# DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION IN ETHIOPIA

*Proceedings of the Symposium of the Forum for Social Studies Addis Ababa, 25 March 1999*

*Edited by*
*Zenebework Tadesse*

**Forum for Social Studies**
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The opinions expressed in this book are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of FSS or its Board of Advisors.

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# Preface

## Development and Public Access to Information: A Symposium

### Access to Information

1. In the developing world, *access to information* can mean the difference between rapid and slow economic development. The world today is at the dawn of the information revolution, and many countries, including millions of people in the developing world are reaping the benefits of rapid advances in information technology (IT), which is spreading fast throughout the Third World. The information revolution will become a more powerful engine of social change and development in the twenty-first century. It will provide even the poorest countries of Africa and Asia a unique opportunity to benefit greatly and to leapfrog into the modern age. In view of this, many governments in the Third World (though not in Ethiopia) are investing considerable resources in and creating a conducive environment for the transfer of information technology.

2. In Ethiopia (and this is true of other African countries as well) the *government* is the major *source of information*. The information it generates is not confined to the sphere of the political, i.e. diplomatic, legislative and constitutional, but encompasses information in the social and economic fields essential for policy planning, investment, marketing, professional engagements, development research, the media and even the daily life of the average individual. The *government* in other words has a *monopoly on information*, and it has frequently used its monopoly position unwisely and to the detriment of the development and democratic process. Moreover, the storage, retrieval and accessibility of this information is a cause for grave concern.

3. There are serious shortcomings with the storage and accessibility of sources of information in government departments. To begin with, there is no procedure or policy for the systematization and storage of information. Secondly, there is no depository institution that is responsible for the storage of information generated by the

government. As a consequence, large numbers of research outputs and sources of information have been misplaced, lost or, for one reason or another, are unavailable. *Government experts, investors, donors, researchers and other interested parties often do not know what information is available and in what form.* This means that such people cannot make use of the available information and are not able to benefit by the experiences of the past.

4. There is no policy on *public access* to information. Government officials consider all information and records as top secret and, therefore, inaccessible to the public. On the other hand, there is *privileged access* to information, which is enjoyed by individuals who have a special standing with the government. Thus businessmen, the independent media, researchers, and even government experts are frequently *denied* access to information. This does not promote the causes of economic advancement and democratization.

5. In recent years, the *information technology (IT)* sector has attracted considerable investment. Businesses providing IT services are mushrooming in Addis Ababa, and, to some extent, in some of the big cities in the country. This is a healthy development and should be encouraged. However, *the lack of a clear and supportive information policy* is hampering rapid progress in this area.

## Purpose of the Symposium

6. In this age of the information revolution, it has become increasingly clear that there is a close *link between access to information and rapid social and economic change*. The greater the public's access to reliable information, the greater the chances for improved economic performance. Moreover, public access to information means a more informed and knowledgeable citizenry, which is essential for the development of the democratic process.

7. What is required is, therefore, a sound policy on information and a conducive environment for the transfer of information technology. Without such measures, Ethiopia will fail to benefit from the information revolution and will once again be marginalized economically and technologically.

8. The *purpose of the symposium was to hold a public debate* on the problems of access to information and their consequences for economic and political development in Ethiopia. It is hoped that the debate and the conclusions that will come out of it will sensitize the government on the importance of the issue and the need for sound policies and supportive programs. While in the long run it is the public at large that stands to gain, such measures will be of *immediate benefit to investors, IT service providers, the media, government experts, development practitioners, researchers, professionals and donors*.

# Welcoming Address

*Delivered by Ato Dessalegn Rahmato*

**Your Excellencies,**
**Distinguished Guests,**
**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

On behalf of the FORUM FOR SOCIAL STUDIES, I would like to welcome you all to this symposium. We are particularly fortunate this morning to have with us H.E. Ato Woldemichael Chemu, Minister of Information and Culture, H.E. Ato Neway Gebreab, Chief Economic Advisor in the Prime Minister's Office, and H.E. Ato Asrat Bulbula, Commissioner of the Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission. H.E. Ato Woldemichael, and H.E. Ato Neway have been gracious enough to agree to open this symposium, while H.E. Ato Asrat has similarly consented to close it at the end of our program this afternoon. I would like to note that the Commissioner has been supporting us since our inaugural workshop last September, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for the material support his office has provided us in connection with this symposium.

*Development and Public Access to Information*, the theme of this symposium, is very broad and contains many important issues which I hope this symposium will be able to debate carefully and in depth. I would like, however, to point to two salient issues that I believe are especially significant. The first is public access to information.

