

The Role of the Ethiopian Diaspora in Ethiopia

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Paper presented at *Ethiopia Forum*:

Challenges and Prospects for Constitutional Democracy in Ethiopia

International Center, Michigan State University

East Lansing, Michigan, March 22-24, 2019

Abstract:

The Ethiopian diaspora is a post-1970s phenomenon. Ethiopian government sources has it that there are more than 3 million Ethiopians scattered throughout the world: From America to Australia, from Norway to South Africa. However, the majority of these Ethiopians reside in the US, the Arab Middle East, and Israel in that order. Currently, a little more than a quarter of a million Ethiopians live in the US.

The Ethiopian diaspora in the US, like its compatriots in other parts of the world, is one of the most vocal critic of the government in Ethiopia. However, its views are as diverse as the ethnic and regional origins, manners of entry into the US, generation, and levels of education.

However, the intent of this paper is not to discuss the migration history of Ethiopians but to explore some of the reasons that caused the political fallout between the various regimes in Ethiopia and the Diaspora-Ethiopians. In the meantime, the paper examines the potential and actual roles that the Ethiopian diaspora can play in Ethiopia.

The Making of the Ethiopian Diaspora in the US: A Synopsis

One can trace back the roots of the Ethiopian diaspora in the US to the establishment of diplomatic ties between the Government of Ethiopia and the US in 1903. In that year, the US government sent a delegation, the Skinner Mission, to Ethiopia.¹ It was during this time that Menelik II, King of Kings of Ethiopia, in addition to signing trade deals with the US, expressed his interest in sending students to the United States. Melaku Beyan was among one of the earliest students who studied in the US. Dr. Beyan, who studied medicine, became the 1st Ethiopian to remain in America.² Since then, the US became one of the major destinations of Ethiopian students. The Government of Ethiopia, especially Haile Selassie, and the US financed the education of these Ethiopians.

Though Menelik introduced Western education into Ethiopia, it was Haile Selassie who played the major role in the development of Western education. During his reign educational institutions, including higher learning institutions and military academies were established. These colleges and academies credited for producing highly skilled professionals in the military as well as civilian sectors in Ethiopia. Although Haile Selassie sent students to many different countries, the majority of students were sent to the US. For instance, between 1953 and 1974, the US trained some 4000 military officers. There were also about 2000 civilian students in the US.³ So much was the US involvement in Ethiopia during the reign of Haile Selassie, the period, as Bahiru Zewde noted, was an American Century: While the Ethiopian air force was

¹ Robert P. Skinner, et al., The 1903 Skinner Mission to Ethiopia and a Century of American-Ethiopian Relations (Tsehai Publishers and Distributors, 2003)

² Bahru Zewde, Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of Early Twentieth Century (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002), pp. 89-95

³ Solomon Addis Getahun, The History of Ethiopian Immigrants and Refugees in America, 1900-2000 (New York: LFB scholarly Publishing LLC, 2006)

a showpiece of American ascendancy in Ethiopia, there are no institution, civilian or military, that does not have America's mark.⁴

The amicable relationship between Haile Selassie and his students, abroad and at home, continued until the beginning of the 1970s. Prior to the 1970s, students praised Haile Selassie in their songs. One such song was አላባባ ጃንሆይ የኛ እናት አባት፣ አሳድገውናል በማር በወተት፣ [His Majesty, our father and mother, has raised us with milk and honey.] His Majesty, being the Minister of Education and Fine Arts and Chancellor of the University College of Addis Ababa, frequently visited the university. Almost all college and university students of those days fondly remember Haile Selassie coming to their dining halls and testing their food and chatting with them. The Emperor attended student presentations. However, these events increasingly became forums for mock and criticized his rule. Noting this the Emperor began distancing himself from such events.

Similarly, before the 1970s, whenever Haile Selassie traveled abroad, Ethiopian students used to greet and welcome the Emperor. The Emperor, on his part, often invited students to the Ethiopian Consular Offices where each student met or chatted with him. Not only this, during Ethiopian national holidays, Ethiopian Consular Officials often invited Ethiopian students to the embassy. In the US, the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington DC had hosted so many of those events.

