



# ethiopian enterprises



## *Newsletter November 2022*

The Path Less Travelled





## ***Dear Friends of Ethiopian Enterprises***

***Without a doubt, the past two years have been the most challenging in the 13-year history of Ethiopian Enterprises. Promises of ceasefires and peace talks between the warring factions in Ethiopia have amounted to nothing. While the attention of the West has been focussed for much of 2022 firmly on the Ukraine and Russia, Ethiopia as a whole has continued to destabilize. The capital of Addis Ababa is now widely controlled by dozens of gangs and brutal armed robberies are daily events. Although we will never know how many souls have been lost to starvation since the war began just over two years ago on November 4th, 2020, the sum will be hundreds of thousands. We hate to think what the condition of millions of Tigrayans who have been held hostage in their own state now for over 16 months will be when the borders of Tigray are finally reopened.***

***Against this backdrop of despair, we at Ethiopian Enterprises have taken the steps we can to help and support those from our project community who we have been able to reach while continuing our emergency relief program. A summary of our work in 2022 can be found below.***

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## Scholarship program

First, some good news. In July our two older students Getachew Tesfay (Environmental Engineering) and Abasieru Bili (Chemical Engineering) graduated from the Addis Ababa Institute of Science and Technology with flying colours. It was a proud day for both of them as the pictures below show.

Getachew Tesfay



*Getachew Tesfay graduated in July with flying colours from the department of Environmental Engineering at the Institute of Science and Technology at Addis Ababa University*

These students have been sponsored by MIMB (Mankind Is My Business) for the past two years and the sponsorship made a world of difference to their grades. Forced in past years to spend much of their time coaching students from Addis at their parents' homes to the detriment of their own studies, their grades shot to straight since receiving their scholarships.

Ethiopian Enterprises purchased the suits they were required to wear for the ceremony, and the boys were very proud and happy.

*Abasieru Bili graduated from the Chemical Engineering department of the Institute for Science and Technology from Addis Ababa University.*

Abasieru Bili



Members of the current Addis student group at their semester lunch with Lesley on October 29th



However, as we expected, euphoria quickly gave way to the shock of reality following their graduation. They were asked to leave the university campus which had been their home for the past four-five years within days of graduating, but had nowhere to go. None of the students from Tigray are able to travel back to their families during holiday breaks or following graduation while the fighting continues and the state of Tigray remains closed. These students and many others had no capital with which they could get through the months of July, August, September and then early October when the Ethiopian hiring season begins. They were unable to find casual work at short notice in a city where unemployment is extremely high and jobs are usually given on the basis of personal contacts. We had to finance the rent of their rooms in a boarding house, the costs of their bedding, and provide

money for food. Given the desperate inflation in Ethiopia which affects food prices markedly, the costs involved are substantial. For instance, in March this year an espresso-size cup of Buna – Ethiopian coffee – cost just ETB 7 in one of the hundreds of traditional coffee houses. Today it is ETB 20 plus. (At the international airport, the same cup costs USD 2.00 to 2.50, over ETB 100!).

The two boys spent September and early October preparing their documents and applying for open positions with several companies. They were invited to attend interviews and 'exams' at the companies and were confident that they had done well. However, to their dismay they have been turned down by most of the places to which they applied in favour of applicants from Addis/Amhara. None of the Tigray students



who graduated have found employment and this will become a serious issue for them, especially for those who have no sponsors. We have encouraged them to make many more applications as they appeared to think that 4-5 would be sufficient.

Of course this situation has created a dilemma for the scholarship program. It will not be feasible for us to support graduates indefinitely and won't be good for them either. At the same time to have them on the street with no work is not an option. We are looking for ways through our own contacts for them to gain work experience even if the payment remains small.

A similar situation has faced the other eight younger students at the same university. All of them, some privately sponsored and others by the Lotte and Adolf Hotz-Sprenger Foundation, had continued to work hard and successfully completed their second year. However, in early September they too were told that they had to leave the campus until registration for the new semester took place in mid November! These students have received their food and lodging for free at the university since they started there two years ago and this news was shocking for all of us. Some of them managed to find accommodation with relatives, but others had no such contacts in the big city. In addition, all of them needed money for food. We had to put aside other business and organise housing for those with no other options within just a couple of days. This has made a sizeable dent in our budget and we frankly consider the behaviour of the university administrators to be highly irresponsible. Fortunately, the students were able to return to the campus shortly after their semester lunch with Lesley in Addis on October 29<sup>th</sup>.

Nevertheless, there have been other highlights for these students in the course of this year, such as the allocation of laptops to many of

them, and a lovely Easter celebration in Addis with Lesley and all scholarship recipients outside Tigray. Chocolate was supplied for this occasion by a group of our truly wonderful members and donors. The occasion was an especially happy time for Senait Mangesha, one of our two female students, as her father had just reached Addis safely after being pursued all over Tigray by the TPLF. As a member of the interim wartime administration in Raya he had been placed on the TPLF hit list when Tigray was locked in at the end of June last year.

