

Norad project number:	Several projects (review of partner)
Name of your Organisation:	Norwegian Church Aid.
Local Partner(s):	Evangelical Church of Eritrea.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

Evaluation year: 2004.

Conducted by: Dr Ken Jenkins

Country: Eritrea (Asmara)

Region: Eastern Africa

Theme/DAC sector: various

SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

Title of Evaluation Report: Capacity Building Assessment of the Evangelical Church of Eritrea by Dr Ken Jenkins

Background: NCA has had a long association with the Evangelical Church of Eritrea. The church has battled with many problems in the area of capacity status and asked NCA to assess the present status of the church in this area, as part of an ongoing program to increase the capacity of the church.

Purpose/ Objective: To assess the capacity of the Evangelical Church of Eritrea and to make suitable recommendations as to areas of potential need for improvement.

Methodology: The methodology was one of key interviews with various members of the staff of the Evangelical Church of Eritrea.

Key Findings: It was found that the church has a weak administrative structure, highly centralized in nature with little delegation of authority. This makes decision making a cumbersome process.

Staff are lacking in skills with regards to English, computers, finances etc.

There is very little interdepartmental communication.

Computers are available but are often in the wrong place where the majority of staff do not have access.

The church is in a somewhat transitional phase with plans to amalgamate with the Lutheran church of Eritrea. It is hoped that this may increase the competence, but it is a sensitive process.

Recommendations:

A full review of the entire structure should be conducted in depth by an outside consultant in 2005 (done by Church of Sweden)

Office Manager should be employed to alleviate many of the administrative needs within the church.

Interdepartmental meetings should be held.

Staff is to be trained in English, computers etc.

Computers are to be re-allocated to increase availability.

Departmental capacity programs to be prepared by each department.

Salaries need to be reviewed and increased in many areas if competent personnel are to be employed.

Comments from Norwegian Church Aid:

The competency level of the Evangelical Church of Eritrea remains low. The study done by the NCA consultant was reinforced by a detailed study done in 2005 by the Church of Sweden. Recommendations have been made in detail and it is hoped that, with the union with the Lutheran church of Eritrea in early 2006, there will be a strong move to address the need for increased capacity within the church. NCA has remained in relationship with the Evangelical church of Eritrea but has emphasised the need to ensure that recommendations regarding capacity are enacted and not left as recommendations.

CAPACITY BUILDING ASSESSMENT REVIEW OF ECE

Dr Ken Jenkins. November 2004.

PROLOGUE

I was asked by Norwegian Church Aid to look at the needs and possibilities of capacity building in the ECE. I have interviewed and discussed the needs with members of the working staff at the ECE head office in Asmara. The church is facing many challenges some of which are related to external forces, which are hard to control. In particular the sad military situation in the nation has meant that many talented Eritreans have left the country. This includes a number of talented church members who could have contributed significantly to the capacity and health of the church. The church, according to the President, is only growing biologically and is largely composed of old people and children.

STRUCTURE

The church was founded through the work of Swedish Missionaries, but has a local government and structure, though much of this is no doubt a reflection of those who founded it. An annual Synod General Assembly is held at which a Synod Council is established which effectively governs the affairs of the church. This Council oversees the work of the Central Administration. Under this are different Departments, each of which has its own Committee and Workers, both paid and voluntary. These departments are responsible for the developments of the various church activities. The church has a holistic approach to ministry. These ministries include Evangelism, Health, Education, Youth, Women's work, Deaf school and Communications/Radio. There are 4 Districts and a number of congregations in each area. There are 18 active pastors and 13 pensioner pastors who are still involved in some parish work. There are approximately 30 congregations.

The two most crucial positions in the church are those of President and General Secretary. The President is elected at the Synod and serves a 3-year term. He may only serve 2 consecutive terms, though he may serve in this role again at a later stage. The General Secretary is not an elected post but rather an appointed one, with no fixed term. Both positions can only be filled by an ordained pastor.

STRENGTHS

The staff at the ECE are a good group of people who have the interests of the church at heart. They are willing and to a variable degree able to do valuable work. They are honest, friendly and hard working.

The church has no doubt been a crucial player in the spiritual development of the nation. There are many significant and worthwhile projects presently in operation, which are impacting the lives of many Eritreans through church life, pastoral activity, radio ministry, HIV/AIDS work, addressing FGM etc. These are all valuable programmes, often done with minimal training and financial support, against a background of deep turmoil in the nation.

WEAKNESSES

This will form the majority of this report, as the aim is to look to areas that need improvement. I will deal with these under different section.

1. Administration. Throughout the organization there is a real need for administrative change and development. In particular the organization is

heavily hierarchical, with little delegation of responsibility. The General Secretary post is a vital one but the amount of work is huge and help is needed to deal with this work load. At present the constitution states that this role can only be filled by an ordained pastor. The present General Secretary has been a pastor and theology teacher for many years but has not been formally trained in Administration.

The secretary to both the President and the General Secretary is competent and has done significant office management and computer training. However she needs and would like to acquire English competency. As the first person who has contact with donors and NGOs, many of whom use English as the language of communication, there is a great need for competency in English in this key post.

Computer literacy throughout the organization needs improvement. However several computers have been given which are not being adequately used. Some computers are situated in offices used by personnel who have no training or time to use them. Donors see this as a waste of funding and this may affect future donor possibilities.

