

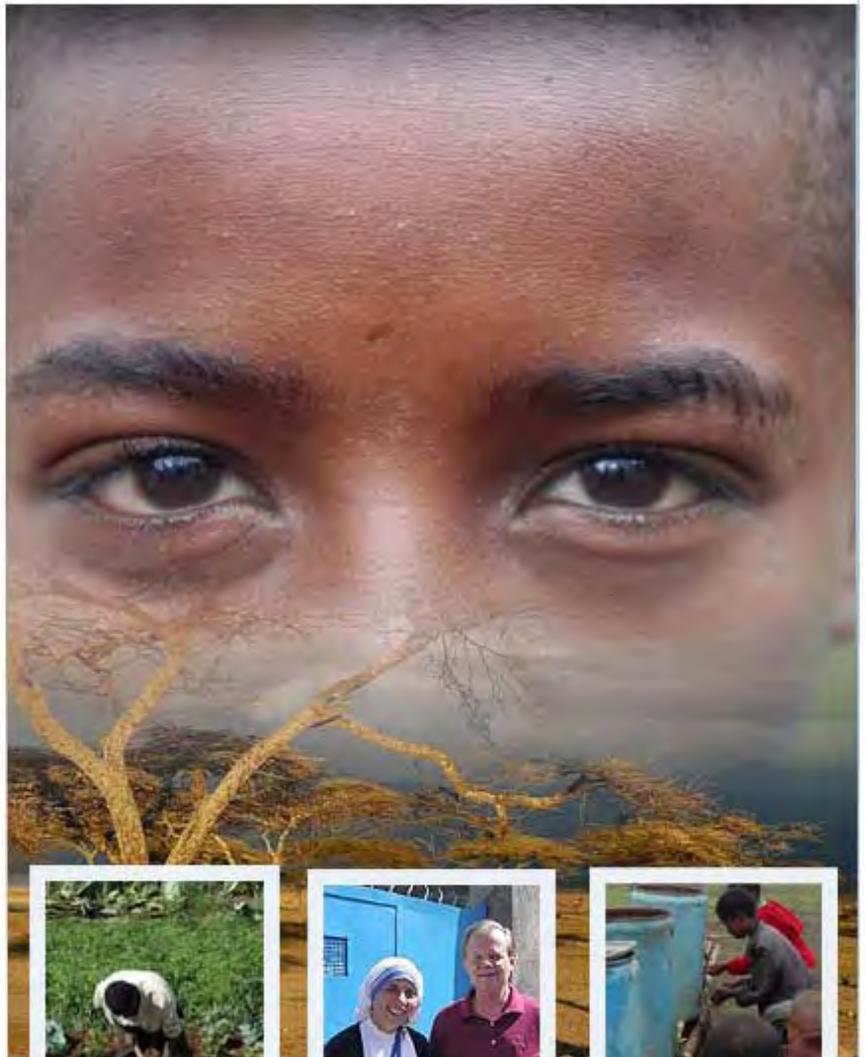


U.S. Mission to the UN Agencies in Rome



HUNGER IN ETHIOPIA Past, Present and Future

Trip Report
by
Ambassador
Tony P. Hall



USUN Rome
Mission Trip Reports
April 12-19, 2004



Hunger in Ethiopia: Past, Present and Future

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Photos by Alexander Jones /EAO

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A team led by U.S. Ambassador Tony Hall visited Ethiopia April 12-19. They found the country with the second largest population in sub-Saharan Africa locked in a struggle to reduce suffering in the aftermath of the drought and acute crisis of 2003. Last year’s crises reportedly caused another one million people to slip into destitution. Although overall humanitarian needs have been reduced, the underlying structural problems will keep approximately seven million Ethiopians on the relief rolls in 2004. This is complicated by localized shocks, such as erratic rainfall, low yields, pests, growing incidence of HIV/AIDS,

continuing high malaria and other diseases, and unfavorable terms of trade for coffee, the country’s principal export. The international community needs to recognize that the humanitarian challenges in Ethiopia will require years to resolve.



