

Ethiopian Rural Education Project (EREP)
Report on EREP Status, Issues and Recommendations for Future
Mary Rhodes – April 12, 2013

This report summarizes my trip to Ethiopia, February 14-27, 2013. The purpose was to gain understanding of the current status of the two EREP schools, to learn of present and future needs of these schools, and to develop a plan through which we could continue our support of EREP. I sincerely appreciate the support of all those who made this trip possible and the generous hospitality of colleagues in Ethiopia who made my stay comfortable and who sacrificed valuable time to transport and accompany me on three field trips. I especially appreciate the open discussions that provided essential information and perspectives.

The glossary at the end of this report explains the report's numerous acronyms and identifies the colleagues with whom I met. A page of pictures also is included.

Objectives of the trip were:

1. To renew and strengthen working relationships with Ethiopian colleagues associated with the EREP,
2. To make site visits to two EREP model schools: Gaba Arbi and Aleku,
3. To discuss with Ethiopian colleagues the successes and challenges of EREP and their projected plans,
4. To identify ways in which US partners might collaborate with Ethiopian colleagues to complete establishment of the EREP curriculum and development,
5. To gather information about interest of the Nuer and Anuak peoples to establish EREP schools in their areas of Gambella Region.

Background:

The Ethiopian Rural Education Project (EREP) evolved through the partnership of Western Wollega Bethel Synod (WWBS) and the Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley (PSV). That partnership was initiated by Rev. Bente Ujulu (then President of WWBS) circa 1994. Through the partnership we came to realize the catastrophic dimensions of the authoritarian Derg regime's policy (1974-1991) which destroyed 135 schools in Western Wollega. Presbyterians (American and Ethiopian) had established and administered these schools in the 1920s-1970s in the area around Dembi Dollo. It occurred to us that the partnership might re-establish rural schools to replace those that had been destroyed. The partnership agreed to explore how to proceed.

2000: Representatives of WWBS and PSV visited the Rishi Valley Rural Education Center (near Madanapalle, India) to assess whether and how the teaching/learning methodology developed at Rishi Valley could be applied to Ethiopia. Subsequently, the partnership agreed to use the Rishi Valley methodology to develop rural schools in Western Wollega.

2004: A planning conference of representatives of WWBS, the PSV, and Rishi Valley met in Dembi Dollo to define a plan of action for the project. The conference initially decided to establish six model rural schools which was later modified to two model rural schools, and to begin curriculum development in 2004. Subsequently, an Ethiopian team

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of four educators spent six weeks at Rishi Valley in the summer of 2004 and again in the summer of 2006 developing curriculum materials for Grades 1 and 2.

2005: two school buildings were built: one at Aleku and one at Gaba Arbi.

2006: Instruction at the chosen sites began.

2007: a team of six from Rishi Valley conducted a two-week teacher training seminar at Dembi Dollo; participants included four teachers from the EREP schools and 17 teachers from other local schools.

2011: In the 2011-2012 school year, 117 children were enrolled in Aleku, and 106 were enrolled in Gaba Arbi.

2013: At the time of my visit, Aleku had one teacher and one assistant; Gaba Arbi had two teachers and one assistant. Mr. Tadesse told me that they need to hire an additional teacher for Aleku.

Mission of EREP: *To build and operate two model schools in rural areas of Western Wollega Bethel Synod, adapting the Oromo school curriculum from the successful learning methodology developed at Rishi Valley, India. The curriculum will teach Kindergarten through Grade 4 to develop self-motivated learners and to assure permanent literacy and numeracy.*

Observations:

The administrative structure in WWBS consists of two offices: WWBS, which administers the religious and spiritual functions, and DASSC, which administers the economic and social development projects. Traditionally, WWBS and DASSC functioned as two hands of the same body representing the long-standing wholistic commitment of EECMY to serve the worldly as well as the spiritual life of its members and communities. In that tradition, joint discussions by WWBS/DASSC administrators led to jointly made decisions. That wholistic theology was a fundamental precept and strength of EECMY. It appears now, however, that the two offices function virtually independently from each other; it was commented that the government expects (or requires) this separation of functions. The result appears to be an awkward, if not painful, situation for administrators of each of the offices.

DASSC administers a broad spectrum of programs, in addition to EREP, including supporting 500 HIV-AIDS orphans, monitoring placement of 180 orphans in foster homes, water projects, environmental work, the Tullu Gopo Clinic, and schools. The well-known secondary school, BESS, is directed by Mr. Amanuel Tesfaye. The elementary school, BYES, is headed by Mr. Dugasa Beyene, who also directs EREP along with other assignments.

