

Activity report of the board for the year 2017

Dear members of the association. The following report is a short summary of our most important activities during the year 2017. Thank you once more for your support!

Current situation in Ethiopia

The last two years in Ethiopia were marked by various protests and clashes of protesters with police forces, in which several 100 people were killed. Even though the state of emergency was lifted in autumn 2017, the situation remained tense. Protest were mainly politically motivated (protest against the government in charge for more than 25 years) but also got a more and more ethnic connotation.

Outlook

Rather surprisingly for many observers, Prime Minister Desalegn resigned in February 2018 after the release of different political prisoners. Shortly after, a new state of emergency was declared by the government. By the end of March, the current coalition government elected Abiye Ahmed as new Prime Minister. He is part of the largest ethnic group of the country (Oromo) and had several times criticised the current, very repressive system. In his inaugural speech, Abiye Ahmed explicitly asked for forgiveness for the past measures against the protesting people. At the same time, he underlined that ethnicity should not become a reason to divide the country.

Despite the fact that Abiye Ahmed was part of the long-term government and that he also introduced internet surveillance measures, which are used to control political activities of individuals, he is an important source of hope for many people in Ethiopia.

Challenges for the new Prime Minister are huge, as he has not only to start real reforms and keep the support of the population, but also not to provoke a conflict with the strongmen in the government, which still have a lot of influence. Despite these challenges, signs in the last weeks are rather promising and some reforms seem to be possible in the next months.

Inside Travel

2017 was a year without many activities as the whole project was somehow on hold. Due to the unstable political situation in Ethiopia, there were very few requests and at the end no trip was carried out.

Together with the little travel initiative of “Kafi und Schoggireisen”, Inside Travel participated at Afropfingsten in Winterthur.

At the end of 2017, two potential partners for cooperation were contacted: Begehbar Reisen organises several trips in countries of the former Yugoslavia. Strangers and Friends is a start-up, which wants to create a platform and do marketing for meaningful trips.

Outlook

A few weeks ago, a common meeting with Begehbar Reisen and Strangers and Friends took place. The team of Inside Travel is currently evaluating possibilities to start a common travel initiative together with these two partners.

YEEP – The Young Entrepreneur Exchange project

Due to the political situation, the Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH) decided by the end of 2016, not to send students to Ethiopia in 2017. At the same time, BFH started a similar YEEP project with a partner university in India.

After several discussions, BFH and Business Machine decided, to loosen their cooperation but still to work on YEEP together.

In June 2017, Stephan Brun participated in the local start-up week in Hawassa, Ethiopia, where 7 teams competed against each other. The week was fully organised by the Ethiopian partners and Stephan's just supported the programme with some inputs and logistics.

In June, Hawassa University and The Business Machine decided, to slightly modify the concept and to try to organise a test "International Exposure Week" in February with those teams who made it to the Ethiopian start-up week. Contrary to the past concept, the focus should not be too much on the competition and the preparation of a business plan, but rather on the work on specific topics, where the Ethiopian teams have the greatest needs to improve themselves.

On the Swiss side, cooperation was expanded beyond BFH and participants from University of St. Gallen (HSG) and the HFW Bern were found as participants.

Outlook

In February 2018, YEEP was very successfully carried out in its new format. The 6 Swiss participants are very much motivated to support YEEP and will be involved to refine the concept for the next edition, which will take place in February 2019.

Ideally, YEEP Ethiopia and YEEP India should become closer, for example by including a south-south component to the project. Discussions with BFH on that matter are ongoing but not yet arrived at a concrete concept.

Gidole School

After some more investigation in June 2017, it would be possible to start a cooperation with a school in Gidole in southern Ethiopia. Before setting up a regular programme, it would make sense to set up a test phase of 2-5 weeks and to check out, how to work with the local teachers. We are looking for volunteers, who would be ready to check out the possibilities in Gidole.

Game development

After a rather long silence, the game group has become active again. Mesfin Aboneh, one of the former Ethiopian members of the group, would like to develop a game about the construction of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance dam. He also considers a visit in Switzerland. Anybody interested in joining this project, is very welcome to get in touch with Mesfin.

Mimi Moto pellet stoves

Thanks to an initiative of Ilanga, another Swiss organisation active in Ethiopia, two Ethiopian members of the Business Machine are going to start an alternative fuel business together. Abiye Ghenna and Tagese Tagele want to import pellet stoves from the Netherlands and produce pellets from coffee husk. These stoves are not only CO2 neutral, but provide a fire without any smoke, which is perfectly adapted to Ethiopian cooking styles. If there is any interest, it would probably be possible to invest into this project.