

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT PEACEMAKING: THE HORN OF AFRICA PROJECT AND THE CHALLENGES OF INNOVATION IN MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

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The Horn of Africa Project (1984–91) was Mennonite Central Committee’s first explicit attempt to engage in international reconciliation or peacemaking in Africa, as opposed to having its development and humanitarian programs shaped by a general pacifism. It also involved members of the African diaspora in North America, a departure from the MCC Africa program’s usual partnerships. These were innovations in Canada’s broader international NGO community as well. The project’s story is important both because it stands at a point where peace work became an explicit part of Canada’s international development repertoire, and because of what the story suggests about the dynamics of innovation in international NGOs.

“I am encouraged with the creativeness of this endeavour which John [Wieler], you, and others have helped set in motion,” a Mennonite Central Committee Canada administrator wrote of the initial phase of the Horn of Africa Project.¹ This was an innovative project, one that created opportunities for reconciliatory dialogue about North-Eastern Africa’s conflicts at a time when international peace work was not part of the repertoire of nongovernmental humanitarian and development organizations. Indeed, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) often struggled to articulate the