Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

- Capital: Addis Ababa
- Area: 1,097,000 km²
- Population: 82,950,000 (as of 2010)
- Ethnic groups: Roughly 80%, including Oromo, Amhara, and Tigray
- Languages: Amharic and English are the official languages

The Current State of Ethiopia

Ethiopia has undergone remarkable economic growth in recent years, with an average annual GDP growth rate of 11% over the past decade. Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, is a bustling city lined with numerous buildings and commercial facilities, and even the occasional traffic jam. The city is home not only to embassies, but houses the headquarters of the African Union as well as offices for other international and regional organizations, making it a political hub on the African continent.

At the same time, development has not yet reached rural areas. The vast majority of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture and leads a traditional lifestyle. Approximately 40% of the population lives below the poverty line and many of them live in these rural regions.

Agriculture

Roughly 80% of the workforce is engaged in agriculture, and agriculture and related sectors constitute 50% of the nation’s GDP. The majority of these people are small-scale farmers who are unable to escape from poverty.

Many farmers cannot earn enough to feed their families. Among other reasons, this is due to the lack of knowledge regarding irregular weather patterns such as droughts as well as improved agricultural techniques. This lack of knowledge results in low productivity.

Education

Roughly 30% of students in Ethiopia move on to secondary school. This low figure is the result of the high rate of dropout at the primary level. The challenge is to provide motivation for the students and to convince the parents of the importance of finishing primary education.
Koraro, Tigray Region, Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

TABLE FOR TWO began supporting school meal programs in Koraro, located in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia, in 2009. The Tigray Region is situated in the northern part of the country, surrounded by tall mountains and magnificent scenery. Due to its high altitude there is considerable variation in the temperature. Furthermore, the region is prone to droughts and other extreme weather events, affecting agriculture and livelihoods. Despite the harsh environment, the people of the region are earnest, patient, hardworking, and always show their generous hospitality to visitors.

School meal programs in Koraro

In the schools supported by TFT, corn soya blend powder (CSB) is mixed with hot water, salt and cooking oil and served for lunch. CSB is very nutritious, but the students told us that they also love eating locally harvested soybeans, chickpeas, and fruits.

We asked the children about their favorite fruit. The older students liked mangoes while those in the lower grades chose oranges. Even though the younger children liked the sweetness of the mangoes, they found it difficult to peel and didn’t like their hands getting sticky after peeling.
Children love both lunch and study

In Koraro, dropout rates have declined since the introduction of the school meal program. In the four schools that we visited on this trip, there were no dropouts in all of 2012. Students and classes are divided into morning and afternoon sessions, with meals served at the beginning of each session. The children are rarely late, as most of them come to school without having had breakfast or lunch. Moreover, students have been better able to concentrate in class with a full stomach.

The school meals bring the children to school, but once there, they learn the joy of studying, which has led to less dropouts and more students that move on to secondary school. Since the introduction of the meal program, the number of students advancing to secondary school has approximately doubled.

Message for TFT and the school meal program

During our visit, we met with the local PTA chairperson who has been actively involved in the development of the community. We were welcomed with recently harvested chickpeas and bread covered with freshly collected honey, a rare treat. The man told us that before the school meal program began, he used to go around from house to house, trying to persuade parents to send their children to school. "Now, children choose to go to school because of the school meals," he said.

When we visited another school, we were warmly welcomed into a classroom with coffee and popcorn. On the wall was a handmade poster expressing their appreciation for TFT and the meal program.