Ethiopia is a highland in the northeast of Africa with great history. Known in the era of the Pharaohs as Punt, in Roman times as Axum - a mighty empire, Ethiopia accepted Christianity as the state religion even before Rome. The people feel very connected to Christianity in a deeply religious way.

Ethiopia has the oldest Muslim community outside of Mecca and Medina, and has also had a small Jewish community for thousands of years. Today more than 200 ethnic groups of different religions live together in Ethiopia.

**Economic and natural challenges**

Ethiopia is among the poorest countries in the world. An estimated 49% of the population is undernourished; even in "good" harvest years million of Ethiopians remain dependent on food aid. And although child labor was abolished in Europe decades ago, it is still widespread here.

Drought and floods caused by widespread deforestation and erosion are causes of hunger, in contrast to an annual population growth of 2 million in the last decade. Whereas periods of drought in earlier years occurred at intervals of 25 to 30 years, they now come at intervals of four to five years.

Hawzien, one of the oldest cities of Ethiopia, emerged in the Axumite kingdom. The Orthodox Christian "town of 6,600 saints" is located more than 2,800 meters above sea level. In order to weaken an earlier liberation movement, a brutal act of violence took place in 1988 at the time of the communist dictatorship. On a market day in full daylight the town was bombed and more than 2,500 people lost their lives. Amidst the ruins of this dramatic event an impulse was born to create a better future for the children. This led in 2002 to the founding of the Phoenix Society for Integrated Development.
And so a project started....
Due to the lack of kindergartens, schools and vocational schools, the region is facing great challenges. Under the leadership of Dr. Atsbaha Gebre Selassie (with a PhD in organic farming) and many other committed educators, a school was built on a three hectare piece of land provided free of charge by the community. And so it was that in the first project in Ethiopia with a holistic approach emerged.

The kindergarten, a home away from home

Today there are 120 children in the kindergarten and with an additional building a 3rd group is planned, in order to reduce the large numbers of children now in each group.

At the same time, plans for a school are being made and the parents are really doing all they can to make it possible for their children to continue in this kind of education after kindergarten. At this point we’d like to introduce the educators who for many years now have worked continuously on this project with great commitment. Their names express the fine quality of their work with the children and what the real tasks are in this country:

Zenanu - Rain
Brehan - Light
Freuwni - Grape
Tigist - Patience
Hiwo - Life

If you put these names together you get a vivid picture of their work with the children: Through "Rain" and "Light" "Life" is created and when we allow things to grow and mature with "Patience", we can if we continue to give the care needed, one day harvest the "Grapes".
A seed of Harmony for a better future

The kindergarten grows and thrives, and is a place children and parents are happy to come to. Through parent work and what the children bring home, a lot has already changed in the families.

The harmony that is spreading through this work is planted in the local the community like a seed and it is especially present in the joy of life of the teachers in dealing with each other and in their relationships with the children.

Some children come on their own all the way to the kindergarten, although it was agreed with the parents beforehand that the children should be brought into the kindergarten. But for the small children it is like going to their 2nd home and so they see no harm in wandering off on their own.

Another focus of the project is to strengthen health education in the families through work with the children and parents in the school. The infection rate of AIDS in 2006 was approximately 6.6% of the adult population, which means that in Ethiopia about three million people are infected. In 2006, approximately 1.2 million children were orphaned as a result of this disease. Through continuous training and development in our work with the adults we help to deepen their understanding of child development and health education, with respect for their culture and taking the local circumstances and possibilities into consideration.

Through this project a seed for a better future is planted and has taken root in Hawzien but it still needs support in order to stand strong against the many storms that pass through this country ruled by adversities.

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