



*Saving and enriching lives in Ethiopia*



## Celebrating 20 years of WellWishers!



Marianne and Ross Allan at the REST well that started the WellWishers journey. Tigray, Ethiopia

### Ross Allan, WellWishers founder writes:

Twenty years ago this year, Marianne and I decided to fund the construction of two village water wells in Ethiopia through Community Aid Abroad, now Oxfam Australia.

The following year, we visited Tigray Province in Ethiopia for the first of many trips, a visit we'll never forget.

We were blown away with the benefits those villagers gained from those wells, in the short time after they were completed. So much so that when we arrived home, we put pressure on close friends to donate to the cause, allowing us to fund a further nine wells the following year.

This coincided with Oxfam Australia's decision to cease direct operations in the Horn of Africa and to coordinate its work with other Oxfams worldwide. Marianne and I were so impressed with the impact and sustainability of the water wells programme that we decided to take up the slack left by Oxfam Australia's withdrawal from the region. A tall ask.

Thus *WellWishers* was formed and fundraising commenced in a serious manner. Wells construction increased every year until we reached a high point of 124 wells in the year of our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary by which time just over 200,000 Tigrayans benefited from the generosity of over 1,000 donors.

In 2012, we moved to Wales to be closer to our daughter and only grandchild. It became evident that trying to efficiently run *WellWishers* from the other side of the world was not practicable so in 2014 I reluctantly resigned from my near-full time honorary role.

Luckily, one of the then Trustees, Graham Romanes, readily agreed to take up the role. Graham has done a mighty job and Marianne and I sincerely thank him for the wonderful work he continues to do in the service of the needy in Tigray. Graham has a long involvement in Tigray, from 1984 when he was with Oxfam Australia developing its early work in village water supplies.

Like all organisations, managers attract loyalty from many people. I was fortunate to have many such loyal friends. It is natural that some support dropped off upon my resignation. I appeal to those who have not donated since that time to make a one-off tax-deductible donation to celebrate *WellWishers* 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. At this time of conflict in Ethiopia the people of Tigray Province need our support more than ever – to build more wells and to refurbish those so wantonly destroyed during the war they have endured for over 18 months. Finally, a big thank you to all those generous Australians (plus many people from several countries around the world) – past and present – for their wonderful support. Remember ... **Water is Life.**

*Ross and Marianne*



Before: Collecting water from a creek shared with animals

After: A pump over a secured well providing clean water

The future: healthy families able to get on with other tasks

**What a journey!** Over those twenty years donations from our wonderful donors have totalled \$4.3million. We have funded the construction of 974 wells in rural villages in northern Ethiopia. Associated with the construction has been comprehensive training for locals in well and handpump maintenance, financial management and basic health education involving training in the construction of latrines in villagers' homes. Our overheads have been miniscule – covering costs of newsletter and donor software at less than 1.5%. Of every \$100 of our donated dollars we are able to send over \$98.50 to our partners in Ethiopia. Most importantly over 317,000 rural Ethiopians have been provided with clean healthy water from permanent water supplies accessible within 30 minutes walk.

For this we can thank you – our donors and our partners – The Relief Society of Tigray, the Ethiopian Catholic Development Office and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development Office. Most of all we thank the village communities who have worked hard to make sure our project succeeded and to keep clean water flowing.

### **The Conflict and Impact on our Program**

Ethiopia is a very complex place! It is an empire, the boundaries of which were defined after conquests of local tribes and smaller kingdoms by the Amhara King Menelik II in the late 1800s. This imperial kingdom lasted until Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed in a military coup in 1974. The Empire held together through direct rule of the emperor and his regents and nobles, and the mandatory use of Amharic as the national language. This was replaced between 1974 and 1991 by centralised military rule and the continued requirement to communicate in Amharic. The Derg, or Committee ruling Ethiopia had close support from the Soviet Union.

In 1991 a coalition of ethnic militias headed by the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF) overthrew the military dictatorship and established a constitution creating Ethiopia as a federal state, composed of ethnic-based regions. The objective was to establish the rights of people in the regions to communicate in their local language, with regional parliaments responsible for health, education, law and order and other local functions. A federal parliament was created, very similar in style to the Australian Parliament. A lower house based on population numbers, an upper house with representation of each of the 80 ethnic groups. The Federal Parliament was responsible for defence, foreign affairs and taxation as in Australia. Important to this regional devolution was the establishment of ethnic-based political parties.

With strong, some would say excessively strong, management from the centre this system worked for 27 years. Ethiopia's economic growth was among the fastest in the world.

In April 2018 the coalition of ethnic parties elected Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister. He set about reversing the history since 1991 and created one national non-ethnic political party, the Prosperity Party with the aim of eliminating ethnic-based politics. The Tigrayan party the TPLF dissented. National elections due to be held by October 2020 were postponed but the Tigrayans went ahead with regional elections. In the meantime the PM had signed some sort of peace arrangement with Ethiopia's old enemy to the north – Eritrea, for which the PM was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize.

In December 2020 the Ethiopian army from the south and the Eritrean army from the north marched into Tigray and set about total destruction of farms, schools, hospitals and industry, massacred thousands and looted anything moveable. Tigrayans mobilised and repelled these armies from central and eastern Tigray and have been in control since. However a subsequent blockade imposed on Tigray by the federal government has caused widespread famine and death. The Tigrayans have been ingenious enough to establish an independent communications system and we have been able to talk to our partner, REST.

REST has now completed the rehabilitation of 80 damaged wells as proposed for 2021, and WellWishers has agreed to support the rehab of a further 40 in the next six months. Staff are working with limited resources and without pay as we are currently unable to send finance into Tigray. I trust this situation will change very soon. The Tigrayans are doing everything possible to convince the PM they want a peaceful solution, but so far these overtures have been rejected. The survival of hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans is a stake.

If you would like more information and the occasional update between Newsletters, please email me at

[info@wellwisherethiopia.com](mailto:info@wellwisherethiopia.com)

Your support is most appreciated by our partners and the people of Tigray.

**A reminder that all donations over \$2 to WellWishers are tax-deductible.  
WellWishers: Bank of Queensland BSB 124048 or 124001 and Account no. 21658949**

Contact: Graham Romanes, WellWishers PO Box 27 Brunswick South VIC 3055 (new PO Box!) Phone: 0419 559 138  
Email: [info@wellwisherethiopia.com](mailto:info@wellwisherethiopia.com) Website: [www.wellwisherethiopia.com](http://www.wellwisherethiopia.com)