



25 Year Journey
to defeat
Poverty Together
in **Ethiopia**

November 2014

act:onaid



Writers

Abebe Wagaw
Ambachew Deresse
Bisrat Alemu
Berhanu Zenbere
Berhanu Diro
Eleni Tekalign
Genet Abebe
Getachew Ali
Jemal Ahmed
Letekidan Berhane
Dr. Memberu Lulu
Mekdes TekleMichael
Hagos G/Meskel
Lemma Belay
Tsigie Haile

Editorial team

Therese Bjorn
Jemal Ahmed
Letekidan Berhane
Hawariat Petros
Hailu Sime
Ambachew Deresse

Proof reading

Letekidan Berhane
Hawariat Petros
Meseret Amsalu
Selam Sebu

Graphic designer

Yosef Ali

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Photo: Andrea Labate/ ActionAid



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25 Year Journey to defeat Poverty Together in Ethiopia

Acronyms

AA	ActionAid
AAE	ActionAid Ethiopia
ACCESS	Appropriate Cost Effective Centres of Education within the School System
CBAP	Community Based Aids Programme
CBI	Community Based Institution
CBO	Community Based organisation
CCDP	Community Based Development Programme
CRSA	Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture
CSP	Country Strategy Paper
DAWWDA	Dalocha Women Water Development Association
ERSHA	Enhanced Rural Self Help Association
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HAPCO	HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Organisation
HTPs	Harmful Traditional Practices
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
(NEP+)	Network of Networks of HIV Positives in Ethiopia
NEWA	Network of Ethiopian Women Associations
NNPWE	National Network of Positive Women Ethiopians
PANE	Union of Ethiopian Civil Society Organisations
PLHIV	People Living with the HIV/AIDS Virus
PLIP	People Living in Poverty
SACCO	Saving and Credit Co-operatives
VAW	Violence Against Women
WISE	Women in Self Employment
WWGs	Women Watch Groups





Photo: Hawariat Petros/ ActionAid

Message from the Country Director

It is a great honor and opportunity to witness the 25th anniversary of ActionAid Ethiopia (AAE) in November 2014. This momentous occasion gives us the opportunity to reflect on AAE's journey of 25 years and review the organisation's strengths and weaknesses, gaps and successes as well as challenges and opportunities. The substantial lessons we obtained along this journey have equipped us with fresh insights that help us strengthen our commitment in the years ahead.

ActionAid Ethiopia, is a branch of the ActionAid Federation, a unique global movement committed to end poverty. AAE envisions a poverty free Ethiopia where every person lives in dignity and prosperity.

ActionAid strongly believes that ending poverty goes beyond meeting people's immediate social and economic needs. We believe that addressing structural and complex multi-layered causes of poverty at household, community, national and international levels, is crucial. This is the core of our theory of change; ending poverty and injustice can be achieved through

purposeful individual and collective action led by the active agency of people living in poverty and supported in solidarity with various actors at different levels.

During our 25 years existence in Ethiopia, ActionAid has worked with people living in poverty especially women, youth and children. Our main approach has been to build close partnerships with community organisations and other CSOs, as well as the Government. AAE's programming is mainly focused on grassroots community. AAE started working in Dalocha in 1989, but by 2014 reaching 28 districts stretching across all regional states including SNNPRS, Oromiya, Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Tigray, Gambela, Diredawa and Addis Ababa. Since 1989, AAE has reached 2.5 million people, 42% of whom are women and 15% children. A total of two billion birr has been raised from abroad during this period. We have focused on women and girls' rights, good governance, food security, access to quality education and HIV/AIDS both at district and national levels. AAE's current Country Strategic Plan (CSP 2012-2017) reiterates AAE's commitment to address structural causes of poverty with a focus on four mission objectives.

Currently, AAE has 15 long-term development programmes. Ten of these are directly managed by the organisation, while the remaining five are managed by partner organisations.

In the last 25 years, AAE has achieved positive results that have impacted the lives of people living in poverty, especially reaching those living in inaccessible and remote places. To give some examples, our education programme, ACCESS (Alternative Cost Effective Centers within Education School System) has enabled over half a million needy children to access basic primary education. In addition, ACCESS's replication by the Government and NGOs has helped to bring education to even more children. In most of the AAE-supported schools, girls currently account for 47% of students. One of the major outcomes of AAE's partnership engagements has been the emergence and development of local NGOs and CBOs. AAE has supported the development of over 800 CBOs; including a number of local NGOs like WISE, Vision and ProPride, and forums/networks of pro-poor agencies like PANE, Union of Ethiopian Civil Society Organisations, National HIV/AIDS Forum and Women living with HIV National Forum.

Food security programmes make up the largest share of AAE's investment. The major achievements have been in the areas of small-scale irrigation, improved goat and sheep rearing and veterinary services, saving and credit cooperatives, multi-purpose cooperatives, along with disaster early warning system and preparedness. AAE's engagement with women and girls paved the way for challenging patriarchal attitudes and changing the status of women from powerlessness at household and community levels. The Women's Watch Groups helped to curb violence against women and harmful traditional practices, whilst the 'Women Won't Wait' national campaign made it possible for women's voices to be heard. Crucially, AAE has also provided women with economic alternatives like micro-credit schemes that led to women's economic empowerment. Encouraged by our successes to-date, we are renewing our commitment to continually anchor women's agenda at the centre of our development works.

One of the unique aspects of AAE's approach is its strong roots at community level. This has a dual purpose: changing people's lives at the community level, whilst providing alternative models based on community experience. AAE is thereby able to establish tested development alternatives to influence the Government and the wider development sector. For example, AAE's Community Centered Development Programmes (CCDPs) have enabled people to combat poverty through empowerment, by building solidarity and influencing each other and local actors through knowledge building. So far, AAE has influenced development actors including the Government to replicate tested alternatives, which includes the ACCESS education model, as an alternative to current primary education.

Women-led Water Supply Associations and the Women Watch Group Model were designed to both sustain water supply and tackle Gender Based Violence and Harmful Traditional Practices, respectively. Women-led Savings and Credit Cooperatives have created economic empowerment and served as a home for women leadership development. These ActionAid best practices have been scaled up, and are now included in CSOs and Government structures.

AAE has also supported the Keffa social minority of Menja in the Dawro and Keffa zones, and supported the social integration of potters in Yem Special

Woreda and Gamogofa zones in the SNNPRS until 2011. The exemplary stories of Alemu and Birtukan in this book are noteworthy; they show how change is possible in cases of deep-rooted social discrimination.

One of AAE's priority areas has been to change the lives of children. Other than providing education, AAE's work has had a special focus of improving the lives of children especially during emergencies. It also worked with partners to protect children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. We, at ActionAid Ethiopia, regard ourselves as ambassadors for children, and child sponsorship is very much at the core of ActionAid's fundraising.

While we reflect on ActionAid's 25 years in Ethiopia, it is also worth highlighting the relationship between the organisation and its staff. Most staff members believe that good management-employee relationship, friendly workspace, staff capacity building and transparent recruitment practices are core features of AAE. Staff strongly believe that AAE's solidarity with poor and excluded people, 'is not simply lip service, but daily put into practice.' Former staff have also testified that AAE is very dynamic organization that has shaped contemporary development thought and discourse at national and global level. Staff members have ample opportunities for learning and personal development. The leadership style is seen to encourage a strong team and work culture, along with a strong sense of purpose and commitment.

At this point, I am particularly delighted to present AAE's Case Stories book, which is a collection of AAE's contributions during the journey of the last 25 years. I kindly encourage you to read the stories in the main body of the book. Thank you.



Jemal Ahmed, Country Director,
ActionAid Ethiopia



Photo: Andrea Labate/ ActionAid

Acknowledgements

The 25th anniversary celebration of ActionAid Ethiopia is an opportunity for the organisation to reflect on its achievements and the unique partnerships it employs to create anti-poverty coalitions. The anniversary is also an occasion to renew and strengthen our partnerships and our commitment to working towards a poverty free Ethiopia, where every person lives in dignity and prosperity.

The organisation had a humble beginning, as a small district-based integrated development programme in the Dalocha area of the Southern State. Today, ActionAid Ethiopia is one of the influential anti-poverty players in the country. ActionAid believes that its contributions would have been insignificant without the support of our partners.

ActionAid is particularly grateful to the people living in poverty that we have worked with and empowered across Ethiopia. The local communities, who trusted AAE, and allowed us to work, whilst sharing their local knowledge and lending a helping hand in the fight against poverty. We have to say a special thank you to the communities, who have worked alongside ActionAid planning and implementing successful programmes. Without such partnerships with people, communities and local organisations, the impact of our work would have been minimal.

We are also indebted to government bodies at district, regional and national levels in Ethiopia, which were key to ActionAid's ability to mobilise millions of people against poverty and its root causes. We are indeed grateful.

Our gratitude also extends to individuals, families and organisations in the UK, Italy, Spain, Brazil and Greece among others, who supported our work even during periods of economic recession. The unfailing support extended by governments and various organisations in these countries have made it possible for AAE to save lives and create sustainable development in Ethiopia.

We must also express our sincere gratitude to AAE's past and present staff members, who are integral to our organisation's vision, mission and values, and without whom our work would not be possible. Without the commitment, hard work and perseverance of our staff, in particularly those who have worked hard in remote rural villages, AAE's vision and work would have had little impact.

Finally, this book provides a telling and eloquent testimony to the active contribution of our committed staff, especially editorial committee members, who have helped enrich the programme content. We are deeply thankful to all ex and present staff, who shared with us their memories and thoughts of AAE. Thank you all.



Photo: Andrea Labate/ ActionAid



ACTIONAID ETHIOPIA: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

ActionAid started operating in Ethiopia in 1989 with the mission to help children, families, and communities overcome poverty. Over the past 25 (1989–2014) years, AAE has evolved through four development phases that influenced the organisation’s approach to development. These changes in ActionAid’s approaches are presented in the illustration on page four as a river of life along which the key changes are outlined.

AAE focused on the sectoral intervention approach of community development especially from 1989 to 1993. This was directed, among others, at addressing specific aspects of deprivation even in the absence of a Country Strategy Paper (CSP).

