



## Women and liveability – Best practices of empowerment from Ethiopia

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### Abstract

How to survive and make ends meet and how to improve the quality of life are daily and persistent livelihood issues and liveability challenges preoccupying disadvantaged communities in underdeveloped and developing countries. In war torn and hazard ridden Ethiopia life struggles are extremely tough for womenfolk who more often than not are burdened with the task of coping with the aftermaths of such natural and man-made disasters. Through examining the findings from secondary information sources this paper illustrates three cases of how women helped make the best of empowerment projects geared to make the livelihood and liveability of their family and community worth salvaging – even celebrating - once more. It also highlights the institutional and organizational traits that were also the success factors of the empowerment projects.

**Keywords:** empowerment projects, Ethiopia, liveability, livelihood, success factors, womenfolk

### Introduction

With a population of 96.6 million (CIA, 2014) people Ethiopia is inhabited by several ethnic groups comprising the Oromo 32.1%, the Amara 30.1%, the Tigraway 6.2%, the Somalie 5.9%, the Guragie 4.3%, the Sidama 3.5%, the Welaita 2.4% and others 15.4% (1994 census). The population also varies in terms of religious affiliation with Christians making up 60.8% (Orthodox 50.6%, Protestant 10.2%), Muslims 32.8%, traditional 4.6%, and others 1.8% (1994 census).

Historically Ethiopia is unique among African countries, not only because the Blue Nile, the chief headstream of the Nile by water volume, rises in T'ana Hayk (Lake Tana) in northwest Ethiopia, and that three major crops of coffee, grain sorghum, and castor bean are believed to have originated in Ethiopia, but also because its ancient Ethiopian monarchy had maintained its freedom from colonial rule with the exception of a short-lived Italian occupation from 1936-41. From 1930 to 1974 Ethiopia was ruled by Emperor Haile Selassie who was deposed by the Derg military junta. The socialist state of the junta witnessed an era of bloody coups, uprisings, wide-scale drought, and massive refugee problems which tore the Ethiopians apart, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) , a coalition of rebel forces , finally toppled the socialist regime in 1999. Ethiopia's first multiparty elections were held in 1995 following the adoption of the 1994 constitution. However, a border war erupted with Eritrea late in the 1990s but ended with a peace treaty in 2000. In November 2007, the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC) issued specific coordinates as virtually demarcating the border and pronounced its work finished. Alleging that the EEBC acted beyond its mandate in issuing the coordinates, Ethiopia has

not accepted them and has not withdrawn troops from previously contested areas pronounced by the EEBC as belonging to Eritrea. In August 2012, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi died in office and was replaced by his Deputy Hailemariam Desalegn, ushering in the first peaceful transition of power in decades.

The border crisis with Eritrea had resulted in Ethiopia losing its entire coastline along the Red Sea in 1993 and making it the most populous landlocked country in the world (Figure 1). The geologically active Great Rift Valley is susceptible to earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and frequent droughts. Ethiopia's current environmental issues include deforestation, overgrazing, soil erosion, desertification, and water shortages in some areas due to water-intensive farming and poor management (CIA, 2014).



Fig 1. Location of study

## Economic profile

Ethiopia's poverty-stricken economy is based on agriculture, accounting for almost half of GDP, 60% of exports, and 80% of total employment. The agricultural sector suffers from frequent drought and poor cultivation practices. Coffee is critical to the Ethiopian economy with exports of some \$350 million in 2006, but historically low prices have seen many farmers switching to *qat* to supplement income. Today the government is pushing to diversify into manufacturing, textiles, and energy generation. Coffee is a major export crop. The agricultural sector suffers from poor cultivation practices and frequent drought, but recent joint efforts by the Government of Ethiopia and donors have strengthened Ethiopia's agricultural resilience, contributing to a reduction in the number of Ethiopians threatened with starvation. The banking, insurance, telecommunications, and micro-credit industries are restricted to domestic investors, but Ethiopia has attracted significant foreign investment in textiles, leather, commercial agriculture and manufacturing.

Under Ethiopia's constitution, the state owns all land and provides long-term leases to the tenants; the system continues to hamper growth in the industrial sector as entrepreneurs are unable to use land as collateral for loans. Today land use certificates are being issued in some areas so that tenants have more

recognizable rights to continued occupancy and hence make more concerted efforts to improve their leaseholds.

