



Dr. Abebech Gobena

Dr. Abebech Gobena, a prominent humanitarian in Ethiopia, was born in 1938 in the then Shoa province, Selale Awraja in small rural village called Shebel. Her father was killed during Ethio - Italian war and she was brought up by her grandparent until she was nine. She was married at the age of ten in traditional marriage system without her consent which made her unhappy with the marriage. She left to Addis Ababa where she scraped basic education and later gained a job as quality controller in a company.

Dr. Gobena is the founder and General manager of *AGOHELMA*, one of Ethiopia's oldest orphanages. Her accomplishments stem from an act of faith. She was on a pilgrimage to Gishen Mariam in the Wollo region of Ethiopia, an important site in the Ethiopian orthodox faith. The area was famine stricken and on her way back home she found a baby laying next to her dead mother, at a feeding center. She picked up the baby and brought her home. She subsequently brought a second baby home, who was lying next to his dead father. In one year's time, she brought home 21 children. This simple act of love grew and grew over the last three decades.

Gradually she got help and, in 1986, her orphanage was registered by the government. The Abebech Gobena Orphanage and School now have over 200 resident and 482 non-resident pupils, the government provides some teachers. **AGO** pays school fees for over 1,000 children from poor families at other schools. Over 1,800 benefit from a child-sponsorship scheme. Over 2,000 malnourished children and mothers receive food. In 1990 AGOS launched its first project outside Addis Ababa, at Guder 90 miles away. Initially, this was a farm to provide food and raise income for the Addis Ababa orphanage. AGOS has since established a primary school and a kindergarten for poor children at Burayu, on the outskirts of Addis, and a training centre in Fitcha, 70 miles away, where trainees learn weaving, sweater-making, carpentry and masonry.

Eighty miles from Addis Ababa , AGOS runs a reproductive health program benefiting 457,000 people in Ambo and Dendi districts where fertility is high and early marriage, forced marriage, abduction and illegal abortion are common. AGOS is seeking to reduce the death rate of children and mothers. It has trained local health educators. It has trained providers of family planning services at market places and work places. It has also set up 11 centers for non-formal education in the area, benefiting over 1,500 children.

Her unusual actions have grown into 6 different branches of the Abebech Gobena Children's Care and Development organization with over 14,000 children under her care. Many of her children are said to have grown and become entrepreneurs, doctors, lawyers, engineers and successful professionals.

Dr. Abebech Gobena, despite her remarkable achievements in the last 3 decades, believes that a lot has to be done on poverty reduction and she has devotes all her energy and time for the expansion of the present organization, so that it could be able to serve the orphans, needy children and marginalized segments of the population. SERVING THE COMMUNITY is her life philosophy and because of her devotion and determination to care for others some call her Africa's Mother Teresa

Dr. Gobena and her organization are the recipients of many awards and recognitions, including:

- *The Second Annual world Food Program International Women's Day Award Honors.*
- *World Aware Business Award 2004 /London/.*
- *Cup and Certificate of Merit from United Nations Association of Ethiopia, Family Federation for World Peace and United Nations Volunteers program.*
- *Certificate and Cup of Regional Winner Central Africa for exemplary and international work in the interest of sustainable development for Africa.*
- *Group of Spain Award in Support of humanitarian action.*
- *Certificate from Women's Economic and Political Support*

Abebech Gobena has no children of her own but she has a family of about 450,000 people. She has been called the Mother Teresa of Africa. Like Mother Teresa.

SEED salutes Dr. Abebech Gobena for her act of kindness that appeals to our collective conscience to do good for others and for the nobility and courage of her acts that have enabled fellow Ethiopians to live healthier and longer life as well as in recognition of her selfless deoprtment, as role model who has endeared herself to our community and the world at large, as inspiring and self-less humanitarian who has made significant difference in the lives thousands of men, women and children in Ethiopia, for her demonstrated love for Ethiopia and Ethiopians, and successful leadership in AGOHELD and for all your distinctive attributes