YOUTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA: PAST EXPERIENCES, PRESENT INVOLVEMENTS AND PROSPECTS

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Esteemed Chairperson
Ladies and Gentlemen:

We would—my colleague Gojjam Bogale and myself, Zeritu Nida—first of all like to extend our appreciation to the Ethiopian Economic Association for arranging this monthly Forum, which has been running for sometime now, under the general theme of *Vision 2020 Ethiopia*, and providing us with the opportunity tonight to express our wishes, aspirations and visions and share our views about the potential of Ethiopia's youth and the challenges and constraints it faces, and to suggest what we consider would be solutions to the problems hampering the active participation of young people in the country's development process. The specific topic assigned to us for tonight's presentation is "Youth and Development in Ethiopia: Past Experiences, Present Involvements and Future Prospects."

We would also like to extend the same appreciation to Professor Andargachew Tesfaye and our fellow young man, Kifle Mariam Getachew for having consented to serve as discussants for tonight's presentation and give us their comments and feedback.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important factors for a country's development is its human resource, and the youth constitutes an integral part of this productive force. The youth can indeed be said to provide the lifeblood to any given country's development. Consequently, the youth needs all the support it can get to be able to use its as-yet-untapped potential to accomplish tasks beneficial to the society at large. Since the youth forms a very large part of the community, the society has the responsibility of mustering its capacity to encourage this social sector to do all it can for the development of its country. More specifically, families, schools government institutions/agencies and non-governmental organizations must make their share of contribution toward this end. The country's youths have, to the extent their capacity allows, undertaken different activities in this respect, as they still are doing and will continue to do in the future. Nevertheless, there still are some questions that seek answers: Have the country's young people engaged in activities to the maximum that their capacity allows? Do they have the fortitude or morale to so engage themselves in the future? How

much of the needed initiative do they have? In short, have they prepared themselves to meet any change as may occur in the future? These and similar other questions must be answered.

We can say that a country is well developed only when it finds itself in a better position compared to its past in terms of its current social, political and economic and strategic capacity as well as its cultural values, and when itself in a much better position as compared with the level of development attained by other countries. A country is said to have the capacity enough to compete with other countries not simply on the basis of the manpower—quantitatively speaking—it has under its command, but also on the basis of the quality and level of that manpower's performance. And the sector that is potentially capable of undertaking these activities happens to be the youth. When, therefore, one speaks of the youth one is simultaneously addressing development issues and vice versa. The two, in other words, are two sides of the same coin.

Seen from this perspective, the youth can be considered as the social sector that constitutes the backbone of any given country's

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development. In this regard, it is most above all important to take into consideration the role of the rural youth. Precisely because the rural youth constitutes a large population size, its members are in a position to take up the issues of environmental protection and productivity, to introduce improved techniques in productivity and, in the process, bring about the desired change. The youth can serve as an agent of progress by introducing new technologies and openly challenging existing social systems and beliefs and conducting dialogue around such issues.

Given this scenario, then, it stands to reason to ask the following questions: How much aware of its role is the youth and how ready to go into action in this respect? Are there challenges or obstacles the youth faces in its march forward to this end? And what must be done in this regard? We shall attempt to explore, as much as possible, these and other related issues within the scope of this short presentation.

The paper is presented in seven parts. The first part is Introduction. The second part attempts to provide some working definitions of 'youth'. In the third part, we have attempted to explore the correlation between youth and development in its various aspects and dimensions. The role outside forces play in the life of the youth is dealt with in the fourth section. The fifth section is given to the analysis of the profile of youth and the constraints it faces. The sixth section constitutes a summary of our presentation, while we devote the last (seventh) part to the projection of our visions and wishes [for Ethiopia of the future].

II.   WHAT DEFINES THE YOUTH IN ETHIOPIA?

There isn't any single, universally agreed upon definition of youth; nor is there any clear demarcation among the different age groups that are supposed to constitute what societies collectively term 'the Youth'. Youth is generally defined within the boundaries of age limits. Given this parameter, the term 'youth' is given different meanings when considered in terms of different economic, political and social values. Youth generally is considered to represent a social sector within a given age-range and as occupying different economic, psychological and social positions and levels in the economy of human life.

Among the various definitions given to youth, one finds the demographic perspective, in which the concept of 'youth' is explained in terms of different age ranges. Because of this, different societies have assigned different age ranges for what they consider falls within the limits of youth, based on their respective social, traditional and cultural values. For example, we see that individuals within the following age ranges have been assigned to the social sector that we call youth,[1] which, according to four of such classifications, gives us the following picture:

The United Nations	*15-24 years*
India	*15-35 years*
Nigeria	*18-35 years*
South Africa	*14-35 years*

In Ethiopia those within the age range of 15-29 years are subsumed under the youth sector, in which case, then, the youth accounts for one-third (or 29 %) of the country's

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[1] Source: The Internet

population. On this basis, youth is that transitional stage in life between childhood and adulthood, falling within one or the other of the age-ranges indicated above. Whichever age-range one picks, as the case may be, the figures show that our country has a huge reserve of potential human resource for bringing about innovation and change.

