

Day 1

We started our visit in one of the poorest areas of the city. From the car you see the multitudes of barracks where the people live. These areas have little or no space because all the sheds are built right next to each other. The roads are just dirt, full of rocks and holes. The houses are very small (3*3 meters), they sometimes have electricity but rarely have running water or a decent sewer system let alone a toilet or shower in the house. The women wash the clothes in front of the house or try to cook the traditional Injeera (if they have food to cook). The men hang around or try selling something in their little shops. The kids are waiting.....and waiting..... No toys around, not even a ball to play with.

Visiting the slums

We went inside one of these houses. Basically one room, the bathroom is outside and it is just a hole in the road that is shared with other houses and families. The room has a couple of beds, two chairs, a small cupboard where a gaslight for cooking was placed. In a 20 square metre "house" 6 people live and if they are lucky maybe one of them is working. A small kid smiles at us and is wondering who we are and what we are doing. This was a very common experience. Kids smiling at us, sometimes even laughing and pointing us out. We are Ferengi (foreigners) and we are white.

Everyone is very kind, they invite us into their homes, they are smiling, although they have nothing. Somehow you feel a kind of happiness, quietness in the air, no rush or desperation. Giordana explains, that the Christian orthodox religion has a very big impact in everyday life. They are happy with what God gives them. They would never steal, or attack someone else for money. Indeed, I have to say, I did not feel one minute of danger in those four days, even we were going around on our own. People here are very polite, they want and need to say thank you and please. We continue our trip, sometimes in the middle of the slums we see high walls which hide more luxurious houses. Those are the houses of the rich people. The gap here is huge. There are also very rich Ethiopians; they are the minority but they have a very good life.

After a delicious lunch in Gordana's Restaurant Sheba we pass by a friend of hers living in one of those nice houses.

We saw a lot of humanitarian organisations over here, it would be easy to recognize them. Newest car and better dressed people.

Visiting a private school

In the afternoon we went to visit one of the best schools in Addis Abeba. The schools here are from grade 1 to grade 8. Normally till grade 4 the kids study in Amharic(the local language), from grade 4 they start to study in English. We are told that the children from this school have the highest grades in the country. A lot of these kids have the possibility to go to a good high school and attend university. The average size of the class has about 25-30 children.

The director of the school is a very nice lady who organises everything perfectly.

I never saw such a clean school; not even here in Holland. After few questions to the owner I realized that the care for the cleaning and the assistance to the children might seem a bit exaggerated. In every class they have 3 people, 1 teacher, 2 assistants.

The bathrooms are cleaned every hour.

The school consists of about 1000 students. The costs of keeping the school running are very high and she told us she would need to raise the tuition fee to be able to survive.

The school was founded about ten year ago. She built the school from nothing. The government gave her the ground and she took a loan to build it. This is a very good school. The tuition fee including transportation costs and other costs are about €650 per child. Currently the school is helping about 50 kids who are attending the school for free. If we wanted to send some of our kids here to give them an even better chance, the director would give a discount. This immediately put an idea in our heads. We could take 3 or 4 very promising kids and send them to this school to give them the best chance possible.

Day 2.

Visiting a Public School

In contrast to the private school we also visited a public school, on

average the classes there have about kids are 70 to 120 in 1 class, sometimes even more. You can imagine that when they finish school they do not even know how to read and write properly.”

Crowded classes, no laboratory, no books, no facilities. We spoke to a very nice teacher who explained to us how the system works. A public school is for free. The children just have to pay for the school uniform and bring their lunch if they can afford it. Grades 1 to 4 have the same teacher for the whole day and for all subjects. The language here is Amharic. From grade 5 to 8 the teachers have a specific subject and go from one class to another. The lessons in grade 7 and 8 are given in English. Even the materials (mostly photocopies and loose pieces of paper) are in English. I must say the teachers and the director of this school really try their best and do succeed in providing somewhat of a curriculum. However, 1 teacher for 70-120 kids cannot perform miracles. Again here I was very impressed with the willingness and eagerness of all the people involved.

In the afternoon we went to the Market (to be a tourist) , the biggest open market of Africa.

The place is enormous, crowded, dirty, but very interesting to see. Kiros is a very nice Eritrean who was our taxi driver for three days. Kiros has a taxi that normal tourists would not dare to get in - a Datsun from 35 years ago with no breaks, broken windows, no key. He had to hotwire the car to start it! We paid him 300 birr a day (about 20 euro). With his job he supports a family of 6 people. Unluckily, we had a car accident on the last day. It wasn't his fault, but if he had breaks he would have been able to avoid the accident. We really felt sorry for him because he won't be able to support his family at the moment.

