Business Research Review
Volume 5, Issue 1 & 2, December 2019
ISSN 2518-6698

Ethiopia: A Historical Overview of the Political Ecology of Food Insecurity/Famine

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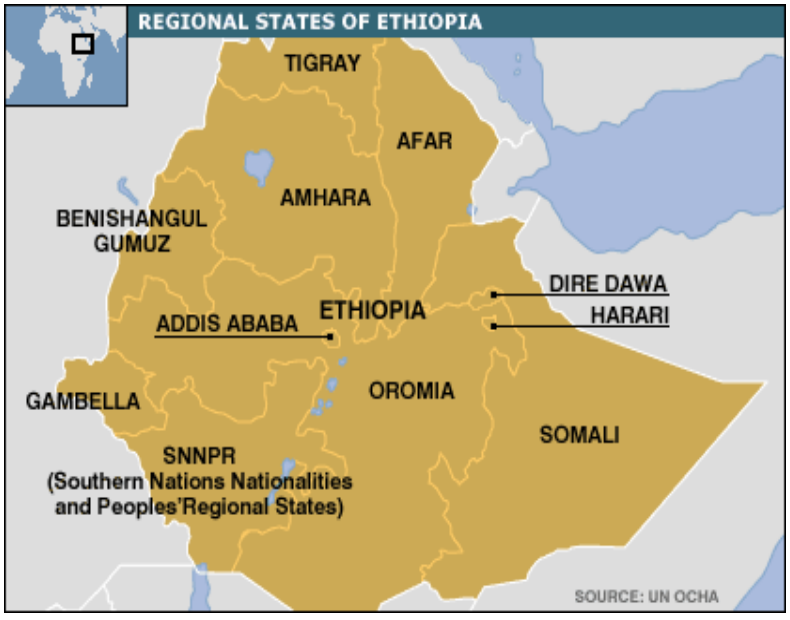
Abstract

Food insecurity/famine and drought have become signifying narratives in public discourse on Ethiopian development and environmental management. The recurrent nature of the problem of food insecurity and famine in a country with a significant and diverse resource base and a relatively large and hard-working population has baffled academic-oriented researchers, politicians, development practitioners, the international community and the broader public. The overriding explanation for the situation has been rooted in the linkage between drought and failure of the country's agricultural systems to withstand the shock from the natural calamity. Based on archival research, participant observation and long years of active engagement in development planning in Ethiopia, I argue that the privileging of ecological factors over political economy structures, demographic change and institutional arrangements has contributed to the failure of successive governments to deal with the problem in an effective and sustainable manner. I argue that notwithstanding the contribution of climatic aberrations, the problem of food insecurity and famine in Ethiopia is largely a product of the failure of the political economy structures and institutional arrangements of successive governments. Hence, sustainable solutions to the problem lie in improving governance, changing the technological base of agricultural production, democratizing land access and management and promoting participatory sustainable development.

Key words: Ethiopia, Food security, Famine, Drought, Governance, Democracy Sustainable development, Political Ecology

Map. 1 Ethiopia: Ethnically Defined Administrative Regional States



I. Introduction

The problems of food insecurity and famine have become signifying narratives synonymous with any discourse on Ethiopian development. Food insecurity and famine have visited the country in a recurrent manner over the last century and in the first decade of the 21st century. Accounts of food insecurity/famine are often associated with drought and/or aberrations in weather conditions. It is no wonder that reducing poverty and ensuring food security have become the emblematic discursive and material frames of the country's development policies and strategies as well as those of international development and aid agencies under successive governments. Indeed, the problem of food insecurity and famine has become the signifying frame of Ethiopia's representation among western journalists, politicians and standup comedians. The late Robin Williams, one of the most talented and funniest standup comedians in the US joked that the Kenyan and Ethiopian athletes who won the gold and bronze medals respectively in the Beijing Olympics marathon were running for food in an apparent distasteful but widely shared reference to the recurrence of famine and food insecurity in these countries (CBS, September 4/2008, David Letterman's Late Night Talk Show)

Since the 1960s, there have been at least 4 major famines that cost the country millions of human lives, livestock populations and losses in economic production and productivity. The 1974 famine that affected the north central province of Wollo and adjoining areas was a major factor for the overthrow of the Ethiopian monarchy that has been the hallmark of the history and iconography of Ethiopia's development as a state. A decade later, the 1984/85 famine claimed the lives of more than 1 million Ethiopians leading to structural dislocation in the economic and cultural lives of many more millions throughout the country. In 2002, close to 14 million Ethiopians faced famine and only concerted domestic and international efforts prevented the death and dislocation of thousands. In 2008, the country was facing another major famine probably affecting more than 8 million people (UNICEF, 2008). According to the United Nations World Food Program, the number of Ethiopians affected by drought and high food prices was raised to 9.6 million. In February 2008, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs indicated that a total of 12 million Ethiopians or about 15% of the country's total population needed relief aid. (UNOCHA, 2009). The entire Horn of Africa region was believed to be facing a situation in which as many as 17 million people may need food assistance for the next 6 months. (nazreth.com, 9/23/08).

This research is interested in exploring some of the most significant aspects of the recurrent food insecurity/famine problem in Ethiopia from a political ecology perspective. Its basic goal is to identify and analyze those ecological and political economy factors that have militated against the attainment of food security for an ever-increasing population. The privileging of ecological factors such as recurrent drought, soil degradation, deforestation, difficult terrain, erratic rainfall patterns etc over political economy, demographic and institutional arrangements, inadequacies and constraints has structured our understanding of the food insecurity/ famine problem in Ethiopia. Such construction of social reality is particularly common among the broader public, government, international aid and development agencies (FDRE, 1996; FDRE & MOFED, 2002; IFRCRCCS, 2008; FA0, 2006).

On the other hand, many academic-oriented researchers have emphasized political economy structures and policy frameworks as the most critical factors in Ethiopia's recurrent vulnerability to food insecurity and famine (Mesfin W/Mariam, 1984; De Waal, 1991 and 1997; Webb P and J .V Braun, Yisehak Yohannes, 1992; Webb P and J.V. Braun, 1994; Kebede, 1995; Diriba, 1995; Bellete,1995; Workineh Nigatu, 2004; Side Goodo,2008, UNIRIN, 2008). Public understanding of famine could be viewed as a combination of the scientific and the superstitious. For most farmers and workers, the problem of famine has often been viewed as one that is directly associated with the lack of rainfall and the wrath of God for people's sinful transgressions. Notwithstanding the ideological and scientific inclinations of different sources of knowledge, it is important to examine the cardinal factors that have defined the problem of food insecurity and famine in Ethiopia from a scientific perspective.

The study is based on archival research and participant observation. I have had the privilege of working as a planner in the national office for Central Planning from 1976-1988. This opportunity accorded me an excellent learning environment about all aspects of Ethiopia's national development challenges and opportunities. As a physical planner, I had the additional privilege of visiting every corner of the diverse country and appreciating its tremendous human and natural resources endowments.

My professional interest in environmental management and sustainable development has resulted in a few peer-reviewed articles and book chapters dealing with various aspects Ethiopia's and Africa's developmental and ecological challenges and opportunities. As a geographer, I also have the additional advantage of appreciating the spatial dimension of the problematic.