Individuals falling within the youth category are possessed of some general attributes and/or qualities, among which we find impulsiveness or hot bloodedness, spiritedness, daringness, guilelessness, deference, productiveness, etc. It is the amalgam of these attributes or qualities that render the youth both virtuous and imprudent at the same time.

III   YOUTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The term development is given different definitions depending on the kind of discipline one professes. Considered from a somewhat comprehensive perspective, development refers to a rather complex and multifarious process that transcends the limited notion of mere economic growth so as to embrace all facets of life and the totality of a community's potential. It is further a process that enables all members of a community to contribute in a situation of social and economic transition or change and achieve results for common good. Consequently, the principles of development should be grounded in the respective needs of each community, such that it reflects that community's identity. This constitutes the cultural approach to development.

According to this definition, development should be fundamentally grounded in human

needs and interests, in other words, in people. This means that, in order to meet the needs and interests of people, it is necessary to incorporate economic, cultural, social and political criteria [when planning development]. Any development project so planned and designed should enable the community to make a transition from one level of livelihood to the next, improved level. When the concept of development is thus broadly considered, it is our feeling that economic development, over and above being conceived of in terms of the conventional criteria of industrialization and modernization, should be so perceived as to enable people feel a sense of ownership of whatever they do and so actively participate in the process. And the youth has a responsibility in ensuring that this goal is realized. The reason is that the youth happens to constitute the single most potentially capable social group with the interest in industry and the initiative to accomplish tasks and motivate others into doing the same. The youth can indeed play an important role in a country's development. The contribution of the youth includes the cultivation of values in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres of a community's life.

3.1 Political

In our attempt to explore the roles of previous generations of Ethiopian youth, we have found that different intellectuals and writers have spoken and written a lot about it as considered in both rural and urban contexts. With this as a starting point, we shall attempt to explore in a somewhat cursory fashion the roles and activities of the youth in the three successive regimes Ethiopia has gone through in recent history.

From what we have been able to garner from different sources, one can realize that Ethiopian youths have undertaken multifarious activities under different political regimes and historical periods. Their acts of rallying around causes or issues of common national interest have been recorded, as indeed they constitute part of current living realities. And as for those moments in the country's history when opportunities for access to modern education were not yet on the horizon, Ethiopia's youths have been known to rally to the defense of their country from foreign incursions while simultaneously engaging in such productive activities as agriculture and handicraft. Since the advent of modern education in the country, they have been known to mount resolute struggles in opposition to different kinds of oppression prevailing in the country and for economic and social development, justice, democracy and a better system of governance.

As the history of the Ethiopian youth [movement] indicates, they have been at the forefront of the struggle, particularly since 1960 (1953 E.C.)[2], acting as tail blazers and actively and extensively mobilizing the society for change. Their protest against unjust and oppressive regimes, their role in mobilizing society for economic and social development, justice, democracy and good governance and the exemplary struggle they waged and the sacrifices they made as well as the victories they achieved have formed the foundation for the activities of the present generation of Ethiopian youth. Their battle cry of "Land to

[2] The reference to this year recalls the abortive coup d'état masterminded and led by the Neway brothers, Mengistu and Germame, the first coup of far-reaching significance in the history of Imperial Ethiopia.

the Tiller," one of the pillars of democracy, and their proud history of struggle to uproot feudalism and liberate the peasants from tenancy will be inscribed on the pages of eternity as something to emulate by the present generation of Ethiopian youth.

With the foregoing as background, let us now briefly explore the profile of the present generation of Ethiopian youth since 1966 E.C [1974]. It is to be recalled that the Ethiopian youth had joined different political organizations and made lots of sacrifices. The sacrifices the young people of yesteryear made (rare as they were and nurtured in different educational and ethical background and experiences of responsibility) by joining different political organizations, which were as varied in their ethnic and religious backgrounds as the youths that joined them, to ensure the realization of democratic and human rights is one the imprints left to us by our recent history. Members of a whole generation of Ethiopian youth have paid with their blood, while more have been forced into exile. This stands as an uncontestable testimony to the love of country demonstrated and the attending sacrifice made by the young generation in the past.

Be that as it may, there are nevertheless evidences indicating that the youth of this particular historical period were outside of the control of their families. Families at the time had neither the opportunity nor the capacity to influence, in any which direction, the different organizations the young people joined at the time. Because of this and similar other reasons, the struggle of the youth at the time had met with debacle, thereby leading to the exile and death of many young people.

When we look at the state of affairs today, however, although it appears that the present generation of Ethiopian youth is not under any particular political and social pressure, because it is characterized by divisions among ethnic lines and could not, therefore, organize itself freely, we feel that it has not done much compared to the achievements of previous generations. However, it does not mean that the present generation is simply sitting-by idly, but doing as much as its capacity allows it. Yet, it is our belief that each and every sector of society is duty-bound to seek solutions to the problems the present Ethiopian youth faces, so that the youth today will be more active and achieve more. In this respect, the following questions, especially, and other related questions should get the right answers in order to solve these problems: How can the youth freely organize and mobilize itself in the future? How can it rid itself of its weaknesses and shortcomings? What are the roles the youth could play in the country's future development?

