

## Engaging Ethiopian Youth in the Workforce:

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The recent unrest in some localities in Ethiopia caused by, among other things, the frustration of unemployed youth, has triggered the author to brainstorm for possible ways of engaging these young people in their country's development. This paper addresses a unique national project that will involve young Ethiopians within their respective localities to change the old labor-intensive method of agriculture. Ethiopian economy is based on agriculture and agricultural products. Currently, every small scale individual farmer and his/her family work hard in the small field they own, from ploughing the land to weeding and harvesting the crop. This proposed national project entails a simple technique applied on flat to gently sloppy farm areas. The intent is to group adjacent individual areas, create cooperative farming (call it Coop) and transition into agricultural mechanization using tractors, cultivators, rock pickers, etc. The job of creating the Coop will involve young workers with minimum training. Once on board with the idea, these employees will work not only for money but will feel empowered as the makers of change in the farming industry. However, the project can only be implemented if and only if individual farmers buy the idea and participate fully in the endeavor. The purpose and the process have to be discussed at the Kebele level and endorsed by all stakeholders.

The Ethiopian government has been facing problems of unemployment; one apparent reason being the rapid population growth that exceeds the economic growth of the country. It is unfortunate that the unrest brought about property damages, uprooted residents and caused the loss of lives in some localities. To address the issue of youth unemployment, the Ethiopian government recently announced that the President and the House of The People of Representatives (Parliament) have agreed to appropriate a ten billion birr fund. Unemployment is not unique to Ethiopia as many countries in the world including the United States and other European countries are experiencing increase in homelessness and shrinking of middle class population. Actually, unemployment has been one of the main issues for the most recent presidential election in the USA.

The proposed Coop will be created by grouping adjacent farms, computing the area of each plot so that individual expenses and net profits to respective land owners can be appropriated proportionally during the farming process. This is where young Ethiopians including high school and college graduates willing to work can be hired in their communities so they don't migrate to nearby cities looking for jobs. At least three people in each Coop can be assigned. They will assess the area, meet with the farmers, and sketch every ownership. The two employees will measure the length and width of each

area while one person will record the measurement on the sketch. The owner is to identify the property corners of his land. They will need paper pads, pencils and pens, measuring tapes with centimeter and meter graduations, rulers and calculators. They should also be required to wear vests to identify them from other unwanted intruders. Based on the measurements, the plot in the sketch will be divided into simple geometric shapes like triangles, squares and rectangles to calculate the area. They all can then review the final results before discussing it with the owner/farmer. After the farmer is satisfied and obtain a copy for his/her records, they move on to the next adjacent land and repeat the process. Local Municipalities can oversee the project. University graduates, if willing to work in this field, can spearhead the progression.

Normally, surveying instruments would be used to stake property corners, conduct accurate measurements with electronic distance meters to read slope distances and compute the areas. However, based on the intensity of the work and the entailed expenses, linear measurements uniformly done to all the flat and gently sloping farmland would be accurate enough. The farmlands adjacent to each other can then be grouped as one big area to qualify for mechanized farming. Once recorded, the Coop would be ready for mechanization whenever facilities are available and the individual farmers are ready. Meanwhile the current individual/manual farming can continue.

When the Coop commences, all the cost associated with the rental of machinery and its mechanic, use of fertilizer, hiring experts for better production, irrigation and other expenses as well as the net profit will be divided among the respective farmers based on the area of their land. Each will pay or earn based on his/her area of land divided by the total area of the Coop times the total cost or the profit respectively. Come harvest season, the same group may be rehired by the farmers to compute the shares of each farmer from the total product. As there will be many Coops in the same localities, the rental cost of the equipment and their drivers can be negotiated and used at a reduced price. There can be some competition between Coops resulting in positive improvements of the land and increase in production. There will also be exchange of ideas for the betterment of the same.

Mechanizing will give current farmers a break to diversify into other productions like livestock and processing and canning of other horticultural products. It will improve the livelihood of the people, achieving food security and increasing exports of agricultural products which would benefit the country's economy. The youth can be hired to help in packing and processing when the farming develops into commercial stage.

The project will bring the youth and the farmer to work together. These young workers will develop appreciation of agriculture and may even team up and establish a group commercial farming. Experts from The Ministry of Agriculture can assist in identifying the best crops for the type of weather anticipated every year or every season in the case of crop rotation. Actually, there is now satellite technology that NASA has launched to map the soil moisture on earth. This data is supposed to help improve climate and weather forecasts and allow scientists to monitor draught and better predict

flooding occurrences. (NASA Release 15-016, dated January 31, 2015). Eventually, the land that is being leased to foreign investors can be owned by young Ethiopian farmers working in a group/Coop.

The youth can also develop an appreciation of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). Some smart and able students get discouraged or intimidated with STEM because of incidents that might have taken place in their early lives. Getting hands-on experience in the math portion of STEM while assessing the area of each farmer, computing the Coop expense/profit accounts and the shares of each farmer may encourage them that STEM is within their limits. In addition, working with the technical group of the Municipalities, the representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, involved college students and graduates may inspire them to pursue further training/education in the field. Supporting each other to achieve best results may also resonate in their thinking for communal attitude and cooperation in life, unlike the individualistic character that some Ethiopians exhibit.

The youth need to be inspired to love and respect other Ethiopians no matter what language they speak. We all have the responsibility to instill the love of the motherland in the young generation's mind.

Other groups that will benefit from this project are investors who can fund the Coops, supply the farm equipment as well as exporting agricultural products. The government will also benefit in the tariff of these goods.

In regards to the current land policy, there are suggestions of privatization to attract foreign investors. Though there may be areas where the country can benefit from privatization, the problem remains that those in and outside Ethiopia with a lot of cash will end up buying out the poor farmers. These farmers, after consuming their assets will flock into the cities for jobs and may end up being homeless; thus breaking up the main fabric/backbone of the society. So the better alternative is creating the Coop, where ever possible, and transform the manual farming into mechanization. This will improve the life of the farmer, engage the youth, improve Ethiopian economy and will satisfy the "Land to the Tiller" slogan that was one of the foundations of the Ethiopian revolution of the 70s.

I hope the government will implement the project. It can be accomplished by private consultants as well.

In areas where this project is not feasible, I have another alternative project to engage the youth that will be posted soon.

If you have any comments or ideas to fine tune the above project, please contact me at [almazfesseha326@gmail.com](mailto:almazfesseha326@gmail.com).

Thank you.