The way an individual, a community or a society sees the world is called a paradigm in scientific thought. Paradigms thus influence and are influenced by the perceptions, culture and overall thought processes and practices of societies at different levels of development. It is based on the acceptance of certain "working assumptions, procedures and findings among a group of scholars" thus defining broader societal understanding of social reality (Johnston R.J et al 2000). Ethiopian society has struggled against recurrent famines for centuries and almost invariably seen food shortages, famines and their multidimensional consequences as the product of drought, a biophysical condition, a wrath of God for societal sins and transgressions and more recently as a reflection of poor/bad governance. After having lived through the 1974 and 1984/85 major famines and currently following the unfolding of even more widespread food insecurity challenges (2003, 2008), I believe that Ethiopian society needs to change its perceptions and paradigms of its thought processes and actions. Neither ecological determinism nor recourse to theological causes can explain the recurrent occurrence and damage that food insecurity and famine bring on the security and welfare of populations. Global understanding of the challenges of food insecurity, famines, malnutrition and under-nutrition has increasingly leaned towards the position that they are primarily the products of the political economy structures of societies. No well functioning democratic society has been under chronic food insecurity and famine in any part of the world since the Second World War.

The ecological determinism paradigm that has been widely invoked by successive governments, development and aid agencies and the broader public does not provide full and satisfactory scientific explanations for the recurrence of famine and food insecurity in Ethiopia. Yet, as a simplistic and commonsensical relationship, such a fallacious explanation often finds currency in broader public discourse and imagination. A closer scrutiny of the underlying causes of food insecurity and famine seems to suggest that it is basically a result of poor governance where repressive and unaccountable governments have failed to provide the minimum level of political, economic, social and environmental security for their populations. Demographic pressure, vulnerability to climatic aberrations, production-related issues, poor market, lack of infrastructures, technology, finance, trained manpower are all related to poor governance in many ways. The international food policy research institute (IFPRI) in its report on the cycle of famine in Ethiopia had poor governance as the number one underlying problem (IFPRI, 2008).

It is necessary to underline a few important and interrelated issues to understand the problem of food insecurity/famine in Ethiopia from a scientific and structural perspective. Hence, this paper will examine the problem from the following six significant vantage points. Following the short introduction, section 2 provides a synoptic definition and explanation of food insecurity and famine as they are used in public discourse and praxis. Section 3 deals with the discursive and material foundations of the causes of famine. In section 4, a synoptic history of the country's food insecurity/famine problematic is provided from both temporal and spatial perspectives. In section 5, the policy, strategy and program responses of successive governments, development and aid agencies and the broader public in dealing with the problem are sketchily outlined. Section 6 throws some light on what the author feels are sustainable approaches to end food insecurity/famine in Ethiopia. The conclusion part summarizes the major highlights of the paper.

*****This paper was written in 2009 and presented at the 105th annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

II. Food Insecurity/Famine-Definitional and Conceptual Issues

The concept of food insecurity should be understood by defining what constitutes food security in a society at any specific time. Citing the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, Goodo considers the existence of food security when "all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (Side Goode, 2008).

Taking the minimum daily required kilocalorie as 2 200 and the money needed to buy it, Goode estimated that on average 6-9 million Ethiopians face chronic food insecurity every year. Based on such estimates, 11.4 million Ethiopians were considered food insecure in 2008.

The USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) analyzes food insecurity from the perspective of three types of gaps, namely: the status quo gap, the nutrition gap and the distribution gap (USDA, 2008). Status quo gap signifies the "difference between projected food supplies and base period average consumption; nutrition gap as the difference between projected food supplies and the food needed to minimum per capita nutritional standard while distribution gap is related to the requirements originating from unequal food distribution among income levels in a society" (Shahler Shapouri and Stacey Rosen of USDA, 2008). Assessing the condition of 66 countries in SSA, Asia and Latin America, the Department of Agriculture report noted that Sub-Saharan Africa was the most vulnerable region with respect to food security. It projected a condition in which per capita food consumption will decline by 0.5% every year for the coming decade. Regarding Ethiopia, the report indicated that the country was one of the most severely affected in terms of land degradation and food insecurity. The report noted that the main factors that influenced the prevalence of food insecurity in a specific country or region were related to domestic food production, foreign exchange availability for food imports, population growth and distribution of purchasing power within a country.

Famine has been a difficult term to define unequivocally due to the complexity of the contexts in which it is often used. Field J.O (1993) defined it as the "regional failure of food production or distribution systems, leading to sharply increased mortality due to starvation and associated disease". This definition underscores its regional character, the importance of markets and the presence of excess deaths. Webb, Braun and Yohannes (1992) have defined it as "extreme geographically concentrated food consumption shortages that result in chronic loss of body weight and a rise in mortality (Webb, Von Braun and Yohannes, 1992). Whiting A (2005) of the Global Policy Forum of the United Nations, referring to the complexity of the term had cited the following four definitions by different corporate entities to illustrate his point.

> "Famine is a situation where more than five people in 10,000 are dying every day" (Medicins Sans Frontieres). Famine is a catastrophic food crisis that results in widespread acute malnutrition and mass mortality. It is a process, rather than an event, with a beginning, a middle and an end' (USAID) "Famine occurs when a serious food crisis is made worse by 'governments' failure to deal with the situation" (World Food Program). "There are three signs of a famine: when people are leaving the countryside and going to live in shantytowns; people are leaving the country; and there are beggars all over the place" (President Mamadou Tandja, Niger) (Whiting A, 2005)

No matter which definition one is willing to accept, the key symptoms of famine remain to be similar in many settings. These include sharp shortfalls in food consumption, increased reliance on foraged food, disposal of production assets, exhaustion of coping mechanisms, community dislocation, wasting, and excess mortality due to under-nutrition, closing or collapse of markets and/or grotesque distortions of normal food prices (Webb et al. 1992, p.14; Whiting Alex, 2005).

III. Causes of Famine-Discursive and Material Foundations

The causes of famine are complex, multidimensional and include political, economic, cultural and biological factors. Webb, Braun and Yohannes (1992) conducted field surveys in seven famine-affected areas of Ethiopia in the early 1990s and concluded that the underlying factor that makes famine possible is absolute poverty at both national and household levels - a condition which they saw as an 'endogenous outcome of resource availability and of policies dictating resources use' (Webb, Von Baun and Yohannes, 1992. p 16). Diriba (1995) noted that the study of famines in Ethiopia has often reflected the discursive frames of drought, land degradation, the specific condition of people and an eclectic approach combining all the above. He held the view that famines in Ethiopia were the products of environmental degradation and the policy frameworks of Ethiopian governments.
Webb and Braun (1994) attributed famine in Ethiopia to a wide range of biophysical and political economy issues such as declining production and availability of food, droughts, military conflicts, crop failures, agricultural policies, prices and restrictions on the market. Kebede (1995) underscored the centrality of the pricing policies of governments on the availability and accessibility of food. Chronic poverty and underdevelopment were viewed as the primary causes for severe food insecurity, recurrent hunger and famine in Ethiopia.

Amarta Sen's concept of 'unfreedoms' seems to suggest that political governance holds the key to the recurrence of famines in society (Goodo, Side, 2008).