3.2   Social

The youth of any given country should enable itself to actively participate in the social affairs of that country and contribute to its development. The youth must realize that it has the responsibility to mould future generations and, accordingly, engage itself actively in all social activities so as to be able to lay the foundation for the dissemination and transfer of cultural legacies to succeeding generations. This means that, unless the generation in question is equipped with ethical uprightness; unless it cultivates the initiative to work; unless it develops a sense of ownership and belongingness and proves itself an upholder of its country's development and pride to

its community, the dream of extricating the country from the morass [of poverty and destitution] and attaining the stage of development we so much desire and long for would remain just a pie in the sky. It is a well known fact that social crisis is one of the major causes of a country's downfall. And the responsibility for such a social crisis as a country may face must lie with the youth. We therefore say that the youth, aware that it must play an important role in the country's social undertakings and activities and taking account of the fundamentals of development, must leave behind something of benefit to its fellow citizens and its country as whole.

3.3.   Economic

The youth constitutes one of the resources for the economic development of a country. Consequently, in order for a country to effectively utilize its wealth of resources, the optimum possible participation of the youth in the country's economic affairs is crucial. To begin with, for instance, the youth must rid itself of the mentality of dependency and become a force capable of creating jobs for itself and others. By 'creating jobs' we mean, first of all, putting oneself in a position to seek the opportunity, or even create the conditions, for oneself to improve one's own livelihood, without being choosey about jobs or despising the kinds of jobs one happens to come across. In addition to this, over and above proving itself capable in whatever work it is deployed, the youth must put itself in a position to identify and combat problems that prove detrimental to the country's economic growth and development, such as, for instance, corruption. Another point is that the youth, instead of wasting its time in idle talk, must be able to put to

meaningful use the hours that it spends at work in order that it may attain its own goals and accomplish those tasks that the community expects of it, by collaborating with the relevant bodies, as their respective responsibilities or mandates allow or require. This means that the youth should not only be able to participate in technological, industrial and educational development, but it must also serve as the locomotive of change. It must especially play a crucial role in eradicating joblessness or unemployment and in appropriately utilizing the country's resources. When we look at the concrete reality of our country, it is only too obvious that the youth today faces multiple economic problems. The main ailment the youth faces, however, is lack of interest or enthusiasm to work, poverty, [the right] outlook and attitude. If a person works and uses his/her income appropriately, there is nothing to stop that person from getting where he/she wants to be. Therefore, the youth must realize that, beyond generating manpower and engaging in other technological development activities, it also constitutes the backbone of the country's development and, accordingly, must bear its share of responsibility.

IV. THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL FACTORS IN THE LIVES OF THE YOUTH

There are external factors that contribute toward the all-round involvement of the youth in a country's development. Among these factors the major ones are the family, society, schools and the government.

4.1. Family

It is common understanding that children born to the same family tend to take up or grow after the professions, ethical codes, life styles and religious preferences of their families. As most psychologists agree, "families serve as models for their children's physiological growth, mental development and similar other processes of maturation." Younglings generally learn a lot of things and increase their mental development and creative aptitude through imitation. To the extent that families serve as models to children, every single activity and behavior within the family has tremendous influence on the future development of those children.

When many psychologists try to deal with people with mental disturbance or crisis, they usually focus for primary consideration on what kind of environment and household conditions those people were brought up in, which they make their primary object of their research. This type of research helps create the conditions for identifying whatever unfulfilled and suppressed needs there have been in the lives of the patients during their childhood days and to find out what traces they have left behind on the patients' mental constitution and, accordingly, find the appropriate solutions to their problems.

Because children's brain is naturally given to absorbing and learning things, they can easily retain what they see, hear and are told. If children are properly cultivated from their infancy, they could end up being great intellectuals, philosophers, renowned poets and engineers worthy of emulation by succeeding generations. Of the factors playing a crucial role in terms of providing guidance to

children in order for them to attain these types of professional competence, families figure in the foreground. Parents have their own assigned role to play in helping their children grow in an environment of love and learn and ask about and inquire into their surroundings patiently in a culture of open dialogue. Youngsters brought up in this type of family setup will more than likely end up being regardful, resolute/determined, discerning, critical and loving of their fellow human beings and their country. Such youngsters, moreover, will be able to lead a life of fulfillment and, therefore, happiness. In short, the nurture parents provide to their children, rather than being limited to the physical aspect of their offspring's life, will go so far as to embrace their children's psychological and social development, so that, in the end, their role contributes to the molding of good citizens.

