

# PARTNERS FOR CHANGE



*A new relationship between people in Ethiopia and the UK*

Autumn 2011

## All Change Please, All Change

This newsletter tells the inspiring lives of a group of poor people who refuse to let their lives be destroyed by poverty.

The Negede Woitto live outside Bahir Dar on the shores of Lake Tana in northern Ethiopia. As the town has expanded, the community has been pushed out onto wasteland where they live in huts with no water or other resources.



*Partners for Change community facilitators on their way to work during the rainy season*

But things are changing. This newsletter reports on a visit made by Dr John Binns, chair of SMCF Ethiopia in July 2011.

### IN THIS ISSUE

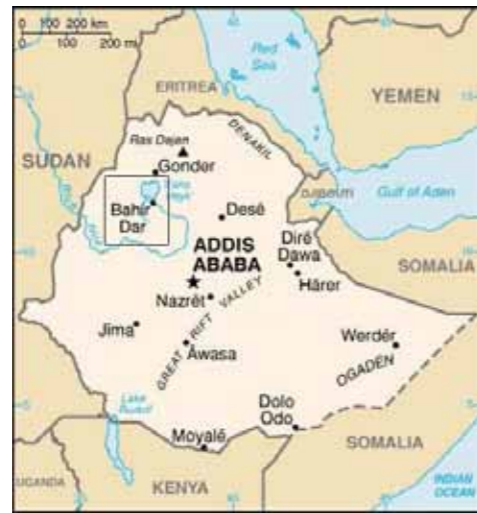
- visit three women to discover how life is changing
- meet the staff working to make it all happen
- listen to a community conversation
- become a Partner for Change



An initiative of SMCF Ethiopia and JeCCDO



# The story so far....



Partners for Change has worked in the regional capital of Bahir Dar for twenty five years. During this time it has transformed the lives of many of the poorest people of the town.

The community of the Negede Woitto at the edge of the town are recognised as the most deprived community in the town.

Now Partners for Change

has begun to work with them.

After months of discussion and planning, development is beginning. The Negede Woitto Community Development Association is in place. Work has begun. They have committed themselves to change their lives in five years.

Our plan is to visit them every six months to see how

it all goes; to find out what works well and what fails. This will give intimate and detailed insights into the life of a poor community, and how it overcomes its challenges.

Our first visit was in January 2011. Now, in July, we are back to see what has happened since then. This is their story.

## What is Partners for Change?

We are a partnership of two organisations, both founded in 1985 to care for children in Ethiopia.

We believe that the only way to care for children is through developing the quality of life in their own communities.

### PfC believes that:

- Poverty and inequality affect and damages us all, we have a shared responsibility to build a more just society
- Poor communities can free themselves from poverty and grow to their full potential.

To do so they need to be equipped with the resources

to take responsibility for their own development and build their own future.

Rich and poor, north and south can learn from each other, help and empower each other to grow to maturity, freedom and full human living.

# Enabling change

Edeglign Fenta Aynalum manages all the PFC activities in Bahir Dar., so he has considerable experience of different projects. I ask him about the Negede Woitto's vision.

'We have to enable them to change their way of life', he says. He starts to list their ideas and hopes.

'They have identified a need for income generation projects throughout the community that will bring a good income for its members. The traditional trade of making baskets out of the reeds around the lake is becoming unsustainable as the town grows and takes over the reed beds. They have to find new ways of making a living.

'The place needs to be clean and hygienic'. 'But already I can see some real changes'

'There was a problem of stigmatisation, and this is improving.

'It's partly because the place is cleaner. You must have noticed that now there is no defecation around the houses – this is a change. It's just cleaner.

'There is a bakery in the community which was boycotted before because of this problem. Now people are beginning to buy



During the rainy season everything turns to mud—it is a damp and miserable time for the Woitto whose poor housing offers little protection from the rain

to combats its effects are becoming available.

