

Can a nation be changed - by the church?

The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you. Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. 1 Samuel 10:6-8

- Communities transforming themselves
- Government adopting training
- Land-use being freed from the control of witchcraft
- Thousands saved
- Reconciliation between castes

The reason

We serve the God of justice, who is dedicated to his Kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven.

The two dominant forces for transformation in human society are governments and business; but in most parts of the world both are handicapped by self-interest, and the change they bring is therefore usually either weak or negative. Who then is the agent of change that can work in partnership with God so that his justice prevails?

The world is in a process of violent disintegration, and the first victims are the powerless. Systematically they are robbed of the life God intends for them, and only the Church has the potential to turn things the right way up.

The vision

Ironically, the church has usually mirrored the structures and methods of the world; thus its impotence. But it is possible to recapture our biblical mission, if we revert to Gods ways.

So the vision is of an army of ordinary people; grassroots members in their millions, equipped and empowered to bring local transformation to their streets and workplaces. The world can be redeemed by small local action in every neighbourhood of the planet.

The powerless, who sit at the back of our congregations by their millions, are our capacity for this dream to come true. If we can envision and empower the 99% in our members who we have taught to be passive consumers of privatised religion, the church will become the most powerful agent for transformation the world has ever seen, or will ever need.

This is the vision of Project Gilgal, set in that global symbol of human pain- Ethiopia.

The nation

Ethiopia is the second poorest nation on earth, and government and business continue to fail its 95% subsistence population, of whom six million are at risk of starvation as I write. Despite many good intentions, essentially nothing has changed- so far!

Tribalism and fatalism combine to deepen the trap in this beautiful place of relentless misery, and now colonial Islam threatens to take advantage of Ethiopia's weakness and make things much worse.

The church

Yet, in this setting something breathtaking *is* happening; the powerless are starting to believe in themselves. There are early signs that the church is allowing the Holy Spirit to lead it back to its God-given role, by envisioning and equipping the powerless millions in its pews.

In the dying years of the last century new leadership came to the Christian movement in Ethiopia known as the Kale Hewet Church. Beginning in 1919, it had grown from two converts to 4.5 million members, and is now 5077 congregations spread across the nation!

At a time when its size threatened disintegration, this new servant leadership brought a new ability to think big. Quickly Kale Hewet's mission was clarified, to transform the nation with the gospel. Yet with this came the recognition that the movement's structures and culture needed fundamental revision if its *massive* potential was to be realised.

The project

The result was project Gilgal. Begun in 1997, and due to run for at least 10 years, project Gilgal is an "Organisational change" project of huge proportions. Based on the premise that an organisations structures and culture must serve its mission (and not the other way round), project Gilgal set about designing and then implementing radical change nationally across Kale Hewet.

Project Gilgal is based upon the following defining principals:

- *Self dependency*: the shocking idea that Ethiopia already has most, if not all, of the resources it needs to be transformed
- *Skill cascading*: the multiplication of small external inputs, by the training of large numbers of local trainers who in turn train local leaders, who in turn train their congregations.
- *Grassroots empowerment*: the belief that ordinary people have the ability to become skilled and motivated as local change agents
- *Upward pressure for change*: the creation of an unstoppable enthusiasm at grassroots that causes internal capacity building throughout the organisation to become utterly essential
- *Small and many*: the strategy that where large scale development projects usually fail, a very large number of small locally initiated ones will succeed
- *Learning by doing*: acceptance that classroom instruction has little motivational impact, but active involvement changes the mind
- *Power sharing*: that whereas paternalistic decision making by elite's deepens the passivity of the powerless, decision making by the grassroots for the grassroots causes sustained ownership and broad impact

- *Follow-up*: that in organisational change, initial inputs must be reinforced by rigorous and sustained follow-up if permanent change is to occur
- *Moving together*: that concerted shared action over a broad front is far more powerful than the ad hoc heroics of a few stars
- *Accumulative uplift*: that the repeated recycling of successes (i.e. money, knowledge, motivation etc) into new local initiatives, leads eventually to a general uplift in the community from which there is no return
- *Mutual responsibility*: the replacement of tribalism with mutual responsibility for each other's growth in success- person to person, congregation to congregation, community to community, organisation to organisation.