The war with Eritrea in 1998-2000 and recurrent drought have buffeted the economy, in particular coffee production. In November 2001, Ethiopia qualified for debt relief from the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, and in December 2005 the IMF forgave Ethiopia's debt. Drought struck again late in 2002, leading to a 3.3% decline in GDP in 2003. Normal weather patterns helped agricultural and GDP growth recover during 2004-08.

Today While GDP growth has remained high, per capita income is among the lowest in the world. Ethiopia's economy continues on its state-led Growth and Transformation Plan under the new collective leadership that followed Prime Minister MELES's death. The five-year economic plan has achieved high single-digit growth rates through government-led infrastructure expansion and commercial agriculture development. Ethiopia in 2014 will continue construction of its Grand Renaissance Dam on the Nile – a controversial five billion dollar effort to develop electricity for domestic consumption and export.

- GDP (purchasing power parity): \$68.77 billion (2008 est.); \$118.2 billion (2013)
- GDP per capita (PPP): \$800 (2008 est.), \$1,300 (2013 est.)
- Labor force by occupation: - agriculture: 80.2% (2005), 47% (2013) ; - industry: 6.6% (2005), 10.8% (2013) ; services: 13.2% (2005), 42.2% (2013)
- Population below poverty line: 38.7% (2005), 39% (2012 est.)

Source : <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html>

## Social profile

Although Ethiopia's population has increased from 85,237,338 in 2009 to 96,633,458 in 2014 the growth rate has slowed down from 3.3% to 2.9% respectively taking into consideration the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS which can result in lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality, higher death rates, lower population growth rates, and changes in the distribution of population by age and sex than would otherwise be expected. Females predominate with 0.99 male(s) for every female (2014) although both sexes have improved life expectancy at birth : male from 55.41 years in 2009 to 60.75 years in 2014 and female from 57.97 years to 63.15 years respectively. Maternal mortality, however, remains high at 350 deaths/100,000 live births (2010).

With health expenditure at only 4.7% of GDP (2011) it is not surprising that there is only 0.03 physicians (2009) and 6.3 beds (2011) for every 1,000 population. Drinking water source has improved for 96.8% of the urban population and only 42.1% of the rural population (2012). By contrast, improved sanitation facility access only benefits less than 30 per cent of urban and rural population. For 72.6% of urban and 77.2% of rural population their sanitation facility remains unimproved (2012). Thus, the degree of risk of major infectious diseases is still very high ranging from food or waterborne diseases such as bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever, vector borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, respiratory disease such as meningococcal meningitis, and water contact disease, in particular, schistosomiasis (2013). Undernourishment has seen 29.2% (2011) of Ethiopian children under the age of 5 years underweight and put Ethiopia at 17<sup>th</sup> place in terms of world country comparison.

Urbanization stagnates at 17% of total population in 2011 just like it was in 2008. Still, the country could only manage to spend 4.7% of its GDP (2010) for education resulting in a low national literacy rate of 39% for the population aged 15 and over. The female literacy rate of 28.9% is slightly more than half of the males' 49.1% (2007). Such gender discrepancy is only to be expected as females had only 6 years of compared to the males' 8 years (2005). In fact literacy has deteriorated since 2003 when the national literacy rate was 42.7% and male and female literacy rates were 50.3% and 35.1% respectively.

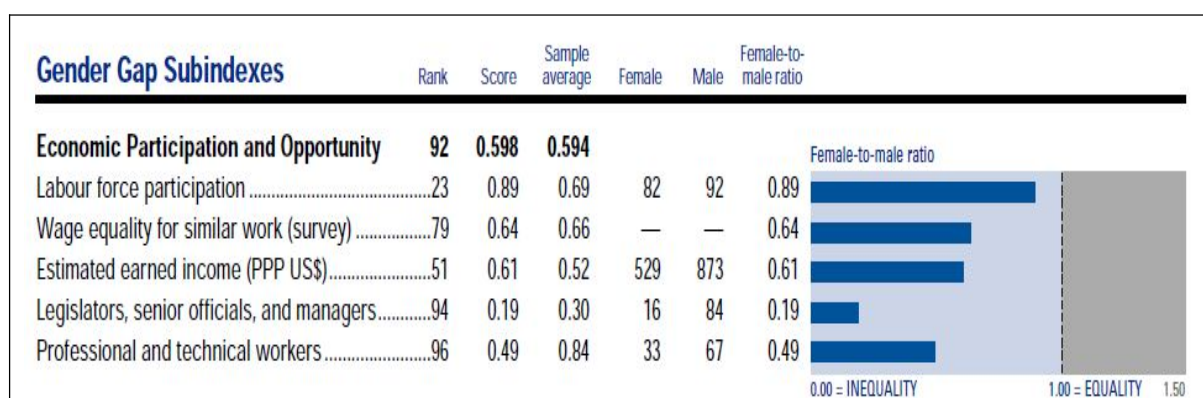
Given such a short span of proper education youth (ages 15-24) unemployment is high in Ethiopia, at 24.9% in 2006 with the figure of 29.4% for females ten per cent higher than that of males. What is more

