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Ethiopia to honor Diasporas for extraordinary contribution

BY HAILE DEMEKE

ADDIS ABABA – The Ethiopian Diaspora Service (EDS) announced a plan to recognize over 40 Diaspora Ethiopians for their noble contribution to defending their home country’s interest and promoting its

cause on the global stage tomorrow.

EDS Communication Director Wondwosen Girma told *The Ethiopian Herald* that members of the Diaspora community who have served as Ethiopia’s soft power in influencing the political decision-making of

their country of residence will be recognized and acclaimed.

Over the past two years, the participation of Ethiopian Diasporas on different national issues has been significantly improved and

See Ethiopia to honor Diasporas ... page 3

BY MISGANAW ASNAKE

ADDIS ABABA- The Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) disclosed that an agreement was reached with the Saudi Arabian government to allow up to 20,000 Ethiopians to perform Hajji pilgrimage in the current year.

EIASC delegation that went to Saudi Arabia to confer on ways to increase the number of Ethiopian Hajji and Umrah pilgrims returned home after conducting a successful task, the Deputy President Sheikh Abdulaziz Sheikh Abdulweli told the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA).

The delegation also participated in the 1444 Hajji Expo organized by Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Hajji and Umrah, along with participants from all over the world, representing Ethiopia.

The deputy president further stated that during their stay in Saudi Arabia, the

See Saudi allows ... page 3

Panel spotlights regional, int’l political dynamics to Ethiopia’s peace

BY MESERET BEHAILU

ADDIS ABABA – Deep understanding and analysis of regional and international political dynamics constitute the main parts of protecting Ethiopia’s peace and preserving its national interest, the Defense War College said.

The college organized a panel discussion

See Panel spotlights ... page 3



Photo Eyob Teferi

Lawmakers approve three ministerial appointments

BY TAMERU REGASA

ADDIS ABABA- The House of Peoples’ Representatives has approved the appointments of the new three ministers recommended by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD).

Having heard the background and work experience of the three nominees, the house approved the ministerial appointments yesterday.

Accordingly, Alemu Sime (PhD) and Girma Amante (PhD) have sworn in as Transport and Logistics Minister and

Agriculture Minister respectively. Eng. Habtamu Tegegn has become Mines Minister as well.

During the course of the meeting, the house has also approved policies and proclamations related to excessive tax, grant agreements with international donors, extradition treaties with Turkey and United Arab Emirates.

Likewise the house has passed Federal Courts Proclamation and that of Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC).

It was learnt that the house improved
See Lawmakers approve ... page 3



Photo Hadush Abrhira

News



City transfers 2,318 prefab houses

BY YESUF ENDRIS

ADDIS ABABA- Addis Ababa City Administration announced that it has transferred 2,318 prefab houses to residents during the last six months. The City Administration along with 30 contractors is working on assembling more houses.

Speaking to the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA), Addis Ababa Housing Development Corporation Project 10 Branch Manager Beyene Regasa said that the inputs for prefab houses' construction are being manufactured by Ethiopian Construction Works Corporation. The assembly work is also being carried out by 30 contractors.

Around 70 buildings which have five floors (G+4) are being constructed, as to him.

"Within the last six months, 2,318 prefab houses have been handed over to those who were in dire need of houses. Additional prefab housing projects will be launched soon," he indicated.

The construction of 20 buildings (G+9) will be also launched when administrative work is finished, according to him.

The Kality Prefab Housing Project which the city administration laid its foundation last year is also expected to be inaugurated as per the plan. The City Administration is following the construction closely, Beyene said.

Beyond housing services, large number of jobs and knowledge transformation opportunity has been created, he noted.

"The prefab housing project is being implemented in support of new technologies and with cost effective inputs. Low and medium income residents will be beneficiary of the project," he stated.

Along with other housing programs, the City Administration has been working on the construction of 5,000 prefab houses construction since last year with outlay of 8 billion Birr budget, *The Ethiopian Herald* learnt.

Ethiopia aims for 2 bln. USD from upcoming IO2023: LBDC

BY STAFF REPORTER

ADDIS ABABA – Land Bank and Development Corporation (LBDC) disclosed that it has finalized preparations to hold Invest Origins 2023 (IO2023)- a global investment forum.

LBDC is also expected to secure 2 billion USD due to this international forum.

Accordingly, the forum would draw high-caliber, diverse investments into Ethiopia's flourishing market.

The two –day investment forum is going to be kicked off tomorrow at the Ethiopian Science Museum in Addis Ababa, it was learnt.

Speaking exclusively to FBC Digital, LBDC Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Lensa Mekonnen said that the coming investment forum is an international high-end quality investment attraction event to develop and attract potential investors into the country providing a full investment opportunity in Ethiopia.

The CEO added that the corporation identified five priority areas of investments including Housing, Health, Education, Hospitality and ICT that can attract and create everlasting business partnership.

Lensa indicated that hosted by LBDC along with partners from the International business community and local partners aligned with the



Lensa Mekonnen

priority of the corporation, the forum is aimed at ensuring all investments, maximizing socio-economic gains and accelerating the nation's journey to ensure prosperous livelihood for all the citizens of Ethiopia.

The CEO mentioned local partners including various ministerial institutions of FDRE, Ethiopian airlines, Ministry of Health, OVID group, Salvatore, Gift real state, consulting firms in the country, among others, are partnered to conduct the international investment forum.

Speaking further about the forum, Lensa said that it is an opportunity that encourages innovations and fresh ways of thinking to lead the way in developing and putting into practice sustainable development concepts in Ethiopia.

The forum creates a platform which is instrumental in building insightful knowledge and learning that foster the investment landscape, Lensa said.

She said that IO2023 is also bridging the gap between internal resource discovery efforts and outlining group initiatives that ensure the production of globally competitive goods and services.

As to her, the corporation believes that IO2023 is more than just investment forum but also an occasion where the country forges enduring business alliances to usher in a new era of global business order.

International partners including investors who are interested in Ethiopian market from Dubai, Bahrain, Tunisia, Sudan, and Kenya, among others, are in Addis Ababa to take part in the IO2023 Global Investment forum, Lensa disclosed.

The CEO estimated that the initial outcome of the International Forum is expected to secure 2 billion USD considering the diverse investments Ethiopia is offering and interested investors of the global market.

Invest origins (IO2023) is an international investment forum hosted by FDRE Land Bank and Development Corporation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which is going to be held from January 26-27 at the Ethiopian Science Museum in Addis Ababa.

Pakistani Arif Habib Group eyes on investing here

• Visit shows effective economic diplomatic activities

BY STAFF REPORTER

ADDIS ABABA - Major Pakistani business group that has interest in investing in manufacturing fertilizer, cement and steel paid visit to Addis Ababa to explore investment opportunities following effective activities carried out by the Ethiopian Embassy in Islamabad, the Ethiopian Press Agency learnt.

According to Ethiopian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Pakistan Jemal Beker, the efforts of the Embassy of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in Islamabad have started yielding results.

A high-level delegation of Arif Habib Group visited Addis Ababa where they met with business people and officials of the government of Ethiopia and discussed prospects of investing in the country's production sector.

On Tuesday, 17 January 2023 the delegation led by Arif Habib Group of Companies Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Muhammad Kashif met with Ethiopian Investment Commission (EIC) Commissioner Lelise Neme (Eng.) and expressed keen interest in investing in manufacturing of fertilizer, cement and steel in Ethiopia.

During the meeting, the EIC commissioner briefed the delegation on the ease of doing business, incentive packages, and investment climate in Ethiopia which was conducive and favorable for investment operations.

On the occasion, the ambassador extended



gratitude to the delegation for visiting his country and said it was high time for the foreign investors to invest in Ethiopia which offered lucrative opportunities, business-friendly environment, cheap cost of production as well as multiple incentives on foreign direct investment.

The ambassador said Ethiopia had undergone a lot of transformation since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (Ph.D) came into power who had a vision to transform the country into a major investment destination not only in Africa but also in the world.

"We are committed to facilitating the investors in our country, that is why we have established a one-window operation for them," he added.

He assured the delegation of the government's support in starting and doing business in Ethiopia which had been producing

96.4 percent electricity from water and geothermal sources that provided in cheap rate.

The delegation of Arif Habib Group held a meeting with officials of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Agriculture and Mines in which they were briefed on the policies, opportunities and commitment and support of government to harvest the availed opportunities in agriculture, manufacturing, mines and services.

Arif Habib Group is a giant company with \$2.5 Billion net assets that has a diversified portfolio of investments ranging from financial services, industries and real estate development and advisory.

It has a history of building Joint Venture (JV) partnerships and is continuing to expand business collaborations with domestic as well as foreign entities.

News

W.H.O. highlights multilayered support to Ethiopia's health sector

BY BETELHEM BEDLU

ADDIS ABABA- The World Health Organization (WHO) said it has been closely working as well as providing technical, operational, and financial support to the Ministry of Health, the Ethiopian Public Health Institute, and other relevant partners at different levels.