These may seem idealistic, but they are precisely what have been missing before.

The key participants

To deliver change throughout Kale Hewet, a number of internal groupings have been utilised by project Gilgal:

- *National change team* * : formed to create legitimacy and high-level ownership, regional leaders of different tribes within Kale Hewet were formed into a national change team that then underwent two years of training in managing change, culminating in the creation of their "Change Plan".
- *Headquarters training team* * : four highly skilled and motivated Ethiopians were formed into a mobile training team, receiving intensive and personal input from an external consultant throughout the life of the project.
- *Local trainers* * : 600 male and female Ethiopians from all tribal groups and regions were trained and supported by the Headquarters training team, so that they could cascade training events, project tools and rigorous follow up throughout the movement.
- *Change Agents* * : at each region a Change Agent was trained and employed to organise and motivate local initiatives resulting from the workshops and follow up run by the 600 local trainers across the nation.
- *Congregational Pastors* * : many of Kale Hewet's 5077 local congregations previously regarded themselves as too poor to employ trained full-time leaders, thus severely limiting local effectiveness. But project Gilgal taught them the importance of this investment, and large numbers of congregational pastors have therefore been appointed. It is these people who local trainers are subsequently training, and change agents supporting. In turn, pastors train and support their congregations (often in excess of 1000 people) in the implementation of new skills and of local community transformation initiatives.
- *Grassroots members* * : the (now) 5 million previously powerless "ordinary" people of Kale Hewet, equipped and motivated by project Gilgal to design and run small scale locally-resourced projects that communicate the gospel in action at street level.
- *Programme Management Office*: A national Kale Hewet agency designed to oversee a five-year Strategic Planning cycle in which the whole movement participates, and with responsibility for the identification of patterns of weaknesses requiring systemic resolution during each five-year cycle.
- *HQ internal consultancy*: the remodelling of Kale Hewet headquarters from administration to an indigenous internal consultancy to be deployed to local congregations in support of thousands of local projects.

* = up and running already

The project tools

A series of training and implementation tools have been written, locally piloted, contextualised, and translated into local languages, ready for cascading down to the grassroots of Kale Hewet (people walk for up to five days to get extra copies of these!). Biblically based, the project tools use characters upon which drama-based workshops can also be delivered.

They are:

- *Managing change**
- *Teamwork**
- *Facilitation leadership**
- *Gods agenda and Pastoral ministry**
- *Successful projects**
- *Projects Stewards manual*
- *Participatory Strategic Planning*
- *Programme Management*
- *Leading Leaders*
- *Grassroots decision-making*
- *Local income generation and book keeping*

* = *already trained down to grassroots level*

In addition to the 1000s of workshops based on these tools taking place across the nation over several years, there are two other vital elements cascading down to the 4.5 million grassroots members:

1 *Behaviour modelling by trainers.* Beginning with the mobile headquarters training team, the emphasis is on changing lives rather than theoretical knowledge. Thus trainers use examples from their own lives, as well as demonstrating teamwork, problem solving, a strong work ethic, and western standards of organisation. It is very common for those attending workshops to be deeply affected by this, and be very emotional in their comments about it.