4.2. Society

Since youths are an integral part of society, they assimilate a lot from what they hear and see members of their communities say and do. [For this reason,] the society has the responsibility of nurturing its youth in the ways of ethical uprightness and inculcating in them the initiative for work and love for one's country. It is from the same communities that the youth learns bad behavior and dissoluteness. It stands to reason, therefore, that society has a big role to play in the proper molding and upbringing of its youth.

Human beings are gregarious by nature, that is, interactive. There are several things that hold human beings together or bind them to one another, whether we think in terms of culture, religion, moral/ethical codes and outlook and attitudes. Because there are things that an

individual wants from other individuals, that individual has no choice but to live in accordance with the needs and requirements of the larger society. This means that communities have their own respective languages, cultures, ways of living, including feeding and clothing themselves, which all go to form the common denominator for members of those communities to live together. In order to survive as a community of individuals, the larger society has the duty to maintain its customs and rules in a manner proper to its sense of community. And it is precisely because a country's culture, customs, religion, and language are embodiments of its identity that society has the duty as well as the responsibility to maintain and transmit the values it cherishes to posterity.

Ethiopia, we know, is a country with a long history and a rich cultural legacy. In order to speed up the country's development and prosperity, it is imperative that society appreciate its different traditions, customs, ways of life, in short, its cultures and legacies and proceed into the future retaining those aspects that it deems beneficial to one and all as one workable strategy. Today, however, there are certain sections of society that think of the youth as incapable of doing anything, hopeless and one whiling away its time in total idleness. It is for this reason, so it appears, that every parent is observed preferring [almost as a matter of course] to dote on his/her own children and look after their welfare alone, while shunning the responsibility of morally molding the children of other parents, as if to say 'what is of no interest to me concerns me not'.

In contrast to what we witness today, when we look back and

consider the ways of the folk in previous generations, we find that the problems of any given family were squarely considered the problems of the whole of society. There was no such thing as discriminating between 'your' children and 'mine'. History tells us that the young people of those generations were encouraged by society to accomplish tasks that would prove the pride of their country and fellow citizens. Communities at that time made sure that the young were nurtured with patriotism and sense of active participation based on respect for one's own citizenship; that is to say, the youth was brought up to cultivate within itself the courage to confront danger with resolve, to believe in the respectability of work, and to live within one's means, eventually proving oneself a good citizen.

In short, it is our belief and conviction that society must rid itself of the 'philosophy' of ultimate selfishness that makes people wish for others to 'be decapitated and still live a healthy life' and, instead, cultivate the sense of looking at children of others as 'my own' and realize that everyone's children are equally theirs—and vice-versa—and live up to the responsibility of acting as the fathers and mothers that society expects them to be.

4.3.   Schools

Next to the family and the community, schools have an all round and a very important role to play in the psychological and ethical nurturing of the youth both through formal and informal education. It is a time-proven fact that young people, over and above acquiring formal education, get instruction in ethics, cooperation, love of work, mutual help, creativity, problem solving and

similar other disciplines at school. In order for the youth to acquire the proper education in the said areas, the contribution of both teachers and students and the interaction ensuing from their relationship play a crucial role. At school, the teacher has the responsibility of molding future generations. Students for their part have the duty to abide by the rules and regulations of the school, respect their elders, fulfill assigned duties, and pursue their lessons with responsibility and a sense of order and discipline. In short, they must contribute their share to the future development of their country. If these twin reciprocal arrangements work, schools will become the main foundation for the all round development of the youth, while the relationship between teachers and students will be like that between fathers and their children. Failure to achieve this, we believe, would make it difficult to guide the youth toward the attainment of the desired goal.

The youth, if it must acquire the kind of education (both formal and informal) it desires, it must be knowledgeable about its duties as much as its rights. Some of the conditions that must be met for the creation and sustenance of a good learning-teaching environment are the general atmosphere of the school setting, the relationship between teachers and students, and the availability of teaching materials and aids. Just by way of illustrating what we mean, let us look at the issue of teacher-student relationship.

We believe it is clear enough that, for a good learning-teaching environment to exist, the relationship between teachers and students must be like that between parents and children. The teacher has the responsibility of identifying

the students' weak and strong points, helping them and providing whatever aid they need, and demonstrating to them that their future is bright. The students for their part have the duty to respect and properly translate into action what the teachers tell them.

And yet, when we come down to earth to face the reality here, we find that things are not as we suppose they are or expect them to be. As things stand now, it is not seldom the case that both teachers and students incriminate each other. It needs no elaboration on our part that this kind of relationship is a big stumbling block to the learning-teaching process. It has become clear nowadays, particularly in the first and second cycles of the school system, that the ethical or behavioral trend among students has turned for the worse. As opposed to this scenario, from what we hear about the school life of previous generations of students and, also, from what history tells us, the teacher-student relationship at school was no less well maintained than the relationship at home between parents and their children. Although we singled out, as one example, the moral deterioration of students, it is equally well known that there also are morally degenerate teachers around the same schools that the said kind of students go to. And, as such teachers have not lived up to the responsibility with which they have been mandated, they, too, cannot escape the rebuke due to them from society. We say, therefore, that students must know and keep in mind the reason for their going to school and utilize the time they spend there in a manner proper to an educational institution. In like manner, teachers should exert themselves to the best of their ability to live out their responsibilities and mold ethically

upright generations. It is only when we have such kind of teacher-student relationship that we can steer our country in the direction of the kind of development that we desire and wish to attain.

