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Photo: Eyob Teferi

## Dialogue Commission witnesses “overwhelming” public support

BY YESUF ENDRIS

**ADDIS ABABA-** The National Dialogue Commission (NDC) said it has witnessed the public’s overwhelming support and participation in its preoperational activities, adding that the participants identification process is well underway.

Speaking to the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA), Commissioner Mohamud Dirir (Amb.) stated that the public demonstrated overwhelming support for the successful conduct of the dialogue and actively engaged in the agenda selection process. “The public

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FDRE Government Communication Service

## Gov't says partners' support vital to ensure lasting peace

BY STAFF REPORTER

**ADDIS ABABA-** The government has called on partners to consolidate support to ensure lasting peace in Ethiopia.

In a statement published on November 6, 2023 by Government Communication Service (GCS) regarding the first anniversary

See Gov't says... page 3

## Czech Premier praises cooperation in aviation industry

BY MESERET BEHAILU

**ADDIS ABABA** –The Czech Republic Prime Minister Peter Falla, who was on a state visit in Ethiopia, praised the success of the two countries’ partnership in the aviation industry.

PM Falla paid a visit to the Headquarters of the Ethiopian Air Force (EAF) in Bishoftu town last Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, the Premier lauded the success of the Czech Republic and Ethiopian aviation professionals’ partnership in the aviation heavy maintenance center for extending the life of

See Czech Premier ... page 3



## Ethiopia implementing 523-million-USD water, sanitation project

### • Commits to restore service in Tigray

BY TSEGAYE TILAHUN

**ADDIS ABABA** - The Ministry of Water and Energy (MoWE) said it has been implementing a 523- million- USD project to improve access to water and sanitation services in 23 cities across the country.

MoWE Sanitation Infrastructure Lead

Executive Officer Nuredin Mohamed told *The Ethiopian Herald* that the ministry has been employing the Second Urban Water Supply and Sanitation project to increase access to basic water supply and sanitation services. The project also helps to improve operational efficiency of water and sanitation utilities in 23 cities.

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# News

## Association endeavors to promote conference tourism

BY MESERET BEHAILU

**ADDIS ABABA** – Ethiopian Tourism and Hotel Market Association stated that it is striving to encourage conference tourism to gain adequate benefit through exploiting potentials.

Approached by *The Ethiopian Herald*, Association President Getahun Alemu said more activities are being undertaken to encourage conference tourism to gain adequate benefit from the field.

The Association together with the Ministry of Tourism has planned to generate over 500,000,000 USD by attracting 1,000,000 tourists this Ethiopian fiscal year.

The association is working closely with other stakeholders such as Ethiopian Airlines and hotels to maximize tourist inflow, Getahun said.

Ethiopia hosts a number of conference tourism such as International Governance Forum in the past year despite the dissemination of misinformation by some foreign media about the country's peace, he stated.

Conversely, he noted that the tourist inflow



in the past year is appreciable and it has promoted the positive image of the nation.

“Currently, the Association is taking the transit passengers to the destinations in the city such as Unity, Friendship, and Entoto Parks to relish. These tourism projects are significantly helpful to motivate the tourism sector in the country. Besides, a common understanding has been reached with the Taxi Association to promote the tourism slogan of Land of Origins and to transport those coming from abroad to attend African Union meetings whilst this service fee covers by the association,” he noted.

Getahun believed that tourists come to

Ethiopia for three reasons such as to attend conferences, to visit historical places, and safari destinations.

He further stated that Ethiopian Tourism and Hotel Award (Nejash Award) will be held in Skylight hotel on December 30 aiming at supporting the area that had been exposed to damage due to the conflict in northern part of the country.

Some 200 potential tourists will observe the area to support renovation activities of the Al Nejashi Mosque, he added.

“Promoting tourism potentials at the international level even using the English



Premier League -the way Rwanda did is significant for tourism development,” he stated, mentioning how Rwanda attracted tourists by promoting the slogan “Visit Rwanda” on the sleeves of the players of Arsenal Football club.

Recently, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) confirmed that Ethiopia is one of the leading countries in the development of international tourism in 2023. The organization has published its quarterly report on the flow of international visitors and related information on Tourism Barometer.

## Leather exporters eyeing gov't support to penetrate int'l market

BY ESSEYE MENGISTE

**ADDIS ABABA**—Ethiopian leather and leather product exporters are looking for the government support to tackle challenges and penetrate the international market.

Although the acceptance of Ethiopian leather product in the international market is increasing, the government should provide support to overcome the challenges in the sector, the exporters said.

Kabana Design PLC CEO and Co-founder Semhal Guesh told the Ethiopia Press Agency (EPA) that the leather market has seen a remarkable improvement after covid-19 pandemic.

“The Ethiopian leather product has great customers at the international market. However, there are some challenges such as lack of quality leather materials, accessories, and zippers for the leather bags we made,” she said.

To give impetus to the industry, Semhal suggested that the government should provide accessories for free or produce them locally to save costs and address Ethiopia's shortage of foreign currency.

This would enable Ethiopia to provide high-quality leather products to the international market and potentially earning foreign currency, she noted.

Her company, Kabana Design is a manufacturing plant which produce and supply leather bags and shoes to the international markets.

She stated that the company is supporting country's plan of becoming a

middle-income country by 2025 through contributing to national GDP, job creation and poverty alleviation efforts.

Kabana Design exports leather bags and shoes to U.S. and Europe markets and it has created some 130 permanent and temporary jobs, Semhal added.

Leather alone cannot be a bag as it needs additional accessories and zippers to become a finished product, she said, adding “We could not find accessories in the domestic market that's why we are importing inputs from abroad.”

Ethio-Leather Industry PLC Marketing Manager Ethiopia Tadesse on her part said that there are great opportunities to promote and sell Ethiopian leather products as it has acceptance at the international market.

“We have been exporting leather products such as shoes, bags, garments, jackets and others to Asian, African, European and American countries including Italy, China and Indonesia for the last 70 years. We are also supplying leather products for domestic market,” Ethiopia said.

She added that the government should support Ethiopia's leather industry by addressing gaps in addressing challenges related to quality issues, accessories, and foreign currency shortages.

Asthiopia Production Manager Tesfaye Beyene expressed that the government has been supporting the sector as it hires a number of employees.

Asthiopia is producing women's bags in various designs and supplying for domestic customers and commenced the process to begin exporting.

## Ethiopia, Czech Republic enjoy excellent cooperation in multifaceted spheres

**ADDIS ABABA** - “The association of the Czech Republic with Ethiopia dates many decades back as we are committed to supporting and empowering Ethiopia's economic potential, Ambassador of Czech Republic to Ethiopia,” Miroslav Kosek said.

Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala arrived at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport for working visit to Ethiopia on last Friday evening, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) received Premier Fiala.

The aim of Prime Minister Fiala's visit is to further strengthen the strategic bilateral ties and cooperation of the Czech Republic with Ethiopia in terms of development and investment among other areas.

In an exclusive interview with ENA, Ambassador Kosek said the bilateral relations between Ethiopia and Czech Republic is very good, describing it “I would say even excellent.”

The Czech Republic's association with Ethiopia in the realm of development dates back many decades, he said, adding they are committed to supporting and empowering Ethiopia's economic potential, striving for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

“We have excellent cooperation in multifaceted spheres,” he said.

The traditional cooperation even before the Second War and then after are going on though excellent cooperation with Ethiopia as the Czech hydrogeologists who have been going on for more than 40 years is a vivid manifestation.

“We are celebrating the presence of our development cooperation in Ethiopia, just these days. It is something to celebrate because there are big achievements you could hear about some results, especially in the field of hydrogeology, protection of the environment and agriculture,” ambassador said.

