



Hoffnung in Äthiopien

Reisebericht der Abgeordneten

Marco Bülow

Josef Göppel

Christian Haase

14. bis 19. November 2015

Hope in Ethiopia

Trip report by the Members of the Bundestag Marco Bülow, Josef Göppel and Christian Haase, 14 to 19 November 2015

German politics is struggling to find the right response to the migrant question, while France has had to suffer suicide attacks claiming 130 lives. Against this backdrop a delegation from the Bundestag Committee on the Environment set off on a trip to Ethiopia. The purpose of the trip was to examine what effect German development assistance has had on climate and species protection and how it is viewed by the indigenous population. During our five-day trip we were able to take an in-depth look at three projects.



Landscape north of the capital, Addis Ababa. On the plain villages set amid small-scale fields; bare hillsides; on the hill the remnants of a forest around a monastery; The forests in the precincts of monasteries were considered sacred and were therefore preserved. In 1970 up to 40per cent of Ethiopia was still covered in forest, in 2000 that figure had dropped to only three per cent! Reforestation programmes have since brought the figure back up to around six per cent.

Valorising regional traditions and products

The city of **Bahir Dar** on **Lake Tana**, which has an area of 3,156 square kilometres, has become Ethiopia's most important conference venue after the capital city, Addis Ababa. This provides favourable conditions for reviving regional cultural traditions and typical local products. This was what brought the attention of **NABU (Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union)** and the **Michael Succow Foundation**, with the support of the **German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety**, to the Lake Tana region in 2012 for the purpose of establishing another African "Man and the Biosphere" project. Unlike in the case of national parks, these programmes are designed explicitly to engage people in nature conservation. Their aim is enhance the scenic beauty of the area and promote tourism through the careful use of typical regional raw materials and skills.

From the air we see a mosaic of villages amid small fields. All the land is used right up to the mountain slopes. 95 million people need feeding. There is busy activity everywhere. Perhaps this is why the highland Ethiopians acquired the nickname the "Prussians of Africa".

But perhaps 3000 years of unbroken independence also play a role. Ethiopia was the only large country in Africa to have maintained its independence during the colonial era. Its tribal borders were never arbitrarily intersected. King Ezana (325 to 355) introduced **Christianity** as the state religion. It is impossible to view the stone remains from that time without being moved by their deep symbolic power and astonishingly modern-feeling form. This is

evidence of an **advanced civilisation** which is at least on a par with European antiquity. One cannot help wondering what Africa would look like today if the kingdoms of Nubia, Ghana or Uganda had been able to develop organically without the dislocation caused by colonialism.



One of the few intact sections of bank on Lake Tana. In the foreground are reeds, behind them papyrus and deciduous softwood trees. This threefold belt protects fine soil from being washed into the lake

We travel in a small boat from Bahir Dar on the southern banks of Lake Tana to **Ura Kidane Mehret Monastery** on the **Zege peninsula**. From a distance we can already see the cross towering over the round church set on a round hill. Virtually the only **forests** left in Ethiopia are in the vicinity of monasteries where

the trees are held to be sacred. Elsewhere the pressure on the forests from the growing population is evident. In 1970 40 per cent of the country was still forested; by the 90s this figure had dropped to only three per cent! As a result of massive reforestation programmes the figure has climbed back up to around six per cent.

We are welcomed at the Zege jetty by the village spokesman, **Tiruneh Enyew**. With visible pride he leads us along a narrow path, lined with coffee bushes, under a wide variety of forest trees up to **Ura Kidane Mehret Monastery**. Long-tailed monkeys in the crowns of the trees accompany us on our way and we are enveloped by a symphony of different bird calls. Along the path are stalls at which local people sell handicrafts, incense, myrrh, coffee and traditional items of clothing. Barefoot we enter the round church which stands at the highest point of the peninsula and gaze at the richly coloured frescoes.



*Left: Environment Committee delegation: Marco Bülow, Josef Göppel, Christian Haase
Below: Outdoor coffee ceremony. Ethiopia is the country where coffee originated. It is drunk black with sugar from small cups without handles.*



While the NABU project was not responsible for instigating the sale of regional products, it probably made the business more professional. The same applies to the training of local guides. Before the trip back, we take part in a traditional coffee ceremony. The coffee beans are washed, dried, shelled, roasted, pounded and then have hot water poured on them two or three times. During this process **Tiruneh Enyew** tells us about the community's future plans. They want to build a restaurant with a biogas plant which takes human and animal waste to turn into energy.



The young Amharic nature guide, Fekidu Yeniesew, explains how the coffee beans are picked and shelled. His name is Fekidu. Ethiopians do not have a surname. They simply add the name of the father, in this case Yeniesew.