4.4.   Government

Governments are there to serve the people and they are mandated with the 'responsibility of holding up the people's wishes and trust. In this role of theirs, they design policies and issue laws and regulations that are deemed necessary for a country's development ensuring the security of the people.

The laws and regulations that governments promulgate must be such that they make the society's livelihood their central concern. Since the youth constitutes an integral part of society and is at the same time tomorrow's inheritor of national responsibility, governments must give serious attention to the welfare of young people and design policies especially geared to protecting their well-being; governments must also be capable of prodding the young toward developing love of work, providing a bright prospect for them and creating conditions whereby they could move freely and engage themselves in productive work.

Let us look into the situation of the youth during the previous regime [of the dergue]. At that time the youth was organized without its free will and forced to engage in activities not of its own making. By contrast, the youth today has organized itself freely and is, likewise, engaged in activities contributing to the country's development. Yet we cannot claim that, for all this, the youth has been able to use all the potential it has to the same extent expected of it by society. Considering this, then, it is

our belief that the government, beyond simply organizing the youth, has a contribution to make toward enabling it to be self-sufficient and self-reliant and keen on its country's development, which all amount to patriotism or love for one's country. When we, however, begin to deal with concrete reality, we find that a mere aggregate of individuals 'does not make an organization'. It is therefore incumbent upon the government to provide everything it can by way of providing financial, moral and managerial support and designing the right policies to help the youth guide itself in the right direction.

As things stand now, however, we don't see anyone of these things happening. According to the information we have, the support provided by the government is almost as good as none. And this speaks of the low level of concern that the government shows for the welfare of the youth. It is true that the government issues policies when it thinks the youth may pose a stumbling block to the country's development. Yet the laws and regulations the government issues do not tally with the moral constitution or cultural makeup of the society. Issuing policies intent upon controlling and getting rid of social problems cannot be a solution to those problems by itself. The policy that the French government issued at one time with regard to this issue would serve us as an example of what we mean.

The French government had at one time promulgated a law to eradicate prostitution. On the basis of the law that the French government promulgated in 1938, all the brothels in the country were outlawed or shut down. What this decree did was simply outlaw or shut down the brothels, without providing alternatives for the

improvement of the livelihood of the prostitutes. The law did not provide a single job for any one of the prostitutes, with the consequences that the prostitutes continued with their activities in a much worse manner just to eke out a living. This is clear evidence that outlawing or shutting down brothels and condemning prostitutes, rather than bringing about the desired change, simply served to reproduce a new type and breed of prostitutes. When we turn to the reality in our own country, it is common knowledge that various policies targeting the youth have been issued. At least some of these policies, however, do not appear to have taken into consideration the livelihood, work ethic and educational level of the country's youth. Consequently, we say that, when any such policy is designed, it must be of a nature that has taken into account its condition of implementation, frees the youth from the fetters of unemployment, and is capable of solving the problems the youth faces at present.

V. THE YOUTH AND THE HURDLES IT FACES

Different census surveys taken in different years indicate that the youth constitutes the majority of the Ethiopian population. For example, according to the projection for 1997 (E.C.), the population of Ethiopia is estimated to hit the 73 million mark. Of this number, the youth is expected to constitute 28.4% (14.4% male and 14% female), of which, in turn, 5.3% will constitute the urban youth population, while the remaining 23% will constitute the rural youth population. And yet, a youth population size of this magnitude still remains victim of different economic, social, psychological and political

problems and difficulties. This obviously has negative impact on the country's development process.

As we have been able to discern from various studies, the problems Ethiopia's youth faces are multifarious and multi-dimensional. This nature of the problems arises directly from the varied nature of the causes themselves. It is possible to classify these different problems under four headings: namely, economic and social other social psychological and health.

5.1 Economic and Social Problems

Many scholars have pointed out, the main problem Ethiopia's youth faces as unemployment. That moment in their life when young people are ready to leave school and start looking for jobs is a transitional phase during which they begin to free themselves of dependency on their parents and attempt to lead an independent life of their own. Youth is that phase in life during which young people struggle to cultivate the culture of self-reliance and in which they are not in a position yet to carry the burden of responsibility. Accordingly, it is considered a crucial moment in their life. In this transitional phase, therefore, the main factor determining the fate of the youth is whether or not young people leaving school find jobs at all. If, upon leaving school, young people are not ensured jobs, the problem this entails is not only economic but also social and psychological.

