



Forum for Ethiopian Scholars & Professionals (FESP) Conference Report

October 8, 2021

The 10th Conference of the Forum for Ethiopian Scholars and Professionals (FESP) which was held virtually on September 4, 12, 18, and 25, 2021, was successfully completed. A total of fourteen papers were presented by established academics, emerging scholars and professionals. The colloquia also included four session chairs and three master of ceremonies. The general theme of the conference was “national priorities.” The four sessions focused on (i) unity, conflict resolution, and taming ethno-nationalism; (ii) economic liberalization & macroeconomic governance; (iii) culture, heritage conservation challenges, and accountability, and (iv) agriculture and food security.

The presentations were made in Amharic in order to reach a wider audience. The Session Chairs were Dr. Ashenafi Gossay of King County, Seattle, Professor Seid Hassan of Murray State University Kentucky, Dr. Yohannes Zeleke of Smithsonian Institute Washington, D.C., and Dr. Zelalem Teferra of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University. The Master of Ceremonies were Dr. Yohannes Zeleke and Dr. Abate Getahun of Wollo University and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Ato Kone Fisseha, Ato Grium Yilma, and Ato Yassin Ibrahim of Abbay Media were instrumental in handling the internet logistics and getting the proceedings of the conference to the general public.

The special guest was H.E. Dr. Aklilu Habte, the renowned educator and author, former Minister of Culture & Tourism, and President of Addis Ababa University. In his brief remarks, Dr. Aklilu underscored that knowledge dissemination should not be confined to the premises of universities and, appreciated the engagement of intellectuals in public policy affairs, all in the spirit of genuine academic freedom and public intellectual service.

The conference was opened by Professor Minga Negash, the Interim President of FESP. His opening remarks were divided into three parts. The first was about the legacy of the forum, which has served as a platform for over 300 speakers (which included scholars, professionals, activists, civil society and political leaders, cabinet ministers, and the Prime Minister of Ethiopia). Prior to the 10th Conference, necessary reforms were carried out, resulting in the rebranding and reorganization of Vision Ethiopia as FESP and, adding 5 new associate Board of Directors who reside in Ethiopia. The second was about the call for [papers](#) and the process by which speakers were selected.

The third point was about the prevailing situation in Ethiopia (armed conflicts, human displacement, atrocity crimes and economic miseries) and the diplomatic pressures faced by the Government of Ethiopia. At the center of the diplomatic tension lies the GERD,



Sudan's Ethiopian border incursions, controversies surrounding the [Convention](#) about the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and, the sacrosanct nature of the sovereignty of the nations that constitute the United Nations. A contextual understanding of why ethnic/religious minorities rebel has become important. Citing the literature on ethnic conflicts, Professor Minga Negash indicated that most contemporary conflicts in the world are ethnonational. The relatively higher level of population fractionalization in the Sub Sahara Africa region is another variable that accentuates conflict. By referring to the work of Professor Brendan O'Leary, Professor Minga synthesized governments' responses to the challenges of ethnonational conflicts in two ways: by eliminating differences (genocide, ethnic/cultural cleansing, partitioning) and managing differences through parity, proportionality, autonomy, and veto power. Professor Minga asked which one of O'Leary's policies has already been tried in Ethiopia and which ones are likely to work. Furthermore, research on ethnonational conflicts also shows that about 26% of such conflicts were resolved through peace agreements and only 7% were resolved militarily. In other words, about 66% of the post-1991 ethnonational conflicts in the world have remained unresolved and, hence one cannot settle for simplistic solutions to solve complex problems, Professor Minga argued.