Attitudes are definitely changing – but it is often slow progress

'There must be improvements to the houses, and this goes alongside negotiations for secure rights to the land'

'Education is a priority. Children go to school now but too many drop out and fail. We also have to convince adults that they need education too. I'd like to see all adults able to write their own name'.



Edeglign with colleague Zebanaye

bread from it, and they even supply a local hospital.

'HIV/ AIDS is becoming less of a problem as drugs

# Guardians and Orphan children

## Progress in just six months

Everyone in the Negede Woitto community agrees that the care of orphans and vulnerable children is a priority — children must come first.

If a child has lost one or both parents, she or he can be accepted on the Orphan and Vulnerable Children scheme.

The Community Development Association appoints a guardian,

often a family member, who is given 100 birr a month towards medicine, school materials, food and other costs. (One Birr is worth around 4p - the official exchange rate at time of writing is 26 Birr to the £)

The guardian is also given a payment of 2000 birr (£76) — one third of which is a loan to be repaid. This payment helps set up an income generating project to

give long term security, because after one year support stops.

In six months there has been dramatic progress.

40 more children have been taken into the programme, making a total of 125 children given a great start in life.

And all this for a cost of £100 per child.

## Assassa's stones

On our last visit we met Assassa, a grandmother looking after three grandchildren. (The four of them live in a hut eight feet square made from grass, branches and pieces of plastic.)

She had made a strange choice of business – trading millstones. We had wondered how an elderly lady could manage to trade heavy objects, so I went back to see how she was getting on.



She was indignant to hear of my concerns. 'I am very strong' she said, and explained how her business works. The stones are collected from the lakeside and then shaped. She buys five or six stones at a cost of 40 birr (£1.50) each; transports them to the lake side port at a cost of 2 birr, then by ferry to the other side of the lake, a journey of two days at a cost of 25 birr.

She stays with a friend until she has sold her mill stones. She gets between 50 and 80 birr (£1.90-£3.00) for each stone. Each trading trip she makes a profit of over 250 birr (£9.60)

She tells me proudly that she has now saved 700 birr (£27) in the bank and plans to

repair and improve her house with corrugated iron and plastic sheets to stop the rain getting in. I had underestimated the courage and resourcefulness of this remarkable woman.

## Investing for

Then I met Hadija. Her husband had left her and she was bringing up her four year old son Huseyn by herself. He had been accepted on the OVC programme.

She had received her 2000 birr grant and had discussed with her neighbours what kind of business she might set up. She decided not to take their advice and instead spent the money on repairing her house. They did not approve – 'this is not the purpose of the grant' they objected.

## Alenesh's shop and the egg disaster

Alenesh was a single mother, looking after three children. She had used her start-up money to set up a small shop, we had admired her small stock of soap, sweets and few household goods; also had been impressed to see that she was rearing poultry and was selling eggs at the local market. This was looking good, we thought. I went to see her to find out how she had been doing.

The shop was doing fine, and was producing a steady

income. But the egg production had been a disaster.

## Mystery hen deaths

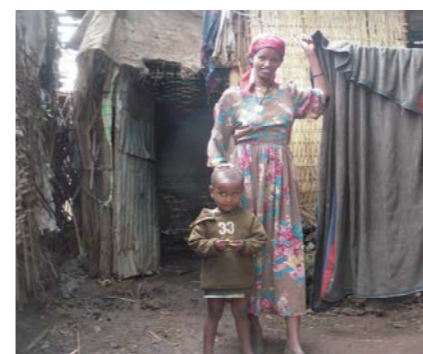
The hens had all died – maybe from disease, or from inadequate protection during the rainy season, or even, she suspected, one or two may have been killed by a malicious neighbour, jealous of her success in producing and selling a few eggs to make a few pence to feed her children.



In theory, hens should be a good way of supplementing

income, since even a few eggs can be sold in the market and egg prices are high. But the demands made by the hens are just too great.

## income and a roof over her head



She's no fool, and turned out to be more ingenious than her neighbours realised.