The Administration is very centralized. Most decisions for finances and projects have to pass through the office of the General Secretary and even the President for approval. This places a huge burden on this office and slows up many simple decisions. One person explained how a broken window in a district church could only be replaced after going through a long approval process to the General Secretary.

2. Finances. Finances are worked through the office in Asmara. The man presently heading up this department is a teacher of 30 years experience. He has formal training in financial matters but has only been dealing with this area for 3 years. There are 2 computers in his department but he is overworked with the amount of work put on him and his small team. An accountant from the Synod who serves on a voluntary basis advises him.
3. Youth Work. At present the Youth Work is largely being coordinated by a Swedish Eritrean, who is supported by an American mission group. He is the official Sunday School co-ordinator. He is a dynamic man with great skill and vision. He is hampered by a lack of materials and qualified personnel to work alongside him. He has limited resources available to him and would benefit from access to other materials and being able to develop some materials in Tigrinya, which he certainly has the capacity to do.
4. Health Programme The present health component is well led and has significant programmes in action. There is a need for capacity improvement in terms of computer and management skills but the director of this programme has had a lot of training in medical work and administration and could be used to upgrade the staff. A good office manager in the program would be invaluable.
5. Women's work. I was told that this programme was temporarily suspended.

6. Evangelism is being carried out to a limited degree amongst local congregations. The comment that the church is largely growing biologically, rather than through outreach is a sad reflection of the situation.
7. Education programmes are decreasing as the government has progressively taken over the running of, what were previously church run schools.
8. Deaf School is run in Keren and has a number of teachers on the staff.

Much of the above information was gathered in interviews with the staff at the Central Administration. It is by no means exhaustive but I think provides a basis on which to make some recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. An assistant be found with administrative skills to work alongside the General Secretary to deal with the bulk of administrative work. Many companies have someone who functions as an Office Manager and this could be the new title. This person would need to have administrative and computer skills, and a good working knowledge of English.
2. There is a need to do a long-term, in depth study of the organization as a whole. It is suggested that someone from either Sweden or Norway be seconded to the ECE for a period of 3-6 months to thoroughly review the church. It also seems vital that the whole salary structure be reviewed as the salaries in many departments are inadequate and result in trained personnel leaving the ECE for better-paid appointments.
3. The present secretary to the President and General Secretary to be sent on English courses to improve her competency in English. She has completed some management courses and seems able to work competently on computers.
4. Regular interdepartmental meetings to be scheduled so that the staff is made aware of what different departments are doing.
5. Present computers and Internet access to be made available to staff who need them and not kept where they are not used. This is a waste of resources and reallocation could decrease workload while providing the tools for those who need it.
6. Each department to be asked to submit capacity building programmes. I would suggest that these be done annually and in conjunction with Reverend Bertil Holmgren. He has the unique ability of being a Swede who has worked in this country for many years and as a result knows many of the personnel both here and in the primary donor countries. The need and desire for better communications with donors needs to be addressed. It would possibly be a good idea to form a capacity building committee to look at this area on an

ongoing basis. I would suggest that Dr Michele Paliaro, Mr Berhane Elias and Rev Bertil Holmgren be key members of such a committee.

7. Training programmes be instituted where appropriate but this needs to be tightly controlled. It may well not be necessary for instance to train an evangelist in a rural church in the use of computers, but there may be great need to send him on appropriate courses. In effect we need to seek the right man or woman for the job and to train them as fully as possible for that position. Selection of personnel could be organised with the Capacity Building committee.
8. There is a need for internal and external attempts to build the capacity of the church. This will require humility and an attitude of service. The present hierarchical structure will need to be altered to give greater delegation powers to different departments and congregations so that many decisions can be handled at a lower level. This could be facilitated by input from external groups with appropriate training and technology.
9. The church needs to be ready to move with the times. There are 2 major internal challenges facing the ECE at this time. Moves are in process to unite the ECE with the Lutheran church. This needs to be brought about so that both groups can grow and help each other. In addition there is almost certainly a degree of conflict between the younger folk and the older folk in the church. This often manifests itself in dissatisfaction in style of worship etc. One risks losing either or both groups if this is not addressed. One may need to develop differing services to cater for different age groups and this is not a bad thing. A vision for outreach to those who are unreached also needs to grow so that the church is not simply growing biologically. The suggestions and recommendations obviously apply only to the Asmara Head Office but by implication capacity building starting there needs to then extend to all the districts and local congregations.

I am submitting this report for review with Norwegian Church Aid. Follow up will require some practical and definitive steps to be taken. As a medical man I would say that diagnosing the needs of a patient is only the beginning. The key is that the patient accepts the diagnosis, no matter how painful and makes appropriate changes and takes the correct treatment. I trust that this report will be received in the manner it has been written, that is with the desire to promote the work of the ECE and to help foster the more effective growth in His Kingdom in Eritrea.

Dr Ken Jenkins.

Personnel Interviewed

ECE President Reverend Asfaha Mahary

ECE General Secretary Reverend Fessehaye Estefanos

ECE Project Coordinator Dr Michele Paliaro

ECE Sunday School Coordinator Mr Berhane Elias

ECE Head of Finance Mr Abraha Seare

ECE Head of Communications Mr Daniel Tesfamicael

ECE Communications/Radio Department Mr Temesghen Berhane

Reverend Bertil Holmgren – from Sweden, seconded to ECE.