The closing remarks and vote of thanks were provided by Dr. Ashenafi Gossaye, the Secretary-General of FESP. In his summary, Dr. Ashenafi related the presentations with the overall theme of the conference. Highlighting the issues that were covered by the fourteen speakers, Dr. Ashenafi Gossaye reiterated them as: the need to tame ethnicity, resisting minority rule while ensuring their protection; the necessity of constitutional reforms; capitalizing the geopolitical and economic integration powers of the GERD; reexamining the link between economic liberalization, austerity, conflict, sovereign debt and money supply; reducing dependency on foreign aid; use/misuse of cultural heritage to accentuate conflict; heritage destruction; food security, land use, and tenure, and the importance of better quality agricultural higher education and extension services, among other things.

Another noteworthy factor is that, notwithstanding criticisms of government failure, consistent with our 8th and 9th conferences, no speaker subscribed or alluded to the idea of a transitional or a caretaker government. In addition, the effect(s) of President Biden's Executive Order of September 17, [2021](#) on agriculture and food security, was seen both as a short term challenge and as an opportunity for reducing dependency on foreign aid where a significant proportion of the population has been anchored, over a prolonged period, on donor supported (food) safety net.

The abstracts of each session, together with the links to the full videos are provided below. The first three of the four videos are on YouTube while the remaining one is on Facebook. Abbay Media has promised that all videos will be uploaded on YouTube. They will also be transmitted on its satellite television. The Board of FESP sincerely thanks the speakers and all those who supported us in organizing this successful conference.



SESSION THEME ABSTRACTS

SESSION ONE

Date: September 4, 2021

Full Video Link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCLejLBibDE>

SESSION THEME

National unity, conflict resolution, and taming ethnonationalism through decentralization and power-sharing in contemporary Ethiopia

Abstract

The first presenter was Dr. Tsehai Berhane Selassie. Her presentation was entitled “*When politics follows tradition to devolve society into chaos.*” Dr. Tsehai is a testimony of one of the dark sides of Ethiopia’s higher education as she was one of the 42 academics who were fired from Addis Ababa University by the EPRDF led Government of Ethiopia in the early 1990s. The former affiliate of the Institute of Advanced Studies in Princeton, she provided a theoretical overview of the concept of tradition and culture and explained why it is crucial to understand their relationship with contemporary politics. Based on her studies, Dr. Tsehai highlighted that in almost all cultures in Ethiopia, people tend to adore warriors and give social rewards that include praise, prestige, and status. This is also reflected in the performing arts and folk music. Dr. Tsehai argued that the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) was successful in using this culture to advance its guerrilla warfare. It also managed to make people believe that ethnic identity is more important than national identity. Dr. Tsehai reiterated the repeated calls of reforming the TPLF/EPRDF scripted governance system (vision, mission, strategy and structure), which lasted for nearly three decades.

The second presenter was Dr. Daniel Kassahun Waktola. He is an Associate Professor of Geography/GIS at the Austin Community College. His presentation was titled “*Cartographic propaganda in Ethiopia.*” Dr. Daniel introduced his presentation by highlighting the importance of maps and simply put visual (pictorial)-based information, such as sizes and shapes of countries, locations or features, directions, and distances for effectively conveying the desired messages to a target audience. He also informed the audience that maps could also be used to influence opinions or beliefs, send a message, mobilize people, rather than to communicate geographic information. In Ethiopia, cartographic propaganda was extensively used by the TPLF. Among the various propaganda maps used during this period, six were identified by Dr. Daniel as more effective. Among these two were critical. The first was the confidential “Greater Tigray” map that shows its boundaries extending to the Red Sea and Djibouti to the east and Sudan to the west. The unofficial map of the “Greater Tigray” primarily produced for propaganda purposes incorporated Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Gambela regions.



The second was the infamous Addis Ababa Master Plan. He underscored how ethnic parties misuse maps to advance their purposes.

