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Christian World Adoption December 9, 2009

A surprise visit to Christian World Adoption proved highly productive in determining current practices at the agency. The atmosphere is similar to that of an airline after they have experienced a crash, increased controls, training and more transparency of the processes and an increased desire to fix that which appears to be wrong. The increased scrutiny and attention to this agency has them increasing their training with orphanages, and communication with the GOE on rectifying the appearance of corruption that may give rise to additional claims of malfeasance. In all, it seems that CWA has taken a hard look at themselves and the GOE and decided that the best option is to maintain a level of transparency that will help them clear their name. The only question remains, can they sustain this?

CWA has historically worked with four orphanages

1. Enaitlem
2. Gelgela
3. CCA/CCE
4. Adera

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Robert Strand, Senior Reviewer

In 2008 they discovered increasing discrepancies with paperwork submitted by Enaitlem and Gelgela and opted to continue working with CCE and Adera. Since then they have added two new orphanages, Tikuret and Mati whom they try to support through capacity building. The budgets for these orphanages are on a lump sum basis rather than a case by case basis, thus discouraging the incentive to recruit children to meet numbers. Of course, the motivation to maintain budget levels remains the same.

CWA stopped working with the Gelgela orphanage. The footage from the Australia Broadcast of ABC was filmed in the Gelgela Orphanage district in 2006, and the woman featured on the film had gone to the village (also featured in the footage) with the orphanage staff. The film basically implied that the CWA representative and the Orphanage Personnel in collaboration with the local authorities were involved in harvesting children. Right now it is the GOE who is taking the onus to make sure that the "harvesting" process outlined in the ABC Australia broadcast is no longer taking place (note the CWA rep did not deny this was happening) at the local level in this country. After a meeting with the MOFA the CWA Country Representative was assured that the GOE has taken extra precautions to stop the harvesting of children at the local level. He was not able to give any concrete examples of what the government was doing.

The US Embassy FPU agent described his experience interviewing families over a two week period in Hosana and how these families had expectations that their children would one day return and that they had been assured that remittances from those adoptive families would arrive within six months. When asked what was being done to dispel those types of expectations at the family level, the CWA Representative explained that the families work with the orphanage and not CWA and that they should have no expectation of future remittances from the United States. He emphasized that the CWA reps do not have contact with those families, all contact is at the local level through the Kebele or orphanage, CWA does not liaise directly with the relinquishing families and they do not encourage adoptive parents to meet the birth parents.

The Orphanages provide children for adoption as well as providing sponsorship programs for food aid and family support. CCE has an additional heart wellness program where clients services include operations. AS of 2010 CWA is trying to expand their sponsorship and community exchange programs in water and public health.

They discussed the new Sebeta complex facility which is 10,000 square meters at a cost of \$15/m. It seems like an ambitious program given the current environment surrounding adoption in Ethiopia. The complex is set out to provide housing, health care, a transition home as well as offices for the agency.

The director discussed the orphan intake process in Ethiopia stating that the intake process starts at the Kebele level when the family decides to relinquish a child, or at the police when a child is found abandoned. In cases where the family tries to relinquish the child directly to the orphanage, the orphanage staff is to advise the family to go to the Kebele and follow the normal trajectory. The Kebele provides a referral letter, and request that the family provide three witnesses to testify that they are destitute and cannot care for the child. Each case requires zonal approval. In the case of Oromia, the family needs a regional letter from Addis Ababa. The rural Affairs office is responsible for checking the information on the family's relinquishment is valid. If there is a discrepancy in the Kebele papers, they are supposed to change this, or the orphanage should request them to correct the paperwork.

He further explained that the GOE's Rural Affairs and Zonal Committee, a city level municipal government function, is supposed to look into the local court documentation. If there is a problem with a relinquishment, they are responsible for having rubber stamped that. Whether or not they will take accountability for that is the question.

From this, there are several holes in the actual family law relinquishment process, it basically puts the transfer of rights to the child from the parents to the orphanage through the Wareda or Regional court, but in the big city of Addis Ababa the Bureau of Social Affairs rather than the Wareda court. There is no real accountability if the paperwork that was manufactured by the Kebele or the Police and has been accepted at the court level. No one will really question that.

In Shashmene the ministry of Women's Affairs is becoming more active at the Wareda Court level. The MOWA representative is responsible to go to the family to assess the process. The MOWA rep is supposed to go to the house to check if the information is valid. If the information is not correct the MOWA rep then asks the orphanage to change the Kebele papers. Shashmene is a crossroads where people from several directions converge and it has a higher incidence of abandonment than many other places, simply because it is easier to abandon a child at the end of a transport route. Many of these children are not from the area and it becomes difficult to sort out their origin, let alone status, therefore the need for this MOWA pilot program.

Right now CWA is focusing on only submitting "adoptable" children. They have hired a former MOWA employee as a staff member and this person reviews all of the documentation. CWA also has social workers who regularly visit orphanages with whom they work.

At this point the Consular Officer and FPU officer pulled two files at random one under the name [redacted] and one under the name [redacted]. After reviewing all of the documents in the file, and discussing the case with the CWA representatives, it was concluded that the [redacted] child had been relinquished by a parent in Oromia. The relinquishment process in Oromia is different from the rest of the country in that the parent does not go to the Kebele to relinquish the child; they go to the court and make an agreement with the orphanage. This could be one reason for the confusion of cases where the adoptive families say the parents relinquished the child to the orphanage. The parent of the child had to appear at the Wareda court and state that the child's father had died and that she was relinquishing the child. The agent from the Orphanage was present and signed an agreement with the mother that the child would be put up for adoption in front of the magistrate. The child then went into the custody of the orphanage. There were still three witnesses at the court to testify that the mother could not care for this child and that the child would be better off in the intercountry adoption process. NB the witnesses present at the court hearing came with the mother and the orphanage personnel. We don't know what kind of influence the orphanage personnel have in the Oromia cases, however the legal process is very clear that the parent is willingly relinquishing their child to the orphanage in front of a magistrate. The process seems more legal in the sense that the transaction takes the child from the parent's custody and directly places custody legally in the orphanages' hands without transactions involving a middle man such as a Kebele official acting on behalf of the parents, or a policeman who had "found" a child.

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In the [redacted] case, the child was abandoned at a woman's house in Awasa. This woman said that she had given shelter to the birth mother when she was pregnant, and that the birth mother gave birth to the child in her house and then ran away leaving the child with the citizen who then turned the child into the police. In this case, it can be implied that the mother was ashamed of having the baby, once again there were witnesses testifying that the birth mother had indeed stayed with this woman in Awasa and that she did flee after the birth of the child. These letters were included with the police report.

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