

Does the Ethiopian in the Diaspora Have a Role in Ethiopia's Development?

A Synopsis

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1. Introduction

Ethiopia is one of the economically poor nations in the world. It doesn't take effort to identify what economic and social problem characterizes our country. Underemployment, malnutrition, subsistence farming, deforestation, erosion, poor transport and telecommunication services, inadequate access to drinking water and health care, high mortality and birth rates, low life expectancy, etc. All these are recipes of what can be considered as individuals living below poverty line, however specific it may be defined. A host of problems face our country. The solution, therefore become complicated because strategies to solve one problem may accelerates others. These problems are the result of not only the less literature and poor households but also decades of inappropriate policies, pressures form international financial institutions, etc. has compounded the problem.

Analysis of recent data from the World Bank shows frightening parameters. Economic growth rates, owing to several factors has slowed down (see Table 1). Illiteracy rate improved, but school enrolment is very low. Access to communications such as telephone is low and mortality rates are height. On the other hand, population growth rate continues to be more than 2%. Incidence of diseases such as TB and Aids are frightening to take away the most productive workforce. These economic, social and cultural parameters indicate the need, more than ever, to explore for ways of helping our people.

Table 1. Selected parameters of Ethiopian economy

Prevalence of anemia (%)	42
Low birth-weight babies (%)	16
Child malnutrition (%)	64
TB (incidence per 100000)	251
HIV (% of adults)	10
Life Expectancy	43
Mortality rate (per 1000 live birth)	173
Fertility rate (birth per women)	6.4
Telephone mainlines (per 1000 people)	2.8
Growth in GDP at market price (1998-1999)%	0
Hospital beds per 1000 people	0.2
Illiteracy rate (%)	70
School enrollment (%)	20
Population Growth (%)	2.4

Source World Bank (2000 World Development Indicators)

Over the past five decades several paradigms of development were implemented by developing countries and Ethiopia is no exception. Common to all paradigms is that unbalanced emphasis is placed on either agriculture or industry. Few studies proposed the need to correct structural deficiencies before embarking on a development strategy. Some studies have argued that regardless of the strategy of development followed, a country, which cannot feed its people, will pay the costs of underdevelopment. That is, poverty, malnutrition and disease will affect the majority of the population.

Ethiopians, in- and -outside their country have suggested and participated in various development initiatives. Decades of spending of significant financial resources have produced minimal improvements in living conditions. Most paradigms of development implemented so far may be right in their own terms but are not complete. Morphologically, Calkins (1989) summarized the [past] status of development theory as:

Indeed, it is as if the theorists and practitioners of economic development were actors in the fable of the three blind men and the elephant. The first, who touched the trunk, thought the elephant was like a tree. The second, who touched the flank, thought it was like a wall. And the third, who touched the tail, thought it like a rope. Each was correct in describing one part of the anatomy, but failed in capturing the organic composition of the whole. The men would have been better off if they had projected what an elephant might look like from such essential postulates as its size, its strength, and its ability to uproot trees (Calkins, 1989:4).

1.1. What is to be done?

In the past significant emphasis was placed, still is, on the importance of physical resources such as capital, land, etc., But these resources while important, are useless without the intelligence and knowledge that will determine their best use. Large number of studies have documented that information, skill, and knowledge are crucial determinants of the extent to which change can occur and the probability with which it may be sustained. However, there are two elements of concern. First, secular western education alone cannot and will not solve the problem of poor countries such as Ethiopia. Secondly, it is high time to explore for ways of preserving and securing indigenous knowledge. Knowledge, experience and skill not only are critical ingredients of change, but also form the basis of empowerment. Indigenous knowledge, knowledge that has proved to be indispensable to the lives of million of households is being tapped into by developed countries. The mere physical dependence of the south on the North will be changed to knowledge and skill dependent if indigenous knowledge becomes a public good.

It is our belief that the discussion on the role of the Diaspora and those concerned about improvements in the lives of millions of Ethiopians should be (i) how to protect indigenous knowledge, (ii) how to improve and integrate with mainstream secular education, (iv) how to restructure education curricula so that education becomes functional, and (iv) how to ensure consistency between efforts to improve skill,

knowledge and information with physical aspects of development (e.g., procurement of finance).

