

# The 'Real' Ethiopia

**By Deborah Spicer**

While the world usually associates Ethiopia with the Bob Geldof-publicised image of the pot-bellied child with flies around her eyes in the middle of a desert, Venmyn has found that Ethiopia is a land of contrasts, and that not all of Ethiopia conforms to the disturbing images that inspired the "Do They Know It's Christmas?" recording.

Venmyn has recently increased its work in East Africa and has been involved in two projects in Ethiopia in the last six months.

In Mek'ele, in the North of Ethiopia, Venmyn found the view of Ethiopia that is consistent with what has been portrayed in the media (Figure 1). In the Danakil Depression, extreme poverty was encountered. In this desert region, people live without the most basic of necessities, and donkeys and camels are the primary means of transportation. In addition, because it is close to Eritrea, with which Ethiopia has a border dispute, Venmyn staff were accompanied by armed guards, amid security concerns, and were told of the threat of uncleared landmines.

In Ganji Wereda, in the west of the country, however, Venmyn found a very different picture of Ethiopia. This region boasts lush tropical areas, and friendly people who were self-sufficient in terms of their food requirements (Figure 2).

The government is intent on encouraging the development of the mining sector throughout this land of contrasts, and issued a mining proclamation in June 1993, that gave foreign investors incentives such as duty-free imports of equipment and repatriation of profits. The preamble to the new mining law also recognises the significant role of private investment in capital formation, technology acquisition and the marketing of minerals – a markedly different stance to the previous government policy of a complete monopoly of the mining sector. That, surely, is very progressive compared with some of the draconian measures some African countries (including Zimbabwe and South Africa) are introducing.

Ethiopia has gold, tantalum, niobium, platinum, iron ore, cement, salt, gypsum, clay, shale, and soda ash, among other deposits. However, the mining sector remains undeveloped, with mining and quarrying contributing only ~0.4% to the gross domestic product.

Venmyn has begun establishing a network of contacts in the country, and is happy to add Ethiopia to the growing list of African countries it is actively involved in. Venmyn's Neil McKenna and Fiona Harper were told by the Honourable Minister HE Mrs Sinkesh Ejigu, representing the Ethiopian Minister of Mines and Energy at the Mining Indaba earlier this year, that she was happy that a specialist firm like Venmyn is working on high-quality mining projects in Ethiopia.

For more information on Ethiopia, please contact Neil McKenna and Fiona Harper.

**Figure 1 : Mek'ele, in the North of Ethiopia**



**Figure 2 : Western Ethiopia, in Oromia Regional State, near Tulu Kapi**

