



PROGRESS REPORT

Addis Ababa, Jan. 28, 2007 (Updated) – Elshadai Relief & Development Association – a home grown NGO dedicated to the wellbeing of children and sustainable development – is taking action to tackle begging.

Begging has drastically increased in recent years. City streets, traffic lights, public transits, places of worship, shopping centers, tourist destinations, and hotels are swarmed with people who try to make a living by begging.

The current trend is particularly alarming as rural based farmers and their families are flooding to cities to engage in begging. What is more disturbing is the fact that using infants and children for begging has become all too common.

It has been said that children who are neglected and left to beg or forced to beg with parents represent a clear-cut child protection issue, and Elshadai shares that view. Not only are such children deprived of their constitutional right to education, but are exposed to verbal, physical as well as sexual abuse – not to mention their increased exposure to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS



A hand stretched for begging and children with little supervision, as parents are busy begging.

Consequently, Elshadai took it upon itself to take a leading role in the effort to address the dependency on begging issue, and take action. Elshadai has allocated a great deal of its human, material as well as financial resources to such difficult yet highly worthwhile undertaking. And to date Elshadai has:

- Conducted a two-year research on the issue of begging that is rural in origin.
- Interviewed hundreds of people who depend on begging.

- Traveled to “begging prone” rural areas in Tigray and Amhara regions, and held several discussions with residents, local administration, and experts in order to have a clear understanding of the underlying causes.
- Worked closely with community and religious leaders as well as with respective local, and federal government bodies to find a lasting solution through intervention.
- Conducted workshops and held various meetings with concerned individuals and institutions in Mekelle and Addis Ababa.
- Involved the media to create public awareness.

The Findings

1. Despite the Ethiopian government’s development efforts, rural-friendly policies and encouraging results in poverty reduction as well as in the provision of education and healthcare services to rural regions, dependency on begging has increased in some areas visited.
2. At least **50,000** people from rural areas are engaged in begging in the city of Addis Ababa alone, and **22,000** of them are believed to be from the Tigray Region.
3. While the underlying cause for some is absolute destitution, for others begging is simply an alternative source for supplementary income.
4. Generous almsgiving has made cities and tourist destinations a fertile ground for begging.
5. Distorted information – spread by those engaged in begging – that portrays cities as a “land of milk and honey” has become a major luring factor for others to follow suit.
6. Some farmers admitted and regretted that the grain they had left in storage was found spoiled when they returned from their “begging trip” to cities.
7. The need to rehabilitate and reintegrate beggars in their places of origin, and prevent discrimination against them.
8. What is needed is not just financial or material aid, but also psychosocial support as well as education and awareness raising programs directed at those who are engaged in begging.
9. The well meaning but misguided public also has to be educated on the negative impacts of unplanned giving.
10. The role of the media is paramount in creating and enhancing public awareness.
11. The need to tackle the problem legislatively by, for instance, introducing a “Safe Streets Act”, which aims to discourage aggressive begging and ban certain acts that compromise public safety, such as begging at traffic lights and on busy intersections.

Progress Made

The Direct Stakeholders:

It was initially difficult for those who are engaged in begging to open up and speak about their way of life. However, after persistent attempt and an education/awareness raising initiatives, Elshadai was eventually able to win their trust. As a result, begging dependents:

- a. Privately and publicly expressed their desire to turn their back on begging, and return home to a productive life.
- b. Have vowed that they would never return to a life of begging.

- c. A total of **2,349** adults and children have willfully returned to their homes in the Tigray Region, so far.
- d. The returnees have been well taken care of during their trip home; welcomed with open arms and smoothly reintegrated in their communities.
- e. The returnees are seen as homecoming heroes who finally said no to begging.
- f. **16** employees have been hired to ensure a smooth transition/adjustment of the returnees, and to follow-up on their progress.
- g. The returnees are expressing their pleasure with their decision to return home and the opportunity to lead a normal life once again.
- h. **4,209** more are registered and eagerly waiting to return.