In a quarterly bulletin (October – December 2022) sent to The Ethiopian Herald, the organization announced that it has delivered 493.5 metric tons of medical supplies comprising trauma and emergency surgery supplies (TESKs), SAM/SC, interagency emergency and medical supplies (IEHKS) to Ethiopia. The support also included anti-malaria, COVID-19 preventive materials, essential medicines, and other critical supplies including 4 WD cars, an ambulance, and other equipment.

The organization also delivered more than 83 metric tons of medicines and medical supplies to conflict-affected Tigray, Amhara, and Afar states in the last quarter of 2022.

According to the bulletin, the WHO Ethiopia was the first organization to visit and deliver medicines and medical supplies to Dessie

and BoruMeda Hospital of South Wollo Zone when the North and South Wollo Zones of Amhara State were affected by the North Ethiopia Conflict. Moreover, the organization donated vehicles to Amhara and Afar state health bureaus to support the restoration of the health system and enhance health emergency preparedness and response.

A high-level joint mission led by the Ministries of Health and Agriculture and supported by the WHO and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) also traveled to Somali and Oromia states on 21 and 22 February 2022. More than 30 metric tons of medicines, medical supplies, and nutrition kits were delivered to health authorities in the two states.

Similarly, the Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) cluster of WHO-Ethiopia raised its intervention to include Gender Based Violence (GBV) in conflict and drought-affected areas of Ethiopia.

The GBV pillar has provided technical guidance on the revision of policy guidelines on the management of survivors and their register; development of GBV standards of operation (SOP). Revision of GBV/SV (sexual violence) training manual as well

as initiation of discussions on the need for revision of the national training manual on GBV/SV among several others were also carried out.

The quarterly report further indicated that Ethiopia administered more than 52 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines as of November 2022 and more than 36 million or 34.3 percent of the vaccinated people have completed the vaccination series. While some 43 million people received only the first dose, a total of 2.6 million have also received a booster.

“Ethiopia has so far received over 73 million COVID-19 vaccine doses, of which 51,868,610 are from COVAX, 2,980,800 are from the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT), and 13,700,000 million from bilateral donations.”

Between September and November 2022, the WHO Representative to Ethiopia Boureima Hama Sambo (MD) visited and met with the heads of nine state health bureaus and their teams. The unique health needs that required the WHO's technical support were discussed with each health bureau, including joint achievements to date, challenges, and the way forward, it was stated.

Ethiopia to honor...

they have played a unique role in making the voice of their home country be heard at the international level. The Diasporas have also served Ethiopia as a bridge to connect with the outside world, the director added.

Accordingly, the EDS decided to recognize Ethiopians in the Diaspora who actively participated in different national issues including knowledge transfer, image building, public diplomacy, resource mobilization, and others. The main objective of the award is to inspire fellow Diasporas to make concerted efforts for the benefit of Ethiopia.

“While preparing this recognition, we aim to express our gratitude to Ethiopian Diasporas for their noble contribution in fending off the unwarranted pressure of some interest groups and promoting Ethiopia's objective reality among global actors.”

Ethiopians in the Diaspora have staged numerous public rallies in major cities across the globe and denounced the undue

pressure some interest groups exerted in their home country. Accordingly, over 70 public rallies were held in 40 global cities in which hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian Diasporas participated.

Besides, the Diaspora community from all walks of life actively participated in discussions with political representatives in their respective countries of residence and sent petition letters and other forms of campaigns.

The director further highlighted that in the economic frontier, over the last four years alone, the Diasporas have mobilized huge resources and provided different kinds of support to their home country which is estimated to be over 3.3 billion Birr.

Zelalem Getahun, a Co-founder of the UK-based Defend Ethiopia group is among the 40 Ethiopian Diaspora selected by the EDS to be recognized. Zelalem told the EH that since 2020, the group has been tirelessly fighting the coordinated disinformation campaign against Ethiopia and registered a notable success in thwarting the destructive

attempts of both local and foreign anti-peace elements.

“Ethiopian Diasporas residing in different parts of the world have come together to express our dismay to international institutions including the United Nations and other non-governmental organizations to support us in our efforts to repel the anti-Ethiopia campaign.”

He added: “We have been working very closely with the EDS for the last two-and-half-years which is commendable in providing us information, and other support which is instrumental for us in our fight with the corporate media lies. The Diaspora community highly values the EDS support and is desirous to the consolidation of closer collaboration.”

The Diaspora community has been vocal to defend its home country and solidify a partnership with the government particularly since 2020 and the #NoMore movement which expanded to other developing countries is the ideal example of the former's success, Zelalem remarked.

with the Saudi Deputy Minister of Hajj and Umrah Abdul Fattah Mashat (PhD) which the measure will enable Ethiopia to utilize its quotas.

“An agreement has been reached with the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs to host 15,000 to 20,000 guests of Allah this year alone.”

He continued: “We will work with the Ethiopian Consulate General in Jeddah to change the mistreatment some Ethiopian pilgrims encountered previously and ensure proper accommodation for citizens. This year service to Hajj pilgrims should be quick and free from unnecessary harassment.”

Saudi allows...

delegation members were able to share experiences of various countries that host a large number of Hajj and Umrah pilgrims including Malaysia. The delegation also made a closer look at African countries that provide better Hajj and Umrah services including Tanzania, Somalia, and Kenya.

Although Ethiopia has the opportunity to use a large number of Hajj quotas in Africa next only Nigeria, it has not been able to use it for various reasons. Following extensive discussion, the delegation signed the Hajj and Umrah coordination and execution agreement

Noting the council's preparations to fulfill its responsibility of serving the pilgrims differently, Sheikh Abdulaziz highlighted that a tender announcement will be aired for the companies that can provide hotel and catering services in Mecca and Medina.

Agreements were reached with various commercial banks to enable the pilgrims to make payments in nearby branches and close partnerships were formed with the two countries' flag carriers to provide effective air transport services, it was learned.

The Hajj is a five-day pilgrimage to Islam's holiest place Mecca and this year it is expected to begin on June 26 and last until July 1.

Panel spotlights...

yesterday under the theme: “Global and Regional Geopolitics and the Impact of the Security Situation on Ethiopia's National Security” aiming at discussing and analyzing the current situation and keeping national interest.

Speaking at the discussion, Belete Belachew (PhD), a guest from Fredric Ebert Setifetung said that the War College has been carrying out various activities such as conducting research, hosting seminars, and providing alternative solutions to the country in a bid to realize the national interest at large.

“Particularly, today's panel discussion would bring manifold advantages due to various issues being raised. Among the various issues, foreign policy of the country, national and peace building, technology advancement, modern and professional skilled human power, and providing adequate training to security bodies are the crucial points of this discussion.”

Ambassador Ibrahim Indris from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented a discussion paper entitled “Ethiopia-Egypt Relations, Egypt's Policy and Strategies with a Special Focus on the Nile River (Abbay): Ethiopia's National Security Concerns.”

The paper claimed that Egypt has been taking various mechanisms to ensure the ill-intended interest of dismantling Ethiopia and controlling the Abbay River while calling the latter to consolidate its stand on the equitable utilization of Nile waters.

Approached by *The Ethiopian Herald* at the sidelines of the event, the College's Department of Education and Training Dean Colonel Tilahun Demsie said the institution has conducted meticulous research and formulated strategic measures to improve the security of the country.

“The college has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with different sectors in a bid to secure national interest. Particularly, today's discussion is different from that of the two discussions carried out earlier due to focus on security, regional and international issues connected with geopolitics and water resources.”

For War Planning and Strategy Studies Department Head Colonel Tomas Alemu, the discussion draws important lessons related to Abbay Dam and identifies measures to address the prevailing and potential problems. “

“As Ethiopia is situated in volatile East Africa, the place where global actors show avid interest to interfere and change the political dynamics, the country needs to make strong linkages with other partners to ensure security and sustainable peace. Ethiopia should also take strong measures in encouraging the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Standby Force owing to their role in fighting against terrorism.”

Participants drawn from various sectors were in attendance in the panel discussion.

Lawmakers approve...

excessive tax policy to lift free excessive tax that have allowed previously to import some commodities and products to enhance government income from tax. The improved tax policy is helpful to reduce the imposed tax on some products highly to encourage the importation and usage of the products.

The house has referred the approved policies to their respective standing committees.

Opinion

We all have to go back and visit!

BY DANIEL TESHAYE, MD

PART ONE

Diplomat, American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology

Practicing Neurologist in Atlanta, Georgia USA

Whenever I encounter my fellow compatriots, fellow Africans, Caribbeans, and some other Asians or East European diaspora, I ask the same question. When was the last time you went home? Of course, a variety of emotions always accompanies the answer. Yet, there is something special about the diaspora returning home for a visit.