In the concrete reality of Ethiopia, a survey taken in 1999 on unemployment indicates that 33% [figure rounded] of the population that falls under the youth category was unemployed. The figure, when

disaggregated on the basis of age-range, shows the following picture:

Age-range	Percentage
15-19	11.1%
20-24	12.7%
25-29	9%

When we look at the rate of unemployment disaggregated by gender, we see that the position of young women is worse than that of young men. According to a 1999 survey, the percentage of unemployed young women is as follows:

Age	Females (%)	Males (%)
15-19	16.8	6.4
20-24	17.8	7.4
Total	**34.60**	**13.80**

The reason for this discrepancy or gap between males and females, as far as we have been able to discern, is that females are by and large deployed in non-productive jobs, usually limited to running household chores, while at the same time they are denied the opportunity to go to school vis-à-vis their male counterparts. Considered in general terms the reasons for the unavailability of jobs for young people are as follows:

5.1.1 Economic backwardness

The fact that the country's economic backwardness is the main source of unemployment faced by the youth should not strike one as something new, which also happens to be one of the reasons that has rendered us vulnerable to poverty. Poverty in turn could lead to despair. Whether directly or indirectly, the economic backwardness the country is experiencing at the moment has very much affected the youth.

5.1.2. Limited investment

It is difficult to pinpoint the role of investment in a country's development. Still, we believe that lack and non-proliferation of investment has contributed to the spread among the youth of the culture of wasting one's time on trivia pursuit, idleness and engaging in activities detrimental to the well-being of young people.

5.1.3 Lack of meaningful education and training

The fact that education constitutes one of the foundations of a country's development is something we have been hearing—and which our commonsense has been telling us—about all along.

The youth is the one sector that could translate this education into concrete action. The education that is provided to the country's youth, so that young people could better participate in the country's development activities and become useful citizens, has an important role in equipping them with basic knowledge and expanding their scope.

If the education so provided is limited to mere theory and is, therefore, considered knowing about what the students garner from books and journals alone, it would be impossible to apply oneself in a way that the country's development requires. It stands to logic, therefore, that education can become a basis for development only if and when we repeatedly test what we have acquired through theory against concrete action. As things stand now, however, it does not appear that favorable conditions have been created for the youth to be able to actively participate in the social, economic and cultural development activities of its

community. Given this scenario, it is obviously difficult to produce productive and capable citizens.

When a country's educational policy is designed, it must be approached in such a way that it takes into consideration the country's overall capacity, level of education and amount of knowledge, and the society's accumulated experience, while at the same time creating opportunities for employment. When we look at the situation in our country, however, this does not appear to be the case. The fact that the available educational policy is not the kind that provides the youth with an education capable of equipping them with the relevant knowledge and skills, while at the same time taking into account the society's accumulated experience, not only drags the country's economy backward but it also poses a danger to succeeding generations. And we believe that our country has become victim to this kind of policy.

5.1.4 Inability to inculcate work ethic in the youth's cultural and psychological constitution

Conditions must be created for our young people to rid themselves of the mentality of dependency and become self-reliant and self-sufficient. And this can only be realized if they are put in a position to cultivate work ethic, properly utilize the time available to them, and engage in any kind of employment as may make itself available. If one rids oneself of the mentality of deprecating and discriminating jobs and mobilizes oneself by making work one's lifeblood, and persist in engaging whatever job is available, the youth can become creative, aware of the values of time and be able to always lead a happy life. When, however, we look at the reality in our country,

we find that the lack of this culture of respect for work constitutes one of the main causes for our economic problems.

5.1.5 Non-expansion of information and mass media infrastructure

As it is well known, information and mass media infrastructure constitutes a major means not only for the facilitation of economic growth but also for the expansion of social, political and technological development. The mass media are not only tools for disseminating education and information and providing entertainment. They also serve as an uninterrupted channel or bridge for the exchange of information, ideas and opinions between the people and the government, while at the same time creating interaction among the people. A country's development is, by and large, determined by the level of its people's progress, stock of knowledge and level of awareness. Consequently, unless the people's mental capability and capacity is properly developed, it is difficult to expect economic, political, social and cultural development to materialize.

The current reality of our country shows, in our estimation, that lack of proper development in the area of information and mass media infrastructure constitutes one of the causes of the underdevelopment (or non-development) of the youth's spiritual and psychological constitution.
Due to the above mentioned and many other reasons, Ethiopia's youth have become vulnerable to an all-pervading unemployment problem. Because of this, the country has not been blessed with the fortune of reaping the fruits of productivity it has been expecting of its youth.

5.2 Other Social Problems

The other social problem faced by the youth in Ethiopia constitutes a multifarious sub-category of the particular problems addressed in the preceding section. These are hallucinogenic drugs, alcohol, homelessness, juvenile delinquency, crime and criminality, and prostitution.

5.2.1 Hallucinogenic drugs

Hallucinogenic drugs are substances that can be taken in the form of solids, liquids, smoke, or vapor assimilated into the body and that affect the natural metabolic processes. Cigarettes and *chat (qat)* are the main hallucinogenic substances affecting the productivity of the youth in Ethiopia. There are data that show that the number of young smokers has been increasing by the day, alongside which the number of *chat (qat)* consumers has shown a tendency to increase rapidly. As could be observed from some studies, about 20% of the youth in Addis Ababa are known to have succumbed to the habit of smoking.

