

PROFILING CHILDREN in ERITREA

The material contained in this teaching 'module' is based directly on interviews carried out in Nov 07 with children in Eritrea. While on a study trip to Eritrea, organised by Self Help Development International, one of the DICE Education Officers had an opportunity to meet a number of children of primary age and believed it would be of interest to children in Ireland to learn a little about these young people. She also believed that the images gathered of these children, and their stories, would challenge stereotypes that young people in Ireland often have of children who live in this part of the world. The DICE project hopes that, through sharing these materials on the website, we will contribute to greater understanding and empathy in our 'global village' and provide teachers with some tools to do so.

Aim of materials

To provide teachers with up-to-date, original, child-friendly material for bringing a global dimension into teaching and learning, specifically highlighting the lives of children in Eritrea.

Curricular focus

These materials could supplement other teaching resources used for Strands and Strand Units relating to teaching about a non-European locality (SESE: Geog); they could also be used for other areas of the curriculum and for cross-curricular work in areas such as English and SPHE. See [Material 2](#) for details.

Learning objectives

Through using these materials children will:

- Gain knowledge and understanding about the lives of children living in Eritrea
- Develop a range of skills appropriate to primary education
- Develop attitudes which are more informed and open towards those living in other parts of the world

Age level: middle to upper primary

Introductory note for teachers

Six **profiles** of Eritrean children, including **photographs** of each, are included in this suite of teaching materials. These can be downloaded and photocopied for use in class. Each profile is designed to introduce a different child to your class but also to make a **link** with an **aspect of life in Eritrea**. This link is indicated at the top of the profile sheet. A fact box relating to the link accompanies some profiles. Millennium Development Goals that apply to the profiles are also indicated ([see information provided](#)).

Suggested methods for using profiles:

- (a) **Individual work:** Present pupils with the list of names (or with the [photographs](#)) and allow them to select one child about whom they would like to learn more. Distribute relevant profile, info box and photo along with [sample worksheet](#) provided (or compile your own set of questions) to each pupil.
- (b) **Group work:** Divide class into small groups and provide each with a different profile and relevant photograph (some groups may have to get the same profile depending on the size of your class).

Follow either of the above with a class discussion on children's answers to questions or on specific aspects of the worksheet.

Profiles

Profile 1. Adunia (pronounced Ah - dooh – nee- ah)

[link with the education system, including higher education, in Eritrea]

{[MDG link](#) Goal 2 and 3 refer to education and to gender equality }

Adunia is 12 years old and she is in Grade 7 in Junior School in Mendefera, a town that is situated south of the capital Asmara. She now learns all her subjects through English and, lucky for her, English is also her favourite subject but she also learns Science, Geography and History, Maths, and PE.

Adunia has one older sister who attends high school in the same town. They are glad that the government has been able to build a high school in their hometown, as other children in Eritrea, especially those living in the countryside, sometimes have to leave home and go to live in a town some distance away in order to attend high school.

Like most of her friends Adunia takes a rest after school before doing her homework or helping out with household duties such as preparing food for the evening meal. Mendefera gets quite hot during the day so most children take a rest after school.

Later on when it is cooler Adunia likes to play football with her friends or listen to music. She also watches TV and she likes films and educational programmes. Adunia would like to work as a science researcher when she leaves school. She will first have to go to high school like her sister and then attend university in Asmara or one of the third level colleges. In Eritrea there is quite a lot of equality between boys and girls (and women and men) which some say is partly due to the fact that women fought alongside men in the war against Ethiopia.

Information box on education in Eritrea

In Eritrea there are three types of school:

Elementary (from age 6 up to 11) Grade 1 to 6

Junior School (from age 11 up to 15) Grade 7 to 11

High School (from age 15 to 20)

Generally there are two shifts so children go to school either in the morning or afternoon shift because there are not enough schools for all the children to attend at the one time or because there is a shortage of qualified teachers.

Morning shift 7.50am – 12.00pm

Afternoon shift 12.45 – 4.00pm

Eritrea has two universities – the University of Asmara and the Institute of Science and Technology - as well as several smaller colleges (such as a new teacher training college) and some technical schools.

Profiles

Profile 2. Rhodas

[link with ethnic groups and languages in Eritrea]

{[MDG link](#) Goal 2 and 3 refer to education and to gender equality }

Rhodas is from the town of Mendefera and she is 7 years of age. She attends the Junior School not too far from her home; she is in Grade 1 and so has just begun to learn through English. In elementary school she learned in her own language, which is called Tigrinya (pronounced Tig-reen-ya). The subject she likes most at the moment is Maths.