Regional initiatives of this kind are often dismissed by economic strategists as a nice extra. But they make a country interesting for other economic activities and give the regions in question a distinct identity. In the European Union regional programmes of this kind are run under the term “**valorisation**”, that is to say they place a value on a region’s cultural and natural wealth. Another important factor here is that **NABU**, represented by a young scientist, **Dr Ellen Kalmbach**, approaches the local population as a non-state provider without sovereign powers. German development assistance here is low-key and promotional. The emphasis is clearly on the Ethiopians making their own decisions. We have the impression that this concept is working.

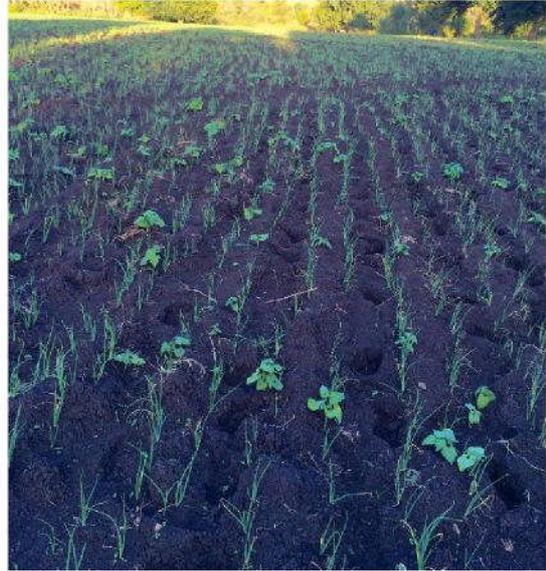
Storing water and preventing soil erosion

The Ethiopian Highlands experience regular torrential rains in July and August and then have to cope with a dry season that can last six to eight months. In these conditions storing water and preventing soil erosion are absolutely vital. Around 30,000 hectares of fertile soil are lost each year through erosion. This brings to our mind texts from the time of the Pharaohs which were already mentioning the fertile Nile mud from the mountains of Ethiopia. Overflying the country we see vast gullies created by erosion and many bare hillsides. The soil, on the other hand, is extremely fertile and friable, making it easy for plants to take root.

The Blue Nile Falls at Tis Abay. The river might more aptly be called the Brown Nile. Its water is saturated with fine soil. The land in its catchment area is deep and fertile and therefore very prone to erosion.

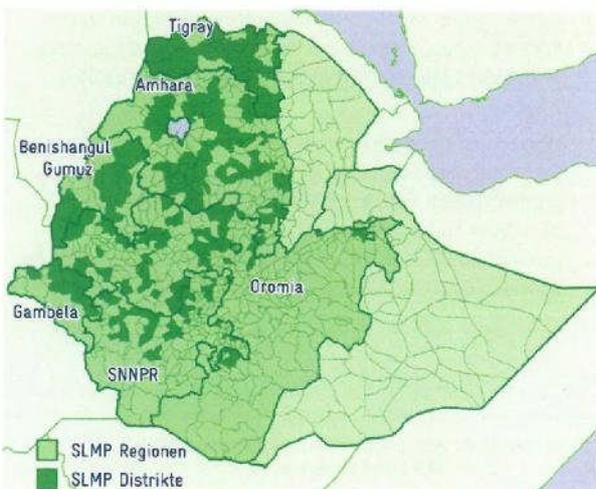


A field in the valley of the Blue Nile with onions and beans. The furrows are dug by two oxen pulling a single-blade plough. The fields are generally smaller than a day's work (3,400 square meters).



But this intensifies erosion. We see the **Blue Nile**, which should more aptly be called the Brown Nile. Its water is turned red-brown by eroded soil. Even in the vast **Lake Tana** we notice the ochre brown colour of the water.

At the beginning of the century the Ethiopian Government launched a large-scale sustainable land management program in **177 districts**. **Three advisers paid by the Government** were appointed to each district, one for animal husbandry, one for arable farming and one for soil conservation. In the Government's jargon they are known as "our development army".



In the framework of the Sustainable Land Management Program the government is installing rainwater storage systems in many places to be used in the dry season to irrigate the fields.

77 districts in 6 regions are taking part in the Sustainable Land Management Program (SLMP).

We travel from Bahir Dar 45 kilometres southeast to the district of **Sheba-Tindwat**. The valley community of Tindwat covers 11,000 hectares with 3,300 households. The elected representatives of the local valley community are lined up, seven men and four women. The Ethiopian adviser for water storage and soil conservation describes the innovations that have been introduced with respect to land management.

