

Ethiopian Rural Education Project Report to Missioners, 14 March 2004 By Mary Rhodes

This report is made following the planning consultancy held in Dembi Dollo, Ethiopia, February 15-22, 2004. The purpose of the consultancy was to define specific steps necessary to implement the Ethiopian Rural Education Project (EREP), and to determine what budget is necessary to complete implementation. Participants in the consultancy were:

1. Western Wollega Bethel Synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus: The Reverend Teferi Barkessa, President of the Synod, Teferi Dina, Director of Development for the Synod, Mitiku Tucho, Principal of Berhane Yesus Primary School, and members of the WWBS Administrative Committee including the Reverend Worate Golache who was on the feasibility study team to India in 2000.
2. First Presbyterian Church, Ithaca – SVP: Mary Rhodes
3. Rishi Valley Institute for Educational Resources: Padmanabha Rao and Rama Rao, Co-directors



This picture was taken in front of the SVP banner at one of our meetings with the WWBS Administrative Committee.

Left to right: Seated: (unidentified), Standing: Mitiku Tucho (Principal of Berhane Yesus Primary School), Seated: Rev. Worate Golache, Rev. Teferi Barkessa (President of Western Wollega Bethel Synod), Rama Rao (Rishi Valley), Mary Rhodes, Teferi Dina (Director of Development), Standing: (unidentified). Padmanabha Rao took the picture. I apologize for not getting the names of the two gentlemen in the picture.

The following are responses to the questions you sent to me in February before I left for Ethiopia combined with similar and additional questions that you sent to me this weekend.

1. How has the exodus from the North affected our area? How many refugees are arriving in the Synod and how many more are expected? How does this impact on these new schools?

The people actually are coming from the eastern part of Oromia, so they are Oromians and have language and culture in common with our Western Wollega friends. So far 35,000 have been moved into our area; 60,000 more are expected. The government transports the people and, I believe, provides houses for them but little if anything else. WWBS has helped the settlers as much

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as they can by providing farming implements and household equipment, but life is stark for the settlers. On a field trip one day we drove by one of the new settlements. It is not a good situation, but everyone is doing the best they can. One of these recently-settled villages about 25 miles north of Dembi Dollo, shown in the pictures below, is being considered for one of our EREP schools.



The houses are round with thatched roofs. There is little else in this village.



2. What individuals will actually work to prepare the kits and supervise their use?

On February 18th, our project team met with the Administrative Committee of the Synod's Executive Committee to discuss this issue. The committee approved the following three educators and one generalist to develop the curriculum, train the teachers, and supervise implementation (we're calling this group the Trainers): Mitiku Tucho (Principal of Berhane Yesus Primary School), Asefa Ayana (Director of BESS), Dugassa Beyene (Director of the Orphans Hostel), and Teferi Dina (Director of Development). They also identified an alternate in the event that one of the subject matter experts cannot participate. It is a strong team and I am very pleased with it. It shows the strong commitment of WWBS to this project.

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3. Can the teaching kit idea be used in the Sunday school classes to push acceptance?

The teaching kit idea can be used in Sunday school classes, but it would take months to develop the kit properly. This would seriously delay implementation. There is no hesitancy among our friends in WWBS. They are eager -- very eager -- to establish the schools because the need is great and they see this as a way to get basic education to the people. (Before the Marxist regime [1977-1991] there were 132 schools in the synod. The Marxists destroyed or confiscated all but Berhane Yesus and BESS. WWBS is slowly rebuilding the educational system. We visited a government school at Chanka and it has very poor conditions and is over crowded. The need to move forward on this project is very great.

The pictures below show the government school at Chanka, about 25 miles north of Dembi Dollo. The school is over-crowded with more than 1,900 students. Children stand outside the gate but cannot enter because there is no room. This school room was dark, had a dirt floor and few furnishings, and the termites had eaten away at the blackboard. Even these children have a school though. There are hundreds of children in WWBS who do not have even a school like this.



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There is such a strong contrast in the faces of the government school's children at Chanka compared with the children at Berhane Yesus Primary School (BYPS) that WWBS administers, shown in these pictures. BYPS has new buildings, now, the result of a donation by A Glimmer of Hope in 2001, and it was evident to me from conversations with the principal that WWBS knows how to run their schools. (Incidentally, I contacted A Glimmer of Hope a few months ago about funding the EREP schools, but they declined.)