Children waiting for food that will save their lives

*Photo by
Tim Lavelle*

“Dramatic needs, dramatic opportunities” in the oldest independent country in Africa

Ambassador Tony Hall, US Mission to the UN Agencies in Rome; US Under Secretary of Agriculture, Eric Bost; World Food Program (WFP) Executive Board President, Miguel Barreto of Peru; Rome Humanitarian Attaché, Tim Lavelle; US Mission/Rome’s International Relations Officer, Willem Brakel; Special Assistant to the Ambassador, Max Finberg; and a number of contacts and colleagues of the Ambassador from the United States, visited Ethiopia April 12-19. In addition to meetings in Addis Ababa with officials from the U.S. Embassy and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Government of Ethiopia, the team spent several days visiting rural areas in the Oromiya and Southern Nations (SNNPR) regions. They reviewed operations of the UN’s Agencies for Food and Agriculture - WFP, Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) - and various NGOs’ immediate relief and longer-term development activities.

In Addis Ababa, the team visited two outreach centers of the Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity and a home-based hospice care project for People Living with HIV/AIDS.

Ambassador Hall's trip commemorated the visit to Ethiopia's northern Highlands he made two decades ago (as a member of the U.S. Congress), during the Great Famine of 1984-1985. In that tragedy, marred by delayed recognition of the magnitude of the crisis and flawed relief coordination capacities, one million people perished.

Ethiopia is slightly less than twice the size of Texas. Agriculture accounts for half the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 85 percent of exports, and 80 percent of total employment. Small farmers account for cultivating over 90 percent of the total crop area and overall agriculture output. Ethiopia, with approximately 70 million, has the second largest population in sub-Saharan Africa (after Nigeria's 110 million). Ethiopia's Islamic population is estimated at between one third and one half of the overall total, i.e., a larger number of Muslims than in Iraq.

Basically self-sufficient in cereal production throughout the 1970s, Ethiopia has not been able to meet its food needs since the severe drought of 1984 because the growth in agricultural production has been lower than the rate of population growth. Ethiopia has become increasingly dependent on food aid that now accounts for meeting approximately 15 percent of the country's total needs. The crisis year 2003 saw

the donation of 1.7 million metric tons of food aid (with the United States as the principal donor) in order to avoid wide-scale famine.



A young boy of 11 has already lived one quarter of his life. In Ethiopia, he has a life expectancy of 44 years.



Ethiopia is a landlocked country in the Horn of Africa

Statistics to Consider

- even in a non-drought year, 472,000 Ethiopian children under five years of age, die from preventable causes (often nutritionally related);
- according to World Bank data, farm yields over the past decade have decreased by an average of one percent a year because of land degradation, low fertility inputs and land tenure issues, while the area under production increased - by 3.2 percent a year on average - as farmers increasingly cultivated fragile land on the hillsides. About three generations ago Ethiopia was 50 percent forest - the level today is less than five percent;
- a recent assessment on food security concluded that nutritional standards have fallen steadily over the past 15 years. Forty percent of rural households do not produce enough food or income to meet their basic nutritional needs. The average farm family in a normal year only produces enough to feed itself for five months;
- GDP per capita has fallen from U.S. dollars 190 in 1981 to \$108 in 2001;
- for children under 6, almost two thirds are estimated to suffer from stunting, and over 10 percent from wasting;

Comparison of Ethiopian Famines:

Basic Facts	1984 - 1985	1999 - 2000	2003
Population	40 Million	64 Million	69 Million
Life expectancy	40 years	43.3 years	43.9 years
GDP Per Capita	\$190	\$118	\$108
Population Affected	8 Million	10 Million	12.5 Million
Deaths	1 Million	10 – 50,000	?

- over the past two decade (as pointed out by Tufts University’s Feinstein Center in a 2003 study), disasters are becoming endemic to Ethiopia. In the period 1994-2003, humanitarian food assistance to Ethiopia totaled 5.62 million tons, of which the U.S. contributed 2.86 million tons (50.8 percent).