The third presenter was Ato Gashaw Ayferam. Ato Gashaw is a Ph.D. student in political science at Addis Ababa University and a researcher at the Institute of Strategic Affairs. His presentation was titled “*GERD and its geopolitical Implications for the Greater Horn of Africa region.*”. Ato Gashaw started his presentation by defining the geopolitical setting of North-East Africa (NEA) where GERD is located. Based on his studies, Ato Gashaw asserted that NEA has distinctive geostrategic, geopolitical and geo-economic significance. The competition to control the major source of the Nile waters and one of the most important chokepoints of international maritime route, between the Horn of Africa and the Middle East where, by colonialists, global and regional powers, have been historical and intense. Ato Gashaw identified two contrasting views regarding the development of GERD and concluded his presentation by recommending Ethiopia to adopt a proactive and assertive foreign policy, coupled with skillful diplomacy to counter the neocolonial ambitions of foreign powers.

The Session Chair was Dr. Ashenafi Gossaye, Capital Planning Program Manager at King County, Seattle, WA.

SESSION TWO

Date September 12, 2021

Full video link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=heyS0s2YDbU>

SESSION THEME: *Economic planning, liberalization & macroeconomic governance*

Abstract

The first presenter was H.E. Ato Mersie Ejigou. Ato Mersie was a former Minister of Planning of Ethiopia and, later he has been serving in a number of international organizations. His presentation was entitled “*Community and household perception of environmental security and conflict in Ethiopia and other countries: Lessons and policy options.*” The study involved household perceptions of four different countries: Burundi, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Uganda. The study was geared towards gathering evidence on how communities and households perceive the importance of environmental security and its link with conflicts. The study revealed the importance of environmental accounting (which includes, inter alia, impacts of climate change, environmental degradations deforestation, soil erosion, droughts). He emphasized that the main determinants of political instabilities (insecurities) and territorialism do not emanate from “other” ethnic groups, but issues related to environmental degradation.

The second speaker was Dr. Alula Pankhurst. Dr. Alula is an Associate Professor of Archaeology at Addis Ababa University and a member of the national heritage restitution



committee which is chaired by Dr. Abate Getahun of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Dr. Alula is also a member of Ethiopia's Prime Minister Economic Advisory Council. The title of his presentation was "*The history and current status of heritage assets restitution initiatives in Ethiopia.*" After presenting breaking news (i.e., the [return](#) of a collection of artifacts that were looted by the invading British army in 1868), Dr. Alula's presentation and subsequent discussions involved theories and the application of economic analysis to heritage assets. Dr. Alula and conference participants reiterated the importance of recognizing the economic, social, and cultural impacts of heritage asset valuations and their continuous contributions to job creation and accumulation of foreign exchange reserves for the country. He also raised the importance of producing young scholars who would be engaged in managing and digitization of cultural heritage. Dr. Alula emphasized the role played by the Ethiopian diaspora community in the repatriation of stolen heritage assets and implored the diaspora community to continue their efforts in this important endeavor.

The third speaker was Dr. Zelalem Teklu Chala. Dr. Zelalem is an Assistant Professor of Business at Fairfax University in Virginia. The title of the presentation was "*The effect of exchange rate liberalization (devaluation) on the external trade balance, growth and poverty reduction: A review of the empirical evidence in Sub Sahara Africa.*" After reviewing the literature which included the various econometric models, Dr. Zelalem presented a descriptive analysis of currency devaluation and its importance and consequences on GDP in general, and on current account deficits, foreign direct investment, and inflation (cost of living). Subsequent discussions indicated that currency devaluations in Ethiopia not only did not lead to better conditions, but devaluations were followed by ever-increasing and unsustainable current deficits, rising inflation and costs of living, and rising poverty levels.

The fourth speaker was Professor Befekadu Degefe. Like Dr. Tsehai, Professor Befekadu was one of the 42 academics that were sacked from Addis Ababa University nearly three decades ago for political reasons. He returned to the same university in 2018 at the request of the new Prime Minister. A student of Ethiopian economy for more than three decades, his presentation was titled as "*The dos and do nots of economic liberalizations.*" Professor Befekadu based his presentation on endogenous growth theory and the damages done by the infamous Structural Adjustment Programs on Sub Saharan African economies; austerity, sovereign debt traps, and passionately asked a series of questions about poverty, liberalization, devaluation, inflation and extreme form of dependency on foreign aid. He emphasized the importance of human capital and argued that it is the driving force for development.

