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Institute readies to develop “ETRSS-2” satellite

BY ESSEYE MENGISTE

ADDIS ABABA-The preparation for the ETRSS- 2 project, which aims to develop satellites with a resolution of up to 0.5 meters is finalized, the Space Science and Geo-spatial Institute (SSGI) said, mentioning the satellite’s meaningful contribution to the mapping of cities.

When the ETRSS-2 is put into practice, institutions will have the chance to obtain information that is more accurate than what is currently provided by the satellite information service, SSGI Deputy General Director Bethlehem Nigussie (Eng.) told the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA).

SSGI Deputy Director General for Geospatial Department BelachewTsehay on his part said that ETRSS-2 will contribute significantly to the mapping of cities. “Developing a satellite is not an easy task and it requires skilled labor, immense capital and technology. Now, we have created this capacity and we will go into production.”

Belachew also noted that the SSGI has been working to assist various institutions that need satellite information including aerial photographs, maps and

other information for infrastructure development, agriculture, urban planning, environmental protection, tourism and other sectors.

Similarly, consolidated efforts are underway to harness satellite data, even though the institute is unable to launch satellites by own capacity. In order to be effective in space science, it is necessary to create a society that supports the sector and overcome the pressing Forex crunch.

“We are doing preliminary activities to develop other satellites. We are completing the development of infrastructure, building the capacity of personnel and we have started work on drones and rockets.”

Even though the SSGI has a short existence, it is in a great development process compared with institutions of other African countries including Nigeria and Morocco that have been working on space science for a long time.

According to Belachew, the data obtained from ETRSS-1 was used by research bodies and served as input for mapping works.

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Sweden to deepen trade, investment ties with Ethiopia

• Supporting Nat’l Dialogue, transitional justice process

BY TSEGAYE TILAHUN

ADDIS ABABA – Swedish government is tolling to enhance trade and investment ties with Ethiopia thereby bringing about economic development, said Sweden Ambassador to Ethiopia.

In an exclusive interview with *The Ethiopian Herald* Sweden Ambassador to Ethiopia Hans Henric Lundquist stated that the Sweden focuses more on trade and

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Expert underlines Ethiopia’s legitimate quest for sea access

• Refutes Ethio-Somaliland MoU misrepresentation

BY YESUF ENDRIS

ADDIS ABABA-Ethiopia’s motivation to sign the port deal with Somalilandis driven by its the pressing need for sea access and it is quite different from some parties’ misrepresented accounts, a senior expert said.

Approached by the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA), Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA) senior foreign relations expert DareskedarTaye (PhD) stated that Ethio-Somaliland Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was not a strategic maneuver to benefit stakeholders.

Dareskedar (PhD), who is also IFA Director General for Europe and American Affairs, further noted that the port deal is critically important to overcome the

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Addis, Kigali accord pivotal for transformation Forum

BY MENGESHA AMARE

ADDIS ABABA-The cooperation accord concluded between Addis Ababa and Kigali cities would be instrumental in making the former catchy and boost common benefit, so stated Ethiopian Cities Cooperation Forum.

Having a stay with the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA), t h e forum Director General Andualem Tenaw said the cooperation of the two sisterly cities to run activities upon framing common plan would be of paramount importance in helping them to bring about real change.

As to him, though Kigali is not as wide as Addis Ababa, it is well known for three things: modern

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News

Ethiopia's manufacturing industries registering auspicious outcomes: MoI

BY ASHENAFI ANIMUT

ADDIS ABABA – Propelling the national initiative, the manufacturing industries in Ethiopia have been setting example of coming up with promising and standard products, the Ministry of Industry (MoI) said.

MoI Minister Melaku Alebel made the above remark to local media in connection with the recently held “Let Ethiopia produce” initiative 10 KM street run.

Giving prime attention to the initiative, the minister pointed out that the manufacturing industry has been managing to curtail core dragging bottlenecks such as electric, financial, input, land supply among many others.

He said: “It (the movement)” also strengthen and smoothen the cooperation between various stakeholders and institutions that are backing manufacturing industries. And, it has been contributing a lot to reshape the

sector through streamlined strategy and policy frameworks.

Mentioning the minimal rate of annual budget allocation to the sector, the minister emphasized that the government has decided to redouble the amount with a view of invigorating the sector.

The ministry is also preparing channels of events and expos that are believed to foster the initiative and promote the products of the manufacturing industry. Industrial parks are currently manufacturing brand sporting textile products, thus, securing more forex.

Indeed, expos are also vital platforms to display hidden talents in athletics, promote the capacity of manufacturing sector and productivity in a meaningful manner to glitch the deep-rooted problems of the sector, he underscored.

The initiative has helped the industries to resume production, Melaku added.

Moreover, he expressed his ministry's firm commitment to providing the necessary



support to bring about a vibrant and influential manufacturing industry in the years to come.

Melaku has called on the government, media and other actors to exert their well-articulated support to the sector to play its huge role in job creation, export, fostering

import substitution that help realize the nation's economic development aspirations.

It is to be recalled that the initiative dubbed “Let Ethiopia produce”, which is a national manufacturing industry movement, was launched in May 2022 with the aim of accelerating competitiveness of the sector.

MoWE attempts to address clean water, energy constraints

BY MESERET BEHAILU

ADDIS ABABA-Various activities are carried out in collaboration with development partners to realize Ethiopia's full accessibility of potable water and energy supplies by 2030, the Ministry of Water and Energy (MoWE) said.

MoWE Minister Habtamu Itefa (PhD-Eng.) made the above statement yesterday while addressing a half day discussion with development partners aiming at addressing various challenges in the sector through a combined force.

The main aim of the discussion is said to formulate the plan together with development partners, evaluate the sector's performance, identify the real problems and direct the relevant solution to utilize the resource in an efficient and proper manner. In this regard, Ethiopia will conduct two discussion forums in a year to bridge the



Habtamu Itefa (PhD-Eng.)

water and energy resources gap.

Habtamu (PhD) further stated that the society's discrete settlement and power line limitation are serious challenges in reducing energy accessibility. Besides, climate change has significantly reduced

the volume of ground and surface water.

“Currently, some 71 million people (68 percent of the total population of Ethiopia) have access to potable water though it varies in one place from the other. The MoWE is working tirelessly to provide clean water for six million citizens in the current fiscal year including conflict impacted areas.”

To end the problem, the government appreciates the involvement of the private sector and partners in the issue and it will allow the duty free importation of drilling machines for ground water, the Minister remarked.

MoWE Minister's Senior Advisor Mechaiel Maheri (PhD) said on the occasion that the ministry is closely working with development partners in different areas including the provision of potable water, sanitation, and water resource management.

Mechaiel (PhD) also stated that World Bank

(WB) is the major development partner to address the aforementioned challenges whilst UNICEF focuses on humanitarian assistance especially in areas that were affected by drought, conflict, flood, and the likes. “Though the development partners have been contributing a lot to reduce various problems, the redundancy in similar areas remains a serious challenge. To address such a problem, the Ministry attempts to draw more energy and organize and lead in the response in a cooperative manner.”

The MoWE will also continue its engagement to create an enabling environment to the development partners through facilitating and establishing smooth relationships from the Federal to the district levels, he reiterated.

In the discussion, the WB, UNICEF, JICA, representatives from Netherlands and Denmark embassies as well as AfDB were in attendance.



Fasika exhibition, bazaar opens to public

BY STAFF REPORTER

ADDIS ABABA – Fasika exhibition and bazaar was officially opened in Millennium Hall on Saturday.

Over 120, 000 to 170, 000 visitors are expected to visit this year's Fasika exhibition and bazaar that opened in the capital. It is aimed to create networking and business to business linkages among businesses.

As to statement, over 2,000 suppliers and merchants would take part. Various

businesses have signed up to show up their products in the exhibition taking place at the Millennium Hall.

