

# PARTNERS *FOR CHANGE*

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

Issue 1

Winter / Spring 2011

## Potential for change

Welcome to the first edition of the Partners for Change newsletter. It gives an overview of the Partners for Change scheme and of the Ethiopian community we are partnering.

SMCF and JeCCDO have already worked together in many areas of Ethiopia with a large number of Community Based Organisations. The new project presented here is in its early stages, and is with a marginalised but vibrant community, the Negede Woitto in Bahir Dar, northern Ethiopia.

Partners for Change works with local people to give them support and skills to transform their community into a place where they can live with dignity and where children are cared for. Central to our approach is that local people decide what changes need to be made.

The newsletter will be produced regularly throughout the project. It will report on progress, introduce you to some of the people and initiatives, share both successes and failures, joys and sorrows

and help you to sense the excitement and achievement as a community in Ethiopia discovers their potential for change and transformation. It will give a unique insight into the development process.

It will be written by the people themselves in collaboration with Partners for Change's UK co-ordinators.

This document is the first instalment of a story which is planned to continue for five years, after which we hope the community will have received sufficient training and skills and developed enough confidence and financial capacity to run their development programmes themselves.

Together we have the opportunity to change not only

life for the Negede Woitto but the lives of our partners and their communities in the UK.

Through the experiences of people who have visited the Negede Woitto we know that people in the UK come away feeling inspired and motivated.

It is this principle of giving and receiving that makes Partners for Change so exciting.



## Bahir Dar – one city, two realities



The northern Ethiopian city of Bahir Dar is on the southern shores of the beautiful Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile. The lake has abundant bird and animal life, and many islands containing historic monasteries. The population of the city is growing and with business and tourism booming, the future looks hopeful.

But look below the surface and you see another side of the city. Whilst there is wealth there is also terrible poverty. Most inhabitants struggle to survive. Leave the main streets and go down the side roads and you



find yourself in shanty towns where people live in dire poverty.

It is perhaps ironic that the poorest of the poor are the original inhabitants of the city. They are the Negede Woitto people who used to make a living from fishing and weaving baskets from rushes. Business and tourist development displaced the community from their homeland and shunted them from one piece of marginal land to the next. The majority of the Negede Woitto now live on one site. Before the project began there were no



water, toilet or washing facilities. They were looked down on by the rest of the people in the city who called them dirty, work-shy and hopeless.

But since the launch of Partners for Change there are signs of progress. Partners for Change has been working intensively with the Negede Woitto for the past year. There has been much meeting, talking and planning. This has built mutual trust and respect. It became clear from very early on that the Negede Woitto community want to bring about change to their community.



## We're off to a good start

The first UK partner was a community group in Hambleden Valley, near Henley on Thames. A member of the group visited Bahir Dar and was so appalled by the conditions the Woitto live in she decided something had to be done.

Then Partners received two grants, from the Barings Foundation and John Ellerman Foundation.

This enabled us to start work in January 2010. Successes in the first year are:

- A discussion process called community conversations has started, and a development committee has been elected.
- Three facilitators have been appointed.
- Four water points have been installed.
- A shower block has been constructed and will soon open.

- The foundations of toilet blocks are being dug.
- A training programme for poultry rearing has begun.
- Self-help groups are being set up.
- Functional Adult Literacy classes have started.
- Young adults have been enrolled on vocational training courses.
- Families with vulnerable children have been supported.

# Community challenges

The Negede Woitto face many challenges on the path to development.. Chief amongst these are land, stigmatisation and food prices.

## Land

One of the main obstacles to the continued development of the community is land. The Negede Woitto live on a piece of land but do not have any legal rights to remain there or to develop it. Partners for Change has been in discussion with the local government about this issue for the past two years.

The local government is worried that if they give legal rights to the land then the community members might sell to property developers. So they are asking the community to demonstrate their commitment to remain on the land by building houses. However, even a simple concrete dwelling costs over £3000 to build – and the Woitto have little money. We continue to work to negotiate a solution to this problem with the government.

