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Foreword to the Special Issue on Education in Ethiopia

"The larger the island of knowledge, the longer the shoreline of wonder." (Ralph M. Sockman)

We launched the Ethiopian open access electronic journal on Ethiopian innovation research, training and foresight in order to expand the island of knowledge so that more and more Ethiopians can expand the 'shoreline of curiosity and wonder', unite around scientific exploration and research, publish peer reviewed papers and sustain them. We think that knowledge, research, education and science can bring the Ethiopian communities scattered around the world together. The learned energy that has been dissipated across the world, owing to the instability and the problems of governance the country has been plagued throughout the post-world war II years, needs to find some organising principle in science, research, knowledge and quality training to come together and establish relevance and tangible contribution to the Ethiopian people, country and nation.

We think science unites and can bring all those with contrarian political views to come together and work to contribute to Ethiopia's development, security, human and ecological well being and dignity. There have been many issues that have disrupted the unity of the Ethiopian intelligentsia for generations now. It is high time that same intelligentsia become resourceful and finds practicable ways to join all the diverse and vast intellectual energy and contribute to the transformation and advancement of the country. There is no reason to wait until the country's

politics is resolved. Given the way the world functions, poor countries may not be able to resolve their political problems. There is no reason to wait until the politics of the country is resolved to address education and science. In fact our region, the Indian Ocean area is predicted to be the zone for a long time where conflict may not subside! It means new strategies to address the country's problems in a creative and imaginative way is highly desirable. Ee-JRIF and/or Nesglobal (www.nesglobal.org) is one way we try to find creative solutions to lingering and inscrutable problems by promoting research on issues that matter to the lives and well being of people such as food, water, milk, agriculture and infrastructure.

Naturally it will be preferable if the country were to have a situation where there is a politics that does not polarize the nation. That would have been an asset to do good science, research, education and high quality training. But it looks for the foreseeable future one cannot expect such developments to materialize. They will take time. We think the proposal to put forward science, research, knowledge, training and education as an arena for all the intelligentsia to rally and find a modus vivendi to address urgent issues by aligning forces rather than dissipating them will be an excellent opportunity even to bring about a spin off effect to dilute the things that divide us and strengthen the things that unite us. This open access electronic journal is appealing to all who do science, all who do research, and all who are committed to improve the education of all Ethiopians to come together, rally behind and continue to generate scholarly work that improves the scientific, academic, research and knowledge profile of Ethiopia as a whole; so that the current unacceptable lowest level status in the ranking tables of the country not only in the world but also even in Africa can improve for the better.

In the maiden issue Vol.1 No.1, 2009, we introduced the important subject of Ethiopian agriculture, given the fact that Ethiopia's age old agriculture remains still without structural

transformation in spite of the fact that Government statistics for economic growth have been reporting on the average near 10% over the last five years. How such a growing economy retains a highly unchanged and untransformed agriculture remains a mystery to many observers. There appears to be an economic growth rate that continues to increase whilst the living standard of vast sections fall and that fate falls mainly on the large number of people who live in the rural areas.

One of the key transformations in a rural based economy that Ethiopia has been for many thousands of years that must take place is mounting and sustaining a robust education revolution that can create a multi-skilled educated population in the country where those in the rural economy are literate, numerate and can access modern technology and be able to use it. In the modern times, though an education revolution is what the country should have mounted since the 1950s, it appears that from basic/primary to secondary/vocational to tertiary and higher education levels, there has not been a systematic approach in building the education system brick by brick, step by step and one by one with thought and vision. What appears to have replaced vision is the sheer willingness to succumb to the educational allure from outside. Ethiopia has its own alphabet, its own numbering system, its own musical notation system, its own art, its own architecture. It has its own civilization. This civilisation could have provided the foundation for a modern education revolution. Instead what successive regimes that appear to come to power from the traditional monarchy to the current ethnic-federalist system did was to imitate educational curriculum from outside, undermine ones own language instead of creating an advanced language academy and institute to translate all the best scientific and engineering knowledge from the rest of the world. This left the country open for all kinds of influences that have undermined rather than consolidating the country's historic national imagination. This is one of the critical failures uniting all the policies of all the Governments that came since the 1950s.