The clearest position on the socio-economic origin of famine in Ethiopia was made by a prominent Ethiopian geographer and ex-chairman of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Mesfin Wolde-Mariam in 2003 when he addressed the US House Committee on International Relations. He cited subsistence agriculture, oppression and exploitation of peasants by despotic regimes and market forces; lack of security of tenure to land; the smallness and fragmented nature of farm size; conflict and taxes as critical socio-economic causes for the vulnerability of Ethiopian peasants to famine. He noted that:

> "Cruel and persistent exploitation and impoverishment of peasants has been the normal practice of successive despotic governments. Adverse natural factors simply accelerate the process of famine generated by the despotic regimes. Today, the mere fact that even after crop failure the regime drags its feet to shift the responsibility for its ineptitude to the international community and allows peasants and pastoralists to die of famine is proof that it has no value for human life. It has the means to purchase killing machines for suppressing the people and for engaging in senseless wars, but not for providing relief assistance to impoverished peasants on the verge of certain death" (Mesfin, 2003)

In earlier times, the causes of famines were largely associated with population growth surpassing the carrying capacity of environments. Hence, the remedy was often sought in the areas of balancing population with food supply through population control and increasing food availability through increased production and importation. In more recent times, the political economy structures and constraints of nations have been widely invoked as explanations for the occurrence and recurrence of food insecurity and famines. Some governments have been accused of using famine as a tool of repression and elimination of political opponents. Based on such trajectory of thought, one could argue that the attempt of the Imperial government of Emperor Haile Selassie to hide the nature and gravity of the 1973/74 drought and famine; the misguided political and economic policies of the Derg and the ethnically-defined economic and political space and policies of the current government have elements of design with a perverse objective of controlling, punishing, marginalizing or impoverishing certain population groups for political ends. None of the three governments ever came out in public condemning the inefficacy of existing governance systems for failing to prevent food insecurity and famine. Indeed, the monarchy, the Derg and EPRDF have been known to invoke drought and externalize blame and responsibility on international market and economic forces for the causes and consequences of famine. On several occasions, the heads of the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Commission (Agency) have made public pronouncements to the effect that international aid and development agencies would be responsible for the death and displacement of food insecure populations if they failed to provide the necessary food, logistical and political support to the victims of famine on time.

Some have blamed international development and aid agencies as important contributors to the triggering of famine and massive social dislocation by imposing unworkable economic therapies that essentially end up wrecking peasant economies and making their lives more miserable (Chossudovsky, Michel, 2001). He pointed out the case of Ethiopia in which World Bank and IMF economic palliatives brought greater economic and social polarization and marginalization through a series of export-oriented and short-term strategies of national development. He cited the case of Ethiopia's export of 1 million tons of its 1996 harvest of cereals and other food crops as a clear example of erroneous economic thinking. The peddling of cheap and sometimes untested seeds and fertilizers to developing countries was viewed as part of a deliberate design to weaken agricultural systems and increase the region's dependence on foreign aid. The absence of regulatory measures and speculation in grain prices were taken as important contributors to global food insecurity and famine.

Population growth has been viewed as a major discursive and material foundation for explaining the recurrent occurrence of famine in Ethiopia and elsewhere. Ethiopia's population has been growing fast over the last century. Some estimates have indicated that the country's population had grown from about 11 million at the beginning of the 20th century to 80 million in 2008 and 100 million by 2017. It took only 22 years for the country's population to double to its present population size (UNIRIN, 2008). In an interview with the Financial Times, the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia noted that Ethiopia's population size was found to be significantly lower than the 80 million often cited by media sources.

The 2007 national census results suggested that the population size of the country was 74 million (nazret.com "Ethiopia: Financial Times interview with Meles Zenawi" (nazret.com, 8/27/2008). This eight-fold increase over a span of a century is indeed an important factor in explaining the gap between food supply and demand. The current rate of growth of 2.4-2.5%/year is increasing the population of the country by almost 2 million people every year. Although there have been reports of declines in the fertility rate of Ethiopian women (the number of children that a woman bears during her reproductive years 15-45), the overall natural increase rate remains high thus making a significant contribution to the country's population growth. Given the fact that the growth of agricultural production is arithmetic while that of population exponential, the challenge of supplying such a fast-growing population with adequate food both in terms of access and nutrition is tremendous under any system of governance. This is particularly so in Ethiopia where the physiological density of population has been increasingly incompatible with the carrying capacity of land under existing technological and organizational structures and arrangements.

Population growth and its impact on food availability should be seen in tandem with the productivity of labor and the technological base of agricultural production in the country. Notwithstanding the increased use of such production increasing technologies as fertilizers and improved seeds in recent years, the role that such technologies have played in the overall dynamics of food supply and agricultural productivity seems to be either nominal or totally incommensurate with the increase in demand for food both in rural and urban areas. The lack of sustained and significant investment in the small-holder agricultural system of the country does not indicate a direction in which the existing gap between food supply and demand will be significantly improved to make a difference in the status quo, nutritional or distributional gap of the food insecurity problematic.

A related aspect of the problem is the age structure of the population and its bearing on population growth, food supply and consumption. Close to 48% of the country's population is below the age of 15 indicating the potential for a high level of population growth. Ethiopia's population policy has not been able to reduce population growth rates significantly since its launching in the first years of the last decade-the 1990s.
The exacerbating role that poor governance and political strife play is often underlined in the discourse on the causes of famine. Poor governance invariably leads to poor macroeconomic policies that contribute to declining food availability, armed conflict, lack of peace, massive socio-economic disruption and environmental deterioration. Under such conditions of instability, the poor lose whatever resiliency that they had developed at household and individual levels.

Economists have generally tended to relate more recent food insecurity and famine in Ethiopia to population growth, the subsistence agricultural production system, the global food crisis due to changes in prices for agricultural inputs, high oil prices and poor agricultural marketing system. Some have indicated that only 1/3 of output reached the market due to high transaction costs, excessive risk and contrived government policies on rural-urban exchange (UNIRIN, 2008).

The preponderance of political economy constraints explaining the problems of food insecurity and famine in Ethiopia seems to suggest that ecological conditions, though important in themselves, are not sufficient conditions for the recurrence of the problems under successive governance systems. Against this brief discussion of the causes of famine, it would be educational to take a historical look at the problems.

IV. A Synoptic History of Food Insecurity/Famine in Ethiopia

The history of food insecurity and famine in Ethiopia is long and some researchers have traced it to as far back as 250 BC (Webb P and J.V. Braun, 1994). On average, about 5.3 million Ethiopians or close to 10 % of the population of the country faced food insecurity during the 1980/2003 period. It is also important to note that the country experienced the most critical food insecurity during the years of 1984/85, 1991/92, 1993/94, 1999/2000 (Workineh Negatu, 2004). The following table provides a historical perspective.

Table 1. Ethiopia: Famines in a Historical Perspective

Years of Famine	Explanations
1st half of 9th century	Famine followed by epidemic
16th century- 1535, 1540, 1543, 1567-70	Famine in Tigrai and other places
17th century- 1611, 1623,1634-1635,1650, 1653, 1678	Famine in Northern provinces, epidemic
18th century-1700,1702,1747/1748,1752, 17883, 1789, 1796, 1797	Famine in Shoa, locust infestations
19th century-1800, 1829, 1835,1880/81,	Himame, famine in all provinces, Gondar
1888/92	Famine in Shewa followed by cholera outbreak, Shoa and Eritrea, cattle plague
20th century-1913/14, 1929, 1958, 1966, 1973,1984/85. 1991/92, 1998	Cattle plague from Afar to Gondar, Rhinderpest famine in northern provinces
21st century - 2002/03, 2008	Famine in northern provinces, Yeju, Tigrai, Wollo, Sidamo, Ogaden, wolaita, Kambatta, Timbaro, Hadya, Silti, Guraghe, Borana. Ogaden

Sources: Richard R.K Pankhurst, 1961 and 1968; Bahiru Zewde, (1991).

The number of drought-affected populations for the 1980 to 2008 period is shown below.