The issue of public access to information is of concern to everyone. The businessman, the professional, the government expert, the researcher all need reliable information and unfettered access to it whenever they need it. Farmers and consumers could also greatly

benefit from broader and more timely dissemination of useful information. An informed citizen is a better citizen in all senses of the word. Here, the immense potential of the media, especially the broadcast media, must be underscored. Moreover, the development process that this country has embarked upon will be considerably constrained without an effective information system and a regular flow of information to the public.

In order to ensure access to information, public (as well as private) sector institutions will have to establish an appropriate system for the storage of information and its retrieval when the need arises. At the moment what we lack in this country, and what we urgently need, is such a system. As you shall hear in the course of the presentations this morning and afternoon, many government institutions lack such information systems and information sources produced at high cost are lost, misplaced or unavailable to those who need them. Needless to say, this is a serious wastage of scarce resources.

My second concern is the issue of information technology. The rapidly changing information technology presents Ethiopia both challenges and opportunities. The Internet provides immense possibilities and if used wisely could enable access to vast stores of information with great economic and social benefits. Information technology could create considerable employment opportunities, transform the labor process, and greatly improve efficiency.

In brief, the development potential of information technology is quite considerable. However, there is a danger that the Information Age may bypass Ethiopia and the country may be marginalized technologically.

Many countries in the developing world are investing heavily in the information sector and actively promoting the diffusion of information technology in schools, businesses, government institutions, the service industry, and even private homes. But Ethiopia is lagging far behind in many respects. Ethiopia has one of the lowest computer ownership and one of the smallest number of Internet users in Africa. There are between 2500 and 3,000 Internet users in Ethiopia at present; this is a small figure. In comparison, South Africa had in 1997 more than HALF A MILLION Internet customers and the number was growing by 10 percent a month.

Some 44 countries in Africa have established live Internet connection, and of these, about 60 percent (including Kenya and Tanzania) have more than one Internet Service Provider. In Ethiopia, on the other hand, we have only one Internet Service Provider, and, as many of you are aware, the service it is providing is highly inadequate, to say the least. If Ethiopia does not try to catch up rapidly with the rest of the developing world, we will be missing out on a golden opportunity.

**Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:**

These weighty issues will not be resolved in this one-day symposium, but the discussions and exchange of experiences that will come out of the symposium will help us to underline the importance of the problems involved and the urgency of the measures needed.

I hope each one of you will have the opportunity to express your ideas, and that you will benefit by the debate.

Thank you very much.

I shall now invite H.E. Ato Woldemichael to make the opening address.

# Opening Address

*By H. E. Ato Woldemichael Chemu*
*Minister of Information and Culture*

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

It gives me great pleasure to address this distinguished gathering at the opening of the symposium on *DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION IN ETHIOPIA*, organized by the FORUM FOR SOCIAL STUDIES. I am glad to see that the FORUM has brought together a wide diversity of people working in, or concerned about, the information sector.

It is commonly said that information is knowledge, and information is power: this is now a reality and no longer a simple saying. Information is critical for economic activity, policy decisions, social and human services, cultural development, and the democratic process. Without accurate and reliable information, economic enterprises and service delivery systems will not be able to function properly.

Access to information is essential to the *investor*, the *journalist*, the *educator*, the *planner*, and the *decision-maker*, as well as the individual citizen. Access to information is also important for the exercise of basic rights, in particular the right to free expression.

The *advanced countries* are now going through an information revolution. Today, large volumes of information can be transmitted from one point to another instantaneously. The NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY has not only expanded the volume of information that can be stored and used, but has also made access to information easier and faster. In the developed countries, the *information sector* generates billions of dollars worth of goods, and employs millions of people.

This information revolution is now spreading to the less developed countries. The *opportunities* of countries such as Ethiopia *to benefit* by

the new information technology are quite high, but this requires that these countries make concerted efforts to harness its extensive potential. Ethiopia should thus adopt a sound policy on information, and provide *effective programs* to attract greater investment in information technology.

The *Ministry of Information and Culture* has been concerned about the importance of information policy and the need to create an enabling environment for *the generation, dissemination, and usage of* information. The *Ministry* is also mandated to promote the preservation and development of the country's cultural heritage.

The *Ministry* is currently engaged, together with the Prime Minister's Office and the Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission, in preparing a draft of a National Policy on Information. The work has been going on for some time and will soon be finalized.

Recently, a National Cultural Policy, prepared by the *Ministry*, was approved by the Council of Ministers. This is important in promoting public awareness about our cultural assets, their usage and preservation. A National Cultural Heritage Proclamation, again prepared by the *Ministry*, is now before Parliament and will soon become law. The *Ministry* has also submitted to Parliament a National Archives Proclamation; this too should become law in the near future.