Politics and the Ethiopian Diaspora during the Reign of Haile Selassie

However, since the failed coup attempt of Mengistu and Germame Niway, Haile Selassie's stature among the educated Ethiopian began to lose its luster. Soon, the Haile Selassie I University students' established the Ethiopian Students Movement (ESM). By mid 1960s, the ESM has established its branches in Europe (ESUE) and in North America (ESUNA).⁵

The ESM, in collaboration with its foreign branches, began openly criticizing Haile Selassie's government. Its 1965 "Land to the Tiller" demonstration, which was also echoed among students in Europe and the Americas, must have disappointed the Emperor, to say the least.

By 1969, Ethiopian students in Europe and the Americas, as a show of support to the ESM at home, started occupying Ethiopian embassies and held embassy officials hostage. One such incident that took place in July 1969 could be considered the tipping point in the relationship between Ethiopian students abroad and the Government of Ethiopia, aka Haile Selassie. Between July 7 and 10, 1969, Haile Selassie was in the US for a state visit. Using this as an opportunity, some 30 members of the ESUNA occupied the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington, DC. Meanwhile some 80 of their compatriots held demonstrations in front of the White House denouncing Haile Selassie.⁶

Since then, the relationship between Ethiopian students abroad, especially those in the US, and the Ethiopian Government became acrimonious: They began seeing each other as enemies.

Politics and the Ethiopian Diaspora during the Reign of the *Derg*

The strained relationship between the students and the government of Ethiopia hit the rock bottom during the reign of the *Derg*, the military junta that ruled the country between 1974 and 1991. In the early days

⁴ Bahru Zewde, A Modern History of Ethiopia, 1955-1991 (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002), pp. 94-100, 103-111

⁵ See for instance Bahru Zewde, The quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement, 1960s-1974 (Woodbridhe, Suffolk: James Currey, 2014)

⁶ The Washington Post and The New York Times, July 8, 1969; see also Chen Jian, Martin Klimk et al., Eds., The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 361.

of the revolution, though the students at home and abroad supported the *Derg* for ending “feudalism” and monarchical rule in Ethiopia, their rapprochement was short-lived. The rapture was partly due to the lack of unity among the student-revolutionaries. Some of the students who established the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM) began supporting the *Derg*. Students who joined the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP) opposed it. As if their division was not enough, they began denouncing each other: counter-revolutionaries, anarchist, opportunist, collaborator etc. Soon targeted assassinations of their respective members followed. The *Derg*, in collaboration with AESM, unleashed the Red Terror and extrajudicial killings, *nesa-irmija*, to eradicate “counter-revolutionaries.” The EPRP responded by killing individuals that suspected as members and supports of AESM and the *Derg*.⁷

The bloodshed between the antagonists was further complicated with the intensification of the secessionist war in Eritrea, and Somalia’s invasion of Ethiopia. EPRP overt support for Eritrean secessionists and Somali irredentists further intensified *Derg*’s determination in destroying its political opponents, this time including AESM.

The badly battered and hunted student-revolutionaries began leaving Ethiopia for foreign lands, the US and Europe, via Sudan, Kenya and Djibouti. Some Ethiopians who had relatives, friends and acquaintances abroad entreated them to facilitate their travel from Kenya, Sudan, Djibouti or Kenya. Meanwhile, the US began facilitating the return of the Beta Israel to Israel through Sudan. It also offered the Ethiopian refugees in Sudan that include members and leaders of the EPRP, Ethiopian Democratic Union, and others. In the eyes of the US, these Ethiopians in Sudan were people who “voted against communism (*Derg*) on their feet.” These Ethiopians, some 24000 of them, were beneficiaries of the 1980 US Refugee Act that, which granted the privilege of living in the US.⁸

Among the refugees, though there were highly educated former government officials, university students, and military officers, the majority of them were high school students and illiterate peasants.

Therefore, by 1980s the Ethiopian diaspora in the US was composed of asylum seekers, Ethiopians who came to the US before the 1974 Revolution for education, government officials and diplomats who, however, could not return to Ethiopia for fear of persecution; and the refugees who joined them in 1980s. These Ethiopians, asylees and refugees, continued the tradition of being critical of the government/s in Ethiopia.