In 1993, a change was made to the approach and strategies of operation. Consequently, the first country strategy (1994-1998) was formulated in which the sector-focused approach was replaced by the integrated community-based approach. The other shift involved specifically targeting people living in poverty, so they would become the prime beneficiaries of all interventions of AAE. Another major shift brought in a wider participatory approach, in which the voices and aspirations of people living in poverty were integral to the development process. It was against this background that the core development programmes such as saving and credit, institution building, community-based health care, non-formal education and water development were identified as key development programmes.

The second Country Strategy Paper (CSP II), ‘JadLaggnot’, was introduced at the end of 1999. In the second CSP, the vision of AAE was: Eradication of absolute poverty and realisation of social equity and dignity in Ethiopia. The CSP was readjusted specifying for whom AAE had to work and with whom it had to affiliate. The Mission Statement reads: ‘to work with poor and marginalised people to eradicate absolute poverty and realise social equity in collaboration with pro-poor partners.’ This was the significant phase where AAE was outlining the crucial approaches to fight poverty which included:

- Local anti-poverty initiatives: to enable poor and marginalised people to fulfil their basic needs and rights
- Public policy and advocacy: to influence policies and practices that regulate structural causes of poverty
- Partnerships against poverty: to promote collaboration and partnerships that act in and give voice to the interests of people living in poverty
- Institutional capacity building: to build pro-poor institutions that empower the poor and marginalised, and promote sustainable development and collective action

ActionAid Ethiopia considered providing social services like health, education, clean water, and credit facilities as aspects of its operations in its Community Centred Development Programmes. But starting the year 2000, ActionAid's approach shifted from 'service delivery' to a 'rights-based approach'. The rationale is based on a change of the understanding of poverty and its structural causes, including power relations perpetuating injustices, encompassing issues of development, governance, public policy and democracy.

The third CSP period encompasses CSP III (2005-2009) and the Interim CSP (2010 -2011). CSP III took a bold step forward in promoting a human rights based approach with a vision "to see a poverty free Ethiopia where men and women realise their rights, and use their potential". Its mission was to work with poor and excluded people, women and girls to eradicate absolute poverty, inequality and denial of rights. The key areas of focus were food security, women & girls rights, HIV/AIDS, education and governance.

The core strategies of CSP III included promoting the rights-based approach, participation, capacity building, policy research and people-centred advocacy, partnership, alliance building and networking, information, communication, and technology.

Towards the end of CSP III, contextual changes in Ethiopia and internal funding issues led to the development of an interim strategy. The political situation created a growing rift between the Government and civil society organisations. Besides, diminishing regular income resulting from the global financial crisis and the appreciation of local currency against UK Pound

plus rising inflation contributed to the change of strategy. Further, the new Charities and Societies Proclamation has resulted in a huge change for how CSO/NGOs operate in Ethiopia. It was as a response to these changes for organisations and the wider national situation that AAE developed an interim CSP. The fourth CSP therefore coincided with the global AA's strategy (2012 -2017) and envisions "a poverty-free Ethiopia where every person lives in dignity and prosperity". Its key elements are:

- Clear theory of change with specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound change promises
- Promoting alternatives of addressing root causes of poverty
- Strong emphasis on organisational development

Key priorities of CSP IV include:

- Improved livelihood and resilience of people living in poverty (PLIP)
- Organised PLIP to influence and secure quality public education
- Empowered women and girls to attain better social and economic status
- Empowerment of people living in poverty for securing basic services

AAE'S RIVER OF LIFE – A 25 Year Journey



PHASE I (1989 - 1993)

- Welfare Approach
- Sector focus
- Two CCDPs phased in
- Supporters - Italy & UK



PHASE II (1994 - 1998)

- Community participation & empowerment
- Integrated approach and focused targeting
- The first CSP
- Ten CCDPs phased in
- Supporters - Italy, UK, Spain & Greece

PHASE V (2012-2017)

- CSPIV –Climate resilient sustainable agriculture
- Disaster response & preparedness
- Access to quality basic education
- Women & girls social well-being
- Empowerment of public institution
- Two CCDPs phased in & three phased out
- Supporters - Italy, UK, Spain & Greece



PHASE III (1999 - 2004)

- Right Based Approach(RBA)
- CSPII - Partnership, Empowerment & Capacity Building
- Public Policy Advocacy
- 11 CCDPs Phased in and ten CCDPs out
- Supporters - Italy, Uk, Spain & Greece



PHASE IV (2005 - 2011)

- Deeper RBA, Women and Girls
- Encounter Challenges & Maintained Relevance for PLIP
- CSPIII and Interim CSP
- Four CCDPs Phased in and three out
- Supporters - Italy, UK, Spain & Greece



Photo: Pettrik Wigger / ActionAid

INTERVENTIONS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Poor access to basic primary education, high drop-out and repetition rates, very low participation of girls, poor quality of education, and poorly equipped school facilities have been the focus of AAE's intervention in education during the last 25 years. AAE has also been working to improve adult illiteracy.

In efforts to help overcome these problems, AAE introduced the Alternative Basic Primary Education approach known as ACCESS (Appropriate Cost Effective Centres of Education within the School System) for school age children missing education.

ACCESS is indeed AAE's most important contribution to the education sector. AAE has also carried out youth and adult literacy and empowerment programmes like REFLECT (Regenerated Freirian Literacy and Empowerment through Community Techniques) and Functional Adult Literacy programme.

AAE's educational work has also included helping formal schools and ACCESS centres to link up, which in turn improved the accessibility and quality of education in intervention areas.

AAE works in partnership with governmental and non-governmental organisations in the majority of regions in the country. These include; Addis Ababa, Afar, Amhara, Benshangul-Gumuz, Diredawa, Oromiya, SNNPS, Tigray and recently in Gambella. As a result, ActionAid's ACCESS work has been replicated by both governmental and non-governmental institutions throughout the country. These alternative basic education programmes are now being run by communities and local governments themselves, with limited technical and financial support from ActionAid.

Over 500,000 out-of-school children were able to access basic primary education through AAE and its partners. Besides, ACCESS's replication by government and NGOs brought education within reach of thousands of children living in poverty in remote villages. The approach has also successfully promoted participation of girls in basic primary education. In most of the AAE-supported schools, girls currently account for 47% of students.

ACCESS projects initiated in three woredas of North Shoa and six woredas of Jimma Administrative Zones during 2000-2004 are good examples of the success of the programme. These were among the first projects launched to further strengthen ActionAid's relations with the Government. A total of 5,145 out-of-school children in North Shoa and other 26,228 children in Jimma accessed primary education as a result. This led local, zonal and regional governments to adopt and replicate ActionAid's ACCESS model. Subsequently, 92 ACCESS centres were set up by AAE 12 years ago, including 20 in North Shoa Zone and 72 in Jimma Zone, which were upgraded to formal primary schools and now fully managed by the Government and respective communities. At these centres government bodies started allocating budget, and assigning trained teachers. ACCESS's contribution to providing basic education to children in marginalised ethnic minorities was appreciated by government and other organisations. ACCESS also taught ActionAid that 'education advocacy becomes effective when it is directly linked to programme work and field practices'.

ActionAid mainly focuses on implementing the principles of promoting qualities in schools in the coming years. These principles are meant to secure free, compulsory, and quality public education for all. The principles also revolve around promoting a school atmosphere with adequate infrastructure, relevant education, safe and non-violent environment, education quality and trained teachers in schools.

In order to sustainably strengthen public education, ActionAid strives to balance access to and quality of education. It will support government and local communities to initiate, own and maintain educational projects. Early Childhood Care and Education will be another focus for ActionAid, in order to increase the national average gross enrolment rate from the current 26%.



Photo: Moly/ ActionAid

Dr. Haile Gebre Silassie partners with ActionAid to mobilise Italians against hunger and poverty(2010)

PARTNERSHIP EXPERIENCES AND NETWORKING

Adherence to principles of mutual respect and equality is important in ActionAid's partnerships. ActionAid looks to adhere to these principles by being transparent in decisions concerning partners. Creating a collective voice with partners is critical in balancing power and influence in the partnership. AAE expects partners to honour agreed principles relating to organisational values, systems, strategies, and communication.

ActionAid's perspective on partnership derives from its understanding of poverty. Ending poverty depends on changing unequal power relations at every level, ranging from household to global institutions. Relations of power exists between boys and girls, women and men, husband and wife, rich and poor, dominant and marginalised communities, rich and poor countries, along with states and multinational companies. The causes of local poverty can be partly attributed to the decisions and choices made by others beyond the locality or national boundary. Hence, our interventions at local level alone would not bring about change, unless we collaborate with others outside our locality.

Given the multifaceted and complex nature of poverty, ActionAid strongly believes that poverty eradication is possible only in solidarity and partnership with CSOs, progressive states and markets at local, national and global levels. Structural and lasting change happens when people and organisations work in partnerships and stand together. Therefore, the commitment to 'end poverty together' underlines ActionAid's unique position on working in partnership.

AAE depended on partnerships even during its early days focusing on micro-level work in Dalocha (1989–1993). Working in partnerships as a development approach was included in the first Country Strategy (1994-1998). ActionAid's partnerships kept on growing, while AAE's concept of poverty and the role of partnership also grew and developed.

Among the major results of AAE's partnership engagements over the last 25 years have been the emergence and development of local NGOs and CBOs. AAE supported the launch of local NGOs like WISE and ProPride, forums and networks of pro-poor agencies like PANE, National HIV/AIDS Forums, and Women living with HIV national forum.

AAE in partnership with people living in poverty was a pioneer in forming and strengthening the capacity of CBOs and CBIs. Women managed Water Development Associations have already benefitted over 210,500 people in Amhara, Oromiya & SNNPRS. Self-help CBIs, SACCO Unions, tsetse control and protection cooperatives/associations are good examples of ActionAid's work with partner organisations.

AAE regards partner organisations as great instruments to disseminate, scale up and institutionalise innovative and pro-poor development approaches. Successes include ACCESS & REFLECT in the education sector, CBAP & STAR in the health sector, women & child protection units & legal aid services in the governance and justice area.

AAE's partners are varied and many, they include national, local, and international NGOs, CBOs and self-help groups at grassroots level, civil society groups, organisations of people living in poverty, women's groups, along with coalitions and social movements working at local, national and international level. District, regional and national government organisations together with research and academic institutions are also partners of AAE. AAE only collaborates with partners that have values, goals, and approaches that are compatible with ActionAid's own to ensure sustainable change and poverty reduction.

