

Changing lives in Ethiopia

It's not every day that our Chairman, Jeremy Pelczer, swaps his suit and tie for traditional Ethiopian dress – but learning about local culture was just one of the highlights of his recent tour to inspect WaterAid projects in this underdeveloped country. *Waterways* reports.



Jeremy Pelczer with two young villagers in the rural Tigray region

Imagine a country with 80m people but only 38% water supply coverage and you have some idea of what life is like for those below the poverty line in Ethiopia. Life expectancy is just 55 and with just 12% sanitation coverage, it's not hard to see why.

As International Chairman of WaterAid, Jeremy Pelczer does all he can to try to change those statistics for the better and was delighted to accompany WaterAid Chief Executive

Barbara Frost on a trip to Ethiopia last month. Said Jeremy: "I'd already visited our work in Malawi and Ghana, so was keen to see how our projects in Ethiopia compared."

WaterAid began work in Ethiopia in 1983 and established a country office in 1991. Since then, much has been achieved: "It is wonderful to see at first hand WaterAid's strategic approach in addressing not only the basic needs of communities, but also tackling the root causes of the problems. The focus is on long term sustainability; in other words, on the integration of water supply, sanitation and hygiene, community management and empowerment, all aligned with technology that is affordable, appropriate to local conditions and easy to maintain."

The WASH (Water and Sanitation, Hygiene) sector in Ethiopia has changed significantly over the past five years, with increased investment in water supply in particular. Said Jeremy: "There is still much to do – particular challenges include low level capacity and weak inter-sector co-ordination in planning, implementation and monitoring – but the political climate is favourable and the country has significant potential for transformation." Indeed, Jeremy and Barbara met with Ethiopia's Health Minister to share thoughts on how to tackle the country's water supply and sanitation issues.

After a short time in the capital, Addis Ababa, Jeremy and the group traveled north by air to Mekelle for a two day visit to rural community projects in the mountainous Tigray region. Said Jeremy: "This one of Ethiopia's poorest regions. Before WaterAid arrived, the community had to walk great distances across difficult terrain and

share the water with their livestock and where they washed clothes. Now that the water supply is in the village, their lives have been transformed; they have access to clean water for drinking, clothes can be washed separately and livestock have segregated access to the supply."

One of WaterAid's key priorities is to ensure that projects are sustainable. "During our time there, we saw both post and pre-intervention sites and it was good to note that, where projects have been in place for over 10 years, there remains good access to water and sanitation."

So grateful are the local community that they presented Jeremy and his colleagues with the gift of local dress (see picture) which required the assistance of the local policeman to put on! After a farewell dinner with community representatives, it was time to return to Addis Ababa, where Jeremy had the opportunity to inspect a successful urban WaterAid project. "Urban projects present very different challenges to rural ones, but the four local women running it showed outstanding community leadership and their energy and drive has ensured the project has sustained over time."

Now back on British soil, Jeremy has nothing but praise for the hardworking staff throughout WaterAid in Africa but declares that nothing would be possible without the generosity of all the charity's supporters, including many SESW customers and staff. "I'd like to thank everyone for their donations both to date and in the future. You really are transforming people's lives every day and I feel privileged to be part of such a worthwhile organisation."



Donning traditional local dress for community dinner in Mekelle



WaterAid's work means villagers can access safe drinking water separately from where they wash clothes