The *Derg*, on its part, regarded these Ethiopians and others who left for foreign countries, especially to Western Europe, as counter revolutionaries, lackeys of imperialism... etc. So much was the government’s hatred to its own citizens abroad; there were instances in which it refused to let Ethiopians who died abroad to be buried in Ethiopia. What is more, during the reign of the *Derg*, sending money to Ethiopia was unthinkable. The government viewed such transaction as part of bigger scheme of imperialism and its lackeys to finance and destabilize “socialist Ethiopia.” Letters sent from abroad are often checked. Thus, for fear of unintended consequences, Ethiopians abroad often used individuals, if there are any, to deliver messages in person.

Politics and the Ethiopian Diaspora during the Reign of the EPRDF

The EPRDF regime, which supplanted the *Derg* in 1991, has a mixed record in its relation with the Diaspora-Ethiopians. Unlike the *Derg*, the EPRDF welcomed members of the Diaspora. It also offered

⁷ For a detailed account of the 1974 Revolution and the role of the student-revolutionaries, see Kiflu Tadesse, The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (Kiflu Tadesse, 1993). The author has two more volumes: Vol. 2 and 3. All three volumes deal with the main actors of the Ethiopian revolution: the EPRP, AESM, the *Derg* and others.

⁸ See Getahun, The History of Ethiopian Refugees

Diaspora-Ethiopians the “Ethiopian Origin ID Card,” henceforth the Card. Initially the Card cost \$50.00, and then \$100.00., and now it is \$200.00. Anyone who can prove that he/she were born in Ethiopia, or if one of their parents is an Ethiopian, can get the Card. Moreover, the EPRDF granted the Diaspora-Ethiopians the right to work, if they have the Card, at any government office, save the Ministry Foreign Affairs and the intelligence services. Furthermore, the EPRDF exempted Diaspora-Ethiopians from visa restriction, including fees for entry and exit visas.

The EPRDF also invited and encouraged Diaspora-Ethiopians to invest in Ethiopia. To attract Diaspora-Ethiopians, the government granted 500M² land for free in early 2000. The late Prime Minister Meles Zenawe handed roses as a welcome gesture to Diaspora-Ethiopians who came to Ethiopia to celebrate Ethiopia’s 2nd millennium.

In spite of opening Ethiopia’s door for its diaspora, using its consular offices abroad and immigration offices at home, the EPRDF was accused of discriminating against some individuals, organizations (be it political, civic and philanthropic), and *killels* (ethnic administrative enclaves). The regime is known for detaining Diaspora-Ethiopians from leaving their country, or those who are coming from abroad. Materials or funds donated to a certain region, organization or individual often “disappear” easily if the recipient is on the “other” side of EPRDF’s political spectrum.

The ethno-centric policies of the EPRDF government was a challenge for some of the Diaspora-Ethiopians. This coupled with irregularities during national election, the narrowing political space and the monopolization of political power pushed Diaspora-Ethiopians to voice their anti-EPRDF opinions using all available means, including smuggling weapons into Ethiopia.⁹ So much was the antagonism against the EPRDF, Diaspora-Ethiopians employed churches and sport arenas as a platform to expose and condemn the regime in Addis Ababa. This is in addition to the various radio and television stations, and lobbying US members of Congress. While ESAT (Ethiopian Satellite Television) is among the most noted anti-EPRDF television station, Congressman Chris Smith (R-NJ) and the longtime Silicon Valley Rep. Mike Honda were some of the supporters of the Diaspora-Ethiopians in the US. While Mike Honda was instrumental in establishing *Congressional Ethiopian-American Caucus*,¹⁰ Chris Smith was noted in lobbying and passing H.R 128.¹¹ Whereas this measure threatened the EPRDF and its cronies, and contributed for the positive developments in Ethiopia, it also shows the maturing of the Diaspora-Ethiopians in the US.

