

A story of local economic development from Ethiopia

Apples, Artemisia and Natural Medicine

Arba Minch lies in the Rift valley in Ethiopia, about 500 km south of the capital, Addis Ababa. Malaria is rife, and the malaria plasmodia have become resistant to conventional drugs. The headquarters of the south-western zone of the Kale Heywet Church is in Arba Minch.

An hour's drive by car, about 1000 metres higher on the mountain (altitude 2400m) is the town of Chencha. Formerly the people in the highlands were the poor neighbours of those in the valley, as tropical fruits from the valley were sold to the poorer people in the highlands, who had little to offer in return. Today money flows in both directions as apples and other farm products produced in the highlands are traded in the valley. Today this trade includes artemisia.

In fact, the economic level of the community in Chencha is being visibly transformed; children are attending school, young people are going for higher education and families are improving their houses.

What is the story behind this remarkable change?

One of the earliest developments, supported by the British charity "Send a cow", was the introduction of improved "Holstein Friesian" cows, which produced a maximum of 19 litres of milk and an average of 10 litres per day instead of the usual 2 to 3 litres. Local farmers were arranged in "pass-on" groups of ten, and five of them were given a heifer. When that heifer produced a calf, this was given to the other five in the group. Then when these calves themselves calved, the animals were given to the first five in another group of ten.

Also some years ago, missionaries introduced the growing of apple trees. Today 70 different varieties of apple are grown, along with different varieties of pears and plums.

The government has attempted to introduce new ideas and techniques in the rural areas, but with very limited success. It is sometimes said that the church is the biggest "grass-roots" organisation there is. This is certainly the case with the Kale Heywet Church, which is to be found throughout the country, located in the heart of poor communities. This church has a real commitment to both the spiritual and physical needs of people. In Arba Minch, this church has enjoyed much greater success in its community development work than the government has ever managed.

Through its training events, the church has continued to teach introduce improved cattle to groups of farmers, and to train them in the cultivation of fruit trees. A Christian, German, economic agriculturalist, Ralph Wiegand, has contributed a lot in this area. The programme of training seminars in livestock and fruit farming has been

considerably developed, and they have been attended by people from far and wide in Ethiopia.

Then, early in 2001, Artemisia annua anamed was introduced. It was quickly discovered that, in the humid atmosphere of Chencha, the plant thrives. A Christian community development worker of the church, Theophilus Tesfaye, has taught local farmers how to cultivate and harvest artemisia, and has organised the



Theophilus Tesfaye with his artemisia

marketing. The church pays each farmer 4 Ethiopian Birr (40 European cents) for 40 grams of dried leaves in a sealed polythene bag.

The artemisia tea is taken down to Arba Minch, where the Kale Heywet Church passes it on to patients for the same amount, 40 cents for 40 grams. Between January 2004 and June 2005, according to carefully kept records, the church has supplied artemisia tea to no fewer than 1800 people. Artemisia tea seems to have been successful in every case. Furthermore, following the treatment of malaria with the tea, both children and adults have been healthy for much longer than is normally the case without suffering a further attack.

At first the local health centre and hospital opposed this programme. But then when the nurses themselves became sick with malaria, and after taking repeated doses of the conventional drugs their illness was still not healed, they too tried treatment with artemisia tea, with immediate success. As a result, when hospital patients are treated unsuccessfully with successive courses of tablets, they are advised to take artemisia, which they buy from the church.

Anamed ran training seminars in Natural Medicine in Arba Minch in 2002 and 2003, each time for 6 days with about 30 people. These seminars taught not only how to cultivate and use Artemisia annua anamed to treat malaria, haemorrhoids and bronchitis, but also

introduced participants to the use of several other locally available plants.



A Chencha gardener shows his artemisia plants and small nursery to seminar participants

The economic uplift of the people of Chencha is as a result of all this activity, which has engaged almost the entire community. The programme includes the improved cows and increased milk production, the cultivation and sale of apples and other fruit, the sale of seedling trees, the cultivation of *Artemisia annua* anamed and the sale of artemisia tea and the production, use and sale of other Natural Medicines. Theo Tesfaye is now planning the establishment of cooperatives in order to establish firmly the community ownership of this activity, and to ensure that the responsibilities and the new found wealth are distributed fairly throughout the community.

In Arba Minch, patients with malaria and haemorrhoids (a chronic problem in the region) are treated every day. It has been discovered that diabetes is also helped with artemisia tea. Other examples of the success of natural medicine in the area are

- a) two women are engaged full-time in producing rheumatism ointment from chillies. This ointment is extremely popular, and each woman earns 800 Birr (80 Euro) every month.

- b) A lady with severe kidney problems was referred to the hospital in Addis for treatment 500km away, but in vain. On her return she was given *Euphorbia hirta* tea, and was cured.

Today in Chencha, training seminars in the agriculture continue three times a year, but with a difference. Still with people from all over Ethiopia, these seminars include the cultivation and use of *Artemisia annua* anamed and also aspects of Natural Medicine.

The training events last for 7 weeks. As a result, people from many regions of Ethiopia have been trained in Chencha. All participants leave with artemisia seedlings, and now artemisia can be found growing in many parts of the Ethiopian highlands. Government officials have been invited to these training events, and the government is now recognising the success of this programme of agriculture and natural medicine. The Kale Heywet Church, together with anamed, intend to arrange an event in Addis Ababa to which they will invite representatives from Government ministries and other influential organisations, with a view to gaining support for a country-wide programme of community (economic) development, with agriculture and Natural Medicine as important components.

Belay Bekele, November 2005



An informal training event at which participants are learning how to make ointments from medicinal plants.

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