“We have Ethiopia as number one on our list for development,” he stated.

Moreover, the ambassador added that Czech has been supporting Ethiopia's efforts in mitigating climate change, which this is something we are concentrating on for many years.

Czech promotes comprehensive rural development, including agriculture, focusing on ensuring food security for the population, through protecting the landscape and managing land and forests sustainability, the ambassador said.

The ambassador further said Czech also focuses on sustainable management of natural resources, particularly water, ensuring access to safe and affordable drinking water as well as provision of adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities in Ethiopia.

He also stressed the importance of further strengthening cooperation between the two countries in health, cultural exchange as well as in agriculture, sector again.

“I would like to stress cooperation on health, agriculture and cultural exchange as well because both countries have rich cultures,” he pointed out.

Recalling the big potential in the past where hundreds of Ethiopian students graduated from Czech universities and contributed to the development of their country, the ambassador noted. “We are supporting the Ethiopian students to come to Czech universities again.”

Beyond development cooperation between the two countries, there is also business to business exchange between the two countries.

“We are organizing Ethiopian and Czech business forums in various sectors including health sector, mining sector or from various other sectors. We are preparing a special business forum for the next year again between the Czech companies and Ethiopian companies, especially ...in the mining sector.”

# News

## University, AUC to redouble efforts on value-addition

BY ASHENAFI ANIMUT

**ADDIS ABABA**-Addis Ababa Science and Technology University (AASTU) and the African Union Commission (AUC) devised the way out to leverage research and developments to strengthen the regional value chain for commodities.

Speaking at the workshop held yesterday, AASTU Research and Technology Transfer Vice President Abraham Debebe (PhD) said the university is working with the AUC to realize the benefits of the continent through skill development, entrepreneurship and technology innovation pillars.

The vice president also called for investment that would help to translate research findings and innovations in the area into practice instead of keeping them on the shelves. "We are focusing on one to one alignment as the university is developing its center of excellence and resource sharing including funding to ensure our mutual benefit."

As to him, the university is dedicated towards achieving the commodity strategy via skills and development areas. Besides, there is a transition from longstanding commodity export to value addition.

It was also indicated that the strategy advocates the efficient supply of raw materials as well as intermediate and finished products under the African Continental Free Trade Area.



Industry, Minerals and Entrepreneurship Director at the AUC, Chiza Charles on his part said the strategy would help Africa to tap its rich potential in minerals, agriculture, construction and others. "The commodity is highly valuable to convert these raw materials with research-based innovations and value addition would bring valuable income from the international market."

Moreover, it helps create more market linkages among industries, the private sector and experts in the area. Hence, the university is exerting its utmost efforts towards creating all rounded linkages and this is a huge milestone and needs to be further enhanced globally,

As people undertake value addition, it is central to propel this to create more jobs and to uplift people from poverty and ensure prosperity across the African continent, the director stressed.

## Ethiopia implementing 523-mln-USD ...

About the finance, the officer noted that the World Bank Group allotted over 460 million USD while the balance is secured from other donors.

The ministry has conducted the research that is necessary to translate the project into reality and purchased and distributed different materials to regional states. Now most of the preparation activities have been finalized and the remaining task is the construction of the treatment plant especially for sanitation services. "Now, we are launching the construction."

Nuredin indicated the project would enable the ministry to expand infrastructure, strengthen capacity building and support post construction. Various projects are underway with the support of the government and development partners and they are in different levels of execution.

As part of improving the sanitation services, 1000 public toilets are under construction

across the country.

The officer further highlighted the ministry's focus to resume water and sanitation services and infrastructure projects in Tigray state, which were severely damaged by the conflict. While the ministry purchased electro mechanical devices worth one million USD to resume the service in Mekelle, it has made a similar attempt to Adigrat.

The accomplishment of these activities would give a huge relief for residents and these two cities are part of the Second Urban Water Supply and Sanitation project and beneficiary of post-construction activities.

Emergency approaches such as resource mobilization, infrastructure reparation and service resumption have addressed timely problems in different areas. Moreover, it has been focusing on sustainable solutions in areas affected by the recurrent drought and other natural challenges, he remarked.

## Gov't says partners' support vital to...

of "Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities (CoH)" that it had signed with the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), the government noted that Ethiopia counts on the continued engagement of friends and partners for lasting peace.

According to the statement, the Peace Agreement has been instrumental in silencing the guns and paving the way for the gradual normalization of life in northern Ethiopia.

The government has shown its unwavering commitment to the implementation of the agreement through a number of bold and decisive measures to build trust and consolidate peace, the statement said.

Elaborating the measures it has taken so far, the government expressed that it had put an end to all military operations and hostile rhetoric against the TPLF.

It also stated that it has set up and put into operation a Rehabilitation Commission aimed at facilitating the process of demobilizing and reintegrating ex-TPLF combatants.

"We are finalizing the formulation of a comprehensive National Transitional Justice (TJ) policy to ensure accountability and reconciliation," according to the statement.

Furthermore, the government stated that it has brought the contesting regional states together to find a peaceful and lawful solution to a problem concerning the contested areas which resulted in a clear pathway for the resolution of this issue pursuant to the constitution.

The government takes this opportunity and milestone which affords us to take stock of the situation and appraise Ethiopia's friends and partners on the progress in the implementation of the Peace Agreement, the statement indicated.

However, the Agreement yet not fully implemented as peace needs the commitment of both parties, the statement said noting that keeping combatants remains a challenge.

Similarly, the disarmament process requires an inventory of heavy armaments handed over and a full handing over of small and light arms, which still remain rampant in the region, it mentioned.

It is thus imperative that friends and partners of Ethiopia continue to support and encourage all actors to adhere to the agreement and refrain from behavior that would jeopardize peace and security in Ethiopia, the government noted.

It has also pledged to redouble efforts to consolidate peace and ensure the full implementation of the Peace Agreement.

## Dialogue Commission...

is telling us that the dialogue is a durable and ultimate solution for the country's current and emerging challenges."

The commission has also collected opinions and inputs from civil society organizations, political parties, religious institutions, think tanks and from other societal associations. "We have made consolidated efforts to hold inclusive and participatory preliminary discussions across the country. However, the security challenges in some parts of Ethiopia are hindering such attempts."

Mohamud further noted that the commission has been working tirelessly to make the dialogue participatory and inclusive and to ensure the involvement of all segments of the society in the participant identification process.

About public comments, which the NDC has received so far, he indicated the public understands about the existence of some problems that need the active involvement of every actor. "We have invited scholars,

community leaders, and others to present best mechanisms that could not be comprehended by government officials."

"We have seen many countries fail due to the absence of peaceful resolution mechanisms. Therefore, the dialogue is the living solution to set the roadmap for dispute resolution. It may not end all contentious issues once in a time. But, it is expected to lay the foundation for future dialogues which Ethiopians are in dire need."

Most crises, which Ethiopia experienced in the past years, are a result of failure to bring agendas to discussion. It is crucial to learn from such experiences too, the commissioner emphasized.

Mohamud further mentioned the agreement reached with the Tigray Interim-Administration to establish basic structures needed to conduct the dialogue. "The processes we have been through in the past dialogues are also encouraging."

## Czech Premier praises cooperation...

aircraft and refurbishing them.

He also visited the flight school simulator and capacity building activities and expressed admiration for the progressive journey of the EAL.

Commander of the EAF Lt. General Yilma Merdasa said on the occasion that PM Falla's visit is of great importance in strengthening

institutional ties with the Czech Republic, which is one of the countries with the best reputation in aviation technology in the world.

According to the commander, the visit is also a great benefit to the EAF, which is on a successful journey of transformation through the effective execution of its

mandate and mission.