Table 2 Ethiopia: Estimates of Drought/Disaster Affected Populations (1980 – 2008)

Year	Population in millions	% Share of total population	Remarks
1980/81	2.82	7.7	
1981/82	3.70	9.8	
1982/83	3.30	8.5	
1983/84	4.21	10.5	
1984/85	6.99	17.0*	1 million deaths
1985/86	6.14	14.5	
1987/88	4.16	9.3	
1988/89	5.35	11.6	
1989/90	3.21	6.8	
1990/91	7.22	14.8	
1991/92	7.85	15.6*	
1992/93	4.97	9.6*	
1993/94	6.70	12.6	
1994/95	3.99	7.3	
1996/97	3.36	4.9	
1997/98	4.10	5.8	
1998/99	7.19	11.7	
1999/00	10.56	16.6*	
2000/01	6.24	9.6	
2002/03	14.30	22.0	Negatu (2004)
2008	11.40	14.0**	

Source: FDRE, (1996). Food Security Strategy. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
FDRE & MOFED (2002). Ethiopia: Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
DPPC Official Report; *Years of most critical food insecurity
** Unofficial estimates by International aid agencies and Journalist reports

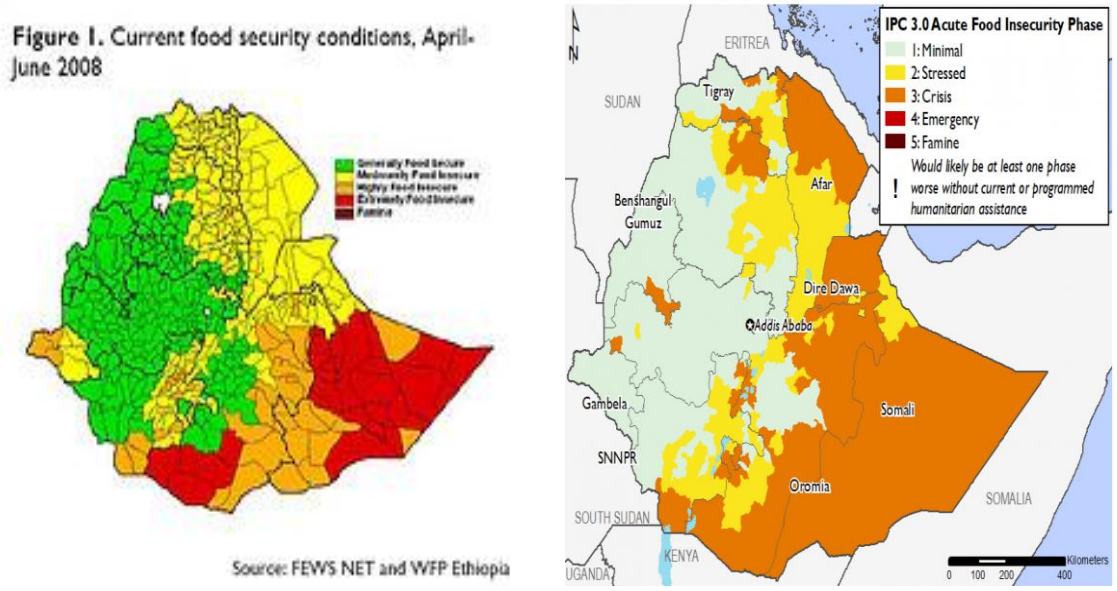
It is necessary to use the statistical information with care since there are often divergent estimates from international sources depending on their ideological orientations and origins of information. It is interesting to note that the total number of people affected by drought and disasters has been increasing for over two decades.

Food insecurity/Famine stress both affected populations and the broader society politically, economically, socially and environmentally. The impact of food insecurity and famine on the health and welfare of the Ethiopian population is too multidimensional and widespread to make an intelligent and reliable assessment of its ramifications. A 2005 demographic and health survey of various regions of the country indicated a high level of anemia and stunting. 47% of all children under 5 years of age were found to be stunted. The stunting rate varied from 57% and 52% in Amhara and SNNP regional states respectively to 19.4% in the capital city, Addis Ababa (Macro International Inc. 2008). This finding was supported by the results of a 2006 Food and Agriculture Organization nutrition survey of populations in the highly vulnerable areas of Northern Shoa and Southern Tigray where 47% of the children were found to be stunted; 11% suffered from wasting and 43% were underweight. The study also found that 10% of the children below three years of age weighed were found to have a body/mass index at least 60% below recommended levels (FAO, Agriculture and Consumer Protection Department, 2006). The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) puts out annual reports on the condition of hunger worldwide by ranking countries with the highest and lowest levels of undernourishment. In its 2008 Global Hunger Index ranking of countries based on the prevalence of child malnutrition, rates of child mortality and proportion of people who are calorie deficient, the institute pointed out that the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Burundi, Niger, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ethiopia scored the worst in respective order. (nazret.com/blogindex.php?title=33_countries_face_alarming_levels_of_hun&more…)

Such tragic consequences of food insecurity and famine are taking place at a time when the world community has shown dramatic strides in improving food security for millions of people. According to FAO's 2006 report on world agriculture, the proportion of people living in developing countries with average food intakes below 2 200 kcal per day had fallen from 57% in 1964-66 to only 10% in 1997-1999 (UNFAO, 2006). Unfortunately, Ethiopia is a country in which such strides were never realized and where increasing numbers of people face serious levels of food insecurity, famine and undernourishment.

Another significant aspect of the food insecurity/famine problematic is that the geographical areas subject to recurrent food insecurity have expanded to include once productive and surplus agricultural regions. Food insecurity/famine is no longer limited to the traditionally food insecure regions of Southern Tigrai, Northern and Central Wollo, Northern Shewa and Parts of Gondar. Increasingly, other more fertile parts of the country in the south have been subject to food insecurity and famine. In 2008, the areas that were identified as facing critical and serious levels of acute malnutrition included Borana, Wolaita, Guraghe, Silti, Kembata Tembaro, Hadiya and Sidama - all in the southern and southeastern parts of the country where spring rainfall is predominantly the source rainfall(Etiology http://nazret.com/blog/index.php?title=map_ethiopia_food_security_update&more=1&c= In 2019, 8.3 million people in Eastern and western Hararghe, Southeastern Oromia including Bale lowlands, parts of Guji and Borana, northern Amhara, Southern Tigray, Somali region were estimated to require humanitarian assistance (FEWS, 2019).

The following map shows the degree to which various regions of the country have been food secure or insecure in 2008 and 2019. The drier northern, northeastern and eastern parts of the country



Note: Key to Colors- Green- Generally food secure; Yellow-Moderately food insecure;
Light Brown- Highly food insecure; Red- Extremely food insecure; dark Brown-Famine

It is interesting to note that more than 60% of the country was considered food insecure in 2008. The economic dimension of the food insecurity problem is reflected in a few economic and social indicators and problems. One of the key economic indicators of Ethiopia's subsistence agricultural economy is the per capita production of cereals in the small-holder highland mixed farming production system. This system is not only the backbone of the country's agriculture but also the source of the core of the Ethiopian diet. Negatu (2004), quoting government sources, indicated that the production of food cereals had dropped from 200 kg/person/year in the early 1950s to 150 kg in 1992. The government sources indicated that domestic food production provided 1 620 kilocalories/person/day while total availability including imports provided 1 770 kilocalories/person/day. Given the fact that a person requires about 2 200 kilocalories/day, there is a 16% deficit of kilocalories to meet the minimum calorie requirement (Nigatu, 2004). The deficit was seen at a time when total agricultural production had increased by almost 70% since the 1980s (IFPRI, 2008)

Another important economic manifestation of food insecurity is the impact that it has on consumer expenditure patterns and family welfare. Poor people spend a far larger proportion of their household budgets on food - typically 50% as compared to only about 10% for high income groups (Collier, P, 2008). Although there are few systematic longitudinal studies on the subject matter in Ethiopia, Nigatu's study throws some light on the dynamics of change in the share of food expenses in the total expenditure structure of consumers. Rural and urban consumers devoted 60% and 56% of their incomes on food in 1995/96 respectively. By 2000, the share of food expenses in total expenditure of consumers had increased to 67% for rural dwellers and 53% for urbanites. Nationally, the share increased from 60% in 1995/96 to 65% in 2000 (Nigatu, 2004). The picture had worsened dramatically in 2008 due to the impact of inflation. The country's food inflation rate jumped from 17.9% in July, 2007 to 43.3% in July of 2008 with significant regional variations. The price of cereals rose by a dramatic 171.9% over the same period (UNIRIN, 2008, August).