2 *Follow up.* Training alone does not change things, so Gilgal incorporates a thorough and vigorous follow up system at all levels using:

- *Grassroots sampling (30%)*
- *Regular evaluation meetings between the mobile training team and the HQ Change Team*
- *Public presentations by students on their personal implementation of previous w/shop at next w/shop*
- *Change agents quarterly meeting with mobile training team. (gathers and analyses follow up data)*
- *Change agents w/shops to build their capacity.*
- *Quarterly Zonal f/up reports*
- *Weekly informal contact (letter + telephone) by mobile training team with District Offices*
- *Replication of mobile training teams f/up methods by 600 local trainers and Change agents.*
- *Zonal secretaries monitor Change agents*
- *Submission of 5 year District Plans*
- *PSP (Participatory Strategic Planning)- now adopted into the KHC constitution, PSP consolidates the change to locally initiated and resourced projects*

The results- so far

At this mid-point in project Gilgal a large proportion of the 5077 local congregations have received sufficient training and follow up to begin local initiatives (not that you could stop them). So, what follows are the stories (also on video) of just four representative locations visited during a 2000 km five-day journey through remote bush, along with seven burst tyres!

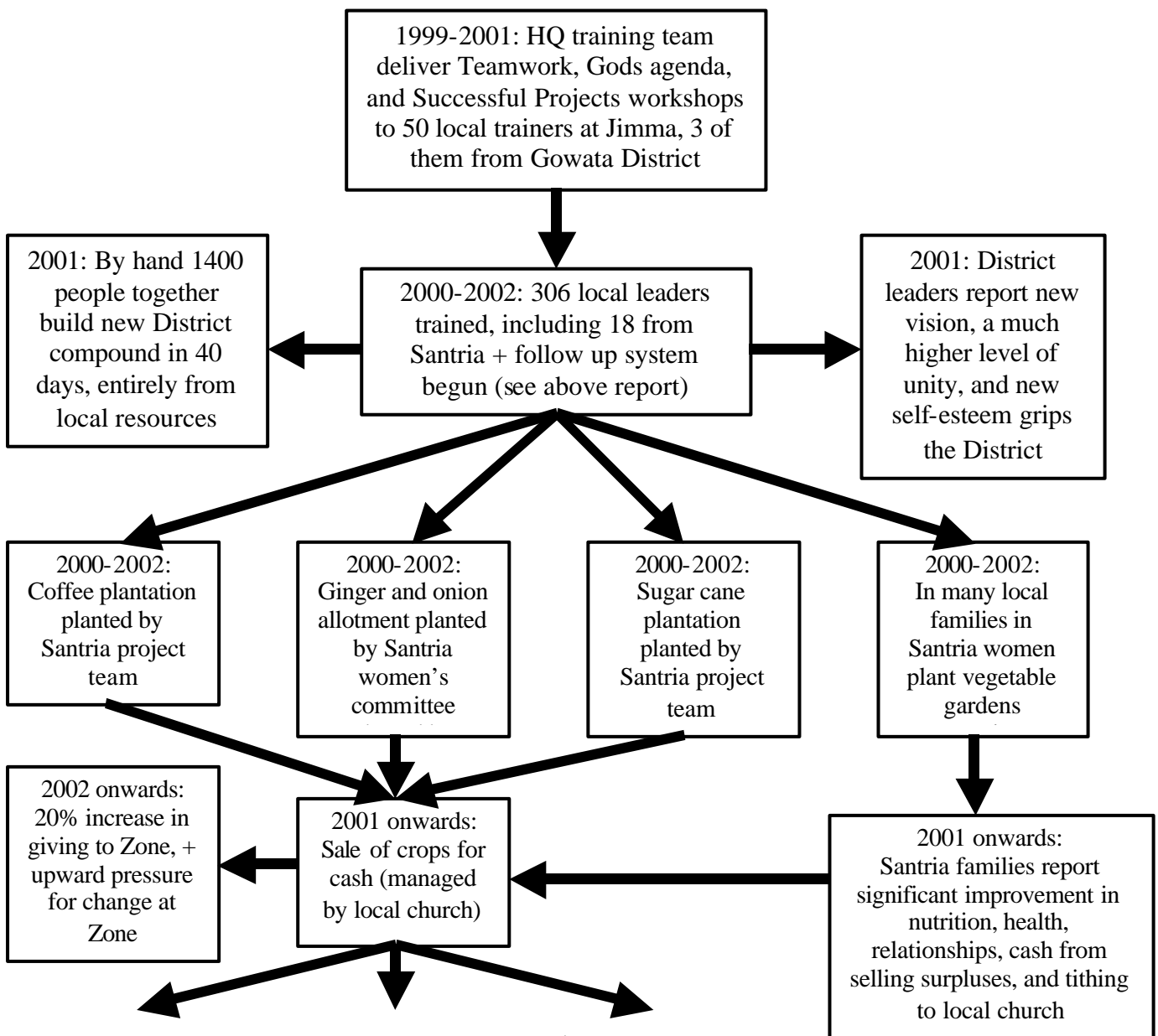
Please understand, there are many many more stories not included here