## Stigmatisation

This is a word we heard many times. The Woitto are aware of being marginalised, rejected and looked down on. This affects much that they do.

They find it hard to sell their baskets. People did not want to buy the bread they make or vegetables they grow.

However attitudes are beginning to change. In the past visitors were met with suspicion and hostility – so much so it was uncomfortable to remain in the community for more than a few minutes. This time however we were greeted with smiles and invited into people's homes. Previously children had difficulty being accepted in schools and training centres – now they are welcomed as a part of the community.

The problem is not just one of prejudice. Cleanliness is valued in Ethiopian society. Visitors



are surprised to see that even the poor people living in huts are dressed in spotlessly clean white shammās – or shawls. Without water the Negede Woitto were considered to be dirty.

One initiative which has not worked – so far – is the growing of vegetables. This was started in a piece of land in the community. Nobody outside would buy the vegetables. They considered them to be dirty – and given the absence of sanitation or toilets, they had a point. This is one reason why the availability of water is so important. With water now provided, the perception that the Negede Woitto are dirty is changing.

## Food price inflation

The birr is the Ethiopian unit of currency. The official exchange rate is currently 25 birr to £1. By western standards wages and prices are low. A good meal at a local restaurant costs 40 birr, and can be less. A bus ride across town is a few pence. But these comparisons do not convey the reality of life for local people. Most important is the cost of food. People are worried. A good guide to how prices affect local people is the

price of the basic grain, teff, from which the national food of injera, a flat large pancake, is made. During the past three years of the global economic crisis, the price of basic food commodities has increased dramatically. Three years ago teff cost 600 birr a quintal (around 100 kg). Now the price is over 1,000 birr. A quintal of Teff will last a family for about four months. So Zamet with her salary of 300 birr earns only

enough to pay for the most simple of diets for her family. Meat has risen from 40 birr a kilo three years ago to 80 birr today, and is too expensive for most people among the Negede Woitto to eat.

A salary of 600 birr a month is often considered to be the minimum needed to provide a family with the basic essentials of life. Few people among the Woitto earn anything approaching this amount.

## ‘Let people decide for themselves’ - the people

Zebenay Gashu is the coordinator of our Negede Woitto project. In his thirties, he is tall, thin and gentle. He spent many hours guiding us around the project area. Tired after many meetings and encounters, we invited him to join us for a beer. It had been a long day but Zebenay seemed in no hurry and became excited as he explained his ideas to us.

He told us that he had been born in the local area and studied at Bahir Dar university, first economics and then nursing. He then worked with

an AIDS charity, providing medical treatments, but came to realise that medicine alone is not enough. He found himself spending more and more time talking to people and exploring how life styles can change – ‘behavioural therapy’ he calls it. He was excited to become a part of this new community project among the Woitto.

‘I spend lots of time just listening, following up concerns, problems and difficulties with the people. I have come to realise that fixed plans and programmes don’t work. Now

I try to change people’s awareness, help them understand their rights, and involve them in their own development process.

People have to decide for themselves’.



Zebaay Gashu

## Community conversations

Zebenay explained that Community Conversations are an important part of the process of changing awareness. They involve the whole community in shaping their future. Every household sends a member to the conversations, which take place on Sunday afternoons each fortnight. There are two

groups of sixty and they have made a commitment to maintain the conversations for a year. Zebenay introduced us to the facilitator who co-ordinates the conversations.

Tesfaw, on the left in the picture below, said: ‘the issues we have spend most time on are



Coordinators of the community conversations

**‘We are speaking together for the first time’**

female genital mutilation, early marriage, abduction of children and alcohol.

‘After much discussion, we all agreed to stop the practice of female genital mutilation, or circumcision. It was hard to convince some people, but talking through the issues made us realise how much it damaged the girls.

‘This is the first time we has a community have come together to talk openly like this. It is a great opportunity for us.’