The Session chair was Professor Seid Hassan, Murray State University Kentucky, and Member of Ethiopia's Prime Minister Economic Advisory Council.



SESSION #3

Date September 18, 2021

Full video link <https://youtu.be/dHW4MuRlh7I>

SESSION THEME: *Culture, heritage conservation, and accountability*

Abstract

In this session, there were two presenters. Dr. Alemesege Beldados, Associate Professor of Archaeology at Addis Ababa University and Director of the University's press. He presented a paper entitled "*Heritage conservation challenges during times of conflict and instability*". Dr. Alemseged's presentation had four sections:- Defining the meaning of historical and cultural heritages; the link between heritage and the economy; the reasons why heritages are targets during times of armed conflicts and political instabilities, and the international conventions and national laws regarding the conservation of natural and cultural heritages. He cited the academic (archaeological, cultural), UNESCO conventions, and the laws of Ethiopia (proclamation 209/2000) and concurred with the legal definition under the Ethiopian law which states that cultural heritage is "anything tangible or intangible which is the product of creativity and labor of man in the pre-history times, that describes and witnesses to the evolution of nature and which has a major value in its scientific, historical, cultural, artistic and handicraft content".

He classified Ethiopia's prehistoric and human cultural evolution and indicated the reasons why Ethiopia's heritage sites have attracted international scientists in the field. The last segment of Dr. Alemseged's presentation was about the link between heritage distraction and violence. He indicated that the last ten years have witnessed an unprecedented level of heritage distraction in countries like Yemen, Libya and Syria. The main causes for heritage distraction are active and latent ethnic and religious conflicts, genocides, colonialism and dictatorships. Unfortunately, these trends are also observed in Ethiopia. He provided a survey of the international conventions on the protections that ought to be accorded to heritage assets during times of conflict.

The second presentation was about cultural and heritage assets management. The presenter sought to link modern management principles and accountability to the heritage sector. Professor Minga Negash, a Professor of Accounting at MSU Denver and University of the Witwatersrand, presented research that is in progress. Dr. Lulseged Ayalew, Associate Professor and Dean's Notable Scholar at the University of North Carolina, and Dr. Yohannes Zeleke are members of this research team. The presentation was entitled "*Extinction and the accounting for heritage assets in developing countries:*



An exploratory study". Whether cultural and heritage assets should be accounted for and reported in accordance with the International Public Sector Standards Exposure Draft and International Federation of Accountants calls is a contemporary debate that Sub Sahara African countries have yet to engage themselves. There is also gulf between conservationists and economists (managers and accountants). Juxtaposing concepts of heritage management, environmental sustainability, International Public and Private Sectors Accounting Standards, and the key elements of UNESCO's World Heritage Manual the paper hypothesized that the Integrated Reporting framework grounded in biodiversity accounting and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) can be used for establishing accountability and mitigate extinction. The causes of heritage assets extinction are several but not limited to poor regulation, management problems, lack of resources for conserving heritage assets, absence of financial/fiscal decentralization, corruption, illicit trade in heritage assets, wars and armed conflicts, vandalism & malicious destruction of heritage assets, poor urbanization & development planning, wear and tear, lack of skill in curatorship & heritage engineering. Identifying the severity of each cause requires a field study. The presentation closed by indicating that an original survey instrument that targets Ethiopia's heritage sector and accountants has been finalized.

The Session Chair was Dr. Yohannes Zeleke, Archeologist and Research Associate at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C.