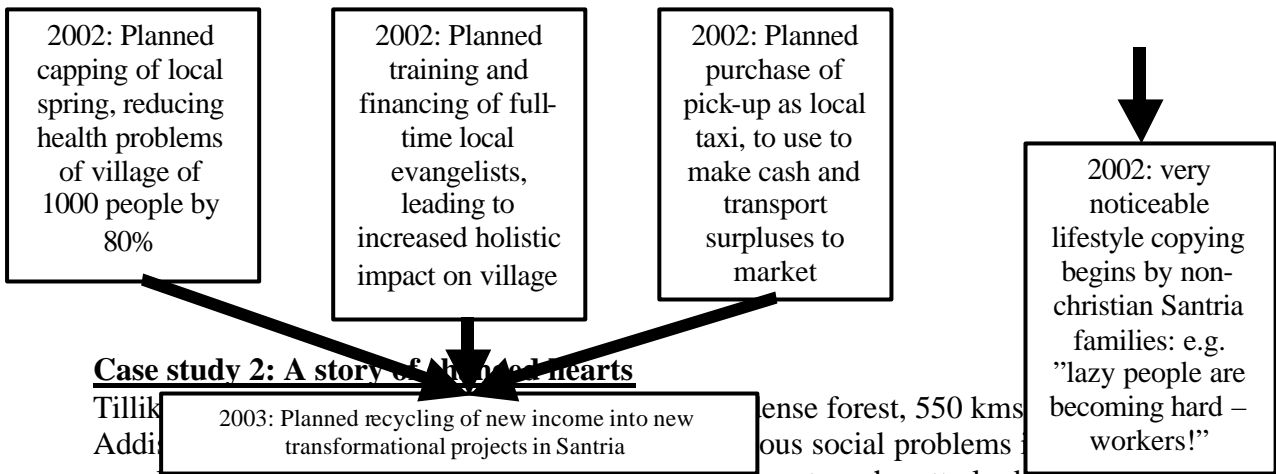
Of course Gilgal is not the only factor at work at this time, but it would be misleading not to report that local people emphasise “It was because of Gilgal!” again and again.

Case study 1: A story of working together

Santria in the Gowata District is a remote hilly location 500 kms west of Addis Ababa, mostly covered with dense forest. It is inhabited by the Kaffa and Oromo tribes, and has a Kale Hewet local congregation.

