‘Kore – Sisters’, Addis Abeba

I would like to tell about the work with ’Kore-Sisters’ in Addis Abeba, the capital of Ethiopia. This is the background and a foundation for my later work at the Mulufikir-day nursery that I started from zero some years ago. This is why I hope you would also read this story that opened my own eyes widely for my future voluntary work with poor children and their mothers. ’Kore’ -name comes from the name of the area where these women live. It also sounds like English word ’Core’ and this is the very same and deep meaning of the work we do: It all starts from the very core of your heart.

It all started in 2012 when a friend of mine Hiwot and I, Mulu Chekol, started a new work with poor women just by loving, discussing and caring for them in Kore suburb. This is why we use the Amharic word *’fikir’* that reminds us to love one another no matter what the situation is. Where does this love come from? We are Christians and we want to share what we have experienced in our lives by trusting God and pouring His love through us to others. As human beings we do not have that kind of life-changing love unless God  fills us with His magnificent love. We also want to follow the most important command of Jesus: Love each other as you love yourselves! We met twice a month in Hiwot´s house in Mekanissa.

We prayed together, counseled and discussed their problems in their lives. They all were helpless. We taught them how to get out of poverty little by little. We did not want them to depend on us. Most of their husbands were drinking and hitting them. Their husbands didn’t give money either to their wives for food or school fees for their children. It was very hard for them. Some of the women were working part time, washing clothes for people, but they got very little money. At the beginning we gave some money for house rent, for school fees, so that children can go to school. There was also a need for medicine, clothes etc. We did not have much money to help, but luckily there were sometimes some people to help our work to be able to continue. I thank God for them and bless them!

First we discussed the ideas and decisions to make. What is their own aim in life? We learnt about Ruth´s story from the Bible. Then we asked the women how they can help themselves, because their husbands don’t want to help their own wives. They don’t get any help or money from anywhere. We challenged them to think and solve the problem themselves and we helped in that process. The women´s own idea was to start making handcrafts and sell them to get some money. They worked at home and when they brought their handcrafts, we gave them money for their rent.  In that way they learnt how to manage their time and money. Our policy was that when they made handcrafts, we gave them money for living. Then we tried to sell handcrafts and when we could sell the goods, we gave them extra money 50% for their handwork and with 50% we bought new materials. These wonderful handcrafts were bought mainly by foreigners. We also tried to get their own bank account for every woman.

After one year they started to encourage each other. They talked about many things and their problems freely with us and with their new friends. At the end of meetings we always had a coffee ceremony. It's like  a holiday for them. They did not have any place to go for rest. Now they got new friends, who had the same kind of problems. So they were not alone. After they had learned to trust each other, if there was a problem, they discussed and prayed together. They lived in a Kore –area near each other. They started to call themselves Kore sisters! They were happy to get these new friends to whom they could talk to and who understood them fully when they were beaten up by their husbands and when their children were hungry. Only one woman had finished high school.

I will tell you something about these lovely women shortly. I have written the costs just for the reader to understand the cost levels in a big city, just to give a perspective of the costs of living. These numbers are from that time, when we started, so the rate of the currency Birr has changed and everything is getting even more expensive.

*Salamawit* is one of our Kore- Sisters association-member. In the photo she is serving at a coffee ceremony. She gets money for making coffee. She has two children. She is not married. Her children go to school. For one year we paid for her house rent. Now she can pay her own rent. She has continued her life. She had a problem with her eyes, so we helped her with the medical costs. She is working as a cleaner at the primary school.

*Tiruwork* has two children. Not married. She is from east Ethiopia. She is working in different houses as a housemaid, cleaning and washing etc. She gets a salary of about 400 birr (20€)/month. She pays house rent 300 birr(15€)/month. From embroidery work she gets about 280 birr (14€) /month. Now her life is getting better and she is happier. She gets money for food. Also we got her child to kindergarten for free. After paying her house rent she still has 380 birr (19 €)/ month. Photo: Tiruwork is with a baby inside the house.

*Lomi*has two children. She lived with her grandmother, who passed away. She came to Addis Ababa from the rural area to help her granddaughter, after Lomi’s husband left her. It was very difficult for the old woman to stay in a small tinhouse, but she did that for the love of the babies. She looks after her grandchildren, while Lomi is working. Grandmother sleeps on the floor. Lomi is cleaning different houses. She is getting about 200 birr (10€)/month. She spinned cotton into yarn, like you can see on the photo. She gets about 400 birr (20€) from that per month. Her house rent is 300 birr (about 15 €)/month. We gave some clothes to them. In the photo she is with her children and her grandmother outside and inside her house. Now she works as a daily worker.

*Dashas* has four children. She is married, but her husband used to drink a lot. He recently he passed away. The husband was not working at all, but Dashas is a very hard worker. She is from north of Ethiopia. She is cooking wot (Ethiopian dish) as a contract work. She started with chickens by selling eggs. After getting more money, she bought a sheep and now she has a cow. She gets money by selling milk. She spinned cotton into yarn. From that work she gets about 300 birr (15€)/month. She is HIV-positive. She gets free medicine. Photo: Dashas outside with Mulu.

*Tadelech* has two children. Married, husband is alcoholic. He is working as a guard, but he is not bringing any money home to support his family. Tadelech is a very hard worker and always happy, even when she is suffering.  She is from south of Ethiopia. She is milking cows, washing clothes etc. She gets about 350 birr (17,50€)/month. She is making bags from plastic cords. From that work she gets about 300 birr (15€)/month. Her child was sick, so he needs medicine monthly. Photo: One Christian man gave this house free to live. We are very happy. Tadelech is with her children outside with Mulu.

*Wubalem* has two children. She was married. She is from north of Ethiopia. She is washing clothes, baking bread etc. She gets about 500 birr (25€)/month. Now she is making and selling chili powder for the poor. From that work she gets about 300 birr (15€)/month. Her child is sick, so she needs to go to the hospital often. Photo: Wubalem is with her children (carrying her baby on her back) inside and outside with me. She was living with her family on the left side of this tin house. Another family lives on the right side of the house and paid 400 birr (20€)/month house rent, and the neighbour pays 400 birr too. Together 800 birr (40€)/month for this tin house!

*Yesoulik*had seven children. She is a widow. She is from north of Ethiopia. When we got to know her, she was living on the street with her children. We found a small house for her family. Rent is 200 birr (10€)/month). She had nothing. We gave her some things she needed. She was making different kinds of handcrafts. She was a very clever woman with new ideas. She got about 600 birr (30€)/ month.  She paid for her house rent by herself. Her children got free education. They were happy to go to school to learn and they didn’t need to beg anymore. Youselik herself started primary school at the age of 45. Sadly She was killed by her uncle.

Kore – sisters still meet with 12 women three times a year (2022). They encourage and help each other. What a wonderful circle of beautiful and hard-working ladies! Miracles are possible!

(All photos taken 2012, also cost of living 2012)