

# ECONOMIC CULTURE OF TIGRAY

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## *Abstract*

*Tigreans are descendants of the ancient Axumites who were neither Tigreans nor Amhara but who were speaking Geez and other foreign languages such as Greek and Sabeen. Their descendants were the people of the kingdom Da'mat. They were Da'amatese. Tigreans are considered as one branch of the ancient Axumites who belong to the Semitic language family. These people, together with other ethnically affiliated peoples, used to inhabit the north eastern and northwestern regions of modern Ethiopia. Through linguistic evolution, the Semitic peoples of Northern Ethiopia developed diverse culture: and one of the societies that branched off from those Geez speakers of the Axumites was the Tigreans. (Sagraw H/Selassie, 'Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1527', pp.59.68). This society, as part of the Axumites, accepted Christianity in the 4th century A.D. The religion of Islam is also introduced into this part of the Axumite society beginning from the 8th century mainly through Dahlak and the commercial port of Adulis (Bahru Zewude, 1998, pp 33-38.) Through evolution, Tigreans developed their own specific culture such as the Tigrean language (derived from Geez) and ways of life. Today they have diverse cultural practices that need to be studied, publicized and documented to the new and the coming generation This research will try to investigate, of the various aspects of cultural practices, the Economic Culture of the Tigrean society. It mainly emphasizes on the economic aspects particularly the culture of work and the Culture of Saving which are the basic elements of economic development. With in these territories the researcher will try to address issues of traditional practices that affect the economic culture of the area and other social issues such as the philosophy of work, the culture of saving, and other matters.*

*The researcher tried to consult some literature in the IES in Addis Ababa University. He also traveled from mekelle to Shire to collect pertinent information to the basic issue of the Economic Culture of Tigray. The hitherto investigation clearly show that Ethiopians and specifically Tigreans do not have the culture of work and saving. We Ethiopians and Tigreans are living instinctively. They know thing about planned life.*

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*They work more hours, with very backward technology or sometimes without the help of means of labour, for a handful of yield, and paradoxically expend more than what they produced. All these problems are the product of much precedence of traditional practices and laws. These include religious practices, lack of education, lack of good governance, lack of concern, and the like. Currently, there are some efforts to develop the culture of work and productivity but with full of repercussions that need the attention of all Ethiopians and above all the government. An important progress is on the way. This is the cutting of holly days that retard the working force from using all days for work.*

*Although there are some attempts to improve the economic culture of the country in general there are many problems that need attention. And the basic question, how can we come out of this poor economic performance needs thorough discussion and investigation. This is the reason behind the call for a workshop in October.*

## 1. Introduction

Even though the research is concentrating on Tigray as a case study, the issue brought on board is of great national concern. This is because, with some variations, the economic culture of most Ethiopians is similar and common.

Currently, Tigreans are engaged in different and various economic occupations. Most Tigreans live in the rural area, and thus the larger portion of the population gets its livelihood from the direct exploitation of the land. Mixed farming is the economic field that holds the larger number of the Tigrean population. In the urban centers, inhabitants are engaged in many occupations, ranging from shoe polish activity to industrial activities. The urban population could be categorized into two: private and government engagements.

It is generally considered that Ethiopians and particularly Tigreans are hard workers. Is this real and true? If so, why are we poor and remained to be the poorest of all? Why are we living under the level of poverty? This is the genesis of the conception of this paper. The paper is intended to assess this nationally very important discourse of the time. Tigray is taken as a case in the study.

The concept of economic culture is not a simple issue. It is rather complex and wide in scope. Even though there is nothing exhaustive in research, to limit such a wide conceptual analysis into a manageable scope is an important strategy in research. Because of the above and some other reasons, thus, the study of the economic culture of Tigray is designed to concentrate on two major issues of the economic culture: **The culture of work and saving.**

As a result of the investigations made in the course of the study, two attitudes are observed among the populace concerning the culture of work and saving. Most informants have the stand that Ethiopians and/or Tigreans do have a poor culture of work and saving. Others try to justify the prevalence of work culture by citing some people who had succeeded to improve their lives. Such exceptions are normal and acceptable. These people also believe and are convinced that in general we have a poor working culture. Almost all informants agree that Ethiopians and/or Tigreans do have a poor culture of saving. Both standpoints on the issue of the culture of work and saving blame partly the Christian religious practices and beliefs. Today, the Ethiopian government has launched a progressive policy to improve the economic culture of the peasantry particularly. Hence, scholars should support this effort.

Methodologically, this research will be the product of empirical and observational analysis. This is supported by field work, interviews, and literature consultations. Principally, the research is qualitative in method and analytical in approach. I personally preferred such qualitative research because a substantiated idea of a person could have much greater importance and influence than a reluctantly filled quantitative data and collective thought that occurs through simple fellowship.

I have traveled to Addis Ababa to consult some literary documents in the internationally reputed library of the IES-Institute of Ethiopian Studies. This effort enabled me to frame the conceptual understanding of the key terms related to the theme of Economic Culture, the historical background of the people of Tigray and the cultural manifestations and traditions of the region or the country. Evidences to the core issue of the research are also obtained from field works. Accordingly, I have traveled from Mekelle to Shire for the purpose of collecting information. Because of shortage of time, informants communicated with here in the campus represent the other parts of the region. These include summer students. The city of Mekelle was

the other center of the research. Therefore, I can confidently conclude that I have explored the whole of Tigray