Some 7,000 to 10, 000 visitors are expected to visit this year's exhibition and bazaar in a daily basis, according to Barok Event organizer.

The organizers invited the public to visit the exhibition and for local businesses to use it as an opportunity to create market linkages. The exhibition will stay open for the next 17 consecutive days, it was learnt.

News

Program on right track to achieve Nat'l electric access

BY MISGANAW ASNAKE

ADDIS ABABA— The updated version of 2019 (NEP 2:0) National Electrification Program helps achieve universal electricity access nationwide in 2030 through both on-grid and off-grid schemes tailoring, Ministry of Water and Energy (MoWE) said.

Senior Energy Advisor of MoWE's State Minister, Gosaye Mengiste told the Ethiopian Press (EPA) that the program is being implemented at least-cost technology ranges by geographic location to ensure timely access provision and priority to disadvantaged groups of rural community, and social institutions.

He said, "Our focus is to bring clean energy to more Ethiopians, promoting sustainable solutions, and fostering a thriving marketplace for off-grid options by unlocking investment, empower innovation, and drive a greener future."

Ethiopia is endowed with various renewable



Gosaye Mengiste

and clean energy resources potential. However, out of 120 million populations, more than 60 million people still lack access to electricity, he said.

He stressed that to overcome this challenge; the government has released an ambitious

National "Electrification Program of revised (NEP 2:0) to achieve national electrification access in short time along with mega project work expansion.

The Program is started implementing a sector-wide approach for the design, implementation and securing Ethiopia's energy is necessary as prerequisite to enhance growth and development of our rural communities," he said.

Therefore, in this program civil society and other stakeholders need to exchange their views and experience in the development of renewable energy sources and technologies in coordinate manner to attain energy development goal of the country, he added.

Here the ministry recognizes the critical role of the private sector, particularly ESEDA in boosting the NEP forward and unwavering, endeavors commitment to advancing the Ethiopian solar energy sector by continuing

its vita contribution. "We are particularly pleased with our collaborative effort in developing the updated Ethiopian Solar Customs Handbook. This valuable resource will significantly streamline procedures for the solar energy sector."

Ethiopian Solar Energy Development Association (ESEDA), General Manger Tewabech Workie on her part said that they have been working ten years in Ethiopia mainly to benefit rural community to use solar energy.

"We work with MoWE in solar, renewable energy when they set plan and with private, public and development partners in taskforce by facilitating the taskforce that work on solar that led by MoWE. ESEDA plays a crucial role in shaping the future renewable energy, protect consumer and distributor and closely working with states energy to distribute imported solar energy products in rural areas," she added.

Sweden to deepen trade, investment...

and investments since economic development will prevent future conflicts. As part development cooperation, the country needs to support regional integration process especially the Horn of Africa (HoA) as well as other parts of Africa.

"We need more trade between African countries and between Africa and Europe. We live in very polarized world today since so many conflicts going on globally."

Sweden contributed in history of many African countries in building solidarity and capacity particularly in people-to-people context. This context is consisting of in Ethiopia for 70 years of cooperation, he

said.

Moreover, the two countries built mutual partnership. The Sweden has a broaden development program with Ethiopia. "Hence, the country has been looking ways on how to contribute in strengthening trade and investment. Right now, we have around 30 Swedish companies operating in the country," the Ambassador added.

So far, the two countries have been cooperating in Agriculture, education, health and other development sectors.

Sweden considers Ethiopia as very important country in the HoA. And the stability in the country would contribute to the stability of

the region. "That why, Sweden believes that Ethiopia is a strategic country in the region. We will continue supporting the country in developing mutual cooperation in varies fields."

Furthermore, Sweden has been supporting the National Dialogue and upcoming transitional justice processes and also thinking how to support the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process in Ethiopia. Therefore, the successfulness of these three national processes is critical for Ethiopia to come out from the conflicts, poverty and other problems, he underscored.

Expert underlines...

economic and security challenges that have been emanated from Ethiopia's overreliance on a single port. "It will also help Ethiopia to break free from this geopolitical prison."

He highlighted the lack of positive responses from neighboring countries, except for Somaliland, where the agreement has been met with a welcoming embrace.

The MoU offers Ethiopia a lifeline and it is providing alternatives for the landlocked country to access ports at fair market prices. Beyond mere economic benefits, the accord is also outlined the potential for enhanced diplomatic and security cooperation between Ethiopia and Somaliland that would be bolstered by infrastructural development initiatives.

Addressing concerns raised by the Somalia government, the expert emphasized the divergence between perceptions and realities surrounding the agreement. "Misinterpreting Ethiopia's pursuit of maritime access as a pretext for military aggression is unmatched with the reality."

"The agreement also reaffirms Ethiopia's commitment to safeguard its national interests and combating insecurity in the volatile Horn of Africa (HoA) region"

Dareskedar (PhD) also criticized Somalia's alignment with anti-Ethiopia forces, urging cooperation over contentious areas. Detrimental alliances could exacerbate regional tensions so, it is important to rebuild constructive engagement in addressing shared challenges.

Ethiopia's pursuit to access the sea through the port deal with Somaliland reflects a strategic imperative driven by economic necessity and national security considerations. "However, the agreement has sparked diplomatic tensions, underscoring the complex dynamics at play in the HoA," the researcher explained.

Addis, Kigali accord pivotal for...

service delivery, proper sewerage and waste disposal and green development.

He said, "Kigali can draw important lessons and best practices in due course of constructing wider boulevards, housing development and quenching residents' thirst of such lucrative development endeavors, whereas Addis Ababa would get experiences of making cities charming and much more attractive."

Citing that the accord would help the two cities work together, the General Director said are expected to work upon framing details of their undertakings.

The cities had better send experts to and for Addis and Kigali, to train and carryout crucial activities as well as investigate and supervise the performed undertakings thereby helping them come up with real difference in the two cities, he opined.

Urging the two governments to translate promises stipulated in agreements into practice, Andualem said the accord made between the two cities peculiarly



centering modern service delivery, proper waste disposal and green development needs to be well implemented via closely working and firm commitment.

As to him, it is quite important closely follow up and encourage sector offices and city administrations duty bound to execute such pivotal subsectors.

The agreement is also decisive as it has been concluded with neighboring and sisterly nations instead of seeking experiences from Europe and USA as it fosters common benefit.

It is to be recalled that the agreement between Addis Ababa and Kigali was signed by Adanech Abiebie and Samuel Dusen Giyou Miva, mayors of cities in that order.

Opinion

Control Hate Speech, keep away consequences

BY GETACHEW MINAS

Social scientists have confirmed that hate speech spread through the social media creates numerous dangers, hazards and risks to the society. It also leads to unexpected clashes within communities which consume time and energy of local elders to settle them. If these clashes, conflicts and collisions are not settled by the elders in good time, they may transform and engage the society at large. These call for the attention of law and order enforcement agencies.

In Ethiopia, the lower level of administration may also be responsible for maintaining peace at the community level. There may be several causes for conflicts at that level, one of which is hate speech. This act may offend individuals and groups who may want to retaliate. It may rekindle, renew and regenerate violence and skirmishes at wider levels, which become difficult to check in time. There is a saying that a stitch in time saves nine. If local conflicts caused by hate speech transmitted through the social media are not controlled in time they may extend to the wider community.

Studies indicate that, hate speech transmitted through the social media often fuels violence and discrimination against marginalized groups. It is revealed that racial minorities are victims of violence caused and spread by hate speech. Minority groups may have to get organized in self-defense against illegal hooligans who conduct terrorist acts of hate, disgust and extreme dislike on these groups of innocent citizens.

