

Addis Ababa 25.10.2017

Verein Emmanuel - Emmanuel Newsletter 7

Dear friends and acquaintances, dear valued supporters!

It is 6 o'clock in the morning, I am sitting at a table by candlelight (and it is still very hot in Addis Ababa/Ethiopia) to write a few lines for the October newsletter. After a 10-day visit with our friends at Project Emmanuel in Soddo, I would like to share the highlights and give you a peek at the many encounters, joyful experiences and challenges that the disabled men and women in Soddo face.



l.: Dibora, the girl with foot prostheses, is now attending first grade. Center: Happy reunion with Zerihun! r.: New members have joined Project Emmanuel.

A chronological account of encounters, impressions and experiences is contained in my travel diary (see separate attachment).

In this newsletter, I am summarizing the most important news, developments, key points and challenges for Project Emmanuel and will let you experience a day in the life of the disabled people in Soddo.

NOTE: The goal of this year's trip, aside from visiting friends, was also to make a detailed project evaluation. Bernard Junod, the treasurer of Verein Emmanuel, accompanied me. Together we visited all of the sections of Project Emmanuel, had talks with the management team as well as with the supporters from the Soddo Christian Hospital.

At this point, I would like to thank all of you once again for your sympathy, encouragement and support up to now, in the form of many gifts you gave us to take along for the project members, but also for your financial contributions!

#### **Visiting Project Emmanuel – October 2017**

I will now take you on a long journey: over the ocean, to Eastern Africa, to Ethiopia. We land at Bole Airport in the capital Addis Ababa; the following day we get up at 5 a.m. to take the green overland bus to Soddo (capital of Wolayitta province) and we are already in the middle of Project Emmanuel here!



l. to r.: View of the large city Soddho Wolayitta – children on the street – the poor fetch drinking water from the river where people wash their motorcycles and clothing, and into which the city's sewage flows...

Ethiopia is a land full of contradictions: there are large cities such as the capital Addis Ababa, with skyscrapers, airports, a highway, and recently streetcars and a train, but also with great expanses of undeveloped, lonely bushland, where farming is done by hand. Grain is harvested on steep hillsides with hand sickles, then threshed on the ground with donkeys, scraped together with pitchforks and carried home on the backs of people or animals. We often see great contrasts: fat, rich people with ties and Mercedes, living in large villas surrounded by barbed wire, then lean beggars and poor people who live in tin-roofed huts or half disintegrated mud dwellings where they are exposed to rain and cold during the monsoon season; people who hardly have enough to eat. The disabled are especially stricken by poverty. Often there are neither mobility aids of any kind nor any health insurance; treatments are unaffordable for them. But in the midst of all of these contrasts, Ethiopia is a developing country: schools, banks, tall skyscrapers are being built, and new houses and streets are popping up all around. You see cellphones everywhere and Internet, radio and TV are strongly promoted.

In Soddho, we transfer from the Selam bus to our own Project minitaxi (Tagrow Bajaj). I will take you along on a visit to Tamirat:

Tamirat is a member of Project Emmanuel. He is a family man, suffering from polio since childhood, and has crippled hands and legs. He can move around without any aid, moving about on the floor on his hands and legs. Tamirat was excluded from his family due to his disability, but was fortunate to find a loving wife. In the meantime, they are proud parents of two small children.

We were invited to their public housing apartment—a simple hut at the edge of the city. They served coffee and popcorn. Tamirat tells us his life story:

As a severely disabled man, he had to fight for his life on a daily basis and was only able to move around his house within a very tight radius by crawling on all fours. But he was a creative and talented craftsman. Working from home, he constructed small wooden items such as chairs and tables, as well as knitting and crocheting in his hut. Finally, he got to know Melese, the manager of Project Emmanuel. Melese gave him a wheelchair so that he was able to be more mobile. From time to time, Tamirat could work at Project Emmanuel's mobility aid workshop if someone was able to push him back up the hill to his home after work. He could roll down the hill on his own, but the return journey was impossible for him to manage by himself. Since the time Project Emmanuel got its own taxi, Tamirat is taken to work and back home every day. In the mobility aid workshop, he manufactures upper arm crutches out of wood and other cabinetry materials. He loves the work and feels comfortable in the workshop team of 20 disabled men. On workdays, he receives three meals at the workshop as well as a small income. From this, he has been able to buy a light bulb for his home workshop as well as a radio. He was able to paint the walls of his house yellow, his wife receives some money for food and his children each get an egg. Tamirat is happy and thankful for receiving a new lease on life and fresh hope through Melese and Project Emmanuel.