I am sure that the scene is very similar at the counters of Emirates, Qatar, Turkish and Ethiopian Airlines in the US and Europe, as these are the leading airlines serving Africa and Asia. Multiple oversized luggages at the counters must be the norm and daily nightmare for the airline employees. My wife and I had the same situation at Chicago's O'Hare Airport, boarding Ethiopian Airlines. It has been 32 years for my wife and eight years for me since we have been home in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The flight was full and unique. Most passengers are predominantly black, flying out of America in an African Airline. Ethiopian Airlines has been the pride of Africans for the past many years. Managed and operated by black people, withstanding the financial crisis of the century. Most airlines worldwide, including American and Western Europeans, have been out of business. Ethiopian Airlines has survived without any outside help. Most importantly, facing COVID, ET has turned the adversity into a great opportunity by expanding its cargo operations and functioning as one of the best profitable airlines in the world today.

Yes, we all are going to Africa! Many of us on board belong to the African diaspora residing in the US. Service in Ethiopian Airlines is excellent in all classes. Most of its wide-bodied aircraft is configured in two categories, business, and economy. Unfortunately, they do not have an "economy plus" seating like their competition. Having this configuration will be helpful for their flights to and from North America. People will pay extra for those seats, given the long haul. The business class seats convert to flat beds, and the service is impeccable. I assure you that you will get your money's worth, especially if your trip is short and you have no time to spare for sleeping and adjusting to the time change.

Our flight was pleasant except for the malfunctioning Wi-Fi. The malfunction was particularly upsetting for many passengers as people were planning to watch the final world cup match between Argentina and France. En route, the captain came through the PA and announced the final score, and I heard a loud cheer behind me. I was rooting for the French, and I am not a soccer enthusiast, but the French team represented Africa well. Finally, I could sleep after eating, drinking, and watching a movie. Again, the flight attendants showed the genuine and loving Ethiopian hospitality we grew up with.

In the past, I vividly remember the bone-chilling announcement for us Ethiopians from the cockpit crew announcing that we crossed the Ethiopian airspace. This didn't happen this time. It was early in the morning, and I suspect the captain didn't want to wake us, the passengers, from our sleep. Later I heard from one of my pilot friends that these days they don't make those random announcements anymore as you can look on your screen and see where you are for yourself.

As the plane descended to Addis, I felt my heart jumping for joy. It was unbelievable to see the growth of the city. The new stadium and many high-rise buildings of the Bole area are visible from the sky as the plane descends. It is no longer the Addis that I knew. The white passenger sitting behind me was astonished by what he saw. "I never expected Africa to be like this" was his exact word. I replied to him sarcastically and with some truth that "CNN broadcasts fake news!" One thing that astonished us both but was heartwarming for me was seeing the hundreds of jets, the wide-bodied dream liners, 777s, Airbuses, 767s 737s, and the Bombardier regional jets all lined up and showing our flag green, yellow, and red on the tarmac at the airport. He said with astonishment and surprise, "I never knew ET was this big!" I wanted to tell him I felt the same way, but I replied yes, we are big! The young man, with his new bride, was on a honeymoon trip and connecting to Zanzibar. We Wish him all the best and deplaned.

We were greeted by a bunch of gate agents guiding us to the immigration booth and guiding most of the transit passengers to their respective gates. The new airport terminal is bright, clean, and modern by any standards. I was paying attention to the ages of the employees; all are overwhelmingly young, and the majority are in their 20s.

I feared my wife would develop some anxiety after returning in 32 years. I checked with her, and she was just fine. Years back, the on-arrival visa process was chaotic and disorganized, and significant change and transformation have occurred for the best. We had e-visas but faced a slight problem with immigration. A convict has my name on Ethiopia's most wanted. I always need help with this problem when I enter or leave Ethiopia. We collected our nine-piece luggage, including our carry-on luggage, and cleared customs with no issues. My wife will be meeting her six siblings and their respective families that she never met. I am also meeting for the first time the son I fathered 32 years ago, my daughter-in-law, and most importantly, my second grandchild.

Only individuals with airline tickets are allowed in the terminal. I once heard from an airline security expert that Bole is one of the most secure international airports in the world. Like everybody else, our families were waiting for us in the parking area. It was a beautiful sunny and slightly chilly morning in Addis. We were greeted by my father-in-law, whom I am very fond of, my new brother-in-law, his wife, my uncle, and two of my best friends. One has just arrived from DC. I saw my son for the first time in person and was shocked at how he looked

like me.

My daughter-in-law was there as well. The most important member of the greeting entourage was my 4-month-old granddaughter.

My brother-in-law's van loaded the luggage, and we headed to the Best Western Plus Addis. My wife still needed to learn where we were heading. However, I was familiar with the direction we were heading. Addis is shockingly vibrant, crowded, congested, and noisy, with crazy driving in relatively narrow streets. Shortly we reached the hotel.

Employees told me the hotel is relatively new and probably 3-4 years old. The entrance is a well-lit, open, resort-looking foyer with a warm bell and front desk staff. The registration was very smooth, and we checked in. It was close to 10:30 AM. We took a shower, refreshed, and immediately tackled the bags. My wife is very organized and has already sorted all the gifts we carry to our families. Unfortunately, before departing, she had locked all her luggage against my advice, now we discovered that all were broken and she found that two of her precious purses had been stolen. Most likely, it happened at Chicago O'Hare Airport.

While she was sorting the bags, I went downstairs and tried to feel at home. The hotel is across from a Pizza Hut and a Cold stone creamery shop. This was new to me, a vibrant area with a lot of hustling and bustling. The glitter, the high-rise buildings, the unique and modern shops, and the environment are not like the Addis I know. For a minute, I felt like a fish out of water. I thought I was in India, Bangladesh, or the Middle East. I was not able to connect spiritually, emotionally, or physically. This feeling took little time.

We were expected for lunch at my uncle's apartment, just behind the hotel. He lives in one of the new high-rises in a "luxury apartment." He has a lovely three-bedroom apartment. So naturally, I was curious and asked about the prices of these apartments. It was mind-boggling! Property prices in Addis are out of control. I am not sure where the money comes from, but people pay crazy for these apartments. Delicious doro-wat for us was prepared, followed by a coffee ceremony.

We planned our time ahead of time and tried to stick with the schedule that we had. We had allocated time for family and visiting the newly built parks and museums. My wife was reaching out to all her siblings that she would meet for the first time and made an open appointment for them, my family, and our friends to come and visit us at the hotel lobby the next day. The hall has a nice bar/restaurant that is open and faces the street. During our stay, we met with family several times and bonded. The next day we drove to the older and new parts of Addis. Then and there, I felt at home!

Editor's Note: The views entertained in this article do not necessarily reflect the stance of The Ethiopian Herald

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The Ethiopian Herald

Editorial

Making Nat'l dialogue a success

It was a year ago, on the 29th of December 2021, the Ethiopia's House of Peoples' Representatives approved the establishment of the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission with the aim to identify major fault lines, resolve differences and disagreements peacefully, reach consensus on the most fundamental national matters; in consequence to sustain the peace and integrity of the country and create a prosperous and democratic Ethiopia.

Subsequently, the Commission, since its establishment, has been executing a number of productive activities that pave the way to realize its mission – to hold comprehensive and holistic national dialogues amongst all relevant bodies, to resolve differences peacefully and build lasting and sustainable peace across the country.

As part of this effort, over the past months, the Commission held discussion and consultations with pertinent bodies, affiliates of competing political parties, religious leaders, and other members of the society.

Not only that, but it has also opened branch offices in the states to make the process more transparent and participatory.

Equally important, studying and learning the achievements and limitations of other countries which went through national dialogues is a key to making the national dialogues a success story. In this regard, the Commission has made efforts to study and explore global trends and draw lessons from the experience of other countries; not only from their attainments but also from their failures.

And following the works done in a manner taking into considerations the existing reality on the ground and the global experience, currently the Commission is getting more popularity and acceptance

and it is on the right track to implement its objectives.

Presently, many, including the Diaspora community and the ruling party, have shown interest in working with the Commission. So far, most, if not all, contending parties have demonstrated keenness to collaborate with the Commission.

The reaction of those contending parties and the Diasporas apart from valuing Commission's commitment and its trustworthiness, ensures parties' determination to resolve differences through dialogues rather than the interferences and influence of external bodies. Most importantly, their decisions to cooperate with the Commission clearly display the extent of the Commission's independence and its autonomy from the influence of any political power.

However, this does not mean that the Commission has greater acceptance from all; and is free from any kind of challenges. Rather, each and every step of it is filled with hitches for the reason the national dialogue is a new experience; and some are still hesitant about the national dialogue process.

However, the Commission, beating all the challenges it faced, has registered remarkable achievements and laid the foundations that are crucial to hold the national dialogue.

As the National Dialogue Commission revealed, as per its timetable, the long-awaited national discourse is scheduled to be carried out by March 2023.

Therefore, all Ethiopians, living at home and abroad, appreciating the energy the Commission has exerted to conduct fruitful national dialogues and sustain peace and security all over the country; should stand by the side of the Commission as the success of the dialogue depends on the active participation of all.

Opinion

Think globally, act locally!

BY EYUEL KIFLU

Countries in different corners of the world at different times staged national dialogues in an effort to end vicious circles of conflict mend rifts or ensure lasting peace.