Similarly, the visit would support the various activities that the EAF has been carrying out to modernize the aviation equipment enhance its combat effectiveness. "Besides, we have benefited from Ethiopia's long-term experience and good relationship with the Czech government in various aviation

technologies," Yilma remarked.

The information obtained from the Ethiopian National Defense Forces social media page indicated that the two countries have agreed to continue capacity building training and other professional cooperation that have been started since the last four years.

# Opinion

## Stakeholders' determination: Inherent for the success of the Ethiopian National Dialogue

BY GETACHEW MINAS

Conducting a national dialogue in countries where reconciliation is impeded by divergent interest groups is the task of Tantalus. The potential success of a national dialogue in a highly volatile political environment may be affected by thorny issues. To achieve success in the endeavor of the National Dialogue Commission, the ruling and opposition parties in Ethiopia must resolve their differing notions of national dialogue before the process begins to end.

The competing issues generated by political parties and the schemes formulated by the national dialogue should be clearly presented. The ruling and the contending parties in Ethiopia have to reckon with past political mistakes that have led to political, economic and social disasters. Their determination to accomplish political goals through a dominant partisan politics, including ethnic, tribal, and clannish ones has, in the past, achieved nothing but hate. A feeling of being oppressed and dominated has become embedded in the Ethiopian political space. Similarly, the ruling party and opposition parties seem to have visions of national dialogue which are utterly opposed. This makes the role of the National Dialogue Commission a difficult one.

Both the ruling and opposition parties expressed their support for dialogue, which is a good political gesture. The dialogue process, however, has to be reasonable, logical and relational, but not necessarily expected to achieve consensus over the fundamental national issues. The mission of the National Dialogue Commission may be devised towards minimizing rather than eliminating differences. This may require an all-inclusive plan to bring armed groups into the dialogue for creating an environment to support the process.

In the process, the Commission may strengthen institutions that promote dialogue. In this process, there is no need to interfere with the efforts of the Commission to invite and include all relevant stakeholders. In this regard, the Commission may design a strategy to improve stakeholders' relations and improve on political splits about procedural matters. Experts observed that divergent positions by political parties are more about the process than disagreements over issues.

A sustained dialogue might help in laying the basis for reconciliation among the diverse groups in Ethiopia. However, experts think that it is not likely for such a dialogue to resolve the political divisions on all the fundamental issues in Ethiopia. They also think that one can hope for a consensus to be reached on democratic solution to political issues. Also, the vast nature of the task of the Commission may require the extension of its term to address all the political issues.

The Commission may redesign and implement a multicultural communication strategy to share the goal, objectives and programs of the dialogue in line with public

expectations. It may have to clarify that the dialogue process is not only designed to reach consensus but to identify and resolve conflicts. In this regard, facilitators have to be selected and tutored on sensitivity to the culture and history of ethnic, tribal and clannish as well as religious communities. The political parties in Ethiopia should reconsider their politicking to reconcile their conflicts peacefully before negotiating with the ruling party and other groups.

Generally speaking, a national dialogue has emerged in Africa, including Ethiopia, as an instrument for minimizing differences in post-conflict and brutally divided societies. African governments initially rejected calls for national dialogue simply because it was deemed that the opposition parties would use it to advance their call for a "transitional government." However, this stance is changed lately and a national dialogue is finally established.

In Ethiopia, the legitimacy of the Commission and the inclusivity of the process have led to the completion of preparatory work. This has been followed by the "dialogue" stage, which has focused on debates in contemporary theories of democracy. Experts have examined the competing conceptual frameworks and political actors across the Ethiopian political arena. During the debates questions have been raised on fundamental political issues. These questions focused on: how the ruling and opposition parties and other stakeholders think of national dialogue; how they envision the conduct of dialogue in a divided society, such as that of Ethiopia; and the need to reconcile the procedural approach with the political reality of the country.

Intergroup dialogues at grassroots level have not yet been applied as the Commission seemed to stick to the procedural approach. Experts, however, argued that all stakeholders must transform issues of conflict into issues of political disagreement. This approach may raise expectations by declaring openly that the process is aimed at forging "national consensus."

It is believed that all stakeholders appreciate the significance of participating in a national dialogue. They may be able to appreciate if their competing ideas contribute to a consensus. Experts believe that competing concepts could further deepen the political difference if they fail to reconcile their approaches. As usual, stakeholders and national elites have questioned the neutrality of the Commissioners and are critical about the independence of the Commission. They have, however, done little about the issues they have raised regarding the process and outcome of the national dialogue.

Reconsidering the concept and initiation of national dialogue, it is a fairly recent political issue in African politics. What is a novelty is that the subject has reemerged as a tool of conflict resolution in severely divided societies. After the cold-war era the resurgence of ethnic politics "exposed" the limits of representative democracy and

the classical liberal political order. The opponents of liberal and individualistic political ideas have challenged the "politics of difference." Hence, the political scientists introduced concepts of politics of recognition and multicultural citizenship.

The politics of reconciliation and conflict management are now being consolidated to find solutions in divided societies. The modernization and advancement of literature as a means of mass communication contributed to making the Ethiopian public more aware of critical developments. However, the proliferation of radio, TV, Internet and other commercial mass media lowered the quality of public debate. The domination of party politics and the mass media as the sole conduit for discourse on matters of public policy in Ethiopia made the public a "passive" consumer. This development and the resultant intrusive nature of the political parties into the public domain contributed to the eventual collapse of public discourse at grassroots level.

To encourage public discourse, the concerned political parties have to express the need for facilitation to lead the process. All parties must appreciate that conflict is a fact of social life and struggle among contenders is not avoidable. National dialogue, in these circumstances, should be considered as a means to transform violence into minor differences and ultimately to democracy.

Dialogue is the only battleground on which differences are fought out politely. The Commission, the ruling and opposition parties should reconcile their concept of dialogue. Also stakeholders should be ready for a sustained and polite dialogue. Given the severity of the political divide in Ethiopia and its potential for endless violence, all the concerned political entities should ensure that the process of dialogue is respectful and result oriented.

The Ethiopian political challenges are animated by the so-called collective memories and communal tensions. Experts believe that these are predicated on competing identities. Consequently, the chances of resolving differences on fundamental national issues through national dialogue become idealistic, unless competing identities are diluted.

Reaching a consensus on political issues through dialogue is a formidable challenge. Thus, the concerned parties should prepare themselves for moderating their expectation from the dialogue. It is imperative to use the opportunity of dialogue as a moment of reckoning with the past. It helps to lay the foundation for an all-rounded reconciliation among Ethiopians, including political elites. It results in understanding the concerns of other entities while managing political differences.

The ruling and opposition parties should, therefore, take the opportunity to: jointly manage adamant identity conflicts between ethnic groups; create a consensus between elites on democracy as the sole principle of resolving political differences; avoid resolving any differences among political

parties without prior settlement of inter-communal tensions and conflicts. These functions of the Ethiopian political parties are predicated on paying respect to the goal, objectives, mandate and program of the Commission. At the same time the Commission should avoid a dogmatic approach, if there is any, to assert legitimacy, credibility and authority.

Experts advocate for the exercise of the authority of the Commission. It has to use its powers legitimately and judiciously to secure peace, law and order. It should protect the civic and political rights of citizens in view of its mission. These experts also propose that the Ethiopian government may amend the proclamation if the need arises. In so doing, it may give the Commission the mandate to "ensure" the implementation of the outcomes of the national dialogue process.