1. There is **no longer any grazing** on hillsides and ditches. Instead the animals are penned or tethered on flat ground and fed there. Every family continues as before, however, to tend their own livestock.
2. Each village comes together to build narrow **terraces** with stone and earth walls to retard the flow of the water. The terraces can be tilled, the walls green over and shrubs root themselves within a few years.
3. **Water reservoirs** are set in depressions in the ground.
4. Improved **cultivation** of locally adapted seeds and propagation by the small farmers increases yields.



The Regional Committee of Sheba-Tindwat presents their water storage project to the German delegation.. 7 men and 4 women represent the population of the entire water catchment area. They ultimately make the decisions on all measures.

The comments of the local dignitaries indicate that the Government is acting smartly here. Every village community can decide for itself whether or not it will implement the innovations. In many of the 177 districts the deliberations lasted for many months. The Sustainable Land Management Program receives financial support from the **European Union** and **Canada**. The implementing organisations are the German **GIZ** and **KfW Development Bank**. **Dr Johannes Schoeneberger** from GIZ has been in residence for five years. He emphasized that the German advisers play a supportive role. The basic subsidiary nature of their position is the same as in the case of the NABU regional project at Lake Tana. All decisions are to be

taken by the Ethiopians themselves.

Village life on the outskirts of Bahir Dar. There is electricity here and satellite dishes on the roofs but the living conditions are pitiable. The women scoop water out of the nearby stream.



Thanks to the skill of our translator from English to Amharic, we learn much about the views of the local population as we walk across the fields. We are struck by the strong attachment of the families to the land they cultivate. That is not surprising. They work the land using a single-bladed plough which they carry on their shoulders from the village and which is then pulled by two oxen. It is reminiscent of the measures used for a day's work in South Germany, which define the acreage a farmer can plough in one day, around 3,400 square meters. The fields here are

substantially smaller. Many agricultural experts might well suggest combining fields and using large machinery to increase yields. But the Ethiopian advisers say: "Then where would all the people go?" In the light of globalised production, which means that all commodities can be manufactured somewhere in the world cheaply without competition, there are doubts about embarking on the road to industrialisation. The Ethiopian Government - at least in this part of the country - has opted to leave land management in the hands of independent smallholders who take responsibility for how they use their fields. From a German perspective this is a sensible approach. The secret to our economic success, after all, lies in having **the greatest possible number of small independent businesses**. Here in the Ethiopian Highlands we

sense the pride of the farmers in the improvements they have been able to make as a result of the sustainable land management program. There is a palpable feeling of confidence. These are not conditions that lead to waves of refugees. At the end of this excursion we meet **Ato Tefera, Minister of Agriculture** for the **Amhara region**. He stresses once again the value of people earning their own living, self responsibility and modernisation in small steps to avoid creating an additional proletariat.



A rubbish dump on the outskirts of the regional capital Bahir Dar (300,000 inhabitants). Children rummage through the rubbish looking for items that can be salvaged.



The road from Bahir Dar to Tis Abayto the Blue Nile Falls. Much of the road network still consists of dirt tracks.

Which is the right path to development?

Up until the financial crisis in 2008 there was a clear pattern to “development”. Institutions such as the World Bank gave countries which were “lagging behind” **loans** for infrastructure projects and demanded in return that they moved from a subsistence economy to the **export of raw materials** and opened their markets, i.e. allowed the **duty-free import of products from industrialised countries**. Between 1970 and 2000, the debt of the 60 poorest countries in the world increased from **25** to **523** billion US dollars (Prashad “History of the Third World”, New York 2007, p. 276). The recipient countries were required to guarantee investments in production facilities. Since this method was applied to all developing countries equally over three decades, the prices of their exports came under repeated pressure so that the **wages** of the local labour force fell more than they rose. The external investors, moreover, siphoned off the major part of the profits since they, of course, had to ensure a rate of return for their lenders.



The new university clinic in Bahir Dar. The scaffolding is made from bamboo poles.



Land grabbing. The white area in the centre of the photo is a glass-roofed vegetable production facility, built and run by an external investor.

At the same time the obligation to open their markets opened the floodgates to waves of imports from industrialised countries which varied according to the respective economic situations in these countries. The EU, for example, is currently paying export subsidies for milk products in order to compensate for the increase in production following the removal of the milk quota and the block on deliveries to Russia. In our hotel in Bahir Dar the tins of coffee creamer, for example, came from Europe.

All this has led in recent years to calls for a different development model. Even the **World Bank** accepts today that markets need to be opened gradually in small stages over several decades. The thinking today is that development needs to be based on small **incubators** consisting of as many independent small businesses as possible. Amhara's agriculture minister, **Ato Tefera**, rightly said to us: "We must get to the stage of processing our raw materials into end products ourselves and first supply our own people with all the goods they need".