If not fully controlled by the law enforcement agencies in time, the violent attacks instigated by the social media may extend to religious institutions and communities that totally depend on the prevalence of peace and security. Their religious operations will be disrupted by irresponsible individuals who propagate hate speech on them. The members of a certain sect of religion may be indiscriminately attacked and vilified using awful and appalling words, insults, abuses, as well as offensive and impolite acts. The religious community may be forced to defend itself in like manner, using legal means. The sword and the cross may confront each other unless the State interferes in time.

At the individual level, hate speech is a thorny issue that may be settled by various means. Individuals may be creative enough to develop instruments for confronting hate speeches directed at them through the social media. They may initially respond in like manner, hate speech with hate.... Individuals may transform it to the community level where their friends and colleagues may generate their means of

communicating disgusting and repulsive languages.

As hate breeds more repulsion, disgust, loathing and dislike among individuals and communities, it may be difficult to control it. Elders entrusted with resolving conflicts that arise from offensive languages between individuals and communities find it difficult to control it in time. It is even more difficult if the individuals are immigrants, coming from abroad. These immigrants come from abroad into the country to live permanently. They are bound to live in a country other than that of their place of origin or birth.

Ethiopian immigrants or emigrants run away from a community that is filled with hate. They struggle to reach a country that is free from hate speech. Such a country accommodates individuals irrespective of their age, sex, color, ethnic or tribal group. It is a country that is free from discrimination of persons based on their color or language. However, this is not true for Ethiopians who are subjected to prejudice, inequity and bigotry because of their ethnic, tribal or clan origin.

The class struggle had caused the elimination of millions of the Ethiopian youth during the authoritarian military regime. This has been followed by ethnic struggle promoted by the TPLF regime that also subjected millions to death without trace. In both cases, "hate crime" has subconsciously been committed by the leaders of class as well as ethnic struggles.

Hate crime promoted by the social media has contributed to physical attacks, harassments, and elimination of political leaders and their followers. Such measures have diminished the vigor, dynamism and vitality of the Ethiopian youth. But they will reemerge.

The Ethiopian youth need not be exposed to hate speech that ensue psychological harm. The exposure of the youth to hate speech can only cause psychological harm, including increased anxiety and depression. It cannot afford to continue with unemployment and underemployment that result in poverty and social distress. These factors may force the unemployed persons to engage in hate speech toward those they believe are the causes of poverty.

Of course, the major cause of poverty is war, conflict or clash that could have been resolved through discussion with the contesting parties. The worst effects of these events are the feelings of fear and isolation among disputing, but losing parties. Conflicts undermine their sense of safety and belonging in the Ethiopian society.

One of the major failures of minimizing the impacts of hate speech is the normalization of prejudice, injustice and intolerance. Members of the community feel secluded

and disoriented when injustice prevails. Hate speeches instigated by the social media do reflect the prevalence of chauvinism, bigotry, discrimination and intolerance in the Ethiopian community, as precursors of crimes against humanity.

Speeches are nothing but reflection of intent that may be hate or love. Where communal hate is cross-fertilized and extended to the wider society, it leads to social conflicts. Consequently, it creates the normalization of prejudice, expressed in hate speech. When hate speech goes unchallenged, it can stabilize and create conditions for accepting prejudice and bigotry. People become acquainted with and accept discriminatory attitudes. Hate speech become socially acceptable behavior which people become adapted to. Adaptation perpetuates cycles of discrimination, favoritism, unfairness, and nepotism.

Social cohesion and trust is eroded by means of hate speech, which breaks community ties. It causes division among communities along ethnic, religious, or ideological lines. Ethnic divisions become rampant to the extent of breaking down law and order in the country that is ethnically delineated. In this situation hate speech becomes a dangerous means of breaking down trust within communities.

In fact, it fosters distrust and propagates local enmity among people of the same community or society. A critical instrument of enmity is hate speech spread by the social media which may have to be controlled by local authorities without much ado, commotion and excitement. The first step in this direction is to bring under control those persons who constantly engage in hate speeches, writings and expressions. These persons plant the trees of hate and animosity among different groups.

Is so doing, they hinder cooperation and mutual understanding in the society. The negative impact of hate speech on democracy is immense. In democratic societies, it can undermine, weaken and undercut the principles of equality and tolerance. These factors are critical determinants of the essential elements for a functioning democracy.

Hate speech has to be strictly checked and controlled before it causes the destruction or elimination of the essential elements of democracy in democratic countries. In the developing countries, where democracy is in its infancy, hate speech seems to be the trend and style of partisan behavior of party apparatchiks. It is common to observe partisans exchanging words of hate. The defamation of personalities or leaders of political parties seems to be the rule rather than the exception. In so doing, party apparatchiks may manipulate public opinion and suppress dissenting voices. They tend to encourage and support

extremist ideology if they believed it helps them retain power.

Education and free speech are hindered by hate speech that may create hostile environments. In educational institutions the learning process is hindered by partisan groups that intend to influence teachers and students to be adherents of their policy. Similarly, at the workplaces, party functionaries impede the production process in trying to enforce their policy and program. They also commit the same acts in public spaces, seeking collaboration in exchanging ideas in favor of their party programs.

In so doing, they may silence marginalized voices and limit freedom of expression using hate speech through the social media. All these acts result in the escalation of conflict. Hate speech has the potential to escalate conflicts, both domestically and externally. It can exacerbate tensions between different groups, leading to polarization and unrest. It may even lead to violent conflict in public places.

Exposure to hate speech through various forms of media, including social media, can have detrimental effects. It may cause mistrust among colleagues or even relatives. The role of media is crucial in creating both peace and war. It may even cause mental disorder among individuals. Lack of mental health contributes to stress and trauma.

Faced with hate speech, individuals may feel a sense of powerlessness. They begin to be suspicious of friends, acquaintances, and even their family members. Lack of trust becomes the rule of community members. They become suspicious of persons residing in their neighborhood.

If the society is to survive at all, it is a crucial to address the social impacts of hate speech. This helps in promoting education and awareness about the consequences and impacts of hate speech. In this process, it is useful to foster inclusive and respectful dialogue.

Ethiopians have to learn lessons from the Rwandan Genocide, that lasted only 100 days in 1994 as one of the most dishonorable and disreputable genocide in modern times. Nearly one million ethnic Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed as the international community and UN peacekeepers stood by watching. Under the presidency of Paul Kagame, Rwanda has a majority-female parliament. Ethiopia may adopt Rwandan policy that control hate speech, promote equality, equity and, consequently, social cohesion in the country.

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

Editorial

Audacious step for ensuring lasting peace

The government of Ethiopia has more than anytime else prioritized peace and security and working for the successfulness of close talks, dialogs and national and, continental peace deals. Besides, the country has been working to effectively deal with the recurrent crisis, civil war, ethnic violence, famine and hunger via fostering peace and security. No doubt, the government is committed enough to ensure peace through holding close talks and dialog with either armed forces, military group, or individuals with indifferent outlook.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has been having close discussions with the community at every part of the nation, for instance with Guraghe community recently. The society in turn expressed commitment to back the effort of the government and to make its trek towards stability fertile. Even the national dialogue commission has called on armed forces in some parts of the nation to come to the right track so as to back the effort geared towards peace and serenity.

Recognizing the significance of holding community discussion towards ensuring peace and security, the government has lent its expertise and support the general public to enhance the nation's peace effort. Such momentous discussion forums and close talks are of significantly useful in boosting the peaceful scenario. With the overall objective of contributing to national efforts for achieving sustainable peace and stability in Ethiopia, public discussions the government has been conducting comprehensively are quite pivotal. Here, all citizens have to be committed to effectively address the challenges and opportunities that arise in the pursuit of sustainable peace.

The public discussions are testaments to the closer collaboration between the society and the government. Since insecurity is playing a role in preventing all citizens from effectively discharging their respective duties and responsibilities that help come up with change and growth, peace has to be well taken care of by all citizens.