l. to r.: A long time ago: do-it-yourselfer Tamirat – Tamirat in the workshop – Tamirat, including his wheelchair, being transported to the workshop and back home with the mini taxi!

While we are still sitting at coffee, Melese suddenly signals everyone to be quiet and points to the small radio in the corner. In five minutes, there will be a radio interview on the local station with some life stories of Project Emmanuel members.

“My name is Zerihun“, says a paralyzed man. “I was always kept hidden by my family because of my disability, because they were ashamed. I was locked into a dark room. It was always night all around me. One day, Melese found me and he invited me to work with Project Emmanuel. He gave me crutches. Today, I work in the mobility aid workshop, I receive meals and have a roof over my head. Thanks to my small income, I can even help others, and occasionally also my family. This way, they accept me better. With the mobility aids we manufacture, we can help many other disabled persons literally ‘get on their feet’. That is wonderful! And now I am in the sunlight during the day; it is only dark around me at nighttime.”

“My name is Asrat. I was put out on the street by my family and sent begging because I had polio and was considered a useless parasite. But I could hardly survive. Hunger, cold and the moisture during the rainy season, being an outcast from society made it very difficult for me. My life had no meaning. I was on my way to drown myself in a nearby river when Melese happened to drive past on his motorcycle and asked what I was doing there. I told him everything. He invited me to come to Project Emmanuel. I was welcomed in the community of disabled persons and found acceptance and appreciation as well as work as a shoeshiner; I got meals and accommodations in the men’s workshop. Now my life has meaning again and I have goals. I am infinitely grateful.”

“I lived on the street as a beggar. At night, I slept as a homeless tramp in the rich people’s graveyard, because there is a sheltering roof over the chapel of rest. Because this is sort of a spooky place, nobody bothered me or chased me away. I could not walk because of my disability. One day, I met Melese on the street, and he gave me wheelchair and took me to the men’s workshop of Project Emmanuel. I work there now, making crutches and wheelchairs for the disabled, I get daily meals and can sleep at the workshop.” That is Abera’s story.

As could be heard in the interviews, many disabled persons in Ethiopia (and in the Third World) are often in a very difficult situation: disability is considered a curse from the gods. People with a handicap are cast out by their own families and society, many of them have a meager existence as beggars on the streets of the big cities. Any sort of aid is unaffordable, and they are not allowed to go to school. No one wants to hire them or give them work, because they are considered to be incapable of productive work.

**Melese, manager and founder of Project Emmanuel**, has a similar story: he also was sent to beg on the streets by his family when he was a teenager afflicted with polio. After a long time of suffering, he found help at the Soddò Christian Hospital. He received surgery, crutches, training and work as a physiotherapist at the hospital. He is very thankful that he has received a new outlook. For him, it is also a gift from God. He lives out the vision to get many other disabled persons off the street and to provide them with mobility aids, work, food, accommodation, income, dignity and community. Project Emmanuel started in 2015 as an innovative self-help project for the disabled in Soddò, with the following motto, to show society that **Disability does not mean inability!**



I. to r.: Asrat the shoecleaner; Abera, the man from the cemetery; Zerihun in his wheelchair, in the light ☺

### Development of Project Emmanuel Ethiopia so far:

Below, I am attempting to list the most important milestones for the history of this project for the disabled as well as to show the changes.

