



and bring about change

Kerebigne school children now have desks and chairs, thanks to Ibssa

IN SACRAMENTO, AT THE McClatchy Company, **Seifu Ibssa**, '92 Business, is known as a financial systems analyst and PeopleSoft expert. In his birthplace of Kerebigne, Ethiopia, he's known as an expert on construction, waterworks, medicine, education, transportation and (probably) donkey management.

Acheber, 10,000 feet above sea level, is the nearest village to Kerebigne. From Acheber, Ibssa's birthplace is accessible only by donkey, horse or a steep 45-minute hike higher into the mountains. To transport the necessary construction materials to build a water storage tank required 25 donkeys and a difficult, uphill trek for Ibssa and his team.

But the results were more than worth the effort, he says.

"I will never forget seeing an eight-year-old boy collect dirty water left over from the dogs, hyenas and cattle from a small spring."

With the new water tank, Kerebigne finally has a source of clean drinking water. But a water storage tank is only the beginning of Ibssa's improvement plans.

"My dream is big. I want to transform that village," he says.

Life in the West

With the help of relatives, Ibssa was able to move to Addis Ababa, finish high school and graduate from a two-year college in 1980 with a degree in accounting. But the political situation in his country was extremely volatile. The Marxist regime that ousted Emperor Haile Selassie in the mid-1970s made Ibssa "desperate to leave Ethiopia for anywhere." With great difficulty, he got to Nigeria, where his brother worked

for Ethiopian Airlines. The U.S. embassy in Nigeria granted him a visa to come to the United States; his brother provided the plane ticket. It was, Ibssa says, "my first time on a plane and on a sweet freedom ride!"

In California, he attended Santa Monica College and worked part time at a local CPA firm.

"Los Angeles was special to me. I was in awe. The technology, tall buildings, freeway system, the enormous freedom people exercised! Unbelievable!" Ibssa recalls.

After graduating from SJSU, he worked briefly for the biotech start-up GenPharm before relocating to Sacramento. Since 1999, he has worked at McClatchy, the newspaper conglomerate.

Acutely aware of the value of his own education, Ibssa wants to provide the youth of Kerebigne with the same access to success. "I want to give them the opportunity to succeed through education, a chance awarded to me almost four decades ago," Ibssa says. Already he has supplied classroom desks and benches for children who previously sat on the ground to learn their lessons.

Ethiopian Village Outreach

Many of Ethiopia's 74 million inhabitants live in conditions of dire poverty. The World Health Organization reports that the country has fewer than three physicians per 100,000 residents (in comparison, the United States has 548). The literacy rate for males is 50 percent, for females much less.

After the Marxist regime was overthrown, Ibssa began returning to his homeland. The acute and widespread suffering he witnessed there sent him back

to Sacramento determined to provide humanitarian relief. In 2005, he founded Ethiopian Village Outreach. In addition to providing clean water for more than 200 villagers and desks that can seat 250 students, EVO has provided medical supplies and paid for a maternity bed in the only clinic.

In the immediate future, Ibssa plans to rent housing for 30 to 40 students in Arba-Chulule, a town closer to the high school. "Ninety-nine percent of the kids who graduate from 8th grade quit school because either they can't walk 60 miles round trip on a daily basis or don't have anyone near town to accommodate them while they go to school," Ibssa says. He also plans to provide those students with shoes. "Ninety-five percent of high school students don't have shoes. I didn't have a pair myself until I was fourteen."

Also on Ibssa's relief agenda: additional water tanks, clinic upgrades and a program that "teaches farmers how best to use their land to produce a variety of grain, fruits and vegetables. At this time, they don't grow any fruits or vegetables."

Each time he returns from Ethiopia, Ibssa says, he "feels like kissing the ground at the airport. The conveniences we have here! Plenty of food, daily showers, vehicles. Too often too many of us take those conveniences for granted. Be thankful for your country, I tell my friends. Have the utmost respect for your freedom and all the good things that come with it."

—Kat Meads

For more information about Ethiopian Village Outreach, contact Ibssa at 916-689-2980, sibssa@yahoo.com.