



What Ethiopian Individuals Are Doing About the Hunger Crisis: Call for More Participants, Stories, Videos and Pictures

October 21, 2008

We want to update you on the very positive response we are continuing to receive from Ethiopians who want to help their fellow Ethiopians who are in greatest need. We are also seeking personal stories as well as pictures and videos that can tell the story of the devastating starvation and need for help as well as other inspiring stories telling or showing, how average Ethiopians are helping in the lives of individual people through their gifts of compassion.

Since we first made the call to individual Ethiopians to take action by forming groups of five to help with the hunger crisis in our country by pooling money (\$20 each) together to send it home (\$100) on a monthly basis for their trusted relative or friend to distribute to the neediest and most desperate of Ethiopians, we continue to receive calls and emails from people who report that they have started new groups.

At the time of our last update, twenty-three groups had formed and committed to help. Now, we know of fifty-eight groups—more than doubling that first number. This means that 58 Ethiopian individuals or families every month will receive help now from people they do not know, who are not even their relatives.

This means nearly seven hundred individuals or families in a year receiving a total of approximately \$70,000 that would never have been otherwise sent! How many lives will be saved or opportunities given through one person at a time, giving only \$20 a month when our individual efforts are multiplied through the cooperative actions of many Ethiopians?

This is such an encouragement! We would like to thank the Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians who are participating and continue to call for the formation of more groups. We know that for every group that informs us of what they are doing, there are others from whom we have not heard. We thank all of you! During a time of difficulty, there are those people who come out and share what they have. These are the Good Samaritans of Ethiopia.

Their actions are in opposition to what the government is doing. For instance, in order to hide the full extent of the starvation crisis, you may have read the recent reports coming out that allege that before western observers could tour clinics treating the malnourished and starving, those Ethiopians, in the worst condition—especially malnourished children—disappeared from the clinics with no explanation leaving workers concerned for their well-being. These workers were certain they were taken away so that the visiting western donor would not see the manmade horror going on in Ethiopia.

Despite all the negative things we are hearing about Ethiopia, this compassion towards the hurting is one way to fight back and is something that brings new hope to a society where the humanity of its people has been devalued and forgotten by its leaders and by many of its people—but not by God.

It is God who values each of us and wants us to see that “our family” is bigger than only our own—neither of which should be ignored. We have now seen many Ethiopians with hearts of compassion step up to do their best to help their “bigger family” of fellow Ethiopians even when they, themselves, may be having difficulty making financial ends meet. These Ethiopians are our real heroes and heroines.

If we could, we would name all of you, but there are too many of you out there. We really want you to know how much you are appreciated. You have done a remarkable thing. This includes individuals sending money to help their own families, individuals helping a child to go to school, individuals helping cover the costs at orphanages and individuals who are sending money through their newly formed groups or through their religious groups, communities or through other organizations so that they can help meet the growing needs for food and help. We thank you and appreciate you. It is these kinds of actions that make us to be human and affirm the humanity of another.

To be human is to love, to appreciate, to respect, to care and to protect. This response shows that there are many good Ethiopians out there who care more for the people than about grabbing opportunities through taking advantage of the dying, the weak and the forgotten. God will judge those people who do; however, our concern should be on what we can do to help right now and perhaps, others will be encouraged and inspired to join us.

That is why we continue to appeal to more Ethiopians who have not yet joined this effort to please come out now and join this movement of helping one another. Join this movement of loving one another. Join this movement of respecting one another. Join this movement of giving to others. Join this Good Samaritan movement that can revive Ethiopia.

There are a million people needing help and while we in the **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia**, along with some others outside the movement, are working towards finding a lasting solution, come out with the little you have and share it, thereby saving the life of a dying Ethiopian, until more substantial change can come to Ethiopia.

Consider all the Ethiopians who are suffering as your family, because after all, they are your own. We are from the same country. Our mother and our father is our land that has bound us together as one family and one people—the Ethiopian people. So, let us rise up as a people who look after one another.

This is our call to you. Join the greater Ethiopians who are already out helping the dying and also the non-Ethiopians who are helping us despite differences, perhaps of skin color, nationality, religion, culture, history or some other distinguishing characteristic, but yet value the humanity of the dying and suffering.

We need to appreciate these people because there are many non-Ethiopians whose actions are saving Ethiopian lives today, like religious groups and humanitarian groups who are sending money, supplies and personnel to help. What a model this is for us to care about those across our borders as well—in Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Sudan and Kenya.