True, it is time for the country to call for coordinated effort for marching against elements working to make the country restless and polarize its people by undermining national unity. Needless to state, peace and development can be attained through preaching the general public about peace and advice them leading a harmonious way of living.

As Ethiopians in general have long experienced the blessings of unity and coexistence, everyone has to make their own contribution to peace effort. Yes, the involvement of every citizenry or their representatives would unequivocally play a paramount role in reinvigorating peace efforts. Though the Ethiopian government is working hard to come up with peace and stability, there is still a long way to go.

Since Ethiopians do not open the door for forces seeking to undermine their unity and coexistence, it would be easy to come up with peace and stability. Yes, sustainable peace can only be achieved by thinking about peace, living peacefully, and teaching peace. Hence, everyone has to be committed to ensure peace.

As per the call made by Prime Minister, all Ethiopians have to consolidate unity for peace, national coexistence, and strengthening fraternity. In so doing, it would be possible to bend evil stance of elements for dividing the nation and polarizing its people.

In a nutshell, there is an urgent need for a peace process, and the Ethiopian government has been ready to ensure peace by working closely with those who are peacefully struggling for peace and national stability. So long as the country is working to confidently ensure peace and stability, the general public, institutions working on the area, the international community has to back the nation thereby helping it get the root causes of conflict and disagreements dried for good. Civil society organizations are also responsible for adjusting conditions for fruitful public discussions as they have had close ties and vicinity with the community.

Opinion

Consultations with stakeholders in Ethiopia vital for developing common narratives

BY SOLOMON DIBABA

Over the last several weeks, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (Ph.D) conferred with representatives of competing political parties, leaders of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church, heads of federal and regional Islamic Council, leaders of evangelical churches, teachers, members of the business community, representatives of CSOs and a number of other stakeholders on issues of national importance related to peaceful development.

Such consultative meetings provide a cornerstone for constructive and inclusive dialogue between the elements of the political system which the author believes include political parties, government institutions, professional associations, CSOs, religious institutions, trade union and other sectors of the society. This is important because timely and proper communication between all concerned stakeholders on nation building is of greater importance for the continuity of the statehood of the country and for the country's position among the nations of the world.

They also provide a good ground for the promotion of empowered democratic institutions in Ethiopia. Democratic institutions play a crucial role in national development by fostering good governance, accountability, transparency, and inclusivity. Conducting such discussions with the leadership of the country is important for their accelerated promotion and the role that they can play in enhancing comprehensive socio-economic development of the country.

Democratic countries have systems of representative government where citizens elect officials to represent their interests and make decisions on their behalf. These elected representatives, such as members of parliament or congress, council of ministers play a key role in formulating laws, policies, and budgets that promote national development. What therefore are the components of these democratic institutions?

An independent judiciary ensures the rule of law and protects citizens' rights by interpreting and applying the law impartially and in a democratic manner. A strong and impartial judiciary is essential for upholding property rights, enforcing contracts, resolving disputes, and providing legal recourse for citizens, businesses, and investors.

Regular, free, and fair elections are fundamental to democracy and national development. They provide citizens with the opportunity to choose their leaders, hold them accountable, and peacefully transfer power. Transparent electoral processes strengthen political stability, legitimacy, and trust in government.

Civil society organizations, including

non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups, and advocacy organizations, play a vital role in promoting democratic values, advocating for social justice, and holding governments accountable. They provide spaces for citizen participation, monitor government performance, and advocate for policy reforms that advance national development goals.

A free and independent media serves as a watchdog, informing citizens, exposing corruption, and holding government officials accountable. Media outlets provide diverse perspectives, facilitate public debate, and promote transparency and accountability in governance.

Decentralization of power and decision-making to local governments and communities can enhance citizen participation, responsiveness, and efficiency in service delivery. Local governments play a critical role in addressing grassroots development needs, promoting community empowerment, and fostering social cohesion.

Strong anti-corruption institutions and mechanisms are essential for combating corruption, promoting integrity, and safeguarding public resources. Independent anti-corruption agencies investigate allegations of corruption, prosecute offenders, and implement measures to prevent corruption in public institutions and private sector.

National human rights commissions or ombudsman offices monitor human rights violations, promote awareness of human rights principles, and provide redress for victims of abuse or discrimination. Upholding human rights is essential for fostering social justice, equality, and dignity for all citizens.

Sound public financial management institutions, including audit bodies, budget offices, and fiscal agencies, promote transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the management of public finances. They ensure that public resources are allocated and utilized effectively to support national development priorities.

Promoting education, civic engagement, and political participation among citizens is essential for building a culture of democracy and active citizenship. Educated and informed citizens are better equipped to participate in democratic processes, advocate for their rights, and contribute to national development efforts.

By strengthening these democratic institutions and promoting democratic values, countries can create an enabling environment for sustainable development, social justice, and inclusive growth.

Furthermore, the consultations conducted

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Business & Economy

Safeguarding small, medium enterprises to navigate the ship onward

BY LAKACHW ATINAFU

Ethiopia's economic growth over the last two decades has been impressive. Ethiopia is emerging as one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa. However, this progress has been driven largely by large-scale industrial projects and foreign investment, not to mention public spending. The backbone of the Ethiopian economy - its small and medium enterprises (SMEs) - has often been overlooked when it comes to policy support and protection.

SMEs account for the majority of businesses in Ethiopia and provide employment for millions of citizens. These enterprises, ranging from small family-owned shops to medium-sized manufacturers, are crucial for fostering entrepreneurship, innovation, and inclusive economic development. Yet, they face a range of challenges that threaten their sustainability and growth.

To address this, the Ethiopian government has taken several steps in recent years to strengthen the SME sector. In 2019, the then Ministry of Trade and Industry launched the National Micro and Small Enterprise Development Strategy, which aimed to provide better access to finance, business development services, and market linkages for SMEs. The government has also introduced tax incentives and preferential procurement policies to support small businesses.

While these initiatives are a step in the right direction, more comprehensive measures are needed to truly safeguard the future of Ethiopia's SMEs. One key area of focus should be improving access to credit and financial services. Many SMEs, particularly those in the informal sector, struggle to secure loans from traditional banks due to a lack of collateral or credit history. The government should work to expand alternative financing options, such as microfinance institutions, venture capital funds, and credit guarantee schemes, to cater to the unique needs of small enterprises.

Additionally, the regulatory environment for SMEs needs to be streamlined and simplified. Burdensome bureaucratic procedures, such as business registration, licensing, and tax compliance, can be overwhelming for small business owners, hindering their ability to focus on growth and innovation. Reforms to reduce red tape and ease the administrative burden on SMEs would go a long way in supporting their development.

Finally, the government should invest in building the capacity and competitiveness of SMEs. This could include providing access to training and mentorship programs; facilitating technology adoption and digital transformation; and promoting linkages between small businesses and larger companies or export markets. By strengthening the capabilities of SMEs, Ethiopia can unlock their full potential as engines of economic diversification and job creation.

As Ethiopia continues its economic transformation, protecting and nurturing its small and medium enterprises must be a top priority. By addressing the challenges faced by this vital sector, the government can ensure



SMEs engaged in leather, garments, traditional clothes, agro-processing, furniture, steel, jewelries and artifacts, among others

that the benefits of growth are more broadly shared and that Ethiopia's entrepreneurial spirit remains vibrant and resilient.

In the existing financial and banking system in the country, Banks provide credit services to those who provide collateral that are high enterprises and industries. Through a small loan provider or Micro Finance Institutions and capacity due to the limited and financial availability of credit they cater to small businesses. The ability of financial institutions to lend to these institutions has limitations. Banks and microfinance, or the World Bank will not lend or support them. Research shows, "missing middle" financing small and medium enterprises delivery, business development, project planning and more financial management training ... etc.