Ethiopia is said to have the largest number of intellectuals (percentage outside the country) working in various capacity throughout the world. While monetary contribution might help to solve immediate problems and serve reverse crises situations, it is high time to start thinking about what kind of actions would constitute fundamental and groundbreaking. We have to start thinking about how we could plant seeds of change, that will produce, however small, sustainable results. We have to start about ways of attaining change that stays within the agents of change and those who participate in it. That see do change is modifications, changes, preservations or even overhaul of knowledge, skill and information of our population starting with those who are in school and going beyond. It is this fundamental belief in the power of education in its ability to empower out people, to produce sustainable changes and contribute to improvements in the living condition of Ethiopians that necessitated the creation of organizations such as AHEAD.

2. Background

The purpose of this paper is to generate a debate among Ethiopians in the Diaspora about their role in and contribution to capacity building in Ethiopia. The main focus of the paper is to ask a series of questions that will be used to guide discussions and/or generate a debate. The paper will use the hypothesis that the Ethiopian in the Diaspora has and must play a role in Ethiopia's development.

The paper will also discuss a model—the Association for Higher Education and Development (Ahead) B as an experiment of resource mobilization by coordinating and channeling resource and expertise from the Ethiopian Diaspora towards development efforts in Ethiopia. The paper, by intent, stays away from theoretical discussions and focuses on practical examples. The focus of the paper is:

- (i) To raise a series of questions that will be used to guide a debate as to examine whether the Ethiopian in the Diaspora has a role in Ethiopia's development and, if so, how best this role can be facilitated.
- (ii) To present Ahead as a potential model to mobilize, coordinate and channel Diaspora input into development efforts in Ethiopia.

Questions for Discussions:

- .. Does the Ethiopian in the Diaspora have a moral responsibility to pay back the country and the people who have invested in his/her education?

- b. Are there individuals and/or groups who have leadership skills and commitment, are willing and available to bring together Ethiopians in the Diaspora to play a more active role in Ethiopia's development efforts?
- c. What mechanisms can be developed to coordinate, mobilize and channel the resources, expertise and services of Ethiopians in the Diaspora towards development efforts in Ethiopia?
- d. What tools, models and practices can be designed to facilitate communication, networking and partnership among Ethiopians in the Diaspora so as to ensure exchange of information, expertise and experiences in addressing development issues in Ethiopia?
- e. What are the potential partners in Ethiopia that can be used to create linkages between the Ethiopian in the Diaspora and development undertakings in the country? (E.g. civil society, government, institutions, informal sector, community)
- f. What accountability mechanisms can be developed to ensure financial, administrative and management responsibilities of Diaspora initiatives in Ethiopia?
- g. What best practices and lessons learned can be drawn from other Diasporas or other I initiatives?

3. The Role of the Diaspora

3.1. Could the Ethiopian in the Diaspora have a role in Ethiopia's development? And, if so, how best this role can be facilitated?

The unquestionably straightforward answer is yes. Why?

As it is known, much of the Ethiopian population can be characterized as peasant, illiterate, subsistence, malnutrition, inadequate access to drinking water and health care, as well as mainstream means of communications. To these essentially poor, uneducated and less prosperous people, experts, governments and organizations have tried to superimpose what and which type of models of development would best help enhance their present state of living conditions. Recognition of the SELF, as an able-bodied individual, an individual can make RATIONAL decisions given constraints and opportunities open to his/her should form the foundation for any development thought that benefit the Ethiopian population, and poor nations around the world.

It is not correct to argue that one paradigm of developed or school of thought is better over the other, or to argue that illiterate and poor people make erroneous decisions. Erroneous or wrong thoughts are always subjective judgments because the basis for comparison is not a mutually acceptable standard. Therefore, the Ethiopian Diaspora can

make two fundamental contribution to assist out people: (i) using publication to influence thoughts of policy makers, expatriates or domestic, organization and agencies that what is good for the poor has to start from what the poor needs and what is needed to ensure that improvements in his/her life will be translated into ways of life, and (ii) start to think what can be done be that will give our people the POWER that will contribute toward changing their life for ever. SO the motto, “rather than giving a fish, it is better to show him how to catch a fish”, is thought to be fundamental the attainment of this goal.

It is true that there are various means of empowerment. It is a fact that our people, despite being not literate in the secular education of western thinking, are knowledgeable. This knowledge, however, is being exploited, they are becoming dependent and become weaker as the only power they have become a public good- indigenous knowledge. Knowledge, information, experience, education, etc. are all ways of empowering the centerfold of decision-making process.