The more potent hallucinogenic substances are hashish, opium, marijuana, and heroine, and these have been observed to corrupt the lives of the youth all throughout the country's urban centers. One singular problem among the homeless happens to be inhalation of gasoline fume. The use of marijuana consumed in a traditional way is no less widespread among the youth than is the consumption of manufactured hallucinogenic drugs.

5.2.2 Alcohol

Alcohol drinking is another one of the main problems of the youth. Beginning with the local, traditional drinks—such as *tella, tejj* and

araqi—all the way up to factory-produced modern drinks consumption of alcohol has affected the day-to-day life and activities of the youth. One of the reasons why the youth has been rendered so vulnerable to alcohol consumption is the fact that there are no laws prohibiting its use by underage adolescents. Consequently, the problem alcohol consumption causes among the youth has been on the increase day-by-day to such an extent that it has literally crippled the potential contribution they could have made to the country's development.

5. 2. 3 Homelessness

Homelessness is one of the major social maladies affecting the youth in Ethiopia. The causes leading to juvenile homelessness happens to be a result of the economic, psychological and social conditions of parents (or guardians).

Among these problems connected with families or guardians, the main ones are the following:
- ❖ parents being dismissed or laid off from work;
- ❖ migration from rural areas to urban centers;
- ❖ the poverty situation of families;
- ❖ separation (divorce) among parents;
- ❖ domestic violence.

Studies indicate that problems in the family are far worse in our capital, Addis Abeba, than anywhere else in the country. Of the 4500 individuals sampled for a study, 55% happen to be children and youngsters ranging between the ages 3-17, and this figure represents those who have been displaced from their families due to conflicts between husbands and wives.

Psychological problems faced by the youth figure as the other serious cause for the proliferation of

homelessness. In this respect, peer influence and psychological instability are considered the major causes.

Homeless youngsters are very much vulnerable to anti-social activities. Among the young that consume cigarettes, *chat (qat)* and other hallucinogenic drugs, as well as alcohol, the homeless constitute the hardened core. It is these same homeless youngsters that are exposed to juvenile delinquency.

5.2.4 Juvenile delinquency

The problem of juvenile delinquency is characteristic of young people in a certain age range, and it manifests itself in engagement in anti-social and criminal activities. Of those that lead a life contrary to the norms of society, juvenile delinquents rank in the forefront. When youngsters who are below the age of 18 are found to commit crimes, they are categorized as juvenile delinquents. And the measures taken against such offenders are different from those taken against adult offenders. The offense committed by such youngsters is considered as resulting from some sort of personality instability or imbalance and deficiency in the form of socialization they are exposed to.

It is estimated that a large number of juvenile delinquents come from low-income sectors of society. Although poverty and migration from rural areas to urban centers could be considered a major cause for the proliferation of juvenile delinquency, the problem could also arise from deficiency in the upbringing of children by the family as well as society at large. It can be observed that the number of juvenile delinquents has been increasing day-by-day.

5.2.5 Crime and criminality

In the context we are addressing this problem, crime and criminality refer to those illegal activities and outright crimes committed by those sectors of society legally placed within a specified age range. In this context, criminality is not considered any differently from group fighting so very common among the youth. What makes criminality different from juvenile delinquency is only the difference in the age-range of those who commit the one or the other. Juvenile delinquency is attributed to those in the age range of 9-17, while criminality involves offense committed by those who are 18 and above, and who are therefore legally recognized as having the right to elect and get married.

5.2.6 Prostitution

Commercial sex is one of the activities that transform the natural tendency of the youth into that of delinquency. There are numerous young women in our capital alone who are engaged in commercial sex. This is an activity that hampers the productivity of the youth as well as its potential to be custodian of the country's welfare and future. The cause of commercial sex is in the main linked with other social ills. Among these are early (child) marriage, migration from rural areas to urban centers, joblessness among the female population, and lack of proper education. Commercial sex is a major problem characterizing urban centers and their environs. In the current objective condition of our country, the existence of many young people engaged in commercial sex plays the main role in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and other venereal diseases.

5.3 Health Problems

When we speak of health problems, we are referring to physiological damages and other related health disorders afflicting the youth. When we look at the concrete reality of Ethiopia, we find that the youth has been exposed to all sorts of health problems. While HIV/AIDS poses the major health problem the country faces, sexually transmitted venereal diseases, abortion, unwanted pregnancy and similar other problems can also be cited.

The main reason for the health problems prevalent among the youth is lack of reproductive health services and proper sex education.

HIV/AIDS for itself has gone beyond just being a serious health problem to putting the country's development process in a crisis. HIV/AIDS is particularly prevalent among the youth. 85% of the HIV/AIDS infection is borne by those young people in the age-range of 14-29. There is further evidence that this figure is constantly increasing.

It is evident that other venereal diseases are highly affecting the country's youth. Moreover, the unwanted pregnancies, abortions, and the abandonment of newborn babies in the streets all come about due to the lack of proper dissemination of reproductive health education and public health services among the youth.

