Two Decades of Charity and Commitment to the People of Eritrea



The celebration of the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the **Shaleku Missionary Group** is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on two decades of generosity, commitment, and service to the people of Eritrea and particularly in the Eparchy of Keren. Founded by young people who wished to put their faith into action through charitable works, the group has become a meaningful example of solidarity, volunteerism, and service to the most vulnerable members of society.



Shaleku team inspired young generations in our region to embrace the values of charity, social responsibility, and to understand the meaning of voluntary service. Your visit to the villages and towns, working closely with religious personnel, parishes, and catechists… helped you to understand the socio-pastoral needs, sharing your experiences and mainly your contributions on social development is highly appreciated.

Hagaz School

The construction of Hagaz school building was fully funded by Diocesan Caritas of Prato and with a contribution from Caritas Firenze. Later with the commitment of Shaleku has made a remarkable contribution to the educational and social development initiatives which covers the teachers' salaries, the Ge'ez script to children, and supporting kindergarten education.

Thanks to your help, our schools have served as models of respect for human dignity, holistic human formation, and moral development. They have promoted values of mutual respect, solidarity, coexistence, and ecumenism among people of different religious denominations. Our educational institutions have always been open to everyone, without discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, or social background. The school of Hagaz accommodated over 1000 students and about 20 permanent teachers. This parish school was a milestone for the children to continue their educational carriers without difficulties.

Our schools represents a profound space where humanity, morality, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence were nurtured. The loss of these schools, therefore, represents far more than the loss of educational infrastructure: loss for the moral and social fabric of the entire country.



Women Empowerment

Beyond education, Shaleku has also contributed significantly to women's empowerment through micro-credit initiatives, the distribution of livestock, and assistance to orphans and other vulnerable groups.

Through the provision of small loans, the initiative has enabled thousands of women to pursue income-generating activities, strengthen their capacities, and work towards greater financial independence.

The project's primary objective has been to empower women to become self-reliant, improve their families' living conditions, and contribute to poverty reduction. Rather than offering assistance only in the form of immediate relief, microcredit creates opportunities for women to develop their skills, establish small businesses, and build a more sustainable livelihood.

As in many third world countries, even in Eritrea women carry on their shoulder the responsibility of the entire family and if the women are economically empowered, the benefits extend to their children, households, and the wider community.

The positive impact of this initiative is reflected in the thousands of women who have benefited from the microcredit project. Their efforts and achievements remind us that providing women with opportunities, resources, and encouragement is an effective way to strengthen families and promote social development.

Currently, more than **3,500 women and 20 animators are benefiting from this specific project**: The initiative has been instrumental and empowering a woman and Shaleku's commitment is highly appreciated:

- Promoting women's economic independence through access to micro-credit and small-scale income-generating activities by providing small loans, practical training, and guidance to expand their economic activities, strengthen their independence, and improve the well-being of their families.
- Strengthening women's cooperatives to encourage collective responsibility, solidarity, and economic sustainability. Thus, giving them the opportunity to open a center in order to sell their products which will pave the way towards lives improvement.
- Promoting maternal and child health, recognizing the importance of a healthy mother and child in building healthy families and communities.
- Supporting vulnerable women, particularly widows, young mothers, and women facing difficult socioeconomic circumstances.

These achievements demonstrate not simply an economic intervention; it is a comprehensive approach to restoring dignity, strengthening families, and transforming communities.

Looking Towards the Future: Priorities and New Opportunities

We would like to establish a women's sales center in Keren - a small commercial center or mini-shop where women could display and sell their products. Such a center would provide a practical link between women's productive activities and the market, enabling them to generate income, recover their investments, and expand their businesses. This will allow them to reach more customers, generate better income, and develop sustainable business activities. It could also serve as a training and networking space

where women exchange experiences, acquire new skills, and explore additional



economic opportunities.

3. Distributing livestock to vulnerable families

The distribution of livestock is another potential priority. Providing families with animals such as goats or sheep could help them access milk and, where appropriate, meat for their own consumption. Livestock can also provide a source of income through the sale of milk, offspring, or animals, enabling families to purchase grain and other essential goods.

Such assistance should be accompanied by appropriate guidance on animal care, feeding, and veterinary services to improve the chances of long-term success.

4. Supporting small businesses and vocational activities

Another important opportunity is to help women and young people establish small-scale businesses that respond to local needs. Examples include hairdressing and beauty salons, tailoring services, small shops, and other practical income-generating activities.

These priorities represent opportunities to move from assistance towards sustainable development, helping people not only to meet their immediate needs but also to build the capacity to support themselves and their families with dignity.

Conclusion:

Reflecting the past 20 years of service, the group demonstrated the enduring value of solidarity and generosity and in the coming years, I'm optimistic our partnership will be more productive! Be proud of your previous involvement

which touched the lives of many, lovely opportunities created, burdens eased, and hope renewed.

During the times of difficulties, we shared a joint vision and still we keep this vivid memories in our lives.

We remember the Pioneers with great esteem who laid the foundations for the fruitful partnership between the Diocese of Keren and the two sister Caritas organization: Keren and Prato which later took onboard **Caritas Firenze**.

Again in 2001, Idalia Venco, then Director of Caritas Prato, together with Roberto Corrieri, Director of Protezione Civile, who visited the internally displaced people in Afabet with food commodities. Their presence was not merely an act of material assistance; it was also a powerful sign of closeness, solidarity, and compassion towards people experiencing hardship.

Brother Amilcare Boccuccia, during his stay in Hagaz asked him to host the young team from Prato during the summer time who never hesitated to respond positively for my request and for two consecutive years Shaleku team accommodated in Hagaz Agro-Technical school.

The various visits of Shaleku management team

1. A memorable visit of Mons. Simone, Bishop of Prato, and Mons. Maniago, Auxiliary Bishop of Florence and our estimable friend late Father Santino who officially blessed the newly constructed school of Hagaz.
2. My particular appreciation to Rodolfo Giusti, who followed the implementation of projects closely and maintained a constant interest in their progress. His frequent visits, thoughtful suggestions, constructive criticism, and sometimes heated discussions were all part of a dynamic process that helped strengthen the work of the Secretariat. This led to a meaningful results, contributed to the growth, experience, and institutional development of the Secretariat over the years.
3. I do not forget our friend to whom I have great esteem Mr. Mario Lanza and his medical team "*Chebi" his intervention in various water projects and later together with the medical team (doctors) who had great aspiration to assist the people of Eritrea in medical intervention.* Their contribution remains part of the wider history of cooperation and service to the people of Eritrea.
4. Our sincere appreciation goes to Publiacqua and Consiag who assisted us with water project in Kunnie.
5. The director of "Agata Smeralda" Sir. Mauro Barsi, who helped our work with various food commodities to the patients of HIV/Aids.
6. Francesca e Samuele – who are the core staff of Shaleku graciously donated their viaggio di noze expenses for the village in Awenjeli to install il mulino

in order to assist the women and children who are walking all the way to Hagaz …. Still it is giving full service to the community of Awenjelli.

Finally, all these joint efforts are the network relationship among many stakeholders who built in mutual trust, friendship, dialogue, shared responsibility, and perseverance. Each person and institution contributed in a distinctive way to the development of this partnership and I have great esteem to you all!