What the team saw

The team was greatly encouraged that Ethiopia’s government has explicitly recognized the severity of its continuing hunger situation and has formed the Coalition for Food Security - with donors, UN Agencies and NGOs. It is only by working together in true partnership, based on mutual trust, that Ethiopia can defeat the tragedy of hunger that looms over this country so often.

At our first stop, near Nazareth in the Oromiya Region, to the southeast of Addis Ababa, we had the privilege of meeting Gete. She is a 26-year old widow with five children. Her husband died six months ago from unknown causes. Her only hope for keeping her family alive was the small plot of land behind her house. She was growing vegetables, learning new techniques in farming and building assets through an innovative WFP/Ministry of Agriculture project. It was an honor to help her plant two fruit trees that will provide a source of nutrition and income for her family in the long-term.

We met Yirgadu, another widow benefiting from a small-scale irrigation project, assisted by both FAO and WFP. She was growing a variety of crops on her small plot of land, with seeds donated by FAO.

She had cabbage, beans, carrots, maize and potatoes - enough to feed her family of eight. One local agricultural official said, “with seeds and infrastructure, we could feed ourselves.”

We visited Project Mercy, whose founders, Marta Gabre-Tsadick and her husband Deme Tekle-Wold, (ex-Ethiopian refugees, who returned home from Fort Wayne, Indiana, after the fall of Ethiopia’s communist regime in 1991), have established a remarkable and efficient relief and development operation in the Guraghe Zone of SNNPR, which is 90 miles south of Addis Ababa, near the town of Butajira. More than 700 children attend Project Mercy’s school. Students receive two meals a day, and a quality education that resulted in 100 percent of students passing the national exams last year. Project Mercy is opening shortly a state-of-the-art hospital that would be the envy of any community in the developed world.



Yirgadu, a proud widow, trying to grow enough to feed her family of eight

This is in addition to their training programs, small-scale irrigation, community health, employment generation and adult literacy initiatives, to list only a few. A faith-based organization, they have raised almost 100 percent of their funding privately, mostly from individuals in the United States.

It was heartening to hear that Project Mercy's top eighth-grade student last year had won a full, \$32,000 scholarship to attend a prestigious private school (Deerfield Academy) in the United States. We spoke with one of the village elders, who donated some of the land for the school. He said with pride, "This was only a place for grazing cattle, now it is as precious as gold." His three-year old daughter suffered a serious burn accident and, thanks to the generosity of some private citizens in America who knew about Project Mercy, she has received the best treatment possible in the United States and is now fully recovered.

The team met Sister Theresa at a clinic run by the Maids of the Poor and Save the Children/US in Kedida Gamela district in the SNNPR region. As we walked through rooms of malnourished children, we asked her if she had seen many AIDS patients. "Yes," she replied, "many, many cases." In 2003, the clinic established a therapeutic feeding center and up to March 2004 had admitted 629 severely malnourished children and discharged 568, with a cure rate of 89.5 percent. Clinic staff reported that the nutritional status of children has stabilized due to emergency interventions.

Visiting the Poorest of the Poor - "Do small things with great love."

The team visited two centers run by the Missionaries of Charity, a society founded by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, in an Addis slum. The Missionaries of Charity came to Ethiopia in 1973, and currently run 14 care facilities throughout the country for 5,500 in-patients and 40,000 abandoned, disabled, destitute and HIV/AIDS infected/affected. They receive U.S. food aid and support from the U.S.-based Catholic Relief Services. We met with Sister Benedicta, the regional superior. One of the charity's facilities that we visited - the home for the sick, dying and destitute in the Sidist Kilo slum - was founded in 1989. Sidist Kilo provides care to 700 in-patients and 1,700 outpatients monthly. On the wall of the home, the team read this saying of Mother Teresa: "God speaks in the silence of the heart - and we listen."

