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## Trip to Sidamo Feb 2, 2010

### Met with Wide Horizons representative in Awassa Ato Ungirso

Rather than doing a paper search we joined the family 80 kilometers up a dirt road deep in the Sidamo Region in a town called Arbegona. The families we visited came to the Kebele from their homes which are in the area but not in the Kebele town itself. The first family walked two hours to come to meet the American families. The family relinquished the child at the Kebele level who in turn referred the child to the Wareda Court who referred the child to the orphanage Ajuja in Awassa. The other two families lived within eight and fifteen kilometers from the Kebele.

On the way to meet the PAPs (who were meeting the birth parents/family members of orphans in the inter country adoption system,) we discussed the concept of uncles in the Sidamo region relinquishing children. After several discussions with the Wide Horizons Representative, the Kebele Manager and the Wareda Court administrative representative it was determined that there are two reasons that the frequency of uncles relinquishing children is high in this region. When there is a "Grand Family" or a family that has experienced several generations on the same plot of land, the land stewardship is turned over to one of the sons in the family since all cannot inherit. That brother or uncle in turn becomes the patriarch of the family, so regardless of the generations living in the same household, whoever has stewardship is the patriarch of the family. As the parcels of land are divided more and more, family members become more dependent on that person who inherited the stewardship of the land. So if parents die and leave their child to their mother, (the grandmother,) if she is dependent on the son as the person who inherited the rights to the family land, then the uncle becomes the legal guardian of that child as head of the family.

The second part of this is a Sidamese cultural tradition inherited from the Oromo/Muslim tradition, where if the husband of a married couple dies, the wife then becomes the property of the brother. Brothers are considered closer to the family unit, especially children, than sisters. So if a woman is widowed she is obliged by custom to marry her brother in law. Current efforts to sensitize communities on family planning and some religious customs are wearing this tradition down, however it is still a "cultural" practice in the Sidamo region. Thus, if the titular head of the family married his sister in law when his brother died, and the widowed mother of a child was obliged to marry him, when that mother dies or becomes incapacitated, the "uncle" (husband) in his capacity is legal guardian of that child and within his right to relinquish the child. The paperwork will still state that the guardian is the "uncle" even when he has married the mother of the child being relinquished.

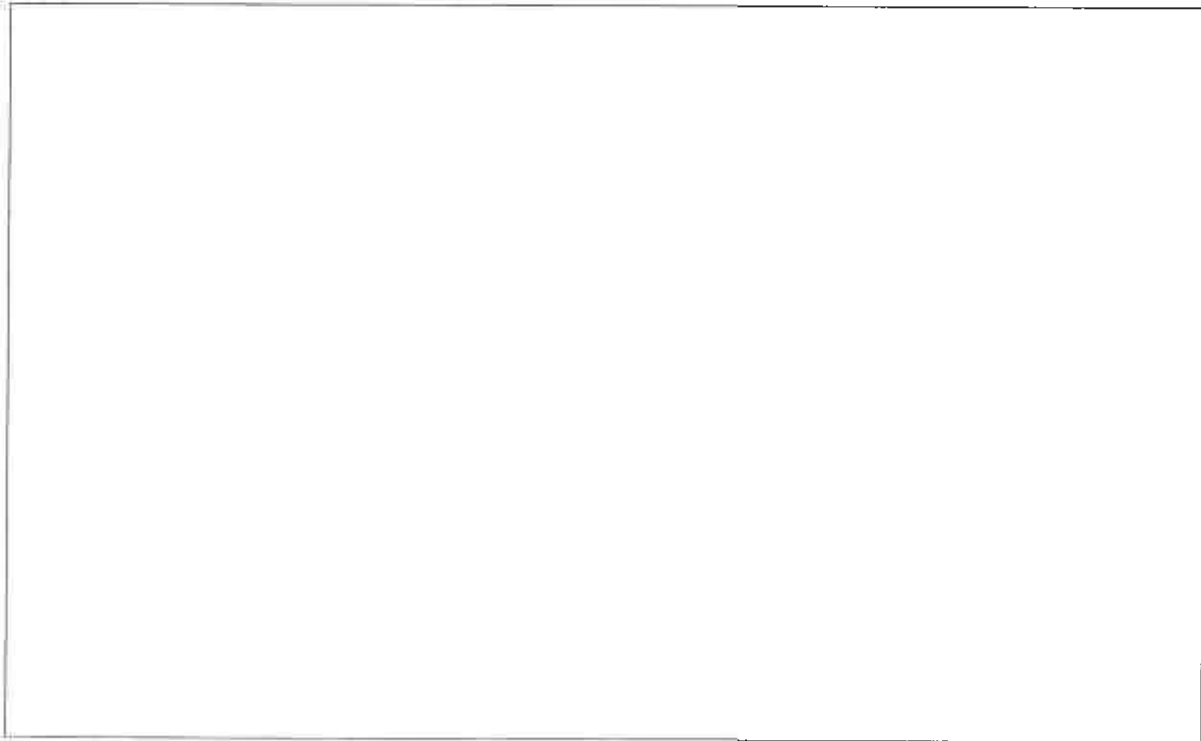
The local representatives at the Wareda level are part of the Bureau of Women's Affairs. The Wareda employs social workers at the Wareda level who are responsible for making sure that the children from families who relinquished children are placed in an orphanage at the recommendation of the Kebele Manager and the social worker themselves.