4. What did you do and with whom on your recent trip? Are the Ethiopians just trying to be polite to please us, or are they really enthusiastic? How enthusiastic are they about establishing these schools?

Our consultancy consisted of daily meetings of Rao, Rama, Teferi Dina, Mitiku Tucho, and myself. We reviewed what we had learned from the feasibility study tour conducted in 2000, and examined what has happened since that time. We discussed obstacles and issues, and ways to address them. We wrestled with the question, how many schools should we start with? At one point we considered one school in each of the 12 presbyteries; but we came to our senses and decided that was a really bad idea! We really examined this from all angles, and decided that six schools will give us the critical mass we need for teachers to share ideas and experiences among themselves. Depending on the child population in the selected villages, we might cluster two or three schools in one village. We think this would be very helpful for the collaborative efforts of the teachers and it

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would enable us to meet the educational demand in a village without turning away some of the children. The six schools will be built within 25-30 miles of Dembi Dollo, thus facilitating supervision by educational staff and development staff from Dembi Dollo. The schools should be built before the rainy season starts at the end of May because construction is not possible during the rainy season. It will take about two months to build the six schools; thus, construction should begin in early April. Construction will be similar in composition (though smaller in size) to the building shown



here. The building on the left is part of the Susquehanna Valley Presbytery multi-purpose meeting center located approximately 60 miles north of Dembi Dollo. The picture below shows the interior of this building.

In addition to the school buildings themselves, we will construct dry latrines for each school. (This is standard public sanitation in this area.) We also will develop a garden plot for the children and a demonstration plot to teach the children and villagers environmental protection, land reclamation, and land enhancement. The schools will be used in the evenings for adult education.

The consultancy team discussed at length the process of developing the curriculum cards. We concluded that it would be best to schedule it in two stages. In August 2004, the team of four trainers will go to Rishi Valley where they will work with the Rishi Valley experts to develop the curriculum cards that will reflect the first two years of the Ethiopian curriculum. August is the earliest that the team can go, and they must be back in Dembi Dollo in early September to prepare for school opening at Berhane Yesus and BESS. When the team returns to Dembi Dollo they will train the teachers for the six schools using the new curriculum cards. Stage 2 of development will be scheduled



in 2005 at which time four experts from Rishi Valley will go to Dembi Dollo to assess the schools and to develop Years 3 and 4 of the curriculum cards. By scheduling curriculum development in two stages, we will enable assessment of Stage 1 and subsequent modification and adaptation as necessary in the Stage 2 card development. It also will enable the Rishi Valley experts to visit the six schools and teachers in operation and to recommend any modifications.

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The consultancy team spent considerable time working out the timeline and the budgetary requirements to build the schools, develop the curriculum, train the teachers, and to operate the the six schools and the central resource center for one year. Our discussions examined every facet we could think of. The budget is on Page 8-9.

The consultancy team met twice with the Administrative Committee of the Synod. I have no doubt but that WWBS is enthusiastic for this project! I came away with every conviction that they want this project to happen and that they want it very soon. I think they have been disappointed that nothing has happened with EREP since 2000 when we made the feasibility trip. But now they believe our commitment that the schools actually will happen and they are themselves committed to it. In our first meeting with the Administrative Committee they selected the four trainers who will develop the curriculum cards and will train the teachers. The trainers are: Asefa Ayana (Director of BESS), Mitiku Tucho (Principal of Berhane Yesus Primary School), Dugasa Beyene (Director of the orphan's hostel), and Teferi Dina (Director of Development). The three educators, Asefa, Mitiku, and Dugasa, will develop the curriculum cards and train and supervise the teachers. If I remember correctly, Asefa is a scientist, Mitiku is a social scientist, and Dugasa is a mathematician – a good balance for development of the curriculum. Teferi will be responsible for site selection, school construction, and implementation of the project. On February 20th our consultancy team met a second time with the Synod's Administrative Committee to present the overall plan. They discussed it extensively, questioned various details, and endorsed it enthusiastically.