## who are enabling the Woitto to change their lives



**Zamet (left) and colleague Indriss**

We had not been long with the Negede Woitto when we met Zamet (on the left in the picture) She looked young and we were surprised to hear that she has a six year old son. She and her colleague Indriss (right) are two out of just three community facilitators, and so she is a key person in the project. Facilitators are chosen by the community to help with the development programmes. She has lived in the Woitto community for nine years and is known and trusted by her neighbours.

Zamet is constantly walking around, talking to people who are involved with the various programmes, explaining why adult education, health and sanitation and saving money can make a difference. She is available seven days a week but more typically works 9-5 Monday to Friday. For this she receives ongoing training and support and a salary of 300 birr - £12 per month.

We asked her to tell us a little about herself and give an idea

about a typical day as a facilitator.

'I came to Bahir Dar to get married. My husband is a teacher but he cannot find work and so does carpentry jobs when he can. I am a college graduate and I chose to become a facilitator because it is my duty to help.

**8-12 noon**— I walk around the community and discuss the development programme with people. We are keen to get them to discuss how they can support each other. One way of doing this is through a savings

### Facilitators act as a bridge to the community

scheme. I ask them how much their weekly contribution have been and how much they have earned from their activities. It is always interesting and I am often surprised how much they have saved. I am always busy when I do this – people always have questions.

**12 noon** – I return home to make lunch. I make my own injera (local bread) every three days and some Wot (the hot sauce which accompanies injera) I play with my daughter and talk to my mother in law.

**2pm** – We have been training people in our community to

grow vegetables and to care for chickens. I go to visit people who are trying to do this. We have had problems with growing vegetables and so are now concentrating on poultry production. People have found it difficult to afford the feed for the chickens and so are letting them out of their pens to forage.

I talk to them about hygiene and health and how important it is to keep their chickens in the pens. You have to be patient in this work! Chicken rearing is a new idea for people – they will learn eventually.

**4pm**—I feel a bit tired. So much talking is exhausting! But next I go to see how the adult literacy programme is doing. I check to see if anybody is absent. If there is, I go and see where they are. Sometimes people are angry with me when I ask them why they are not attending the classes. 'I don't want to come, I don't want to come' they say, but I speak to them and explain how the literacy classes can help their business, then they take interest and come to the next class.

**5-5.30 pm**—I return home. Often my husband looks at me and says 'Where have you been? We never see you?' I know he is joking but I do feel bad sometimes when I return late. I have to make the meal and also grind the coffee beans using a big pestle and mortar. It is tiring work but the coffee tastes good. While I am doing this I talk to my husband and look after my mother in law.

## Care for orphan and vulnerable children

Care of children is a vital part of the project. It is up to the Community Association to decide which child can be accepted onto the orphan and vulnerable children scheme, as they know who is in the most need.

The child's guardian is given 100 birr per month – £4 – to support the child. Of this 30 birr is placed in the bank to build up savings for the child and 70 birr can be spent on food or other things. During

the year the guardian will be offered a loan of 2000 birr - £80 – in order to set up a small business to give lasting security. This will usually be some form of petty trading.

After one year the support finishes, and the family should be able to support themselves. At present 80 children in the community have been included in this programme. Zebenay reckons there are 150 families out of a total of 250 families



who need this support and so far the project has been able to support eighty, leaving a further seventy in urgent need of help. We calculate that it costs a total of £120 to provide this level of support for a family to care for an orphan or vulnerable child.

## Between a rock and a hard place



Assassa Ayichew is part of the guardian scheme. She looked as if she is in her early seventies but is probably younger. She lives in a hut, two metres square, with three of her grandchildren, one of whom, Tesfay, is financially supported by Partners for Change. No-one knows who the father is and the mother has moved away.

The family live together in the hut – there is a raised area which serves as a bed for two of the family, and the others sleep on the ground, without any bedding or blankets – or even a change of

clothes. They demonstrate their sleeping arrangements to us enthusiastically (see right). Her eyes are too weak to make rush baskets like other women so she has hit on a different way to make a living – through trading millstones.

These are rocks collected locally and shaped into small millstones used to grind grain for bread making. They can be bought for 40 birr (£1.50) locally but she takes them to a more distant town where the price is 80 birr – which after the bus fare leaves her with a profit of 80 p per stone.

