

Interview

“The effect is really immense”

Berhanu Negussie was the first employee of Menschen für Menschen (MfM) in Ethiopia, working as a social worker and interpreter. He met Karlheinz Böhm, the founder of the aid organization, in 1982 and joined him on his mission to help people who had been displaced by war and drought. In 2002, Negussie took on the role as country representative, a position he held until his retirement at the end of 2020. Spotlight talked to him about the work of the organization and the impact it has on the lives of so many living in communities in rural Ethiopia.



Today, MfM has a staff of 650 in Ethiopia. What do MfM’s employees do?

In Addis Ababa, we have some 60 staff, including drivers and guards, at the Project Coordination Office. The rest reside among the community in different parts of the country. Development agents, who are working at the grassroots level with the community, live with them, sharing their lives and, at the same time, learning from each other. This is indigenous knowledge that we value very highly at MfM, because it is a learning and teaching process. We also have social workers, who work with women, in home economics activities and health education, especially with family planning and the like.

Could you tell us about a specific community MfM has helped?

I would like to talk about one community living in a village called Jelissa, in southern Wollo. MfM started growing apples there. We went long distances to the southern part of Ethiopia, brought [back] apple seedlings and trained farmers. This was seven or eight years back. Recently, it has become so productive that they are producing vegetables at the same time. They have crops like wheat, they have water places, they have beekeeping and honey. In that village, life has been totally changed and they’re getting very good incomes compared to previously. They have improved their houses, they send their children to school nearby and others can pay tuition fees for private colleges.

It is not only the amount of money or the income they’re earning, it is also about the introduction of new technologies, a new, modern way of farming. And now many farmers are growing apples in the whole area, but that is where it started and it is really very unique and the outcome is also very encouraging.

- aid organization
- Hilfsorganisation
- beekeeping
- Bienenhaltung, Imkerei
- crops
- Feldfrüchte; hier: Getreide
- displace
- vertreiben
- drought [draʊt]
- Dürre
- grassroots level: at the ~
- Graswurzel
- home economics
- Hauswirtschaft
- impact
- Einfluss, Auswirkung(en)
- indigenous [ɪnˈdɪdʒənəs]
- der Eingeborenen, überliefert
- interpreter
- Dolmetscher(in)
- previously [ˈpriːviəsli]
- früher
- reside
- wohnen
- rural
- ländlich
- seedling
- Jungpflanze
- tuition fee [tʃuˈɪʃən]
- Schul-, Studiengebühr
- unique [juˈniːk]
- einzigartig, besonders
- wheat
- Weizen

Spotlight

In Kooperation mit



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And it all began with water provision?

Yes. Whenever we construct water places, we use them for multiple purposes, not only for drinking. It is there for washing, and we can have animal troughs at the same time. There is a dam where the water can be held and used for small-scale irrigation. This is a wise use of water.

How is climate change affecting your projects in rural communities in Ethiopia?

We used to get water for our project areas from 10 to 15 metres below ground, but this is not possible any more. The desert is going to expand, but at the same time, torrential rain will increase, which is the cause of massive soil erosion. Areas are washed away, rich topsoil is being taken away and then you experience a decline in production. The effect is really immense. Of course, at MfM, we have been taking mitigation measures, at the micro level, where we can for three decades: planting trees, doing soil and water conservation, especially warning farmers not to cut down trees and to preserve the existing parts of the forest. Our forestation programme is given the utmost attention at MfM, but that is just a drop in the ocean.

How is the Covid-19 pandemic affecting the work you are doing?

It doesn't bring all our activities to a halt, but there are activities that we are not able to execute, mainly due to social distancing rules. Training, which is the backbone of all our development activities, cannot take place because of the pandemic. And neither can health programmes. Of course, we are struggling, but we try to address these activities as much as possible, but this is also one of our challenges for the future. The general goal for the coming year is to improve the livelihood of the rural community in a sustainable way, so that communities can plan their lives independently and become self-reliant.



address sth.	→ sich mit etw. befassen
affect sth.	→ sich auf etw. auswirken
animal trough [trɒf]	→ Viehtränke
backbone	→ Rückgrat
construct	→ bauen
decline	→ Rückgang
distancing rules	→ Abstandsregeln
drop: a - in the ocean	→ ein Tropfen auf dem heißen Stein
forestation	→ Aufforstung
halt	→ Stillstand

livelihood	→ Existenzgrundlage
micro level	→ Mikroebene
mitigation measures	→ Abschwächungs-, Schutzmaßnahmen
preserve	→ erhalten
self-reliant [ˌself riˈlaɪənt]	→ selbstständig
small-scale	→ in kleinem Maßstab
soil	→ (Erd)Boden
topsoil	→ Humusschicht
torrential rain [təˈrenʃəl]	→ Starkregen
utmost	→ höchste

Information:

This year, Menschen für Menschen has launched a campaign for children and adolescents aiming to build wells in Ethiopia to fight the water shortage. All details about the campaign and MfM's work can be found here:



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