In broader terms, AAE's partnerships are categorised as respectively short and long term. AAE's short-term partners number over 300. Of the 28 long-term programmes (ranging from 10 to 13 years), which AAE has implemented over the past 25 years, 14 were run by 10 long-term partners. The remaining 14 long term programmes were implemented by ActionAid in partnership with local communities, who also shape the priorities, strategies, plans and budgets of the programmes.

Mutual capacity building is a key element in ActionAid's partnerships. ActionAid supports partners so as to make them stronger, healthier and sustainable organisations. Based on the outcomes of the partnership appraisal, including a comprehensive capacity building needs assessment, capacity development activities are part of the work plan in order to support the effectiveness and sustainability of the work carried out by ActionAid's partners.

Major emphasis is given to developing the capacity of peoples' organisations to effectively deal with poverty and its causes, to initiate transformative processes to challenge and change norms, beliefs and practices that perpetuate poverty. AAE through its partnership and capacity building strategies has created opportunities for 2.5 million people living in poverty to be organised and exercise their empowerment to bring positive changes to their lives.

AAE's partnerships with regional government bodies are aimed at influencing and improving public sector responsiveness to the demands of quality basic services by people living in poverty.

AAE's current strategy (2012-2017) recognises partnerships as a key approach and necessary strategy that cuts across both geography and levels. In this manner, AAE's work is facilitated and implemented by many different actors; NGOs, networks, think-tanks, unions and progressive companies alike. The strategy opens the possibility of engaging constructively with both governments and the private sector. Our engagements will still be guided by the overall principles of empowering people living in poverty.



Current Board members of DAWWDA



Photo: Letekidan Berhane/ActionAid

ActionAid project becomes a model partner

As an organisation championing grassroots women leadership, the Dalocha Women Water Development Association (DAWWDA) grew from being a project to become a development partner for ActionAid. The 18 year-old DAWWDA was founded in Dalocha woreda, Silte Zone of the Southern State, 180 km south of the capital. This was the very first area where AAE started working a quarter of a century ago.

DAWWDA has now supplied clean water to the Dalocha population of over 127,000 for 18 years. The clean water kiosks are built at 0.5 km radius

saving women and girls between six to eight hours travel (per day in search of water from unprotected sources. The health, economic and social development impacts of this project are immense. The project currently employs about 100 permanent and contract workers in its 48 water kiosks.

DAWWDA's sustained and effective leadership by women has been the model for ActionAid to share and scale up nationwide. DAWWDA took illiterate Dalocha women with little public experience, and gave them the tools and confidence to participate and represent the local community. As a centre showcasing women's capacity to manage and

lead, this rural organisation challenged the age-old negative attitudes against women's public roles and leadership ability. This in turn brought about the election of women to social and political positions at various levels. ActionAid's support to Dalocha women and their communities included awareness raising, skills training and financial support.

"Dalocha women never attended public meetings before AAE's intervention, as it was not in our culture. Besides, they had no time for such things, as they had little time left after doing house chores and spending hours in search of water," said Shashe Abdurahman, a Dallocha resident.



Photo: ActionAid

Over 40 Greek child supporters visited Azernet CCDP and got first hand impression of AAE's works (2012)

DAWWDA project's strong aspects including its being innovative, sustainable, cost effective and scalable. These and its networking abilities won ActionAid the CSOs national Good Practice Day Award in 2013.

Dalocha is now home to a generation of women grassroots community leaders. ActionAid's partnership with DAWWDA is used as a model for its women focused development work. ActionAid has started 10 similar women-led water development associations in different parts of the country. Leaders of these projects went on visits to DAWWDA to learn and share their experiences. Hence, new water development associations in various parts of the country are examples to learn from and their women leadership models to replicate. A total of over 210,000 people have already benefitted from water projects that AAE has set up in the country.

DAWWDA has already developed a reputation at home and internationally. It has been attracting visitors including researchers and development agencies. The project has also been supported by local, regional and the national Government. The project is showcased as a model by the national water works authority.

WISE emerges as ActionAid's best partner

Women's development is at the core of all of ActionAid's work. Hence, the best partner AAE could want is an organisation that is a strong promoter of women's development. Women in Self Employment (WISE) is such an organisation.

WISE has influenced and changed the social and economic conditions of nearly 25,000 women and girls living in Addis Ababa's slums over the last 16 years. The women and girls are supported through 55 savings and credit cooperatives that were set up by women and supported by WISE.

WISE's success is due to its unique interventions including training on entrepreneurship, business, health, leadership and management and self-development, all of which is designed in such a way that illiterate women easily can understand and set up their own small businesses. ActionAid provided considerable financial support and technical expertise to founder, Tisge Haile a former staff member, to get the organisation set up and off the ground. WISE's close partnership that complemented the maturity of AAE's women development works is also notable.



Photo: WISE

WISE has a three-fold programme strategy of institution development, enterprise development, and learning and strategic partnerships. Accordingly, its work areas include building capacity of women micro and small entrepreneurs by creating access to both financial and non-financial services. WISE envisions 'a nation where women are socially and economically empowered, gender equality is attained and poverty significantly reduced.'

Recently, WISE was named an African Centre of Excellence in women's leadership by the Institute of International Education. In 2013, It was also awarded the best urban anti-women poverty worker by CCRDA at the national CSOs' Good Practice Day.

WISE's training has benefitted over 16,000 women in 104 other like-minded NGOs, government and private organisations working throughout the country. This has led to the replication of WISE's women self-employment and other development programmes in 83 organisations. AAE partners with WISE to facilitate the same training for women it works with.

As an AAE-supported organisation helping women in chronic poverty develop self-confidence and courage to change gender relations at their respective homes, WISE is a strong example of AAE-partner best practice. With the situation of many individuals and families changed from destitution to a decent living, WISE beneficiaries are AAE's show case of how empowering women is key to combating poverty.

WISE has a result-based literacy and numeracy programme aimed at improving the economic and social participation of women. Members are taught how to read and write in their home any time that is convenient for them.

WISE works in 44 woredas of six sub-cities in Addis Ababa: Kirkos, Nefas-Silk-lafto, Akaki-Kaliti, Kolfe-Keranyo, Addis Ketema and Gulele. Most of the residents in these woredas are poor and of low socio-economic status.

ActionAid has contributed to the set up and development of many CSOs during the last 25 years. Many have gone onto to partner with AAE, working alongside ActionAid to fight poverty.



Photo: Letekidan Berhane/ActionAid

"Positive Lives" photograph exhibition (June -July 2004) was visited by about 50,000 people including higher government officials, international community, youth and other community members

AAE IN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE AND RESPONDING TO HIV/AIDS

Improving community health has been one of AAE's primary objectives, since its arrival in Ethiopia. From the onset, it conducted training to frontline health professionals including community health agents and traditional birth attendants. Health education, maternal and child health service, family planning and immunisation were among the first programme components in Dalocha and Koiysha. AAE also built health posts, health centres and model pit latrines. Providing clean water to people living in poverty has been one of its health strategies, as well as alleviating women's work load and thereby freeing up time to challenge power imbalances.

AAE was quick to recognise HIV/AIDS as a pandemic threatening national development and therefore made it a priority issue in 1994. In 1995, AAE began working with a number of local non-government organisations working on HIV/AIDS. AAE's second Country Strategic Plan in 1999 clearly set out the organisation's commitment to expand its programme coverage, introduce rights-based work to better address HIV/AIDS issues and influence policies towards curbing the effects. The organisation worked with women, men, boys and girls living with HIV/AIDS as well as relevant organisations strengthening national efforts to address rights and needs of AIDS infected and affected people.

AAE also recognised the collective role of civil society organisations in addressing poverty in general and HIV/AIDS in particular. Consequently, it contributed towards the set up and strengthening of networks like Network of Ethiopian Women Association (NEWA), Network of Networks of HIV Positives in Ethiopia (NEP+), National Network of Positive Women Ethiopians (NNPWE) and many others.

The anti-HIV/AIDS efforts of AAE sought to eliminate the stigma and discrimination. It backed the emergence of collective voices through associations and networks of People Living with HIV/AIDS. This gave HIV positive persons and affected people the power and access to decision-making positions. AAE's position in making universal Access for Anti-retroviral Therapy (ART) available to those who need it is among its most notable policy and advocacy successes.

In addition, AAE worked with the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Organisation (HAPCO) in strengthening the national HIV response through massive capacity building of regional offices, strategic planning and set up of a national partnership forum that brought together the Government, NGOs, faith-based organisations, the private sector, donors and the media. AAE has been working with 55 organisations including federal and regional HAPCO, NGOs, FBOs, PLHIV associations and networks, CBOs, and CSOs. The stigma and discrimination campaign launched with the Addis Ababa Youth Association that mobilised 1000 Addis Ababa university students was a success, which contributed to reduction of stigma and discrimination.



Photo: Letekidan Berhane/ActionAid



Photo: Letekidan Berhane / ActionAid

Right to left, former president of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ato Girma w/Giworgis opening the positive lives exhibition, ex-president Negaso Gidada & other visitors (June 2004)

From small associations to vast networks

AAE is certain that the role of collective voices and efforts is the best strategy against HIV/AIDS. AAE was a pioneer in setting up networks of people living with HIV/AIDS. A case in point is Network of Networks of HIV Positives in Ethiopia (NEP+). This umbrella organisation made it possible for people living with HIV/AIDS to collectively raise their voices to be heard. AAE has provided technical and financial support to setting up 20 associations and then worked to provide further support including leadership, networking, and conflict resolution trainings.

The Network of Networks of HIV Positives in Ethiopia is now an umbrella organisation of 11 regional networks, three national associations, encompassing more than 400 PLHIV associations throughout the country. More than 100,000 individual PLHIV members and 35,000 Orphaned Vulnerable Children are represented by these organisations. The Network of Networks of HIV Positives in Ethiopia has won a grant of 25 million USD from Global Fund Round 7, and AAE's contribution was instrumental in securing the funding.

NEP+ Executive Director, Ato Dereje Alemayehu, says of ActionAid's role: "To us, AAE is like a parent. It is mainly because of AAE's technical and financial support that we have been able to come together like this, voice our concerns and work in solidarity. It is in this framework that we are now able to develop a strong passion for collective development. AAE has, undeniably, been a key player in this."