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EREP Schools: I visited both Gaba Arbi EREP School and Aleku EREP School during the school day when classes were in session. There is no doubt in my mind but that the EREP schools at Aleku and Gaba Arbi are successfully teaching children to become self-motivated learners. The children appeared absorbed with learning, and when they completed one curriculum card they would help themselves to the next card guided by the learning ladder. I was told that children who complete the EREP and who then attend a government school, achieve better than the children who only start directly in the government school. There were examples of five or six children who initially were enrolled in a government school, but failed to learn there; then they were enrolled in the EREP school and now are motivated and successful.

Curriculum: Although both schools have been teaching students since 2006, the educational program of EREP will not be complete until curriculum for Grades 3 and 4 is developed. In addition, the curriculum materials currently in use need to be updated to comply with the standard Oromo curriculum including English language instruction as required by the government. Completing the curriculum development should be top priority. Discussions included a comment that the methodology could be applied to Sunday school curriculum, though doubtless this would need to be postponed until Grades 3 and 4 curriculum is developed.

Facilities: Each of the EREP schools that were built in 2005 consist of a building that contains two classrooms and one room for teachers' use. Each school has a separated toilet facility.

The EREP methodology teaches in multi-grade, multi-level units. That is, all children of any grade level attend school together in one room, thus facilitating children advancing in each subject matter at their own pace. For example, a child might be advanced in math curriculum but much slower in language.

EREP envisioned that each of the two classrooms would be multi-grade, multi-level (as is the practice at Rishi Valley). However, the government requires that each grade level be assigned to its own classroom. To accommodate Grades 3 and 4, both EREP schools need two additional rooms built as attachments to the existing structure.

Mr. Dugasa expressed that the teachers can accommodate this requirement without significant compromise of the teaching methodology. Construction of the additional rooms will be a considerable expense for which I do not yet have an estimate.

Economic Issues: Ethiopia experienced widely fluctuating inflation rates in recent years, averaging 21.76 during 2006-2013. The implications of this for WWBS and DASSC are considerable. On a visit in Ethiopia in 2007 I was told that EREP teachers' annual salary was the equivalent of US \$1,000. Table 1 on the next page expresses the current teacher's annual salary in Ethiopian birr and in US dollars. Teaching assistants' salary is approximately half that of teachers. The consequences of inflation since 2007 are evident.

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Table 1 Annual Salary of EREP Teachers

Year	Exchange Rate \$1 = x Birr	Gross Salary Birr	Gross Salary US Dollars	Net Salary* Birr	Net Salary* US Dollars
2013	\$1 = ETB 18.52	ETB 15,300	\$ 826	ETB 12,804	\$ 691

*Net salary is the take-home pay after income tax and provident fund are withheld.

The total of all teachers' and assistants' salaries in FY2012 was ETB 58,555 (US \$3,253). Total expenditures in FY2012 for all aspects of EREP schools (including maintenance, repairs, supplies, materials, teachers' and assistants' salaries, and all other costs) was ETB 94,313 (US \$5,239).

Gambella: The Nuer and Anuak peoples in Gambella Region are eager to establish EREP schools in their areas. At this time, the EREP program in Dembi Dollo (Oromia Region) focuses on completing their curriculum and building additional rooms on the two model schools.

Recommendations:

The following suggestions are offered to our participating groups including DASSC, WWBS, Ethiopian colleagues, Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley, Missioners of First Presbyterian Church, Ithaca, Northside Presbyterian Church, Blacksburg, and myself representing LearningWell Partners Intl. ***I hope that all will share ideas and explore ways to collaborate.***

Complete development of curriculum for Grades 3 and 4. DASSC has the expertise and knowledge base in the person of Mr. Dugasa and others in Dembi Dollo who have experience developing EREP curriculum. Financial and human resources are factors, as Mr. Dugasa carries heavy responsibilities.

An option is to provide financial support to DASSC for:

(\$2,000) six months' salary for an administrator's assistant to assist Mr. Dugasa while he designs the curriculum cards.

Other costs would include

(\$1,500) three months' salary for an artist to prepare art work after Mr. Dugasa has planned each of the curriculum cards;

(\$300) supplies such as paper, artist's paper and pencils;

(\$200) scanner;

(\$500) computer – if one is not available in DASSC's offices.