5.4 Psychological Problems

That phase in life that we call youth is found between the stages of childhood and adulthood. It is during this phase that young people undergo several mental and psychological changes. Because the desires of young people are not the same for the group as a whole,

young people are exposed to different kinds of psychological problems. These psychological problems in turn lead to instability and refusal to submit to society's mores, culture and different customs. These problems have the negative effect on the youth of rebelling against social order and altogether alienating oneself from society as a whole. Because of this, the youth has become vulnerable to various sorts of alien culture and victims of cultural colonialism.

In connection with this, one of the major psychological problems Ethiopia's youth faces today, particularly the youth in urban centers, is identity crisis resulting from exposure to western cultural modes and practices, the corollary to which is denigration of one's own culture. The other psychological problem, which has abandoned our country to the morass of poverty in which it finds itself, is the virtual absence of work ethic among the youth. Problems of indolence and despair have rendered the youth unresponsive to any kind of development activity.

VI. CONCLUSION

The youth constitutes that part of society that leaves behind in its footsteps the foundation stone for every new phase of a country's development. Young people in this phase of life are capable of being productive more than any other sector of the society they live in. They are also full of potential energy, ready for change and responsive whenever they are called upon for action in the general development of their country. It is our considered opinion and belief that families, the government, society and schools should, therefore, make their share of contribution to this end in a concerted manner if the youth must

bring about the desired change for their country.

As the Amharic saying has it, "there is strength in unity," and the above-mentioned bodies must stop deceiving themselves that it is of no concern of theirs when they see young people catch themselves in undesirable activities, for a country's development is a matter of the concerted effort of each and every member of its communities. The economically advanced and prosperous countries in the world earned the fame and respect that they pride themselves in not by engaging in the futile and impossible task of clapping with one hand; rather they got where they did by following up and assessing their problems and utilizing the productive and energetic force they have and deploying it in the right place at the right time. Our country's youths today, on the contrary, have not contributed as much as their capacity allows to the development of their country. Among the main reasons for this failure are the political, economic, social and health problems the youth today confronts.

Although the youth has different problems to deal with, because it constitutes the force making the country's future leadership, it must, as much as the country's capacity allows, stand up to these problems and strive to move one step ahead. Preparing oneself for a noble mission is something that needs to be given priority.

In short, it is our belief that today's youth must put itself on the ready and do all it can to leave behind a spiritual strength that will serve as a foundation for succeeding generations upon which to build the country's sustained development.

This, we say, is the key to any success worth the name.

VII.   VISION

7.1. We the youth would like to see our basic needs met; strategies designed by means of which our problems find lasting solutions and as a result of which we will be able to strengthen our inclinations and talents; programs designed to enable us to adapt ourselves to the living realities of our communities; a system put in place to bring together young people rather than put walls between them; and all this implemented in a just and equitable manner.

7.2. It is our belief that parents, schools, the community at large, the government and, also non-governmental organizations have decisive roles to play in the implementation and realization of the above mentioned task**s**. When we say this, we are convinced that especially families, the community at large and the government shoulder the bigger share of the responsibility in building the capacity of the youth and raising it to a higher level. It is our wish to see these bodies in particular giving sufficient attention to the youth, design strategies through which young people could be more productive, integrate themselves with the youth and act in a concerted manner for the development of our country.

7.3. At this particular juncture, we believe that the power and the resources to jolt into action and mobilize the youth lie with the government and non-governmental organizations. We believe that these institutions have a big responsibility to provide the youth with the financial, material and educational support for it to develop and build its capacity. Our desire in this particular respect is to see the government do everything it can to reduce unemployment and nurture and develop the working skills of the youth, but especially create the favorable political, social and economic environment for all these to be realized.

7.4. It is our firm conviction that, in the year 2020, Ethiopia's youth will be in a position to freely organize itself and realize its rights and duties. We believe that the youth will be able to work in harmony in spite of the ethnic and religious differences and such other reasons as may exist, create good relationships with the other sectors of the community and make big contributions to itself, its families, the community it lives in and the country at large.

The youths of Ethiopia would like to witness an era in which young people, in collaboration with the above mentioned social and political institutions accomplish what is expected of them by society and prove themselves worthy citizens on which families; the community, schools and the government will rely. We especially wish to see an era in which young people indeed have become genuine products of the concerted efforts of the family, society and schools, all in one.

We, the youth, are cognizant of the fact that our country expects much from us. In order to solve the multifarious problems that we face, we must close our minds to all forms of anxiety and fear and turn ourselves into problem solvers capable of arresting the attention of our community. It is our wish, then, that by the year 2020, Ethiopia will have managed to extricate itself from the mire of poverty in which it finds itself at present.

Thank you all for hearing us out!

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"Vision 2020 Ethiopia"
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Prof. Seyoum Tefera  -
    May 27, 2005

Ato Neway Gebre Ab  -
    June 24, 2005
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