Rhodas' favourite food is *frittata* (something like an omelette) made from eggs. She often eats it for breakfast before she goes to school. School starts early – around 8am because she attends the morning shift. When she is not at school or doing her homework or helping out at home she likes to watch TV – especially children's programmes and films in her own language of Tigrinya.

When she grows up she would like to be a teacher. In Eritrea many teachers are needed because more and more families want to send their children to school, in particular more girls are going to school than ever did before. In some schools the numbers are almost equal but in parts of the countryside it will take a little longer for customs to change and for girls to have the same opportunity as boys to attend school. This is the situation in some Muslim families because they want to protect their daughters and are afraid that they will leave home and move away from their family once they complete their education.

Info point about languages and ethnic groups in Eritrea

Almost half of all the people in Eritrea speak Tigrinya but there are at least seven other languages spoken. The second most common language spoken is Tigre. Some words are the same in these two languages, for example, *salem* means 'hello' and *salemat* means 'goodbye' in both Tigrinya and Tigre. The alphabet in Tigrinya is quite complicated since there are 35 lines of letters in it and 44 more letters for advanced writers.

There are nine different ethnic groups in Eritrea and many of these have their own language and distinctive customs such as traditional dance and music. To make it easier to communicate there are three working languages in Eritrea: Tigrinya, Arabic and English.

Profiles

Profile 3. Abelelom (pronounced Ah- bell- el- um)

[link with health, nutrition, medical care in Eritrea]

{[MDG link](#) Goal 6 refers to health}

Abelelom is 10 years of age and is in grade 5 (in Junior School). He likes Science and is doing very well in school. Abelelom hopes to become a doctor when he leaves school.

When school finishes at 12.00 he takes a rest and then does his homework but if there is free time he likes to play football and he is on a local team. He also likes to cycle with his friends. Lots of children use bicycles to get to school and often cycle long distances, sometimes over bumpy paths if they live in the countryside or along one of Eritrea's many good roads if they live near one.

Abelelom's favourite food is *tsebhi*, a spicy stew or soup made from beef. In Eritrea lots of dishes are made from goat meat but also from beef, chicken, lamb and fish. There is a large variety of vegetables too which are sold in markets along the side of the road or in market places in towns and villages. Stews are sometimes eaten in a communal way in families. Large round flat soft breads (almost like pancakes but made from fermented grain) called *injera* are piled on top of each other and the stew or vegetables are placed in the middle of the top 'pancake'; people take pieces of *injera* and some stew and eat it without need for plates or forks.

In Eritrea many people have enough to eat and good variety including lots of different types of fruits (guava, oranges, mangos) but there are also problems because of lack of rain so crops don't grow or families do not have any spare income to spend on food or medicines. This is especially true for families living in the rural parts of Eritrea.

Information point about health problems in countries such as Eritrea¹

In developing countries such as Eritrea most people die from infectious diseases that have been brought under control in richer countries. There are six diseases that cause almost 90% of all deaths – they are pneumonia, tuberculosis (TB), diarrhoea, malaria, measles and HIV/AIDS. These diseases affect children and young adults worse.

These diseases are preventable but for different reasons this has not been made a priority by rich governments or by aid agencies (even though it is now listed as a target in the MDGs). One reason for this is that preventing such diseases will not get as much coverage in newspapers or television because people are more interested in hearing about big projects such as building hospitals or shipping vaccines or medicines.

¹ More detailed descriptions of these issues are contained in Self Help's booklet Health and Education, the third in a series produced as part of their development education schools programme called Africa Alive. Check out www.selfhelp.ie

Profiles

Profile 4. Natnael (pronounced Naat-naa-el)

[link with transport in Eritrea]

Natnael is 7 years of age and is in Grade 2 of elementary school. He likes to learn Tigrinya (his own language). His favourite food is a soup made from chickpeas called *shiro* but he also likes to eat sweets and different kinds of fruit. In Eritrea lots of different types of fruit are grown because it is warm and sunny for many months of the year. These include oranges, mangos, guavas, pineapple and bananas. There is also a fruit which grows on cactus – the cactus pear- and it is used to make jam or eaten like an apple.