She repaired her hut, divided it into two parts and rented out one part for 50 (£1.92) birr a month. So she managed to achieve both a waterproof house and a steady income.

Hadija told me that she could not concentrate on starting a business and making an income if her young son was suffering from living in a hut with holes in the roof.

She says others on the programme have done the same.

She commented 'if I spend money on my house, it is not lost but invested'

As one woman commented 'the hens are additional mouths which I can't afford to feed'.

Hopefully this is a temporary setback.

The development association committee plans to try again with a just small number of motivated households to show to others that this can work and work well.

## Training scheme extended—developing businesses



Since our last visit to the Negede Woitto community the number of young people on training schemes has grown. In all there are now over 20 young people in training for skills such as sewing, food production, driving, hairdressing, which will help them earn their way out of poverty.

The first people on the scheme were three girls, – Maryam, Chomaye and Hadija — who last year were offered places at reduced rates to learn sewing and clothing repair at the local skill training centre .

They have now all completed their course, and Partners for Change has bought each of them a pedal operated sewing machine – at a cost of 2500 birr each. They set these up in their homes and take in sewing work repairing clothes at 50 cents an item (2p)

I went to see Maryam. She has a problem. Few people go past her house, and this limits the amount of work she gets. She'd like to rent a space in the central market and work from there, but this costs 500 birr. - way beyond what she can afford.

Her two friends have the same problem. Partners for Change will work with them to find ways forward. Perhaps there is a cheaper alternative to the central market., perhaps a hut by the main road or in the smaller

local market area.

Meeting Asassa. Hadija, Alenesh and Maryam left me with some clear impressions. These women face enormous obstacles and difficulties in building a better life. The amount of money they want to earn is small and their lives will continue to be difficult. But it will be a foundation on which to build. They are not looking for handouts, they are doing it themselves

Maryam with her husband and child



## New water points and shower bring better hygiene

Thanks to Partners for Change, the Negede Woitto people now have four water points, two shower blocks and two latrines to serve 1200 people.

They are very proud of their new hygiene facilities and the dramatic change they have brought to the community. The area is cleaner, there is less rubbish and the piles of human excrement around the houses have disappeared. This should lead to improvements in health but it's too early to see this now.

They take me to see one of the shower blocks. Zemzem, an elderly lady with AIDS, is in charge. She shows me round the neat square structure with its two sections each with three showers, one part for men and one for women.



The new shower block is well used

No hot water, but it's clean and functional. It costs 1 birr 50 cents for a shower, and 3 birr if soap is needed. She shows me her record book of showers taken. Today no-one has come for a shower – but it's cold and wet. Usually between 10 and 20 showers are taken each day rising to 40 or 50 at weekends.

I notice that more men take showers than women and at the weekends it is only men who shower – no women.

This may be because men go out to

Zemzem with the record of showers taken

work as day labourers and return muddy and dirty; or that women don't like coming to a place when there are too many men around.

Use is increasing - but there remains a job to be done to ensure better access for women.

The water points are also well used, being local and cheap. It costs 30 cents for a 20 litre jerry can, with those outside the community paying a little more.

The charge levied by the Community Development Association Committee pays for the water supply and leaves some over for new projects.



# COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

## How one community decides what's important to them



It is Sunday morning at 10 am. We are at the new Functional Adult Literacy centre, with its long corrugated iron shelter divided into two rooms, each with several rows of school desks. People are gathering for the Community Conversations.

This really is an amazing initiative. Its not like anything else I have come across. I had heard about it, and now I'm excited to see it in action for myself.

The idea is simple. Each household in the community chooses a representative. The represen-

tatives agree to attend a Community Conversation which will take two hours every alternate Sunday morning. The conversation will discuss anything which anyone wants to bring up. It will identify problems, share ideas, work

out responses. The aim is to change attitudes. The commitment is to attend these for a complete year.

Usually there are two groups of with sixty in each, but today they have decided to meet altogether.