Solutions to our bigger crisis will not come overnight, but will take time, resources and planning. Those in the **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia** are working hard, but there is so much work to be done, we cannot do it alone so we need all Ethiopians to step up.

Please join us in support and in prayer, asking God to intervene and save those who are dying and suffering in the Horn of Africa and to correct the broken system that causes 17 million people in the Horn of Africa to desperately need food.

We do not have to sit by—turning our heads, closing our eyes and covering our ears to the pain and suffering of Ethiopians—while this tragedy unfolds, claiming countless new victims every day.

We do not have to sit by, watching as our country falls apart and while mothers bury not one, but two or more children. We have had enough! Ethiopia has had enough!

Together, we can take action and it can begin in our homes and in our communities. No person of compassion should miss this opportunity to act on behalf of our fellow Ethiopians.

This is not a time to claim discouragement, disinterest in politics, or a time to claim narrow loyalty to one ethnic, religious, political or regional group. This issue should be of importance to every Ethiopian regardless of differences and preferences. It is time for all Ethiopians of heart to come together to make a difference!

Don't be a bystander during one of the worst crises faced by Ethiopians. Encourage family members and friends to join you for this grass-roots action that can revitalize a nation, one person or one family at a time.

Please read these stories of how the lives of some Ethiopians were changed through the compassionate gifts from Ethiopians they have never met and then please be encouraged to follow their example.

A story of a young mother of two children, begging on the streets of Addis Ababa, helped by a group of Ethiopians from Toronto:

Meskerem, an Ethiopian woman from Toronto, called to tell me that this call to help had inspired her to do her part. She had recently returned from Ethiopia after being there during the New Year and knew of the desperation of the people. She immediately talked to five of her friends about forming a giving group and her friends agreed.

She called her sister in Ethiopia and told her sister about the idea, asking her to form her own committee of three or four people there so that when the first 1000 birr was sent, they could identify an individual or family that was among the poorest of the poor to receive the money.

Her sister went into action and found three other people, all of whom were better off, who could responsibly help with the distribution of these monthly gifts. These four people soon told the Toronto group that they had found the right candidate.

They described a younger woman named Aster who was in her early twenties and had two children, one about five years of age and the other, about two years of age. This woman lived as a beggar in their neighborhood and was always sitting on a certain corner, begging for her children, lovingly caring for them as best she could.

In the past, the sister had talked to Aster who had shared with her how difficult life had become for her because of the poverty of so many, reducing the number of givers and increasing the numbers of those begging for help. Aster told her that she might only receive one or two birr a day and that it was not enough to feed her children.

She used to live in the south and had moved to Addis Ababa thinking she would find a better opportunity, but had not. Yet, Meskerem's sister could see that Aster was a very caring and committed mother who continued to struggle despite the difficulty and that she was someone who, if given a boost, would do her best to find new ways to sustain themselves.

After receiving the first money from the group in Toronto, this committee decided to approach this young mother. They sat down with Aster and told her that they had received 1000 birr from five Ethiopians from Canada who wanted their committee to look for the right person to give it to, someone who would use this money effectively. They told her that the money was not to be given back, but was a one-time gift and that they had decided that she was the right person to give it to because they had seen how hard she was trying to care for her children.

They then pulled out the 1000 birr, counted it and gave it to Aster. They told her she could do whatever she wanted with it, including using part of it to start a small business selling bread, onions or anything else she could sell in the market. They told her that if there was any help she needed, that they would be there, but reminded her that it was a one-time gift.

The young mother began crying and could not believe it. She said it was only God who could have done this. She told them that she had been praying to God for help because she no longer knew what she could do. She said she had decided to leave it in the hands of God. Everyone started crying with her. They told her that all they needed from her was a picture and for her to write a small thank you note so they could send it to the people in Canada who had sent this money.

Meskerem's sister and the rest of the committee were so touched by this experience that it spurred them on to identify potential receivers for the future, encouraging the sister in Toronto to please send the next money as soon as they have it. They are not only going to those in their own neighborhoods, but are going to other parts of Addis Ababa due to their commitment to identify the most needy of people, regardless of their ethnicity. They are inspired by this experience, believing that they are really making a difference and contributing to a better society.