The Ethiopian Diaspora and the Politics of Remittance

During Haile Selassie’s era, sending money to Ethiopia or taking money out of Ethiopia was not an issue. The reign of the Derg, as indicated earlier, was difficult and dangerous. Consequently, Ethiopians used every available means to support their needy families in Ethiopia. I have learned from Ethiopians who immigrated to Italy, of course illegally, who wanted to send money, through Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, to their relative in Asmara, Eritrea. In those days, the *Derg* suspected anyone who receives money from abroad as a counter-revolutionary. The fact that the money is going to be sent to Eritrea, a province that was battling the regime for secession, made things dangerous. Thus, the Ethiopians in Italy, apprehensive of the dangers of sending money to Asmara, devised a means to evade government detection. Accordingly, instead of sending the money thorough the banks, they sent in it in a perfume

⁹ See The Economist, December 9, 2018; James Jeffrey, “How did US and Ethiopia become so close?,” The BBC, April 8, 2019.

¹⁰ Christine MAI-DUC, “Longtime Silicon Valley Rep. Mike Honda losses seat to fellow Democrat in bitter rematch battle,” The Los Angeles Times, November 9, 2016.

¹¹ *CSPAN Televises, Smith hearing on progress in Ethiopia: Reviewing Current Developments in Ethiopia* US Congressman Chris Smith <<https://chrissmith.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=401383>> (Sept. 12, 2018). Accessed February 19, 2019.

bottle. They rolled two-single \$200.00 bills and inserted into the bottle. They then placed the bottle in a new perfume packet, and carefully resealed it to its original state. They sent the “perfume” to their mother via an acquaintance whom they met in Italy. Thus, using individuals to deliver money to relatives in Ethiopia was the most common manner by which Diaspora-Ethiopians were able to support their families in Ethiopia. Accordingly, Ethiopia is one of countries where more than 78% of the remittance comes through informal channels.

Distinct from the *Derg*, the EPRDF not only welcomed remittance from the diaspora, but also allowed Diaspora-Ethiopians to be buried in Ethiopia. However, the ethno-federalist government and its affiliates were accused of taking part in illegal activity such as money laundering. In Addis Ababa, one finds individuals who exchange the Ethiopian currency, *Birr*, for any foreign currency, at a higher rate than the country’s banks can offer. In an attempt to financially cripple the regime and convince it to desist from its alleged criminal activities, diaspora-based political organizations, especially those in the US, lobbied Ethiopians not to send money to Ethiopia. Some even went as far as urging Diaspora-Ethiopians to boycott Ethiopian Airlines.

Frustrated by such measures from the diaspora, the government apparently passed a law that forced Diaspora-Ethiopians to sell their shares in private banks and insurance companies. It also openly began to deny access to foreign currency to business and individuals whom it suspected of being against its developmental-state ideology, cronyism and human rights violation. The most who suffered were business owners who hail from other ethnic groups.

Thus, business and individuals that the EPRDF denied hard currency were able to circumvent the regime’s discrimination against them in many ways. One of them is to use their relatives and friends abroad. Ethiopian relatives or friends abroad will wire money to Dubai and China where most of the Ethiopian businesspersons import goods. The entrepreneurs in Ethiopia will remit or pay in *Birr* for an Ethiopian who lives in Ethiopia, or for a Diaspora-Ethiopian who is in Ethiopia for a visit. Recent political developments revealed that some of the individuals were TPLF members and associates—exposing one of the darker sides of a dying regime.

The aforementioned practice, while weakens the regimes ability to monitor, also damages the country’s fledgling economy: Some Ethiopian parents, who finance their children’s education, often find such practice convenient to circumvent lopsided government regulation.

The dollar has other ways to leave the country illegally. People rent, or sell a property in Ethiopia to a person who resides abroad. While the person abroad agrees to deposit the price for the property that he bought or rented (cars, land, house etc) in Ethiopia, he/she will deposits the price in dollars in US banks, or wires it to a desired destination. Both the seller and the buyer benefit in many ways, including saving time, avoiding taxes, and avoiding discriminatory practices.

