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Notes from the Editors

By Mammo Muchie and the Editorial Team

In this issue of Ee-JRIF, the first three papers largely and not exclusively focus on the critical issue of food and nutrition security in Ethiopia and the second paper deals with social science. Food security is one of those challenges Ethiopia has been facing for a while now. The country had suffered not from lack of food, but the lack of physical and economic distribution and access to food that Ethiopia has adequately, if not indeed in abundance. It has never lacked adequate food supply even at the worst occurrence of the drought. In fact it has been reported that exports have continued at periods when the country is known to be suffering from famine in 1974 and 1985. But it has not up to today adequately laid down the infrastructure for sharing food from those that feast in abundance to those that were forced into fasting mode and state with food scarcity. Invariably hunger is largely a social construct. It is not a result of merely the scarcity in the food supply due to drought and other calamities. To this day, it is odd that it is much easier to receive food aid than to take an intelligent inventory of the food the country has and learn to distribute that efficiently to make hunger history in Ethiopia. The fact that food aid continues when there is enough food at home is indeed something that must not continue. Food aid must end. Food supply that is available must be distributed by revamping the infrastructure and the capability of the relevant institutions to anticipate the dangers earlier and act on time.

In general, famines are created socially and not naturally, despite the contribution of the latter. It is possible there can be a bumper harvest in one zone and hunger in another zone far enough where there is lack of information or absence of established communication channels; equally where information is controlled, it is possible that the place where hunger may not be reported or the place where there is food abundance may not be informed of the hunger elsewhere. All these factors have nothing to do with food scarcity. They have everything to do with a lack of appropriate food distribution facilities related to lack of physical, economic and information access. Beyond the natural calamity that may diminish food supply, very often what is more critical is the existence or lack of it of the capability to access food.

Amartya Sen has produced two books that are relevant in understanding the problem of starvation, famine, lack of nutrition and poverty. His first book is entitled *Poverty and Famine, An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford University, Clarendon Press, published in 1981 and his second book was on *Development as Freedom*, written in 1999.

Amartya Sen argued in his *Poverty and Famine* that it is possible that a disproportionately large number of people can go hungry despite the fact that a country has a sufficient food supply in the aggregate just as it could have in normal times. During droughts and climatic crises, it is possible for a sizeable section of the population to fall into hunger, even if the nation had an adequate reserve to have aggregate food availability. The existence of food supply at the aggregate level does not

necessarily ensure sufficiency at the household or individual level. His definition of poverty is the deprivation of basic capabilities.

In his *Development and Freedom*, Amartya Sen identifies five distinct freedoms: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security. "Freedom, he says, is a principle determinant of individual initiative and social effectiveness; it is good primarily because it enhances the ability of individuals to help themselves" (Sen, 1999; page 11). Sen recognizes social institutions as useful to buttress individual freedoms. Food security relies on a variety of support system that includes legal, institutional, freedom and communication. Food security at the macro level may not necessarily resolve the food security at the household level. Food security at the household level may not resolve necessarily the food security of individuals. It thus matters very much how the relationship amongst the macro, national, regional and sub-regional reality is co-joined with the local, community, household and individual levels. The key is to align food security as part and parcel of nutrition security for all by a self-aware and vigilant state and public spheres.

Still 85 % of Ethiopians are said to live in the rural economy and agriculture is their main means of survival. Weather fluctuations affect agriculture where Ethiopia has faced severe droughts over a number of years. Still today about 5.3 million people are said to need food aid. Though Ethiopia's GDP is growing, Ethiopia is ranked at 171 out of 182 countries in the UNDP Human Development Index. In The Global Hunger Index Ethiopia also scores much lower at 29.8 % in a scale between 0 and 100, where 0 is excellent and 100 is the poorest and is ranked 80 out of 84 countries. These figures are spread routinely by many international organisational, media and other outlets.

Ethiopia has initiated since January 2005, the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) to tackle chronic food insecurity and break Ethiopia's dependence on food aid with a budge of 107 million dollars. The PSNP tries to provide security when sudden income changes confront citizens. Despite all efforts including the country's high GDP growth, Ethiopia continues to confront continuous food insecurity, considered often negatively as the famished and hungriest country with more than 5 million people needing assistance.

Ethiopia has enough to share and solve any food problem. What is missing is the ability to mobilize these resources and share them. There is no need for relying on outside assistance. It is critical that the policy makers learn how to feast less in abundance to pass it on to those who fast with harrowing hunger.

The first three papers in this edition of Ee-JRIF address mainly this vital issue. One of the paper is Combating Food Insecurity and Rural Poverty in Ethiopia: A Review Paper by Sisay Assefa, Workneh Negatu, and Tewodaj Mogues; the second paper is on Food Security and Rural Vulnerability in Ethiopia: a development perspective by Alemayehu Lirenso; the third paper deals with a Rural Poverty and Food Insecurity in Ethiopia The Quest for Sustainable Rural Institutions and Technologies, written by Sisay Asefa and Adugna Lemi. In the second section the paper is about Prevalence and Patterns of Sexual Violence Perpetration among Male Secondary School Students in Eastern Ethiopia by Dr. Alemayehu Belachew. In the book review section this time we are carrying a review by Dr. Fekadu Fullas of CD-Rom produced by Dr. Ermias Dagne on the following topic: A review of "Natural Database for Africa (NDA), CD-ROM Version 2.0.

This editon mainly explore new and interesting issues primarily on a critical issue of food security. This should encourage and inspire that further and deeper research is needed to find ways of relying on ones own resources, knowledge, learning and capability the most basic necessity of life. to feed one self and

remove the dignity and humiliation deficit that came to Ethiopia when the country cannot go beyond the food aid dilemma it has been trapped for nearly 40 years now!