**Table 1: Consolidated data of the people of Tigray**

Population Status	Urban			Rural		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
<b>1. Total population</b> (3,136,267)	214,066	254,412	468,478	1,328,099	1,339,690	2,667,789
<b>2. Total Pop. By Age</b>						
0-9	66,279	65,602	131,851	435,715	420,003	855,718
10-14	33,769	33,409	69,178	185,276	162,420	347,704
15-24	40,374	53,292	93,666	242,812	258,440	501,252
25-49	51,074	66,897	117,971	289,205	337,027	626,232
50-64	14,448	22,508	36,956	115,540	115,652	237,192
Above 64	8,122	10,704	18,826	59,551	46,140	105,691
<b>3. Religion</b>						
Christianity						
Orthodox	185,004	224,253	409,257	1,286,488	1,296,560	2,583,048
Protestant	430	402	832	136	168	304
Catholic	1,203	1,224	2,427	4,872	5,190	10,062
Islam	27,197	28,353	55,550	35,435	36,672	72,107
Traditional	11	13	24	11	18	29
Others	53	36	89	70	92	162
Not stated	168	131	299	1,087	990	2,077
<b>4.Disabled = 90,742</b>			18,748?			71,742?
Below 15 years old= 12,940						
15-49 years old =38,465						
50 and above =39,337						
<b>5.Education</b> (above ten years old)						
Illiterate=1,703,854	41,801	100,931	142,732	706,076	855,046	1,561,122
Literate=439,575	104,379	87,426	191,805	184,378	63,392	247,770
<b>6.Economic Status (Above 10)</b>						
Active=1,492,339	76,200	65,482	141,682	717,329	633,328	1,350,657
Inactive=644,795	69,412	122,279	191,691	170,745	282,159	453,104
Not stated=9,822	1,030	892	1,922	3,805	4,095	7,900
<b>7.Migrational issues</b>						
Migrants	102,602	125,189	227,761	158,968	164,831	323,799
Not stated	2,249	2,141	4,390	6,032	5,597	11,629
<b>8.Fertility</b>						
Crude fertility rate (CFR)=34.1			30.7			34.7
General fertility rate (GFR)= 151.4			121.0			151.5
Total fertility rate (TFR)=5.4			4.2			5.6

CFR refers to the total number of births in a year per 1000 midyear population.

GFR Number of births in a given year per 1000 women in the reproductive age, between 15 to 49.

TFR is related to the number of children a woman is likely to produce at the end of her reproductive period.

Source: The Ethiopian Statistics Authority, statistical abstract, 1997.

As part of the research method, a workshop was conducted on this issue to observe and include the reactions of participants. It was carried out in the middle of the research, in which some unfinished conclusions were reconstructed and speculated. The workshop consisted of representatives from all Zones of the region of Tigray and from all sections of the society. Participants of the workshop framed, commented and forwarded their ideas concerning the region's working and saving culture. The workshop consolidated the unvarnished conclusions and speculations and also proposed solutions for some investigated problems related to economic culture. The workshop cemented the conclusion that Tigreans have poor working and saving culture.

Almost all evidences at hand attest that we need education, and thereby attitudinal change to improve our economic culture. For these to take place the state and the society should work hand in hand. Particularly a lot is expected from all religious centers in teaching and encouraging the people work. Religious centres had better teach their laities about the need for work on the bases of their respective holly books. The state has already launched a campaign to improve the culture of work and saving in different ways. Scholars, religious centers and the mass media should support this effort. To begin with, educational centers and institutions should better include, at least a chapter, in their course outline about issues of Economic Culture.

## 2. General Conceptual Framework

Culture, which is the cumulative process of attitude, practices and beliefs, greatly influences economy. Culture is now at the core of a major trend of transformation. Ideas and concepts affect technology and economy. Economic culture has become an influential and basic sector in economic evolution and transformation. The effort to change some hindering traditional economic practices would also be protracted and exhaustive.

Primarily development depends "not only on technology, capital, specialists and natural resources, but (also) on ordinary men and women or, on these non-conventional inputs that are the productive workers." (Savard, p.9) It is understandable that at early stages economic development demands more and extensive manpower. But this will be more fruitful if assisted by vigorous and industrious working philosophy and culture. "... genuine development is not the result

of manipulation, or passive subjection, but of the people's willingness to change, an effect that requires considerable time and effort on the part of the development agent." (Ibid) The human element in development includes not only the number of the working force and experts, but it also demands the economic values, beliefs, behavior patterns or generally the economic culture of that particular society. The people matters greatly. No matter what change is to be introduced, the decisive role to implement it is always in the hands of the people. Citizens or the practitioners will be the key factors that could decide whether the innovation could be recognized or not. It is the people who have to understand and accept what is happening and who have to participate in the process of change. Without such understanding and motivated participation substantial and long lasting transformation is unthinkable and if tried to implement it will end up with crisis. (Ibid, p.10)

*To change the land holding system, improve the farming methods and develop the industry, what is needed above all is the manpower capable of achieving these aims; not only, of course, administrators able to carry on programmes of land reform, but first and foremost people who will agree to adjust to new conditions, and make the most out of their own potential. (Ibid, p.11)*

Society is also resistant to new changes through cultural traits. The reasons behind the resistance are the possessiveness and in some ways the peculiar nature of culture and misoneism or lack of communication between change agents and the change deriving forces or the people. The latter factor happens not merely because of the 'application of many languages' but also it is because of the 'attitude of the people involved'. (Ibid) People create some sort of resistance to change because they have already immersed themselves into the culture that is actually operating in society. People assume that what they have is the best of all others. And any new changes will distort their 'best' cultural heritage. On the other hand, people resist change because of the lack of information and communication or lack of understanding of the essence of the new approach. This is because agents impose the change upon the practitioners without sufficient clarification and discussion. A very interesting example of misunderstanding between the so-called change agents and practitioners of change is presented below.