The establishment of the Small and Medium Finance Project, according to Yemenzwork Grafe, Coordinator of the Small and Medium Enterprise Finance Project in Ethiopia Enterprise Development, was in 2017 with the aim of increasing production and productivity by supporting these neglected "missing middle" small and medium enterprises with financing, business development, project preparation and financial management training.

Yemenzwork said, "There are three institutions that mainly implement the purpose of the project". The first implementing institution is Ethiopian Enterprise Development. Since this institution manages, supports, etc., small and medium enterprises, the coordination office of the project has been organized under the institution. In this way, the project is not organized under the institution, but it is going down to the administrative level of the Minister of Industry. Where are the small and medium enterprises? What is their shortcoming (market connection, financial, manpower and financial management, technical and professional deficiency)? What is the obstacle to their growth? etc., from the

region to the district, and provides support to fill the gap. Because if the problems of training needs are not solved, the enterprise will not be effective or profitable, it will not grow just by getting money or credit.

The second operator is the Development Bank of Ethiopia. The bank on behalf of the project from the World Bank and other international financial institutions take the money and give it to small and medium enterprises distribute various loan options. The other one that implements the purpose of the project is National Bank of Ethiopia. This bank formulates the policy of banks; overseeing the banks in general as it governs; for small and medium enterprises, it creates a favorable credit environment for enterprises.

Among the comfortable conditions is to guarantee the borrowed funds the information is accessible to the banks and microfinance while registering the dreamed of a communication network. By doing this, banks and microfinance institutions have confidence in small and medium enterprises. She stated that it enables them to provide loans. The project focuses on manufacturing sector, agricultural production processing, and construction, input production and small and medium enterprises engaged in the tourism sector. Yemenzwork pointed out that the project focuses on supporting small and medium enterprises engaged in the manufacturing sector, agricultural product processing, construction input production and the tourism sector; the main problem of the enterprises not getting a loan to start working is because they cannot get a guarantee.

To solve this problem, the project facilitated ways through the Ethiopian Development Bank that the enterprises get equipment rental loans. The proposals that the enterprises present based on the feasibility study, the equipment will be purchased and given to them. They repay the loan while using the machine as a rental. When they finish paying

the debt, the device becomes private property of the enterprise at the end. Accordingly, when the bank lends and the enterprise borrows, there is no question of collateral. Therefore, the project has solved the bottleneck of the Enterprises.

There are two windows the Ethiopian Development Bank present loans for enterprises; the first is equipment lease loan window (capital goods lease finance window). In this window they offer direct and indirect equipment rental loans. When the direct equipment rental loan is given from 10 to 30 million Birr through the head office and branch offices of the Development Bank of Ethiopia; below that, revolving loans starting from 2.5 million Birr are provided by regional equipment rental companies to small and medium enterprises. These organizations provide loans with the money they get from the development bank. Therefore, through the equipment rental loan window, enterprises have the opportunity to obtain both direct and indirect loans.

The second window in which the bank offers loans is the working capital loan window. If the enterprises have only equipment and no operating funds, they will not be able to start operations. So they have to get working capital. The bank will take the money received from the World Bank and other international financial institutions in the name of the project and provide it to banks and microfinance through the second window.

Banks and microfinance also lend to enterprises to operate. Based on this, it is a project designed with the belief that "enterprises will receive equipment rental loans on the one hand and operational financing on the other hand to continue their work in an efficient and effective manner." Yemenzwork said that it is a project that aims to solve the basic problems of small and medium enterprises and to support them in all fields.

In the Sphere of Diplomacy

Managing the dynamism in the Horn of Africa

BY EYUEL KIFLU

The Horn of Africa (HoA) region has witnessed significant socio-economic integration in recent years, driven largely by the efforts of Ethiopia, a key player in promoting regional cooperation. The establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has been a crucial step in fostering economic integration across the continent, and Ethiopia has played a pivotal role in supporting this initiative. By supporting efforts to reduce trade barriers and promote economic cooperation among African countries, Ethiopia is helping to create a more integrated and prosperous region.

According to the Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), the 2018 normalization of relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea opened up new opportunities for the HoA. Subsequently, the region witnessed the restoration of the Eritrea-Somalia relation, the Djibouti willingness to improve ties with Eritrea, and the formation of the Ethiopia, Somalia, and Eritrea tripartite alliance. These diplomatic breakthroughs have been instrumental in enhancing regional stability and security.

The country has also taken steps to strengthen its ties with other countries in the region through various bilateral agreements and partnerships. For example, Ethiopia has signed cooperation agreements with neighbouring countries such as Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia to enhance trade, security, and infrastructure development.

On the security front, countries in the region collaborated through initiatives such as the Djibouti Code of Conduct and the Regional Maritime Security Programme (RMSP) to address security challenges such as terrorism, conflict, and piracy. Regarding terrorism, the countries in the region give their unwavering support to the Somali government in the fight against al-Shabaab. The role of Ethiopia as an anchored state in the region in fighting the terrorist group Al-Shabaab shows the country's commitment to stand for regional peace.

Ethiopia's commitment to regional integration is further demonstrated through its active involvement in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional organization that promotes peace, security, and development in the HoA. As a founding member, Ethiopia has been at the forefront of mediation efforts and facilitating dialogue among member states.

Beyond its diplomatic efforts, the country has also played a significant

As the HoA region stands at a critical juncture, regional integration and collaborative efforts emerge as the keys to unlocking the region's potential for stability, prosperity, and sustainable development

role in addressing regional challenges such as climate change, food insecurity, and refugee crises. The country's willingness to host around 1 million refugees from neighbouring countries and beyond underscores its dedication to regional solidarity and humanitarian assistance.

However, the HoA region still faces several unresolved problems that hinder its prosperity, including terrorism, political instability, and the spill-over effects of tensions in the Middle East.

To address challenges in the HoA, the Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA) organized the second series of the Horn Dialogue on April 19, 2024 in Addis Ababa, where regional stakeholders and experts discussed potential solutions.

During the dialogue, State Minister Ambassador Misganu Arega emphasized Ethiopia's role in uniting the region to fight terrorism, piracy, and political crises in the Horn of Africa.

"Today, as we assemble here, the Horn of Africa is at a turning point. This area serves as a vital entry point to Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. But we also can't deny the harsh reality of the entire region, which is beset by complex security issues, unstable political environments, and on-going drought brought on by climate change," he said.

Ethnic conflicts, governance problems, and historical grievances are all entwined with these difficulties. He emphasized that the current political and security environment is frequently complicated by external actors with both overt and hidden goals.

Amb. Misganu stated, "This crisis has a tremendous human cost that impedes progress and exacerbates the humanitarian crisis."

He proposed that there is an urgent need for collective action to get together and debate a solution because the existence of terrorism and armed conflict not only causes pain but also intensifies piracy and illicit trade over the crucial route.

Ethiopia is fighting against illegal trade and terrorism, which worsen political unrest and insecurity. He continued, saying that all states in the region must be involved in battling terrorism and ensuring maritime security.

Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of Foreign Affairs, Jafar Badru, stated that the region is going through complex security dynamics that have a significant impact on both its citizens and the international community as a whole.

These problems go beyond national borders and require all-encompassing, long-term solutions that deal with the underlying causes and promote stability

in the region. According to Jafar, the situation necessitates quick action and cooperation from all parties involved.

He pointed out that, a wide range of specialists from many institutions, nations, and academic fields have gathered to talk and come up with answers since they understand how urgent the problem is.

Despite the challenges, the Horn region holds immense potential for regional integrity and prosperity, he said, adding that the region can achieve security, economic prosperity, and social development by leveraging the collective strengths, resources, and aspirations of these member countries.

On the occasion, Senior Regional Security Analyst Semir Yesuf (PhD) said that, the regional issues happening at this time in the region require fostering relationships, collaboration, and dialogue based on mutual interests.