In the evening we had dinner in a very good restaurant and there we saw the first tourists since we arrived. What we saw in this restaurant, and many others, was groups of couples with a black baby. They were there to adopt and they came to get a child.

This made Lex and I think again about the possibility to adopt. We have all the paper to do it but..... then we thought that the 22000 euro they ask us to adopt 1 child could save the lives of hundreds and hundreds of children.

Day 3. The meeting with the children

Giordana had arranged a meeting with the families and the kids we support.

8 children were able to come. I did not want to do it, I felt uncomfortable, I did not need anybody to say thank you. But Giordana insisted and explained that for them it is important to be able to say thank you. It was actually very nice to meet the children. We offered them lunch (for most of them it was the first time in their lives that they had eaten at a restaurant). The kids were beautiful, very polite and grateful. They all came in their best Sunday clothes, but they had lots of holes. We will also need to send them some new clothes to go with their new start. They all had big smiles on their faces. One of the kids had a small infection in her eye and a slight fever. Giordana asked if she had gone to school that week. When the mother said no, Giordana asked if this girl had seen a doctor; again the answer was NO. Giordana got a bit angry, she told everybody that it is unacceptable that the children don't go to school. She then told all the parents that if one of the children is sick, to contact her and she would arrange that the kid can go to see the doctor., which we would pay for. She immediately contacted a doctor, gave the mother some money, and sent them to see him. The mother (as well as all the other parents) were very very happy about this.

That afternoon we went to see the clinic of doctor Geta. As soon as we entered we could smell the decay of the place. A lot of people were sitting and waiting for the doctor. I believe this was the only place where I felt desperation and people abandoned by the world.

The rooms where the patients are taken are basically dark holes in the wall with just a bed, and no windows. As we passed in front of those rooms, old people lying in bed were calling us to go in. The common bathroom was a hole in the ground, hidden in a corner, with no running water. This was a very sad reality; however this was the work of one man who did his very best with the limited resources he had. Doctor Geta is a wonderful person, who decided to dedicate his life to this clinic and the poor people.

For a consultation he asks 10 birr (80 cent). including medicine, blood tests etc. The complete cure of a child would cost about 60/70 birr (4 euro). The sad truth is that a lot of parents don't have this amount of

money.

Because of the cost, a lot of parents try to get cheaper medicine. According to the doctor this is one of his main concerns. The European medicine is the best, but often too expensive. Many families are forced to buy cheaper antibiotics that come from places like India. There was a time when some medicines from India didn't even contain any antibiotics. To save more, some parents give half of a tablet to the child, which of course has no effect whatsoever.

We agreed with Giordana that our children would be sent to this doctor and we would pay for it. One of the things that really stuck in my mind is the story that Doctor Geta told: He told us that a lot of these children have very simple infections to their ears, throat or eyes and can easily be treated. However he has been witness to several cases where it wasn't treated and it led to meningitis, sometimes with children dying.

Day 4.

On Friday we went to the Museum to see the famous Lucy and to the largest Church in Addis ababa. I was curious to see how people pray in this country. Before we could go we had to go to the Hilton hotel to change money. After all we have seen we really found this place with very little taste basically disgusting. Here we saw the rich tourist and business people who want to be oblivious to the reality that could be found right under their noses. Obviously we can't blame them because they most likely don't know better or didn't have the chance to see and experience what we saw. We were very happy to get out of there.

Visiting an average private school

In the afternoon we visited one of the schools where several of our children go. Very crowded classes with between 50-80 children, and little or no facilities. However, the director assured us that the level of teaching was very high and the children in general do well. The level of the teachers seems to be higher than in the public schools. The same grade system applies at this school. Grades 1-4 have one fixed teacher and in grades 5-8 the teacher has a specific subject. At this school the children got into contact with English at the first grade, and then from grade 5-8 all lessons are given in English (except for Amharic). When we got there a class was having gymnastics outside. The sun was burning and the

temperature was about 28 degrees. These children don't have clothes or shoes for gymnastic. Normally the kids have to bring their own lunch, but a lot of these kids are already happy if they eat once a day. The main thing they eat is bread, because it is cheap and fills your stomach. One of the things I can say about all the people we met is the ability to share, even the teachers share their food with the less fortunate ones. And this is an "art of being" that I think we in our world have forgotten a bit.

On Friday evening we went to the airport of Addis Ababa with an extra baggage of knowledge, emotions, fears, anger and willingness to share.