*A certain community was instructed to build pit latrines. They did it as ordered and after three months a government inspector found the latrines still in beautiful*

*conditions. How could they be so clean? The answer was simple. The people were not using the new latrines, but keeping them for their guests. (Ibid)*

In the particular case of Ethiopia and/or Tigray, change seems to be fragile because, in addition to the above mentioned factors, most 'change agents' are foreign and the theoretical frameworks of change-the researches-(including this one) are worked out in foreign language. And most of them are high-level researches. We are teaching about Rockefeller rather than dealing with the very small-scale commercial activities-the gutit- of our locality. Even these research outcomes are not communicated to the people. Most of them could not escape the shelves. Research papers are shelf decorators and means of promotion and honor, some times sources of wealth. Hence, it will not be surprising if people resist to a change that was not communicated in their own language and cultural setting. Change and transformation need the willingness of people to accept and participate in action. Willingness needs persistent and strong effort and clear communicative language. The former Tanzanian President J. K. Nyrere clearly pointed out this issue as follows:

Every body wants development, but not everybody understands and accepts the basic requirements for development. The biggest requirement is hard work. The energies of millions of men in villages and thousands of women in the towns.... (Nyrere, p.14)

Change agents, before trying to instruct people on changes, should know the real and inherent tradition and culture of a community because "change takes place on a continuum, not by leaps and bounds." (Savard, p. 14) To respect the identity and cultural tradition of the group is of paramount importance for real and lasting changes. Without the recognition of the personality of the practitioners, institutional communication is bound to be imperfect and frustrating and even chaotic and waste in terms of resources and time.

The concept 'Economic culture' is not a modern idea created in the new millennium. Even though it was not commonly used, economic culture is actually inherent in the tradition of any society. It is not of course clearly described and defined. Otherwise it is the major and deriving element in the development of society. Economic culture generally refers to the cultural activities of society that are related to the economy of a particular society. The concept is self-descriptive. It is made up of the two broad

terms and concepts-Economy and culture. Hence, Economic Culture describes the economic tradition of a society. It includes economic outlooks, experiences, activities, beliefs and philosophies that are inherent in a particular society. Societal philosophy of work, saving and investment are the major and pivotal elements in the assessment and description or explanation of economic culture.

### 3. Historical Survey of the Economic Culture

In spite of the prevalence of good weather condition, soil fertility and relatively sufficient natural resources, including manpower and rainfall, Ethiopians suffered from repeated hunger and disastrous poverty. The reasons for hunger and poverty were and are many and intricate. Despite the dominant poverty, some Ethiopians say that Ethiopians are industrious. Is this really true? If so why are we living under poverty?

According to an ancient Portuguese traveler, named Almeida, the major factors behind the Ethiopian poverty were the following: (in Merid, p.4)

- 1) **Lavish consumption and expenditure.** Although there had been much food, the food was not consumed as only food. The food product of the Ethiopians was also used for the preparation of beverage particularly *Tella* (Ethiopian local drink). According to Almeida, Ethiopian peasants, particularly peasants of the North drink more than they eat.
- 2) **Plague of locust**, which, in some kingdoms like Tigre (Tigray) and others, was very common and devastating the farmland of the peasants.
- 3) **Lawlessness of the country.** War among the various political entities of the Ethiopian regions necessitated the recruitment of a large mobile fighting force. Mostly this fighting force was recruited from the peasants.
- 4) **Lack of market and market oriented mind:** Ethiopians did not carry food or any other good from places of abundance to areas of scarcity. The main reasons for this condition were poor market oriented mind, difficulties of transport, and insufficient surplus.

Richard Pankhurst supported the above three factors. According to him, Ethiopian farmers were suffering from repeated famine and poverty that was caused by drought and crop failure, ravages of locust, deaths of oxen, and the depredation of the mobile



army and the consequential war, destruction and devastating. (Pankhurst. p.216) Peasants thus were easily affected and exposed to severe hunger and death because the economy was basically below subsistent.

### **5) Poor Technology of production**

**The ploughshare.** Basically the economy of Ethiopia had been and still is agricultural. The farming system of the country had been very rudimentary. Many foreign observers explained it “as extremely rude. The iron ploughshare had been a common component of the farming instrument since the beginning of farming. Until the 1830s and 1840s, the ploughshare had been made of wood. Iron ploughshare was an introduction of the post-second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Pankhurst. p.186)

**Irrigation:** The poor technology and techniques of constructing irrigation channels demanded “a lot of work” and time. The amount of labour needed in the construction of the system had been very great when compared with the result it yields. Thus travelers like Wylde “can not help admiring the natives for their ingenuity and hard work that has to be done every year to keep the small water courses in order.” (Ibid p.187)

**6) Philosophy of Work.** It is commonly told that Ethiopians are hard working people. Is it true that Ethiopians are hard working or industrious? I will try to discuss this issue later. Now I will restrict myself to the observations of early foreign travelers. Salt “acclaimed the peasants’ industry, noting that, in Tigre, for example, laudable attempts were made where they yielded nothing but stones weeds, thorny bushes and acacias” (in Pankhurst. p. 185). Another traveler Wylde assessed Ethiopian peasants as “no harder workers.” He also added that “no Abyssinian has any capital, nor is it safe altogether for him to be known as a rich man. Therefore, he cannot lay out money for improving his herds by keeping provender for them.” For Ruppell, Ethiopian farmers particularly of the north “never ploughed more land than was necessary for the use of his own family, nor attempted to grow crops for storage.” (Ibid, p. 223) Another traveler by the name Hamilton as quoted by Pankhurst reported, “though the soil was capable of growing any thing it was allowed to serve no useful purpose; the whole area being a barren waste” (Ibid) Ethiopians are easily satisfied. As long as they have what to eat, to drink and where to shelter for today they do not bother for tomorrow. The attitude of the Ethiopian peasant towards production is the result of “ignorance, indifference and entirely different system of

values that have imprisoned him to his traditional methods of satisfying his immediate and limited needs.” (Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, p. 50)