Natnael wants to be a bus driver when he grows up. Public transport in Eritrea is very important, as many people, especially in poorer rural areas, do not own a car. Buses take people long distances to visit family or to go to the nearby town or city. If Natnael moved to the capital he could also think about becoming a taxi driver and drive one of the new fleet of yellow taxicabs.

Constructing roads is a priority for the government in Eritrea because it means that people who live in the rural areas will not be isolated and they can get to the market or health centre more easily. If you are in the Eritrean army you might have to help construct roads and during summer holidays students also work on projects like this.

Information point on transport in Eritrea

In Eritrea the most recent highway to be constructed was the 500km road that runs along the coast from Massawa to Asseb.

Other forms of transport in Eritrea include the railway but there is just one rail track which runs from Asmara, the capital city to the port of Massawa. The rebuilding of this railway track was done using local labour and went on even though Eritrea was at war with its neighbour, Ethiopia, from 1998 to 2000.

Profiles

Profile 5. Ruth

[link with life in rural areas and problems of drought; also link with customs/cultural norms]
{[MDG link](#): all the MDGs are in some way relevant here since they are concerned with elimination of extreme poverty and related problems such as those experienced by rural families in Eritrea}

Ruth lives in a small rural village in the western part of Eritrea. The region is called Gash-Barka and is part of Eritrea's western lowlands that are very hot and dry (arid). In this part of the country temperatures do not fall below 20 degrees and reach a maximum of 35 degrees C. The average annual rainfall is about 46cm but it is erratic (not regular) so it is difficult for families to plan for crop growing and to be sure that they will have enough food throughout the year.

Ruth lives with her family in a simple house built in the traditional way from stone and wood. Most families in the area are farmers and they are semi-nomadic which means that they sometimes move with their animals (goats and donkeys or camels) to find food or water.

Ruth has a pet cat which she likes a lot but there isn't much time for playing with her pet as she works hard helping her family ...She looks after the goats, often taking them long distances to where there is food and water, she helps her mother prepare food for the rest of the family, washes dishes, collects firewood and looks after her younger members of her family. When there is work to do on their small plot of land like sowing or harvesting she helps too or brings food to her mother and father working in the fields.

Ruth went to Elementary school in her local village; about 250 pupils attended and there were just 6 teachers (which meant she had just over 40 in her class – this is considered small by Eritrean standards). There are very few facilities in the school and it is difficult to get teachers to work in such isolated areas (for example the village is 267km from the capital, Asmara). In school they learn through their own language, Tigne, and take subjects such as English, Maths, Science and PE.

Ruth will not get a chance to go to Junior School as it would mean leaving her village and her family in order to attend a boarding school in Barentu (Gogne), a town that is many (30km) kilometres away. She is also likely to marry at a young age, as this is the custom for many Muslim girls living in rural parts of Eritrea. Her family will arrange the marriage with a man from the same ethnic group but living in another village.

Information point about rural life in Eritrea

Most people in Eritrea live in the countryside (only about 20% live in towns or cities). Most of those who live in the rural areas are either farmers who work a small piece of land (sometimes less than a hectare) using basic tools or pastoralists who are semi-nomadic (this means that they move with their animals during the year to find food and water). Conditions are hard for these people because the landscape is dry in many parts of Eritrea and drought is

Profiles

a major problem affecting people in rural areas. Deforestation (cutting down of trees) and soil erosion are also related to the drought problem faced by farmers and herders. Now scientists also know that climate change and global warming are making the situation worse for people living in this part of the world even though they did not cause it.

It is difficult to make a living if you live in rural part of Eritrea so many people are poor and do not have enough food to eat or enough income to buy food. However when farmers are able to irrigate their fields (pump water to them) the situation improves very much and they are able to grow enough food to feed their families and even to sell what they do not need or grow crops especially to sell (called cash crops – like coffee). Sometimes organisations from outside Eritrea will give some financial help to farmers so that they can dig wells, build dams and pipe water to their fields. Self Help Development International is one of those organisations. Check out their website for lots more information about the work they do in Africa www.selfhelp.ie

See also CASE STUDY 2 Irrigation Scheme in Keren, Eritrea
p 16 Book One 'Water' published by Self Help Development International in Hacketstown,
Co Carlow. Check out www.selfhelp.ie

1. What is the name of the person you are leaning about?

2. What age are they and are they older or younger than you?

3. How many brothers or sisters does the person have? _____

4. Can you write down any subjects that they do/did in school?

5. Can you list some of the things they do/did after school?

(a) Put a circle around any that are similar to what you do after school

(b) Put a square around any that are different

6. What is their favourite food? _____

7. What does the person you are reading about want to do when they leave school or what other event(s) might happen in their lives as they grow up?