But as more arrive the room gets too cramped and after a while the groups separate.

atives agree to attend a Community Conversation which will take two hours every alternate Sunday morning. The conversation will discuss anything which anyone wants to bring up. It will identify problems, share ideas, work

rows crowded into school desks, three to a desk. The conversation is managed by one of three community facilitators. He sits at the front and invites people to speak in turn.

They usually stand to speak. I'm struck by how freely they express their views – no anxiety or shyness here. Also by how attentively they listen to each other and how they respond with agreement or appreciation when



they feel it.

It's a wide ranging discussion.

'How do we become infected by AIDS?'

'You have to be careful not to wear the clothes of someone with AIDS or you will catch it.'

That's not always the case. It's important to keep the clothes clean. Hygiene matters'.

'At least it is not conveyed by air, like TB, it comes by touch only'

A wide range of subjects has been covered – harmful traditional practices, including for example, female circumcision; problems caused by alcohol; care of orphans. Today it is HIV/AIDS.

It's all very formal. The members sit in



# — REACHING CONSENSUS

'The big cause is unprotected sex. But this is a real problem for us. It's hard to use a condom'.

'I don't use a condom. I'm worried it will be split or will break and get stuck inside me'.

'I'm a prostitute. But I always tell the man to bring a condom and if he doesn't I have one ready'.

'Shortage of money is the problem. We women can't earn enough to feed or children and so we turn to prostitution'.

'I tell my partner to use a condom, but I never know if it is broken or not'.

## Speaking freely—listening and deciding together

'Why do you women go after one man and compete for him. He might have AIDS and then he will infect you all'

'And you men too, you see a beautiful woman and you all pursue her. This is bad. There should be one person for one person'.

'We must all teach our children and also teach ourselves'.

'Don't forget it is all connected to drink. If a woman is invited by a man for a drink, she should ask herself why he is inviting her'

I discover that many community conversations get round to the topic of drinking alcohol sooner or later, and that the members of the conversations have all agreed to stop drinking.

'Why do we always turn to others for support? We should be able to change by ourselves. We should decide what needs to be done and to change now'.

'We have done it before. We all decided to stop drinking and we changed our behaviour'.

'There has been a big decrease in drinking since these conversations started'.

'We used to be isolated an on our own. But now Partners for Change support us, and we are now learning to do it for ourselves'.

'Before these meetings started there was child abduction, now this has stopped'.

'My husband is still drinking. However, I don't drink anymore'.  
'And my husband is still drinking too. He is not a member of this group. Please can someone tell him how important this is'.

As we are talking Momina goes around with the register. Those who are there sign or make a mark with their finger if they can't write. She will visit the ones who have not come to find



out why and remind them how much it matters.

As we leave there is a woman outside shouting and crying. I'm told she was a member but was told not to come anymore because she is still drinking, even though the Community Conversations pledged themselves not to. She wants to be re-admitted. She is told that she can start coming again but is warned that they will be checking with her neighbours that she is keeping to her commitments.

This is the place where all agree the real change is taking place, and the place from where true development begins.



## More facilitators to ensure progress

The facilitators are the people who make it all possible. They work tirelessly and with total commitment, endlessly walking around the community, talking to people, explaining, discussing, persuading, comforting, reassuring ...

**Zamet**, who we met last time, had now withdrawn. She is expecting her second child and was not able to carry out her tasks. 'Burn-out' one neighbour commented.



She has been replaced by **Emebet**, aged just nineteen, recently finished school and with a three month computer course to her credit as well. I ask her if she finds her youth a problem. 'No' she says, 'this is not a problem for me. I know all the people here, and I like the work. I am working for my community and I want to see changes'. Like Zamet, she earns 300 birr a month.

The Committee however has been concerned that the facilitators might be seen as too young and lacking authority.

They appointed **Momina**, an older woman from outside the Woitto community, and with experience of working for other agencies. The number of facilitators has increased from two to five since our last visit.

I meet Momina and Emebet in the corrugated iron shed which serves as their office.