The poor philosophy of work is the product of poor education and other religious beliefs and practices. The productivity of the country throughout the long history of the country is significantly curtailed by the fact that the Christian people are very religious and abstain from work on the country’s Saint Days and other public festivals. Ethiopian Christians are under the strong ‘priestly device’ and thus the ‘whole population becomes idle for the third of the year’. (Plowden, 1868, p.135) For Plowden, given the natural richness of Ethiopia, Ethiopians would have been ‘laborious’ and rich. Unfortunately they are not. As a result, ‘notwithstanding their hard work and the relatively plentiful rainfall... the various extortions suffered by the (people) meant that they lived but frugally.’ (In Pankhurst, 1990, p.147)

**Religious Issues:** Religion particularly the Christian religion desperately affected or arrested the material and economic progress of the Ethiopian society. It affected the economic lives of many people in many ways.

all the rural population is not engaged in agriculture. The rural population includes some groups of people who are out of direct productive activities. Richard Pankhurst pointed out that around 220 holidays were celebrated among the Gojamese in a year. (Pankhurst, p. 224) Mesfin Wolde-Mariam increased the holidays celebrated per year to 240. (Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, p. 55) The people were left with 125 working days per year. These working days also include market, weeding, baptism, teskar, Geber, digis, and funeral days. The observance of holidays is not purely and always spontaneous and voluntary, /on the contrary/ it was enforced by social values and pressures and traditions. Both the Church and the government through excommunication and awaj officially sanctioned the observance of holidays respectively. The following is an awaj declared by emperor Menelik in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*... now we realize that the wrath of God has not abated due to your indulgence in working on the Holy days especially on the Sabbath against the excommunication and proclamation. Now observe the Sabbath and the other Holidays. Do not work on these days. Any person found working on these days forbidden both by proclamation and excommunication shall be punished.* (Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, p. 55)

We are not of course sure whether the Muslims were abiding by this awaj or not. Paradoxically, the state was declaring such sanctified and discouraging awaj but it used to collect taxes, tributes that were valued arbitrarily. The numerous and excessive religious fastings leave the large number of the working forces (some times more than half of the general working power of the country) with a complete inactiveness. (Pankhurst, p.223) It also “definitely makes people rather tired, lethargic and indifferent to work.” (Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, p.54)

7. Work which is the basic source of material and mental wealth had been for long ‘looked down upon.’ (Mesfin Wolde-Mariam p.57) The most productive and useful sectors and occupations were stigmatized. These include such occupations as pottery, tannery, weaving, smithery, trading that are considered as occupations of socially caste groups of the society. Workers in these occupations were discouraged and isolated or were caste groups of the society.

There is one very impressive example of casting handicraft persons. In ancient times a blacksmith in the Semen ‘was accused of having relations with the devil and forced to flee to Gondar from a place called Enchat Kab. He was also forced to leave Gondar for similar reasons. He was wandering from place to place as fugitive. He reached Tigray, Begemeder, Amhara and Gojam. Finally he settled in a cave and is reported to have said the following desperately:

*Oh! If instead of being a blacksmith I had worked the land or adopted the occupation of a soldier, I would not have had to exile myself. I would still be in my native country, in the midst of a family, which loved me; and here I live alone in a cave, which wild animals will perhaps one day dispute with me. Oh! Why was I born a blacksmith? My skill in that art made my entire life miserable. (Pankhurst. p.223)*

Some enlightened leaders of the fast tried to rectify the situation. They tried to give work and workers the dignity they deserved. Emperor Tewodros was one such leaders. He was seen carrying stones for construction to be a model for his society. Likewise, Emperor Menelik declared an awaj against such practice of discrimination and caste. The opening part of the 1900 EC awaj of Menelik reads as follows: “Those of you who insult people because of their occupations better discontinue that practice.” The awaj continues:

*So far you have called the black smith teib, the one who made the shema- shemane, the literate- tenquay, the one who served the Church- debtera; the one who cultivated the land and harvested both white and black; the one of whom it is said the farmer excels the Crown, you have called gebere; and the merchant who bought gold and merchandise was called by you ye ghteaba atabi lij ... The lazy fathers whose son does not possess any skill whatsoever continues to harass (the society) by insulting the skilled. ... you insult the workers so much there is a danger of destroying the country and turning it empty by absence of people who can make the plough-share. From here on, however, any one who insults those workers has insulted me and not them. The punishment for such an offense shall be one-year imprisonment. If you government officials are not able to keep them imprisoned for one year, chain them and send them to me. (Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, p. 58)*

This awaj did not have force and power to stop the insult and system of caste because until recently and even now we sense this discriminatory sentiment among Ethiopian societies.

Generally speaking, poverty seems to have been ‘the most desirable spiritual asset rather than a social evil...’ under the philosophy that says ‘poverty is not leprosy’ among the Ethiopian society. And most of the current economic practices trace their origin in the past.