And what of our students in Tigray? Over the summer months we had intermittent calls from students from the Kukufto area who travelled to the town of Alamata which is known to have phone connections. They told us of the TPLF's efforts to force them to join soldier training camps and of their hardships due to lack of work and money. In August we decided to take a risk and send money to Alamata for the students by a courier. The courier business is flourishing as you can imagine at such a time. The couriers are expensive, taking 25-30% of the amount they carry for themselves as commission. However, the risks they take are also considerable and we made an attempt despite knowing that the couriers sometimes just disappear with the money. In this case we were successful. More than a dozen of our students received sufficient money to help them and their families for some weeks.

In the case of many of the other students we have had no news at all and have told their sponsors that we have to put their scholarships on hold until we know of their whereabouts or whether they are even alive at this time. For sponsors who have not yet heard from us, we ask you to bear with us. We will be contacting all sponsors individually in the near future and we thank you all for your patience and understanding during a highly challenging time.



## Emergency Aid and the War in Ethiopia

*'Dear Lesley*

*Today my mother called me from Raya. She told me that everyone is okay. Ethiopia defence forces captured the area of Cher Cher 17 days ago. I also asked for information about Dawit's and Haregnesh's families there. They are fine. There has been no gunfire for the past week. Mehoni is still under Tigray forces (TPLF).'*

The email text above was received by us on November 7th. Lesley had returned from Addis Ababa 5 days earlier and just after her return we were informed by our contacts in Ethiopia about an official ceasefire and plans for peace talks.

*'Dear Lesley,*

*Now we heard that the Ethiopia government and TPLF came to agreement on the ceasefire of the northern war. It's a relief for us. You have no idea how glad I am to hear this news. It's a great move and I wish things will end smoothly. We will get back to Raya, Tigray probably soon enough.'*

While our students and friends from Tigray are excited about this news, we are sorry to say that we have heard this before in the course of this war and remain sceptical. Knowing what we know now about the duplicity and hunger

for power of the Tigray rebels, we cannot currently imagine lasting peace in Ethiopia. We hope we are wrong.

Rationing of grain...



No matter what the status of the civil war, however, Ethiopian Enterprises has continued to do what it can in terms of emergency aid. In early October our local team delivered grain, oil and hygiene items to Internally Displaced

People camps full of Tigrayans in the region of Afar which borders on Tigray. In three IDP camps, roughly 32'000 people were on the brink of starvation, having had absolutely no food for several days. Many of the thousands who received at least sufficient rice for a couple of meals had arrived at the camps after tortuous walks from Tigray and were in very bad shape indeed. Women were using filthy cloth or rubbish from the ground to stem menstrual bleeding and as a result many arrived with infections at the camps. Thanks to the help of MIMB – Mankind is My Business – we were able to deliver 1'000 packets of sanitary napkins to the camps but this only helped roughly 10% of the women who needed them desperately.

Official estimates have been cited in the media in the past days of half a million dead from starvation due to the closure of Tigray in June 2021. We do not know how this estimate has been calculated given the closure of the state of Tigray for the past year and five months. But what we fear is that it is wrong. The death toll from starvation by the time this war ends will probably be far, far higher.

## ***Lemlem Baro School***

Photos of Lemlem Baro School were smuggled out of Tigray to us some months ago (see pictures at the end of this Newsletter). The school was and is – according to a recent call from a student from Mehoni – still standing, as is the almost completed kindergarten. However, it is clear that the fighting with heavy artillery in close proximity to the school, and its use as an army hospital for several months, has caused damage to windows, the slate paths and so on. Whatever happens right now with the so-called ceasefire, the community still has a school, albeit one which will need expensive repairs.

## ***Last but not Least***

Many of you will remember from our Newsletter in January that Lesley had rescued a pregnant street dog in Addis at the end of 2021, protecting her before and during the delivery of 8 pups. A number of international dog magazines have already asked Lesley to share the story of her rearing of the family (all financed privately). For now, though, it is enough to say that 7 of the 8 young dogs are in Switzerland, the 7th (Fleur) arrived in early November. The first six have now all been adopted by lovely families and the dogs meet in small groups from time to time for playdates. They are all wonderful.

Mama Grace and her youngest son Melky are still in Ethiopia but we expect them to join us in

... and fair distribution



Ethiopian Enterprises used its final emergency aid reserves, boosted by a generous gift from the Lotte & Adolf Hotz-Sprenger Foundation, to purchase and transport a truckload of rice to the Afar camps. The allocations were organized and carefully controlled by our local team. However, while the planning and execution of the allocations were exemplary, how we wished we could have done more. It is a sad fact that with all the focus on our neighbours in Eastern Europe in the past months, the tragedy unfolding not so far away in Ethiopia has been all but forgotten. We greatly hope that we will be able to raise further funds in Christmas donations to facilitate a further allocation in Afar.

the coming weeks. Should you be interested in giving a permanent home to beautiful Fleur, a loving and affectionate girl, please let us know as soon as possible. The young dogs celebrate their first birthday on December 1st.

Fleur



## *Many thanks to you all*

Once again we thank all our supporters and donors for the continued help we have received despite the fact that we still have no access to our school projects in Mehoni. A special thank you also goes to all participants of the 2022 edition of our “Böögg-Aid”. With this initiative, related to a traditional Zurich celebration, we were able to raise almost CHF 800 for our Emergency Relief Fund.

**Lesley, André und Thomas**

Lemlem Baro School Mai 2022







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