Over the years, from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Tunisia, nations held national dialogues. But the toll order as witnessed in the past brought both blessings and curses to the countries.

According to the experiences of different countries, national dialogues can succeed or fail mainly depending on the process. By holding national dialogues some countries were able to end conflicts, yet others ended up descending into chaos and bloodshed.

For national dialogues to succeed they must have inclusiveness, transparency, public participation, a far-reaching agenda, and other qualities; otherwise, it is doomed to fail.

The Tunisian national dialogue, which took in the aim of an end to the political violence, assessment of a temporary government, and the ratification of the constitution were what the national dialogue achieved. Tunisian experiences can serve as a benchmark for other states that wish to stage a national dialogue.

On the contrary, the national dialogue held in Yemen is mentioned as a failure. The result of the dialogue was not accepted mostly by the country's southern representatives. The reason was that Yemeni leadership appeared likely to favor smaller, more selective committees or working groups rather than large, inclusive public mechanisms like the National dialogue conference. A small committee led by the then President Hadi made a decision that the number of regions and development of power without inclusiveness of most southern

representatives. External interference and lack of inclusiveness were also among the factors that distracted Yemen's national dialogue.

So, inclusiveness of all parties and entertaining all voices is the most relevant mechanism of successful dialogue. It turned out also that some other countries that failed to produce effective national dialogues and continue to face turmoil and civil wars. The global experiences provide an important tool to other states that plan to conduct national dialogue. In other words, countries should think globally and act locally. And, that is what Ethiopia must do as it embraces for much-awaited national dialogue.

Best by years of political polarization, the country is set to conduct national dialogue to create national consensus on the country's outstanding issues.

The dialogue is also expected to help resolve the country's conflict between political parties and hostile groups. There is also optimism that the country can find a gray line among polarized political views.

It's expected to create a national consensus among different ethnic groups, religious groups, and any class of society. Also, it can also bring sustainable peace to the area that was affected during the northern Ethiopia conflict. To do this, the country has formed National Dialogue Commission (NDC). The proclamation and members of the commission were approved by lawmakers.

Now that preparations are underway to begin the main task, it is imperative that the country draw lessons from international experiences to stage an effective dialogue.

The commission has been hugely engaged in studying and exploring global experience with a view to conducting successful National Dialogue that will address the country's age-

long contentious problems.

In his recent interview with the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA) Prof. Mesfin Araya, NDC chairperson, emphasized that the experience of most countries that went under national dialogue indicates that their agenda was set top-down. However, in the case of Ethiopia, the public is the one that would set the agenda, he added.

Studying the experience of others has become a common experience globally and attempts have been made to understand the reason behind the successes and failures of national dialogues that have been conducted in various countries, the commissioner added.

External interference, government interference, lack of inclusiveness and others were among the main reasons for the failures of the National Dialogue conducted in different countries. On the other hand there are also countries that have made successful deliberations citing the experience of Tunisia. Mesfin further stated that countries including Yemen and Sudan failed to execute successful National Dialogue because of the interference of the government and external actors. Accordingly, conducting an all-inclusive dialogue that consists of the lower part of the society, religious leaders, civil society and others is crucial.

In Ethiopia, the commission has been making an extensive preparation to execute an inclusive and transparent National Dialogue complying with its mandate. Due attention has been given to keep the deliberation inclusive and participatory in preparation, process and implementation phases so as to bring about holistic peace making.

"Likewise, we have been discussed with various segments of society including

political parties, civil society organizations, and other parts of the society. Understanding of historical narratives on contentious issues is among the most important elements to conduct a successful National Dialogue."

According to the National Dialogue proclamation, the national dialogue's main objective is to resolve the "difference of opinions and disagreements among various political and opinion leaders and also segments of society in Ethiopia on the most fundamental national issues through broad-based inclusive public dialogue that creates national consensus."

The commission is currently holding different conferences with regional states officials and peoples representative. The aims of conferences are to select participants in the dialogue and the way how to collect agendas.

In what could be said a vital step to make the national dialogues inclusive, 10 members of the NDC latterly paid a visit to Tigray state. This shows that how the commission is try to make the dialogue inclusive and have all voices heard.

The commission also plans to open offices in different parts of the country, including the Tigray regional state.

To sum up, emulating global lessons is crucial to make national dialogues successful. The issue of inclusiveness, transparency and participation should be considered during the whole process. The dialogues must be inclusive for the outcomes to be acceptable by the public. It is doomed to fail if it's not accepted by the general public.

Editor's Note: The views entertained in this article do not necessarily reflect the stance of The Ethiopian Herald

Business & Economy

Audit findings evidence to enhance transparency, accountability

BY ABEBE WOLDEGIORGIS

The second most populous country in Africa next to Nigeria with more than 120 million inhabitants, Ethiopia, its economy is mainly relied on agriculture characterized by rain fed, less utilizing input which in turn with less output. The sector supplies inputs to the manufacturing industry, to domestic market and is a source of foreign currency earnings. Though striving to become a middle income country scoring promising progress, its economic status put it among the poor nations.

To reverse this ugly situation, the government exerts efforts by formulating appropriate policies, to reduce poverty and to raise productivity.

For its development endeavors, it allocated huge budget obtained from local and foreign sources. But as to reports, the rampant budget mismanagement, corruption and resource misallocation crippled the all development efforts.

The Office of Federal Auditor General (OFAG) is working under the auspicious of the House of Peoples Representatives and reports its audit findings to legislatures. Meseret Damte, Auditor General of the Office, recently presented her office's first half performance report of the current fiscal year to the parliament.

As to her, the OFAG's activity is based on international principles. There is nothing that changes at the office, whether she or another person becomes the director general. The task of any OFAG director is to strengthen and maintain those existing principles.

OFAG's mandate is derived from the constitution, and there are also several international declarations. These laws are necessary to avoid alterations to national auditing principles whenever there is a regime change.

In the past, the office used the Regulatory Audit Manual and this year, it launched the Financial Audit Manual that includes the compliance and financial aspects of the audit and disseminated to all regional states.

In order to upgrade the knowledge and skill of the staffs regarding the profession, the office launched a master's degree program for auditors in cooperation with the Addis Ababa University (AAU). Currently, the office is auditing the budget expenditures of the last fiscal year, and they will be made public soon.

She further said that in the past, there were many public projects requiring up to 200 percent price adjustments due to delay. Project performance in Ethiopia used to be very poor and substandard, but projects managed by the PM have changed this history and are finalized on time.

The office prepared to conduct an audit if there is evidence that public projects are being delayed and to that end evidence is needed more than hearsay. The office of the auditor general obtained all budget documents, especially loan and aid documents, from the Ministry of Planning and Development before conducting the audit. Then it prioritizes the issues and launches findings of the audit.

As to her, the office audits all federal institutions. There are 175 federal institutions,



and this year, 15 are being audited by the Audit Service Corporation. The OFAG is auditing the rest. It conducts financial audits, performance audits, and special audits. The IT audit is also mentioned in the audit proclamation, which is currently in the pilot project stage and it will be continued fully in the future.

Nevertheless, in the 2019-20 OFAG report, the audit report of 39 institutions was not accepted by them. Therefore, the Ministry of Finance and other respective regulators have taken the necessary measures against those institutions that failed to be governed by the audit principles.

This year, the office managed to return over 4.1 billion Birr to the government which was spent illicitly. There are a lot of public financial mismanagement cases that the office has forwarded to the Ministry of Justice for further investigations. Cases involving several institutions are currently under the legal process. Even though the degree varies, most public institutions are accepting and implementing the recommendations.

Asked whether her office is auditing the regional states or not, she said that basically, her office did not audit regional states earlier since the regional states have their own auditing jurisdictions. But a new proclamation has been introduced that enables the OFAG to interfere with them.

As a result, this year, the office is attempting for the first time to include all twelve regional states in the federal auditing system and trying to implement a uniform audit format across the country. To this end, it sent OFAG auditors to train regional states' auditors.

This system is called the Single Audit Act. The office is working with the US Center of Excellence to adopt this system. As a result, their experts will arrive in the coming months to train OFAG staff as well as members of the parliament's government expenditure standing committee.

Because of the Act, OFAG can make sure that all government institutions, both in the federal and regional states, are accountable. Previously, when the federal government

allocated budgets to regional states, they became subject to regional states' jurisdiction, and the regional states had full autonomy over their internal audit. So, based on the Single Audit Act, the office introduced a new proclamation that enabled it to create a similar audit format. Currently, the office is building the capacity of all regional states based on OFAG principles.

As to Meseret, from now on, regional states' auditors will audit based on OFAG formats and principles. This will avoid duplication of efforts. If the OFAG conducted its own auditing across the country, it would have needed 10,000 auditors. But now it can rely on regional states' auditors and make it part of OFAG's reports.

Once the regional states adopt similar auditing formats and principles, it will be easy to the office to integrate and it planned to send mentors and regularly check that the quality of the auditing is intact.