disheartening is the rampant incidence of child labour – the employment of children ages 5-14 which totaled 10,693,164 or 53 % of the population in 2005.

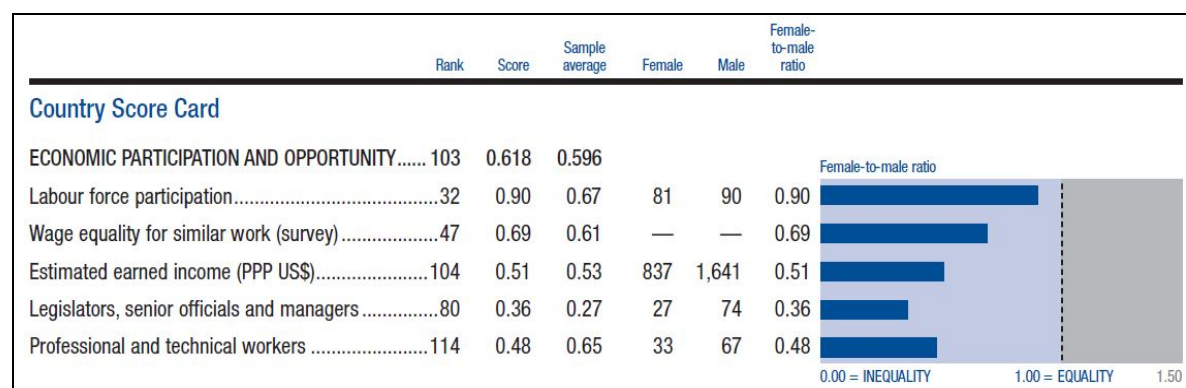
### State of socio- economic participation of women in the country

Mixed achievement and performance characterize the state of socio-economic participation of women in contemporary Ethiopia. While the overall participation of women in the labour force goes down a little from 82% in 2009 to 81% in 2014 the women’s estimated earned income has improved from USD 529 to USD 837 in the respective years although this is less than the doubling of income earned by men. More women are now occupying the positions of legislators, senior officials and managers than it was five years ago (Table 1), an increase of more than 100%.

**Table 1. Gender comparison in economic activity**



Source: <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap2009/Ethiopia.pdf>



Source: [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR14/GGGR\\_CountryProfiles.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR14/GGGR_CountryProfiles.pdf) (p.178)

Women, nevertheless, remain the more hard-pressed when it comes to coping with livelihood and liveability challenges.

## **Best practice project 1: Amhara credit and savings institution (ACSI)**

### *Project initiators, location and background*

ACSI is the largest micro-finance institution (MFI) in Ethiopia. It is also the oldest and it is entirely home-grown. The Amhara Credit and Saving Institution (ACSI) was established in the Amhara Region, Ethiopia, aiming to fill the gap of formal institutions to meet the need of small-scale borrowers in income generation schemes. Its operation is traced back to 1995 when it was initially initiated by the Organization for the Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA), an indigenous NGO engaged in development activities in the Amhara region. Funded to launch in 1996 by the Ethiopian Social Rehabilitation and Development Fund ACSI undertook the pilot activities and was licensed as a micro finance Institution in 1997.

Amhara is the second largest ethnic and linguistic region in the country and today has a population of more than 19 million. As there had been so much bloodshed, drought, and degradation conditions in Amhara could not have been less conducive to the spirit of self-reliance and entrepreneurship that normally enables microfinance institutions to thrive. For the last 50 years people in Amhara had been expecting relief, aid and charity such that they had no culture of producing something of, for example, taking a loan and doing something in the form of business and repaying the money. ACSI had to change this picture.