It seems an arduous and precarious business for an elderly lady and we are anxious about the longer term future of the family. 'I have promised to care for these children' Asassa tells us.



The family sleep on the floor with no blankets, the nights are often cold and when it rains the water comes through the big gaps in the roof

## From small acorns

We feel more hopeful about our next visit. Alenesh Hassan is 25 and a widow. She has four children – who are therefore ‘half-orphans’, or as we would say, a single parent family.

With her loan she has opened a small shop in a tiny covered stall outside her house.

When we visit, Alenesh had to quickly go to the market but her neighbours kindly show us the total stock of the shop in four cardboard boxes – sweets, soap and some other items. She also has nine hens and can sell surplus eggs at 6 p each.

It is not a huge income but is enough to make a difference. With the ever increasing rise in food prices in Ethiopia running a small business and keeping small livestock can make the

difference between life and death.

However for poor people who have never had a full education the responsibility of running a small business can seem daunting.

The support women get from self help groups and also the

skills they learn from adult functional literacy classes are vital to success.

**‘We do not want to live on hand outs’**



## Broadening horizons



The local school is called Kulkual Meda. Like all schools in the area it seems over-crowded and poorly equipped. But there is a new determination to improve.

The classroom shown here is in a

poor condition but the teacher has re-arranged the furniture from rows of desks into a horseshoe shape to encourage children to interact and support each other. Partners for Change has also built toilets and a library.

Due to the efforts of all involved the school was graded 3<sup>rd</sup> out of the 47 schools in the area this year.

Partners for Change is working closely with the school in order to improve the quality

of education for the Woitto children but also to improve the image of the school. It has now been selected by the regional education bureau to become a model school for the area. This will help to challenge some of the stereotypes about the Negede Woitto community

## ‘I want to become a cleaner’

Among the traditional crafts of the Negede Woitto is the weaving of baskets, made from the reeds which grow on the banks of the lake. People who collect the reeds have to walk a long distance as the banks of the lake become developed with new building and the reeds disappear due to the number of people who collect them.

Groups of women weaving baskets is a familiar sight among the Woitto. We were watching a group of young women weaving the baskets and asked them if they enjoyed the work. They looked at us in amazement. ‘No!’ They shouted in unison. ‘What would you like to do instead?’ we enquired.



**There is no quick fix to poverty of ambition**

‘I want to be a cleaner’ replied one of the young women. ‘Yes, me too’ replied another.

Whilst shocking, the lack of aspiration in the community is hardly surprising. The Negede Woitto have been economically and socially marginalised for so long their horizons are limited.

Partners for Change has identified change in attitude as one of the most important tasks ahead. There is no quick fix, no one solution. Rather it will involve building self-confidence through learning and education, including adult functional literacy and vocational training, as well as formal schooling.

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## Real life learning

Functional adult literacy classes (pictured right) are an effective means with which to engage adults who have either never attended school, or have had to leave school early. Women in self help groups in the Negede Woitto community are learning literacy and numeracy skills that directly relate to their small businesses. This will help them to succeed and lift themselves out of poverty. This motivates the women to learn more. We hope to extend the numeracy and literacy classes to the men in the community in the near future.



**Women have seized the opportunity to learn**

## Skills for life

The Community Skill Training Centre is in a collection of huts around a dusty patch of ground. Several courses are offered – embroidery, dress making, weaving, metal work and carpentry. In one room several young women are working at sewing machines learning to make various kinds of clothing.

Maryam, Chomaye and Kedija are three young women from the Negede Woitto community who are attending a three month training course in sewing at the Training Centre. They come every afternoon and are approaching the end of the course.

They wonder whether this will lead to a job and a livelihood for the future. Maryam is married and has a child – she hopes that this will help her to give her a family a better life.

The Skill Centre supports the Negede Woitto project. The cost of the dressmaking course is usually 3200 (£123) birr, but



the community has negotiated a lower fee of only 2000 birr (£77) for each of the three.