The single audit system proved successful in the US. The US has a federal structure, and the system can be successful in Ethiopia too.

For the current fiscal year, four regional states have become part of the federal auditing system. Oromia, Addis Ababa, Sidama, and the southern regions have now become part of OFAG's auditing system. Next, all regional states will be integrated into the system.

Donors especially want the office to audit the utilization of their funds on the ground. This is reported every three months, but it usually does not comment on it. So, one of the biggest changes is that the office is including regional states in the federal auditing system.

Most of the institutions under investigation and facing challenges are universities. Measures are also being taken against state-owned enterprises based on the office recommendations.

Meseret further said that Ethiopia uses the Westminster auditing model. This means that the auditing institution must present its findings to the legislature. Then the jurisdiction system takes legal action. Countries that have a parliamentary system, basically adopt the

Westminster way.

In the court-system auditing model, the auditing institution can also take legal action. There is also a board system. Different institutions represent the board.

Since Ethiopia has a parliamentary system, the OFAG can only report its findings to the Parliament. But whenever the office find out about any wrongdoing, it directly presents the evidence to the attorney general. It also works with the Anti-Corruption Commission.

The model is determined by the type of political structure a country adopts. Only the Westminster system is possible in a parliamentary country. The court system model is adopted by countries that have a presidential system.

If Ethiopia's constitution is changed and shifted to a presidential system, then it might be possible to change the audit system to a court system.

The implications for the economy are very serious. The value of one Birr is changing fast. This is causing project costs to increase substantially every time the project is delayed. On the other hand, the country is not getting the return of that project because it has not been finalized on time.

The public is also not benefiting from the project. The additional cost of some projects can finance new projects.

As to Meseret, she has been at the OFAG for the past six years. It presents its findings to the Parliament before the officials from the audited institutions come to Parliament to take comments. This trend did not change.

For instance, open criticism had been conducted at 26 institutions last year. The office never hesitates to expose wrongdoing. The parliament is the primary venue for reporting and criticizing executive wrongdoing. That is crucial platform. To make the findings public, it collaborates with the parliament's government expenditure standing committee, but it cannot go beyond its auditing scope.

Most of the corruption tricks and schemes in Ethiopia are not document-based. They are difficult to detect and find evidence since they are done without documentation. It is difficult to discover via auditing. They are systematic, but the office indicates such issues in its report.

If the government had taken serious action on OFAG recommendations from the beginning, the current problem could have been avoided. The office has been giving recommendations on every mismanaged project in the country.

For example, billions were squandered on MeTEC now National Industrial Engineering Corporation. But because it was difficult to correct the wrongdoings of the past, they chose to leave them there. If the respective institutions had taken the right action at the right time, such a waste of public resources could have been avoided.

Unless the implementers take them seriously, audit findings have no meaning. Earlier, the Anti-Corruption Commission was not powerful and active. If the commission had been strong enough, it would have been no need for a new committee to combat corruption.

Art & Culture

Works that resonate loud transcending generations

(Tesfaye Gessesse's Foundation inaugural ceremony)

BY NAOL GIRMA

Born on 27 September 1937 in a small village called Guro Gutu in Hararghe in eastern part of Ethiopia, Tesfaye was the sole child for his parents. Sadly, he lost his mother and father when he was eight months and two years old, respectively. For years, the tenants who rented land from his parents raised him. At the age of seven, he came to Addis Ababa and started to live with his uncle, his mother's elder sister.

Completing church education, which includes reading psalms and prayer books, Tesfaye joined the then Teferi Mekonnen School at the age of eight and started his formal education. After completing his secondary education, Tesfaye had enrolled at the University of Addis Ababa's Law Faculty where he graduated in 1958. While there, upon watching him superbly play at a drama staged by another prominent playwright, Kebede Michael, Emperor Haile Selassie advised the young Tesfaye to study theatre and arranged for his scholarship at Northwestern University's theater school, in Evanston, Illinois. Returning in 1961, Tesfaye was "a part of a small group of reformers, who in the 1960s turned theatre from an art form aimed at propagandizing for the aristocracy into a means for examining the political and social situation in Ethiopia."

A few years later, Tesfaye moved to Haile Selassie I University and helped to establish the Creative Arts Centre under the initiative of the American national Philip Caplan who came to the country on a Fulbright scholarship. The two reportedly met in 1962 to co-direct a play and they hit on the idea of starting the drama section at the young Haile Selassie I University and establish a center for experimental drama and actor training. Under the auspices of the Centre, Tesfaye and Caplan had directed the premiere of plays by the young playwrights including Tsegaye Gebre Medhin and Mengistu Lemma. The center at the time was a kind of drama school where the noted actors Wogayehu Negatu and Debebe Eshetu and a talented director Abate Mekuria, got their preliminary training and experience. Solomon Deressa, Gebre Kristos Desta, Haile Gerima, Berhane Meskel Reda were also among the active visitors to the Centre. Tesfaye acted as the Centre's director for four years and he nurtured countless future stars.

He was able to listen to what Martin Luther King Junior, the American black people rights activist, had to say in his speech. The white supremacy of the time was also a living testimony and then he was very motivated when he returned back to his home country. Tesfaye is credited for having worked actively in upgrading the physical infrastructure of the theatre. He extended the stage as well as having the auditorium made sloping. He also set up a lighting booth for the stage at the back of the theatre among others.

He has done a lot in the field of theatre.



Photo- Hadush Abreha

By preparing and presenting theater in a modern way, he tried a lot to make it familiar and popular among the society. Assistant Professor Tesfaye was a playwright, poet, and translator, author of short and long novels, actor, theater producer and theater art teacher.

On the inaugural ceremony of Assistant Prof. Tesfaye Gessesse Foundation EPAs journalist spoke with the multi-disciplinary artist and his colleagues to learn about his contribution for the Ethiopian art.

The eldest son of artist Tesfaye Gessesse and director of the foundation Gessesse Tesfaye who has been in the process of expanding the scope and objectives of the foundation told Ethiopian Press Agency that Tesfaye was a pioneer who truly developed modern Ethiopian theatre and managed to produce memorable theatre brands with brilliance and charm, at a time when the theatre was flourishing as the most vital sector of the arts in Ethiopia.

It has been days since the establishment of the Tesfaye Gesese Foundation, led by his son, Gessese Tesfaye Gessese, said that on the day of the inauguration of the foundation, we had the opportunity to call the artists who had left the artist's footprints to testify and express their feelings about the artist. He also said that remembering the past is very essential for the future. When giant artists pass away, their memory is remembered and a permanent memorial is built for them.

There is a gap in building a permanent institution for the artists, apart from making a temporary memorial when the heroes of the country who were able to leave a lot of mark in Ethiopia. Other artist

families should take lessons from Artist Tesfaye Foundation and Autobiography. Gessese also said that a public library will be built under the name of associate professor Tesfaye Gesese. He traveled great distances to ensure that his father was not forgotten whenever he got the chance.

According to what his close colleagues on the event said, he does not have time to look at the bad things but the good things of life. Although he did not receive any awards for his contribution at various times, he consecrated his time, money and life for wisdom without entertaining ill feelings that no one recognized me for my work. He was able to manage the country's biggest theaters, the National Theater. There was a lot to be said about associate professor Tesfaye Gesese, they said.

Tesfaye, the first Ethiopian to earn an M.A. degree in Theatre Arts, had written and successfully produced several plays. Among his plays were Father and Sons, the absurdist *Iqaw* (The thing), *Tehaddiso* (Renaissance), *Yeshi*, *Cherchez Les femmes*, and *Ferdu Lenaninte* (The judgment is for you)

On the occasion head of Addis Ababa Culture and Tourism Bureau, Dr. Hirut Kasa, expressed words of appreciation about associate professor Tesfaye Gesese. The ephemerality of Artist Tesfaye and his likes will be confined to the flesh. Because their works will be passed down to generations and make them remembered for many years. Transcending one's era through one's brainchild was an easy task for artist Tesfaye. He is rich of works that go beyond the span of his earthly existence. Her office recognizes that he is a man of wisdom who can be exemplary to many.

Tesfaye's luminary profile extends beyond acting, directing and leading in theatre. His involvement in the establishment of the Addis Ababa University Cultural Centre in 1963 as well as the Theatre Arts Department in 1978 was of paramount significance.

At the inaugural event, Prof. Mesfin Araya Commissioner of Ethiopian National Dialogue chief Commission also explained that art plays a very significant role in peace building. It is very important to focus on the power of art in bridging the gaps in understanding the challenges that our country is currently facing.

On the occasion the noted Artist Teferi Alemu testified that Tesfaye was not fearful penning down his outlooks, directing dramas and acting in plays of great significance, but many of them were greeted with cold shoulders. "Once, while he was a manager of a theatre house, he increased salary for the artists of his own will to encourage the poorly paid artists and to uphold the profession," Teferi told. "Consequently, all his good deeds put him behind bars all the times, suffer disciplinary measures and constantly put him under pressure. All these are sacrifices he paid for the betterment of the profession." Six months later, he was released and appointed as the director of the Ethiopian National Theatre. It was around then that he staged one of his well-received plays, *Tahadisso* (Renaissance). His attempt to improve the financial and working conditions of artists ultimately led to his termination of his post in 1983.