He said that, since military action and unilateral policy changes are insufficient to end the situation, win-win solutions must be reached.

He reiterated worries about the competitive dynamics in the Horn of Africa, emphasizing the tensions stoked by participation from Western, Eastern, and Middle Eastern forces. He claims that, the region's propensity for internal conflict gives outside actors a chance to wage proxy war, making efforts to establish peace and security even more difficult.

Semir stressed the importance of addressing the root causes of conflicts through dialogue and cooperation among Horn of Africa countries.

The on-going tensions within countries like Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia need urgent internal resolution on governance crises, demilitarization of civil issues, and mitigation of power struggles.

As the HoA region stands at a critical juncture, regional integration and collaborative efforts emerge as the keys to unlocking the region's potential for stability, prosperity, and sustainable development. Ethiopia's pivotal role in this endeavour underscores the importance of fostering diplomatic relations, economic partnerships, and shared solutions to the region's pressing challenges.

Also, regional integration is of paramount importance, not only for economic development within the group but also for peace and stability. It must recognize that without peace, there can be sustainable economic growth, successful integration, or a thriving country.

Law & Politics

Access to the sea: Reliable path to sustainable economic prosperity

BY DANIEL ALEMAYEHU

The Red Sea is one of the most crucial yet geopolitically volatile places in the world. The region puts the neighboring countries in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East in an advantageous position to defend national interests. Many superpower nations across the globe have done everything to have a stake in the region. Name it the USA, China, Japan, France, or UAE; every nation has at least a military base to put boots on the ground.

The Horn of Africa and the Red Sea are also important for African countries to maintain their national interest and get every advantage that the regions provide. Those who have access to the sea have been benefiting more in the past years as other nations who want to be in the region pay millions of dollars to get and access any portion of the area.

Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia are obtaining a lot from their ports. On the other hand, countries that are still in the Horn region but with no sea access have faced several challenges to stay in the competition and secure their national interest. A nation with no port always has sovereignty and economic threats compared to the ones that have one.

At this point, one of the densely populated nations in Africa, Ethiopia has been left with no sea access for the last three decades facing myriads of bottlenecks.

Indeed, the country is playing a vital role in the region fostering regional integration. It has been involved in major regional issues like peace and security. Ethiopian soldiers have paid their blood and bone like no other nation to defend the region's peace. Besides, the country is known for its successful diplomacy to live peacefully with its neighbors. It has shown its unchanged stand regarding regional integration and shared values for a better tomorrow.

With all the good deeds that the nation sacrificed for the region, Ethiopia has recently started to raise some bold questions about accessing the sea. Surprisingly, the country was seriously rejected and shifted in political cooperation. Some even started to work closely with Ethiopia's historic enemies to reject Ethiopia's call to sea access.

It is a fact that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) has lately raised the desire to access the sea by applying a win-win and give-and-take approach with its neighboring countries. In good truth, Ethiopia has not hesitated to bring its mega projects like Abbay Dam and Ethio-telecom to the table for negotiation so that any country can get a share in any of its flagship projects and companies for its quest for sea access.

Keep knocking on nations' doors rigorously, Ethiopia has finally got a positive response



With all the good deeds that the nation sacrificed for the region, Ethiopia has recently started to raise some bold questions about accessing the sea

from Somaliland to get some land and access the sea. In return, Ethiopia pledged to support the latter in its quest to become a sovereign state coupled with letting some share form its asset. From the onset of the announcement of the agreement, nations from different corners of the world have reflected on their stand regarding the accord between the two parties.

Prominently, Somalia has fully rejected the agreement and asked other nations to stand by Somalia. Forgetting all the favors Ethiopia did to Somalia, the government of Somalia even sticks with some historic enemies of Ethiopia and with the ones who have no track record in regional integration in the Horn.

The accord between Ethiopia and Somaliland will bring economic and other benefits without harming the other. It is a fact that Ethiopia has been disadvantageous in the past years as the nation imports more than 90% of its commodities from outside. Such a deal paved the way for Ethiopia to economic and political supremacy and influence in the Horn and Red Sea. The country always believes in peace and fosters regional cooperation among its neighbors. Such a stand has been reflected in every endeavor of the country.

Having a stay recently with a local media, Peter Pham, a former U.S. Special Envoy for the Sahel and Great Lakes Regions of Africa, said that it is imperative to understand Ethiopia's legitimate interests and needs to access the sea and ensure economic security for its people.

The former U.S. Special Envoy said Ethiopia has played a critical role in providing peace and security throughout the region. "It has every right to expect in return for that same goodwill and understanding for its legitimate interests and needs within terms of access to the sea and secure economic security for its people. It can't all be a one-way street," he stressed.

It is to be recalled that speaking of the MoU signed between Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somaliland President Muse Bihi Abdi, Pham stated that he has been very encouraged by the historic agreement from the very day of the announcement.

"Why am I so positive? First and foremost, I believe international relations have to be based upon reality not fiction, not fantasy, not wishful thinking but reality. And the reality is the geopolitics and economics of this Horn of Africa region, which is so vital and changing, shifting before our eyes; and we need to adjust to these."

According to him, the second part of the reality is Ethiopia's legitimate interest in having "what I call redundant port structures." Additionally, Ethiopia is the world's most populous landlocked state with 120 million people, and to date, Djibouti has been providing access to the country. However, he added that a great country with 120 million people should not rely on one outlet. The former U.S. Special Envoy further pointed out that as Ethiopia is looking for access to sea the Berbera Port makes sense economically.

"DP World has already invested in there, and the United Kingdom government is investing in phase two. There's a road infrastructure, bringing up the port there." There is an excellent runway; all sorts of things make that a compelling case, he added.

Moreover, Pham elaborated that Africa as a whole and this region in particular lacks critical infrastructure. "I think the key is that Africa as a whole, but this region in lacks critical infrastructure. So, I'm very much in favor of anything that contributes to whether ports, roads, energy, or electricity. Anything that adds to the stock, that helps create the conditions for economic growth and prosperity shared throughout the region is a positive development."

Society

Strengthening eye care services to eliminate avoidable visual impairment

BY MENGISTEAB TESHOME

It is crystal clear that eye health is a critical aspect that has a crucial role in overall well-being; its importance cannot be overstated.

In Ethiopia, like many of the developing countries, eye related problems are posing huge challenges to individuals and communities.

To curb eye diseases and reduce the risk of complete blindness and partial visual impairments, governments and stakeholders working on the area are engaged in providing service to citizens through formulating various approaches. Countries in accordance with their development strategies and policies are promoting eye health and working determinedly to address the concern and avert the challenges.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), estimated to be over 1.5 million Ethiopians are blind, and approximately four million individuals suffer from moderate to severe visual impairments. According to the report, most common eye health problems in the country are cataracts, refractive errors, trachoma, glaucoma, and corneal diseases.