Ato Dereje, continues: "Currently, NEP+ is working with more than 10 international partners and donors and is implementing large grants from Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis. It mainly works in the areas of HIV/AIDS impact mitigation through non-clinical care and supports programmes such as food and nutritional support, income generating activities, community-based palliative care, adherence and treatment literacy, case management, and social research aimed at generating strategic information, as well as capacity building programmes. All of which promote greater involvement of the PLHIV principle. AAE's contribution towards initiating and nurturing this network has been tremendous."

National Network of Positive Women Ethiopians (NNPWE)

AAE supported the launch of Tilla, the first association of women living with the HIV virus over 14 years ago. Tilla Association, formed in Awassa in 2000, inspired positive women in various parts of the country to start similar associations. It is now one of the 25 members of the National Network of Positives Women Ethiopians (NNPWE).

The founder of Tilla, Berhane Kelkay, stood out as a key figure in setting up NNPWE in 2007. Berhane was one of the first women who made her HIV positive status public. Berhane, an AIDS widow who led AIDS awareness campaigns, says that her exceptionally bold actions were made possible by ActionAid's constant support and encouragement. Before setting up the very first organisation serving and representing women living with HIV/AIDS, Berhane had quietly and out of sight served and worked with people affected by AIDS.

Berhane led Tilla Association, which started in early 2000 with the membership of five HIV positive women to a huge organisation today that stands as a model for anti-AIDS initiatives. Berhane, together with those first five members, boldly confronted AIDS stigma and discrimination that prevailed at that time. AAE's financial and technical support was the reason behind Tilla's launch, growth and influencing power. Since its establishment, Tilla has played a key role in creating awareness of the transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS through information, education, and behaviour change communication, and it has provided care, support, and counselling to people living with HIV/AIDS along with supported AIDS orphans and vulnerable children.

In 2007, AAE took a step further and made a significant contribution towards launching a network of associations of women living with the virus with the Tilla Association founder Berhane. Thus with technical and financial support from AAE, the National Network of Positives Women Ethiopians came into being. A number of donors approached NNPWE and worked in partnership with AAE, and AAE has been a leading partner ever since. At present, NNPWE is working with different state and non-state actors to build capacity within new associations of women living with HIV and to empower women to assume leadership positions. Moreover, it conducts national level advocacy workshops aimed at formulating new and improving existing HIV/AIDS policy, legislation and programmes. NNPWE is currently a network of 25 associations with a total of 7269 members. One of the national coordinators, Mekdes Yilma, commented on AAE's contribution to the National Network of Positives Women Ethiopians (NNPWE).

Mekdes said: "We are seeing improvements in the quantity and quality of proposals submitted to different development agencies, as well as timely reporting to donors. This has made it possible for us and our constituencies to obtain funding from different donors. We are grateful to AAE, who took the initiative and supported us technically and financially to form our National Network of Positive Women Ethiopians, and subsequently helped us to develop our capacity."

AAE is very pleased to see NEP+ and NNPWE grow and witness their contribution to the HIV/AIDS national response. These are some of ActionAid Ethiopia's biggest achievements in its 25 years history.



Photo: Letekidan Berhane/ActionAid

Dawro - Waka Social integration day organised by AAE (April 2004)

AAE AS AGENT OF SOCIAL RECONCILIATION

ActionAid identifies itself with people living in poverty, particularly those who are discriminated against based on their identity, gender, occupation, age, clan, religion etc. This is why minority groups in the Kafa Zone consider ActionAid as their own organisation. Menjas in this area suffered the worst form of exclusion for generations. To ActionAid, discrimination is one of the root causes of injustice and poverty. It therefore used to fight the social discrimination by building capacity within the marginalised communities in order for them to demand their rights. The ultimate objective was ensuring an inclusive society where everybody leads a dignified life.

The Menja community hardly used any social services including education and health facilities. Marriage to people out of their community was a taboo. They were not allowed to enter the houses of members of the majority groups. They were not even supposed to look into the faces of people other than fellow Menjas, as they were considered to have evil eyes. Participating in local Idirs, debo and other local welfare institutions, sharing dining utensils, sitting at tables with majority groups during weddings, funerals, holidays and other festivals was unthinkable. Utensils used by Menjas and potters were thrown away. Members of the Menja community had little access to any public spaces or services, such as local bars, restaurants, schools, water points, flour mills, and even excluded from local elections. Religious institutions, particularly churches and traditional ritual ceremonies also excluded Menja members.

Prices of goods sold by Menjas were not solely determined by the market, but by local people who took advantage of the Menja's low negotiating power.

These discriminatory practices in parts of the Southern State excluded Menjas from mainstream development for generations. ActionAid befriended and supported the Kafa social minority of Menja in the Dawro and Keffa zones and potters in Yem special woreda of the SNNPRS. Menjas constitute roughly 10-12% of the population in these areas.

Oral legends and surveys confirm that discrimination against Menjas is attributed to mistaken attitudes and behaviours of others. These attitudes and behaviours have their roots in religious bias, legends, socio-economic status and feudalistic mentality.

ActionAid implemented a number of social integration projects in many areas including Keffa, Dawro, Gamogofa zones and Yem special woreda in the SNNPRS for two decades until 2011. Over this period AAE made use of multiple approaches and actors/agents to address the situation and mitigate the problem in the communities. ActionAid began by conducting rapid survey and census on the reality of the discriminatory beliefs and practices. Then it raised awareness of all the social groups in the intervention areas.

AAE also worked with activists to promote social integration among minority and majority groups. Local governments at all levels, members of the minority and majority groups, service providers, civil servants and students were part of the campaign. Among the advocacy groups were also youth scouts, Menja network groups, school clubs and watch groups. Similarly local level government offices including woreda administrators, religious and traditional leaders, the judiciary and police as well as prominent influential community members participated in numerous advocacy and sensitisation workshops and trainings. Consequently, social marginalisation is significantly reduced in the areas where AAE intervened. The initiatives helped government bodies to develop a common understanding and awareness of the legal and constitutional entitlements of citizens, including the protection of human rights of minority people.

The programme created various advocacy groups including non-Menjas, who worked for social integration of Menjas and potters. The use of local services, representation in political and administration roles and recognition for Menjas were transformed, particularly in the areas of Kutu, Kutashora, Butahora, Wacha, Woshi, Shishinda and Ufa in Kafa Zone.

Religious inclusion, political and administrative representation and participation, inter-personal relations like inter-marriage, inclusive utilisation of public facilities and services have become common place in these areas. These trends are noted as very encouraging by Menjas and other concerned groups. AAE believes that a lot has to be done jointly by various actors to completely change this ancient social intolerance and for Menjas to live a life without discrimination.

Menjas liberated from social exclusion: the case of Alemu

My name is Alemu Wolede Gebriel. I am 26 years old. I have two sons and two daughters. When my father first sent me to school, I took a vacant seat in the middle of the classroom beside another student. Everything was okay for the time being. The next day, the child, I sat next to, changed his seat. I didn't know what was going on that day. Gradually, however, I recognised that nobody in the class wanted to interact with me. Nobody wanted to share group assignments with me. Though the desk can accommodate three persons, I sat alone and I was subjected to various forms of harassment for being Menja. The students were from the majority social groups and shared the value of their parents. I was so irritated and eventually dropped out of the school. However, my father insisted that I continue my education tolerating all of the harassments. Therefore, I went back to school. I endured all the hardships and completed my primary school sitting alone. To pursue the junior level education, I had to go to Shishinda town, a half-hour walk from home. My father sought for a house to rent in the town but no one was willing to rent room to a Menja. On the other hand, no Menja lived in the town to help me with this. Eventually, I was subjected to the worst form of discrimination as I couldn't get services from tea houses, restaurants, hotels and public services in Shishinda town. I, therefore, had to drop out and I became a farmer. The effects of discrimination continued as I was not in a position to bargain or set the prices for my agricultural products as a Menja.

Following the intervention of AAE, many changes took place. Most of the service providers including civil servants working in local clinics, schools, hotels, restaurants, and butcheries started serving Menjas without any discrimination. Churches also agreed to accept us into their local congregation even in Shishinda. I am now able to set the price of my products in the market and I obtain far better price and income. I joined a group of Menjas, organised with the help of ActionAid, to request the municipality of Shishinda town to obtain plots of land to build our own houses and settle there. Our request was accepted and 13 Menjas including myself obtained land in town for free. Two of us have already started construction. Now I am confident that I can use the house for starting businesses like selling tea and coffee, starting a butchery, or anything like that. Most importantly, I am confident that my children will get a better opportunity to pursue their education in Shishinda town.



Photo: Letekidan Berhane/ActionAid

A girl making a difference

Birtukan Ayele is the first college graduate from her Menja community in one of the Dawro remote villages in southern Region. Members of her social group, hunters and fuel wood sellers, have traditionally been hated and shunned, and regarded as unclean and inferior by majority groups of the Dawro community.

Going to school was unthinkable for Menja children until ActionAid introduced an ACCESS centre making education accessible – the lack of education being one of the root causes of poverty in the area. This situation was especially bad for Menja girls and women, who were being discriminated against, not only by the majority groups, but also by men from their own community.

Birtukan was among the first to join the ACCESS centre. ActionAid supported and encouraged her to stand firm against exclusion and supported her through her school years. Birtukan graduated from a health training institute in Butajira about a decade ago. “ActionAid and the state government wanted



Photo: ActionAid

me to be a role model for my people and ActionAid covered all my education expenses,” she said.

Following her graduation, Birtukan was placed in a health post in her locality. She was also promoted to head of another health post in the area. Her education transformed the lives of members of her social group; people in the village now send their children to school. Many testify that they no longer consider themselves as inferior to the other social groups. Her status and ActionAid’s multi-layered efforts to promote integration changed the attitude of the majority groups, who are now socialising and interacting with minority groups.

Birtukan’s role as a trail-blazer, for Menja women in particular, has won her national and international recognition. The Network of Women’s Associations and the Addis Ababa Women’s Association as well as the World Food programme devoted space to her in their 2006 publications, sharing her story of success. Birtukan’s story was also widely covered by the news papers.



Photo : ActionAid



AAE AND CHILDREN

For ActionAid, unequal power relation means children have less access to their basic needs. Naturally, children are by nature living under the control of their parents and community. As such, they are vulnerable to various forms of physical, emotional or sexual harm. In times of crises, children are the most vulnerable.