One of the consequences of the mushrooming of illegal money wiring services, between Ethiopia and its diaspora, is the disparity of remittance figures between the World Bank and other international agencies, and those that are being reported from other agencies and banks in Ethiopia. For instance, the 2016 World Bank reported indicated that Ethiopia received about \$0.6bn while reports from Ethiopia are much bigger.¹²

¹² World Bank’s Migration and Remittance Factbook (2016): Inward remittance flows to Africa, in US \$ billions. The same report indicated that The Top 10 remittance recipients in 2015 (\$US billions): Nigeria (\$20.8bn), Ghana (\$2.0bn), Senegal (\$1.6bn), Kenya (\$1.6bn), South Africa (\$1.0bn), Uganda (\$0.9bn), Mali (\$0.9bn), Ethiopia (\$0.6bn), Liberia (\$0.5bn), Sudan (\$0.5bn). Meanwhile the World Bank report disclosed that Ethiopia is among the world’s top-eleven low-income countries.

The *World Bank's Migration and Remittance Factbook* report is cognizant of the lower remittance figures for Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular, and ascribes it to diverse and yet interrelated factors. Accordingly, one of the reasons is an incomplete data. One such loophole is the prevalence of a primarily informal channel/s that Africans used to send money, and the unwillingness or inability of African states to report remittances.¹³

Though Africa is one of the continent, if not the only, with the largest number of emigrants, 23.2 million people, which account for 2.5 percent of the global emigrant population, the majority of them, 65.5%, are “intra-regional.”¹⁴ They remain as refugees and internally displaced persons within the continent. Thus, their financial contribution to their country of origin is limited or none. In fact, they often become burdens on host societies and relatives within the continent. The global North wants to keep African emigrants within Africa in spite of its preaching about *globalization*. So much so, asylum seekers to Europe had fallen after reaching an all-time high in 2015. Yet, the factors that triggered the migration crisis like state-fragility and conflict remained the same.¹⁵

According to the World Bank data, Ethiopia is not among the top ten emigrant origin countries. This in contrast to the international media reportage: Mega TV news outlets showing Ethiopians being rescued from drowning in the high seas, or being among those killed by ISIS while trying to cross the Sahara Dessert. Ethiopia is also awarded the highest index for being unstable and hence a failing state. This partly explains the limited inflow of remittance from members of the Ethiopian diaspora.

In addition to such incongruity, until recently, due to Nile-Water politics the Middle East was not accessible for many Ethiopians as a destination. This is in spite of the geographic proximity and cultural ties, and the reigns' dependency on emigrant labor. While countries in the Middle East are scouring for labor as far as Southeast Asia and beyond, they did not welcome Ethiopians or were reluctant to accept them. Though in the past couple of decades the Arab countries began recruiting laborers from Ethiopia, most of these Ethiopians used human traffickers and smuggles to reach the Arab lands thereby limiting their ability to remit. In addition, the kind of laborers that these Middle Eastern countries seek from Ethiopia are the barely literate, primarily Muslim etc. Hence, the lower rate of remittance for Ethiopia.¹⁶

Depoliticizing emigration and legalization of emigration through bilateral agreements and diplomatic channels would make the lives of Ethiopians in the Arab-Middle East countries safe and prosperous. Such measure in the meantime curb the proliferation of non-government actors in the emigration process. It also definitely increases the remittance inflow to Ethiopia.

The quality of emigrants, though does not often guarantee the desired results, is one way of boosting higher remittance inflow into Ethiopia. For instance, a recent study conducted on higher education in Ethiopia supports the above claim. Until 2010, the country was barely producing 50 PhD holders annually. On the other hand, Southeast Asian countries such as Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore,

Nigeria and Egypt are among the top ten remittance receiving countries. For instance, 2017 India received (\$69b), China (\$64b), Philippines (\$33b), Mexico (\$31b), Nigeria (\$22b), Pakistan (\$20b), Egypt (\$20b), Vietnam (\$14b), Bangladesh (\$13b), Ethiopia got \$387 million in 2013.