#### 4. The Current Situation

**What is Different Today? Is there any progress and improvement? Or, are Ethiopians still running on the same track?**

The Current situation of the economic culture of Tigray is not much different from that of the fact. The economic culture more or less continued as before. My informants could be divided into two on the basis of their outlook on the economic culture of Tigray: A considerable majority of the informants hold the opinion that the people of Tigray and the people of Ethiopia at large have poor economic culture. Others, very few, say that it will be very unreal to say that the people of Tigray have no culture of work. They work, **even though it is not cultured**, hard but their effort is under serious cultural attack. By conclusion, even these few informants are attesting the prevalence of poor working and generally poor economic culture in the region. This is

because the poor economic culture is the product of other cultural beliefs and practices through which the society traveled for long.

The poor working culture is not inborn, it is rather the product of many and cumulative traditional and cultural practices and beliefs. A number of traditional and natural conditions greatly affected the economic culture of the people of Tigray. Particularly among the peasants, there is great effort for productivity. But the land, which is really highly exhausted, only consumes the great labour of the peasant. Saving is unthinkable because there is no surplus.

The condition is contradictory. People are not working hard for a number of reasons but they need and are ready to expend more. This is done sometimes through credit. In our country there is a clear wastage of the natural resources, the human power, money, and the public property.... The paradox is that we are not working hard but we consume and waste much. Hence, as long as these conditions are allowed to continue, poverty will continue to be the rule in our country.

Shortcomings are numerous: - low educational standard, unproductive religious practices activities and traditions, poor working culture, poor health service, poor infrastructure, poor sense of national development and poor preservation (protection and maintenance) and utilization of national resources, poor management and governance, poor saving, poor leadership, extravagant graduation ceremony (a newly developing expensive practice), economically incompatible population growth, shortage of land, low knowledge of creativity and productivity, high sense of dependency, poor saving and high consumption and wastage.

Saving is an important base of investment. It is one of the crucial parts of the continuation of life. Saving enables the human life to survive and develop. It is one of the very important ways of promoting work, employment and development. The concept of saving could be explained in terms of time, resource and money. Saving does not mean suffering or facing problems where there is sufficient money or resources. Saving means the proper utilization of its three aspects: time, money and resources. It is from these perspectives that the saving culture of the Tigreans could be treated. Do the people of Tigray have the culture of saving? This means, do they have the culture of using their time, resources and money properly?

The saving of material and human resources include all that we have been given by God as a natural gift and the various man-made materials we use in our day-to-day activities. The human labour is another very important resource in the human development. The issue of preservation and economic utilization of the limited resources is very poor in Tigray and in Ethiopia as a whole. This includes the state itself and the citizens alike. The state has no sophisticated system of control and the citizens have very poor national sense. It is clear that Ethiopians have a very glaring and impressive national sense on issues of national sovereignty. A blatant sense of national sovereignty remains incomplete without national economic concern.( Info: Tewodros Teshome and Fisehatsion Tekla)

Among Ethiopians or Tigreans the concept of time is distorted and it is considered to be equivalent to 'the soil of the earth'. This shows that there is plenty of spare time. This manifests that most of our time is wasted by unproductive dealings. The knowledge about the economic value of time is very-very poor. Ya-habesha qataro (Literarily means the Habesha appointment) is well known by regular delays. Our misconception of time starts from such cultural practices. Ethiopians are blamed for their disrespect of appointment; this means they are either very early or very late in their appointment. This, on the other hand, clearly shows how much time we invest on economic activities. We also waste much time chatting, and for tea break; and we are sluggish at work.

In general sense, the condition is much more complex and paradoxical. We are poor; we do not use working time properly, but consume more than we deserve.

Moreover, we are demanding eight-hour a day working time. It could be really good to think equally with the more developed countries, but the important issue here is that they have already established very strong economic base and succeeded to eat properly. But in our case, we could not eat properly because our economic base is poorly grounded. The developed countries are still struggling to decrease the working time per day to less than eight hours. It is also to get additional time to work elsewhere for additional income. But it should be born bear in mind that they succeeded to establish such strong economic base working for more than 12, 14 or 16 hours a day. And even today, peoples in the west are working for more than eight hours by employing themselves in different companies. For them reduction of time is logical; for us it is unreasonable. Hence, we have to rethink about this issue. On the

other hand, we have to fight to increase and efficiently use our working time. (Info: Zeray W/Gerima)

In connection with time, the culture of procrastination is another problem. This is the product of both poor time concept and unpreparedness for work. Postponement of duties is widely 'practiced'. Not to complete work on time is another problem in economic development. Tomorrow is another day and it has its own share. (Info: Teacher Temesgen Endalew)

### Major Factors Affecting the Economic Culture

#### **Religion**

Religion affects economy in three ways: making working hands idle because of holidays and consuming the small produce through various religious deges. It also concentrated many working forces as priest, deacon, debtera, ye-qollo tamari and the like.

Scholars saw religion as encouraging work rather than discouraging it. Stephen Palmquist in his "A Christian philosophy of work" (pp. 6-7/) indicated that God creative activities, described in the Bible, are 'work' /Gen.2: 2.3/ and human beings are put in a garden to 'work the garden' /2:5,15/.

In principle, religion condones work. For that matter all religions teach work as the most essential factor to the survival and prosperity of the human race. Work is an important base of religious practice; without work there is no human existence and without survival there is no religious practice. Basically, religion advocates work as the basic necessity of the human race. When we come to our case, the impact of religion on work is different. Most informants agree that although the people of Tigray are potentially ready to work hard, the religious traditions hinder them from utilizing the working days efficiently.