ActionAid's distinct development approach aims to empower all members of a community including children. We took certain actions based on the following considerations:

- We provided school uniforms and equipment to sponsored children and direct assistance to their families at the time when our approach was charity and welfare; however, we later realised that our focus on individual children was random and unjust.
- We subsequently moved beyond individual children and schools as the main focus of our work; we put additional emphasis on meeting the basic needs of communities and families, which children are part of.
- Currently, we are adopting strategies committed to explicitly demonstrate changes in the lives of children and youth as a result of our programme. To this effect, we included mainstreaming of the views and needs of children and youth as a strategy.

In the last 25 years, AAE has contributed towards changing the lives of children in the country in general and in the programme areas in particular. To give a brief insight of our programming in relation to children:

- Saving the lives of children and their families during emergencies in some programme areas and national level engagements

- Initiating child focused long-term development areas in partnership with ANNPCAN-Ethiopia in Griar Jarso woreda whereby increased protection of children against abuse, neglect, and exploitation is guaranteed
- Developing special methodology called Children's Reflection and Empowerment for Social Transformation.

Along with this programme, AAE works with children and appoints children as ambassadors to mobilise funds for programmes.

Child sponsorship is ActionAid's core fundraising mechanism to fund development programmes in the areas where we work. This little but regular contribution from overseas individual sponsors funds diversified and long-term development programmes to tackle the root causes of poverty. In 1989, when ActionAid started its operation in Dalocha, there were about 5,000 sponsors from Italy and the UK. By 2014, the number of sponsors had grown to 20,616 and sponsors are now from Italy, UK, Spain, Greece, and Brazil. The number of intervention districts also grew to 28. Similarly income from sponsorship increased from Birr1.8 million in 1989 to Birr 43,497,000.00 in 2014.

The approach of ActionAid's child sponsorship focuses on community development and the money that comes from individual sponsors goes to development works that benefit the whole community and not directly the sponsored child or his/her family.

The story of Temam Argaw from Dalocha district is one example of how ActionAid is creating opportunities for children to have a better future. Temam Argaw, 26, pondered the question about his first school trying to recollect



Photo : Mekdes TekleMichael/ActionAid

his early childhood experiences of being a sponsored child. Temam said he joined school before he was three. “This was because parents including my father were very excited to have the first school around and they sent all their children to attend class,” he said.

Temam was one of the first ACCESS students in his village of Gole Cheba, 15 kms east of Dalocha town. “I never forget the time when a certain AAE staff member was driving a motor bicycle, and as a result I also developed an interest to drive. Children from my village including myself used to draw pictures and send to our sponsors. Frequently, I drew colourful flowers, chicken and houses with crayons and other drawing materials. It was a very exciting experience for all of us to draw with crayons, which were not normally available where we lived. The drawing was also a source of joy for me and for the children of Dalocha, because we used to draw things that we wish we owned like houses built with iron sheets”, said Temam with a smiling face.



Photo : Dawit Zewdu/ ActionAid

Temam believes that, if it hadn't been for ACCESS centre in his area, he would have missed out on education throughout his life. He remembered and sang a song that goes like this: “Parents, please send me to school; if you don't, you are keeping me in darkness during this era of enlightenment.” He sang it and said that it motivated both students and parents at that time.

Completing his education at the ACCESS centre, Temam joined the Greezla Torera primary school that was upgraded by AAE. He also attended the Dalocha secondary and preparatory school built by AAE.

Temam holds a BA degree in accounting from the University of Axum in the northern Regional State, Tigray. After graduation, he was employed as Finance Inspection Auditor with the Bureau of Trade and Industry Development in Dalocha. He is now the Vice Administrator of the District.

Apart from being a reliable source of funding, child sponsorship is powerful to bring people across the world together and an effective way to end poverty.



Photo: Letekidan Berhane /ActionAid

It connects individuals (child sponsors) providing financial support with children and communities in developing countries. Child sponsors of ActionAid mainly come from the middle class, who have the commitment to support communities and children to live a better life. In return, sponsors receive child messages, drawings and photo updates from the child they sponsor, reports showing how the lives of community members are better following ActionAid's involvement. The reports and letters also create an emotional and rational attachment between sponsors and the child/community they support. The communications enable sponsors to understand how their donations have been spent in the community, the nature of the programme conducted and what impact and progress have been made over the years.

Gilian Pope, from UK, has been a child sponsor since 1973. She says, "Child sponsorship isn't just giving money. It's much more personal. You really get to see the difference that you make. And I have become emotionally attached to the children I've sponsored over the years."

ActionAid Ethiopia is thankful beyond words for the commitment and generosity of these sponsors, who have made possible the changes in the lives of communities so far away. Amidst the current financial crisis across the world that has left many jobless, many sponsors have kept their promise and continued supporting communities in Ethiopia.

Among supporter countries of ActionAid, India and Brazil, the emerging economies in the world, used to be supported by sponsors from other developed countries. However, recently ActionAid started to recruit child sponsors in these countries to support development programmes, not only in their own countries, but also beyond their borders reaching Africa and Asia. Since 2013, Brazilian child sponsors have started to support ActionAid Ethiopia's development programmes in Seba Boru wereda. This is a challenge for us Ethiopians. We better start asking ourselves, 'Are we supporting each other, whilst foreigners are showing commitment to people they do not even know? Does it occur to any one of us to sponsor a child or in any way be part of the fight against poverty in Ethiopia?'



Photo: Pettrik Wigger/ActionAid

Sofiya Adem a woman who transformed family through AAE's food security interventions: Dollocha

FOOD SECURITY APPROACHES, ACHIEVEMENTS

ActionAid has been working on food security programmes in all but the Somali and Harari Regional States. Over the past 25 years, 28 community centred development programmes were established to implement food security programmes in fragile and remote areas of the country. In terms of the overall geographic coverage, AAE's food security programmes have reached over 28 woredas in Amhara, Oromiya, Tigray, Gambella, Benishangul, Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional States, and Addis Ababa.

AAE has evolved through different stages in terms of approaches in delivering food security programmes. It changed from provision of agricultural services and training in the early 1990's to organising communities, and focusing on empowerment, networking, institutional building, awareness raising, changing attitudes, and promoting climate resilient sustainable agricultural practices.

Previously, development strategies of food security were geared towards attaining self-sufficiency in food, income generation, and continuous supply of foodstuff and fulfilment of basic nutritional requirements. The strategies relating to these interventions could be categorised into four major groups of targeting people living in poverty; institutional capacity building; improving access to credit for the poorest households to increase production, productivity (particularly livestock) and income; and from 2005 onwards the programme focus was on empowerment, as well as alliance building and networking.

AAE's scope of strategy and approaches to food security are determined by learning from experience, and identifying root causes of food insecurity and changing climatic trends. Based on the amount and predictability of rainfall, ActionAid can then design appropriate sustainable agricultural practices that are resilient to climatic shocks and stress. Consequently, AAE's current food security programme focuses on Climate Resilient Sustainable Agricultural Practices (CRSA). This practice incorporates gender equality, soil conservation, sustainable water management, agro biodiversity preservation,

livelihood diversification, processing and market access and value chain, and supporting farmers' organizations. Integration of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures in the regular livelihood actions is a key feature of CRSA.

ActionAid Ethiopia has managed to directly reach over 1.5 million people (900,000 women) with food security and emergency response programmes since 1989.

Apart from the direct improvement of food security and livelihood of people living in poverty, AAE has contributed in the following areas:

- Promoting community-based tsetsefly control in Yem Speical Woreda and Dawro Zone where the approach was scaled up by the zonal office of agriculture
- Initiating and supporting the establishment of regional and national level food security networks playing a pivotal role in influencing decision makers on issues such as access and control of women to land, improving the targeting of productive safety net programmes, and extension services
- Managing and organising events for sharing experiences and best practices of various stakeholders at regional levels through the networks

In its current strategic plan, AAE envisages 211,000 vulnerable people experiencing changes with respect to their food security status and economic wellbeing. The five -year Strategic Plan (2012–2017) clearly sets out that:

'By 2017, food security of at least 61,000 smallholder farmers living in poverty will be improved through sustainable agricultural development. ActionAid will also assist over 150,000 people affected by disasters, restore their livelihoods and enhance their preparedness'.



Photo: ActionAid

Building climate resilient sustainable agriculture in Doba

ActionAid with its partner Enhanced Rural Self Help Association(ERSHA) started an integrated rural development programme in Doba Woreda of West Hararghe Zone, Oromiya Regional State, in 2002.

The Doba community lives in the highlands and were exposed to drought and soil degradation that resulted in food insecurity and widespread poverty. The average annual income of a Doba community member ranged from Birr 939.00 to 1230.00.

Though the community is food insecure in general, women and children were the most affected. Since 2002, AAE and ERSHA employed integrated climate resilient sustainable agriculture interventions that reached over 20,000 people living in poverty and ensured food security at household and community levels. The key achievements are in the areas of small scale irrigation, improved goat rearing and veterinary services, saving and credit

cooperatives, multi-purpose cooperatives, disaster early warning system and disaster preparedness.

All these interventions have brought about significant changes in the livelihood of people living in poverty, and women in particular, by improving access and availability of food. The integrated climate resilience and sustainable agriculture programmes have supported communities to achieve food security at household level, and the average income of households, that ActionAid worked with, have increased. Moreover, the capital available in the cooperatives increased significantly. The changes made to the lives of poor people, and women and children in particular, testify to the success of the programme.

The case of the Doba community illustrates well how integrated food security programmes have changed people's livelihoods. Many similar successes have been recorded in the 28 CCDPs, where AAE worked during the last 25 years.

‘Poverty is vanished from my household’

Hamelmal Girma, 27, is a woman farmer in the village of Gende Sheka, Doba woreda in Oromiya State. She got married to Maruf Abdela in her early 20s. Having no job, she had a hard time in making ends meet and supporting her family. In an effort to change her life, she joined ACCESS as a facilitator with a monthly income of 400.00 Birr. After three years of service, the centre was handed over to the district education office and she was again without a job. However, in 2008 she joined the Biftu Keraru saving and credit cooperative together with her husband, which at the time had 27 members. This was to be the turning point for Hamelmal.