We have also submitted to Parliament a National Broadcast Law, and the debate on it will begin shortly. Finally, the *Ministry* was instrumental in setting up a Training Centre for Journalists, offering a diploma course to young people who have chosen the media as their career. The first batch of students graduated last year.

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

I am quite pleased that we are holding a public discussion about the problems of public access to information. The Government is determined to enable all citizens to have access to all the information they need. However, there is a lot of work to be done before this goal is achieved. In the meantime, PUBLIC dialogue and consultation among all parties concerned, including policy-makers, *is essential and urgently needed.*

I very much hope that this *symposium* is the beginning of such dialogue and that there will be other occasions for debate and deliberation.

*I wish you all the best. I hope you have a very fruitful discussion.*

Thank you very much.

# Keynote Speech

*By Ato Neway Gebreab*
*Chief Economic Advisor, Office of the Prime Minister*

**Mr. Chairman,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

It has now been a few months since I first heard about the formation of "Forum for Social Studies." My immediate response was, of course, salutary, as I hold civil society of utmost value for itself and for the modernization we all want to see in this country. Further reflection on the mission of your organization made me also think of the difficult task you have embarked upon, not only because of the weight of the issues that have to grappled with but also the discipline that will be entailed in the interest of science and professionalism. There is much ground to be covered ahead, and I can only wish you, however belatedly, the best of all possible outcomes.

The topic of the symposium, "Access to Information" is aptly chosen. That it is featured at the very start of the public activities of the Forum signals the importance attached to information, both as an input for research and an output to be disseminated. Allow me to put the topic in the mold of an economist and talk briefly about information and contestable markets.

There are two types of information - private and public - and two actors consisting of a transmitter and recipient engaged within a contestable market. The market could economic or political. Contestable markets in the economic sense are of recent origin in Ethiopia, while in the political sense they are just under formation. In both fields tradition militates against choice and competition, which makes the transition to contestable markets doubly difficult. Until about half a century ago, the economy was locked in subsistence production, and even today, for the majority of the population, the market is of secondary importance for the provisioning of goods and services. As to the political market it was non-existent under the

sovereignty of the monarch and the successor first republic of the military dictatorship during 1974-91. It is only in the past few years, since the establishment of the second republic, that a political market has been instituted constitutionally.

The natural (or subsistence) economy, with its relative absence of competitive markets coupled with a feudal hierarchy, has, it seems to me, left us with that mind set of zero-sum game that so much pervades our economic and, if you will, political relationships. In zero-sum games there can only be gains for one side mirrored in direct measure by losses for the other side. Transactions and exchanges in social, economic and political fields rely on outwitting, or, plainly speaking, lying and cheating, so as to extract all possible gains by making the other party suffer losses. Obviously, at its extreme the game becomes unplayable, and the opportunity for transaction ceases altogether; and the skill of those who must play the game, such as the trader, the farmer, diplomat or lover, lies, in part, in manipulating private information to appear credible in their engagements. The mind set of zero-sum game I have alluded to is not peculiarly Ethiopian, although we seem to feel that we have a natural monopoly over it, if we were to consider the jokes that we often tell about ourselves to show how much we are driven by jealousy. In fact, it is a game of traditional societies where the object of life, individual or social, is to replicate the past rather than change it. The more information is private rather than public the greater the probability of successful replication.

Private information is what one side to a deal knows and keeps secret from the other side so as to maximize gains from exchange. The transaction could be economic or political, but I will talk about the former as it relates to contestable markets and presume that analogous observations would apply to contestable political markets.

My argument is simple: contestable markets tend to force information out of the private arena into public domain. Let me cite the example of grain markets during this century in Ethiopia. In earlier years, prices were quoted in terms of a variety of ill-defined measures expressed in volume. There was no uniformity of measures within our country, within regions, and not even, perhaps, within local markets. Suppose smaller quantities are measured in *quna* and bigger quantities in *dawla*. Were the volume conversions adequately specified, at least at the level of local markets, and if they were, was there enough

competition to bring about its enforcement? I would tend to think not on both counts. Sellers would then have a clear motive for withholding information about the exact measure of their product to the buyer. Contrast this with the situation in grain markets today. Prices are quoted in weight, except for transactions in very small quantities, and there is enough competition of weights throughout the country. I would assume there is enough competition at least in the bigger towns to ensure enforcement. In these markets, sellers who might wish to cheat would be faced with an ever decreasing opportunity, due to threat from other sellers who would play the game differently and increase their volume of sales and profit, as well as from customers who would shift their business away. Inevitably, as a market becomes more contestable, it organizes information more efficiently, and it does so by expanding the domain of public information.