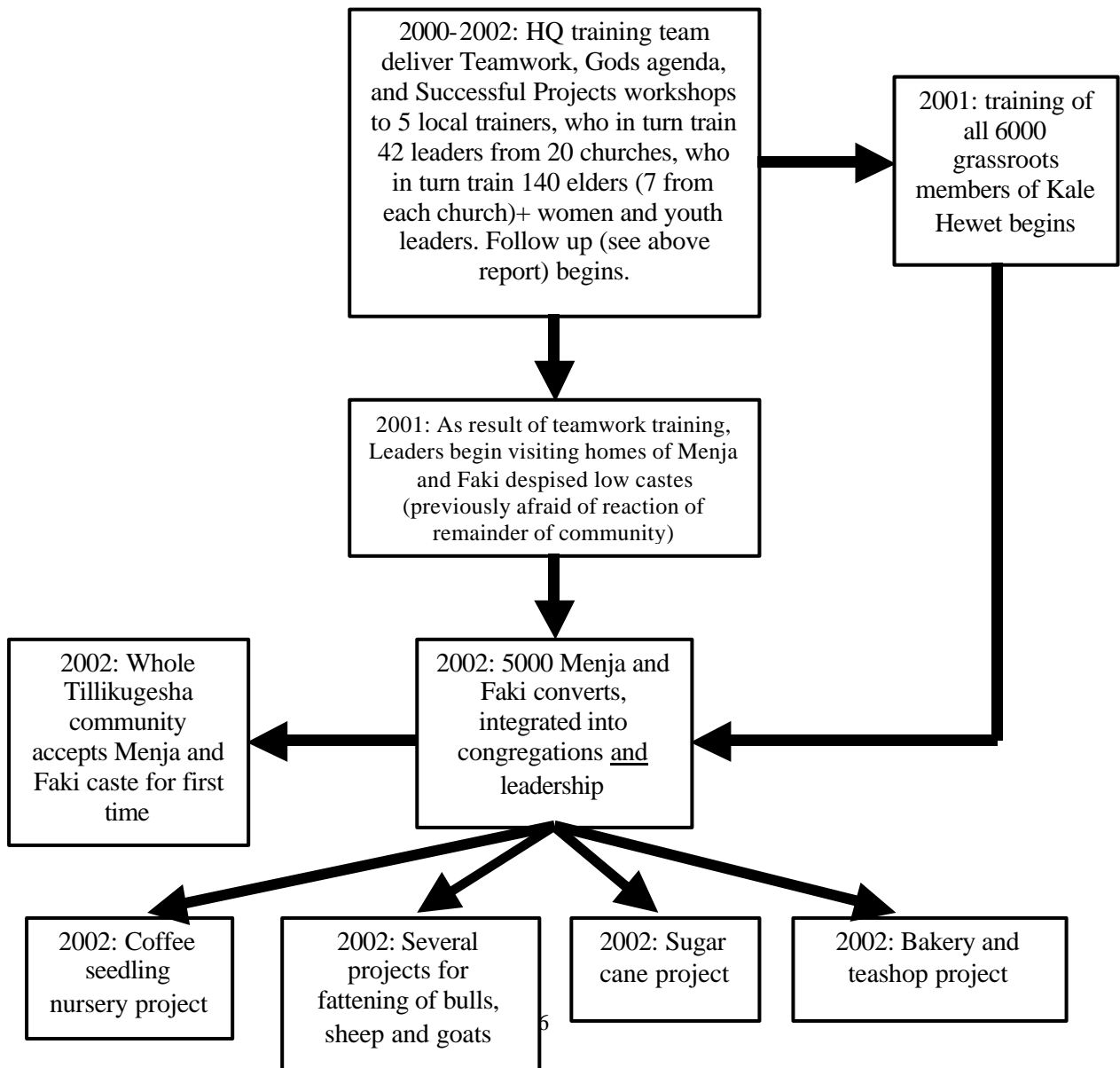
The following diagram describes *wonderful* teamwork and the beginning of community transformation resulting from the workshops and follow up from project Gilgal:

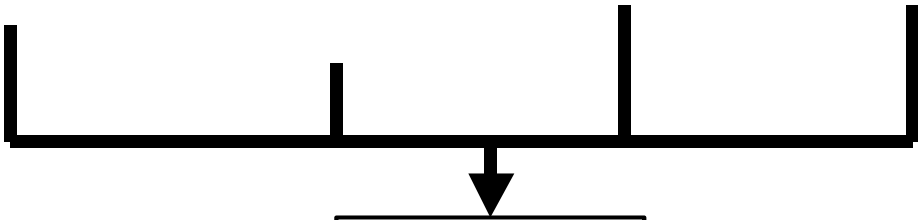




Tillik Addi population of 95,000, it is divided into low and high castes who utterly despise each other. With 6000 members in 20 local congregations, Kale Hewet had sadly reflected this serious social division until now.