Hamelmal received a loan of Birr 500.00 from the cooperative after being a member for three months. With the money she launched a goat and sheep fattening business, where she also traded in livestock. A year later, she was able to repay the initial loan and secured another 2,000 Birr loan together with her husband (1000.00 Birr each). She was now able to extend her business to bull fattening, donkey trading, and vegetable production. Together they earned an income of 51,000.00 Birr within one year and this motivated them to continue with the business. Hamelmal said, ‘our economic capacity has increased to the level of buying and selling over 30 animals from and to other traders, who come from far-away places like Wolega and Gonder. Our current assets are now valued at more than 100,000 Birr and poverty has been banished from our household.’ The achievements of Hamelmal were a blessing not only for her own family, but for others too. Five students are now working with Hamalmal and they get paid 150-250 Birr per animal when taking her animals to the market.

Moreover, the community has recognised Hamelmal as a role model and recently the cooperative elected her as chairperson. She has helped members to grow from 87 to 250 and the capital from 4,350 to 300,000 Birr. Hamelmal wants her cooperate to become involved grain trading and constructing houses in nearby woreda towns.

‘From poverty to prosperity’

Bireda Awel and his wife Beyida Hassen live in the Dalocha district of Dube Godobamo kebele and were among the beneficiaries of an ActionAid project in the woreda. They have five children (3 boys and 2 girls). Bireda recounts how he became a self-sufficient and model farmer with the support of AAE.

‘16 years ago, I was among the many poor farmers of this village. In 1998, I became a member of the poor farmers’ saving and credit group of the village organised by AAE. I joined the group replacing my father, who was a founding member of the group. I was given training in how to save money from my meagre resources and work hand in hand with my wife. We now have access to credit services that we use for purchasing seeds and fertiliser. We also trade on a small scale. ActionAid has been providing us with cash credit, training on growing various crops including vegetables, and fruit gardening, as well as using seeds and farm tools, soil and water conservation, primary health care, and educating children. I was very interested in the vegetable and fruit production and selling, because I thought that I would succeed in this area and be able to manage my household better. Explaining further, he said, ‘We spent the first two years getting training, participating in exchange visits and growing vegetable and fruit seedlings. In the following eight years (1996-2003), our crop production, income level and working culture really improved. At the beginning, we produced enough crops for my family and received an additional income from the sale of vegetables and fruit. It was then that we decided to buy oxen and expand our vegetable, fruit and cereal production.

My wife Beyida and my children looked after the vegetables and fruit, while I worked on the cereal crop production.’

Bireda further explained, ‘We have half a hectare of land allotted to vegetables and fruit, while two hectares are used for cereal production. Every year, we produce about 75 quintals (50 qt cereals and 25 qt vegetables and root crops).



Photo : ActionAid

Family members are fully employed in the farming and all family members jointly plan, own and control the resources including the income. Moreover, our family has the knowledge and necessary skills to produce different crops, rearing animals and selling the produce. Our annual income has reached over 40,000 Birr and raised the overall capital to over 100,000.00 Birr. I am recognised by the other villagers as hard working, and our family is seen as a role model. Our garden and cereal crop fields are regularly visited by the villagers along with farmers coming from other areas. I have become great at motivating others to produce vegetables, root crops, fruits and cereals. Four households are now close to lifting themselves out of poverty.

I was selected as a model farmer and awarded by the Government at the district, zone, regional and national levels. My wife and I are actively participating in kebele administration on issues affecting our lives. I have been elected as an executive member of the kebele council, and I am also the head of information and communication affairs. I am planning to expand the size of the garden and increase vegetable and fruit production. I will also invest more money in the business I started in Dalocha town and work with the villagers to improve social services, in particular education, health, electricity, telephone services and transportation.



Photo : ActionAid



Photo: Yemataye Tesema/ActionAid

Damenech Mecha: a woman modelling grassroots leadership in Yem

WOMEN IN POVERTY ERADICATION

Over the last 25 years, AAE has been working with women and girls living in poverty aiming to change patriarchal attitude, and in turn transform the lives of women. AAE has also been influencing men and boys to act in solidarity with women, as a strategy to end poverty.

ActionAid has always believed that the participation of women and girls is an indispensable development component. Women have been the main beneficiaries of AAE's community-level welfare and service delivery. ActionAid's first national strategy (1994-1998) focused on gender inequality as a key development concern. The second Country Strategy considered women's rights as a cross-cutting issue and the organisation's Policy and Guideline for Gender Mainstreaming were developed and implemented during this period. With the launch of ActionAid's third national strategy (2005-2009), AAE revised its gender policy in line with the international strategy that considered gender equality, equity and women's empowerment as inter-related objectives. Its Interim Country Strategy (2010-2011) and fourth strategy (2012-2017) focused on women and girls' freedom from economic and

social setbacks. AAE has adopted a three-track approach of addressing women empowerment as separate objective, as part of every other programme objective and as linking initiatives in all its programmes.

ActionAid has also been working with urban and rural women living in poverty helping them to access and make the most of economic alternatives. Women's saving and credit cooperatives have proved to be one of the most powerful tools to realise economic development for women. Hence, during 2005 to 2013 alone 149 saving and credit cooperatives were organised in 13 intervention areas with a start capital of 4,822,327 Birr that grew to a total of 15,822,960 Birr.

ActionAid's women development programmes during the last 25 years have also raised awareness and built the capacity of law enforcement bodies, community members, and women themselves to tackle violence against women.

Women and girls have been given support to fight harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation. Meko Aman, 19, from Seru woreda

said in 2011, 'many girls undergo female circumcision although we are taught about its harmful effects at school. It was very difficult to convince parents to abandon this traditional practice. Now, anyone can report to the women watch group. Watch group members try to convince parents to stop performing this ritual and remind them of the consequences of ignoring the law. As a result, fewer parents now circumcise their daughters.

Meko is one of more than 1313 young girls, who were saved from early marriage and other harmful traditional practices.

The 'Women Won't Wait' national campaign was launched in partnership with NNPWE and helped positive women's voices to be heard. Furthermore, 2,262 women and girls now understand how to deal with court cases related to land, and division of shared property during a divorce etc. This supported women to stand together against polygamy, early marriage and female circumcision. ActionAid supported the revision of police training curriculums and putting in place women and child friendly systems in both police stations and courts. This together

with studies on women's land rights, and land certification challenges helped improve the lives of women in Ethiopia.

Positive changes were also seen in women's negotiation skills and decision-making power. Moreover, women have increasingly been assuming leadership roles to improve their status in society. Women-led cooperatives have formed unions to facilitate collective action. Development programmes in areas like clean water, food security and education are improving women's leadership and decision-making roles in the public domain. Currently, ActionAid programmes are underway to organise urban women living in poverty through a safe cities campaign, whilst work has also begun on engaging with the general public to change attitude and behaviours towards women.

In summary, AAE celebrates its 25th anniversary with an array of achievements and successes in addressing women's development. Whilst celebrating the successes to date, AAE renews its commitment to anchor women's agenda at the core of all its work and looks forward to making great strides in years to come.



Photo: Yemataye Tesema/ActionAid

Models of women grassroots leadership

Damenech Mecha is no more a quiet housewife, but instead a visionary leader inspiring others to lift themselves out of poverty. The mother of four says that her empowerment comes from being part of a saving and credit cooperative supported by ActionAid. Damenech lives in Yem Special Woreda, one of ActionAid's intervention areas in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS). She has led the Deri Women Saving and Credit Cooperative for eight years before retiring four years ago. Damenech still works as a member of the committee. She is in charge of liaising between the cooperative and the Yem Union of Women's Saving and Credit Cooperative on various issues. Damenech has also herself set up several anti-poverty initiatives.

"My family did not had enough to eat. We also didn't have proper chairs to sit on in our house, before I joined the cooperative", she said. Damenech, who had no previous experience of appearing in the public domain and therefore no confidence in public speaking, was first elected to head up the cooperative by 17 members. During the first seven years of being chairperson, the membership grew to 340. The cooperative won awards from the woreda, zone and state administrations for consecutive years under her leadership. She has been voted 'best leader' several times.

She said that ActionAid's trainings on leadership and financial management equipped her with the necessary confidence and skills. Damenech has been putting to use the leadership skills and values that helped her transform the life of her family, colleagues and neighbours. Her family now owns their own house, along with a restaurant, vegetable farms and cattle.

"Leading and managing the cooperative and other setups taught me about planning and saving. It gave me the insight and skills to encourage and capacity build others," she said. Damenech recalls disagreements between husbands and wives on how to spend loans. "I travelled up to three hours from my place to discuss and convince husbands about the need to agree with their wife on how to use the assets in a profitable way and repay the family debt," she said.

Damenech has been elected to be on the management committee of three other social organisations. She is member of the kebele cabinet, while she also takes part in the running and management of other organisations. Asked why she is repeatedly re-elected, she said, "I carefully listen to what members say and try to help to find a solution to their problems. I share my knowledge, experience and friendly smile with everyone." She recounts how she also shared the loans she secured with other members, who were unable to obtain credit due to fund shortages in the cooperative.

Damenech and her fellow women leaders of CBOs and other organisations mobilise community members to support widowed families and people in need. Damenech has also launched new and innovative initiatives like village health and education savings. The idea is to help mothers get better pre- and

post-natal treatment and to help children access education. Damenech said that she and her colleagues began making a monthly health contribution of five birr beginning December 2013. They have also been contributing the same amount for education.

Damenech has been working with women groups, local government and individuals fighting poverty and social problems. Beginning January 2014, she has been mobilising and organising like-minded people and kebele administrations to draft and implement a law forbidding excessive drinking, which is common and widespread and fuels violence and trouble in their area.

AAE-supported women saving and credit cooperatives in Yem have been centres of excellence showcasing great women leadership. Unlike in the past, people and organisations in the area are keen to appoint women to key leadership positions. The number of men joining the cooperatives led by women has been steadily growing. AAE has supported the set up of women credit and saving cooperatives and the Union of these.

26 saving and credit cooperatives have been established by women, but the cooperatives are also open to and joined by men, as the underlying principle of the cooperative movement makes 'membership open to all regardless of sex, colour, religion, etc.' However, if a man wants to join a cooperative or the Union, he first has to promise not to seek a leadership position. That is why all 26 primary saving and credit cooperative associations are led and managed by women. The total number of cooperative members currently stands at 2,523 (1562 women, and 961 men).

Women as agents of community wellbeing

Harmful traditional practices and violence against women - that is still commonplace in many parts of the country - not only affect the health of victims, but also contribute towards loss of social and economic security. For instance, in Kerensa kebele of the Kombolcha woreda, 540 km east of Addis Ababa, wife beating, polygamy, early marriage and the worst kind of female genital circumcision were common before ActionAid's intervention in 2009. In addition, many women were forced out of their house without any money or assets during divorce. Many women lacked the confidence and awareness of their rights to take such cases to the police and law enforcement agencies.