It is also suggested that the Commission may conduct a "horizontal, sustained, intense and relational" dialogue among conflicting communities at grassroots level. It may also conduct a deliberative dialogue among political elites at both local and national levels about issues to be mutually agreed upon. Experts have also suggested that it may redesign its own existing rules and procedures on reporting of issues on the media. It is also proposed that the Commission may work actively with the ruling and opposition parties to bring conflicting political issues to a peaceful resolution.

Several suggestions have been made to create a national advisory council that comprises gender, political, ethnic and religious representatives. This council may provide advice on social issues. It has also been suggested to mandate either the Commission or another independent organ to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission. It is suggested that the media should avoid antagonistic communication and concentrate on discussing peace and stability in the country.

Moreover, it is proposed that the national dialogue becomes a "national preoccupation." The media should be in a position to manage public expectations about the objectives and outcomes of the dialogue. In other words, the local media should ensure that local communities are informed about the dialogue initiative and they participate in the process. The media has to focus on reporting the reviving significance of the national dialogue. It may focus on the Ethiopian Diaspora community for applying pressure on all conflicting parties to ensure that the negotiation processes strengthen the national dialogue process. Both the Diaspora and local communities may fully shore up the National Dialogue Commission with inspirations and initiatives without endangering its independence.

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

# Editorial

# Opinion

## Exemplary achievement in tourism sector

The Ethiopian government has so far been revamping regional tourist destinations, restoring historical sites as well as building new potential areas like Hallala Kella, Koysha, Wonchi, Gorgora, and others in a bid to attract more tourists from continental and global circumferences.

Born to the farsighted vision of the Prime Minister, the 'Dine for Sheger', 'Dine for the Nation', 'Dine for Generation,' and other united efforts have made Ethiopia the most preferable tourist destinations in the continent these days. Even the UNWTO has recently attested this fact.

All these promising tasks have helped Ethiopia in particular and the African continent and the globe in general bring about safe ecotourism and reinforce the tourism sector at a sustainable manner. Not only does this positive stride enable the country to be a desirable continental tourism destination but it also helps build a climate resilient economy across the continent and beyond. True, Ethiopia has so far been in a position to secure billions of dollars in spite of some social, economic and political challenges, which can be handled at its disposal.

The government has also expanded conference tourism as the country has once again become keenly aware of its immense tourism potential to help itself seize the tipping point of progress—a journey towards prosperity and real transformation.

Ethiopia has currently been selected as one of the most preferable tourist destinations in Africa and beyond. Such a rewarding achievement has never been recorded out of the blue, but demanding efforts have been exerted to help the country reach at this level.

A lot has been done despite some challenges compromising the country's endeavor towards real growth and prosperity like sporadic skirmishes in some parts of the country.

The country has taken the lead in attracting international tourists, and the tourist inflow to the country has been sharply rising. The very thing that has to be well taken into consideration here is there are many notable community tourism initiatives in various parts of the county, which need to be well focused on.

The Government of Ethiopia is currently implementing a number of strategic measures to further develop the country's tourism sector, including investment in infrastructure and capacity building on destination management. These measures reflect how tourism is firmly established among the development drivers of the country, and the commitment of the government to make sustainability a priority in future tourism progress.

Ethiopia is endowed with rich historical relics which, combined with the hospitality of our people, make it viable for tourism. The government has lined up capable professionals to work within the industry and there is the right political will in place to contribute towards tourism.

The steps being taken by Ethiopia, namely enhancing the protection and conservation of tourist attractions, expanding the tourism infrastructure, establishing a tourism marketing organization and increasing education and training institutions in the field of tourism, will surely make tourism a pillar of the growth of Ethiopia.

Collaborated efforts are being exerted for boosting natural, historical and cultural resources to strengthen the tourism sector, identifying the potential value-chain gaps and intervening to allay these gaps based on tangible and scientific training jointly with the private sector and the international tourism community.

In sum, confidently making the country highly benefited out of the untapped tourism sector should not be left only to the government or line ministries and other concerned bodies as it badly requires the combined effort of all. Together, it is possible to make the tourism sector one of the leading economic sectors of Ethiopia as the great deeds done so far are living proofs in this regard. Hence, reinforcing collaboration in the areas of tourism has to come to the forefront to make Ethiopia a well-developed nation in the years to come.

## Landlocked Ethiopia wants better sea access

BY NAMHLA MATSHANDA

Ethiopia's access to the coast has occupied the minds of the country's rulers since time immemorial. This is because being landlocked undermines Ethiopia's ability to grow its economy, develop its military (navy force) and exert influence across the Horn of Africa.

We see this preoccupation in the history of Ethiopia and Eritrea. In 1952, Eritrea – a coastal country – was controversially federated into Ethiopia. Failure to maintain this annexation led to Eritrean independence in 1993 and Ethiopia became a landlocked country once again. This was a major blow for the new administration that had taken over political power in 1991. For the new government this translated into some limitations on their economic and political goals for the country.

As a scholar of African politics, I have researched Ethiopia and its relations with its neighbors, including its internal conflict, political reforms, national identity, state building and border tensions.

There is no doubt that Ethiopia's lack of direct access to the sea has constrained its ability to cater for its large population and hindered economic growth and development. Politically, being landlocked limits Ethiopia's geostrategic options in the Horn of Africa and beyond.

Ethiopia has several options for peaceful access to the sea. All of them could have a positive economic impact not only in Ethiopia but across the region. The options include further engagement with Eritrea, Djibouti and Somaliland on equitable terms for the use of their ports.

The Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor with Kenya – which is still in its early phases – could also be a game-changer in the region if built to completion.

Ethiopia is one of the fastest growing economies on the continent. It also has a large population, estimated at around 126 million and projected to grow at about 2.7 percent a year. This indicates a big market and many needs to be met.

Economic development became central to fiscal and economic planning and projections in the period between 2000 and 2012. But lack of direct coastal access became a notable obstacle to Ethiopia's efforts to achieve middle-income status via export-oriented industrialization.

At one time Eritrea's Assab port handled 70 percent of Ethiopia's trade.

At present Ethiopia's imports and exports mainly pass via the port of Djibouti.

Reliance on Djibouti has proved costly and unsustainable, however, leading Addis to search for alternatives.

Peaceful access to the coast would depend on its relationships with its neighbors. Some have been strained, others harmonious.

Since 1991, Ethiopia has been on a path of regional domination, aided by its economic dominance in the region and in Africa. This was interrupted by its war with Eritrea between 1998 and 2000, which remained unresolved until 2018. The conflict limited but did not end Ethiopia's political ambitions in the region, as seen in the country's foreign policy since the early 1990s. Addis has appeared willing to get its own way in the region by whatever means.

Ethiopia continues to host the African Union and has been an active and dominant member of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, a regional organization. Since 2018, the country's foreign policy has taken a conciliatory tone. We see this in the rapprochement with Eritrea following a peace deal that restored relations between the two states after two decades of conflict. This suggests a shift from a rigid security-focused foreign policy to a more pragmatic approach to issues that include diplomacy, climate change, migration, terrorism and access to the sea.

Because of its history and geopolitical position, Ethiopia has the potential to be a force for either stability or instability in the region. Finding a peaceful way to improve coastal access would make it a force for stability.

If Ethiopia opted for a forceful approach this would add fuel to a fire. Countries in the region, including Ethiopia, are currently battling various internal conflicts, with real potential to spill over.

Despite the fact of being landlocked, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has sought to revive the country's navy, suggesting grand ambitions for the country's armed forces.

There is no way forceful access to the coast would be a feasible option for Ethiopia.

The country is already engaged in negotiations with Djibouti and Kenya for more equitable terms for the use of their coasts. Peaceful and mutually beneficial agreements with any of the neighboring countries will have positive outcomes for all. Ethiopia would still emerge stronger, and would continue on its economic growth path.

