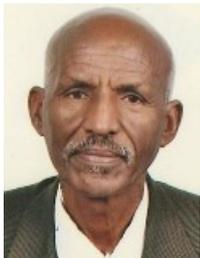


## Covid-19 Updates from Ethiopia and Eritrea

The world has changed starkly since our last newsletter. While our Dublin office has been perfecting the art of remote working since March, our teams in Ethiopia and Eritrea have had to find a way to protect their staff and communities while ensuring our work continues, safely and effectively. This has

been made even more difficult by the fact that the Meher season, the long rainy season and the main growing season, started one month earlier than usual in Ethiopia this year. Hear about on the challenges they have encountered in continuing our work during this pandemic.



### Afewerki Solomon, Programme Coordinator in Eritrea

“In Eritrea, restrictions were quickly put in place to keep infection rates low and now we are beginning a tentative return to normality as our staff continue important field visits to smallholder farmers and communities participating in our projects. It was important to continue these visits as the rainy season has started and farmers need demonstrations on planting, soil, and water conservation to successfully grow their crops over the next few months. In visiting smallholder farmers in Anseba, Debub and Maekel, precautions were taken to minimise the chance of contamination. We kept our distance and covered our mouths and hands with mask and gloves, continuously washing our hands and using alcohol and sanitizers. In the beginning, it felt strange not to shake hands and do the shoulder pump (a greeting gesture in Eritrea) to greet the farmers but you get used to it!” .

### Ascalu's Pearls of Wisdom -

.Ascalu Kidane is a 45-year old mother of five children and the head of her household. She lives in Kerved, a small village in Anseba. Like other people in her village, Ascalu depends on agriculture for her livelihood, growing sorghum, pearl millet and maize on her half-hectare plot. To support farmers like Ascalu, who were struggling to produce enough crops to sell and feed their families, Vita began an improved pearl millet programme, in which small farmers could benefit from disease-free seed and climate-smart agriculture training.

Initially reluctant, Acsalu joined Vita's programme once she saw the difference between Vita's pearl millet variety, known as Kona, and the local crop she was using. “I saw that the improved Kona variety has much higher yields. My neighbours got a three to four-fold increase in their yield. Besides, Kona was early maturing, resistant to drought and disease, and produced much more food.”

This has enabled Ascalu to start planning for her next planting season and she is already hoping to plant more than two hectares of land and even take a lease from her neighbours.



Misgana Gobeze, Comms & Publications Officer, Ethiopia



Arba Minch

In Arba Minch, we have joined the zonal COVID-19 task force as a member of the hygiene and sanitation sub-task force. Our role is to facilitate, control and raise mass awareness of the hygiene and sanitation issue with regard to COVID-19. To achieve this, our team have been giving demonstrations on the importance of hygiene and hand washing, as well as assessing and carrying out maintenance on non-operational water facilities to ensure better access to sanitation. We're also collecting donated sanitary items like soap, sanitizer, gloves and masks from local donors and distributing to local Woredas (districts) and kebeles (villages)

South Omo

The South Omo area, because of it's border with Kenya and South Sudan, is a high risk location. whose risk is increased by the remoteness of the area as well as its limited access to COVID-19 informational resources. Our project staff on the ground have put in place appropriate measures including coordinating with district health departments, health centres and country offices to supply all field staff with sanitizers, soap and face masks. "We are playing a crucial role in creating awareness about COVID-19. We have revised our work plan here, identifying achievable work while postponing any activities that could pose a risk during the national lockdown."



Amhara Region

"The main focus of our projects here is to hold demonstrations with local farming communities to teach best farming practice," says Misgana. "While public gatherings are totally forbidden in Ethiopia at this time and thus this vital support to farmers is impeded, we are working with these necessary restrictions by visiting each farmer at home. While this requires more time and resources, we remain committed to our farmers, and will continue to give them the support they need to thrive, despite these difficult circumstances."





## Act on Poverty

Thanks to the generous support of Action on Poverty, Australia we have been improving livelihoods and crop production for smallholder farmers like Mihretie from South Gondar, Ethiopia, for many years now. Mihretie and his family had been struggling to farm enough food to eat: he struggled to produce adequate yields from his potato, pulses and cereals crops. Through Action on Poverty's support Mihretie says he is the wealthiest person in his community and is proud to send one of his kids to university. From disease and pest management, training on potato seed and storage and establishing farmer's cooperatives to create a route to market, Action on Poverty's partnership with Vita has transformed the lives of many farmers like Mihretie



## Domhnal Slattery, Avolon Aircraft Leasing

Avolon is at the forefront of the Irish private sector in using its assets and experience to deliver vital PPE to the Irish health sector. That spirit of generosity is also being reflected in their support of Vita as we too recalibrate to provide corona-related support into our programmes.



“We have been on the ground with Vita for many years where we have seen first-hand the value of their work,” says Domhnal Slattery, CEO of Avolon Aircraft Leasing. “These unusual and challenging circumstances only serve to make the partnership stronger and more enduring.”



We have spent the first half of this year looking at our impact in both Ethiopia and Eritrea to ensure that our partnerships with local communities supported them to deliver projects that are efficient, life-transforming and truly beneficial. Here are just two examples of the improvements you have been a part of and which we only hope to build on in the coming years.

In Eritrea, the farmers we are working with have noted that since 2017, their potato yields have tripled, pearl millet yields have doubled, wheat harvests have increased by 250% while milk production is five times what it was in 2017. This doesn't just mean that farming families now have secured their own access to food. This means the larger community too can look forward to a more varied and nutritious diet.

In Southern Ethiopia, Vita's clean water and energy security projects have not only improved community health and wellbeing, comparisons from 2017 show they have also saved women up to fifteen hours a week in time that was previously spent fetching water or collecting firewood for fuel, as well as boiling dirty water or cooking on inefficient stoves. Fifteen hours of spare time a week is a game-changer for women and their families, helping to redress the balance of gender inequality and create opportunities for female-led entrepreneurship.



## Climate Action

One of the positives to come from the coronavirus outbreak has been its potential to act as a reset button for the natural world, affording our planet a welcome pause from fossil fuel-powered industries. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has reported that the world's energy demand will decrease by 6% this year - the equivalent of India's energy consumption. This will be the biggest drop since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Total lockdown has also pushed global electricity demand down by at least 20%, the IEA went on to say.

Reports showed that global average road transport activity fell to 50% of the 2019 level by the end of March 2020 and eight out of ten flights globally were cancelled.

All of this offers hope for the future and has proved that we can take drastic action when we believe the threat big enough. However, as restrictions begin to decrease and countries return to business as usual, there is the prevalent fear that this prolonged pause will have been in vain. As Gina McCarthy, former head of the US Environmental Protection Agency, states, "You wonder if people will want to go back to what it was like before," she said. "The pandemic has shown people will change their behaviour if it's for the health of their families. This has been the lost message on climate, that it's a human problem, not a planetary problem. We have to show you can have a stable environment and your job, too."



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