

S-15

**REVIEW AUTHORITY: Robert Strand, Senior Reviewer****RELEASED IN PART B6**

**From:** Parker, Christine D  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 17, 2010 2:39 PM  
**To:** Fekybelu, Elias B; Asfawe, Merid G; Rupp, Abigail M; Rosalik, Linda L; Ladenson, Jeffrey L; Whitt, Lester E; Demere, Seble G; Tadesse, Belay A; Fanta, Muluaalem S  
**Subject:** Gelgela trip report

Today Muluaalem and I visited the Gelgela orphanage in Addis and met with program coordinator Ato Isais, program officer Ato Mebratu, and social worker Ato Menbak. Although they appear to be moving in the right direction, we had some serious concerns about oversight of operations at the local level orphanages, documentation, and filing.

Isais and Menbak explained that the Gelgela manages two orphanages in Addis – the principal one houses 60 children (this is the one we visited) and the secondary one houses special-needs children. These children were all originally in one of four “branch level” orphanages in the Oromia region.

We were told the same story about children’s movement through the process as Les and Elias heard on their February visit. After the kebele/warda process is complete, a branch-level orphanage social worker visits the relinquishing relative and completes a 4-page questionnaire confirming the reason for the relinquishment and identifying other family members. The relinquishing relative and the social worker both sign the document. It is only after that social worker review is complete that a child can be placed into the adoption pipeline.

We checked 3 case files: [redacted] (AWAA from the Bench Maji orphanage), [redacted] (Bethany from Shashemene) and [redacted] (Bethany from Bench Maji). Bench Maji is south of Awassa. None of the cases originated from Hadiya or Kenbata (see notes below). The files contained the social worker report, kebele papers, and a few medical lab test checksheets. After our visit and learning that there really is no oversight at the Addis level, the agencies are not demanding accountability or performing due diligence on cases from Gelgela, and the numerous rumors we’ve heard about Gelgela’s branch orphanages’ unethical recruitment of children, I do not feel any more confident in these three cases. I recommend we wait to conduct field investigations out at the local level. We have the relinquishing parent’s address (but not phone) in two of the cases, and the third was found by police.

B6

Our concerns are:

- Isais indicated the social workers at the branch level are all “long time employees”, meaning if anyone knows how to finagle the system, it’s them
- The branch social worker is also supposed to speak to some of the relative’s relatives, but that is not documented anywhere and there is no follow-up to insure this is actually being done. Same for abandonment cases.
- Menbak said that he visits the branch orphanages about 2x per year to independently confirm certain cases, but hemed and hawed when asked directly (three times) what prompts him to feel they need to look more closely at a case, never giving us a real answer
- They said they recently ceased to accept kids from the branch orphanage in Kenbata. They wouldn’t answer why, just kept citing “general concerns”. Only later on did they confess that the social worker independently contracted by the Germans found “paperwork problems” with 2 of 12 Gelgela cases, both originating in Kenbata. Although they temporarily have ceased to accept children from Kenbata, they took no adverse action against their own social worker.

- They said the agencies "never push" for additional documents and rarely ask specific questions about a child's origins (Bethany and AWAA).
- They denied ever having worked with Better Futures, twice, saying they have never heard of Better Futures (according to BF, BF recently cancelled their sponsorship contract w/ Gelgela over processing concerns, and we just interviewed last week a BF adoption originating at Gelgela)
- Medical evaluation is supposedly done at the branch and Addis level, but none of that information is kept with a child's case file

Despite the concerns, they are doing (or trying to do) some things well:

- During the medical exam, they conduct bone density testing on all children 5 and up to verify age
- They do in-depth interviews with all children 5 and up to verify their own histories. Recently this type of interview uncovered a case originating at their Hadiya orphanage in which a child w/ no parents actually had two parents. They returned that case to the local court.
- They reported two other cases in which "they" discovered the paperwork was incorrect and brought the children back to court at the local level (Note: in hindsight, I think these are probably the Kenbata cases actually discovered by the German social worker)
- They provide transportation to insure relinquishing relatives appear in federal court

We suggested several ways they could improve the quality of their recordkeeping and verification, and ways in which we could partner with them:

- greater independent verification by the Addis social worker conducting unannounced visits and independently confirming branch social worker's reports with the relinquishing family's neighbors, documenting those visits in writing in the case file
- demanding full accountability of each branch social worker's work – documentation of interviews with relinquishing relative's relatives, taking photos of the relinquishing family member at the time of the social worker interview, and recording the interviews
- keeping medical histories together and with each child's complete case file
- providing copies of all of that information to each agency, whether they ask for it or not
- contacting the Embassy for assistance when they have suspicions about a particular police officer or a particular kebele employee, etc
- telling us in advance when a case looks "odd" and is going through a U.S. agency

*Christine Parker*

Deputy Consular Section Chief  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
[ParkerCD2@state.gov](mailto:ParkerCD2@state.gov)

The Embassy's website is: <http://addisababa.usembassy.gov>  
This email is unclassified according to E.O. 12958