



Methodist Relief &
Development Fund

Ethiopia – Emergency update for Harvest

This Autumn, MRDF is urging churches to reclaim the essence of Harvest as God intended it. But this theme suddenly became very literal for the partner featured in this year's Harvest pack when the May rains in Ethiopia failed.

In the highlands of Ethiopia - an area of natural beauty, famed for its forests, people have been caught in a vicious cycle: when crops have failed and they cannot eat they have felled trees to sell wood. Now deforestation is causing soil erosion, less food can be produced and the forests have been all but wiped out.

MRDF is working through a local partner agency to break this cycle by enabling people to work co-operatively and use the land in different, sustainable ways. This means families are able to reclaim degraded land, grow new crops and farm traditional produce more efficiently.

'We chose to feature our Ethiopian partner for Harvest because the partnership we have there typifies MRDF's way of "doing development". The failure of the May rains means families have had to eat their seed corn and malnutrition, amongst children, has increased sharply. This illustrates just how vulnerable the people are – and why MRDF's work there is so important.' said Amanda Norman, MRDF's Supporter Relations Director.

Because of our ongoing relationship with the very partner featured in the Harvest pack, MRDF has been able to respond to this crisis through a solution devised by the local community – and now it is being delivered by them too.

Through five years of support from MRDF, the local delivery partner has grown from just two paid staff and a single office to 29 staff working across three field offices. This increased capacity was the seed of hope in the current emergency. With an infrastructure of staff and field offices not only was the scale of seed able to be assessed quickly as the situation unfolded, but the start of a solution was there as well.



The community self-help groups that have been established with MRDF support will administer a system of grain loans, providing people with seed to plant for the coming harvest.

In June, the Ethiopian partner approached MRDF with an urgent proposal for planting grain and plans for a seed bank: using the network of field workers and community self-help groups established with MRDF's support, it was perfectly placed to administer grain loans. But timing was critical. Seed needed to be planted before the next rains, which were due in three weeks' time. MRDF was able to respond fast and sent £23,500 for the purchase of grain within a matter of days. Had this partnership

not already developed the local capacity and ongoing relationship to make speedy action possible, 13,000 more people would be facing starvation. Their only hope would have been handouts of emergency food aid.

Instead, this crisis intervention has the potential for a lasting benefit. Families have taken seed on the agreement that as they harvest, an equivalent amount of seed will eventually be repaid. The resulting seed bank will provide a co-operative system for the efficient storage and distribution of grain, providing the community with the resilience to withstand environmental shocks in the future.

'It is important that in being moved by news stories of emergencies we don't lose sight of long-term development,' Sam Tuck, MRDF's Programme Officer for East Africa explains. 'It's ongoing and genuine local partnerships, such as this one, that enable communities right on the margins of survival to stand up to present challenges and face the future with self-sufficiency and hope.'

The Bible shows us that God has always intended looking after those in need to be part of our Harvest celebrations. And this is why MRDF is asking churches to Reclaim Harvest with them and support long-term, sustainable development that makes small miracles like this one possible.

You can download MRDF's Reclaim Harvest pack at www.mrdf.org.uk or order it for free by calling 020 7467 5132. An accompanying CD ROM of photo-packed presentations and extra resources is also available, priced £5.