- Start of Project Emmanuel in January 2015: joint vision of Melese und Rahel Röthlisberger
- Focal points: work, income, food, accommodation, dignity, appreciation and community for the disabled
- At the project's start, workplaces were created in the form of microcredit-based small businesses. The disabled persons worked as shoe cleaners, street kiosk salespersons, seamstresses or sold eggs, for example.
- During the last two years, further workplaces suitable for disabled persons were created; today, 20 men and 20 women are working in the two workshops producing mobility aids and food. They receive three meals a day, free accommodation and a small income that finances their daily needs.
- During the last two years, most of the people in the microcredit project have given up their small business venture and are now working at one of the two workshops. The reasons for this they mentioned were that the income from the business was hardly enough to buy food, and certainly not enough to pay for living quarters. In the workshops, the employees receive three meals a day and can stay overnight there for free. Not least, they have fellowship and community in the 20-person teams.



I. to r.: Melese, founder and manager of Project Emmanuel – Fellowship among the members – Almaz with crutches and knitting



l: Women in the food production workplace; center: A seamstress r: Melese with Dibora (before she received foot prosthetics) below l.: Men in the mobility aid workplace below r.: Countless people without mobility aids must crawl on the floor until they receive crutches or a wheelchair.



- In the meantime, Project Emmanuel now has a motorcycle (owned by Melese) and a mini taxi (Tagrow Bajaj), that are available to the project around the clock for employee transport, delivery of merchandise, purchasing supplies etc.
- A shop for mobility aids such as crutches, wheelchairs and walking frames has been opened on the premises of the SCH Hospital, which are being sold directly to hospital patients for some weeks now.
- A further house is currently being constructed for the Emmanuel Center. It will later be used as living quarters for Melese Project Emmanuel employees and homeless disabled persons. The house is not finished yet; further funding is needed for the roof and the interior amenities such as kitchen, toilets and showers. The access road is impassable during the rainy season due to enormous mud patches. The city authorities are responsible for making the road drivable, but it is always very unsure when this will happen.
- In the meantime, Project Emmanuel had grown swiftly, so that the manager Melese was under increased pressure due to the double burden of managing Project Emmanuel and continuing his job as a physiotherapist at the hospital. For this reason, he has concluded his employment at the hospital in the summer of 2017 and is now full-time director of Project Emmanuel (receiving financial support from Verein Emmanuel Schweiz.)
- The Project Emmanuel management team consists of Melese and the Project Emmanuel board: Tesfaye, Birhanu Simon, Belay, Jaffo and Desta Dea
- Project Emmanuel is receiving great support, coaching and supervision from SCH professionals such as Duane Anderson, surgeon, and Gary Vanderkooi, accountant, as well as Ato Desalegn, CEO
- There is continued contact to the local authorities, who call Project Emmanuel a "showcase model" for Ethiopian work with the disabled and always mention it in public. The media (radio and TV) also continually publicize and report on Project Emmanuel and in this way, they help other disabled persons in remote areas find out where they can procure mobility aids.
- Verein Emmanuel was founded in Switzerland in summer 2015. It funds Project Emmanuel and supports project development. The association is tax exempt throughout Switzerland.



I.to r.: above the Emmanuel Center – a construction site – Management team Project Emmanuel – Mobility aid workshop – Continuous media visits – Film and interviews

So much about what Project Emmanuel has become since its founding in 2015. Today, the project for the disabled offers work, income, daily meals and accommodation for around 40 men and women. People who have been despised and outcast receive appreciation and dignity and are integrated into the community of the disabled just like into a family.

We from Project and Verein Emmanuel are thankful for everything. This way, our joint vision comes alive and becomes real.

But there are also **great challenges for Project Emmanuel**, and I would like to mention a few of them here: **Both workspaces** offer jobs, but the workspaces are currently not self-supporting and do not make a profit. They still need financial support from Switzerland. We will see if Project Emmanuel can stand on its own two legs financially, so to speak, or if the workplaces still need to be funded (similar to protected jobs for people who are on disability insurance in Switzerland).

If the two workspaces develop well, **a third facility for the production of garments and leather goods** is planned. This would offer workplaces for around 20 persons.