8. In what ways, if any, do you think their life is similar to yours and in what ways is it different?

Similar: _____

Different: _____

9. In addition to learning about the young person what else did you learn about the country in which the person lives? Has this new information changed what you thought about the country before you started learning about it? [write answer on the back of the page]

10. What one question would you like to ask the person you were reading about, if you had the opportunity? [write on the back of the page]

Material 2

Discussion questions

Profile 1 and 5

- Some Irish children also go to boarding school. Can you think of reasons why this happens in Ireland? Do you think it is for the same reasons or different reasons?

Profile 1,2 and 3

- Learning through English.....what might be some of the advantages of this for Eritrea children? What might be some of the disadvantages? For example what might happen to local languages ...how does this situation compare to Ireland?...

Profile 2 and 5

- Customs differ from country to country and from one culture to another....cultures and customs also change....do you think girls should get equal opportunities to attend school .. what reasons can you think a family might have for not sending girls to school...what might change this situation

Profile 4

- Public transport is important in all countries but maybe for different reasons...why is it important in countries like Eritrea? Why it is important in Ireland?

ENGLISH Imaginative exercises/creative writing

Imagine that you are the person in the photograph:

- (a) Write a short paragraph about your life in the town or village where you come from. Include some information about your family and about what you do each day. Write a sentence about your hopes for your own future and for your country.
- (b) Write a letter to someone in Ireland who is the same age as you. Include some information about your family and about what you do each day. Write a sentence about your hopes for your own future and for your country. Include some questions that you would like to ask the boy/girl to whom you are writing.

SESE: Geography activities

- (i) Identify Eritrea on a map of Africa. What is that part of Africa sometimes known as (it may be indicated on your map or the shape of the area might give you a clue)?
- (ii) Identify the countries that border Eritrea. Can you name the country with which Eritrea has been in conflict with in the recent past?
- (iii) Locate the town or village (or region) mentioned in the profile sheet and calculate how far it is from the capital. [MAP OF ERITREA TO BE INCLUDED DURING APRIL 07]
- (iv) Weather – compare the weather in Eritrea with that in Ireland. [STATISTICS TO BE INCLUDED DURING APRIL 07]

Material 3 - Facts -

FACT FILE: Eritrea and Ireland

	ERITREA	IRELAND (Republic)
Population	4,400,000	4,000,000
Area (sq km)	117,600	42,800
Life expectancy (average number of years for which people can expect to live)	54 years	78 years
Infant mortality rate (number of babies who die out of every 1000 born)	45	6
Medical care	1 doctor to about 100,000 people (1993 figures)	1 doctor to about 700 people
Literacy Rate (percentage of people who can read and write)	57% (up from 20% in 1993)	99%
Access to clean water	57% (up from 6% in 1993)	100%
Living with HIV/AIDS	27%	0.1%
Gross Domestic Product (per person)	€75	€30,000
Currency	Nafta (in Nov 07 the exchange rate was 1 Euro to 17 Nafta)	Euro
World Development Ranking (needs footnote)	161 st (out of 177)	8 th (out of 177)

Note – figures in table above are national averages; in Asmara and other towns the situation would be much better but in rural areas it might even be a little worse in some areas

Based on figures from SHDI Annual Review 2005, Eritrea – Africa's Newest Country, Christian Aid, 1993 and www.wikipedia.org

Material 4 - Facts -

Background information on MDGs

→ General information on the Millennium Development Goals can be found in PowerPoint from www.developmenteducation.ie/issues/mdg.php

The UN's Millennium Development Goals

In 1992, the largest-ever gathering of world leaders took place at a summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: 117 heads of state attended and a total of 178 countries were represented. The summit aimed to address the twin issues of promoting worldwide economic development and protecting the environment – including tropical rain forests, biodiversity and reducing global warming.

While many good intentions were expressed, there was a lack of firm commitments, and the event was criticised by poorer countries (Less Economically Developed Countries, or LEDCs) for placing the responsibility for environmental protection on them, without the necessary support from the More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs).

Five years later, in 1997, world leaders again met in Kyoto, Japan. This meeting aimed to build on the Rio agreements, placing more specific targets for countries to achieve. Its most important, yet contentious, aim was the worldwide reduction of greenhouse gases (to 5.2 per cent below their 1990 levels) in order to slow down the rate of global warming.