**REVIEW AUTHORITY: Robert Strand, Senior Reviewer**

We asked who trains the Kebele workers. Turns out they are trained by the Wareda government representatives who are trained by the zonal representatives who are trained by the regional representatives who are trained by the Bureau of Women's Affairs and MOWA. The end result is similar to playing the game "telephone" and it seems that the concept of inter-country adoption becomes more of an interpretation of how the practice works rather than strict adherence to a process. You will recall, from the visit to Wide Horizons earlier this year the Agency Director told us that he had conducted a training in the Awassa area for Kebele and Police officers in conjunction with MOWA. The training, he noted, was not able to reach all of the Kebele workers with whom the orphanage Wide Horizons uses works. We then asked the local representative what the topic of the training in January was, and it turns out that it was training on the "Development Works," in the name of social welfare, that the Adoption Agencies are required to conduct. It had nothing to do with Inter-country adoption.

The end result is that the Kebele workers are then dependent on the knowledge imparted to them from the Wareda officials who had attended zonal training conducted by zonal officials who were trained by the regional administrators who were in turn trained by the Bureau of Women's Affairs and MOWA.

We had brought the Guidelines recently published by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and asked the Kebele Manager if he had ever seen this book. He said he had not; he had only attended a one day training conducted by the Wareda on how to determine the economic status of a family relinquishing a child. We then asked the representative from the Wareda if he had ever seen this book and he said he had seen the Amharic Version but he was not familiar with the contents.



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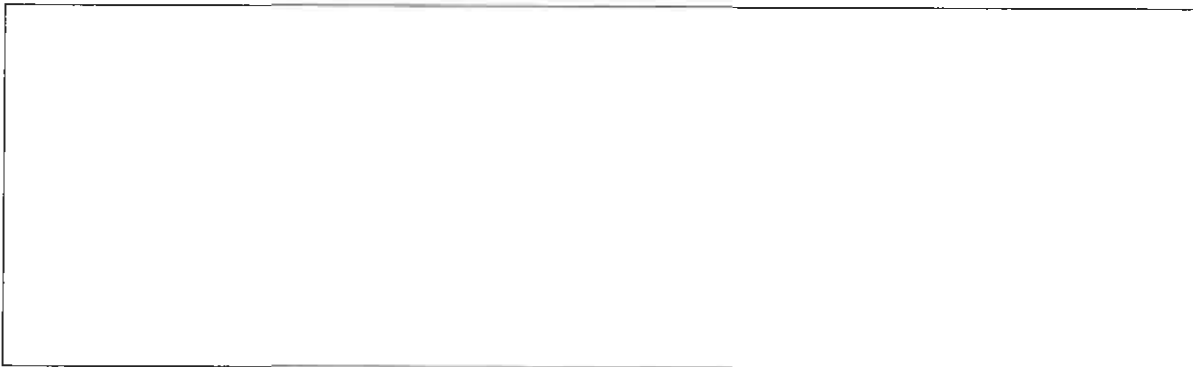
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relinquishment to determine if it has been properly done. If the relinquishment procedure has been properly followed then the Kebele manager determines the economic status of the family. If the Kebele officials determine that the family does not have sufficient income to raise the children then the relinquishment is accepted. If the Kebele determines that the family has sufficient economic resources to raise the child they will not allow the family to relinquish the child. So, the first check is the application the second check is the economic status.