*\*Namhla Matshanda is Senior Lecturer, Political Studies at University of the Western Cape*

**Editor's Note: The author of this article is Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia**



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The Ethiopian Herald

# Business & Economy

## Cooperatives: Means for driving economic growth with equity, inclusion

BY MENGESHA AMARE

It has been customary in Ethiopia that a number of combinations and unities are formed to create wealth and investment. For instance, cooperatives have helped citizens, particularly members; reduce poverty and inequality by providing economic opportunities, ensuring production continuity and supporting maintainable husbandry.

Agricultural cooperatives can play a significant role in managing the environment, securing sustainable communities and economies across the nation, region, and continent and even beyond. That is why cooperatives are widely set up and come to the forefront, be they are agricultural and non-agricultural ones, to play a crucial role in achieving sustainable development and real growth.

Taking this notion into account, *The Ethiopian Herald* had recently a stay with Amanuel Mathewos, an agro economist graduated from Dilla University and working for a private company as a cooperative management consultant, to gather ample information about cooperatives' role in boosting economic progress, expanding entrepreneurship and backing as well as attracting investment.

He said, "There are four tiers of cooperatives: primary cooperative, cooperative unions, cooperative federation and cooperative confederation. Their contribution to sustainable economic progress, investment and job creation is attested quite vital as they help ensure production continuity, sustainable agricultural production and wealth equality thereby improving work and quality of life by providing their respective members and employees with the opportunity to access quality education and training activities."

Apart from this move, cooperatives would also contribute a lot to the effort geared towards sustaining the environment by performing activities thereby reducing environmental pollution and protecting natural resources.

Sustainable management of the economy by supporting sustainable production and consumption, adopting sustainable technologies, such as improved seeds, organic fertilizers and smart farming practices are attributable to the success of cooperatives.

"They have to be well expanded as instruments to defeat poverty and inequality. Though cooperatives are of paramount importance in helping the society and the nation at large combat poverty, they have been facing a number of barricades in due course of smoothly running all rounded activities. These challenges include the gender gaps in employment, lack of women leadership, absence of training, shortage of research and development investments, among others," he opined.

Cooperative model of enterprise has as an intrinsic feature of forming purpose driven networks, too. The potential to impact the socio-economic transformation as cooperative networks are part and parcel of their lasting progress and change.



The impact of cooperative inter-cooperation and collaboration within the social solidarity economy and beyond is significant in terms of economic growth, investment promotion and raising entrepreneurship.

Besides, cooperative value chains add value of mutuality, with equitable income distribution as one of its outcomes. Cooperatives are prone to incongruent isomorphism due to a lack of understanding of their nature, regulatory pressures, competitive pressures on cooperative leadership, and other factors, he added.

As to Amanuel, one of the most significant aspects of Ethiopia's economy is cash flow. When a large amount of cash is flowing through a community, it can grow, create more jobs and diminish the poverty rate.

As to him, when a member of the community purchases a product or service from a business, their money flows to the business. For-profit businesses will typically take a fraction of the profit and invest it back into the enterprise to keep it running. Cooperatives all over the world continue serving the communities better, bringing more jobs, lowering poverty rates and ensuring even wealth distribution. It is strongly believed that cooperatives should work together with other citizen-run groups to create a genuinely equitable, inclusive and democratic economy.

Amanuel said, "Cooperative economic growth is possible in any environment. From rural to urban, big to small, or wealthy to impoverished, cooperative businesses can operate successfully and flourish into a critical asset of the community. Not only can all cooperatives provide citizens with a versatility of undertakings but they are also instrumental in reinvigorating eco-friendly investment."

Cooperative's intention and capacity for growth and social inclusion is also worth considering as they are well placed to promote self-help, democratic processes, and for putting economic power in the hands of marginalized populations, he added.

Yes, the path towards sustainable and inclusive development requires the concerted

effort of all he said adding that there is a need for strong investment by governments, civil society and the private sector forging effective partnerships that make the most of the sector operators effective.

Cooperatives thus play a key role in health and social care, access to financial services as well as water and energy provision in rural areas across the nation.

Cooperatives have been widely benefiting the farming community, too

They also support more inclusive and equal trade relations and value chains through their engagement in alternative forms of trade, such as fair trade, and contribute to a low-carbon economy through innovative approaches, he opined.

In this era when many people feel powerless to change their lives, cooperatives represent a strong, vibrant, and viable economic alternative. Cooperatives are formed to meet peoples' mutual needs. They are based on the powerful idea that together, a group of people can achieve goals that none of them could achieve alone, he said.

"Cooperatives are community-based, rooted in democracy, flexible, and have participatory involvement, which makes them well suited for economic development. The process of developing and sustaining a cooperative involves the processes of developing and promoting community spirit, identity and social organization as cooperatives play an increasingly important role in poverty reduction, facilitating job creation, economic growth and social development," he added.

In a number of ways, cooperatives play important role in global and national economic and social development.

In Ethiopia, cooperatives can provide locally needed services, employment, circulate money locally and contribute to a sense of community or social cohesion.

"The central role of cooperatives should be making an instrumental contribution to transformational move via three primary pathways, economic pathway—for alleviating poverty; stimulating economic growth; democratic pathway—for providing a framework for democratic participation and Social pathway—for building social capital and trust and bridging ethnic, religious and

political divides as well as providing social services."

To capitalize on these successes, a forward looking continental and international network of researchers and practitioners is needed to bring new analytical and practical methods to the advancement of cooperative development in the global economy and dispel outmoded assumptions about cooperatives.

Besides, cooperatives can create linkages to other investment opportunities. These inclusive investment moves combine the strengths of the investor—bringing capital, technology and expertise in management and marketing—with those of local farmers who provide labor, land, traditional know-how and knowledge of local conditions, he remarked.

Cooperatives are key economic players for improving food security. The challenge is to build self-reliant organizations that operate efficiently within a market economy and contribute to improving incomes, creating employment opportunities and integrating small producers. The central characteristic of cooperatives—is crucial in attracting foreign investment.

The cooperative form of company and entrepreneurship also needs to be an extensive use throughout the country, and the significance of cooperatives has also been proved useful in organizing other economic activities among the society, particularly within the social economy of the third sector between the private and public spheres, Amanuel said.

According to him, cooperatives are values-driven and principles-based enterprises, and therefore, sustainable development is part of their nature. These principles and values, such as equity, solidarity, democratic management and commitment to the environment, constitute a series of guidelines that value human beings over capital and are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which represent basic principles related to the environmental, political and economic challenges facing the community, among others. The main role played by cooperatives in fulfilling the SDGs has recently been recognized, and it has also been demonstrated in the economic arena that cooperatives are particularly aligned with the SDGs.

He further elucidated that cooperative firms are configured as an optimal business alternative to meet these challenges. They are business organizations whose management is designed to benefit all stakeholders.

As to Amanuel, cooperatives are organized to engender and sustain multiple benefits for the involved stakeholders and members, while contributing to local sustainable development, and they can play an important role in the implementation of sustainable development goals.

In a nutshell, cooperatives are models that incorporate a desire to serve the stakeholders in their mission. They must therefore, adopt a sustainable development strategy that can represent an effective alternative to the dominant model, capable of comprehensively responding to the socio-economic challenges of the era that prevail across the developing world in particular.

# In the Sphere of Diplomacy

## Promoting knowledge exchange through public diplomacy

BY EYUEL KIFLU

Ethiopia's diplomatic relations with various countries have been growing stronger over time, encompassing multiple sectors. These ties have not only opened doors for economic and political collaborations but have also offered educational opportunities for Ethiopian citizens as well. Many Ethiopian students are studying and working abroad in international educational institutes and organizations.