The implications of the statistical information for public welfare are clear. Those with little or virtually no income are the most vulnerable to recurrent food insecurity, famine and all the health and welfare aftereffects that they come along with. Children, in particular, bear the brunt of food insecurity and famine. Collier P (2008) had the following to say on the impact of famine on children.

> "If young children remain malnourished for more than two years, the consequence is stunted growth-and stunted growth is not merely a physical condition. Stunted people are not just shorter than they would have been; their mental potential is impaired as well. Stunted growth is irreversible. It lasts a lifetime, indeed, some studies find that that is passed down through the generations" (Collier p. 2008).

V. Policy, Strategy and Program Responses to Food Insecurity/Famine

As indicated earlier in the paper, the problem of food insecurity/famine has been understood from divergent discursive and material frames among policy makers, academic experts, nongovernmental organizations, donor agencies and the broader public. Likewise, the policy, strategy and program responses of households and corporate entities to food insecurity/famine display a certain level of convergence and divergence in their intent, scope, intensity and efficacy. For the sake of clarity and relevance, it would be instructional to analyze both household and institutional responses to famine. Webb, Braun and Yohannes (1992) noted that household response to famine could be grouped into three stages. In stage 1, households minimize risk by dispersing crop and herd. In stage 2, attempts are made to diversity non-farm incomes and accumulate savings and assets to ward off any food shortage and famine. In stage 3, households employ a wide range of risk absorption behaviors such as the sale of livestock and unproductive assets, reduction of consumption, the sale of productive assets and in extreme circumstances migration (Webb, Braun and Yohannes, 1992).

Institutional responses to famine in Ethiopia have shown remarkable similarity in their constructions, approaches and interventions. A synoptic look into the responses of the three governments that have ruled the country for the better part of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century sheds some light on the issue.

The Imperial government which administered the country for the first 75 years of the 20th century saw food insecurity/famine as the product of drought. The traditional coping mechanisms of interregional migration of people and flow of food crops from surplus producing areas thus dealt with the problem at societal level. There was no specialized institutional arrangement for the mobilization of resources in aid of the victims of drought. The 1973/74 famine, which is estimated to have killed between 40-80,000 people mostly in the Wollo, Afar and Oromo regions of Northeastern Ethiopia, was not officially admitted by the then government in power. The Emperor explained the situation as a product of the 1973 oil crisis that increased the price of imported goods, gasoline, and unemployment. It was only after leaked reports reached the international community that more attention was given to the problem. The news not only undermined the government's legitimacy but also served as a rallying point for progressive forces in society to overthrow the monarchy. The Derg (committee) of largely noncommissioned officers and soldiers overthrew the monarchy and established a new military government. It introduced socialism as a state ideology and development strategy by a series of major policy changes including the nationalization of land, extra urban houses, industries, financial institutions and the commanding heights of the economy. On the social front, it introduced farmers and urban dwellers associations so that local administration would be conducted at the community level. The series of changes not only galvanized opposition but also led to significant reduction in economic production and social dislocation.

The response of the military government to the famine was affected by the confluence of events. The 1984/85 great famine came at the juncture of the government's elaborate program to celebrate the achievements of the ten years of military power in the country. The government did not want to mar the celebrations with the unpleasant sight and news of starving farmers flocking to the capital city for the world to witness. Hence, the government ignored the famine and resorted to a disinformation campaign that linked famine to drought and overpopulation until international sources brought it into the limelight of global attention. BBC's airing of a series of reports including "a biblical famine in the 20th century" and "closest thing to hell on earth" laid bare the gravity of the problem and forced the government to accept international assistance from different sources. Live Aid which was believed to have been viewed by over 1.5 billion people world-wide mobilized more than US $ 100 million for famine relief.

The insurgencies in the north and south further compounded the problem of famine. The government opposed the shipment of food to rebel held areas to deny the insurgents the much-needed food. Its relief and rehabilitation commission not only distributed food to the affected areas but also took the gigantic task of resettling more than 600,000 peasants from the drought affected areas to more fertile regions of the country in the western part.

The resettlement program was coercive, poorly planned and executed and led to family separation, death and dislocation. The resettlement strategy was complemented by a massive villagization program with the aim of nucleating the peasantry in planned and controllable villages. Both measures are widely believed to have caused a significant decline in food production (Alex de Waal 1991; 1997)

Other restrictive measures such as price controls on agricultural commodities, denial of farmers' interregional movement and engagement in nonagricultural seasonal employment activities exacerbated the famine. The confluence of violence, political instability, poor governance, bad macroeconomic policies, poverty and drought created the worst famine that the country witnessed in the 20th century. It was a classical example of how bad governance leads to situations where governments have little or no obligation whatsoever either to prevent famine or deal with it in an effective and sustainable manner.

The responses of EPRDF to famine show both similarities and departures from previous governments. In 1998 and 2003, when the country faced severe food shortages, the government was quick to inform the international community of the impending disaster and seek international assistance. The late Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi then told the Christian Science Monitor "as soon as we became aware of the threat, we began allocating resources in the hope that the rest of the world would soon chip in as well. We realized we needed to take foremost responsibility- but there is only so much our resources allow…so we are forced to beg" (Christian Science Monitor, 2003 http:/www./csmonistor.com/2003/0207/p01s04-woaf.html). This candidness probably helped avert the starvation that would have affected 11-12 million Ethiopians. The establishment of the safety net program in 2005 by the Ethiopian government was essentially aimed at making the livelihoods of vulnerable populations more secure through a wide range of interventions at the local level. With the assistance of the International donor community, the safety net program is believed to have provided food or cash transfers to 8 million Ethiopians at a value of US $ 90 dollars or 60 British pounds per household. It was also reported that 756 school classrooms; 342 health posts and 6,160 km of rural roads and 407 hand-dug wells and 310 springs were constructed by the program. (DFID, 2008, June 12)

In 2008, the country faced another major food shortage and high food prices. Government response to the threat has been a mixed bag of denials and international appeals. In an interview with Time Magazine, the country's late Prime Minister, Mr. Meles Zenawi indicated that there has not been famine under his government's watch, only emergencies "…we have pockets of severe malnutrition in some districts in the south and emergency situation in the Somali region"

(http://nazret.com/blog.index.php?title=ethiopia_meles_zenawi_q_and_a_with_time_&more...). The then Deputy Prime Minister Addisu Legesse was quoted as saying "institutions that exaggerate the food shortage in Ethiopia and report inflated figures of the needy are intent on belittling the economic growth of the country and calculating their interests" (Ethiomedia.comall6096.htm). Describing an extensive food shortage and skyrocketing food prices as "the product of overactive imagination of foreign media and humanitarian organizations" is indeed a troubling discursive frame particularly coming as it did from the leaders of a country. The statement of the country's health minister at the time, Dr. Tewdros Adhanom, that "we don't need to beat the drum of hunger for Ethiopia every year…OK, there is a drought in some parts, but we shouldn't exaggerate" seems to suggest that the government is more interested in keeping its name from being tarnished internationally than in dealing with the problem in a transparent and more effective manner. (Jason Mclure, 2008, July 14).

