

Ethiopia Calling

The newsletter of **Partners in the Horn of Africa**

World recessions are particularly vicious in the third world. In Ethiopia, where **Partners in the Horn of Africa** works, rampant inflation has put the cost of food out of reach for 4.5 million people at the same time as faltering economies in the West threaten the flow of international assistance. Starvation again stalks the land.

In the face of this doomsday scenario **Partners** is ramping up its assistance while remaining true to our two guiding principles:

- *100% of donations go directly into projects. Our directors work voluntarily and cover all operating costs.*
- *All **Partners'** projects have an Ethiopian "partner" who contributes 15-20% of the project cost, usually in the form of labour.*



Priests & monks celebrating the new school in Gubaya

It Takes a Village



Parents digging the school foundation

Supporters often ask "How do you find your projects?" or "How do you 'partner' with an Ethiopian group?" Here's the story of one project.

Gubaya, a cluster of small villages in central Ethiopia, is 17 kilometres from the nearest town, Dejen. The people are poor and till the soil by hand. There are 5 elementary schools but the nearest high school is in Dejen. It might as well be on the moon. There are no vehicles and the distance is too far to walk twice a day. Schooling stops at Grade 8.

"I was a good student and finished Grade 8 top in my class in Gubaya, I however, was not fortunate to continue Grade 9 and beyond. For we had no high school in Gubaya. My fa-



Community carrying rocks for the sub floor

ther found it impossible to handle the field work without my support and he refused to let me go to Dejen to continue my high school education.” ~ Dereje Mamo, a former student

Some students from Gubaya had continued their education by boarding with relatives and gone on to successful careers. They wanted to give children in Gubaya the chance to continue their education but the cost of a new high school would be \$240,000, an impossible sum in a community where people live in mud tukuls and the *per capita* annual income is about \$125.

Partners agreed to build a high school if the village would contribute about \$40,000 in labour and cash. A portion in cash because the “value” of the village labour would be less than the 15-20% contribution required by **Partners** for any project.

Everyone promised to contribute. The head priest explained that those too poor to contribute 50 Birr (about \$6) could sell a goat or sheep that would otherwise be used to commemorate a religious holiday (“God will understand”). The villagers tracked down former

residents of the area who had emigrated to other countries...challenging them to contribute and offering titles (“Hero of Gubeya”, “Ambassador of Gubeya” etc. to the top donors). Local farmers sold livestock and foodstuffs and each family in the area contributed something. Several hundred villagers pledged their labour to local contractors.

The New Horizon Foundation, a charitable organization created by the founders of Club Penguin (www.clubpenguin.com), and dedicated to relieving

poverty and improving the health and general wellbeing of children and families around the world, decided to sponsor the Gubaya project.

In May 2008 construction began. Up to 700 villagers worked each day digging foundations or carrying rocks for the contractor. In September a representative of Club Penguin attended a grand celebration, depicted in the photos. Four weeks later classes began with 425 students, including 85 earlier graduates of the elementary school system who had had to abandon their education.



Who needs shoes when you've got a new school?



A typical rural schoolroom and a new Partners' project

"I have never thought that a high school will be opened in Gubaya in my life. I struggled hard to send two of my children to do their high school in Dejen.... Our children have to walk very long distance every weekend back and forth for we can't afford the food cost and we need their labor. And this led us to a decision to not send two of our daughters for a high school education. Had there been a high school earlier in Gubaya, our daughters too would have continued their education instead of getting married early."

~ Gubaya parent



"Seeing a high school opened in Gubaya is like a dream come true: I can now resume my education with no regret for the three years I was out of school."

~ Dereje Mamo

Melkam Genna — Merry Christmas

Most Ethiopians are Christian Orthodox and celebrate Christmas on January 7th. Christ's birth is called Genna and "Melkam Genna" means "Merry Christmas".

Rising at dawn on January 7 to attend early mass, most Ethiopians don a traditional shamma,

a thin, white cotton wrap with brightly colored stripes across the ends. Upon arriving at the church each person receives a candle and the congregation proceeds around the church three times in a solemn procession, holding the flickering candles. They then gather in the second circle to stand throughout the long mass, with men and

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boys separated from the women and girls.

After the service the rest of the day is spent with the family - dancing, playing sport and feasting. Genna is not an occasion for giving gifts. Meat is scarce and served only on very special occasions. For Genna, the feast will consist of the meat of goat, chicken or lamb accompanied by injera, vegetables and perhaps some eggs and traditional Ethiopian drinks.



Christmas day in the Cathedral in Addis Ababa

“Melkam Genna” “Merry Christmas”

Partners is having an impact in the Horn of Africa. The problems are immense but your donations do make a difference in the lives of many Ethiopians. **On their behalf we thank you.**

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Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. ~ Margaret Mead ~

This newsletter is published courtesy of the United Food & Commercial Workers Union, Local 1518