

Laying the groundwork in Ethiopia: Debra Stein reports from the field

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## Laying the groundwork in Ethiopia: Debra Stein reports from the Field

Ethiopia is considered the birthplace of coffee, which is a main thread in the fabric of Ethiopian culture. The coffee ceremony is a key social event, and turned out to be a great time to speak to local women about our stoves. I travelled to Alem Gena with Zertihun Tefera, the Executive Director of SIQQEE, an Ethiopian charity that had helped form the women's group. We walked into a classroom at SIQQEE's branch office full of chatter and the sound of coffee beans crackling over the fire, the air redolent with their roasted aroma.

I first listened to the woman focused on stirring the roasting beans as she explained that they are the first of SIQQEE's many women's groups and that with seed funding, they are now able to earn a small income by selling grain at their local market.

The group was pleased that I was sharing my first coffee ceremony experience with them and astounded when they learned that scientists in the U.S. had tailor made a

stove for Ethiopia. To help address Ethiopia's high rates of deforestation and diseases caused by inhalation of cooking smoke, our partner, the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL) developed the Berkeley-Ethiopia Stove™. This stove is similar to the stove that we distribute in Darfur but has been adapted for Ethiopian culture and cooking. The new design includes features such as notches that hold a coffee roasting pan in place and metal rods that hold a *jebena*, the traditional pot used throughout Ethiopia to brew coffee.



*Debra visiting with a women's group from the Ethiopian organization, SIQQEE in the Oromia region of Ethiopia.*

As the first round of coffee was poured into small cups and served to everyone sitting in our circle, one woman described to me the day-long journey she takes each week to collect heavy loads of firewood for cooking. **With over 90% of the Ethiopian population dependent on firewood and charcoal for cooking and lighting, deforestation has forced these women to travel further and further, taking up their valuable time that could be used for more productive pursuits.**

One woman's loud cough throughout our discussion was a reminder that these women are all too familiar with the harmful effects of cooking. The need for fuel-saving stoves around the world is tremendous. In fact, the need is so great in Ethiopia that the government recently committed to putting nine million clean cookstoves into use throughout the country by 2015. **But they need the help of groups like us who have the ability to link the world's best science with local customs.** The innovative technology of the Berkeley-Ethiopia Stove™ can help lift many Ethiopians out of poverty.

The women expressed their eagerness to learn new job skills as stove sales agents and to serve as role models to young girls. This seemed especially fitting when I learned the name of their group means “growing by working” in the Oromo language.

As my second cup of coffee was filled, I told them more about our work in Darfur. Despite the already significant hardships that these women face, they audibly gasped when they heard about the dangers that await Darfuri women when gathering firewood.

As we sipped our final cup of coffee, the women volunteered to use the stove to prepare meals for their families and suggested that they demonstrate the stove at their local market. Zertihun will report back with the women’s feedback, which will help us to ensure that Ethiopian families are getting the greatest possible value from their stoves.

I left that day feeling over-caffeinated and inspired to hear from these women who are so eager to create their own opportunity that they volunteered to do a market trial. We’re very excited about the chance to help them and with your support, we will. I look forward to reporting on our progress!

## Did You Know?

According to the [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#), global prices of staples such as wheat have hit record levels, driving hundreds of thousands of the world’s most vulnerable further towards hunger and poverty.

This Thanksgiving, please remember  
those who struggle to provide a meal to  
their families and  
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