In 1989, he became chairman of the Theatre Arts Department at Addis Ababa University but he was dismissed and incarcerated for a short period when the military government was overthrown.

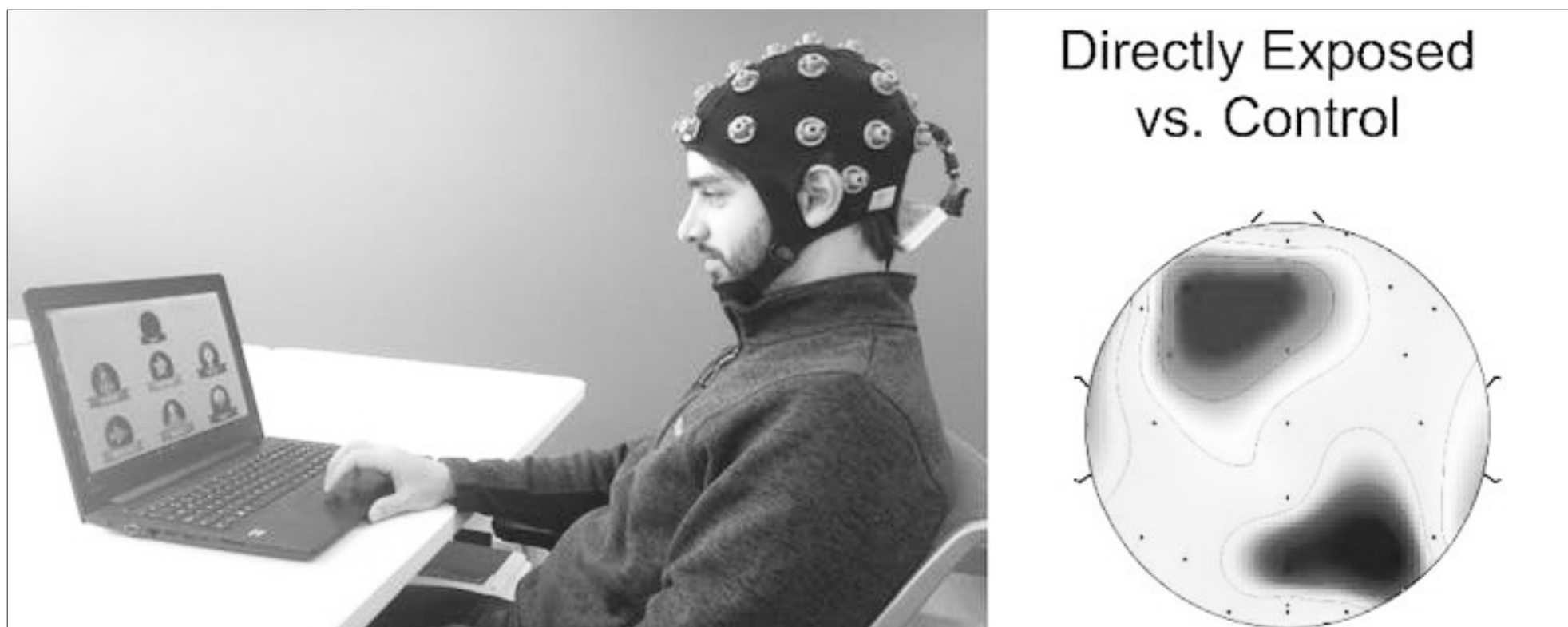
Tesfaye led a radical change in the form and content of the Ethiopian national drama in the early 1960s. Tesfaye had directed and starred in multiple plays, including in Tsegaye Gebremedhin's adaptations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. He translated a brief sketch of the lives of the Sufi mystic Omar Khayyam and his Rubaiyat.

His numerous accomplishments as a cultural programs presenter, however, are less known. Tesfaye used to host cultural programs at Radio Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Broadcasting Service (radio and television) in the early 1970s.

Tesfaye Abebe, a veteran artist said that "Tesfaye is a gentle and decent human being. It was always a pleasure to meet up with him and share good times."

Of course, many agree that Tesfaye is among the masterful who played a key role in transforming Ethiopian theatre by introducing modern approaches and techniques. Artist Tilahun Gugsa, a veteran actor who has been in the profession for many years, noted people like Tesfaye made theatre up to the standard. They as well allowed it to stand independently and become popular.

Global Affairs



A wireless EEG cap records brain activity as a person responds to cognitive tests. The image on the right shows significant differences in electrical brain activity recorded on the scalp between people directly exposed to wildfires and a control group, with greater activity in left frontal cortex (red) for the group directly exposed. Grennan et al., 2022, PLOS Climate, CC BY

Climate change trauma has real impacts on cognition and the brain, wildfire survivors study shows

The big idea

Psychological trauma from extreme weather and climate events, such as wildfires, can have long-term impacts on survivors' brains and cognitive functioning, especially how they process distractions, my team's new research shows.

Climate change is increasingly affecting people around the world, including through extreme heat, storm damage and life-threatening events like wildfires. In previous research, colleagues and I showed that in the aftermath of the 2018 fire that destroyed the town of Paradise, California, chronic symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression were highly prevalent in the affected communities more than six months after the disaster.

We also found a graded effect: People whose homes or families were directly affected by fire showed greater mental health harm than those who were indirectly affected, meaning people who witnessed the event in their community but did not have a personal loss.

In the new study, published Jan. 18, 2023, our team at the Neural Engineering and Translation Labs, or NEAT Labs, at the University of California San Diego, wanted to understand whether the symptoms of climate change-related trauma translate to changes in cognitive functioning – the mental processes involved in memory, learning, thinking and reasoning.

We evaluated subjects' cognitive functioning across a range of abilities, including attention; response inhibition – the ability to not respond impulsively; working memory – the ability to maintain information in mind for short periods of time; and interference processing – the ability to ignore distractions. We also measured their brain function while they performed cognitive tasks, using brain wave recordings obtained from

electroencephalography, or EEG.

The study included three groups of individuals: people who were directly exposed to the fire, people who were indirectly exposed, and a control group with no exposure. The groups were well matched for age and gender.

We found that both groups of people exposed to the fire, either directly or indirectly, dealt with distractions less accurately than the control group.

We also found differences in the brain processes underlying these cognitive differences. People who were exposed to the wildfire had greater frontal lobe activity while dealing with distractions. The frontal lobe is the center for the brain's higher-level functions. Frontal brain activity can be a marker for cognitive effort, suggesting that people exposed to the fires may be having

more difficulty processing distractions and compensating by exerting more effort.

Why it matters

With climate change fueling more disasters, it is incredibly important to understand its impacts on human health, including mental health. Resilient mental health is what allows us to recover from traumatic experiences. How humans experience and mentally deal with climate catastrophes sets the stage for our future lives.

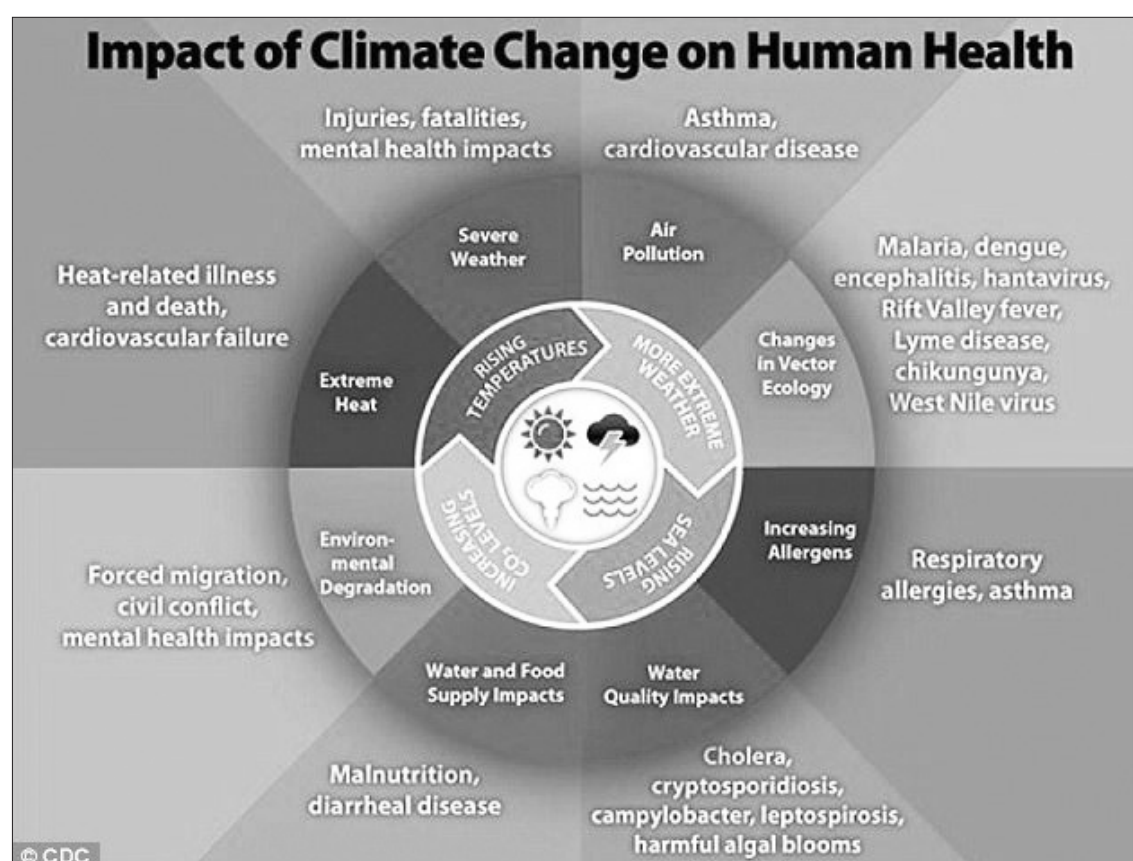
There are strategies people can use to help reduce the stress. Psycho-social research suggests that practicing mindfulness and developing healthy lifestyles, with regular exercise and enough sleep, can protect mental well-being in these scenarios, along with developing strong social bonds.