In recent years, the Ethiopian government has been actively working to reform the country's education sector, aiming to enhance the quality of the sector and foster students' abilities and creativity. International scholarship programs have played a crucial role in supporting these efforts. Currently, there are estimated to be over 8,000 Ethiopian students studying in different countries.

With its rapidly growing economy, Ethiopia requires well-trained professionals across various sectors, particularly in the field of technology. The country's educational advancements and international scholarships are vital in driving tangible economic and technological progress. In pursuit of these goals, Ethiopia has been actively engaged in public diplomacy and cultural exchanges with many countries. The country, in particular, has established a longstanding relationship with China in various domains.

Addis' relations with Beijing go beyond political and economic ties, as many Ethiopian students have travelled to the latter to pursue their studies. The Chinese government has provided numerous scholarship opportunities for Ethiopian students, enabling them to acquire knowledge and skills that they can later contribute to their home country. It is known that China is giving scholarship for many Ethiopian students annually.

The Chinese Ambassador to Ethiopia, Zhao Zhiyuan, highlighted in his Ethiopian New Year Congratulatory Message that 225 students and 710 officials from Ethiopia, sponsored by the Chinese government, have pursued their studies in China.

"China and Ethiopia have developed a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership and education cooperation is one of the most important cooperation fields, playing an important role in our bilateral cooperation," Zhao said months ago on a farewell party organized by the Chinese Embassy in Ethiopia for Ethiopian students receiving Chinese government scholarships for the 2023/24 academic year.

Abdulkadir Kubi, a graduate student in International Communication at the Communication University of China (CUC), shared his insights with *The Ethiopian Herald* regarding what he has



learned from China. He emphasized the amicable relations between the two nations, which have strengthened over time through public diplomacy. As both Ethiopia and China are developing nations, they can share experiences and knowledge. Ethiopia can particularly benefit from China's economic achievements over the past three decades. Beijing's continuous advancements in various fields, including technology, offer valuable lessons for Ethiopia's own progress.

China's success in producing educated citizens has significantly contributed to its economic growth. Abdulkadir believes that Ethiopia can learn from China's approach to education, as a well-educated population can play a crucial role in national development. The scholarships provided by China to Ethiopian students not only contribute to the number of highly educated citizens but also foster stronger public diplomacy between the two nations. When Ethiopian students pursue their education in China, they gain valuable knowledge and skills.

Additionally, they are exposed to various technological developments, which can inspire them to drive similar progress in their home country. Furthermore, China's academic curriculum includes education on culture, history, and languages, strengthening people-to-people relations and enabling a first-hand understanding of China that can be shared with families, communities, and the media in Ethiopia, Abdulkadir, said.

China's remarkable development journey, from agricultural transformation to industrial and technological revolutions, offers important lessons for Ethiopia.

China's investment in innovation, committed citizens, and leadership has allowed it to achieve food security, develop modern infrastructure, and revolutionize its economy. Ethiopia, too, is striving to digitize its financial system, and it can draw inspiration from China's successful implementation of e-payment systems.

Encouraging and supporting initiatives such as Ethio-Telecom's expansion of services can contribute to the widespread adoption of cashless transactions, saving time and energy while promoting economic growth.

Abdulkadir was impressed by the strong work ethic he observed among the Chinese people during his stay in Beijing. Their dedication to hard work and patriotism has been instrumental in China's rapid growth. He believes that Ethiopians can learn from the Chinese example and improve their lives by drawing lessons from their forefathers, rather than dwelling on past accomplishments without tangible progress.

Gebreyesus Haileselassie, another Ethiopian MA graduate, shared his experience at the Communication University of China. He chose to study international communication as it aligned with his work as a public servant. He discovered that China's development surpassed his initial expectations, especially in terms of technological and infrastructural advancements. Gebreyesus also debunked assumptions about Chinese food culture, emphasizing that it is not vastly different from what other nations consume.

Gebreyesus said that the Chinese people economic and technological advancements were once similar with Ethiopia. However, by making use of their resources, China

was able to achieve rapid transformation. The primary element is their awareness of their identity and possessions. Also, they have a lengthy history of being a part of the ancient world's civilization like Ethiopia. However, they advanced their economy and raised people's standard of living by using this history. Instead of boasting in vain about what our ancestors accomplished, Ethiopians should take this as a lesson and use it to build the country.

"My thoughts about China after spending almost a year in Beijing are primarily focused on its security, rapid economic development, particularly in the areas of technology (e-payments, Chinese social media), infrastructure (underground bridges, bullet trains), and national mind-set (shared vision)" he concluded.

Both Abdulkadir and Gebreyesus' experiences highlight the transformative power of scholarship opportunities in strengthening people-to-people relations and facilitating knowledge and cultural exchanges between both nations. Through these collaborations, the two countries can learn from each other's successes and drive progress in their respective societies.

Economic relations between the two nations are continuously improving, and a majority of Chinese investors are backing Ethiopia's industrial sector. Ethiopia's investment-friendly climate, particularly in the agriculture sector, is still unexplored. If the Chinese investors work on it in Ethiopia, they might have a good chance, which would be advantageous to both nations. If more Chinese wanted to invest in Ethiopia, the government's eagerness to receive foreign capital could make the process easier.

# Law & Politics



## Ethiopia's interest on Red Sea: An opportunity not a threat

BY ADDISALEM MULAT

Ethiopia's landlocked status has been a barrier to its trade and development limiting its potential for growth and prosperity. By granting Ethiopia sea access, neighboring countries can foster mutually beneficial economic partnerships and contribute to the overall stability and development of the region.

Ethiopia's access to the sea will undoubtedly accelerate its economic growth, but it is also important to note that the benefits extend beyond the country. The neighboring countries that may contribute to granting Ethiopia sea access will also experience significant economic development. This mutually beneficial relationship will lead to an increase in per capita income not only for Ethiopia but for the entire region.

Granting Ethiopia sea access demonstrates regional solidarity and cooperation. By supporting Ethiopia's economic aspirations, neighboring countries can foster a sense of unity and shared goals. This positive environment will encourage further collaboration in various sectors leading to increased regional stability, peace, and improved living standards for all citizens reflected in higher per capita incomes.

Ethiopia's request for sea access should be seen as an opportunity to enhance regional integration and cooperation. By enabling Ethiopia to have direct access to the sea, neighboring countries can create a more connected and prosperous region. This would facilitate the movement of goods, services, and people leading to increased trade volumes and economic exchanges that will benefit all parties involved.

By addressing challenges faced by Ethiopia, neighboring countries can demonstrate their commitment to fostering a vibrant and interconnected African economy. This, in turn, will attract more regional and international investors, stimulate job creation, and fuel economic growth throughout the region.

Neighboring countries should recognize the potential for increased trade and investment opportunities that come with granting Ethiopia sea access. Ethiopia's large population and rapidly growing economy make it an attractive market for goods and services. By allowing Ethiopia to access the sea, neighboring countries can tap into this market, expand their export bases, and diversify their economies leading to increased investment and economic benefits for all parties involved.

Ethiopia views access to the sea as a vital factor in ensuring the survival and wellbeing of its citizens. It is no longer seen as a luxury but as a necessity, given the country's growing population and demand for resources. Access to the sea would also allow Ethiopia to diversify its economy, create jobs, and tap into the potential of the economy. The government's efforts to secure access to the sea indicate that Ethiopia has a long-term vision for its growth and prosperity.

With sea access, Ethiopia can import raw materials at lower costs, establish industries that rely on global supply chains, and produce finished goods for export. Neighboring countries can benefit from this by supplying raw materials to Ethiopia providing technical expertise and participating in joint ventures that capitalize on Ethiopia's competitive advantage in sectors such as textiles, leather goods, and agro-processing.