The bishop of the Mekelle synod has very different and progressive idea. He declared that there are only **NINE holydays** in a year including the weekly Saturdays and Sundays. These holydays, according to the bishop are related to Jesus Christ, and they are the following:

1. Ethiopian Christmas- Tahisas 29 of every year
2. Tahisas 29 when Christ became Human
3. Baptism of Christ or the Ethiopian Epiphany-Tir 11
4. The July Buhe/hawaria Nehase 13
5. Crucifixion
6. The day of his resurrection Ginbot 18 or/
7. The time when Christ was seen by his disciples
8. Saturdays
9. Sundays

**Poor Educational Culture**

All agree that the large majority of the people of Tigray and Ethiopia are illiterate. This was the result of the overall socio-economic and political system of the country. And the few educated are not ready to apply their knowledge in favour of their society. We are learning in foreign language and try to conduct researches in foreign language, which is alien to the illiterate masses.

It will be very impressive to mention what Dr Daniel, one of my informants, observed while he paid visit to the Tekeze hydroelectric project that is run by the Chinese. Daniel told me that he heard the Chinese saying that “one Chinese is better than 30 Ethiopians.” This seems to emanate from the Ethiopian poor culture of work that angered the Chinese. This is really astonishing and scar full because what is constructed is for our own benefit. This also remembered me what Prime Minister Meles had once said:

*ረጅሙን አካፋ ብብቱ ውስጥ ከቱ እየቆመ ቢያስገግራቸው ቻይናውያን የአካፋውን እጅታ አሰጠሩት በዚህ ጊዜ ደግሞ በጭኖቹ ስር አስገብቱ መሰረያውን አካፋ መቀመጫ አደረገው*

**Poor Technology and the Culture of procrastination**

Ranging from the house knife, most of our instruments of labour are labor and time consuming. They are not supportive and facilitators of work. We are not making them ready to facilitate our work. The culture of positioning duties for the next time is also another problem in our economic culture. But tomorrow is unknown for us. (Info. Mulu Mebrehatu)



Informant Nega Gebre-Egzabher also shared his experience of time wastage as follows:

*በደህነት ቅነሳ ዙሪያ ለመወያየት በስራ ቀን ስብሰባ ተጠራ። በሁለት ሰዓት በተወሰነው የስብሰባ ቦታ እንድንገኝ ተነገረን። እኛም በሰአቱ ሄድን። ስብሰባዎቹ ራሳቸው ግን ከአንድ ሰዓት በኋላ መጡ። ሁላችንም በአንድ ሰዓት ዘገየን ማለት ነው። መምህራኑ ከማስተማር ስራቸው ሌሎችም ከቢሮ ስራቸውና ባለጉዳዮችን ከማስተናገድ በአንድ ሰዓት ዘገዩ። ባለጉዳዮችም በአንድ ሰዓት ከየስራቸው ተጓጎሉ። ስለዚህ ያባከነው ሰዓት አንድ ሰዓት ብቻ ሳይሆን እጅግ በጣም ብዙ ነው። ታዲያ ይህ ደህነት ቅነሳ ውይይት ደህነት ማባባስ ይሆን?*

**Poor Governance**

A considerable number of people visit courts, administrative offices and other offices seeking justice, and for other routine and regular activities. Because of repeated appointments and absenteeism and reluctance and bureaucratic nature of responsible persons in the different offices, citizens are subject to visit offices and courts suspending their own duties. Their presence somewhere out side their actual duty will also divorce other people from work. It is an unbroken chain. Hence, in addition to much religious holidays, public holidays, continuous meetings, etc, people are made idle by very intricate bureaucratic system of administration. Because of this poor system, most of our economic policies' implementation, even though good, impressive and attractive, is entangled by many other intricate and complex factors. (Info. Sahle-Selassie Teka, Haile-Mariam, Tsegay Abreha, others)

**Poor National Sense and Vision**

When it comes to the issue of economy there is very diminishing sense and vision on the national level. Economic issues are conceived as being the concern of only individuals and the state. The economic role of an individual is not considered as having a positive or negative impact on the national development. Public and state properties are properties without owners. Possessiveness of such public properties is really very poor. Hence, on top of our poor work culture, the limited public properties and resources are under a destructive wastage and insecurity. (Info. Berhe Geber-Kidan)

### **Poor Rewarding Culture**

Our society lacks the culture of reward. Owners of enterprises and managerial officers are not leaders of work and performance in the real sense of the word. In most cases, officers are bosses. They are controls. They do not have the culture of reward. Reward ranges from the encouraging phrase “Thank You” to many other material rewards. This will prepare people for further strength and achievements. (Info. Girmay Tadele and many other informants) We are really poor in encouraging hard workers. We need to thank for any work accomplished on time and rightly. We need to point out and emphasize on the good aspects of a particular accomplishment and even try to leverage their strengths to become success full.

