



Full Bellies, Ready to Learn

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Imagine walking for two hours to get to school. And then walking two more hours to get home again. Whether slogging through mud in the brief but intense rainy season or travelling under the heat of a blazing hot sun, kids in a small Ethiopian farming community make the daily trek with a spring in their step. Their energy levels are high.

This seems a little out of place in Tigray, a northern province in Ethiopia plagued by droughts, where there never seems to be enough food to go around. But the taste of change is being ladled out at their school.

Students at the Abrha We Atsbaha school (named for two ancient Christian emperors) have an extra incentive to be on time, pay attention in class, and not drop out . . . there is a hot meal waiting for them.



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Students eating their daily hot meal in the schoolyard.

School Feeding in Ethiopia

With Canada's support, the [World Food Programme](#) (WFP) provides each child with 150 grams of carbohydrates and protein—a corn and soybean blend cooked into a porridge with salt and vegetable oil—every day. The school-feeding program brings in so many children from the surrounding community—1,500 in all—that they are divided into morning and afternoon shifts. The children bring their own drinking water with them everyday.

Although it is a public school (primary school—grades one to eight—is free in Ethiopia), the community pitches in for resources that aren't provided by the government. They also make decisions about what goes on at the school. After a recent fundraising drive, they started construction on an additional classroom. And they pay for the cook and the firewood for the daily, nutritious meal that the kids get. Once the jerry cans of oil and the containers of the corn and soybean blend are empty, the school can sell them to earn a little more income.

Teaching Life Skills

At the school, children from grades one through nine learn Tigrinya (the regional language), Amharic (the national language), and English. They also have classes in math, science, geography, civics, music, drawing, biology, physics, chemistry and carpentry.

In a country where 15 to 20 percent of the population is HIV positive, AIDS education is an important part of the curriculum. Instead of saying "good morning" or "good afternoon", every teacher begins the class by launching into a five-minute group discussion about HIV/AIDS. You will also find the school's AIDS club performing skits and reciting poems to teach their peers even more about protecting themselves from the virus and about treating those living with the disease with the respect they deserve.

The school even boasts a garden that provides another source of income and teaches the children basic agricultural skills. A community pond is also located on the school property.

The school principal sits below a sign that reads, "Plan your work and work your plan". Faced with so many challenges-the need for more classrooms, materials, latrines, teachers' offices, a potable water source, and a fence to protect the garden-he hopes for more resources to put his plans into action.

In the meantime, the students' full bellies enable them to concentrate on their studies. In a country that relies on the land for its growing prosperity, these school children are learning much-needed life skills that they will be able to hold on to, thanks to the staying power of their daily porridge.

Canada's Support

WFP is the largest international food aid organization working to combat hunger in developing nations. It provides the food and the logistical support necessary to get food aid to those in need.

In 2009 alone, Canada contributed to the success of the WFP's school feeding program in seven African countries, helping more than 1.5 million children to access education, eat, and do well in school:

Number of children receiving meals in 2009:

	Girls	Boys	Girls Receiving Take Home Rations	Total Per Country
Ethiopia	261,541	220,250	77,947	559,738
Ghana	54,555	78,819	27,506	160,880
Mali	67,108	61,749	13,924	142,781
Mozambique	99,889	88,876		188,765
Niger	76,359	49,623	10,100	136,082
Senegal	96,385	89,851		186,236
Tanzania	109,017	104,735		213,752
Total	764,854	693,903	129,477	1,588,234

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