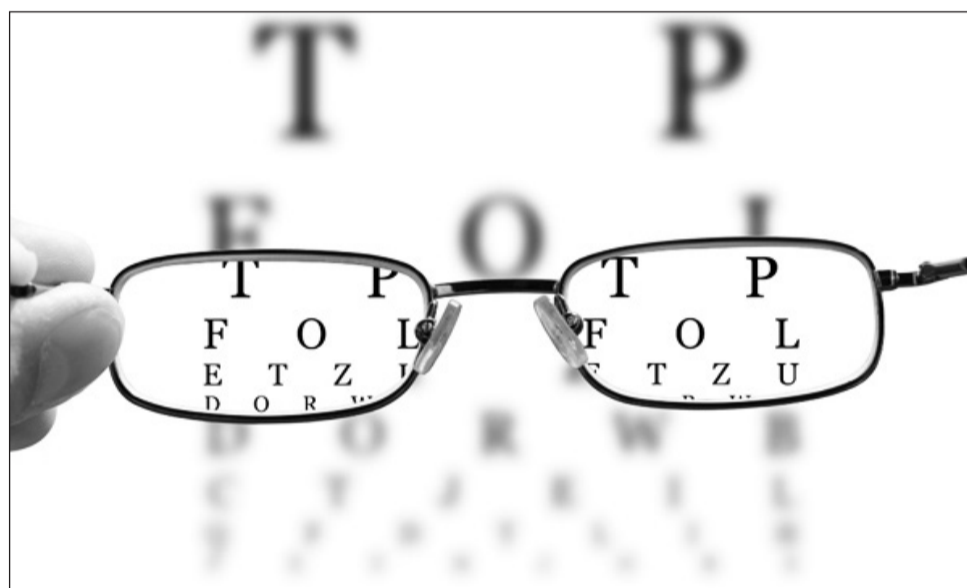
The Ethiopia Herald approached Oromia State Health Bureau and Ophthalmological Society of Ethiopia (OSE) to share insights on ways to improve eye care.

Oromia Health Bureau Disease Prevention and Control Directorate Director Dereje Adugna said that, concerted efforts are underway to reduce the burden of eye health problems and improve the overall well-being of the people through regular and outreach programs designed to address the challenges and arrest avoidable blindness and partial visual impairments.

“The Bureau had carried out over twenty thousand surgeries for trachoma and sixteen thousand for cataracts to correct eye defects; however, we are still behind the elimination margins with a high number of cases that is two hundred thousand. This calls us for more engagements and commitments,” he noted.

The primary eye care centers provide both medication and undertaking awareness raising activities among the vulnerable communities about the eye health, the care that should be taken to maintain a healthy eye as well as visit health institutions in case of illnesses.

According to him, because the State has shortages of ophthalmologists, they follow outreach arrangement programs



in a bid to address health problems of a number of communities in the hinterlands.

Likewise, to address shortage of skilled human power, the State is working along with the Ministry of Health. The two bodies agreed to send general medical practitioners to the Ophthalmology specialization program; the Bureau believes that this could improve the scarcity.

What is more, Oromia State has trained and deployed 550 integrated eye care workers to the hinterlands with the duty and responsibility to provide eye care services and aware rural people regarding eye health problems at the local health facilities and strengthening the capacity of health institutions to serve as referral spots for further treatment.

The State's Health Bureau is also working along with local and international development partners like Himalayas to improve eye care in the State. The Bureau also urged respective stakeholders to enhance effort in providing technical and financial support that could help in providing effective eye care services to communities thereby giving relief to those who are suffering from cataracts and refractive errors as well as trachoma, glaucoma, and corneal diseases.

the majority of the populations are residing in rural areas and far from eye care facilities. Resources allocated for eye health are also very limited.

According to him, the most common cause of blindness in our country is cataract, which accounts for half of the burden of blindness. Similar major causes are scarring of cornea that comes to happen due to trachoma and other causes, such as refractive errors and glaucoma.

Responding to the need to improve eye care, Girum, who is also an Ophthalmologist Consultant at WGGA Eye Center, said that eye health is essential because poor eye health has a number of various impacts beyond an individual level. Eye health is closely related with the socioeconomic condition of a nation; and is important for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Poverty is both a cause and a consequence for poor eye health. Improved eye health can increase household income which in turn reduces hunger. Eye health is key to ensuring good health, mental health and wellbeing. It also has a positive impact on school enrolment, educational attainment and learning.

Mentioning that, improving the quality of eye care in Ethiopia and eliminating avoidable blindness is possible through working in unison, he said that this can be achieved by enhancing ophthalmic service provision, by conducting different outreach campaigns, enhancing training of ophthalmic personnel, facilitating exchange of knowledge and experience and funding research.

In this regard, OSE is strongly advocating for blindness and visual impairment to be a development agenda and priority to be given by the concerned stakeholders.

OSE is working with various governmental, regional and international organizations. At the Federal Ministry of Health level, OSE is an active member of the national committee established for the prevention of blindness. OSE is also a member of the health professional council.

He finally said that, OSE is a member of the International Council of Ophthalmologists/ The International Federation of Ophthalmological Societies (ICO/IFOS) and College of Ophthalmologists for Eastern, Central and Southern Africa (COECSA). The OSE is represented in the executive committee of the National Committee for Prevention of Blindness (NCPB) as the Vice Chairman. OSE is also on the Board of Trustees (BOT) of the Eye Bank of Ethiopia (EBE).

President of the Ophthalmological Society of Ethiopia (OSE), and Glaucoma Specialist, at St. Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College Associate Prof. Girum Woldegebreal (MD), for his part said that the Ophthalmological Society of Ethiopia Association (OSE) was established with the aim to improve the quality of eye care in Ethiopia and eliminate avoidable blindness.

According to a national survey that was done more than a decade ago, the prevalence of blindness in Ethiopia was 1.6 % and low vision was 3.7 %. A recent systematic review has also found a similar prevalence of blindness. Considering the estimated total population of the country as 120 million, nearly 2 million people are blind and 4 and half million people are with low vision. Most importantly, nearly 85 % of the causes of blindness and low vision are either preventable or treatable.

He further noted that, prevalence of blindness and low vision in Ethiopia is one of the highest in Sub-Saharan countries and it is a major public health problem for various reasons. The infrastructure available and the number of eye health professionals working in the country compared to the large population are very limited. Furthermore there is an issue of accessibility since

Digital economy focuses on youth employment

BY BETELHEM BEDLU

ADDIS ABABA- Digital economy stands in better position than the remaining sectors in terms of creating jobs and easing the rampant youth unemployment in the country, experts in the issue said.

Speaking to local media, the United Nations Capital Development Fund Coordinator in Ethiopia Ibrahim Mama stated that in recent years, the sector has created ample jobs for the youth given most of the innovations in technology and Fintech are destined to the new generation. “In turn, the digital economy would open doors for the youth to create further employment.”

Digital Ethiopia 2025 is a huge milestone in terms of enhancing financial transactions as well as introducing new digital financial services over the years, he added.

“Ethiopia has carried out several activities to boost the contribution of the digital economy to the GDP. The more the infrastructure of the digital economy



is strengthened, the better other sectors in the country would engage in delivering their services in the system.”

Ibrahim also stated that the sectors would not only deliver their services, but they could also begin providing new service and deliver it in an efficient way.

There are ongoing activities in different

sectors including education, transport, and health in the digital system. Of which, the effort that is being put in the agricultural sector would have a paramount importance to Ethiopia’s economy and the public’s livelihoods.

The United Nations Capital Development Fund is partnering

with the Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Transformation Institute to support smallholder farmers and small scale producers in digitizing the latter’s activities in a bid to increase agricultural product and productivity.

Nonetheless, more efforts need to be put in place to enhance the community’s digital financial literacy to achieve better results in the sector, the coordinator emphasized.

Kifiya Financial Technology Founder MunirDuri on his part stated that Ethiopia is already building the digital economy infrastructure. What is left is creating and upgrading different innovations in the sector.

According to Munir, equal attention should be given to curb cyber security breaches that could come along with digital systems. Thus, more awareness creation activities and training need to be available for the community at all levels.

Apart from enhancing digital literacy, due emphasis needs to be given in encouraging consultants in the area, he remarked.

Consultations with...

were held under the backdrop of the above mentioned democratic values and systems with the view of the government seeking feedback from various social and political institutions including competing political parties. The feedback from these institutions is of vital importance as inputs for the government either to rectify some government functions or build up on the growth areas.

Listening to public opinion helps the government to clearly understand the needs, interests, values and attitudes of the public and will help to mobilize the entire nation on a pathway that will ensure peaceful development of the country in every aspect of social and economic wellbeing of the people of Ethiopia.

