

How Self Help Groups have been improving livelihoods and transforming lives in Ethiopia

Background



Photo: Eleanor Bentall/Tearfund

Some years, Ethiopia produces enough food to feed its population. But often, other factors - such as drought, soil erosion, poverty, lack of access to education and poor infrastructure - have held up this progress and have contributed to food insecurity and limited the livelihood opportunities of the Ethiopian people.

One response by Tearfund was the introduction of Self Help Groups (SHGs) in 2002. SHGs are groups of 15-20 people who voluntarily form a group and start saving money (often starting around 3-5p). When a sufficient amount of money has been saved, members can take out loans to set up small businesses and those most in need are prioritised. As a result of this work 1,000s of people have now improved their

livelihoods and together are lifting themselves out of poverty.

Partner organisations

Tearfund's partner organisation, Kale Heywet Church (EKHC), has a membership of over 6 million people and consists of 7,000 local churches. For a number of years now, the church have been supporting and encouraging local churches to reach out to people in their communities, to address issues related to poverty and livelihoods.

In 2009, in the village of Kaynante, a local EKHC church was inspired to address issues in their community after participating in training provided by EKHC on mobilising the community and the establishment of SHGs.

"We heard about the concept of the Self Help Group, and that it is not just for believers. So we shared it with the whole village, and everyone- including the Muslims - liked it and wanted to participate. Since then we have formed 7 Self Help Groups."

The SHGs save between 1-5 birr (5-20p) depending on their capacity, and the groups have managed to save a total of 5,120 birr (about £250), in less than a year. This is amazing considering how poor these people are. Furthermore, there are 8 more groups established in the area by others like Mekane Yesus and Full Gospel Believers Church. Both these churches heard about the approach from what the SHGs were doing in Kaynante, and asked to be taught the SHG approach. As a result they set up their own SHGs.

From some of the savings, 2 SHGs in Kaynante have managed to buy 8 sheep, which gave birth to 9 lambs. This has proven to be a good investment and has improved the villages' food security situation.

"Most of the people are destitute and we never had a saving mentality but now we are seeing the difference that saving makes and the future seems bright. The Self Help Group approach means salvation to us, by doing this we are saving peoples lives!"

Impact on beneficiaries

One of the leaders of the Kaynante local church tells a moving story of how the SHGs have reached out to help others in the community:

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“We all knew about this man who was living in a very poor condition. He and his wife and five children were living in a hovel in the field and it was not fit for anyone to live there. All the Self Help Group members decided to contribute and build this house for him.”

The man who had the house built for his family by the SHG was overwhelmed by their love and support and remarked:

“This is not just a hut to me, it is far more than a building. I was waiting to die but now I am saved! I have five children and we were all waiting to die but not any longer, now we are alive and saved!”

His wife continued:

“We did not have hope. But when we heard about the Self Help Group approach, we joined one and they have come and built this house for us. I did not even prepare breakfast or anything like coffee for them, but they even brought this with them.”

One of the leaders of the Kaynante local church reflecting on the work of the SHGs observed:

“We see that by working together and by loving each other we can bring transformation to our community and the people living in it.”

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