### *Project design*

The mission of ACSI is to improve the economic situation of low income, productive poor people in the Amhara region through increased access to lending and saving services. It will maintain cost effectiveness in service delivery, and integrates its activities with government and NGO's working towards achieving food security and poverty alleviation in the region. The vision is a society in which people are free from the grips of abject poverty, with all the power determining their future in their own hands, and its own capacity as an institution well developed to provide best services for all in need in a sustainable manner.

The objectives of ACSI are fourfold : (1) promoting agricultural and non-agricultural economic activities; (2) alleviating poverty and stimulating the region's economic growth, giving priority to rural and remote communities, particularly women; (3) significantly increasing clients' income and asset position; and (4) promoting sustainable financial services, both operational and financial.

ACSI's groups of clients are deliberately segregated by gender. This is not only because many men will not tolerate their wives interacting with other men, but also because women tend to be reluctant to speak out when men are present. Instead, having single-sex groups gives women leadership opportunities they rarely have elsewhere. By segregating the women learn how to lead and participate effectively in community organizational meetings (Helmores et al., 2009).

As pioneers of Ethiopian microfinance, ACSI relies on carefully-crafted procedures, intensive training of staff and rigorously conceived operational manuals to guide all its activities. Microfinance feasibility studies are conducted in every kebele where ACSI operates. Before ACSI began conducting business, the staff, management and some outside advisors spent about a month writing a financial manual and an operational manual. A client management manual was also developed: It outlines how to recruit clients, how to organize clients into groups and centers, how to train clients and how to follow up on clients' activities. In addition, conscious of the need to establish a strong rapport with clients, ACSI designed a human resources manual to help staff members communicate effectively with people in Amhara's remote kebeles.

ACSI has a policy of recruiting staff members from the very communities they will be serving. Each *kebele* (kabilah) has its own culture, traditions and way of speaking. Staff have to use their language, the ways of talking and thinking that are native to the *kebeles* in their area. Recruiting and training people to work in their own communities has helped ACSI to inculcate its philosophy of transparency, hard work

and respect for sound financial practices throughout its client base. The staff members sit with the people; they respect their style of doing things.

*Project impact: Women are a priority*

Targeting women clients is a priority for ACSI. This is because women clients are very scrupulous and they repay what they owe 100 percent. Moreover, women are more prudent than men in their borrowing and their investments and borrow only the amount they will be able to manage. When they get a return, they use the money for their family’s welfare – not for drinking or for personal purposes like their male counterparts do. Of ACSI’s 740,000 borrowers the most reliable clients are women who constituted 58% of the total number of borrowers (Mekonnen Yelewumwosen, one of ACSI’s founders).

In 2006, ACSI used the AIMS/USAID (Assessing the Impact of Micro-enterprises Services) tool in its major impact assessment survey (Table 2).

**Table 2. Welfare conditions of incoming vs. Mature ACSI clients**

Description	690 Clients (Incoming vs. Maturing)	
	After 1 Year	After 5 Years
Clients who experienced food shortages over the past 12 months	21%	14%
Clients whose family members managed to see a doctor last year	46%	54%
Proportion of school-age children going to school	68%	77%
Clients who made home improvements worth at least \$10 in the last two years	25%	48%

At the regional level, the AIMS impact study revealed that ACSI’s intervention in 2004/2005 accounted for about 20 percent of the growth in total GDP and 53 percent of growth in agricultural GDP in Amhara. Moreover, the study found that the ability of many poor clients to manage small businesses and develop business skills as the result of taking continuous loans is laying the groundwork for the emergence of a viable business sector in the region that will contribute to national sustainable growth. In this respect, the study noted, MFIs such as ACSI can be likened to incubators of future enterprises.

The last serious drought in Amhara occurred in 1999-2000 when ACSI was only four years old. Yet, in those years the organization’s loan repayment rate was 98 percent (Helmore *et al* 2009).

**Best practice project 2: Ethiopia – The women development initiatives project (WDIP)**

*Project initiators, location and background*

The International Development Association (IDA) is the part of the World Bank that helps the world’s poorest countries. Established in 1960, IDA aims to reduce poverty by providing interest-free credits and grants for programs that boost economic growth, reduce inequalities and improve people’s living conditions (<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTABOUTUS/IDA/>). IDA is one of the largest sources of assistance for the world’s 79 poorest countries, 39 of which are in Africa. It is the single

largest source of donor funds for basic social services in the poorest countries. IDA lends money (known as credits) on concessional terms. This means that IDA credits have no interest charge and repayments are stretched over 35 to 40 years, including a 10-year grace period. IDA also provides grants to countries at risk of debt distress.

