



Alfa Demmellash
CEO/Co-founder, Rising Tide Capital



Alfa Melesse Demmellash was born and raised in Ethiopia. She came to the United States at the age of twelve with a keen interest in poverty alleviation and conflict resolution. Demmellash graduated cum laude from Harvard University in 2003, where she majored in Government. During her time at Harvard, her interest in conflict resolution brought her to Rwanda. Recognizing the role economic poverty played in fueling conflicts, Demmellash turned her focus to economic empowerment as a strategy to achieve peaceful societies.

Named as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum in 2015, Demmellash co-founded Rising Tide Capital in 2004 to empower underserved urban entrepreneurs in northern New Jersey to start and grow successful businesses. RTC's signature program is the nationally-recognized Community Business Academy – an intensive business training program coupled with year-round consulting and management support, which equips entrepreneurs to better operate their small businesses.

On average, a new Rising Tide business opens every seven days. Many Rising Tide Entrepreneurs use the increased earnings from their business to supplement low wages, transition out of unemployment and build on assets that allow them to better provide for their families. As their businesses get stronger, Rising Tide Entrepreneurs become local employers, tax-payers, volunteers, donors and role models to youth in their communities.

To date, 1,114 entrepreneurs have graduated from the Community Business Academy, forming a community of change agents and local leaders that are transforming their neighborhoods from within. There are currently 515 Rising Tide Entrepreneurs in business, with another 546 in the planning stages. Collectively the incomes they generate return \$3.80 for every dollar invested in Rising Tide Capital.

Today the organization has operations in five locations throughout northern New Jersey and runs the state's largest annual business pitch competition, the Start Something Challenge, serving entrepreneurs from dozens

of towns across the state. Demmellash is actively building a community of funders to support RTC's national replication through a network of licensed partners, enabling many cities seeking to invest in the existing entrepreneurial energy of their communities to get a head start.

Demmellash has received a number of awards and recognition for her work with Rising Tide Capital. In 2009, she was selected and profiled as a CNN Hero, and recognized by President Barack Obama during a speech at the White House. She was recognized as one of Forbes' Most Powerful Women Changing the World with Philanthropy in August 2012, and has been awarded honorary doctorates from St. Peter's University and New Jersey City University.

Major media features include the Suze Orman Show, The Larry King Show, O, The Oprah Magazine, Inc.com, BusinessWeek.com, The Star-Ledger, Entrepreneur.com as well as Essence Magazine's 40th anniversary edition where she was recognized as a "40 under 40 Dream Maker."

Demmellash currently serves on the boards of St. Peter's University and Business Alliance for Local Living Economies. She is passionate about social entrepreneurship, education, conflict resolution, and the environment.