



Centre for International
Migration and Development
a joint operation of GIZ and the
German Federal Employment Agency



Financed by
Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

ETHIOPIA

IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

In Germany, the doctor-to-inhabitant ratio is one to 270. According to Ethiopian sources, the ratio in Ethiopia is one to 38,000, making Ethiopia's health care system one of the most inadequate in the world. The Ethiopian doctor Neghist Tesfaye Belayneh is out to change this.



Ethiopia's children suffer the most from the weaknesses in Ethiopia's health care system. Many die before they are even five years old of treatable diseases like lung infections or diarrhoea. The risk that mothers will die during pregnancy or in childbirth also remains extremely high in Ethiopia. In rural areas, about one woman in seven dies of some complication or illness related to pregnancy.

"What is especially sad about this is that even in poorer countries most of these deaths could be avoided. Often it is not medicines or equipment that are lacking but simply the right know-how at the right time in the right place. This needless mortality is a kind of non-visible epidemic," says Dr Neghist Tesfaye Belayneh. Belayneh, 44, came to Germany in 2006 for further studies in international health. Today she heads the division of Urban Health Promotion and Disease Prevention at the Ethiopian Ministry of Health.

The numbers that play a major role in Belayneh's life are 13, 11, 7, 5 and 4. The numbers 13, 11 and 7 are the ages of her three children. Numbers 5 and 4 are the Millennium Development Goals that Belayneh wants to achieve by 2015 through her work for the Ethiopian Ministry of Health. If she succeeds, child mortality in Ethiopia would be dramatically reduced: by two-thirds amongst the under fives. Ethiopian mothers, too, would finally have better health care. Belayneh has devoted much of her energy over the past year-and-a-half to seeing that better care is provided by the country's emergency and infant care stations

and in preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Thanks to her initiative, Ethiopia has recently begun producing iodised salt for its people to reduce malnutrition and thyroid disease.

After completing her studies at the University of Addis Ababa, Belayneh first worked for 10 years as a paediatrician. "It was not an easy decision for me at that time to leave my family for further studies in Heidelberg, Germany. Going back to university at the age of 41 wasn't easy either. Then there was the obstacle of the new country and a different language and culture – all things that I had to get used to first," says Belayneh of the challenges she faced in Germany. Her 15-month stay in Germany was financed by the KAAD, the Catholic Academic Foreigners Service.

Saying Yes to responsibility

Belayneh had scarcely returned to Addis Ababa when the Ethiopian minister of health contacted her, offering her a position as head of the division of family health at his ministry. As Belayneh remembers, "I just couldn't react at all at first and asked for a little time to think it over. I knew that working for the government would be far more than just hard work: it would mean taking on more responsibility than I had ever had in my life."

"As a practicing doctor, you only have to deal with your patients. The work at the ministry is completely different. In your daily work you are in contact with many different actors on many different levels. At the one end of the spectrum you have the

international organisations and donors such as the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria or UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund. And at the other, there are the health counsellors in the numerous Ethiopian municipalities. My job is to get everybody aboard the same boat. That's the only way the strategies we work on in Addis Ababa will eventually reach people in rural areas, especially children and their mothers."

A brain gain instead of a brain drain

"A particular challenge in my job is remuneration. The ministry offered me a net salary of around EUR 380," recounts Belayneh, who is very proud to be working for the Ethiopian Government. But finding a job in Ethiopia that is rewarding not only professionally but also financially is anything but easy, despite the strong demand for well-qualified professionals.

"There is a large gap between supply and demand for health personnel in Ethiopia," concedes Ethiopian Minister of Health Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. As he says, "This gap is due to the emigration of experts, the so-called *brain drain*. But it is also due to our not having trained enough health specialists in the past – particularly not enough doctors. We now want to change this, among other things, by radically reforming our health system. But for this we are going to need support – also from Ethiopians living abroad. We need more people like Dr Neghist Tesfaye Belayneh – people who return to Ethiopia and

help us by applying their extensive experience and their international know-how to improve framework conditions in Ethiopia in the long term."



United with her family in Ethiopia once more: Dr Neghist Tesfaye Belayneh

Reaching more people

"In the end, there were two things that influenced my decision to take the job," says Belayneh. "One was that I could help my country move forward – that I could make things happen. If I do a good job at the ministry, I can reach far more people than I ever could in my medical practice. The other was the financial subsidy to my salary through the German Returning Experts Programme." Her cell phone rings. It's her 13-year-old daughter trying to coax her home from the office. 13, 11, 7, 5, 4.

The programme:

For Dr Neghist Tesfaye Belayneh it was clear right from the start that she would return to her husband and three children in Ethiopia as soon as she finished her studies in Germany. Through her work at the Ethiopian Ministry of Health, she is actively engaged in improving health care in Ethiopia and is contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals set by the international community for 2015. For these reasons CIM, the Centre for International Migration and Development, grants Belayneh a monthly payment and other benefits through its **Returning Experts Programme** to top up her salary from the Ethiopian ministry. The programme is financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

The ideas behind it:

Even in Ethiopia, a monthly salary of EUR 380 is hardly sufficient to attract a foreign-trained doctor. For Belayneh to apply her knowledge there anyway and so improve structures over the long term, CIM makes the job at the ministry more attractive through its Returning Experts Programme. This programme's services make it easier for returnees such as Belayneh to reintegrate into professional life in their country of origin. Belayneh's work at the ministry also strengthens the impact of other German and international development projects working to improve living conditions in Ethiopia.

Links:

CIM and its programmes: www.cimonline.de/en
The Ethiopian Ministry of Health: www.moh.gov.et