Granting Ethiopia sea access can facilitate the importation of fertilizer, advanced farming technologies and high-quality seeds which will enhance agricultural productivity and contribute to food self-sufficiency. Neighboring countries can support this by sharing their expertise in agriculture, providing access to markets for Ethiopian agricultural products and collaborating on research and development initiatives.

Through collaborations in the energy sector, Ethiopia and neighboring countries can harness their collective resources to meet the increasing energy demands of the region. Ethiopia's potential for hydropower generation and other renewable energy sources could be harnessed to provide electricity to both Ethiopia and neighboring countries. By working together, these countries can establish energy interconnections and develop a reliable and sustainable energy network that benefits the entire region.

By supporting Ethiopia's request for sea access, neighboring countries can contribute to the socioeconomic development of Ethiopia reducing the potential for conflicts arising from economic disparities and grievances rooted in inequality. By actively pursuing sea access, Ethiopia can overcome the challenges posed by its landlocked status and pave the way for a prosperous and sustainable future.

Access to the sea enables countries to engage in international trade, facilitating the movement of goods and services across borders. By utilizing shipping routes and establishing ports, nations can boost their economies and create jobs through increased imports and exports. This not only benefits

individual nations but also fosters global economic growth.

By the same token, access to the sea promotes tourism attracting visitors from around the world. Coastal areas often offer scenic beauty, diverse marine ecosystems, and recreational activities. By capitalizing on these resources, countries can develop thriving tourism industries, generating revenue and employment opportunities. This symbiotic relationship between coastal regions and visitors fosters economic growth leading to prosperity for both tourists and the local population.

Access to the sea is of paramount importance for Ethiopia, not only in the present but also for future development and prosperity. As a landlocked country, Ethiopia faces significant challenges in terms of trade, transportation, and accessing global markets. However, by establishing maritime access, Ethiopia can unlock a plethora of economic opportunities that will drive sustainable growth and enhance its position on the global stage.

Through international agreements, countries can establish fair and equitable access to the sea preventing conflicts over maritime boundaries. These agreements promote cooperation, collaboration, and diplomatic relations among nations. By respecting one another's rights and sharing resources, countries can maintain peace and stability.

Another aspect of the win-win nature of sea access is the potential for technological advancements and innovation. Countries with coastal access can develop and implement cutting-edge technologies for various sectors like shipping, renewable energy, marine engineering, and fisheries. This technological progress can stimulate economic growth and drive global innovation.

The demand for sea access encourages investment in coastal infrastructure development. Building modern port facilities, improving transportation networks, and establishing maritime security measures create employment opportunities and stimulate economic growth. These investments also enhance a country's ability to respond effectively to natural disasters and provide assistance during emergencies.

From a strategic perspective, sea access provides Ethiopia with a stronger geopolitical position. It enables the country to actively participate in regional and international affairs fostering political alliances, partnerships, and diplomatic relations. By being connected to global maritime networks, Ethiopia can enhance its influence, strengthen its voice in

international forums and promote its national interests on a broader scale.

The granting of sea access to Ethiopia can lead to increased tourism opportunities in the region. Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage, historical sites, and diverse landscapes are attractive to tourists worldwide. By having sea access, Ethiopia can develop coastal tourism destinations, offering visitors the chance to explore pristine beaches, engage in water sports, and experience unique marine ecosystems. This would not only benefit Ethiopia but also create opportunities for collaboration and entrepreneurship in the tourism industry across the region.

Ethiopia's request for access to the sea is based on a win-win approach and mutual economic benefit, Industry Minister Melaku Alebel said.

In an exclusive interview with ENA, the minister noted that the economic perspective should weigh much more than its political perspective in Ethiopia's legitimate demand for access to the sea.

The neighboring countries with access to sea should consider the country's request as economic benefit, not a threat.

Ethiopia will of course benefit from access to sea to further accelerate its economic growth; but this will not only develop Ethiopia. Certainly, the per capita income of the other countries will also increase as a result, the minister stated.

"The direction set is on win-win basis and in ways that ensure mutual economic benefit of all the countries. This option should (therefore) be taken as a priority by the countries; and I don't think they should see it as a threat."

Noting that access to sea is important for Ethiopia not only for now but also for the future, Melaku noted that "these countries can benefit more than Ethiopia by providing port access."

According to the minister, Ethiopia's GDP has been doubling within a short time, and countries that provide port services (for the country) should consider it as a blessing because the countries can get economic benefits which they cannot achieve.

Melaku underscored that "the objective (of Ethiopia) is not war, it's not about politics. The objective is peace and sustainable economic development based on fair mutual benefit."

The Red Sea coastline has the potential to adequately accommodate ports for 40 countries, the minister said, adding that the issue then should be ensuring mutual benefit through concession.



# Society

## Transformative Training: Influencing environment and epidemiology

BY TEKLE TESFALIDET

Today, the world, including Africa, has been facing significant environmental challenges, and Ethiopia is no exception. Different studies show that Ethiopia is grappling with various environmental health issues such as air pollution, water contamination, vector-borne diseases, and food safety concerns. Consequently, the people of Ethiopia, like their fellow Africans, are at risk of contracting diseases associated with these environmental factors. Due to inadequate access to safe drinking water in numerous regions of the country, waterborne diseases like cholera and diarrheal illnesses persist as significant concerns for the reason these challenges have a direct impact on public health, necessitating efficient regulation and enforcement measures to mitigate associated risks.

Furthermore, all of the aforementioned issues are interconnected with climate change. Ethiopia experiences the effects of climate change, including heat waves, droughts, crop failures, and floods. These environmental changes not only affect the availability of food and water but also indirectly impact public health. The scarcity of food and water resources can lead to malnutrition leading to increased susceptibility to diseases, and other health consequences.

Recently, an extensive four-day training program was held in Bishoftu Town with the aim of equipping researchers at the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) with the essential skills and knowledge needed to effectively address environmental and epidemiological challenges in Ethiopia. By comprehending the underlying causes of environmental challenges, participants can contribute towards the implementation and development of suitable strategies aimed at effectively combating air pollution, water and vector-borne diseases, as well as concerns related to food safety, thereby making a significant and measurable impact.

According to the organizers, the training has the purpose of equipping public health officers and professionals with vital skills to identify and address emerging environmental health threats. It is aimed to enable them to provide accurate data and information to high-level officials, facilitating informed decision-making and the development of evidence-based policies for implementing effective disease prevention interventions. The comprehensive course ensures an engaging learning experience that encompasses all



Participants of the training

facets of environmental epidemiology and exposure assessment, making it a valuable resource for professionals in the field.

Opening the program, Getachew Tollera (MD), Deputy Director General of EPHI said: "Today, we proudly launch the Environmental Epidemiology and Exposure Assessment Training, which is part of the 'Building Stronger Public Health Institutions and Systems' (BIS) collaboration agreement, aimed at building institutional capacities in environmental health." The training, according to him, is organized to build the capacity of EPHI staff in environmental epidemiology and exposure assessment, as part of the BIS institutional capacity building efforts.

Furthermore, it aims to foster public health capacities at four levels: enhancing the capability, knowledge, and skills of public health workers at the individual level; supporting the systems and knowledge of local public health institutions at the institutional level; aligning policy with public health functions at the national level; and facilitating collaboration and learning among national systems at the global and regional level.

Enhancing the active involvement of participants through a carefully designed mix of theoretical and practical activities is also the other intent of the training.