This is not due to any lack of counsel by Ethiopian educationalists like Mekonen Desta, the State Minister of Education in the early 50s, who understood the value and importance of creating a national education system whilst being open to the knowledge from the rest of the world. The direction of imitation rather than national origination was chosen owing to the constellation of inside and outside influences that ended up winning and undermining the Ethiopian national project. This undermining has not stopped, it still continues to date.

Another critical problem is related to the way the country's overall political direction evolved over the course of over half a century since the 1950s. The transition from one regime to another was never smooth. It was made through upheavals. This very often meant that it imposed also adverse consequences on the education sector. In 1974 there was an education sector review that aimed at expanding basic education into the rural areas. The regime that replaced the monarchy was not in a mood to even look at the Sector Review, let alone learn from it and use it. What mattered was it was done under the Monarchy they opposed. So the sector review with all the cost that got into preparing it got shelved. So the regime of the time had to denounce the education under the monarchy and not build from it or correct it. There was neither the political will nor the intellectual patience to do this. Everything that was done by the regime earlier was seen unworthy and subject for rejection. Everything done by the regime was seen as the best. With such self-referential and self-reverential approach, a sound educational policy to produce a self-sustaining educational system will not be easy to forge. So when the new regime replaced the military regime, it too tried to increase numbers at the expense of quality by claiming that it is redressing the injustices and the inequities bequeathed from the earlier era.

What these demonstrate is that the country's educational system is not made purely from the need and consideration to get education right regardless of how others who ruled the country may or may not have mishandled it in the past.

Thus, very unfortunately, education has not enjoyed the luxury of being considered on its own merit based on national vision and not the special interest of politicians who had the chance to come to power using often violent means.

In this issue the scientific papers cover a number of important areas especially the paper by Tekste Negash: Education in Ethiopia. The literature review by Lemlem also sheds light on similar challenges raised by the leading Ethiopian scholars who wrote on the problems and challenges of Ethiopian education.

We had contributions from Seid Hassan on Educational progress in Sub-Saharan Africa: a comparative analysis. Assefa Endeshaw has contributed on: The Formation of Ethiopian Intellectuals. Amare Desta has contributed on: Exploring the extent of ICT in supporting pedagogy in Ethiopia

In the research note section Tewabetch Bishaw writes on the brain gain network to attract in concrete terms to Ethiopians who are scattered throughout the world to contribute to their homeland. Richard Pankhurst has written an informative article on the early young Ethiopians who were sent by Emperor Haile Selassie to study abroad and return. He quotes extensively the speech by the Emperor who treated all the young Ethiopians sent abroad for education like his own children. The article by Hanna about her father's inspiring profile, having come from Shiromeda to being deputy director general of the UNESCO, a truly splendid achievement, is useful for Ethiopians to learn like Getachew to go for success with humility and not hubris. We have added a doctoral dissertation review by Bruck Tadesses on vocational and technical education. The book review by Mammo Muchie on quality of higher education in public institutions demonstrates the real challenge facing the higher education sector in Ethiopia. The morale is that it is not good to expand higher education numbers without considering clearly the quality enhancing measures needed to enhance the large number of universities and colleges that are growing in Ethiopia.

Finally, It is with pleasure that the editors present this special issue on the problems and challenges of Ethiopia's education and trust all of you will engage by using the open access facility that is provided. Ethiopians and other researchers both at home and abroad should access and engage and debate with a view to create a highly rated open access journal that bring all Ethiopians together to unite and rally behind science and for science, research, knowledge and high quality lifelong learning to all. We encourage the linking of home with abroad and the vice versa through this journal, research networks and other useful forms of connectedness that all Ethiopians initiate to create a strong Ethiopian research area (ERA) that is rooted in Ethiopia but also embed all the energy that is flowing scattered across the world.

By Mammo Muchie & Fekadu Fullas, Yeshitela Degfu, Seble Worku and the Managing editors