### **Poor infrastructure**

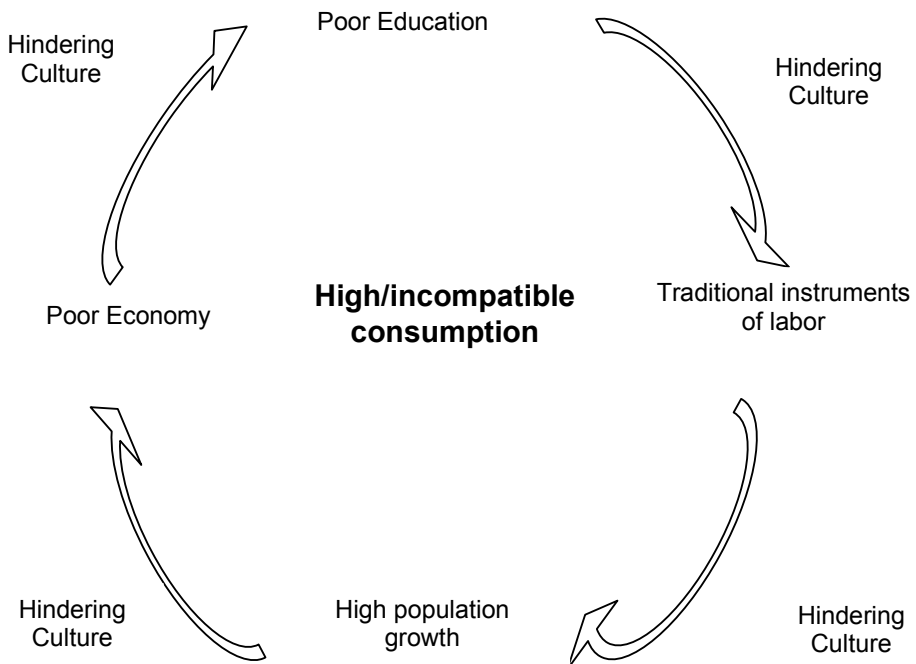
It is well known and obvious that more than 80% of the population of Ethiopia (Tigray) is living in the rural areas where infrastructures are poorly established and organized or totally absent. Health, educational, market, administrative, water supply and the like centers are concentrated in some urban centers that are not well connected by roads. Absence of roads and thus shortage of modern transport wastes most of the working time of the peasants. For that matter, peasants are obliged to travel very long distance to get health, administrative, educational and other services. This kills much of their very poor working time.

### **Incompatible Population Growth**

Poverty is considered as a “Godly granted” fate. At large this is the sentiment of most Ethiopians. The implication of such sentiment is that poverty could not be defeated by work. The poor working culture also emanates from such sentiments. The other dangerous aspect of the Tigrean belief is their conception about family or birth. Truly speaking birth is one of the most mysterious gifts of God to the human race. But it demands careful reconsideration and management. In this respect, peoples of our country are convinced or determined to give birth as long as they are capable of doing it. “Lij ba edilu yadgal.” (Literally, means: ‘a child could grow on his own fate’). Because of this, the belief to give birth to children in Ethiopia is more than normal. The paradox continues as follows: We have poor working culture, high consumption rate, and high birth rate. At average, a woman could give birth to twelve children. This data seems to have been minimized by some conscious families; otherwise an individual woman gives birth to more than this number. This is very critical in the rural areas, where the main base of the economy is located. “Children are born not by

choice but by chance.” (Info. Nega Gebre-Egzabher.) This becomes more difficult when men have more than one wife. The Ethiopian television once disclosed that a farmer had more than **eighty children** from different wives.

**The Vicious circle of our poverty**



5. What could be Done?

Education in Ethiopia is at its low ebb. The larger portion of the population of Ethiopia is illiterate. Paradoxically, the economy of Ethiopia is highly dependent on agriculture; and more than 80 percent of the country's population resides in the rural areas and

most of the agricultural communities are illiterate. This condition seriously affected the country's socio-economic life.

Currently, scholars and the new generation blame the past. True the past had its own role on the present socio-economic and political situations. Economically, the past was in a better condition not because it was better off but because of the abundant natural resource and less population. Today, the so-called modern society failed to reconsider the existing situation. It failed to modernize its means of production, replenish its resources and control its ever-increasing birth rate, which is exploding over the scarce natural resources including land. Generally, this generation lacks the good culture of work and saving when compared with the prevailing socio-economic problems and the past situations.

One basic action to be taken is to develop a strong culture of work.

Education matters in the determination of the size of population. The population of a country should be proportional to the natural resources that country possessed. The natural resource should have the capacity to hold the population of the country. One of the natural resources of a country is population. But population over and above the other natural resources will create economic difficulties. Under normal circumstances, the size of population a country could hold is always determined by the resources and the economic capacity it has. In a country where this is not the case there will be always poverty, hunger, disorder and other socio-economic and political instabilities.

Attitudinal change is a basic issue. All informants agree that we all need change in our economic culture. But the 'how' question is not clearly stipulated and articulated. Education is, in any way, central to the anticipated change. All say that 'we need to learn to minimize many of our problematic economic cultural practices.' These include over population, poor health care and other traditional practices as mentioned above. (Student informants: Tebereh Gezae, Asmeret Beyene, Berihu Fiseha and Gebrehiwot Teklay). Education could also enhance the creative capacity and rational thinking of citizens. Education could not necessarily entail schooling. The mass-media, rather than being preoccupied by over dosed political issues and some over loaded programmes, had better provide time to teaching the populace about the economic culture. It is very difficult to change such deep-rooted backward tradition

within a short period of time. But we have to start now. It is clear that change needs layers of years but the effort should begin now and today. (Info: Abeba Belay).

Others also proposed to train pioneers and strong leaders and cultural campaigners. We need a sort of popular 'Zemecha' against retarding economic culture. (Info: Haile-Mariam Amare, Sahle-Selassie, Desta Kahsay, Mulu Mebrehatom, Mesfin Amare and others.) One of the participants of the 'Shay-Buna Talk Show' programme, on 29 Nehase (August) 1997 EC also proposed to cultivate a new, industrious and economically cultured generation using both home and schools as centers of learning the essence of economic culture. Both teachers and parents could play a crucial role in the creation of a new cultured generation. Parents should teach their children the art, the necessity and importance of work at home. Both males and females should be treated equally at home. They should be assigned to duties on equal grounds without any discrimination. The early commencement of such practice will help all the family and the trainees. (Info: Teachers- Getu Kahsay, Tekle-Mariam G/Wubet, and Aradesh Desalegn) Concerning the role of schools informants are also suggesting the preparation of new and additional curriculum that could enhance better economic culture among school children. At least it will help students to conceive the essence of better economic culture. Such educational forum should be prepared from an early educational level and continue to higher educational institutions. The attainment of the essence and concept of economic culture and its practical application needs continuity. The learning could be integrated systematically into the various subjects or courses delivered at different levels. In the whole process of enhancing better economic culture, the leadership of both parents and teachers is paramount and indispensable. Children need role models to imitate. Parents and teachers, rather than encouraging children to fill the American DV Lottery, and fly to the Arab world, should instead inculcate a sense of nationhood and common national vision in the minds of the young. "All Ethiopians would have left Ethiopia if they had flying wings. There will be no Ethiopians left in Ethiopia. All would have been in Europe or the USA." These situations need to be changed. The development of national vision is important. There is a high demand of physically and mentally new generation that scarifies itself for the betterment and development of its country with a new and strong national vision rather than searching for better life abroad.