¹³ The US government has outlawed and condemned *Alberkat* for fear that the informal money-transferring entity can also be used to finance terrorist organization like al-Shababa

¹⁴ The World Bank, *Migration and Remittance Factbook, 2013*

¹⁵ The World Bank, “Trends in Migration and Remittances, April 21, 2017,”

¹⁶ Currently Dr. Aby's regime is trying to formalize the labor migration between Ethiopia and the Arab countries of the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia, Jourdan, Lebanon and Qatar. Besides, unlike previous years, agencies that were shipping Ethiopians, especially women and girls, are now required to have a license and the knowhow to vet and facilitate Ethiopian maids travel to the said places.

India, and China, and the Latina American country of Mexico that had been sending highly skilled laborers to the US and to the Middle East are among the forefront in producing PhD holders in the world.¹⁷ Some of the countries even surpassed the US in producing PhD holders. Yet, these countries are also among the top remittance recipient countries in the world.

Of course, bilateral agreements between countries must complement the sending of highly educated professionals abroad. Countries like India and China, who were able to capitalize on their diaspora community in the US and other parts of the world, did it through such agreements. Ethiopia, too, should follow their example; if it wants to gain financially from its diaspora population.

The quality of its diplomatic missions such as its educational attaches must be highly trained and qualified diplomats than ideologically motivated, ethnically minded illiterates. A certain Metasebia Kassaye's article, *ህገ ወጥ የሰዎች ዝውውር ተባብሷል*, exposes the lack of concerted effort between the various government agencies, the absence of standardization and bilateral agreements between Ethiopia and the Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar. Such oversight from the Ethiopian government opened the door for corruption and human smugglers.¹⁸ These days, every day, about 1000 Ethiopians leave the country on tourist visas. Lured by human smugglers, most of the tourist visa holders' destination is the Middle Eastern countries. Some of these Ethiopians are barely 18 years of age.

Money Transferring Organizations (MTOs) are other culprits for the lower remittance inflow into Ethiopia in particular and Africa in general. The MTOs such as Western Union and MoneyGram are almost the only money transferring international agencies that operate in the continent. There are MTO agencies that compete against these companies. As a result, they charge the highest fees for sending money to Africa. The highest fee levied on Africans, beside reasons explained earlier, encourages Africans to look for other venues and hence the continuations of the informal ways by which Africans send money home: Through networks of individuals that charge less or through friends who travel back-home.

However, the development of newer technologies such as smartphones has encouraged emerging newer competitors such as Xoom and Willstream who use software that enable sending and receiving money than MoneyGram and Western Union. Hereto, Africans in general and Ethiopians in particular are disadvantaged. Mobile phone penetration, though growing fast, is limited compared to the rest of the globe. Government control and bureaucracy is another impediment in Africa. Moreover, in countries like Ethiopia contentious power interruption, unreliability of the internet/ wireless service, lack of savvy knowledge on using smartphones and the poverty of its population hinders the use of such gadgets for such services. Despite the 42 million Ethiopian's ownership of cellphones, it is very common to hear Ethiopians say, "Why did not you respond to miscall?"—complaining why their friend or relative did not call them after getting "a missed call" from them. The so-called missed call is not really a missed call but just beep and hanging the phone before even the recipient's phone asks, "to leave a message." This is intended to save the caller a few coins that he/she might incur.

One might be wondering, "Why then is this person cared to buy a phone?" The answers demands a look into the "Ethiopian mentality," probably culture and the role of the Diaspora-Ethiopians. The Ethiopian society is very "competitive." Had Ethiopians used this competitiveness for productive purposes, it would have been helpful. However, it is not. In fact, "competitiveness" is so much, it boards banality and pomposity. For an Ethiopian, if his neighbor has something that he does not, he must have it even if he has no need for it. Otherwise, he feels less than his neighbor does. Such behavior can partly explain,

¹⁷ Wondwosen Tamrat, "The Meager Output of Ethiopian Ph.D.s," *The World View: A Blog from the Center for International Higher Education*, (Blog on April 22, 2018)