Solar power for mobile communications and light

Ethiopia is rich in renewable energy sources yet only 23 per cent of the 95 million inhabitants are connected to a power supply. Of the 67 million people who live in rural regions, the figure

is as low as five per cent. Until recently there were scarcely any affordable alternatives to **firewood**. Besides this, the rural population is relatively unaware of the advantages of a modern energy supply. This is causing increasing deforestation and soil erosion and is also leading to respiratory diseases. In 2010, in response to this situation, the Ethiopian Government, with international support, launched the **Energizing development partnership – EnDev**. The aim of the project is to establish self-supporting markets for modern forms of energy. The core element is the **training of manufacturers and dealers** in new energy-efficient cooking stoves and solar home systems. Since 2000 local dealers have sold 920,000 efficient **cooking stoves**. With an average household size of six people, this improvement reaches 5.5 million people. 3.3 million people in rural areas have been given access to electricity via small photovoltaic units. **Solar lights** including batteries cost around 45 euro. That is a lot of money given an average monthly wage of 20 euro. Microloans are therefore available for electrification. Solar home systems with an output of 150 to 200 Watt are being installed in clinics and schools. They provide enough electricity to power a few lamps and to charge mobile phones. They cost around 180 euro. The units can be leased. Ownership is transferred once the investment has been paid off. Over the course of time local politicians want the off-grid systems to come together to form local networks in the municipalities. Once a certain density of units has been achieved energy cooperatives will be formed for this purpose. As we are leaving a European intermediary tells us as an aside that virtually all the systems will be supplied from Germany.



Energy-efficient cooking stoves – it sounds banal but the impact is huge. Since 2000 local dealers have sold 920,000 units. With an average household size of 6 people, this improvement reaches 5.5 million people: fewer respiratory diseases and a 50% saving on firewood are the most important benefits.

The reactions to being able to access electricity were almost euphoric. One young woman said: “At last I can study in the evening in peace”. Mobile telephones are now ubiquitous in the countryside. During one of our car journeys we see two herdsmen in their traditional colourful robes sitting under a tree by the side of the road. They sit there like two stone pillars, bent forward, motionless. As we drive past them we see that both of them are typing on their mobile phones. Access to electricity has brought a new mood to

the rural areas. Young people see a future for themselves in their own country. They want to do all they can to make something of it.



A local solar power specialist who sells and installs the systems on his own account. The training for such experts is one of the priority areas of German development cooperation in the energy sector in Ethiopia.

Competition between hydroelectric power and agriculture

The 180-kilometre drive east of Lake Tana from Bahir Dar to Gondar provides breathtaking views and also a deep insight into the region's ecology. The **Lake Tana plain** stretches 70 kilometres from north to south. A dense network of irrigation ditches enables several harvests in the course of a year. We see **rice fields** stretching as far as the horizon, as well as the national cereal teff, maize, wheat, sugar cane and vegetables.



*The staple Ethiopian cereal teff (*Eragrostis Tef*) is gluten-free and is hence enjoying a huge upsurge in demand in the European organic trade as a non-allergenic bread grain. It is a difficult crop, however, to harvest. One hundred grains are needed to achieve the weight of a single grain of wheat.*

Bread made from teff – light and smelling of cereal in the summer wind.



During the rainy season the water level in Lake Tana rises and floods the rice fields. In the dry season the water level falls far enough for the fields to be accessed and harvested. Now, however, a manmade outflow tunnel has been installed at the southwestern end of the lake which takes water from the lake via the lower course of the Blue Nile to a new hydroelectric power station on the border with Sudan. Ongoing extraction of the planned volume of water, however, will drain the rice growing area to the north of the lake. There is hence a conflict here between food production and electricity generation.

We come to the **mountain range** which borders the Lake Tana plain to the north. The land is cultivated up to a height of 3600 metres. Extensive bare hillsides are the implacable result of overgrazing and soil erosion. Suddenly we are in a lush green forest. We get out; it smells like the Harz. Birdsong rises up from the crowns of the trees to the zigzag road. The forest region is called **Washa Endyrias**. The land belongs to a monastery, the roofs of which are visible from between the trees. This is the only reason the trees have survived. Freshly hewn trees on the side of the road, however, indicate that the appetite to exploit them has reached here too.



The 40-metre high granite rock of Yakuala on the mountain range between Gondar and Bahir Dar, a legendary landmark half way between the old imperial city and Lake Tana.