Some LEDCs thought that restricting the fossil fuels they burnt would also restrict their development and they were unhappy that they had to suffer for the overuse of fossil fuels by the MEDCs. But some MEDCs were also unhappy about reducing their fossil fuel use because they believed it would have a bad effect on their economies.

It took a long time and a lot of renegotiation, but 178 countries eventually agreed to a final, watered-down version of the treaty in 2001, though importantly not the USA, the world's biggest polluter.

While the final version of the Kyoto Treaty was being negotiated, another important agreement was being developed. This time, the development needs of the LEDCs were to be at the heart of the discussions. At this summit, held in New York, September 2000, known as the Millennium Summit, every country in the UN agreed to continue working towards global development and the elimination of poverty.

The following year, guidelines were drawn up to help governments to continue their development work: these are known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

These eight goals help to focus the world's community on improving the lives of millions of people by, for example, aiming to halve the number of people living in absolute poverty by 2015 and reduce by two-thirds the proportion of children dying before the age of five. Ultimately, the MDGs will help to concentrate the international community's efforts on issues that matter most to the world's poorest children - like whether they eat nutritious food or whether they go to bed at night hungry; whether they stay healthy or whether they even live to *see* their next birthday.

Material 4 - Facts -

When the next World Summit took place in 2002, in Johannesburg, South Africa, the agenda continued to focus on LEDCs achieving sustainable development, though its targets are less ambitious than the MDGs. The MDGs remain the most comprehensive list of aims ever agreed.

The first seven MDGs reinforce each other and aim to reduce all forms of poverty, while goal eight - a global partnership for development describes how the world's richer countries can contribute to achieve these goals.

The MDGs are important as they:

- **endorse a multi-dimensional view of development.**

Progress is measured not only by economic growth, but also by factors that make a direct difference to people's lives - the realisation of their human rights, eg, their rights to nutritious food, a decent standard of health, education, and to have a say in decisions that affect them.

- **have been adopted by many countries and international development agencies as a basis for their work.**

This means that development programmes supported by international agencies will endeavour to tackle some of the most important problems facing poor people.

- **recognise that different development problems 'cross-cut'.**

For example, in some countries children usually girls - spend up to four hours a day carrying water. As a result, lack of access to clean water may mean that girls do not go to school.

The MDGs matter to children because:

- They cover most of the **fundamental rights** enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), for example, the right to life, education, health.
- They include many of the development indicators relevant to children. There are 32 indicators linked to the first seven goals, and ten of these are direct measurements of child welfare (such as under-five mortality and school enrolment).
- Most of the other indicators cover areas that have a direct or indirect impact on children, such as maternal mortality

Progress towards achieving the MDG targets will be measured at regular intervals, and over a period of 15 years the results will show countries whether or not they are likely to achieve them. To date some countries are on track, but many are not, and only a few will meet some of the targets, such as the three-quarters reduction in maternal mortality. Action is needed at both national and international levels for all countries to achieve their targets for each MDG.

The less developed countries are working towards their goals, by allocating a larger

Material 4 - Facts -

percentage of their economic budget to meet their population's basic rights, such as better nutrition, healthcare provision, education, clean water, sanitation; a more modern infrastructure, including housing and roads; and better employment opportunities.

But politics often stand in the way of achieving these needs. For example, in Africa government spending per university pupil is several hundred times that spent on each primary school pupil. Similarly, large-scale infrastructure programmes, such as dams, often give governments more visibility than longer-term investments, such as healthcare provision. The more developed, donor countries are also working towards goals related to the MDGs (see section on Aid on page 7).

As in many countries (developed and developing alike), military expenditure or an overblown, inefficient civil service, may consume essential resources. Moreover, despite recent efforts at debt reduction, many poor countries continue to pay large amounts of debt service each year to developed countries. More developed countries will need to provide support to ensure that all countries reach the MDG targets.

(Young Lives, Global Goals. Children, poverty and the UN Millennium Development Goals, A resource pack for environment studies and citizenship for 11- to 14-year olds, London: Save the Children 2004, pg. 3 and pg. 5)

Material 4 –Pictures –

Profile 1: Adunia



Material 4 –Pictures –

Profile 2: Abunia (left) and Rhodas (right)



Material 4 –Pictures –

Profile 3: Abelelom



Material 4 –Pictures –

Profile 4: Natnael



Material 4 –Pictures –

Profile 5: Ruth