There is a social court at the Kebele level it is called the Mahbret Social Court, but they are not necessarily legal professionals. The three witnesses that the families bring give their testimony to the social court.

The Kebele receives their training from the Wareda. They have never seen the MOWA guidelines on Alternative Childcare. The Kebele Manager thought that the Wareda should have a copy. He and his staff only received a short one or two day training from the Wareda. The main focus of the training is helping them determine who is in need of adoption since the Kebele can only provide recommendations from their findings. The final decision whether a family can relinquish a child is in the hands of the court.

The training teaches them to give priority to children of impoverished families. They only recommend relinquishment for relatives of children who are unable to raise the child for a variety of reasons for example: they are HIV + or both parents are deceased and the relative who is guardian cannot afford to raise a child.



The Kebele manager gave an example of why families frequently relinquish new born children when the mother has died in childbirth. He said that when a mother dies in childbirth the entire extended family sees that child as a "bad sign". Not only because of superstition, but that the mother died, and there is no one capable of feeding a newborn infant. These children are frequently relinquished right away because an orphanage is often better equipped to feed a newborn since they can more often afford baby formula. Poor families can barely support themselves, add the burden of purchasing baby formula and the family economy is devastated.

We also discussed the concept of the brother of a deceased parent inheriting both his brother's wealth and debt when he dies, this includes children. He said that if his brother died of HIV then he would inherit both his children and his wife. If he could not afford to support them, he would consider

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relinquishing the children. He said that in Sidamo culture the father's brother is the very closest family member to his brother's children.

### **Trip to Ajuja Children's Home Awassa**

On February 3<sup>rd</sup> we met the staff at the Ajuja Children's Home in Awassa. The facility itself was clean and cheerful. The children were in the courtyard at play. The rooms were tidy, the bathroom and kitchen were clean, and the laundry was hanging in the sun to dry.

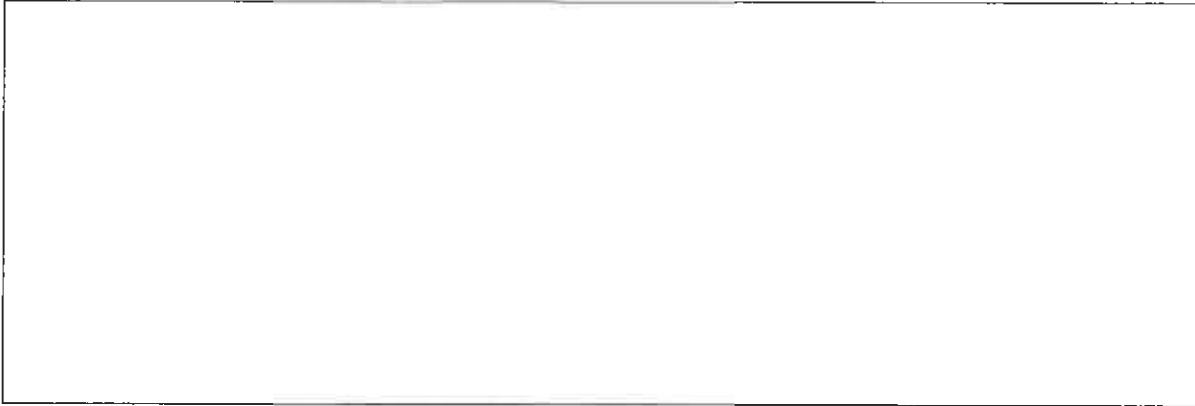
We spoke to the Ajuja children's home manager about the procedure when the children are referred to a family. He spoke of the Court agreement between the American Families and the Orphanage. He said that the cases were adjudicated in the Federal First Instance Court in Addis Ababa. The orphanage stands up with the family to create a legal agreement with the Adoption Agency who is acting on behalf of the adoptive family.