Planning estimated total: \$4,500

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Follow-up issues (funding to be determined):

- Mr. Dugasa would send digital copies of the cards to me and I would place specified text on the cards and add color to the cards as necessary. I would produce a digital image of each completed card and transmit via internet to Ethiopia. (Minimal funding)
- Mr. Dugasa would arrange for printing and laminating the cards in Ethiopia after development of curriculum cards is completed.

Maintenance of EREP school buildings. I observed that the Gaba Arbi School has some noticeable deterioration on the exterior that should be repaired to reduce damage by termites. Those repairs should be made as soon as possible. From subsequent discussion of the problem inadequate maintenance funds were the issue.

Construct four additional classrooms (two each) at the two EREP schools. Discuss/explore various solutions. Numerous charitable organizations might offer solutions to this challenge.

Sustainability. Explore options to address continuing needs of the two EREP schools.

Long term goal: to establish an EREP resource center in the WWBS compound at Dembi Dollo providing a consolidated location for teacher training, meetings, curriculum development, storage of curriculum supplies. When others, such as the Gambella synods, come forward to learn how to establish EREP schools in their locale, the resource center would provide space for them to develop their curriculum and even train their teachers.

Remember, EREP has established two *model* schools that others might emulate. EREP does not have the resources to create schools for others who want them. Each community must be self-motivated to establish their own schools with willing advice from the EREP program in Dembi Dollo. It would be for the EREP program in Dembi Dollo to decide if, and how much, to charge others for advice and assistance in developing their schools.

I agreed to take the following actions at the request of DASSC:

- Request the English module curriculum from Rishi Valley that might serve as a model for similar curriculum in Ethiopia. It will be up to DASSC to develop it for their Oromo curriculum
- Seek funding and construction from A Glimmer of Hope of two additional EREP school classrooms at Aleku and two at Gaba Arbi, and an EREP resource center in the WWBS compound in Dembi Dollo. It will be up to DASSC to follow up with A Glimmer of Hope to make and execute any agreement to build; I am simply making the initial contact. (You will recall that A Glimmer of Hope funded construction of the Brahane Yesus Elementary School campus consisting of eight classrooms and four additional buildings to house the library, laboratory, administrative and other functions. That construction was accomplished in three months in 2003 under Teferi Dina's leadership.)

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Glossary and Persons Consulted

Aleku School - One of two Ethiopian Rural Education Project model schools

Bethel Evangelical Secondary School (BESS)

Mr. Amanuel Tesfaye, Director, Bethel Evangelical Secondary School (BESS). Mr. Amanuel was one of the original developers of the Oromo curriculum for EREP.

Bethel Synods Coordination Office (BSCO)

Located in Addis Ababa, the office coordinates many activities of the Bethel Synods. The Reverend Teferi Barkessa is Director. Reverend Teferi formerly was President of WWBS following Reverend Bente, and worked diligently to achieve formation of the partnership with PSV, and subsequently to establish EREP.

Brahane Yesus Elementary School (BYES) – located in Dembi Dollo.

Development and Social Service Commission (DASSC)

Mr. Tadesse Alemu, Director
Mr. Desalegn, Financial Officer
Mr. Dugasa Beyene, Principal of Brahane Yesus Elementary School, and Director of EREP. Mr. Dugasa was one of the developers of the Oromo curriculum for EREP.
Mr. Varaga, Assistant Director

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) - the denomination which blends the Presbyterian and Lutheran based churches in Ethiopia. EECMY is one of the fastest growing denominations in Africa. There are now six synods in Ethiopia of which Western Wollega Bethel Synod is one of the oldest.

Ethiopian Rural Development Project (EREP)

A project of WWBS and the Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley to establish two model schools to teach the first four years of curriculum using the methodology adapted from that developed at Rishi Valley, India. The two schools are Aleku School and Gaba Arbi School. Grades 1 and 2 curriculum was developed in 2004 and 2006. The two school buildings were built in 2005. Instruction at both schools was begun in 2006.

Gaba Arbi School – One of two Ethiopian Rural Education Project model schools

Presbyterian Church (USA) – (PCUSA)

The Reverend Michael Weller, East Africa Regional Liaison PCUSA
Ms Rachel Weller, East Africa Liaison Administrator & CHE Training PCUSA

Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley (PSV) – Partners with WWBS since 1996.

Western Wollega Bethel Synod (WWBS) – one of six synods in EECMY

The Reverend Chali Yosef, President
The Reverend Deressa Wakjira, Executive Secretary