New 'Japanizers' and volunteer pioneers are called for all over the country for starting a movement that may be called '**A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AND MOVEMENT FOR BETTER ECONOMIC CULTURE**'.

This is a good time to reconsider our economic culture. We have traveled enough in poverty. Today, the government and the society have started the mind setup. Let us assist these efforts by a new mind ready to foster productive economic culture. It is worth mentioning the very interesting and conclusive remarks of Prof. Mesfin Wolde-Mariam:

*"... the practical thing for a traveller, who is uncertain of his path, is not to proceed with the utmost rapidity in the wrong direction: it is to consider how to find the right one." (Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, p. 45)*

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**Informants**

No	Name	Age	Occupation	Place	Date of interview	Remark
1	G/Tensae Gebru	32	Civil S.	Wukro	13/10/97	
2	Tsegay Hadgu	48	Personnel	Wukro	13/10/97	
3	Kindeya Abreha	37	Civil S.	Wukro	13/10/97	
4	Hagos Abreha	45	Judge	Adigrat	13/10/97	
5	Mesfin Amare	37	Teacher	Adigrat	14/10/97	Group
6	Mulu Mebrehatu	49	Director	Same	Same	..
7	Desta Kahsay	38	A/Director	Same	Same	..
8	Merhawit Assefa	18	Student	Adigrat	14/10/97	Group
9	Samuel Negash	18	Same	Same	Same	..
10	Muez Ahmad	17	Same	Same	Same	..
11	Shefena hagos	18	Same	Same	Same	..
12	Mustefa kemal	16	Same	same	same	..
13	Sahle-selasse Teka	36	Mayor	Adigrat	14/10/97	
14	H/Mariam Amare	40	Civil s.	same	14/10/97	
15	Tsegay Abreha	28	Photographer	same	14/10/97	
16	Negisty W/Aregay	45	Trader	same	14/10/97	
17	Berhe G/Kidan	30	Civil s.	same	14/10/97	
18	Girmay Tadele	35	Civil s.	same	14/10/97	
19	Goitom Mulu	34	Driver	same	14/10/97	
20	Ermias Ergeno	26	Soldier	same	14/10/97	
21	G/Mariam hailu	60	Farmer	Hagreselam	14/10/97	group
22	Birhane kassa	60	Farmer	same	14/10/97	..
23	Kiros kahsay	53	Farmer/priest	same	14/10/97	..
24	Birhane Gidey	28	Farmer	same	14/10/97	..
25	Tasew Nerea	50	Farmer	same	14/10/97	..
26	Haregot Asmelash	36	Police	Bezeta	14/10/97	
27	Nega G/her	35	Director	Adwa	15/10/97	
28	Two-dros Amare	28	Civil.s.	Adwa	15/10/97	
29	Mussie mengesha	27	Director	Axum	15/10/97	Group
30	Tesfay berhane	36	Teacher	same	15/10/97	..
31	Seleshi Berhe	35	Teacher	same	15/10/97	..
32	Gidey Berhe	39	Director	Axum	15/10/97	
33	Getu Kahsay	45	Teacher	Axum	15/10/97	Group
34	Aradesh desalegn	43	Teacher	same	15/10/97	..
35	H/Mariam G/Wubet	31	Teacher	same	15/10/97	..
36	A/kakir kebedaw	34	Police	Axum	16/10/97	Group
37	Tewolde mammop	44	Police	same	16/10/97	..
38	Mebrat	26	f. Police	same	16/10/97	..
39	Hadera G/Selasse	39	Bank manager	Axum	16/10/97	
40	Hagos Mesgena	60	pensioned	Wuqro m	16/10/97	
41	A/Wassie Rezuq	44	Urban chair	same	16/10/97	
42	Abreha G/Michael	35	Farmer	Wuqro M.	16/10/97	
43	Haile Negash	30	Civil s.	Axum	16/10/97	
44	Belay Asgdom	49	Civil S.	Shire	17/10/97	
45	Tewodros Teshome	28	Civil S.	Shire	17/10/97	Group

**Table continued**

No	Name	Age	Occupation	Place	Date of interview	Remark
46	Fisehatsion Teka	45	same	same	17/10/97	„
47	Zerabrook W/Gerima	32	Private w.	same	17/10/97	
48	Temesgen Endalew	30	director	same	17/10/97	
49	Tebereh Gezae	18	student	same	17/10/97	Group
50	Asmeret Beyene	15	same	same	17/10/97	„
51	Berihu Fiseha	19	same	same	17/10/97	„
52	Birhanu W/Michael	42	C.S Cultural	Mekelle	5/11/97	,
53	Merha Kristos	76	Priest-Abun	Mekelle	1/11/97	
54	G/Hiwot Teklay	19	Teacher	Temben	6/12/97	
55	Abeba Belay	35	Teacher	Alamata	5/1/98	