What's next?

There is much work to be done to understand if the effects we found are replicable in large sample studies. In this work, we focused on a total of 75 study participants. Scientists also need to understand how these effects evolve as climate disasters like wildfires occur more often.

We are also pursuing research with community partners to implement interventions that can help alleviate some the impacts we observed on brain and cognitive functioning. There is no one-size-fits-all solution – each community must find the resiliency solutions that work best in their environmental context. As scientists, we can help them understand the causes and point them to solutions that are most effective in improving human health.

Source: (The conversation)



Law & Politics

The hoax hunger story

BY ADDISALEM MULAT

For over two years now, Ethiopia has been at the receiving end of unfounded allegations of grave human rights abuses. From the accusation of genocide to the weaponization of hunger, the country was a victim of coordinated intrigue to discredit and criminalize the government.

The final destination of the far-fetched conspiracy is then to put a puppet government that is submissive to special group interests. This interest was high that it even antagonized the investigation of human rights bodies that concluded that neither genocide nor weaponization of hunger was committed in Ethiopia.

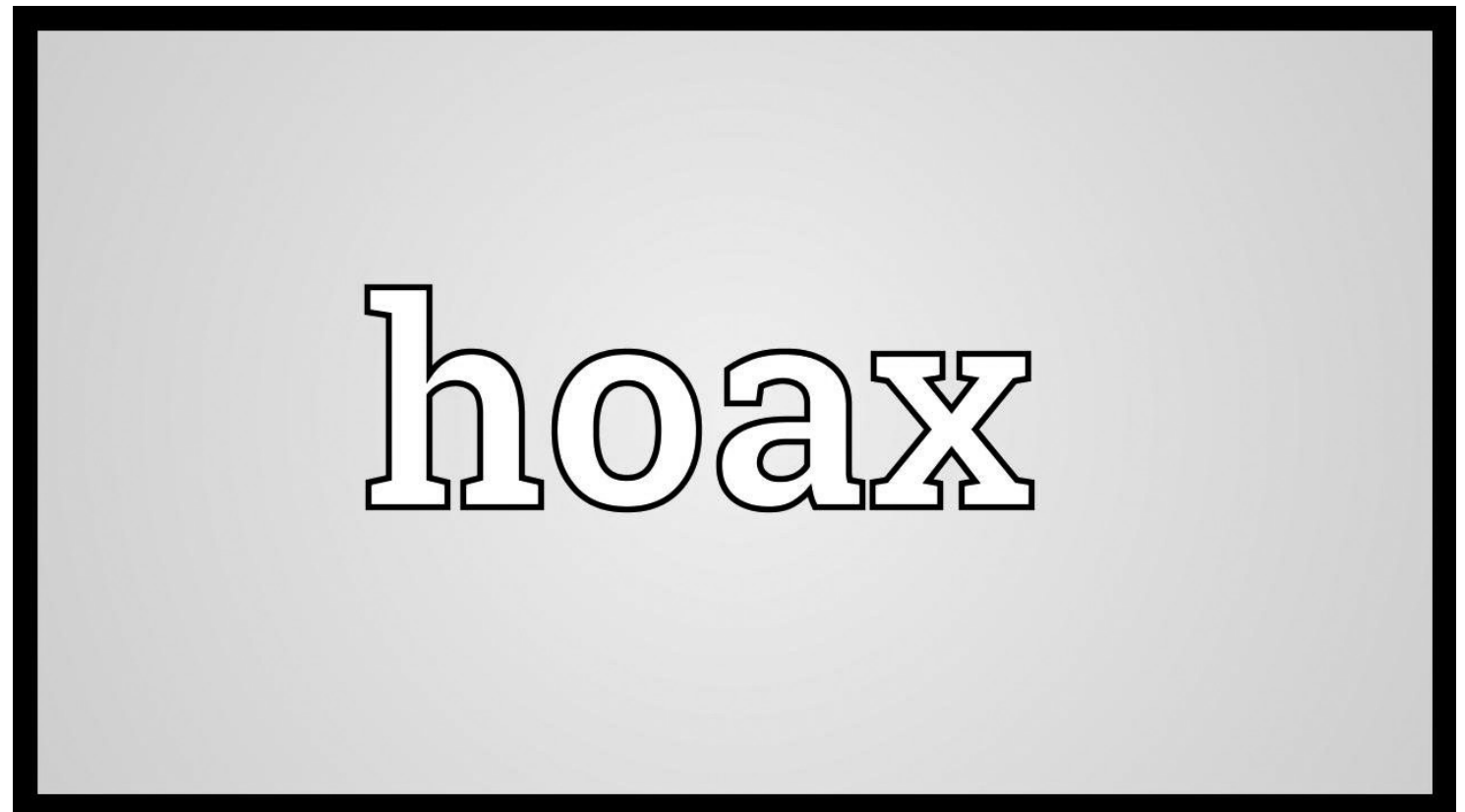
The Joint Investigation Teams (JIT) of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the UN Human Rights Council revealed that no genocide was perpetrated in Tigray. And, the Ethiopian government has been implementing the recommendation of the JIT in connection with other alleged crimes. Hoax stories were aired and published by some discredited international media to falsely substantiate the stories of some human rights groups. But, scientific probes conducted by local and international organizations have proved the allegations as being false. Yet, some foreign entities and their collaborators have continued their diatribe against the incumbent even after the Pretoria peace deal was signed.

Ironically, some are still fixated on the issue of hunger and genocide even when the government is working round the clock to supply war-impacted communities with essential humanitarian aid. That is what the numbers are indicating. Aid is entering the state is like no other time with donors and humanitarian agencies providing the much-needed support. In this day and age, some entities have been exerting every effort to bring discredit to the smooth flow of humanitarian assistance to Tigray State by spreading barefaced lies and misleading information across the globe. It is worth remembering that since the onset of the conflict, the federal government has been greasing the wheels of the delivery of humanitarian aid in all four corners of Northern Ethiopia via road and air successfully.

Irrespective of the fact that the federal government has been assisting the progress of unhindered access to the free flow of humanitarian assistance in Tigray State, some entities in several instances have been making a supreme effort to blacken the positive moves.

It is also abundantly clear that in the course of the war, some entities went to great lengths to fabricate the false narratives of siege. What's more, they have been time and again bewildering the wider international community with their usual fabulous stories on the subject of humanitarian assistance.

But the fact on the ground is the government has been giving unrestricted



access to humanitarian organizations intending to pave the way for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Tigray. It is widely known that in the wake of the uncompromising stance of the incumbent to speed up the smooth path of the federal government, aid agencies have been providing humanitarian assistance to the people of Tigray.

There has been an increase in the flow of aid after the signing of the Pretoria peace pact as it eased challenges. The sad thing is that even though humanitarian aid has been entering Mekelle via road and air many a time and oft, the disenchanted group in the signing of the peace accord has set in motion playing a part in a campaign to discredit the positive developments mushrooming in the Tigray State.

Regardless of the fact that some entities that failed to learn from their past blunders have been pulling out all the stops to turn the lives of civilians into chaos and mystify the global community under the guise of food insecurity and hunger, people from all walks of life have been giving credit to the federal government for its firm stance in returning the whole lot in the Tigray state to normalcy.

But after the signing of the cessation of hostilities agreement, the incumbent former has continued fast-tracking the delivery of humanitarian assistance in every corner of Tigray State. On the basis thereof, the whole thing in the Tigray state has been getting back on track at the earliest possible moment.

Given the present circumstances, after the peace accord, some entities have been engrossed in mystifying each and every one as if humanitarian assistance has not been reaching Tigray State with flying colors. Disappointedly, as nothing makes them happier than engaging themselves in a smear campaign against the positive moves unfolding in the Tigray State, they

have been working around the clock to mystify every Tom, Dick, and Harry to confound the global community.