The country director of UNICEF, underscoring the seriousness of the famine in the country, indicated that the government was sensitive to criticism because it did not want to be compared with the Derg, the military regime that oversaw the death of 1 million Ethiopians in the 1984/85 famine. The late Prime Minister of Ethiopia accused UNICEF's assessment of the gravity of the famine problem as patently false and motivated by a desire to mobilize more emergency resources by painting a gruesome picture of a manageable problem. Like the constructions of earlier leaders and governments, chronic food insecurity and famine have been viewed by EPRDF as the products of drought and international price escalation for oil and gas. The removal of the head of DPPA in late August, 2008 and the reconstitution of the agency as one of the departments of the Ministry of agriculture seem to suggest that the political leadership was unhappy with the bad publicity that it was getting from the international community regarding the famine ravaging the country at the time.

The regime has been known to be extremely sensitive to criticism about its performance in the political, economic and environmental fields. In particular, the juxtaposition of famine in the dominant government narrative of double-digit rates of national economic growth seems to have incensed the political leadership more acutely than the suffering of hundreds of thousands of famine-stricken families in various regions of the country. The UN's emergency relief coordinator, Sir John Holmes, was reported as saying that the real number of famine-affected population in Ethiopia was more than 8 million, a figure that the government strongly disagrees with. Regarding the response of the Ethiopian government to the famine, he noted that "any government does not want to be perceived as always in the position of receiving aid" (Jonathan Rugman, The Times,(2008, Sept 18) .

The post 2005 political environment in Ethiopia has been one in which the incumbent party, which was believed to have lost the national election in 2005, has gone out of its way to re-legitimize itself before the populace through claims of high rates of economic growth and extensive public works programs in urban housing and infrastructural development in rural areas. While there has been an improvement in early warning systems and public disclosures of impending famine disasters, the typical behavior of the current government had remained structurally similar with the past two governments. Denial, unaccountability, externalization of responsibility, disinformation; a tendency to link famine to drought and climatic aberrations and lack of sustainable policy and program changes in dealing with agricultural production, conservation of natural resources and significant improvements in the technology of agricultural production seem to have defined its responses. Some have accused EPRDF of using famine as a weapon against those geographical areas that have strongly supported the opposition in the 2005 national election. Far fetched as it may seem, the convoluted nature of political thinking among Ethiopian leaders has been responsible for the death of hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people. Marginalizing and punishing communities for their political alignments and sympathies is not a new tool in the arsenal of successive Ethiopian leaders and governments. Some have gone to the extent of calling the 2008 famine, which has most intensely affected the southern region of the country, as a politically motivated disaster (http://nazret.com/blog/index.php?title=meles_zenawi_says_no_famine_in_ethiopia_&more... Accessed 8/8/2008. Jonathan Rugman, reporting for the Times not only accused the Ethiopian government of hiding the real magnitude of the 2008 famine but also implicated the US and British governments for complicity in allowing the food operation to continue in its current manifestation. Quoting a confidential investigation of the famine by USaid, the US Government's disaster relief agency, he described the situation in the Ogaden region of Eastern Ethiopia as so bad "that it would be shameful in any other country" (Rugman, /2008, Sept 18).

VI. Sustainable Approaches to End Food Insecurity and Famine in Ethiopia

One cannot adopt a know-it-all strategy regarding how food insecurity/ famine can be prevented on a sustainable basis for a complex developing country like Ethiopia. However, it would also be equally irresponsible to see the problem as one without a sustainable solution. The ideas expressed in the following pages are neither novel nor untested. The challenge is one of strong political commitment, sustained national development, visionary leadership and wide and active public participation.

Democracy/Good Governance: The institution of democracy and improved governance hold the key not only to end food insecurity and famine in Ethiopia but also to transform its political economy into a sustainable one. Ethiopia has been politically unstable virtually throughout its history. In modern times, the political instability has been compounded by poor governance at home and the influence that international forces have been exerting on the politics, economics, culture and environment of the country. The last 50 years have been particularly difficult for the country since central governments have been challenged by widespread insurgencies and public disaffection due to their harsh governance systems. The lack of peace and political stability that result from harsh governance systems has militated against sustained development processes in which the collective energies of the entire population could be effectively harnessed and deployed with a single purpose and vision. The monarchy, the Dergue and EPRDF, have all ruled the country with an iron fist without regard to people's fundamental human and civil rights. As a result, all three governments have been suspended in political "thin air" without widespread public support for mounting effective and sustainable national development policies, strategies and programs. The establishment of a genuinely democratic order and corresponding institutions of good governance hold the key not only for maintaining peace and political stability but also for increasing agricultural production, ensuring food security and preventing famine from recurring every few years.

The current political space in the country is such that there is a dangerous trend towards the narrowing of pluralistic engagement of civil society and the broad masses. Food insecurity and famine cannot be eliminated under a condition of poor, unaccountable and predatory governance systems. The meltdown of the ruling party, EPRDF in 2018 due to sustained and massive public opposition to its autocratic, undemocratic and discriminatory governance system has opened-up a new political environment in the country. The reform wing of the party has invited all opposition groups within and outside the country to join it and work towards the establishment of a broad-based government and a pluralistic democratic system of governance. The success of this positive development will have a significant influence on national development policies that could ensure food security for the 110 million people of the country.

National Development Strategy: The Ethiopian government and people should chart a strategy that puts food security as the number one national development priority. Such a commitment should put in place appropriate policy, program and institutional arrangements and palliatives to achieve the strategic goal. Policies on land ownership and management, agricultural technology (fertilizers, seeds, implements, agricultural research etc), investment in irrigation, infrastructure and services, marketing, pricing, credit facilities for the farming community and trained manpower should be reexamined and changed to be more responsive to the challenge of ensuring food security. While the small holder model of agricultural development is indeed the right strategy of promoting rural development, the promotion of efficient commercial farms through incentives should not be forgotten for ideological or other politically motivated reasons. The Gezira scheme of the Sudan serves as a good example of the fusion of government and private involvement in effecting productive modern agricultural development. Ethiopia has the land and human resources to revolutionize agriculture and make it the driving engine of its national development. Food security should be the cornerstone of its national development strategy.

Land and Agricultural Development Policy: The continued adherence to the policy of state ownership of land is viewed by many as one of the root causes for the recurrence of food insecurity and famine in Ethiopia. The situation has led to the lack of economic dynamism in urban centers because land is the all-important asset and little investment is made in other vital sectors of the economy. This situation contributes to the scarcity of jobs for all kinds of job seekers thus swelling the number of the poor. Liberalizing land ownership and its management could certainly introduce the principle of incentives in the production and reproduction of food and wealth. The small holder subsistence agriculture that dominates Ethiopia's economy could increase its productivity and contribute significantly to ensuring food security only when it is capable of utilizing such production increasing technologies as fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, markets, research inputs etc. The government practice of using land as a political tool for ensuring control and support has invariably led to uncertainty and lack of incentive among land managers and producers. The efficacy of the land certification program that the government has introduced to improve land use security for farmers has to be carefully studied and acted upon accordingly. Common property regimes have invariably failed the challenges of increasing agricultural productivity, ensuring sustainable management of environmental resources and improving the lives of agricultural communities in many parts of the world. Ethiopian farmers cannot be an exception to the global pattern. The promotion of commercial agriculture that contributes to the country's food security should be given special government support both sectorally and regionally.