The "Gift of Love" Home in Asko (on the outskirts of Addis Ababa) has approximately 250 HIV-posi-

tive orphans who are not eligible for fostering or adoption because of their HIV status. Those coming to the home have either been referred by the police, a medical facility or found in destitution outside the Home with nowhere else to go. Using extensive testing and outside medical support from the university hospital, they have seen a few children who were HIV-positive "convert" to HIV-negative, usually within their first year and a half of life. Sister Benedicta told us: "Our HIV patients all say that, without food, they cannot take the prescribed medicines."

Unfortunately in Ethiopia, the stigma of AIDS is just as deadly as the disease. A local poster we saw at a home-based hospice center captured the situation best - when it comes to AIDS, people do not want to see it, speak about it or hear about it. But, it is not as simple as "see no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil." AIDS will not simply go away. In fact, it will soon reach catastrophic levels throughout Ethiopia if it is not now addressed forcefully and at all levels.

A September 2002 report issued by the National Intelligence Council, entitled "The Next Wave of HIV/AIDS: Nigeria, Ethiopia, Russia, India and China" (http://www.cia.gov/nic/special_nextwaveHIV.html), comments: "Government figures cite 2.7 million Ethiopians currently as HIV positive, although experts believe the actual number may be between 3 and 5 million. The generally poor health of Ethiopians as a result of drought, malnutrition, limited healthcare, and other infectious diseases has caused HIV to progress rapidly to AIDS. Looking ahead, we expect 7 to 10 million will be infected by 2010 because of the high current rate of adult prevalence, widespread poverty, low education

levels, and the government's limited capacity to respond more actively."



by Ellen Belcher / Dayton Daily News

Ambassador Tony Hall walks with Sister Benedicta outside the Home of the Sick, Dying and Destitute, which is a hospice for AIDS patients



Meals at school ensure that these girls get good nutrition and an education

Photo by Tim Lavelle

U.S. Mission/Rome Conclusions and Recommendations

1 The HIV/AIDS pandemic is spreading and has already infected at least several million Ethiopians and created 1.2 million AIDS orphans. This “gathering explosion” is progressively killing Ethiopia’s productive capacity. Simply, the country needs to engage right now on a war-like campaign against HIV/AIDS or it will destroy the country, as we know it.

2 We strongly endorse: a) accelerating the reform agenda for foreign investment; b) sharper focus on developing both private and public sector capacity to increase commercial food importation; and c) prioritization of investments in the construction of rural infrastructure. We are pleased to note that an Ethiopian Caucus has now been established in the U.S. Congress (chaired by Congressman Mike Honda of California), which will provide a good mechanism to reach out and mobilize support from the 500,000-plus Ethiopians residing in the United States.

3 Specifically, US Mission urges: a) establishing a Business Advisory Council where multinational firms and the Ethiopian business community would offer independent advice on constraints and opportunities warranting Government of Ethiopia’s attention to open the commercial market and support investment, and address past grievances; b) USAID and other U.S. Government assistance in the establishment of an agricultural commodities exchange in-country; c) funding technical assistance to build the capacity of Ethiopian commodity traders to operate in regional markets; and d) a USAID matching grant program to co-fund proposals from local/international partnerships to invest in equipment, infrastructure and skills to enhance agricultural marketing and processing.

4 We favorably note the 2003 Ethiopian government’s food security-related budget of approximately \$116 million (1 billion birr). This amount needs to be ratcheted up annually. Similar to its food aid commitment in 2000, we recommend that they contribute a minimum of 100,000 metric tons of cereals into its national Emergency Food Security Reserve (EFSR).

5 The government is on the right course by recognizing the importance of food security for their people. It needs to stay the course. Given the size of the problem, however, no government can fix it alone. There needs to be increased coordination and a true partnership, built on mutual trust, among all of the humanitarian actors.

6 US Mission/Rome welcomes the initiative of USAID/Food for Peace to seek an annual floor support level of \$150 million in Title II food aid assistance (\$100 million through NGOs for development support and \$50 million through WFP for relief and recovery activities) that will form the cornerstone of a famine prevention strategy. And, once up and running, we urge annual allocation of \$25 million from the new US Famine Fund for timely and essential inputs.

