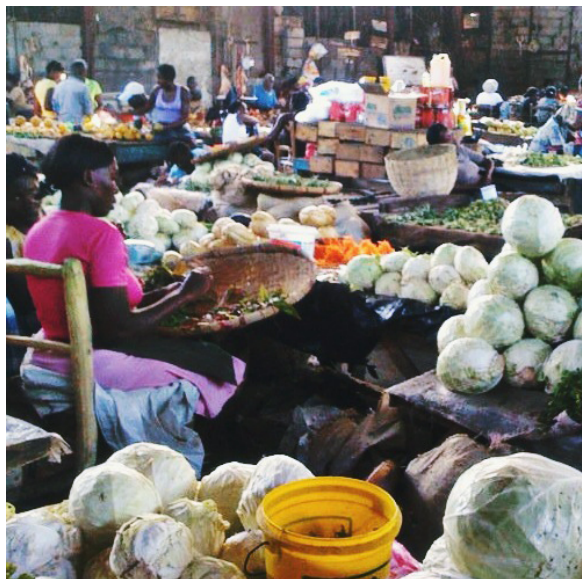


A Lesson in Ethiopia



Several years ago, I was able to travel with an NGO to Ethiopia to work on setting up sustainable garden systems. We were in Northern Ethiopia, close to the capitol, Addis Abbaba. This area of Ethiopia has suffered much war and famine. I remember seeing the news on TV as a little girl, hearing that Ethiopia was having a great drought, leading to crop failures, starvation, and disease across the country. I never dreamed I would someday go there.

We arrived in a village that seemed the epitome of what I'd seen on the TV when I was little: desolate and desert-like with very little vegetation, but beautiful nonetheless. We had been told the village was a sort of conglomerate of several villages that

had been placed together in this area when either war or famine had visited their traditional villages. Fortunately, they had a great set of leaders here. It seemed that this tribe was ready to work together and glad that we had come to help with building and gardens. The organization I went with was known for holding medical clinics, but it also helped build wood ovens and a school for the village. I was specifically in charge, with another man, of the gardening project.

Again, this tribe had come together with little more than the clothes upon their backs. I suspect that some people were already there before this onslaught of new people had arrived, since in the outlying edges of the village, there were a few wonderful mud huts where people had goats and grains and seemed to prosper. The problem for much of the main village, though, was lack of seeds and knowledge because of the displacement. Not only had elders been either killed or lost, there was a serious lack of resources.

Because of this, we brought seeds to the village and a couple basic irrigation systems which consisted of a series of long, flat rubber hoses that had small holes set equally in them and then ultimately connected to a bucket. The bucket was meant to be set upon a large stick buried into the ground. The hoses were to be set along the rows of plants, thus creating a drip irrigation system that allowed for less water usage and got water straight

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to the roots of the plants. All the farmers had to do was to carry water to the bucket and it would stream down into the hoses. Our team ended up starting three large gardens in the village, teaching leaders how to plant seeds, harvest and then save seeds again.

When we were done in that village, we had the opportunity to tour the South of Ethiopia. The contrast between the village we had just been in, and the villages I was seeing in the south were striking. War and famine had not touched these areas at nearly the same level as in the north. I saw thriving gardens of sunflowers and peas, systems of government and law put into place in indigenous villages that had been in existence since the beginning of time. It was extraordinary to see the possibilities of what could be, but also sad to realize the villagers in the north had gotten this sustainable existence taken away from them and would now struggle for years to get to that gain that level of prosperity and security again.

I left Ethiopia understanding more than ever what can happen when knowledge that has been gained and has evolved over thousands of years is lost.

When I returned home, to the glorious United States, I renewed my commitment to learning sustainable life-giving practices for my own family

and community, and ever since, gardening has been a large part of my personal world.

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