After a careful study and assessment of the situation, ActionAid began organising community awareness trainings and supporting the formation of women groups to collectively fight harmful traditional practices, gender-based violence and poverty. In the beginning, community members accused the women groups of violating community traditions and customary practices.

“Thanks to the training and relationship and interaction with ActionAid, we now understand the nature and consequences of harmful tradition practices, which we now resolutely fight”, said Kemero Alishe, Chairperson of the Kerensa women group.

Kemero Ousman, Vice-chair of the group said, “Thanks to our successful efforts in fighting harmful traditional practices, we have now won the respect of the community and our local government bodies. Community members, especially children and young people, now report to us cases of circumcision, rape and other offences. The kebele is keen to assign policemen to accompany us, when we go to rescue victims. The woreda administration and justice offices also refer cases of divorce and gender-based violence to our women group.”

“These women groups have also set up an excellent network and partnership with local and religious leaders”, said Semira Ahmed, Vice-Head of the Kombolcha Woreda Women and Children's Affairs.

Women groups in Kombolcha Woreda, Oromiya State, have played a significant role in reducing harmful traditional practices by 75% (2011 figures), according to the Woreda Women's Affairs Office.

Women groups have made extraordinary progress. In collaboration with religious leaders and local authorities they have rescued girls from abduction, saved marriages from divorce, protected abandoned children, rescued 15 girls from early marriage, and put a stop to eight cases of polygamy. FGM has been totally eradicated from the kebele, and for the first time all women are given medical treatment during child delivery.



Photo: Petrik Wigger/ActionAid

Dallocha women transporting water before the introduction of clean water facilities

Besides fighting harmful traditional practices, ActionAid has also helped to organise the women group into a saving and credit cooperative to help members set up small business like; cattle fattening, grain banking and other small trading to generate their own income. According to Kemero Alishe, members of the women groups have been able to bring in an income of 12,000 Birr from these projects. She said, “Being economically independent, I was then in a position where I could convince my husband to allow me to work away from the house and spend time dealing with issues concerning the women group. ActionAid has left a big legacy. I will keep on working for the women group.”

The women group has a main focal person in each of the six villages of the kebele. These focal persons report to the core group, whenever there is a case of violence. Cases are examined and decisions made during the regular quarterly meetings, when all focal persons and group members from the kebele are present. Emergency meetings are also held, whenever a case needs immediate action.

AAE has supported the set up of a total of 156 similar women groups throughout the country. The groups act as guardians and agents of wellbeing for the whole community.



Photo: Letekidan Berhane/ActionAid

Some of the girls rescued from early marriage by the Women's Affairs Bureau of Ofla Woreda, Tigray and ActionAid (2007)

AAE LEAVES FOOTPRINTS IN YEM WOREDA

Deepening poverty along with high rates of illiteracy were among the factors that motivated AAE to start programmes in Yem Special Woreda, SNNPRS in 2002.

The community, furthermore, had poor social services, a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, and high rates of tsetse fly infestations hindering production and productivity. Violence against women and harmful practices were commonplace, and school enrolment of girls was particularly low combined with a high dropout rate.

Yem is located 240 kms southwest of Addis Ababa. AAE collaborated with the community and the local government to implement a range of development interventions to improve the situation. Empowering Yem community members to tackle the root causes of poverty was the greatest outcome of the successful programme.

ActionAid spent over 41 million Birr implementing development programmes over a period of eleven years. Currently, the programmes are being phased out following an exit strategy. So far, the efforts to empower the community particularly people living in poverty and women have been successful. Women-focused organisations, such as women water development associations, saving and credit cooperatives and Women Watch Groups (WWGs) have grown and expanded to woreda level.

The continued sensitisation programme carried out over the years by WWG against harmful traditional practices, like abduction and early marriage, significantly contributed to bring about awareness of the harm caused by these customs among women & girls, religious leaders, the elderly and other community members. Alongside, the women watch groups' network

kebele level groups were set up to teach the communities about different development topics.

The school committees made significant progress in getting more girls enrolled in school, and enrolment rates grew from less than 10 % to 90% in 2012. Consequently, the number of students pursuing a higher education after passing the national level college entrance exams went up significantly. With regards to creating livelihoods, AAE's integrated efforts achieved tangible results; a credit cooperative union was set up, multi-purpose cooperatives, tsetse fly control associations and networks with neighbouring areas, plus getting irrigation associations off the ground.

ActionAid backed women development programmes also brought significant changes and succeeded in reduced incidences of different harmful traditional practices such as rape, abduction, physical assault along with other forms of violence. The following key achievements include;

- Establishing 34 women watch groups (6 members each and one in each kebele). As a result, harmful traditional practices in the lowland parts of the woreda have now been totally stamped out.
- Setting up 51 village level water points which made it possible for about 12,000 rural people to access to clean water; along with establishing two women water development associations in the towns of Saja and Fofa towns. These water points alone provide safe water supply for 9,600 inhabitants. This substantially contributed to bringing safe water 27% more people and drastically reduced the workload of women and girls.
- Constructing 15 ACCESS centres, two libraries for girls and two separate girls' toilets whilst also providing sanitary products.

AAE has left similar footprints in each of the 28 woredas, where it has been working over the last 25 years.





Photo: ActionAid

The Arsi Seru community celebrating the inauguration of the ActionAid-supported clean water service

ACTIONAID COMMUNITY CENTRED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

One of AAE's central development approaches during the last 25 years is changing people's lives by working at community level. Lessons learned from working with the communities have in turn helped ActionAid to influence the development discourse at different levels.

Community Centred Development Programmes (CCDPs) are designed to work in close partnerships with people living in poverty including women and children. AAE sets up and supports CCDP at grassroots level, and thereby make it possible for people living in poverty themselves to combat poverty by building empowerment and solidarity.

CCDPs serve as a 'best practice' model for the organisation. So far, AAE has successfully influenced various development actors, including the Government to replicate ActionAid development alternatives.

- ACCESS approach in education
- Women-led Water Development Associations
- The Women Watch Group Model. Until 2010, the model was replicated and scaled up in different parts of SNNPRS, Tigray, Oromiya and Amhara regions through government structures, mainly the Bureaux of Women, Children and Youth Affairs.
- Women-led Saving and Credit Cooperatives, as a means to realise women's economic empowerment under their own leadership.

It is worth noting that CCDPs have evolved over 25 years through better understanding of poverty and its causes. Whilst following the service delivery approach, ActionAid's work was depending on its staff, rather than the capacity of the community to respond to their own needs.

The other area that has evolved through the last 25 years is the phase out of CCDPs after working 10-15 years in a particular woreda and moving to new areas where poverty is widespread and the need for support is greater. One of the approaches to maintain the services and benefits of the CCDPs is to establish and strengthen community based practices. Even if some of the CCDPs have already been phased out, the number of existing CCDPs supported by AAE have grown to 28. The expansion of ActionAid programme areas to different parts of the country includes the urban areas, which were earlier overlooked.

Similarly, when we recall how CCDPs have evolved, one of the changes that have taken place is AAE's role of facilitator instead of direct programme implementation. Now the actual implementation is left to the community and their grassroots organisations (CBOs). In addition, AAE has given emphasis to building capacity of the local government bodies, and by doing so equipped them to respond to the needs of the community.

With regards to staff numbers; although CCDPs have increased and expanded, the number of staffs has been significantly reduced from about 60 staffs at a CCDP earlier to five staff members in each CCDP today.

ActionAid Ethiopia only sets up a CCDP after undertaking various appraisals. An appraisal is an exercise undertaken to explore and understand the context, feasibility and potential value of new partnerships and programmes based on various development indicators.

Before starting a detailed appraisal process, AAE also undertakes a pre-appraisal process to select an area. During this pre-appraisal process, two to four woredas are chosen based on economic and social indicators. Therefore, it is according to statistical data from the Government and other sources that, one or two woredas are picked for further appraisal. Then when a woreda has been selected, a period of one to two years is used to prepare for the launch of ActionAid's interventions. The appraisal process includes, a workshop to build awareness of ActionAid's vision, mission, core values, development approaches and strategies. The workshop is a tool to explore with stakeholders the major causes of poverty and the socio-economic, cultural and political dynamics of poverty. The workshops, hence, paves the way for the implementation in phases of the development programmes. In every phase, AAE conducts both external and internal reviews to evaluate performance of the CCDP in order to changes to people's lives and draw lessons on how to sustain and improve the projects.

In AAE, the CCDP phase-out process is started in a clear and transparent manner, where the community and other relevant stakeholders fully participate and plan the programme exit.

The phase out process begins after undertaking both in-house and external evaluations. It mainly focuses on making sure that communities are organised in various CBOs and have the ability to lead the development programmes themselves only with the support of the local government and other development actors.

AAE never stops its relationship with communities following the phase out. ActionAid continues its relationship with the community through the CBOs. For example, AAE has phased out its programmes from Dalocha and Lalomama during 2003 and 2005, but it has still maintained a strong link with these communities through DAWWDA and Lalomama Midir Community Based Institution.

AAE works at community level through CCDP for several reasons: firstly to support the community to improve their capacity and change their lives for the better. Secondly, to generate knowledge and alternative development models with a view to influence development practices.



Photo: Lerekidan Berhane/ActionAid

Members of an adult literacy group in Kombolcha CCDP



Photo : ActionAid



Photo: Letekidan Berhane/ActionAid

WHAT MAKES ACTIONAID A GREAT PLACE TO WORK

Reviewing ActionAid's 25 years history in Ethiopia would be incomplete without mentioning the relationship between the organisation and its staff, as well as the overall work environment. Therefore, we have included thoughts and reflections of present and former staff below.

The trust and working relationship between the ActionAid management and staff is one of the reasons, highlighted by staff members, which makes ActionAid a great place to work. This positive work environment is product of good communication keeping staff, management, and joint mission on track. Another major factor, singled out by staff, is the space and opportunity that AAE gives its employees to develop and reach their full potential.

Getting to know the organisational culture begins with an induction process that introduces newcomers to AAE's approaches and vision of a poverty free Ethiopia. It would be hard not to share ActionAid's bold vision and work hard to fulfil the humanitarian mission. Staffs refer to ActionAid as one big family and emphasise the non-existence of power and status - an overall atmosphere that fosters hard working and committed employees.