Traditionally, women in Ethiopia have been consigned to strict societal roles that limited their activities to household chores and childcare and denied them a say in decisions that affect them. Many women accept tradition and continue to uphold traditional practices including female genital mutilation, early marriage, milk tooth extraction, and domestic abuse.

The Ethiopian government recognised that economically empowered women would contribute to national prosperity. In March 2001, the government joined forces with the World Bank, the Italian Cooperation, and other donors to implement the Ethiopian Women's Development Initiatives Project (WDIP), a program which provides economic and social opportunities for women in low-income households. IDA's financial contribution to the Women Development Initiatives Project totaled US\$ 5 million. The government of Italy supported WDIP with US\$ 1.8 million and further US\$ 0.5 million were contributed by multiple other donors.

### *Project design*

The Women Development Initiative Project (WDIP) aimed to redress gender imbalances in development opportunities by investing in women's skills, productivity, and organizational capacity. The project encouraged women from low-income households to form women's groups to coordinate their productive activities, such as grain and spice processing, handicraft production, and the rearing of animals and poultry.

Women's groups were supported by a financial grant and by training in business skills. The time commitment expected from each of the participants is flexible enough to allow women to pursue their domestic responsibilities at the same time. Moreover, the groups often support each other in ways that allow them to earn income and still perform their household duties.

After a women's group formed and selected its businesses, the women contributed 5 to 10 percent of the total funding needs from their own savings. They then presented themselves and their financial contribution to their local Regional Coordinating Unit (RCU) for more support. The RCU coordinated, monitored, and hired intermediaries to teach the women effective business operation skills.

Between 2000 and 2005, the WDIP supplied grants and training to 621 women's cooperatives in rural and urban low-income areas in Ethiopia, benefitting 11,300 women and 60,000 direct family members.

The project components included (1) a demand-driven fund that finances women's group activities, such as grain and spice processing, handicraft production, and the rearing of animals and poultry; (2) capacity building and training for women's groups and other project stakeholders on organization, facilitation, project design, appraisal, and monitoring and evaluation; and (3) information, education, and communication activities that enhance gender awareness.

### *Project impact*

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The Women Development Initiatives Project (WDIP) helped women organize in groups and start small businesses to improve their socioeconomic outcomes. Random assignment into WDIP benefits

during the early phases of the program provides an opportunity to measure the causal impact of WDIP on economic, social, and psychological outcomes using a survey of 1000 women three years into program implementation. The impact evaluation finds that WDIP participants earned 100 *birr* more on average per month (about US \$11), compared to a valid control group. The additional income increased their household bargaining power, and specifically strengthened their ability to make decisions on household purchases.

As a result of participation in the WDIP, women are less likely to uphold traditional rules that constrain their participation in the workforce and freedom of movement. Yet, a reduction in household violence has not been observed, perhaps due to the countervailing effects of more income and independence and increased stress on traditional power relations in the household. With respect to mental health, the evaluation finds significant effects on happiness and reduced prevalence of depression symptoms, which cannot be explained by the increase in income alone.

Even when the economic gains are considered alone, the returns to the project are still positive. Given an average group transfer of US \$4,000 for an average group size of 12 women, and under the assumption of a 40 percent project overhead and that the observed level of economic gains can be sustained by the women's group for a period of five years, the internal rate of return for the project is about 15 percent.

### **Best practice project 3: A Glimmer of Hope, Ethiopia**

#### *Project initiators, location and background*

A Glimmer of Hope (AGH) is a compassionate social enterprise making a sustainable difference in the lives of some of the poorest people in the world. Since 2000, A Glimmer of Hope has helped more than two million people improve their quality of life. The foundation believes justice, equality and dignity are everyone's birthright and where you are born should not determine whether you live or die. AGH supports programs in the areas of water and sanitation, education, health care, income creation, micro-finance, micro-irrigation, and veterinary clinics ([http://www.aglimmerofhope.org/about\\_us/index.html](http://www.aglimmerofhope.org/about_us/index.html)).

AGH has developed an innovative and entrepreneurial approach to Humanitarian Aid and Development. It starts at the village level listening to community leaders about what they need. Then, using a bottom up instead of a top down approach, AGH work with those communities to develop a plan and identify projects that truly reflect the true necessities of those communities. Only if the people of these communities are engaged in solving their own issues can the solutions be sustainable. This applies during each of a project's construction phases but especially after completion when management and maintenance play such an important role in their success.