The following diagram describes how the Holy Spirit used workshops and follow up from project Gilgal to cause *marvellous* reconciliation between castes with exciting further consequences:



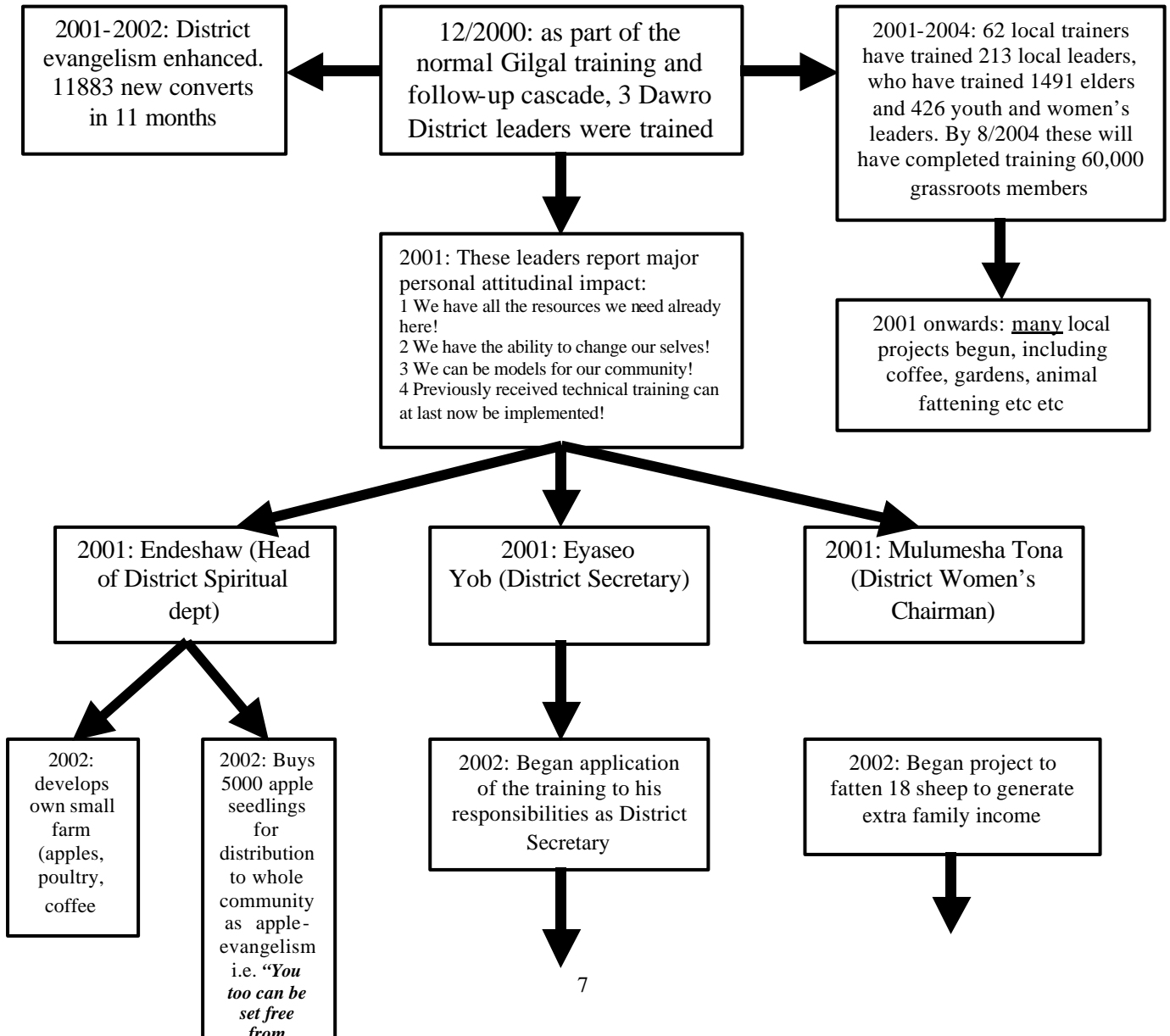


2003 onwards: all outputs to be recycled into other local projects to transform the community

Case study 3: A story of leadership

Dawro is a dry mountainous plain 80 kms southwest of Addis Ababa. It is inhabited by the Dawro tribe, with a total population of 750,000 very poor people.