It is argued that education is a means of empowerment. It can equally be challenged that education, depending on the content, focus, and goal, can make individuals dependent, mentally, spiritually and even physically on the provider of knowledge. Education can be considered as a means of empowerment only to the extent that it contributes to meaningful employment, contribute to exploring solutions to day-to-day problems.

In general, therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the Diaspora should participate in changing the perception from what is good for our people, to what they think is good for them and how they think would like to improve their life. Secondly, in order to keep the momentum, the Diaspora can contribute to greater empowerment of our people through protection of indigenous knowledge, making education functional, amplify experiential knowledge, and is based on constraints/opportunities faced by our people.

Part II: Ahead and Its Mission

The association for higher education and development was based on the following premises:

- .. Our people need to keep upfront with progress in scientific research
- .. Our country do not have the resource to acquire books, journals, electronic publications, etc. in order to furnish students with new scientific developments
- .. Development that is based on education, and that has education at its roots with respect to influencing how decisions are made and actions executed is key toward sustaining improvements attained in living conditions
- .. One of the most fundamental, often forgotten resources is not physical (e.g., land, capital etc..) but also non-physical or non-tangible such as knowledge and information. Any change

- that is based from within the SELF, from within the agent and/or participants of change is expected to have a lasting impact on the ways of life.
- .. Education, knowledge, experience and information are critical ingredients of decision-making, thus any change, growth and development. Without linking or integrating education/knowledge with development activities, any effort is doomed to fail.
 - .. Thus, AHEAD was born from the need to acknowledge the role of education, both a means of empowerment and change/development.

4. About Ahead

Ahead is a non-profit, voluntary and non-governmental organization, established in 1990 in Canada by a group of volunteers of Ethiopian origin. The goal of Ahead is to facilitate resource mobilization by coordinating and channeling the contributions of the Ethiopian in the Diaspora towards development efforts in Ethiopia.

Ahead is guided by a set of principles that uphold the following values:

- ⇒ Focus
- ⇒ Result
- ⇒ Credibility
- ⇒ Partnership,
- ⇒ Accountability and Sustainability

4.1. Methods of accomplishing Ahead's goals:

Ahead started its goal of contributing to Ethiopia's education development with a modest approach. Sending books, newspapers, encouraging students through financial mechanisms, etc. Ahead's motto is one-step at a time, one-book at a time, and one-student at a time. If every segment of the Diaspora operate based on these principles rather than evaluating the magnitude of individualized impact, it is more than likely to see substantial changes to the lives of thousand and millions of Ethiopians.

Ahead have three distinct but complementary activities:

1. Book Shipment
2. Bursary Program
3. Equipment Project

In the future, Ahead plans to arrange for exchange program in which Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians can volunteer to teach at various educational institutions, conduct research with various organizations, etc with the goal of improving the knowledge base of our society.

○ **Ahead works with the following partners:**

Any challenge that either the Diaspora or other entity face can be minimized through networking and collaboration. Ahead out of the need to coordinate assistance or support, educate about how and why we need to act now, and improve awareness about the growing disparity between the North and south imitated several productive and fruitful partnerships.

- ⇒ Addis Ababa University
- ⇒ Getachew Bolodia Foundation
- ⇒ Ethiopian Airlines
- ⇒ Ethiopian community in Canada
- ⇒ Non-governmental organizations in Ethiopia and Canada
- ⇒ Governmental bodies in Canada and Ethiopia
- ⇒ Ethiopian Embassy in Ottawa
- ⇒ Medical institutions and professionals in Canada

Embarking such a small organization with handful of members and resources can be a several constraint to the level achievement or may be an opportunity to do more. Since the implementation of AHEAD as a not-for-profit organization, it has achieved the following goals.

- .. Over 2000 books and journals sent to the Medical Faculty, Addis Ababa University
- ◆ The first batch of 18 medical students sponsored as Ahead fellows for Ahead Bursary Program that allows them to receive monthly allowances for three years while at medical school.
- ◆ Preparations underway to work with the Medical Faculty to start equipment project to furnish students and fresh graduates with basic medical tools required during training and for practice.

AHEAD started with a modest goal, resources and objectives. It has grown beyond the expectation of its founding members and friends and supporters of AHEAD. The longer-term objective of AHEAD is to incite, initiative and collaborate with the Diaspora in the medial and other fields in order to contribute toward meaningful change and development

among the poor of our country. Ahead will also establish sister organization throughout the world so that the million mile march could be reality during our lifetime.

Please visit Ahead website at: www.aheadonline.org