5. What has been accomplished to date? How soon can we take the next step? Is there any money left from the \$15,000? What is our timing? What is the minimum you could get started on? Who will take leadership? Do you want/need to return to Ethiopia?

Quite a lot has been accomplished, I believe. The feasibility trip to India in 2000 gave SVP and WWBS the opportunity to evaluate and assess the Rishi Valley rural school methodology. After considering the feasibility report, WWBS decided that they wanted to proceed with the project. Having visited both Rishi Valley and some of the rural areas of western Ethiopia, I can understand why they are so enthusiastic for it. This is an appropriate and needed solution to a great lack of schools for a large segment of the population.

We can get started as soon as we have funding. The immediate timeline looks like this: build the schools in April-May 2004; develop the curriculum in August 2004; train the teachers in September 2004; open the schools in October 2004; operate the schools through June 2005 (end of regular school year). Develop the Stage 2 of the curriculum cards in 2005. This is the outline of the development that, of course, will require more detailed steps which we have planned out.

First Presbyterian, Ithaca, has been exceedingly generous in funding the feasibility trip in 2000 and the planning consultancy in 2004. Continued support from First Presbyterian is needed, but we also need to look toward other sources. I assume that SVP has been planning for EREP implementation since approving the project in 1999 and hearing reports in the intervening years, but I do not know how much they have set aside. I continue my efforts to find other funding sources, but to date I have not found them. Of the \$15,000 that Missioners committed in 2003, we have approximately \$8,500 remaining after this consultancy trip. (I am still awaiting a final report from the Rishi Valley folks after their return to India.)

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These are the resources that can get us started over the next eight months:

March 31	\$16,700	construct schools (this is <i>in addition to</i> the \$8,500 left from the Missioners' \$15,000; total cost about \$25,200)
June 1	\$1,860	build the school furniture locally
July 1	\$6,000	purchase tickets for 4 trainers to go to India in August
July 1	\$3,060	purchase ticket for project director to go to India in August [This could be optional if funds are not available.]
September 1	\$8,600	construct resource center and furniture
October 1	\$11,762	pay Rishi Valley for board/room, training trainers and curriculum development

Since this is a First Presbyterian Church/SVP project, it is for you all to decide on the leadership. I am certainly willing to continue involvement and I am willing to return to Ethiopia as needed. This is a project that we have been working together on for so long, I really want to see it happen. It is an appropriate and needed solution to a serious problem among people who are our friends and colleagues.

In Corvallis, I have co-founded Wellspring, Inc., with others from the former local UNIFEM chapter. Wellspring, Inc. is a not-for-profit, non-membership NGO incorporated in Oregon. Members of the Wellspring board of directors are from the Oregon State University community and the Corvallis community. They want to promote empowerment of women locally and worldwide. Many have been involved in international development projects. Wellspring has adopted the EREP as a project, thus facilitating tax deductions for persons who make donations, but Wellspring does not itself have funds available. The \$15,000 that Missioners committed for the EREP in 2003 was deposited in a separate, identifiable Wellspring account at the OSU Federal Credit Union in Corvallis because it would have been inappropriate to put the funds in my personal account.

6. What schools are now in place and government approved? Will the government allow these new rural schools?

I do not know what schools are in place or government approved. I do know, however, that before the Marxists took over in 1974, there were 132 schools in what is now Western Wollega Bethel Synod. The Marxists confiscated all of those schools. Since the Marxists' demise in 1991, some of the schools (I do not know how many) have been re-established under government administration. One example is the school we visited at Chanka that I describe above on Page 3. The Chanka School is seriously over-crowded, and lacking in facilities and teachers. Many other areas have no school at all, such as the village of new settlers described above on Page 2.

WWBS has discussed the EREP with the regional government officials and the government has no objection to it since our project will use the government curriculum. At an appropriate time in the future WWBS will set up an advisory committee for the EREP project that will include a person from the regional government and thus keep the government informed about the project in relation to the overall educational program of the area. My impression is that the government spends few resources in Western Wollega and they are happy for WWBS to carry out as many development programs as they can.

It was a very useful trip. Thank you, Missioners and Session, for supporting this project-planning consultancy! I believe the project now has a firm plan of action.