U.S. Mission/Rome Conclusions and Recommendations

7 One of the best single investments in Ethiopia's development is school feeding. Providing a meal brings kids to school, keeps them there and allows them to learn more while they are there. We saw examples of decreased drop-out rates and increased attendance and performance, simply by offering a meal. This was notable at school feeding intervention in the village of Ellie run by the Irish NGO, GOAL. Together with complementary efforts like deworming medicine or nutrition education, this will pay rich dividends in the future. With programs like this, schools will become magnets for development.

8 The U.S. Government should encourage its partners in the Government of Ethiopia, UN and international non-governmental organizations to intensify their efforts to expand linkages with and strengthen the capacity of local, indigenous NGOs.

9 Safety nets are essential for Ethiopia given the cycles of drought and disaster. Small-scale irrigation, nutrition and child survival projects all need to be expanded greatly. The latter two interventions are a major part of the U.S. government's domestic strategy to help our own people in need, and should continue to be a key part our strategy to help Ethiopia's vulnerable populations.

10 US Mission/Rome is chagrined to note that the Missionary Sisters of Charity have been refused a VAT (value-added tax) exemption from Ethiopia's Department of Inland Revenue, and presently face an outstanding tax bill of approximately 4 million birr (\$465,000), related to purchase/planned purchase of construction material for new homes, septic tanks, storage facilities, and other needed items, that are required in order to respond to the growing needs. We request that the Government of Ethiopia reconsider this unfortunate decision.

11 The UN and its partners need to focus and concentrate on "crisis management" as their key strategy. We are pleased to note that WFP, UNICEF, OCHA, and several international NGOs, opened sub-offices in the Southern Region (SNNPR) in response to last year's "surprise" crisis in the region.

12 WFP needs to renegotiate its Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Ethiopia, which is centered at the federal level with the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC). Simply handing over food to the government is not enough. Given decentralization, agreements at the regional levels are required. And WFP needs to realize that the "mechanics" of managing food assistance weaken as you move down the ladder from the federal to the regional to the woreda (district) and kebele (township) level. Specifically, we believe WFP needs to step-up in assisting regional governments to solve a variety of operational problems at the field level, from targeting to storage to monitoring. WFP needs to "get the ration right, especially for priority areas."



Aberush, a young mother, at a feeding center with Agenyo and Beka, her 18-month old twins suffering from malnutrition

13 Finally, the international community needs to recognize that the humanitarian challenges in Ethiopia will require years to resolve.

Conclusion and personal note from Ambassador Hall

This marks my sixth trip to Ethiopia. When I first visited in 1984, Ethiopia had a population of 40 million, an estimated 8 million people were affected by drought, and one million died. In 2003, the country, whose population had grown to 69-70 million, was affected by a similar drought (that Prime Minister Meles Zenawi compared to 1984), which put more than 13 million at serious risk. Thankfully, people didn't die in terrible numbers and we showed that, working together, we can prevent famine. I am proud that in 2003 the United States contributed more than half a billion dollars (USD 533 million, including one million tons of food) to feed the hungry and prevent the emergency from becoming the tragedy that happened 20 years ago. Building on our 2003 success, we all need to intensify our efforts until we collectively succeed in breaking Ethiopia's

cycle of famine. Hopefully, the G8's Initiative to break the cycle of famine in the Horn of Africa will continue the forward momentum on a famine prevention strategy. This will build on the G8's Africa Action Plan and the Action Plan against Famine, especially in Africa. I will continue to push WFP, FAO and IFAD, along with our fellow OECD donors, to work together on comprehensive solutions in the immediate and longer terms.

I wish to thank all of our U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa, USAID, NGO and UN colleagues for their untiring efforts in making this visit so very productive and fruitful. Keep up the good work.

We can't stop drought in Ethiopia, but we can stop famine. We can't make it rain, but we can make sure people have enough to survive. We can't focus on every problem, but together we can move this country forward.



"With seeds and infrastructure, we can feed ourselves"



Ambassador Hall and Under-Secretary Bost learn about an FAO small-scale irrigation project