#### *Project design*

AGH is run like a business and it measures its success like a business. It is in operation to turn a profit – a social profit - to help the rural poor of Ethiopia lift themselves out of poverty; yet it understands the best way to achieve this is to operate entrepreneurially and expect results from its social investments through Integrated Rural Development (IRD).

IRD is a strategy that combines multiple initiatives to create sustainable development within a targeted community. The three key elements can be described as humanitarian, development and enterprise. Enterprise refers to income generation and micro-finance programmes that provide help to farmers, women and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to lift themselves out of poverty by way of agricultural and entrepreneurial income creation programmes. Development addresses health care and education. The foundation has completed a major hospital rehabilitation project and built more than 150 clinics. Education is a key to breaking the cycle of poverty and A Glimmer of Hope has funded over 300



education projects (schools, classrooms, educational materials, furnishings, etc.). Humanitarian projects address the basic need for clean drinking water. AGH constructs three types of water projects: hand-dug wells, spring protection schemes and bore-holes. By 2009 it has funded almost 3,000 water initiatives throughout Ethiopia ([http://www.aglimmerofhope.org/about\\_us/our\\_model.html](http://www.aglimmerofhope.org/about_us/our_model.html)).

#### *A Glimmer of Hope's Income Creation programmes*

AGH income creation programmes pertain to micro-finance, micro-irrigation and micro-enterprise. Micro-finance involves small loans (between \$100 and \$500) being made to individuals in the hard-to-reach rural areas without any collateral at subsidized, low rates of interest and with an exceptionally high repayment rate. Micro-irrigation projects allow farmers to turn acres of rock and rubble into fields of green to better provide for their families and to sell surplus crops for cash in local markets. Small, low cost foot pumps and/or diesel pumps are used to draw water from nearby ponds, reservoirs, wells or rivers through open channels or drip kits onto the land being irrigated. Loans are also made to farmers for fertilizers and seeds. Micro-enterprises refer to small businesses, from start-ups to Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs), in particular, those operated by women. These enterprises represent a wide array of businesses including agriculture-based ventures such as pumps and kits for irrigation, cows for milk production, bees for honey, grain preparation and trading. Commercial ventures include baking, handicrafts, textiles, cooking stoves, shops, market stalls and transport services (<http://www.aglimmerofhope.org/projects/>).

#### *Project impact: Life-changing effects of water projects*

AGH recently opened a new water project in the impoverished, rural village of Geja Gedamba about 20 miles south of the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. It was a festive scene as people had come from all over to witness the unveiling of the community's newest and most precious resource. A woman by the name of Azalech Sembeta walked up to the distribution point, filled her clay jug with water and then defiantly cast it off her back smashing it on the ground, saying :

I was very tired of carrying [these] pots for hours and long distances. I and the women in this area led such a life for years. Now the situation has been changed and I will not allow this pot to remain on my back. I don't want to hand down this burden to my children. This should be stopped here.

Azalech Sembeta is 40-years-old and a mother of six; three sons and three daughters ranging in age from 12 to 24. She described the change in her family's daily life with the advent of the water supply :

Before, my children spent their time waiting in line with all the other local children at springs to collect water. They always wanted to go to school but I was not able to send them as it was very difficult for me to fetch water by myself. One of them would have to wait their turn at the spring and then the others would help me to carry pots home.

We used to go out in the evening to line up for water at the nearest [unprotected] spring. It was usually late in the morning of the next day before we were able to collect our water and make the three-hour walk back to our home. Many times I made this walk with a child resting against my bosom and a water pot on my back. I can not tell you how difficult this was and yet this was how we were all raising our children. Some of us used to filter the water using our netela (shawls). I can't tell you what we felt when we see worms and black dregs on the cloth. But we had no choice and were often sick with abdominal ailments.

We had to use the water as economically as possible. We did not wash our bodies. We were not even able to wash our hands before our meals. Every day I used to put out a quart of water for all of my

children so that they could wash their faces - nothing more than that. Every child knew how to use that amount of water economically.

Now, thanks to AGH, we are able to wash our bodies, our clothes, our dishes ... everything," she said. And, you don't see children in the village in the morning any more. That's when they go to school.