There is no denying the fact that in the aftermath of the signing of the milestone peace accord the flow of humanitarian aid has been seeing an upward trajectory. Nowadays, as a consequence of the positive developments of the government international bodies have been extending their optimistic outlook toward the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Lately, some former officials from the inner circle of the UN bodies debunked the allegation of weaponization of hunger in Ethiopia.

The pronouncement of 'people dying of hunger in Tigray' by some international organization was a politicized attempt to put pressure on the government for other hidden reasons, the World Food Program (WFP) former Country Director to Ethiopia disclosed lately.

Speaking to local media, Steven Were Omamo (Ph.D.) stated that there was not good information revolving around the fact to make a definitive assessment of food insecurity in Tigray State. "The pronouncement of 'people dying hunger' or 'on the verge of death' needs supportive information."

As to him, any pronouncements of 'people dying of hunger' really were based on subjective assessments for the most part or it was an over interpretation of the little information that was available. A lot of assumptions to drive this analysis and the time when the analysis was completed are the most important thing.

"There was no evidence that people died of famine...but, these conclusions were based on limited information and that we needed to be very careful about it. Nevertheless, there were statements from many international organizations

including the leader of WFP; saying that actually people were dying of hunger."

Omamo continued: "The conclusion that I reached in this regard is that this was a politicization of the process. It was sensibly to put pressure on the government or maybe for other reasons. Clearly, there was another narrative that was a play and largely political, I would say, it was a recurring theme."

While talking about humanitarian aid trucks that have gone into and stayed for a long time in Tigray during the war time, the ex-country director noted that the absence of fuel was not the real case. "In fact, the TPLF told us that they did have fuel in the area as I said in the book. But, there were other priorities beyond the humanitarian operation that they were dedicating."

"The reasoning that they were providing at that time was two. The one is the fuel. I think the truth has come to be clear that fuel was not the case. And the second was that some ethnic-Tigray truck drivers were being harassed and attacked."

Omamo argued that there were other factors that challenged the transportation of humanitarian trucks including lootings in Tigray; recalling that his time as the WFP Country Director here was tough. "The change of administration results in many new things. Operationally for the first time, we were able to operate very smoothly in Somali State because peace had come. We had new partners in government. We had new kinds of relationships that we were able to build with NGOs and with other different main parts of government.

However, there were lots of challenges including drought, flood, and locust infestation. Finally, the civil war, (the war in north Ethiopia), was quite a challenging period, but we tried to be a partner to respond to the crises," he remarked.

Planet Earth

Reversing the recurrent impacts of environmental crisis in the Horn of Africa

BY GIRMACHEW GASHAW

The Horn of Africa is known for its great geographical diversity, rich in natural resources and inhabited by different ethnic groups who are engaged in different economic activities. However, so far, there is no serious and detailed agronomic, hydrological and land resources investigations have been undertaken. The horn of Africa region is assumed that the abundance of rainfall, water and arable land would provide food self-sufficiency and surplus production.

Nevertheless, the Horn is one of the poorest regions in the continent; and droughts, hunger and war often affect it. Except for the more privileged classes, hunger affects millions of poorer farmers, pastoralists and urban dwellers; and the international communities are responding with emergency food aid from time to time. Food aid saves life, but it also prolongs hunger as long as environmental degradation is not alleviated.

Environmental degradation disturbs the traditional balance between people, their habitat and political, cultural as well as the socio-economic systems in which people live. The mass media image of hunger in the west tends to portray hunger in the region as a consequence of droughts, wars and floods. But droughts and floods are the meteorological phenomena that do not always bear direct relationships to hunger. The confusion between drought, war and hunger obscures our understanding of the root causes of hunger and delays the findings of its possible solution in the Horn.

Ethiopia has a high degree of risk to hydro-meteorological hazards and natural disasters. Vulnerability is exacerbated due to the country's high level of poverty and its dependence on key sectors most likely affected by climate change: agriculture, water,



tourism, and forestry. While the country is at high-risk to natural disasters such as flooding as well as drought, its topographic diversity and highly marginalized segments of the population make it additionally vulnerable.

Additional, non-climate stressors such as inadequate infrastructure to handle the increasing population are also impacting the vulnerability to natural disaster sensitivity and climate change vulnerability.

Ethiopia is ranked 161 of 182 countries on the 2022 Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Climate Vulnerability Index with increases in temperature, erratic rainfall and unpredictability of seasonal rain, increased incidences of drought and other extreme events. Many regions in Ethiopia are currently experiencing one of the most severe La Niña-induced droughts in recent decades, with more than 8 million people acutely food insecure. The death of 3.5 million livestock due to the drought has further destroyed livelihoods.

Drought-affected regions comprise three quarters of the total land area of Ethiopia with Somali, Oromia and Afar Regions the most severely impacted. 1.8 million people are displaced in drought-affected regions of Ethiopia and one out of five displaced persons in Ethiopia is displaced due to drought (as per IOM's latest displacement report published in October 2022).

In order to reverse the situation observed, Ethiopia plans to be climate-neutral by the year 2025, and it aims to generate jobs in the process. By overhauling its rural economy to support more sustainable agriculture and regenerate millions of hectares of degraded forest. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) data shows Ethiopians are among the most climate-innocent people on the planet.

The average Ethiopian, for example, generates just 1.3 metric tons of greenhouse-gas emissions per year, while the average American generates about 20 tons, and the average Kuwaiti generates a staggering 60

tons.

Like all signatories to the Paris climate agreement, Ethiopia submitted a Climate Action Plan – technically called an “NDC” (Nationally-Determined Contribution) – to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Their NDC came embedded in a broader Climate Resilient Green Economy strategy, which grew out of an existing effort to boost productivity on farms – in part by planting shade trees in among coffee plants, but also by spreading solar energy across the countryside and helping local communities regenerate 22 million hectares of degraded forests by 2030 – a plan that amounts to nothing less than a complete overhaul of the agriculture sector.

Key to the program is something called “participatory forest management” – essentially working with communities to help them coordinate management of their forests, in part by teaching modern agroforestry, but also by setting up self-governing cooperatives.

The people in the Horn have suffered and will continue to suffer unless the root causes of hunger are addressed quickly and adequately. Through sustainable utilization of the natural resources, water and energy-based development (sufficient and adequate food production, income generation and livelihood) is possible.

Such development requires proper methods and well-thought-out strategies for balancing ecosystem resilience and human activities in the region. Besides, useful traditional institutions have to be restored and various types of conflicts (between different political groups, natural resources and their users as well as between and among ethnic groups) in the region have to be resolved if poverty and hunger are to be banished.

Fostering recovery, transformation in Africa to reduce inequalities and vulnerabilities

BY STAFF REPORTER

The 55th Session of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (CoM2023) will be held from March 15-21, 2023, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The Session, a statutory meeting of the ECA, will review the state of economic and social development in Africa as well as progress on regional integration.

CoM 2023 will be convened under the theme, ‘Fostering recovery and transformation in Africa to reduce inequalities and vulnerabilities.’ It will be attended by African ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, representatives of member States, entities of the United Nations system, pan-African financial institutions, African academic and research institutions, development partners

and intergovernmental organizations.

A preparatory meeting of the Committee of Experts of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development will precede the 55th Session followed by the ministerial segment of the Conference which will deliberate on the development agenda of Africa on the back of a raft of economic and political challenges facing the continent.

Despite high growth rates in the past two decades, which have reduced poverty levels in Africa with the share of the population living in extreme poverty decreasing from 55 to 35 percent between 2000 and 2019, 667 million people still live in extreme poverty in 2022.

ECA's Acting Executive Secretary, Antonio Pedro, said global shocks are turning millions of vulnerable people into the continent's new poor, reversing decades

of progress, citing that the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed an additional 55 million Africans below the poverty line.

Mr. Pedro said even when growth rates were high in Africa, everyone did not benefit equally. For example, between 2004 and 2019, the top 10 percent of wage earners received about 75 percent of total income. High inequality, along with high levels of poverty, creates a vicious cycle in which structural bottlenecks persist, rendering the population in Africa perennially vulnerable to both economic and non-economic shocks.

“The ability of African countries to effectively tackle poverty and inequality is now severely constrained given declining economic growth, narrowing fiscal space, rising debt, commodity shocks and tightening global financial conditions,” said Mr. Pedro, adding that, “The risk of missing the poverty

and inequality targets set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, is higher than it has ever been before.”

The 55th Session of the Commission aims to renew focus and action on reducing poverty, inequality and other factors that have left the African population continuously vulnerable to these scourges.

Mr. Pedro urged that recovery efforts must be pro-poor and inclusive, with a view to fostering a new social contract that offers equal opportunity for all.

Considerable opportunities to reach these goals exist on the continent and beyond, including through activities carried out under the African Continental Free Trade Area, green investments, digital transformation, and reforms to the global financial architecture, he said.