Ethiopian agrarian landscape in the Amhara region. Small fields predominate. The small farmers farm the slopes on narrow terraces. The Government has recognised that maximising the number of independent smallholdings and businesses contributes more to value added and social stability than landless workers. In the light of cheap globalised production, the traditional changeover to industrial jobs now offers few prospects.

On land near the village the last grass meadow is often grazed – the growing population needs ever more meat. Ethiopian orthodox Christians do not eat pork.

After crossing over the pass we see a lot of **sorghum** being grown. There are cacti along the road but right next to them the land is cultivated, indicating that there must be enough rain here too.

Circling eagles, vultures, hen harriers, buzzards and falcons herald the **mountains of rubbish** on the outskirts of the old imperial city of Gondar. Officially it has 265,000 inhabitants, unofficially 400,000. Although we arrive at midday, the climate, at this altitude of 2230 metres, is pleasant.



Education and health close to home

Our round trip comes to an end with a look into basic schooling and local health services in Gondar. **Lesanu Matheos**, the Catholic Bishop of Bahir Dar and Gondar, accompanies us. The **Catholic Church**, with support from the German **Missionswerk Missio**, runs a primary school here, a hospital with its own pharmacy, for women and children in particular, an art workshop for single women and a school for the blind. All the facilities are in the middle of a residential area so that they can be easily reached on foot. We meet people of all faiths. Cattle, sheep and goats for local consumption graze nearby. In between are fenced gardens with bananas, figs, papaya and vegetables. Nuns from the **Convent of St Anna** are in charge of the business. As one would hope in such institutions, the atmosphere is relaxed and attentive.



Primary school in Gondar, part of the social complex run by the Catholic Church in Gondar which includes a hospital, pharmacy and women's training centre in the heart of the Arbaba district of the city.

The Amharic alphabet. It has 267 characters.





In the school garden tended by the Catholic nuns of St Anna in Gondar with banana and papaya trees.



Catholicism plays hardly any role in Ethiopia. Only around **one per cent** of the population belongs to the Catholic Church. Public life in the Highlands is very much dominated by the **Ethiopian Orthodox Church**. We are repeatedly struck by how well cared for the Orthodox churches are and by the good condition of their fabric. This, too, is an indication of their social importance. At the end of our trip we visit the Orthodox Church of the Trinity, **Debre Berhan Selassie**. Although relatively young, built in 1694, it exemplifies, in its form of religious expression, the essence of the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia. We pass through a massive courtyard gate and are immediately struck by the clamour of the city behind us. The Church stands behind a high wall with fortified towers encircled by old trees. A priest opens the entrance door made from weathered wooden planks. Expressive faces gaze out at us from the frescoes; above us is the world-famous ceiling of angels. The interior radiates an archaic grandeur and a feeling of protection.



The world-famous ceiling of angels in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church of the Trinity in Gondar. The paint is applied directly to the wood of the crossbeams and the intermediate boards.

Despite the feeling of peace here, the church bears signs of the latent conflict between Christians and Muslims. In 1888 it was destroyed by the Sudanese Mahdi during an attack on Gondar. Such conflicts run through Ethiopia's entire history. From 1200 churches hewn from rock became a widespread architectural style. Today there are still some 60 rock-hewn churches in the Ethiopian Highlands east of Lake Tana. They were designed not to be visible above ground but to form an "African Jerusalem" in the bowels of the earth. Imagine it: starting from a flat surface on a granite bedrock, over a period of decades church buildings with heights of up to 15 metres were chiselled downwards out of the rock. Today around 35 per cent of the inhabitants of Ethiopia are Sunni Muslims. People live predominantly in peaceful coexistence. In the 80s the Muslims were granted three feast days. Since the turn of the century mosques have been built in many cities, with financial assistance from Saudi Arabia. In the regions bordering Somalia the growing influence of Wahabi teaching is apparent.

Our resumé

We visited only a small part of the country and did not see the areas in the southwest subject to land grabbing, or the resettlements in the Gambella region, or the famine areas in the northeast. In comparison with other African countries, however, we were struck by the stronger involvement of the local population in development projects and a basic confidence in the actions of state bodies. In this respect it is doubtless significant that Ethiopia's statehood was not interrupted by colonialism. As we talked to people who are directly affected by development projects we detected a feeling of pride, even if progress has been slight. The key factor, as we saw it, was the importance attached to people taking charge of and developing their own livelihoods. This applies in equal measure to farmers, to tradespeople and to business people in the towns. Access to electricity is probably the central element enabling young people to see a future for themselves in this country and to opt to stay.

Text: Josef Göppel

Photos: Josef Göppel, Marco Bülow, Christian Haase