

The Need

Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world. More than three-quarters of the population lives below the poverty level – a consequence of recurring drought in a country heavily reliant on agricultural production. Nearly all Ethiopians are subsistence farmers, with little opportunity to pursue goals beyond meeting their family's basic needs.



A half-century of autocratic and military rule has further exacerbated Ethiopia's precarious economic situation. In the 1980s, the country's Marxist economy, poor harvests and ongoing civil war brought severe famine to millions of people. According to the most recent UNICEF estimate, Ethiopia has 5.7 million orphans – a result of multiple and widespread causes, including a high rate of HIV/AIDS infection.

In 1995, the country's first multi-party elections brought an end to two decades of military rule. Ethiopia became a federal democratic republic and started developing a viable economy – a process however strained by ongoing political tensions.

Holt's History in Ethiopia

Holt assessed and established an international adoption program (ICA) in Ethiopia in 2007. In Ethiopia's capitol city, Addis Ababa, Holt founded a transitional home with capacity to care for 35 children in process for ICA. Through partnership with a local NGO, Holt also helped renovate a childcare facility in the rural southern region of Durame and subsequently began in-taking children. By the end of 2007, Holt had completed two adoptions. Despite more restrictive processing requirements the following year, Holt-Ethiopia's ICA program grew rapidly.

While ICA proved a successful way to bring Ethiopia's homeless children into loving, permanent homes, Holt also began exploring ways to keep children in their birth families and their birth culture. In 2008, Holt introduced a family preservation program designed to alleviate the crippling poverty endured by many Ethiopian families.

Current Projects

In 2009, Holt-Ethiopia allied with community and regional leaders to identify the "poorest of the poor" in four impoverished zones. Here, social workers collaborate with each family to create an action plan toward self-reliance. Key to a family's action plan is access to education for younger children, and the opportunity for older children serving as heads of household to develop vocational skills or income-generating projects such as keeping livestock or small retail. After providing the resources and start-up funds for these projects, Holt monitors their progress on a monthly basis. Assisted families also join action support groups composed of 5 or 6 families who seek ways to help each other.

Once they've achieved food security, reliable income and adequate housing, when their children are attending school and their medical and psychosocial needs are being met, a family is considered stable. They have achieved their goal of self-reliance and are encouraged to serve as role models to others in their action support group. Holt's family preservation work is diverse and also includes counseling, food assistance, educational sponsorship and health care.

In addition to case-by-case interventions, Holt made a broader effort to improve health care for Ethiopia's rural poor in 2009 with the renovation and expansion of a maternal-child health clinic in Shinshicho, a district capitol. After renovations, the clinic's capacity to treat patients grew substantially, child survival improved, and health care workers became better equipped to promote long-term health of mothers and children. Increased education about family planning, health and sanitation, and pre- and postnatal services also reinforce Holt's efforts to prevent child abandonment and preserve family stability in the region.

In 2010, Holt also equipped a healthcare clinic for mothers and children in the District of Doyogena, the location of one of our family preservation programs. In the years since, the Shinshicho and Doyogena health centers have seen remarkable achievements in maternal and child health services. In 2011, more than

68,000 children and adults received medical services within the centers and, through health outreach, in the surrounding villages as well.

In 2010, Holt initiated a fundraising campaign to complete renovations to the medical clinic in Shinshicho. Thanks to support by the Ethiopian government, and the local community's commitment to raise significant matching funds, the clinic was upgraded to a maternal-child health grade hospital. Once construction of the Shinshicho Maternal Child Health Center is complete, Holt anticipates that the total number served will grow exponentially.

In 2009 and 2010, Holt helped coordinate two medical/surgical teams at the Shinshicho Medical Center and at a hospital in Durame. Here, volunteer medical teams from the U.S. worked alongside Ethiopian physicians to provide specialized care to those who couldn't otherwise afford treatment. The collaborative effort served to enrich the knowledge and skills of staff at the two facilities, giving Ethiopian medical personnel the surgical-team experience to perform operations independently.

Holt's family preservation efforts over the past few years have also shown great success. In February 2011, 120 families in our family preservation program participated in a graduation ceremony celebrating their extraordinary achievement. By year's end, every one of the original 360 families – including 2,093 children – in our programs had successfully graduated. At the request of the Ethiopian government, Holt subsequently expanded the family preservation program to two new districts in the southern region. Here, we established new action support groups to help a new group of families achieve both self-reliance, and lasting stability.

For children living outside of family care and unable to rejoin their birth families, Holt continues to place them with adoptive families at a steady – albeit slower – pace. Holt also helps support several childcare centers in partnership with local organizations, providing nurturing care for children awaiting permanent placement.

Strategic Directions

The rapid growth of adoption from Ethiopia over the past several years has brought increased scrutiny by some Ethiopian media outlets and international NGOs – many of whom advocate humanitarian activities only. Adoption officials in both U.S. and Ethiopia – including Holt International – continue to support

international adoption as an important solution for homeless children. But as the rate of adoption has grown, so has the task



of ensuring important protections for children and their birth families. Holt continues to work with the Ethiopian government to develop practices that are ethical, protect children and families, and ensure adoption for every child who truly needs it – maintaining consistent, if fewer, adoption assignments.

In 2012, 390 households are slated to receive support through the family preservation program. As new partnerships are solidified, we anticipate an additional 570 families joining the program – serving around 3,000 children through all partners. Educational sponsorship, including funding to improve buildings and provide school supplies, will further expand Holt's outreach in the coming years.

Holt is also partnering with a local orphanage, zonal police and the local social service offices to reunite children with their birth families. To ensure families' capacity to care for their children, Holt provides funds for training, family counseling, food and clothing. As Holt begins to serve new regions, the number of reunifications is expected to grow.

With additional funding from Holt donors and adoptive parents, the \$1.2 million construction project for the Shinshicho Maternal Child Health Center is projected to complete in early 2013.

After the success of the first two medical campaigns, Holt drew considerable interest from donors in the U.S. Holt will fund another medical campaign in 2012, and will actively pursue grant and donor funding to grow services in all areas of Holt's work in Ethiopia.