Having clean water nearby also allows the women to grow food in their gardens which contributes to the health and welfare of their children. Some are closer to the water point than others but in Azalech's case, it has turned a six mile walk into one that measures just over 100 yards (<http://www.aglimmerofhope.org/impact/fromthefield/potsmash/index.html>).

### *Water projects' high impact on re-settled famine victims*

Throughout history, Ethiopia has endured recurring droughts and famines it was not until 1973 that the rest of the world would realize just how dire the situation was. That year, a British reporter named Jonathan Dimbleby discovered a famine that had already claimed the lives of more than 100,000 people which the government had concealed from the outside world. His footage of this holocaust was seen around the globe and eventually became the catalyst for the downfall of the imperial regime of Haile Selassie. Amplified by scenes, shown in Ethiopian television, of the high life at the imperial palace, the footage was used to help fuel the military coup that followed. It was not long before Selassie was dead and Ethiopia's 2,000-year-old imperial system came to an end. Now faced with doing something about the famine as quickly as possible, the new military government known as the Derg adopted a number of drastic measures to rectify the situation, often with tragic results. Many of these hurriedly made plans were ineffective and by the time the famine was over more than 200,000 people had perished.

One of the strategies tried by the Derg was a system of relocating the surviving members of entire communities to parts of the country deemed more suitable for sustaining human life. To ensure people would not try to return to their homes, the relocation sites were selected as much by their distance from the original village as they were for their ability to support life. In fact, many of the selected sites were little better off than the ones left behind and the arrival of large numbers of "re-settlers" placed a huge strain on the existing members of these communities.

Jewha, situated in the Amhara Region, was one of the areas chosen as a "resettlement village" despite the fact it had little to offer new residents but a slightly better chance of being able to grow the food they needed. Almost overnight, its population ballooned to its current level of more than 2,500 people and the villagers' overriding concern became the availability of clean water. Their lone well had barely produced enough for everyone to drink before the influx of all the new settlers.

Women began lining up at around 6pm in the evening in the hope of being able to draw water for their families by noon the next day. According to Chalew Minwuyelet, a local leader, the situation severely affected life in the village:

Mothers did not have time to rear their children, attend to their farms or send their children to school. We appealed to our local administration and to passing NGOs (charities) but to no avail.

In fact, the village did eventually receive a limited amount of help but in most cases it was largely ineffective. New wells dried up, a health post built in the late 1980s was out of service by 1991, and the area continues to face rampant malaria.

Today, however, the situation in Jewha is much improved thanks to the efforts of AGH. Using funds from the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, AGH constructed seven new hand-dug wells in the village in 2006 including one at the local school.

Merema Yimer is a member of the recently organized water committee responsible for maintaining the wells and teaching people about sanitation. She said the wells have had a huge impact on the village and its people:

Gaining easy access to clean water has transformed my life. I've now got more time for my children and family. I now have time to work on my farm. I can fetch water at my door. The burden we shouldered for over two decades has come to an end. The wells have also contributed to a noticeable drop in the incidence of waterborne diseases throughout the village.

For a few, seeing the new wells transform life in the village is a bittersweet experience. Mengiste Gebre Egziabihier was one of the original re-settlers brought to Jewha all those years ago:

Most of the original re-settlers and my friends have now passed away. Most died as a result of drinking from contaminated rivers and malaria. And, while I am blessed to be alive to witness this change, I feel sad because my friends are not here to see it too.

By 2009 A Glimmer of Hope has implemented a total of 71 projects in resettlement villages throughout Ethiopia that have benefited nearly 140,000 people.

## Conclusion

Socio-economic empowerment projects have enabled disadvantaged Ethiopians to cope better with their livelihood and liveability challenges. Women are particularly instrumental in the empowerment projects not only because they are the inheritors of the issues and challenges but also because they have proven to be capable of making the projects doable. The Ethiopian cases point to the fact that respect for the women's existential right makes the difference, and that faith in women as effective leaders for change in their families and communities secures success of projects. A special emphasis on remotely located women, on chronically neglected and physically disabled women adds value to the projects.

The Ethiopian experience also underlines the vital role of prudent management and organization of liveability empowerment initiatives. Here, when a collectively felt need justifies the efforts ready funds pave the way for their implementation, sometimes with the help of a global-local network. Then an efficient on the ground mechanism guarantees implementation by inventing and utilizing creative techniques to ensure women's accessibility to the empowerment projects, and by training them to make the projects work.

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