



STAFF PHOTOS/KATHLEEN GRIFFIN

Ethiopian villagers on their way to market. Grass on the donkey will be sold for fuel to heat homes or to thatch mud hut rooves.

# Glimmers of hope costly, long-term

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to be done. When that didn't happen either, I figured additional research would provide clues.

But there are no easy answers. Only glimmers of hope — all of them plodding, long-term and costly. For the 64 million people living in the second-poorest nation on earth, where the average income is \$137 US a year and 50 per cent live below a poverty line we can't begin to imagine, those glimmers of hope are all they have. The alternative is death.

"The country is desperately poor," explains Doctor Abbas Gnamo, who specializes in modern African history at the York University's Centre for International Studies.

Famine, wars, coups, 20 years of Marxist philosophy and decades of government corruption have all contributed to Ethiopia's lagging evolution over the last decades, he said. The country's resources have been used to combat those problems, leaving little left for structural development and humanitarian aid.

"Ethiopia exports raw materials, coffee and agricultural products like teff (a wheat-like crop used to make bread called injera), but it doesn't generate enough capital to buy finished goods."

Theoretically Ethiopia produces enough to feed itself, but can't move it from A to B. Paved roads are few and there is little in the way of dependable transportation. Only four per cent use advanced technology, like tractors — the majority still farm with oxen and a plough made of sticks. More than 85 per cent of the population is rural, most of those rain-dependent farmers on one or two-acre plots.

Even in a good year most produce only seven or eight months of food; they have no purchasing power, no surplus of anything, no sustainability year to year. Land is ravaged as des-

perate people exhaust their plots, harvesting even the grass (to thatch roofs, feed livestock or use as fuel) and the trees, (for building homes or to sell as firewood).

Frequent drought, coupled with centuries of deforestation further threatens the health of the land. In many regions, the soil is so eroded it can barely support the growth of trees and grass, never mind crops. And as the dry, loose, barren land falls into itself, it creates miles and miles of vast gullies, a truly frightening sight.

"Some problems are a result of Ethiopia's natural calamities. Drought, erosion, deforestation. Rain is not abundant and in many regions it's not enough. Some areas are hurt by overpopulation. Some areas have been inhabited for thousands of years and the land is over-exploited, eroded and barren," confirms Dr. Gnamo.

"They tried to re-populate in the west, where arable land is more abundant, but people don't want to leave their land."

## ETHIOPIA: THE FACTS

Population: 64 million  
 Percentage of population in rural areas: 85  
 Percentage of arable land: 12  
 Life expectancy: 49  
 Infant mortality rate: 97 per 1,000  
 Younger than five: 166 per 1,000  
 Average number of children per woman: 6  
 Percent of children younger than five stunted due to malnutrition: 51.5  
 Percent of underweight children: 47.2  
 Percent of household within 15 minutes of a safe water supply: 10.1  
 Percent of households with flush toilets: 0.3  
 Average annual income: \$137 US  
 People living with HIV/AIDS: 3 million, 250,000 younger than five  
 Percentage of hospital beds occupied by AIDS patients: 50

Again, the lack of water where it's needed is Ethiopia's greatest challenge. Small irrigation schemes and man-made ponds designed to store water from the rainy season have meant the difference between life and death for some villages.

Women many kilometres for water, lugging 50-pound plastic containers or clay pots on the

backs. In one village, women walk four hours for water and four hours back.

Every day. Their time is not spent cooking, cleaning, sewing or helping harvest. Their time is spent surviving.

Canada is now taking a new interest in Africa, including Ethiopia. While we spent \$30 million in Ethiopia last year, 85 per cent of it through CIDA-funded projects, Prime Minister Jean Chretien is the front man for G-8 nations leading the newest initiative in Africa, dubbed the New Partnership for Africa's Development or NEPAD.

Chretien has persuaded the G-8, which meets in Kananaskis, Alberta in June, to put Africa's development at the top of the agenda.

He has pledged \$500 million for an action plan and an increase of eight per cent a year in aid to Africa.

But Canada and the G-8 are putting some conditions on the deal, including a progress-ranking system to focus aid investment and a commitment on behalf of African nations

to good, transparent governance.

Dr. Gnamo praised the Canadian effort, but said despite the fact G-8 countries agreed to the plan, he wonders if those nations will actually pony up the funds.

"Canada can't pay by itself. We can't blame all rich countries, many governments have squandered resources in Ethiopia. But are the other nations really ready to give more resources in funding this initiative?" he said.

Doug Clements, an agricultural economist working for CIDA's program support unit Addis Ababa, said Canada's focus must be on the long-term, continuing success of aid in Ethiopia.

"I've been in Africa 31 years and there are so few success stories," he said. "Even in a good year there are half a million tons of food aid needed — four to five million people need assistance every year. We are no closer to a solution now that we were 31 years ago."