Promotion of Irrigation: Ethiopia is believed to have more than 3 million hectares of potentially irrigable land out of which less than 200,000 hectares have been developed through traditional and modern irrigation schemes. The history of many hydraulic civilizations clearly suggests that the effective use of surface and ground water for agricultural production contributes not only to increased agricultural production and productivity but also to sustainability. Power is an important dimension of irrigation development and management. Notwithstanding the tremendous water resources potential, the country's power generation capacity was limited to about 791 MW in 2008 with an anticipated increase to 1970 MW by 2010. Yet, the percentage of households having direct access to electricity was estimated at 8% in 2008. Given the welfare and production implications of electricity, the country's strategy in this vital sector of the national economy should be dramatically improved. The success of Indian agriculture to meet the food and energy needs of its 1.2 billion people is often associated with its all-out support for irrigated agriculture.

Integrated Rural Infrastructure Development: The introduction of a package of modern infrastructures and services such as roads, schools, health centers, water supply, electricity, telecommunications etc to the rural population plays a major role in increasing agricultural production and productivity. Such delivery not only opens effective markets for agricultural inputs and outputs but also creates alternative employment opportunities for farmers during and after major agricultural seasons. The expansion of paved federal, regional and local roads has been quite significant since 2000. According to Ken Ohashi, country director of the World Bank to Ethiopia and Sudan, Ethiopia's paved federal roads increased from 3800 km in 2000 to nearly 5 500 km in 2007, an increase of 43%; other federal and regional roads were expanded to 37,000km and Woreda and community roads covered another 47,700 km bringing the total network to 100,200km (Ken Ohasi, 2008). Such significant expansion of the road infrastructure network of the country could have a positive impact on the production and productivity of the agricultural sector and in improving the current poor level of rural-urban exchange. This expansion should be complemented by agricultural extension, land management, price and marketing and labor mobility factors. Unfortunately, such systemic and comprehensive visage has been either missing or imperceptible in the development praxis of successive governments. The piecemeal, disjointed and uncoordinated nature of infrastructural development and management has significantly reduced the impact of such investments on rural and urban transformation in modern day Ethiopia.

Conservation Programs: The biophysical resources of Ethiopia are extremely varied and richly endowed with tremendous genetic and biotic diversity. Hence, the effective use of this tremendous ecological diversity requires massive conservation of the flora, fauna, soils and water resources of the country. Unfortunately, Ethiopia also represents one of the most environmentally degraded countries in the world by virtue of its rugged topography, millennia of human use and misuse of land and careless management of the critical ecological resources of water, soil, forest and animals. Sustained programs of natural resources management require knowledge, organization, technology, finance and above all active public participation. A national conservation strategy based on these premises and individual and public incentives should be mounted on a sustained basis. It should be based on local resources and augmented by whatever international assistance could be mobilized. Unfortunately, our national conservation strategies and programs have been largely driven by externally generated paradigms, financial and technical flows and other support mechanisms. Such paralyzing dependence makes our conservation efforts piecemeal, fragmented and short-term in character and impact. Conservation of the natural resources of the environment should be based on sound public knowledge and commitment at the local, regional and national levels. The successful massive reforestation programs of the last three decades of national development should be re-evaluated and given a broad-based support from the federal and regional governments and international sources. The two massive national tree planting campaigns mounted in 2019 and 2020 by the new prime minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, are laudable efforts at mobilizing the whole country in reforestation. The Prime Minister has the vision of sustaining the program over the next few years.

Knowledge: Tacit and Codified. Modern agriculture is characterized by mechanization, chemicalization, genetic engineering and vertical and horizontal integration of production, marketing and consumption. The knowledge base of Ethiopia's agriculture should be significantly expanded by fusing both traditional and modern sources of knowledge and information in all critical areas of agricultural development. Our society's absorptive capacity in the areas of generating, diffusing, controlling and managing information and knowledge has been rather limited. The capacity of a typical Ethiopian farmer to recognize, assimilate and exploit internally and externally generated knowledge is so limited that production and productivity remain low. The typical Ethiopian peasant is not likely to afford the increasing cost of fertilizers, pesticides and other production increasing technologies and change the overall pattern of agricultural production on a significant level. It is therefore critical to expand the tacit and codified knowledge base of Ethiopia's farmers and the entire society to improve agricultural production and productivity. The widespread use of production increasing knowledge systems and technologies could improve not only the productivity of the agricultural sector but also the performance of other critical sectors of the national economy. At the same time, the promotion of commercial farms at micro and macro levels makes sense because they are better suited to garner the necessary investment for technological, organizational and marketing resources that are so essential for modern agriculture. Our financial institutions should be equipped to provide the necessary credit facilities on a wide scale.

Dietary Culture: The cereal-dominated agriculture of Ethiopia and its religions have defined our dietary structure and cultural preferences. This structure has significant implications for daily calorie intake and energy levels available for personal physical growth, intellectual development and productivity. Our dietary preference for cereals and meat has significantly affected the development and expansion of root crops, vegetables and fish as sources of food, fiber and energy. Although significant areas of southern Ethiopia have been and are practicing root-based agricultural production and consumption for ages, the system-wide impact of this sector of agriculture has been rather limited. The use of such low value but higher productivity agricultural products as potatoes, yams, '*enset*', cassava and a wide range of vegetables and fruits as part of our dietary culture could go a long way in reducing stunting, the problem of underweight children and brain development in the formative years of children. A concerted and sustained national educational effort and acculturation is needed to change our dietary pattern and reduce our recurrent vulnerability to food insecurity and famine.

Population Policy: Stabilizing population is a major strategy that could significantly contribute towards ensuring food security and preventing famine. Ethiopia is currently experiencing a yearly population growth rate of 2.4-2.5% thus contributing to an annual absolute increase of 2 million people to the existing population. This is almost double the global average which is currently estimated at 1.3%. The 2005 demographic and health survey found out that the fertility rate of an Ethiopian woman (15-49 years of age) was 5.4 nationwide. It showed significant regional variation from a high of (Oromia, 6.2), Somali (6.0), SNNP (5.6), Amahara and Tigrai (5.1) to the low figure of Addis Ababa's (1.4) (Macro International Inc. 2008). If this trend continues, the country's population is projected to reach the 144 million mark by 2030. Although there are divergent views on population size as a problem in development discourse, the practical realities of the post World War II period in every part of the world clearly suggest that fast population growth rate in the developing parts of the world has been the single most important factor in dampening the effect of fast economic growth and accelerating environmental degradation through the overexploitation and/or mining of resources beyond sustainable levels. In a recent article on Africa's population growth dynamics, it was pointed out that Africa's population was nearing its biological limits. The Global Footprint Network released a report in which it indicated that the per capita consumption or ecological footprint of the average African in 2003 was 1.1 hectares/person well below the global 2.2 hectares/person. Ethiopia was cited among those African countries that were living exceeding their national bio-capacities (http://www.peopleandplanet.net, "Africa's Population is nearing biological Limits"). Notwithstanding the merit of the argument that technological means could significantly alter the population/environment balance, practical realities in Ethiopia call for a stronger and more effective population policy and program that combines family planning, reproductive health care, environmental sanitation, dietary education and praxis. The stagnation of agricultural technology in the Ethiopian production system has invoked the widely circulating view that the Malthusian thesis of the structural imbalance between fast population growth and slow agricultural development has been clearly manifesting itself in the country for decades. Notwithstanding the conceptual flaw of invoking Malthusian thinking in an age of tremendous technological change and economic productivity, one cannot help but be prudent in examining the relationship between Ethiopia's fast rate of population growth and the performance of its agricultural food production system. A cursory look into the recent hikes in the prices of all food items in the country seems to suggest that Ethiopia's food production system is structurally unsound and not likely to show dramatic positive change in the immediate future if the current business-as-usual scenario continues. That is why there is a need for a multi-pronged approach involving effective population control and increasing the production and productivity of the agricultural sector.