This is not even the end of the impact of Aster's story. After Meskerem recently told me about it, I shared it with friends from Saskatoon. These two non-Ethiopian friends were so touched by it, that they also wanted to do the same. They said it was an especially appealing way to give because they could see there was no overhead and that the gift was given person to person.

Both gave as they were able, the younger one in a one-time gift of \$100 and the other, a doctor, said he would commit to sending \$100 a month for one year as long as Meskerem's sister was able to find a needy recipient whose life would be empowered by it.

I have already made the connection between him and Meskerem's sister and his first donation has been sent. Someone will now have another story to tell.

An Ethiopian from Washington D.C. makes a difference when he travels to Ethiopia.

An Ethiopian man, Tamrat, who lives in Washington D.C. recently returned to Ethiopia on a visit. According to him, before going, he had read the article calling Ethiopians to form groups, helping one person at a time, but had not yet done so himself.

When he was in Ethiopia, someone told him about some people who lived in a certain neighborhood who were so desperately poor that they were starving. These families had become invisible to others in the area and were no longer seen outside of their homes.

Apparently, some of the neighbors used to share their food with them, but none of them had any resources anymore to continue to do this. This man knew he did not have the money to give, but took the initiative to tell the owner of a local restaurant about this situation, encouraging the owner to do something.

The restaurant owner went to the homes of these families and was shocked beyond belief at what she saw. These families were literally starving and had become so weak that they could only lay in their homes, unable to walk and ready to die.

Immediately, the owner went to get food from the restaurant and brought it to the people in these homes, giving them both food and water. Some of them threw up because they had not eaten for so long. This restaurant owner determined that she would continue to help them as able, but did not know for how long it would be possible.

Tamrat then came back to Washington D.C. and shared this story with family members of how this restaurant owner was helping. His family members raised \$3000 to go to the restaurant owner so that she could continue to distribute the money in the most effective way. It was decided that she would give a thousand birr to each of these families and then to continue to search for others needing the same kind of help.

Tamrat's family group has now split into three separate groups, each of which is committed to sending \$100 every month, a total of \$300 a month now going to help. It is a win-win situation and everyone is inspired by what is happening and feel that it is fulfilling to be part of it.

The restaurant owner was originally doing it herself because of her own willingness to help, but now these three groups are expanding her efforts by providing even greater means for her to continue on.

Many people can get sick from a virus spread by one person. The reverse can be true also. How many Ethiopians will catch the spirit of compassion from these inspiring stories so that it spreads like a contagion of good throughout our society!

Please join this effort! When you give, you receive more back!

What can we learn from this is, **when you give, you receive more!** These are just a few of the stories from two of the 58 groups that have formed. There are certainly many more inspiring stories and we will try to continue sharing some of these stories with you as well as pictures related to the people and this crisis as we receive them from all of you.

I have one more story for you involving my good friend Clay and what he has done. Clay is a Canadian man in his mid-thirties, a devout Christian and a great family man. He and his wife are the most wonderful of people and recently adopted twin girls from Ethiopia. When he went to pick up his two little girls, he took a substantial amount of money along to contribute.

When he got there, he and his beautiful wife Cheryl donated some of this money to two orphanage centers and bought playground equipment and toys for a children's center for children infected with HIV. However, one thing he and his wife wanted to do was to personally help four of the most needy Ethiopian families.

With the help of his Ethiopian taxi driver, Clay and his wife went to one of the most impoverished areas of Addis Ababa and found four families in great need and gave each of them a bag of teff and 1000 birr.

Each story of each family receiving these gifts is incredibly touching, but the details will have to wait until another time; however, you can see a picture of Clay carrying a bag of teff to one of the a needy families.



Mr. Clay, carrying a bag of teff to one of the needy Ethiopian families in Addis Ababa.

The main point is that these are human beings who want to help other human beings. They have done something that many of the Ethiopian government officials, including the unelected Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, probably would never do for the very people he and they are supposed to care about the most. Yet, this couple is willing to share with people they had never met before.

May God bless these two wonderful people and their new children who now have a wonderful home in Saskatoon and have become part of a loving family, which also includes their six-year-old biological daughter.

Many Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians are standing up to help. Will you be next?

I hope these examples will inspire many more to help. May God forgive us for our past and present failures to Him and to others, but may He now inspire many more to join in this work.

May He show himself and His faithfulness to us, not because we deserve it, but because of His mercy and love so that we may then pass on these blessings to others in generous acts of kindness and mercy.

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