In this area where land-use has been controlled by witchcraft, Kale Hewet's 60,000 members in 213 local congregations, have the potential role of setting the land and its people free. The following diagram shows how godly leaders are being *ground-breaking "models"* as a result of workshops and follow up from project Gilgal:





2003: Expected increase in family income to be spent on education for wife and children (+ later himself)

2002 onwards: acts as model to other KHC district employees, causing greater efficiency, in order to release finance for other projects

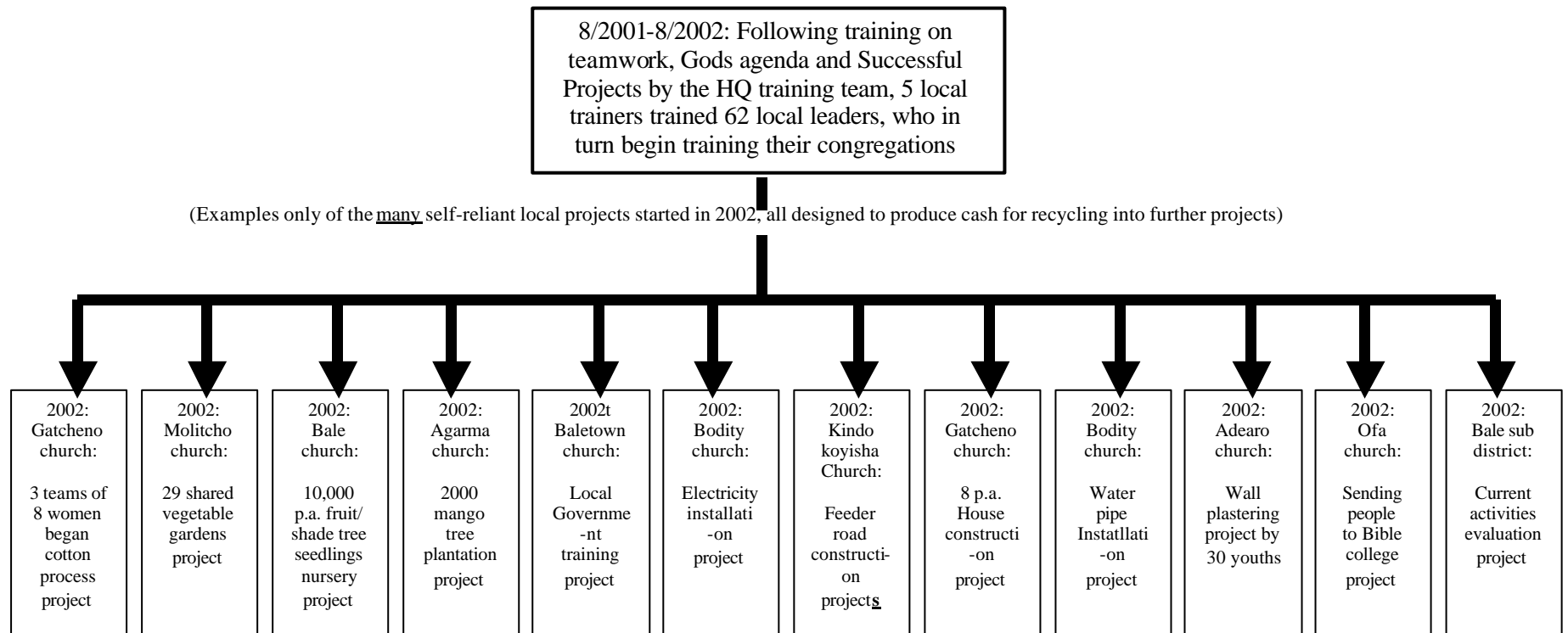
2003: Expected increase in family income to be spent on better food, health, education + increased tithes to local church for further holistic evangelism

Case study 4: A story of fast and broad take up

Bale Koyisha District is a remote area 450 kms south of Addis Ababa. It is set in an undulating plateau marked by a series of v-shaped valleys that accommodate only seasonal and intermittent streams. With run off slopes exceeding 30%, low nutrition in soils and serious leaching, rain fall is unpredictable in time and volume; so crop failure and drought is normal.