The assertion that 'our staff are our best assets' is at the heart of ActionAid's work. Acting on its word ActionAid strives to create a friendly workspace, develop and build staff capacity, encourage information sharing and a healthy life/ work balance. To ActionAid, the personal wellbeing of staff is top –it therefore is also interested in staff members' personal issues.

Asked what impressed them as newcomers to ActionAid, many staff noted:

- The organisation's commitment to work with people living in poverty, not merely lip service, but put into practice every day
- Very transparent recruitment policies and practice
- Staff members backing of the organisation's goals. Most staff members see AAE's vision and mission as a personal calling
- Outstanding staff discipline and friendly approach.



AAE's former staffs share their thoughts

Bizuwork Ketete worked with AAE from December 1988 to March 1997. She later left AAE to become Country Director for ActionAid Rwanda. Currently, she works for Irish Aid.

Reflecting on her experiences at AAE in different manager level roles, she was quick to commend AAE's shared organisational culture and values. She said: "The overall 'one-ness' and boldness demonstrated while pursuing development and

people centred agendas made ActionAid a unique organisation. Its innovative child sponsorship scheme, its courage to support and develop civil society, community organisations and its adoption of rights-based approaches, when many other NGOs did not even attempt to pursue these approaches made AAE a pioneer organisation in many areas."

Bizuwork further noted: "the exemplary leadership, the team spirit, the drive and commitment, a shared vision of ActionAid staff along with their tremendous hard work and commitment is stays fresh in my mind at all times. ActionAid, truly, is people-oriented, pro-poor, and pro-development organisation, where I was lucky to be introduced to development work."

Bizuwork has a message for AAE: "Strive to be more relevant as time changes and be more visible and vocal about the great work that you're doing"



Tsige Haile, the founder and now Head of Women in Self Employment (WISE), worked at ActionAid in HR from 1993 to 1997. The former Human Resource Development Manager recounts her experiences and pays tribute to her colleague and mentor leader, Thomas Joseph (TJ), (1993-1997):

I joined ActionAid Ethiopia in 1993. It was the start of a new phase in my life. Previously, I had worked for Addis Ababa University for over two decades. I applied for the job of Human Resource Development Manager and was interviewed by the AAE Country Director at that time, TJ, and by Margaret Stourton, (HR/OD International Director). I was later told that I was appointed, but I had to wait for many weeks before receiving the appointment letter. As I started working at ActionAid, I found the working environment markedly different from the academic institution of over 4000 employees that I had just left. I found that AAE with its 30 staff members or so had its own unique mission and working culture. I started the Human Resource Development Manager's job, but with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I was pleased but at the same time somewhat surprised when I learnt that I needed more orientation for the job, for which I had a lot of previous experience. I was asked to stop working immediately and be briefed by my supervisor every day. I said to myself: 'Wait a minute. Be patient, this must be how supervisors relate to their employees in NGOs.' I felt uncomfortable for the first few days. Gradually, however, things began to take a new turn



Photo : ActionAid

Left to right, Tsega Assefa (staff member), Tomas Joseph, Tisge Haile and Alemitu Driba (cook) chopping onions during one of the staff retreats

for the better. All went well; I developed an excellent relationship with my manager and I started my job.

In the 1990s, AAE was pioneer NGO introducing and promoting the concept of vision, mission and values. 'Organisational culture' was the fad management word those days and AAE echoed it. Staff members at all levels were expected to internalise the vision, mission and values of the organisation, which was developed with the participation of all staff. TJ was the chief engineer. It was during his four years' service as Country Director that AAE grew to become one of the few outstanding NGOs in Ethiopia. Staff development and demonstrable results in community development were the highest priorities. TJ's positive attitude towards the development of employees, his trust in the capacity of people and the support he accorded them helped those who worked with him grow and subsequently assume international positions in Africa and Asia. During his tenure, three local NGOs were set up by members of his management team -one of which is WISE. And quite a number of his former staff members are now holding high positions in different organisations -some even heading up big international NGOs.

TJ's style of leadership was characterised by freedom (space for action), respect for people's ideas, high regard for integrity and trust in the potential of people. This was instrumental in helping most of us to be where we are today. Thomas used to read and quote to us verses from the Bible. He used to tell us that the Holy Bible was his management book. All AAE staff used to gather at his house many times for parties and social functions with all costs borne by him. This culture contributed substantially to the creation of a strong team spirit among AAE staff.

Even after many years, TJ's leadership legacy still exists at ActionAid. Many still remember him and most of the members of his management team are still in contact with him and enjoy a life-long friendship.

I personally attribute my success at WISE mainly to lessons I learned from him. I am certain that all my AAE colleagues agree with me on this. I treasure my four years of experience working alongside him. And I have many pictures that remind me of the wonderful time I had at AAE.

Dr Meseret Kassahun used to be AAE's education assistant. She worked at the ActionAid Dalocha office in South Region, for three years (1994 to 1997). She is now Assistant Professor at the Social Works Department of Addis Ababa University.

When approached for a comment, Dr. Meseret singled out for special mention the creative capacity of AAE staff, the unique innovative approaches and the motivating work atmosphere, as well as the family-like relationship that prevailed at AAE all of which strongly appealed to her. "ActionAid is a value-oriented organisation that is exceptionally transparent and humble in its approach towards the community," she said.

Elaborating further, Dr Meseret said, "As a junior elementary school teacher, I didn't meet the minimum work experience that the AAE vacancy required. Yet, I was shortlisted, because AAE wanted to give the only female candidate the opportunity to sit for the exam. Working at ActionAid at the young age of 19 to 21 was great in many ways; it shaped and broadened my understanding of integrated development and gender equality,"

"AAE believes in staff development. We attended staff capacity development training at quarterly intervals. Staff members were equally valued irrespective of positions. The Country Director visited and encouraged us every month, and it was one such informal discussion with the Country Director that paved the way for me pursuing higher education. I wanted to pursue education but there was no higher institution of learning in Dalocha at that time. I mentioned this to the Country Director during one of our friendly discussions. With no delay he made it possible for me to join Propride, ActionAids' partner based in Addis Ababa. This gave me the opportunity to join the evening classes at Addis Ababa University doing a BA in Sociology and Social Administration. Later on, thanks to the support of my husband, I did my MA in the same field and also earned a PHD from the University of Illinois , Chicago," she concluded.



Yaekob Metena, worked for AAE for 11 years (2003-2014). He's currently the Country Director of ActionAid Tanzania, Yaekob believes that capacity building and career development is a trend in AAE.

Reflecting on his experience of working at AAE, Yaekob says, 'I joined ActionAid as Regional Programme

Officer in the South Regional Coordination Office. After 15 months service, I moved to the Kemba office at my request, as I wanted to gain more grassroots experience in addressing poverty. At this, some friends joked, 'Kebirhan wode chelema,' an Amharic equivalent for 'from light to darkness'. This was true as we worked under very basic conditions using candle light until the organisation set up solar light in our offices.

Later, I worked as Regional Coordinator, Decentralised Support Department Manager, Head of Program Development and Quality Assurance as well as Interim Country Director. ActionAid cares for its staff and I really value my exposure to poverty dynamics at community level, my experience of regional and national posts, which taught me a lot. Various in-house and external trainings, workshops and participatory reviews acquainted me with theoretical and practical paradigms of development and laid the foundation for my personal career development. It also motivated me to stay with ActionAid for a long time. I am very proud of being part of the ActionAid Ethiopia family. During these years, ActionAid Ethiopia has significantly made headway towards a poverty free Ethiopia.

Helen Amdemikael, another former member of staff, says: «I had the pleasure to work for AAE from 1994 to 1999 as Programme Officer and later as Programme Adviser for gender & HIV/AIDS. However, my first acquaintance with the organisation was during an orientation visit to Dalocha whilst working with SNV. The overnight stays in staff quarters with the community had been bewildering and to this day I have the «blocks», PAs, extension workers and the implementation strategies mapped in my mind - as also the first «induction» visit (we re-named it «abduction») in Waka riding mules as we sung the AAE song.»

With regards to my work experience at ActionAid, I am proud to have performed my job with dedication and passion and I am pleased that I was given the freedom to grow and develop. My years with AAE set my standards for development work –the fact that communities must be at the heart of any development work. Several years later, I smile broadly knowing that my work in AAE continues to direct and inspire my work in development. Thank you AAE and all the colleagues that made the difference!



Yitna Tekaligne worked for AAE in different positions and disciplines for 13 years (1992-2005) before he left to assume the position of programme director for ActionAid Tanzania starting

April 2005. Today, he is the Country Manager for Christian Aid Ethiopia.

Yitna says: 'ActionAid is a very dynamic organisation, leading and shaping contemporary development thought and discourse at national as well as global level. It is more than a university with ample opportunities for learning and personal growth. I am where I am today, because of what I have experienced and learned whilst working for ActionAid Ethiopia. I have always valued the ActionAid leadership style, strong team spirit and work culture, along with the strong sense of commitment and purpose among all staffs. Working at ActionAid totally changed my perspective and values, and the experience has shaped and developed my managerial and leadership skills.'

Yitna continues: 'The leadership style and practice, as well as decentralised way of working are unique features of AAE in general. I think it would be hard to find a place comparable to ActionAid's work environment.'

'Concerning challenges, ActionAid used to frequently introduce changes to its development approach with not enough time spent on reflecting on what worked well and what didn't. I see this not as a challenge, rather a shortfall. I believe that AAE needs to maintain its decentralised way of working, and its participatory and empowering leadership style.'

CONCLUSION

To conclude, AAE has made a long journey during a quarter of a century with resolve and perseverance to fight poverty. It has been an interesting journey of ups and downs, a lesson where we as an organisation have learnt from our successes and challenges we've faced. At the end of our 25 years, AAE seizes this opportunity to take stock and at this juncture, we would like to renew our pledge to continually do better by drawing useful lessons from the challenges faced and by consolidating our experiences and insights. We thank all our partners and all those who have worked alongside us, especially people living in poverty in our intervention areas and the Government. Many thanks and long live ActionAid Ethiopia and the Ethiopian people!



Photo - Mekdes TekleMichael/ActionAid



Published by
ActionAid Ethiopia
P.O.Box 1261
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
Tel: 251-011-4654671
Email: admin.ethiopian@actionaid.org
Website: www.actionaid.org