Sustainable Development: The UN has defined "sustainable development as one that meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs" (UN, 1987). Sustainable development has the three interrelated objectives of promoting economic growth to generate societal wealth and meet basic needs, protecting the environment and promoting equity in the distribution of societal wealth and shouldering the responsibility of environmental costs. Ethiopia needs to guide its national development policies, strategies and programs on these tenets of sustainable development. Policy makers, development planners, executioners, administrators and the broader public should go beyond paying lip service to the concept as a mere international diplomatic and discursive development slogan. As amorphous and difficult as the concept may be, it provides a basic framework for meeting societal basic needs without destroying the biophysical resources of the environment on which all development activities rely. It also provides a moral compass in which societal wealth and the environmental costs incurred in the production, distribution and consumption processes should be more

equitably and justly distributed among peoples and corporate entities. Poverty reduction is a key element of sustainable development and massive interventions are required to change the current difficult condition in the country. The current level of absolute poverty (income of less than 1US$/person/day) in Ethiopia is obscene since it affects between 65-70% of the population. If there are significant positive results in the poverty reduction projects and programs of the current national development strategy, they should be strengthened and widely replicated. Otherwise, there is a need to reexamine existing policies and programs and make structural changes in their intent and content.

International Trade. Lastly, the promotion of international trade can bring about significant improvements in ensuring food security and fostering agricultural development. Ethiopia strategic location in the horn of Africa renders it a comparative advantage vis-à-vis the markets of the Middle East and Europe. Taking advantage of its proximity and diversified ecology, concerted efforts must be made not only to attract investors and trading partners but also to improve the quality and safety of foods to be traded. Although Ethiopia is in no position to influence the spiraling food prices at international levels, it can minimize the impact of speculative trade in basic food commodities within its borders through carefully studied and devised incentive and regulatory actions. In the short term, the country's leadership should take proactive measures to mitigate the vulnerability of millions of poor farmers and urban dwellers in times of structural food shortages through the purchase of food from international sources. Governments that fail to protect their populations from the vagaries of food shortages should reexamine their overall political, economic and environmental policies and strategies and make appropriate changes in their institutional arrangements. Only irresponsible, undemocratic and unaccountable governments transfer the responsibilities of ensuring food security to their populations to international donor organizations and countries.

VII. Conclusions

I believe that the following issues deserve special focus in public discourse and action at local, national and international levels regarding various aspects of food insecurity and famine in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia's food insecurity and famine are indeed the products of complex biophysical and political economy constraints. The web of interlocking governance, policy, population, land, knowledge and biophysical problems has made millions of Ethiopians vulnerable to recurrent food insecurity and famine. Political economy problems play the most significant role in explaining the recurrence of famine in an otherwise relatively well-endowed biophysical environment.

Civil strife and political instability have provided the overall context of food insecurity and famine under successive governments. Eritrea, Tigray, Wollo, Ogaden, and Oromia regions have been the scenes of insurgencies at different times thus bearing the brunt of the food insecurity and famine challenges. The current political instability in various parts of the country will have significant ramifications for food security and agricultural production and productivity.

The domestic food production gap, the lack of foreign exchange for importing food, population growth and the widespread poverty that have defined the food insecurity and famine problematic are primarily a result of the misguided political and economic development policies and strategies of successive governments. The corruption that has defined development policies and strategies over the last three decades has had a highly corrosive impact on the effectiveness of agricultural and infrastructural investments.

Food aid and external assistance have become the main sources of food insecurity for a variety of reasons. They have been not only morally paralyzing and embarrassing but also disempowering. Successive governments have relied on international handouts to deal with a structural national developmental and governance challenge of meeting the food requirements of a growing population.

The country's extreme dependence on imported food, energy, finance and technology has been increasing over time to such an extent that no window of opportunity seems to be left for sustained autonomous long-term economic development. The tremendous energy and indigenous knowledge system of millions of Ethiopian farmers and pastoralists have largely remained unorganized and underemployed by successive governance systems. The lack of freedom of speech and the marginalization of the intellectual segment of Ethiopia's society

paralyzed the indigenous knowledge system from being assisted by scientific research and praxis. Such lack of marriage between indigenous knowledge and science has resulted in the fossilization of the agricultural community in its production, reproduction, consumption and overall cultural development history.

Massive environmental degradation and a common property land ownership and management system have been and remain the Achilles heel of Ethiopia's subsistence agricultural system. The often cited high rates of economic and agricultural growth and considerable soil conservation and reforestation efforts in recent years have improved agricultural production but the food insecurity problem has been widening and deepening in its scope and geographical impact due to fast population growth and cultural changes in the urban and rural communities.

The country's population growth rate has been high thus contributing to increased status quo, nutrition and distribution food insecurity gaps over time. The per capita consumption of food has been declining quite significantly contributing to a wide range of health and public welfare challenges.

The technological base of agricultural production has not only remained backward but also had little impact in terms of affecting the productivity of small holder subsistence producers. The agricultural implements, fertilizer, seed, irrigation and information technologies that are so vital to agricultural revolutions are largely missing from the production systems of most Ethiopian farmers and pastoralists.

The challenge of food insecurity and famine in Ethiopia can thus be addressed by a wide range of critical policy, strategy and program initiatives including democratizing governance, establishing peace, charting out and implementing appropriate economic policies, liberalizing land ownership and management regimes, scientific and technological changes, environmental conservation, investment in irrigation, infrastructures and services, population control, dietary cultural changes and active public participation in political governance and national development.

In a broader context, human capital formation is at the root of any country's state of development and underdevelopment. The success or failure of Ethiopian society to realize concrete improvements in its material, intellectual and spiritual culture lies in its educational and acculturation institutions. The problems of food insecurity and famine in Ethiopia can only be solved through the active involvement of conscious, knowledgeable and engaged citizens. Governance plays a key role in mobilizing, facilitating and engaging the millions of Ethiopians with both indigenous and modern knowledge and skills to fight poverty and achieve a level of development that ensures freedom from recurrent food insecurity and famine. The lack of democracy, peace, government accountability and unity of purpose has so far defined governance in Ethiopia. I believe that the key to food security and freedom from famine is in our hands and not in international assistance, external funding and paradigms of development and resource management. The remark of the late Kofi Annan, the former secretary general of the United Nations and former chairman of the Alliance for a green revolution in Africa in 2007 that "no country or region of significant size has been able to lift itself out of poverty without raising productivity in its agricultural sector" captures the essence of the challenge that Ethiopians and Africans should heed earnestly (Kofi A Annan. July 14, 2007)

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