I. to r.: Workspace No. 3? – Power cuts and the big baking machine! – All kinds of mobility aids are in great demand!

There is a great demand for the production of mobility aids, but many disabled persons hardly have any money to buy the necessary aids. Verein Emmanuel Schweiz set up the **Benevol Fund** for this reason, which makes it possible to distribute crutches and wheelchairs for free to needy disabled persons. In addition, it funds orthopedic surgery offered by Dr. Duane Anderson at the SCH hospital.

Many hospitals all over the country have a **great demand for mobility aids**. Aside from expanding production, the transportation problem must also be resolved. It would be a great help if Project Emmanuel had its own transportation vehicle, but it is very expensive. The transports and deliveries have to be carried out using rental vehicles at the customers' cost.

The frequent electrical outages in the city often cause losses for the **food production workspace** (spoiled food) with lost sales and salaries. The baking will be carried out in several shifts throughout the day to minimize losses. An emergency generator for the near future would help secure round-the-clock production.

The city government wants to **prohibit the use of the workspaces for eating and sleeping**; these should only be used for manufacturing. But where should all of the disabled go? Rented apartments are too expensive and there are hardly any alternatives. The Emmanuel Center might be able to house some of them, but the building and the access road have to be completed first.

Lacking school education, badly functioning technical equipment as well as the Internet continue to make **bookkeeping and administration on location as well as the communication** between Project Emmanuel in Soddo and Verein Emmanuel Switzerland difficult. Improvements are necessary and have been initiated.

Because of the current challenges, **Verein Emmanuel Schweiz** has set the following **key support items for Project Emmanuel**:

- Provision of starting capital to expand production at both workplaces, to secure jobs suitable for disabled persons, and running the shop for mobility aids on the hospital grounds.
- Benevol Fund: Donations for free mobility aids and orthopedic surgery for penniless disabled persons.
- Completion of the Emmanuel Center: Accommodations for disabled persons, with the support of Duane Anderson and Project Emmanuel Soddo
- Coaching and a salary for the project manager Melese
- Further concerns that Project Emmanuel has are simply being noted, and we hope to be able to fund these sometime in the future, depending on further project development: a generator for the food production workspace, a transportation vehicle for regular delivery of mobility aids to hospitals all over Ethiopia, equipping and operating a third workspace (again with 20 workplaces that are suitable for disabled persons for the production of garments and leather goods)
- On behalf of all of the disabled persons in Soddo, Verein Emmanuel would like to thank everyone for their concern and participation in the lives of these people and for all of the financial support for further development of the project. These are a great encouragement for the association as well as Project Emmanuel!
- News from Verein Emmanuel Schweiz: there is not much news. Two thirds of the board were just in Ethiopia and had been intensively involved in preparations for that beforehand.



Recipients of mobility aids—there are countless, thankful disabled persons. Thanks to the Benevol Fund!

Last but not least:

- Please note the date of the **Annual General Meeting 2018**: Saturday April 7, 2018 (as from 17:00), casappella Worblaufen

- Photographs from Project Emmanuel November 15, 2017 at 14:00hrs – 60 plus at the KGH Ittigen. You are all invited!
- Website Project Emmanuel: [www.Project-emmanuel.ch](http://www.Project-emmanuel.ch) with all of the forms and newsletters. Upon request, I can gladly send you a paper or email version. Please e-mail me ([rahel\\_medizin@gmx.ch](mailto:rahel_medizin@gmx.ch))
- Membership Verein Emmanuel Schweiz: new members are gladly welcome!
- Donations: Payment slips (Postfinance account) – heartfelt thanks from Emmanuel for all of your support
- Verein Emmanuel Schweiz is a tax-exempt charity in the canton of Bern (retroactively since August 15, 2015)
- Sale of charity cheese: As always, you can order cheese from me ([rahel\\_medizin@gmx.ch](mailto:rahel_medizin@gmx.ch))

Attachment:

- Flyer Project Emmanuel
- Travel diary by Rahel Röthlisberger October 2017
- Payment slip