Dominated by the Wolayta tribe, the community is of 150,000 desperately poor people in scattered villages and towns with virtually nil protection against starvation; the Ethiopian government being virtually non-functional here.

With its 55,000 members in 62 local congregations Kale Hewet is more than 1/3 of the population. It therefore has huge but as yet unrealised potential to transform the life of its community. The following diagram describes a *portentous* story of the fast and broad take up of the workshops and follow up delivered by Gilgal in the last 12 months:



The potential impact on government

In addition to these case studies, another exciting development is occurring.

Many Kale Hewet people who have been involved in workshops and follow up are also senior employees of local and national government. On many occasions as they have taken the training material to work with them, and it is being used now to train government workers!

Four examples have been supplied to me, though I am told there are many more:

- 1 Civil Service Training College, Addis Ababa
- 2 Engineering dept, Addis Ababa
- 3 Local Government Offices, Jimma
- 4 Local Government Offices, Bale Koyisha Wolayta District

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The lessons from Gilgal so far?

These inspiring case studies share several characteristics:

- 1 The multiplication of small external inputs through a cascade system really works!
- 2 Grassroots people do understand to an amazing degree
- 3 Local take up can be surprisingly rapid and (so far) sustained
- 4 The presence of humble power-sharing and risk-taking leaders is vital for such an approach to work
- 5 The harder the area, the greater the overcoming spirit once Gilgal has been given
- 6 Long term planning, creativity and confidence of success are ready to be engaged in apparently "hopeless" areas
- 7 Hard work, self reliance and self-esteem grow quickly when people "learn by doing"
- 8 Highly motivated change agents act as important multipliers
- 9 In addition to actual investment by the church into the community, transformation also occurs by simple copying

The threats to Gilgal's success

Of course, success will not continue and deepen unless the threats to Gilgal, also made visible by these case studies, are taken seriously and dealt with. They are:

- ***Illiteracy: without basic literacy up to half of the people (often women) will not be able to take full advantage of training and follow up***
- ***Unclear ownership of Gilgal by some Zones and lack of Zonal capacity (problem solving, work ethic, organisation, mobility of Change Agents): So Zones may act as bottle necks to Gilgal***

- **Unbiblical taboos against commercial activity, empowerment of women, and the use of church buildings for non-religious purposes:** all severely reducing the “multiplier” effect of Gilgal
- **Continued tribalism in the church:** thus knowledge becomes hoarded rather than disseminated
- **The replacement of visionary leaders by administrators:** the understandable drive for training and competence having the undesirable effect of a shift of power away from the visionary
- **Potential HQ delay in becoming an internal consultancy:** reducing the impact of first level local projects and thus reducing momentum across the whole piece
- **Insufficient capacity of mobile HQ training team to consistently follow through on this long- term hugely demanding project:** these wonderful five people work so hard that they may not make it to the end of Gilgal without (1) More time off (2) More income for their sacrificial families (3) More authority within the KHC structures.
- **Short-termism by donors:** Gilgal could take several more years to realise its full potential for Ethiopia

The power of the Gospel, to change a nation

I believe that what is beginning to happen through project Gilgal, as it equips and motivates 5,000,000 people in 5077 congregations (that is, 10% of the total population), does have the potential to transform the nation.

The choice between the three possible responses to this (pessimism, wait-and-see, or active support) seems obvious and compelling to me.

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14/08/02

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Presented at Global Connections Relief and Development Forum March 2003