well taken care of and looking back those were the best times of my life. I will never forget all the love and care we received."

Speaking of their best times at Homosha, Belaynesh added: "The best time for me during the four years stay at the boarding school was when we went to church every Sunday by the school bus. And when we came back, our non-Christian friends would have cleaned the dormitories for us. In return, we would do the same for our Muslim sisters. The respect and love we had for one another was amazing."

Moving forward to their graduation in 2021, Elisabeth was delighted to be valedictorian and both women described this as one of the proudest and best moments of their lives.

Now starting university and hoping to study medicine, both Elisabeth and Belaynesh expressed a surprising lack of nerves. They put this down to their time at Homosha preparing them both in terms of their learning habits and also setting them up for the diverse cultural landscape of university.

Ever the modest duo, both Elisabeth and Belaynesh said they would like to give full credit to the foundation for their success, saying "We scored the highest entrance exam in the region because the school supported and guided us through."

Both women send their thanks to everyone at The Pharo Foundation and we'll be keeping tabs on how they progress... so watch this space!

## An Outsider's View of Homosha: Pharo Management's Megan Gerali Swaps NY For Homosha



Pharo Management has created a volunteer programme for those amongst its employees who are willing to dedicate their time, skills and abilities to support The Pharo Foundation's schools in Africa. The Pharo Foundation has interviewed Megan Gerali and Sufiyha Hashmi, two volunteers who just spent two weeks at The Pharo Foundation's Homosha boarding school. Please visit [our LinkedIn page](#) for their full interviews. An excerpt of Megan's interview can be found below:

**Please tell us what you have been doing since you arrived and how you have contributed to the girls' education.**

When we first arrived, we were attending a variety of different classes, from Biology to Civics to History. We quickly learned that we could add the most value in the English classes, so we started teaching 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade English, and assisting the teachers for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. We created lesson plans based on the unit each grade was currently learning, and incorporated vocabulary and conversational games to practice speaking English aloud. We started to notice an improvement in their skills and confidence in speaking in class after only a few days!

**Is there anything unique about this boarding school? What has impressed you the most?**

I find the boarding school has an excellent school/life balance. The girls seem to really enjoy their classes, which motivates them to study and work hard. At the same time, they also have free time each day to spend with their friends, playing games, sports, etc. Learning this kind of life balance early on ultimately sets them up for success at university and beyond as they begin their careers.

**What words best describe the Homosha girl in your view?**

Sweet, wise, friendly, determined, cheeky, happy, caring. They are some of the most incredible women I've ever met.

**Has this experience highlighted what is special for you about working at Pharo Management?**

Absolutely. One of my biggest takeaways is seeing how involved the Foundation is with day-to-day operations. Seeing from the ground level how pivotal their work is and what an incredible difference they're making in these communities made me even more proud to work at Pharo.

**Would you recommend the experience to other Fund employees?**

YES! I think it is a once in a lifetime opportunity and I would highly recommend it to other Fund employees.