This opportunity is one that few young women in the community have had before. Maryam who is newly married and Kedija and Chomaye, who both still live at home, are now facing a new challenge. Building their self esteem and confidence along with their skills is key to success.

**Learning new skills, building confidence and self esteem**

The training course has almost finished and the women now have to think about how they will make a living using their new skills. We will follow their progress and report back in the next edition.



Maryam



Kedija



Chomaye



## **What is Partners for Change?**

Partners for Change has been set up by two organisations, both founded in 1985 to care for children orphaned as a result of war and famine in Ethiopia. These are JeCCDO - the Jerusalem Children and Community Development Organisation, in Ethiopia, and SMCF Ethiopia - St Matthews Children's Fund in the UK.

Following evaluation and research the organisations realised that the only effective way to care for children is within their own communities. The orphanages were closed and children re-integrated into the areas from which they came. Since then the partnership has been developing innovative and effective approaches to child care and community development based on the

principle that local people have to plan and manage their own development.

## **Partner Principles**

Partners for Change believes that poverty and inequality affects and damages us all, and that we have a shared responsibility to build a more just society.

Partners for Change believes that poor communities can free themselves from poverty and grow to their full potential but to do so they need to be equipped with the resources to take responsibility for their own development and build their own future.

Partners for Change believes that even the most deprived community has the capacity to change.

Partners for Change believes that to do this they need the partnership and support of others. Rich and poor, south and north can learn for each other, help each other, and empower each other to grow in maturity, freedom and full human living.

Partners for Change is committed to build new, equal and effective relationships between rich and poor for the benefit of both.

Partners for Change offers to all of us new hope and a new way forward.

## HOW IT WORKS

### As a Partner

You will receive a newsletter twice a year to keep you informed about the Negedde Woitto project and any other partners activities.

You will be invited to take part in a Partners visit to meet the people featured in the newsletters, see the project in action – and visit some of the historic buildings and places of natural beauty in Ethiopia.

You will be invited to attend meetings in the UK to get to know and learn from other Partners and plan new developments together.



### Giving

As a Partner, you are not required to give money. There are various ways you can provide support – all you need to do is contact us and we can discuss how..

However there is no getting away from the fact that in order to continue making progress the Negede Woitto need financial support.

£10 per month supports an orphan child and their guardian family – £120 is the total amount required by a guardian family to give a child a new start.

£12 per month pays the salary of a community facilitator like Zamet.

£80 equips a young woman like Maryam or Chomaye with a useful skill.

(note: Partners for Change will allocate your support as you request as far as possible but will consult with the local community to ensure that it is spent where it will have the best results)

## Partners for Change in the U.K

This edition we introduce Willingdon Community School in Eastbourne who have built a relationship with the Hawassa Reproductive Health Association (HPRHA). The HPRHA are a group of young people from the southern city of Hawassa who use traditional dances as a way of attracting young people to meetings where they then give instruction about AIDS and reproductive health. They estimate that they have now brought their message to 60% of the young people of Hawassa.

Pupils from Willingdon School read some of the personal stories from Hawassa and got in touch. They brain-



stormed ways of raising money and developed an idea to write a book about two young orphans in Ethiopia and sell the book locally to primary schools.

The children learnt how to write a business plan including a budget, timescales and risk analysis. They formed two committees one for marketing and another for sales. A local printing company agreed to produce the book at cost price. Some businesses provided sponsorship.

Profit from sales has enabled the HPRHA to buy a television and satellite dish, which they use to show films and football matches to local youth, charging a small entry fee – after which they give their instruction on AIDS. Some of the children from



Willingdon School have decided to make a difference in their community. They are now volunteering at a local day centre for young homeless people in Eastbourne and are also raising money to keep the centre open as well as raising funds to help build a youth centre for the Reproductive Health Group in Hawassa..

Back in Ethiopia the HPRHA were selected to appear on Ethiopian Idol. A local version of the X Factor, and have so far reached the semi-finals.

This is Partners for Change in action

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