



A question of survival

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia / September 2008

The rain is bucketing down. The drops of water are falling with such force that they bounce up a full half metre on hitting the pavement outside my window. Ominous peals of thunder rumble right above us, making our new home in the wealthy Bole district of the capital Addis Ababa creak. The dark grey sky is split in two by chalk-white flashes of lightning. It's the rainy season in Ethiopia. The country's poor farmers in the highlands have been looking forward to the major rainy season for a long time. This will ensure a good harvest for them from October onwards. That is, if the farmers have seeds to plant. And if the rain falls as it usually does.

The situation in Ethiopia is again critical. The headlines in the country's English language newspapers are clear: "Senior UN official warns that the drought must not lead to hunger," states the regional newspaper (The Sub-Saharan Informer, 5th Sept 2008). In April 2008 2.2 million people needed emergency aid. By June, this figure had risen to 4.6 million and now, in September, the government estimates that 6.4 million people require emergency aid.

Even in the western world stories of malnourished children and an impending hunger in Ethiopia have reached the newsrooms. Notwithstanding the ongoing hunger in Africa which is too commonplace to be news, in May 2008 the Danish media had already brought this particular story to Denmark. In

Ethiopia - still in the minds of many following the severe famine of 1984-85 when over one million people starved to death - hunger has been brought under greater control. In place of the famine disasters of the eighties, hunger has become chronic; a natural part of everyday life for millions of Ethiopians. When harvests collectively fail there are now even more mouths to feed. And thus it is year upon year in Ethiopia.

What is new is that climate change is making things even worse for the country's poor. The rains no longer fall as they used to. They aren't arriving on time, and when they finally come the rainy seasons are shorter and more intense. Crops are destroyed or cannot mature. In some places the rain doesn't come at all, or arrives in very small quantities. The changing climate is resulting in an even more vulnerable population, and an even greater risk of hunger crises.

I've just arrived in Ethiopia, where I will work as a climate employee for the next sixteen months for a Danish NGO called DanChurchAid. One of my tasks will be to document how climate change affects the poor, and to help local grassroots and development organizations put climate on the agenda. Climate change is a global problem, but the consequences of the changing climate strike unevenly. In Denmark the media writes about flooded basements. However, the situation is quite different in developing countries where climate change does most harm. Altered rain patterns and temperature rises can, in the extreme, mean the difference between life and death. This is the case in Ethiopia which is one

of the world's poorest countries. The population cannot simply just adapt to the changed climate - they have neither the resources nor the capacity to do so.

In this book I present an insight into what climate change means for a country like Ethiopia, and why we in the West will have to change our way of life. It is our lifestyle and high level of development which is responsible for the change in climate. The industrialized world has contributed the most to global warming by burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas, but it is the developing countries which are paying the price in the form of a rapidly changed climate, and this hits the poorest hardest.

Over the course of just under a year I follow an ordinary Ethiopian family's struggle against the changed climate. By focusing on the human aspects of climate change, I hope to breathe some new life into the climate debate. I want to convey an understanding that climate change is about the survival of millions of poor people and that it is us, in the rich part of the world, who indirectly have an impact on their lives.

I am writing this book on my own initiative and DanChurchAid cannot therefore be held responsible for its content and views.