Momina tells me that they are continuing with the same tasks that we heard about last time. They follow up the adult literacy classes, to make sure that there are teaching materials – chalk and pencils – and visiting anyone who does not attend. They make sure that the Self Help Groups – women's savings co-operatives – are collecting money and paying it into the bank.

They check that the showers and

latrines are cared for and maintained.

But - she admits - there are problems. Take the OVC scheme. 'There are more families that need this support and we cannot support them all. They keep asking me why others are helped and they are not. Those who are not on the scheme are resentful of those who are.

Then there is the adult literacy. Everyone wants their children to go to school and learn, but they can't see why they, as adults, also need to learn. They say 'we are worried about so many things – how we can find enough food, how we can learn money, how we will get the work done. How can we sit for three hours to learn to read and write?'

Then there can be conflicts between members of the self help groups from different parts of the community. Conflict resolution is part of our job.

'So how do you deal with these difficulties?' I ask.

The answer comes back without hesitation, 'Community Conversations'.

## PARTNERS FOR CHANGE—learning from each other

Partners for Change believes that we learn from each other. People in Ethiopia have many gifts and resources, and those in the west have much to learn from them. We all gain by meeting and learning together.

Partners for Change is setting up an exciting new initiative. We are starting to construct two training centres. Work is well advanced on the centre in Debre Zeit near Addis Ababa, and plans are made for the centre at Bahir Dar.

They will be modern and well-equipped in quiet and beautiful locations.



The previous training facility was cramped and draughty



The new community training centre in Debre Zeit

They will welcome groups from communities all over Ethiopia to share experiences, learn how to set up effective projects, build networks of mutual support.

They will also welcome

groups from the UK and other western countries for short courses. These will give fascinating insights into the problems of poverty and the ways out of it. Those who visit our projects often find them a life-changing experience. The training centre will share this excitement. It's the first centre of its kind in Ethiopia.

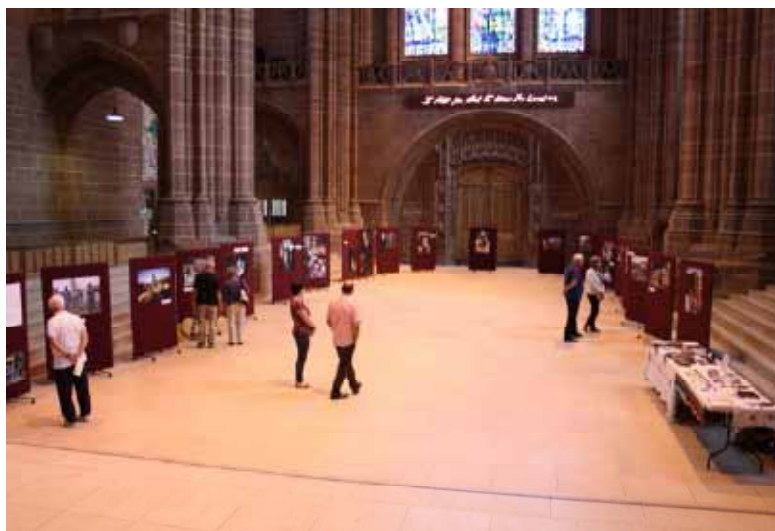
The first study visit will take place in September 2012. If you would like to find out more about the opportunities to use the centre please get in touch.

# Partners for Change Exhibition, Liverpool Cathedral

The Partners for Change exhibition of photographs taken in the Negede Woitto community reached Liverpool Cathedral during August and September 2011.

With commentary about the challenges and successes the community has made many people were moved and inspired by the story told—here are a few comments

*‘Thank you for such a moving visual statement of what is clearly a life-giving partnership.’*



*‘The images are superb, and give me an insight into this community’s life and a growing sense of hope’*

Do you know of a good venue where we can show this exhibition? If so please contact us.



*‘Absolutely stunning photos and wonderful to read how Partners for Change is working so closely with the community for their development.’*



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