¹⁸ መታሰቢያ ካሳዩ, "ህገ ወጥ የሰዎች ዝውውር ተባብሷል", *አዲስ አድማስ ጋዜጣ* (May 7, 2018)

besides poverty, the reasons why Ethiopians leave their country through illegal means while knowing that they might not reach their destination: they might die on the high seas or in the Sahara desert. Similarly, it explains why so many Ethiopian have a cellphone, though some of them do not afford and often do not know how to use it. Cellphone were often associated with and used as a sign of privilege and prestige. In the early days of the cellphone, it was those who can afford and access to power such as government officials and then the rich, who had it. Their cellphone number starts with 911. As the price for cellphones declined so was the difference in numbers and accessibility. Thus, the populace that noticed these changes coined various nicknames for cellphones according to the first three digits and who primarily had them: የባለስልጣን ወይንም የመንግስት፣ የነጋዴ፣ የደላላ ከማን፣ አንሺ . . . ወዘተ. These nicknames, in addition to revealing hierarchy, expose the cultural norms of the populace. Thus, despite the existence of more than 40 million Ethiopian cellphone users, the latest money wiring technology-using cellphone will remain “unknown” for the majority of Ethiopians. In fact, late alone cellphones, ATMs are a very recent addition in the banking business.

Either to stave off the hard currency crunch in the country or to stimulate more remittance, Prime Minister Aby Ahmad’s government is encouraging Ethiopian to send money to Ethiopia. As part of this initiative, Dr. Aby asked every Ethiopian to save a dollar a day and send it to Ethiopia. With the money from the diaspora, he pledged to build schools, clinics, etc. To this end, the Prime Minister had even established a committee, rather appointed, composed of members of the diaspora. Though the Diaspora-Ethiopians enthusiastically supported the scheme, their initial performance was abysmal, in fact disappointing. In the first seven weeks, the Diaspora-Ethiopians remitted less than \$500,000. Not only the sum of money raised in the seven weeks was too small, the number of people contributed for the diaspora fund was around 2,300. In short the participants were too few compared to the estimated, but not verified, 3,000,000 Ethiopian diaspora members.

So disappointed was the PM with the lackluster participation of Ethiopians in the diaspora fundraising, he literally said, “shouting alone is not enough,” which means “talk is cheap.” An Ethiopian blogger, who was also dismayed by the dismal participation of the diaspora-Ethiopians, calculated even those who contributed money to the diaspora fund have not done enough. Their contribution, according to him, was \$0.50 cents per day. In short, the Ethiopian diaspora can do a lot more. As of today, some 21,000 Diaspora-Ethiopians contributed about \$4 million.

Conclusion: Recommendation

For Ethiopia to capitalize from its diaspora population, what Dr. Aby Ahmad started has to continue: smooth relationship between the Ethiopian government and its Diaspora-Ethiopian population. Therefore, Dr. Aby’s initiative should not remain a onetime initiative. It should evolved into an institution that specifically tasked to engage the Diaspora-Ethiopians at all levels. This author sees the Ethiopian Origin ID Card as one example of institutionalization of diaspora relations.

The government of Ethiopia must be careful in selecting ambassadors that it sends to foreign countries. They should be highly educated professionals than political appointees.

On the other hand, the diaspora too should recognize the situation in Ethiopia before demanding things that the country cannot met, not because it was unwilling, but because the state is incapacitated due to structural constraints.

To mobilize Diaspora-Ethiopians, diaspora organizations should know their capabilities and shortcomings. One major shortcoming is unity. According to Dr. Menna Demise, there are more than 400 IRS registered Ethiopian agencies. Some, if not many, of them are redundant but evidences of disunity. Moreover, in order to “convince” the government in Ethiopia, Ethiopian diaspora organizations and individuals ask diaspora Ethiopians not to send money to Ethiopia, not to fly on Ethiopian airlines, and

even asking governments and philanthropic agencies from sending a badly needed aid to Ethiopia. Such demands, as experience shown, are not headed by Diaspora-Ethiopians. We all know that helping one's family in Ethiopia an obligation no one can overlook. Despite the ups and downs, Ethiopians are patriotic irrespective of creed and ethnic origin. Thus flying on Ethiopian Airlines, which is pan-African airlines, is a reflection of that patriotism. At the same time, agitating to stop food aid reaching the needy Ethiopians is equivalent to passing a death sentence. It also shows the lack of political maturity, to say the least, on the organizers side.