Mistakes have been made, despite good intentions. Aid organizations have come to Ethiopia, building dams or water pumps or irrigation systems using the latest technology.

But when they went home, the villagers are left unable to understand the mechanics of the projects. They can't operate them on their own or repair them when they break down.

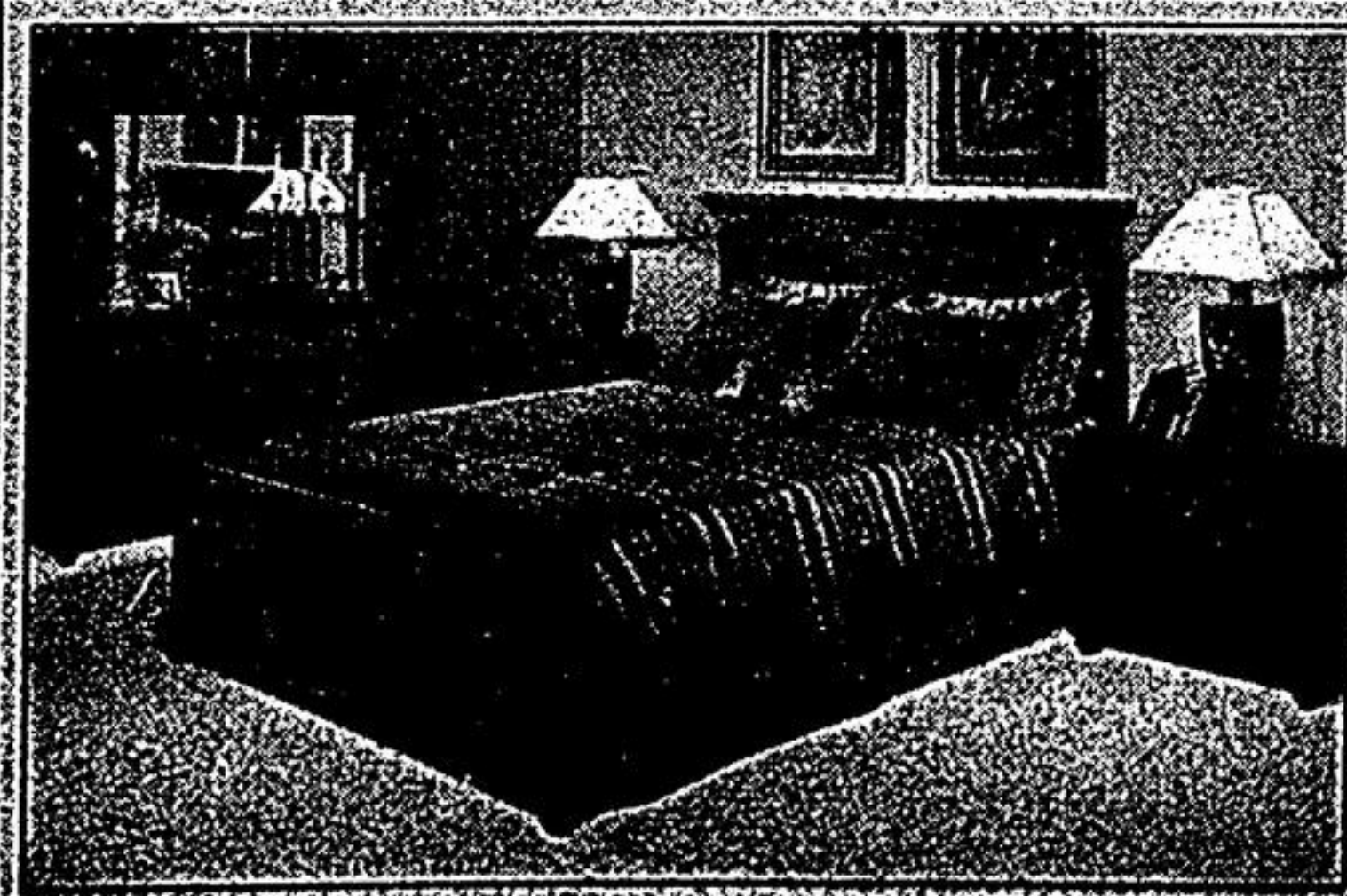
"There have been examples of the government turning down aid," Mr. Clements said. "Not that officials don't recognize the need, but they can't afford to maintain equipment after the donor walks away. So people continue to suffer."

"We have to accept when we come here we're going to have only a limited effect," Mr. Clements said.

But even a limited effect in a country with so little is better than none at all.



Unending drought, deforestation and decades of farming has caused land in Ethiopia to fall in on itself. It's barely capable of sustaining life, much less agriculture.



## ANNUAL SPRING SALE EVENT

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 Saturdays 10-5 pm  
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