

Ethiopia

GEOGRAPHY

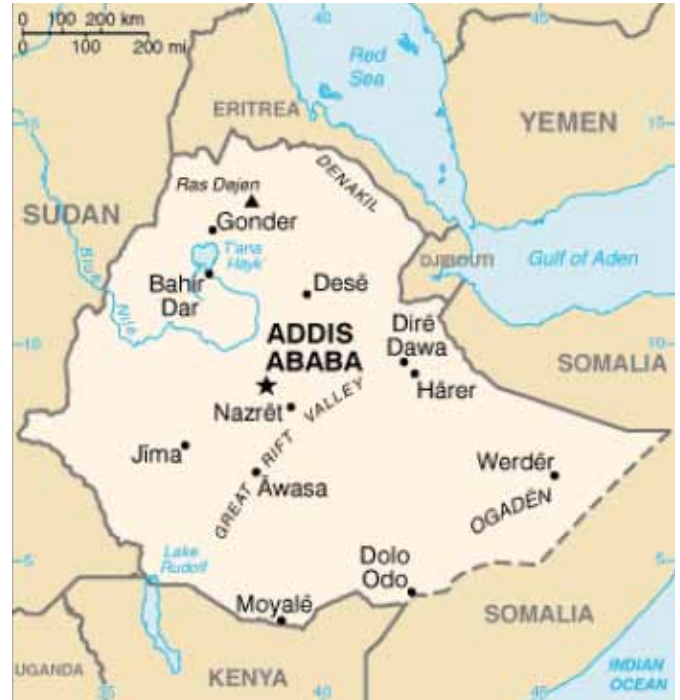
Ethiopia, located in east Africa, is slightly larger than South Australia. Since Eritrea regained its independence in 1993, Ethiopia has been landlocked. In the north and centre, the high mountains and plateaux are dissected by steep gorges. The Great Rift Valley crosses the south. Although Ethiopia lies within the tropics, the highlands have a temperate climate (average 16°C) compared with the hotter lowlands (average 26°C). The highlands, where two-thirds of the people live, usually have enough rain for agriculture, but the country suffers periodic regional droughts.

PEOPLE

The population (85 million) is growing rapidly. Addis Ababa, with over two and a half million people, is the capital and largest city. There are many ethnic groups, including the Oromo, the Amhara and the Tigrayans. Each has their own language – over 80 languages are spoken. Orthodox Christians and Muslims are the two largest religious groups.

HISTORY

There is evidence of human settlement in this region which may be 100,000 years old. In the 19th century, leaders such as Menelik reunited much of the region and avoided being colonised by Europeans. In 1930, Haile Selassie came to the throne. He introduced a written constitution and began a process of modernisation. By 1974, economic problems and famine led to his downfall. A military junta (the “Derg”) deposed Selassie and established a socialist state. It nationalised banks, industries, land and schools, and set up peasants’ associations to carry out rural reform.



Map courtesy of The General Libraries
The University of Texas at Austin.

In 1977, Lieutenant-Colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam became a virtual dictator. His opponents fought a long civil war, with both sides armed by superpowers. Mengistu was ousted in 1991 and the new government introduced a new constitution in 1995. Ethiopia’s first multi-party elections were held in 1995, but ethnic and regional differences remained.

A border war with Eritrea broke out in 1997, but ended in December 2000 with a peace treaty. Border demarcation continues to be an issue with both Eritrea and Somalia.

ECONOMY

Prolonged war, drought and famine have been very costly for Ethiopia. Agriculture has been disrupted as farmers are forced to move, crops fail and animals starve. More than four-fifths of the people still depend on agriculture for their living. Most farmers have very small plots, where they grow cereals including teff (a local grain) and pulses such as beans and chick peas. Since many cannot afford fertiliser or equipment, they struggle to feed their families. With many trees felled for fuel or timber or to make way for crops, heavy rains cause severe soil erosion; on the other hand, lack of rain leads to loss of livestock and food shortages.

Since the Great Famine of 1984-5, when half a million people died, Ethiopia has improved the distribution of food aid, and received international support. Tree planting, terracing, crop rotation and water conservation have been helping to restore the land’s productivity, but the country



All smiles, ready to start the day in a classroom constructed with support from World Vision.

remains vulnerable to drought and famine. The war and low prices for agricultural exports (coffee is a major export) have left Ethiopia with a huge foreign debt. Part of this was cancelled by creditors in 1992, and in 2001, Ethiopia qualified for debt relief under the World Bank-led Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative. In 2005, the IMF voted to forgive Ethiopia's debt.

The end of hostilities with its neighbours, coupled with renewed foreign aid and debt relief, will assist in economic recovery.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Farming families live in thatched huts called tukuls. Nomadic livestock-herders build portable homes from branches and hides. Modern cement block houses are built regularly in cities, but not everyone has this option. In Addis Ababa, while many people live in strongly built wood and mud houses, others live in makeshift houses along unpaved streets, without any sanitation.

For many Ethiopians, the staple food is injera, a flat, spongy sour bread. It is eaten with wat, a spicy stew; but meat is a rare luxury. Breastfeeding provides the best food for babies, but young children may not get enough food once they are weaned. The average daily calorie intake is about half that of Australians.

Many illnesses in Ethiopia can be linked to the lack of a clean, safe water supply. Health problems include dysentery and diarrhoea, bilharzia, cholera and TB. Malnourished children are very vulnerable to infection.



Farmer Adunga and his children stand in their maize field. World Vision is committed to helping Ethiopian farmers to increase crop production.

Comparatively speaking...

CATEGORY	ETHIOPIA	AUSTRALIA
Population	85 million	21.5 million
Urban population	16.7%	89.1%
GNI per capita (US\$ PPP)	\$992	\$38,692
Population with an improved water source	38%	100%
Adult literacy rate	35.9%	99%
Population living on less than US\$1.25 (PPP) a day	39%	0%
Under-5 mortality rate (deaths per 1000 live births)	109	6
Life expectancy at birth	56.1 years	81.9 years

Source: Human Development Report 2010
United Nations Development Programme

Most rural women receive no healthcare during pregnancy and childbirth. Preventive measures like immunisation, checking the weight of children, building latrines, and training local health workers are vital in reducing child deaths. HIV and AIDS is also a serious issue, as it is in other parts of Africa.

EDUCATION

Recent years have seen a concerted effort to increase the number of Ethiopian children with access to education. In 15 years, the percentage of children enrolled in school has swelled from 20 percent to almost 90 percent. However, the system is stretched beyond capacity and dropout rates remain high, with few children continuing to secondary school. Classes can be conducted in local languages, but many schools still lack books, equipment and trained teachers. Many adults have missed out on learning to read and write due to poverty or the war. Providing these services close to where people live is all the more difficult because of the rugged terrain. Ethiopia faces a considerable challenge in opening up new opportunities for its diverse population.

WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA IN ETHIOPIA

- assists sponsored children, their families and communities to meet their basic needs in areas such as education, clean water and healthcare;
- enables farmers to learn new agricultural skills such as intercropping and use of organic fertiliser;
- helps communities to identify local resources and skills and work together on tasks such as terracing, tree-planting and road-building;
- distributes food aid to drought-affected families.

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