SESSION FOUR

Date September 25, 2021

Full video <https://www.facebook.com/AbbayMedia/videos/260075325999413>

SESSION THEME *Agriculture and food security*

Abstract

The first paper was presented by Professor Assefa Gebre-Amlak. Professor Assefa was the former Dean of Hawassa (Agricultural) University and later he became Professor of Entomology at the Colorado State University. In his presentation entitled "*The State of Agricultural Education and Extension Services in Ethiopia*," Professor Assefa summarized the inception and development of agricultural higher education and extension services in Ethiopia. Despite the good beginning and remarkable expansion, agricultural education in the country encountered serious difficulties in recent years, mainly due to declining quality of education, compromised relevance, redundancy, lack of engaged teaching, and limited community-based research. He argued for the reform of the higher education sector, including the curricula, and urged that faculty members should be encouraged/incentivized to engage in extension services-based research that targets the farming communities.



The second presenter was Dr. Mulat Demeke. Dr. Mulat was a former Dean of Addis Ababa University who also served as Senior Policy Officer at the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). The topic of his presentation was *Food security: challenges of Ethiopia*, their root causes and implications were discussed at great length. Contemporary food security problems were attributed to wide-ranging factors: soil degradation, dwindling size of farm plots, limited input use, low level of irrigation, limited loan services as well as policy and governance failures. Dr. Mulat proposed institutional innovation as a major intervention option to ameliorate prevailing problems. Finally, it was suggested that the adoption of the '*Integrated Planning Model*' wherein various options are taken on board as an intervention strategy would foster agricultural productivity and reduce food insecurity.

The third presenter was Dr. Dejene Makonnen. Dr. Dejene was the first President of Alemaya/Haramaya University (of Agriculture). He also served the FAO and a number of international organizations as an expert. Dr. Dejene presented a paper entitled "*Agriculture and food security in contemporary Ethiopia: A perspective from agronomy.*" He elaborated on the antiquity of ox-driven plow agriculture and the loss of productivity in the harvesting and storage process. Dr. Dejene argued that despite its endowment with immense agricultural resources, and its once-coveted position as the breadbasket of East Africa, contemporary Ethiopia failed to produce enough food and remained aid-dependent. Vulnerability to vagaries of nature and manmade calamities, particularly drought, civil war, and frequent displacement have seriously impacted the country's capacity to produce a surplus. Dr. Dejene recommended land use planning and regulatory reforms to enhance agricultural productivity. Among others, he proposed land tenure reform, expansion of irrigation agriculture, natural resource conservation, as well as strengthening of agricultural research and extension services.

Dr. Tsedeke Abate was the fourth speaker of the day. Dr. Tsedeke was the former Director General of the Institute of Agricultural Research. He was a lead scientist at international organizations. His research titled "*Would the green revolution ever come to Africa? Lessons from Ethiopia*" inquired into why the green revolution failed to produce expected results in Africa and what lessons could be learned from the Ethiopian experience. Using statistical information, he pointed out that Ethiopia achieved significant improvement in cereals (particularly maize) and grain legumes productivity over the last two decades. Yet, it was further pointed out that by focusing too much on the cereals for food security and selected grain legumes for export earnings; Ethiopia has missed opportunities to exploit the full potential of its own indigenous/traditional crops such as *enset*, oilseeds like Ethiopian mustard and safflower, and even coffee. In light of these, Dr. Tsedeke suggested a two-pronged lesson for African countries to learn from the Ethiopian experience: a focus on what he called *the "3 Eyes" principle*, i.e., institution building, investment, and inputs and pursuit of a homegrown research tradition, which is not donor-dependent.



During the question and answer session, all four speakers agreed that the sanctions imposed by President Biden must be an opportunity for self-reliance in agriculture and be freed from the aid industry.

The Session Chair was Dr. Zelalem Tefera, Associate Professor of Sociology and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University.

The Master of Ceremonies was Dr. Abate Getahun, Associate Professor of Languages and Communication, Former President of Wollo University and an expert at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.