Participants have expressed that the training has been instrumental in enhancing their research skills and deepening their understanding of the significance of selecting an appropriate study design to ensure accurate and timely data collection. They have noticed a positive impact on

their research approach, attributing it to improved data collection methods, statistical analysis techniques, and a heightened awareness of the relationship between environmental factors and public health outcomes.

This newfound knowledge has empowered them to provide more informed recommendations to government officials regarding effective interventions.

Researcher at EPHI and participant of the training Tsigereda Assefa highlighted the training's value. "The training has imparted essential knowledge to researchers, covering crucial topics such as environmental epidemiology, environmental exposure assessment, assessment methodologies, research ethics, and data management."

Senior Researcher at EPHI and the other trainee, Kirubel Tesfaye, also shared his perspective towards the training. "The environmental and epidemiology training has enriched my research skills by enhancing my ability to analyze and interpret data related to exposure assessment and disease investigation, thereby bolstering my professional development."

Closing the four-day training program, Masresha Tessema (PhD), Director of the Food Science and Nutrition Research Directorate (FSNRD), emphasized the importance of the training for young researchers, who, he said, face daily challenges. He said that the training was unique for its focus on environmental issues like air pollution, climate change, sanitation, waste management, and

urbanization, which are currently causing health hazards to the Ethiopian people.

Masresha expressed deep gratitude to the Norwegian Institute of Public Health (NIPH), BIS, and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) for their support. He also thanked the instructors for their efficient knowledge-sharing, without whom, he said, this training program would not have been possible.

In the training, which was jointly organized by EPHI and NIPH in collaboration with the BIS program, 25 researchers, including six women, who are actively engaged at the Ethiopian Public Health Institute, took place.

During the training days, participants were also actively engaged in daily group work discussions, case study analysis, and presentations.

The training program, in addition to senior professionals from the Ethiopian Institute of Public Health (EPHI), involved scholars from around the world, including from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health (NIPH) and the Nigerian Institute of Medical Research (NIMR).

The training on environment and epidemiology held in Bishoftu Town was undeniably valuable. Given the ongoing environmental and epidemiological issues faced by our country, these training sessions are crucial. Producing well-trained professionals is necessary to address health problems resulting from environmental challenges. Therefore, it is vital to ensure the continuity of such training.

# Planet Earth

## Mitigating the adverse effects of soil acidity

BY FIKADU BELAY

Ethiopia's agricultural sector plays a vital role in its economy, employing a significant portion of the population and contributing to both food security and export revenues.

In a society where agriculture is the primary source of employment, it offers food security, industry inputs, job opportunities, and other advantages. Ethiopia's diverse climate, unique topography, and rich soils enable a wide range of agricultural pursuits.

Ethiopia's agricultural industry consists of both commercial and subsistence farming, with an emphasis on cash crops, livestock production, agro-forestry, and staple crops. Both modern methods and technologies and age-old practices that have been passed down through the generations have an impact on the agricultural practices of the country. However, the fact that acidic soils are common in many areas is an obstacle for Ethiopian farmers.

The acidic soils in Ethiopia are most commonly found in highland areas, including parts of the Rift Valley, the central and northern highlands, and some regions in the southwest. These acidic soils pose significant challenges to agricultural productivity and can have detrimental effects on crop growth and nutrient availability.

The nation has roughly 16 million arable lands, of which seven million—three of which are affected by acidity—according to research data. 7 million are classified as highly acidic.

Ethiopia's agriculture industry faces a variety of difficulties, such as restricted access to modern technology, poor infrastructure, uneven weather, degraded soil, and disease and pest infestations. Smallholder farmers also frequently lack access to agricultural extension services, loans, and market knowledge.

Acidic soils hurt plant health and crop production, which can be rather detrimental to agricultural productivity. Ethiopian farmers, who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods and food security, face a great challenge as a result of this. Moreover, increased soil erosion, water pollution, and biodiversity loss are only a few of the long-term effects of acidifying soils on the environment.

Nine million quintals of lime are to be distributed to various regional states of the country to address the issue of soil acidity and to maintain the value of soil health, Lire Abiyu, the leading executive of soil resources development in the Ministry of Agriculture's Natural Resources Development Sector, told The Ethiopian Herald.

He remarked that a significant quantity of nine million quintals of lime will be needed to treat the targeted 300,000 hectares in the fiscal year; the allocation has been accurately planned to supply the specific needs across the nation. He also revealed that the distribution of lime would commence in the third quarter of the fiscal year.

He mentioned that an average of thirty



**Through the use of organic matter to improve soil structure and nutrient retention, and additionally, adopting conservation practices such as terracing, contour plowing, and agro-forestry can help reduce soil erosion and maintain soil fertility**

quintals of lime is necessary to treat one hectare of land. He further stated that the fiscal year's budget for acidic land treatment has been set at a staggering more than eight point five billion birr, signifying the government's commitment to addressing this pressing agricultural concern.

The regional states of Oromia, Amhara, Sidama, Central Ethiopia, Southwest Ethiopia, South Ethiopia, and Benshangulgamuz will receive their respective allocations based on the number of hectares requested for treatment, he added.

Acidic soil is characterized by a low pH

level, typically below 7, indicating an excess of hydrogen ions. The weathering of volcanic rocks, the presence of acidic parent materials, and the leaching of basic nutrients as a result of heavy rainfall are the main natural causes of soil acidification in Ethiopia. Human activities such as improper land management practices, deforestation, and excessive use of chemical fertilizers can also contribute to the acidification process.

On the other hand, the major consequences of acidic soils are the reduced availability of essential nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. Acidic conditions can lead to increased leaching of these nutrients, making them less accessible to plants. Additionally, the high concentrations of aluminum and manganese in acidic soils can become toxic to plants, inhibiting root development and nutrient uptake.

According to him, the Ministry of Agriculture's comprehensive plan to distribute lime to the various regional states of the nation is an essential step towards improving agricultural yields and restoring soil health.

He mentioned that of the 3.7 million hectares severely affected by acidity, 105,000 hectares had already been treated in the previous year, representing a significant milestone in the ongoing efforts to combat soil degradation, but this is not sufficient for the sector.

To address these challenges and promote agricultural development, the Ethiopian government has implemented various initiatives and policies. These include investments in irrigation systems, infrastructure development, research and development, extension services, and market linkages. Efforts are also being made to promote sustainable agricultural practices, enhance productivity, and increase value addition along the agricultural value chain.

He also emphasized that to ensure the

production of high-quality lime and tackle potential transportation challenges and other issues, collaboration with relevant stakeholders, both within the government and the private sector, is underway to guarantee the smooth production, delivery, and application of lime throughout the regions.

Furthermore, Ethiopia has placed a strong emphasis on climate-smart agriculture and sustainable land management practices to mitigate the effects of climate change and preserve natural resources, such as through green legacy programs and other initiatives. This includes initiatives to improve water management, promote agro-forestry, and implement conservation agriculture techniques.

He urged those individuals to take collective responsibility and adopt sustainable soil management practices. In addition to lime treatment, he stressed the significance of utilizing natural fertilizers and cultivating resistant crop varieties to preserve soil fertility and mitigate the negative impacts of poor management and environmental disasters.

Through the use of organic matter to improve soil structure and nutrient retention, and additionally, adopting conservation practices such as terracing, contour plowing, and agro-forestry can help reduce soil erosion and maintain soil fertility.

Ethiopian farmers may mitigate the effects of acidic soils and increase crop yields by encouraging farming skills, suitable soil management measures, and sustainable farming methods, which will support food security and economic prosperity.

Ethiopia can advance and upgrade its agricultural techniques in addition to this. Ethiopia can fully utilize its agricultural industry to boost livelihoods and stimulate economic growth by tackling obstacles, encouraging sustainable practices, and investing in infrastructure and technology.