We spoke of the process from intake to Federal First Instance. He said that the social workers bring the children to the orphanage from the Wareda. These are the Wareda hired social workers who are assigned to the case when it comes from the Kebele, through the Wareda court, to the final installment at the orphanage. These social workers are part of the Bureau of Women's Affairs. The director stated that when the families can't take care of the children that they take them to the Kebele. The kebele manager checks the process was correct and that there were witnesses. A letter goes from the Kebele to the Wareda Court and Social Affairs writes the approval letter. The approval letter goes to the Zonal Administration and the Sidamo Zonal Social Affairs Bureau refers that child to Ajuja orphanage. We asked the manager who trains the staff and he said that the Zone trains them on Ethical practices and that MOWA and the Bureau of Social Affairs trains them on the Guidelines.

We asked the manager what agencies work with Ajuja. He said that they have a current agreement with Wide Horizons and WACAP and that they were being considered by Gladney.



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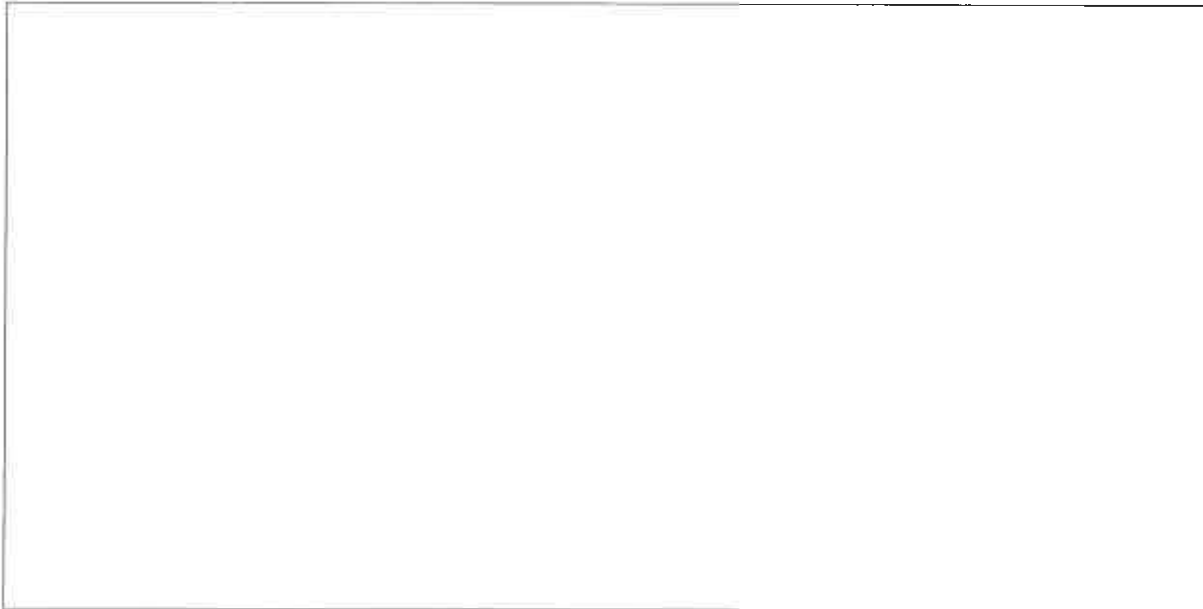
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We asked the director if he was confident that the documents in the [redacted] case were legal, he said he felt fairly confident that the process had been followed correctly. He was fairly confident that the Kebele, Wareda and Zonal recommendations had been sound. He said that he had met the uncle several times, including the trip to the Federal First Instance Court to relinquish the child in court.

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He meets the families on several occasions. Sometimes they come to the orphanage to drop off the children. They often visit the child at the orphanage, and then they go to the Federal First Instance court with the orphanage. When the family does go to Addis Ababa he will contact them, pay transport and housing and then accompany them to court. If at this point the uncle wished to take back the child, he could in his full right take the child back or relinquish the child for good.

We asked the orphanage about the mechanism for funding that they receive. The orphanage receives a quarterly stipend for operations. It is a package deal for purchasing formula, paying rent, and all other costs included in running an orphanage. If they cannot manage on a quarterly stipend, say for example, they run out of formula, or a child requires additional medical treatment that is beyond their budget, the orphanage will ask for an additional request.



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