The consultations provide ample opportunities for the Prime Minister and his government to provide the public with the latest developments on policy and strategic issues, national priority areas and concerns.

The discussions that Prime Minister Abiy has conducted with stakeholders contribute to democratic governance by promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in decision-making processes. By involving diverse stakeholders in national dialogues, governments can build trust, foster civic engagement, and strengthen democratic institutions, thereby enhancing the overall legitimacy and effectiveness of governance.

The issue of the preservation of the

sovereignty and peace of the country as well as issues of institutional significance and strategies related to the economic challenges of the nation were cross cutting issues that were discussed on almost all the consultations and discussions over which the prime minister has presided.

As usual, some politicians and so called activists undermine the importance of public dialogue and try to speculate that nothing positive will come out of it. However, political developments over the last several years indicate that such discussions were useful in promoting common narratives on major socio-economic and political issues of the country.

Developing common political narratives in Ethiopia is crucial for fostering national unity, social cohesion, and inclusive governance amid the country’s diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural landscape.

As stated earlier, Prime Minister Abiy’s engagement in inclusive dialogue and consultation processes involving diverse stakeholders, including government representatives, political parties, civil society organizations, religious leaders, traditional elders, youth groups, women’s associations, and representatives of ethnic communities helps to enhance common political narratives between citizens and the government, create platforms for open, transparent, and constructive discussions on shared values, aspirations, and challenges facing the nation.

Empowering Preservation...

to prevent spoilage. This technique has gained popularity due to its convenience and commercial viability. With the establishment of fruit processing plants equipped with modern canning facilities, farmers now have access to a value-added market for their products.

Fruit canning has not only created employment opportunities but has also enabled farmers to supply their produce to distant regions, ensuring a steady income throughout the year. Moreover, canned fruits are exported to international markets, strengthening Ethiopia’s position in the global fruit trade.

Furthermore, promoting value-added activities, such as processing fruits into juices, jams, or dried fruits, can enhance their shelf life and reduce post-harvest losses. By adding value to fruits, their marketability and demand can increase, leading to reduced waste and associated emissions.

Proper waste management practices are crucial for minimizing air pollution associated with fruit preservation. Organic waste generated during the preservation process should be properly composted or utilized for biogas production, reducing the need for open burning and minimizing harmful emissions, scholars underlined.

Entrepreneurs within the sector recognize its immense potential for job creation. By incorporating export value into remittances, the

sector can further boost foreign exchange earnings. To harness these opportunities, the focus should be on carefully selecting product varieties for the foreign market, establishing and maintaining high-quality standards, and supporting local breeders in reproducing superior products.

Abdela highlighted that not all products sent to the foreign market suffer from quality issues. Ethiopia’s avocado production, for instance, is in high demand globally. Strategies have been implemented to reduce post-production waste and damage, demonstrating a commitment to addressing quality concerns.

In conclusion, the horticultural and fruit sectors in Ethiopia hold tremendous potential for ensuring food security, utilizing water resources, creating employment opportunities, and generating foreign exchange earnings. However, the sector faces challenges related to research support, low wages for professionals, limited infrastructure, and quality control. By addressing these challenges and prioritizing research, training, and product quality, Ethiopia can unlock the full potential of the sector, leading to improved food security, economic growth, and sustainable development. Besides, the combination of traditional and modern preservation methods contributes to the preservation of Ethiopia’s diverse fruit varieties and supports sustainable agriculture and food security.

Planet Earth

Empowering Preservation Techniques to Ensure Food Security

BY FIKADU BELAY

Ethiopia has a diverse agricultural landscape and is a hub for fruit production. With an abundance of delicious fruits such as mango, banana, papaya, avocado and orange, the country possesses immense potential for both domestic consumption and international trade. The horticultural and fruit sectors not only play a crucial role in ensuring food security but also possess abundant water resources and offer employment opportunities, particularly for the country's young and female population. However, despite this advantage, achieving food security within the sector has become a challenge. Scholars assert that it is imperative to convert the sector's potential into tangible outcomes to address the prevailing issues of rising living costs, inflation, and unemployment while ensuring food security.

"The sector has high contribution to food security and foreign currency earnings" says Bayable Atnafu (PhD), Deputy Director of Addis Ababa University's Bio-Technology Institute.

He told the Ethiopian Press Agency that lack of research support for the production and post-production processes, are rather hindering the society from fully benefiting from the sector's potential. Consequently, this lack of support not only results in losses but also renders Ethiopian products less competitive in the international market, he said.

He stated that the horticultural and fruit sectors have the capacity to ensure food security to the extent of 30 to 40 percent. To increase foreign exchange earnings, he suggests prioritizing product quality and ensuring food security in urban agriculture, while also minimizing pollution caused by by-products.

Fruits can contribute to air pollution through various mechanisms, primarily during the post-harvest and preservation stages. In Ethiopia, where the preservation of fruits is essential for maintaining their quality and preventing spoilage, several methods can be employed to minimize air pollution and ensure fruit preservation.

Improper variety of packaging materials can contribute to air pollution. Certain packaging materials, such as plastics, can release harmful gases when they degrade or incinerate, contributing to air pollution. Also, inadequate refrigeration and cold storage facilities can lead to fruit spoilage, resulting in increased waste and emissions.

Additionally, the transportation of fruits, especially over long distances, can contribute to air pollution. Vehicles used for transportation, such as



To ensure the success of these preservation techniques, the Ethiopian government has collaborated with international organizations, research institutions, and agricultural experts.

trucks, may emit pollutants, including greenhouse gases and particulate matter. Moreover, scarce post-harvest handling practices can result in significant fruit losses, leading to increased waste and associated air pollution.

He emphasizes that scientific research and adherence to proper production methods are vital for achieving desirable outcomes. He mentioned that the example of Kenya, where the sector receives significant attention, contributing 40 percent to the country's total income.

Zenebe Mekonen (PhD), a teacher and researcher at the Department of Plant Science at Arba Minch University, stated that fruits and vegetables, due to their nutrient content, can readily contribute to food security. However, despite various research efforts in the field, professionals in the sector receive low wages, resulting in a lack of motivation and reduced effectiveness. Although challenges exist regarding crop protection, improved varieties, and modern machinery, current activities demonstrate encouraging progress.

He remarked that while investigations are regularly conducted, there are limitations in altering research findings into actionable solutions. He emphasized the necessity of focusing on product quality to maximize the sector's contribution to foreign exchange earnings. He also underscores the importance of establishing warehouses to preserve manufactured products and providing regular skill training for professionals in the sector.

Abdella Negash, the Executive Director of Horticulture Development at the Ministry of Agriculture, highlighted the significant contributions of the horticultural and fruit sectors toward

ensuring food and nutrition security. He explained that considerable attention is being dedicated to turning this potential into a reality. While the sector is expected to become a valuable resource when combined with the agro-industry, more work is required to fully capitalize on its potential, despite the ongoing efforts.

To ensure the success of these preservation techniques, the Ethiopian government has collaborated with international organizations, research institutions, and agricultural experts. To address the challenges, these partnerships facilitate proper training and education programs should be implemented to educate farmers and workers on best practices for handling, sorting, and storage to minimize post-harvest losses and subsequent waste generation. To mitigate this, eco-friendly and biodegradable packaging materials should be prioritized, such as paper-based packaging options.

The Ethiopian government should introduce solar drying technology. Farmers are provided with solar dryers, which use the sun's heat to remove moisture from the fruits, extending their shelf life considerably. This environmentally friendly technique not only reduces post-harvest losses but also allows farmers to access markets beyond the harvest season. Moreover, solar drying helps retain the nutritional value of the fruits, making them a healthy snack option for consumers.

In addition to solar drying, Ethiopia has also embraced the concept of fruit canning. Canning is a time-tested preservation method that involves sealing fruits in airtight containers

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