Local Communities:

Intensive education and awareness raising programs have been carried out in “begging prone” areas of Tigray. As a result, while denouncing dependency on begging, residents of the local communities in Tigray who rejected begging all along and remained in their homes and villages despite any hardship have passed a resolution and committed themselves:

1. Not to follow in the footsteps of people who leave their homes with a clear intention to beg.
2. Not to discriminate against their brothers and sisters who were engaged in begging.
3. To provide all the necessary support to those who decide to give up begging, and return home to a productive life.
4. To help rebuild the homes and plough the farms of those who have been engaged in long-term begging but have decided to return, if necessary.

Credit Where Credit is Due

The progress made so far would have been impossible without the support of:

- Local and regional governments of Tigray who supported this noble cause from the beginning by providing vital advice; logistical support as well as education and awareness raising programs.
- Respective federal government bureaus and high ranking officials, particularly the Honorable Ato Sebhat Negga and Ato Hebur, who applauded the idea; led various brain storming meetings and provided their valuable input, which paved the way for the progress we witness today.
- Representatives of the four main faith institutions – i.e. the Orthodox Church, the Islamic Council, the Catholic and Mekane Yesus Churches – who participated in meetings, and embraced the initiative support.
- Members of the Tigrayan community their valuable time and resources.





Concerned citizens with the Honorable Ato Sebhat Negga (left) & faith groups in pursuit of a solution.

The Challenge Ahead

While the preliminary result of the endeavor to tackle begging is indeed encouraging, the goal of repatriating **22,000** people engaged in begging to their homes and a productive life remains a challenge. Of those who expressed a strong desire to return immediately, **4,209** adults (**240** of them registered in the last week) are waiting for their next trip home. When asked when they would like to leave, the most common response has been, “even tomorrow”. The total expected fund to transport the **4,209** people to their homes is Birr **1,262,700** at a rate of Birr **300**/person. Once the repatriation of people engaged in begging from the Tigray Region is successfully completed, the next step is to focus on the estimated **28,000** people from the rural areas of the Amhara, Oromia and other regions.

That said, Elshadai is not going to declare, “Mission Accomplished” even when all the people engaged in begging are repatriated. After all, the difficult part is ensuring that begging becomes unappealing and that a productive life remains the only option for survival. Thus, Elshadai has prepared a five-year project proposal that addresses this long-term issue, which will be released soon.

Needless to say, Elshadai has used a great deal of its available resources and it is counting on every concerned citizens’ and groups’ support to bring this work to completion. We really have to capitalize on this great momentum and historic opportunity to help return our fellow citizens to a productive life once and for all. It would not be an exaggeration to add that this is not just an opportunity, but also a responsibility of every Ethiopian.

The Recent Leap Forward to Tackle the Challenge

Thanks to a vigorous involvement of concerned and responsible Tigrayans, tremendous progress has been made lately:

- A grand committee of **40** members has been formed to ensure a speedy repatriation of the **4,209** adults with children who are eager to leave their begging life behind, and return home.
- **7** Executive committee members have been elected to lead this endeavor.
- Three sub-committees have been chosen to solicit and mobilize the support of the Tigrayan business community, civic and professional organizations as well as individuals who work in governmental and non-governmental organizations.
- **132** concerned Tigrayans have generously donated money they could afford – ranging from **10** to **5,000** Birr.
- The total amount raised so far is Birr **30,338**.
- In the last couple of weeks, **349** adults with children have been repatriated to their homes. This means that the aforementioned amount has covered the transportation cost of **101** of the adult returnees and their children.
- A meeting of concerned Tigrayans in Addis Ababa has been called for **Sun., Feb. 04, 2007** (Tirr 27, 1999 E.C.), **8:a.m.**, at **Mega Amphi Theatre** to address this vital issue, and come up with a lasting solution.