Economic agents with long-term interest of expanding their business and market share need not wait upon competition to desist from using private information for purposes of short-term gains. They can choose to conduct sales as per specifications of quality and quantity claimed in the transaction, i. E. Close the gap between private and public information. Their risk is that they can be out-competed by others who cheat. Whether the risk pays off or not depends on the responses of buyers. If buyers are non-discriminating about the attributes of the products that they buy and are not able to shop around (or search) for the best offer, the risk would take longer time to payoff and could even turnout to be untenable. The shrewd business woman would have to study her market and measure the depth of financial resources before trading-off short-term gains for long-term expansion. At any rate, there is always room, however, for making credibility pay, particularly where the transaction is a recurrent event. Another important way of taking information from the private to the public domain is by making divulgence of certain types of information to the public obligatory and making mis-information a legal offense. The underlying rational is that a transaction is to start with a contract and that implicit contracts can be required to be made explicit that may be considered valid, such as protecting the community from health hazards and buyers of goods and assets from being swindled. In less developed countries, the scope for these kinds of government intervention is, however, far less than in advanced countries, not only because of problems of legal enforcement, but also of the cost of

information both to the government and the private sector.

Lest I give the impression that all information should be public domain, I should point out that there will always be information held privately. Information is costly to compile, analyze and convert into knowledge. Firms undertake research with a legitimate intent of taking advantage of competitors until they catch up with them. In other words, it is beneficial to economic growth that some information is proprietary. But even here, government, particularly in a less developed country, can judiciously intervene to make certain types of information readily available to the business community if the weight of the evidence is that the net social benefit far outweighs the net private benefit.

Before concluding, let me say a few words about the importance of information in economic theory. When we did our economics at the University, and others after us up to the mid-1980s, at least perfect competition was understood to be theoretically feasible. This made it meaningful to construct models of perfect and imperfect competition as a means of understanding the real world. These days, the theoretical possibility of perfect competition as taught to us is rejected by an increasing number of economists. The arguments revolve around the absence of a feasible theory of perfect information.

Thank you.

# Information Technology in Ethiopia: Usage and Access

**Daniel Admassie**

## 1. Introduction

Ethiopia is the seventh largest country in Africa with a population of over 54 million, of which 85% live in rural areas. Agriculture, mainly subsistence in mode, is the main sector of the economy. All social and economic indicators rank Ethiopia as one of the poorest countries on the continent.

Since the fall of the *Dergue*, the country has been moving along a new course. The command economy has given way to a free market economy. The ruling EPRDF party has recognized in its five-year program the importance of infrastructure development in promoting economic growth and facilitating integrated rural development. There is a growing recognition of the importance of information and communication to the overall development of Ethiopia; however, there is a long way to go before a modern information network adequate to the growing needs of the country is established.

The aim of this paper is to address the issue of accessibility to and usage of information technology in Ethiopia. The relevant questions posed are: what are the factors that determine access to and usage of information technology? What is the status of each of these factors in the Ethiopian context? And finally, what should be done to promote progress?

### 1.1. Information Technology and Information Systems

*Information Technology* (IT) refers to computing and telecommunications technologies that provide electronic means for gathering, processing, storing and disseminating information. IT is therefore taken here to represent equipment: both the tangible

hardware and the intangible software. A computer linked to other computers on a local area network represents one example of IT.[1]

Information Systems (IS) refer to systems of human and technical components that accept, store, process, output and transmit information.[2] They may be manual or automated, i.e. IT- based. In this paper the term Information System is restricted to IT-based systems.

*Access to and usage of IT* in any given country is determined by situation, competence and cost. *Situation* refers to:

1. the available telecommunications infrastructure - its span, adequacy and service quality,
2. implemented information systems - technical adequacy, content and connectivity;
3. information culture;
4. the state of IT industry - hardware, training and software companies;
5. the locally available means of linking to the Global Information Infrastructure;
6. National IT policy.

*Competence* refers to awareness (the public, managers, decision-makers) of the technology's capabilities and the skills needed to use them efficiently.

*Cost* refers to the cost of equipment, software and content as well as line and connectivity charges.

### 1.2. IT and Developing Countries

In the developed countries, as they prepare to enter the new millennium, there is optimism that a new economic era stimulated by the revolution in Information Technology (IT) will usher a new age of growth. The information revolution has created strong links between nations, companies and peoples. It is changing life styles and organizational principles and has necessitated business process re-engineering. Cyberspace has made geographical location irrelevant for the ability to receive or deliver services. The future belongs to network computing, e-commerce, e-money and the Information Superhighway.

The impact of IT on developing countries is assumed to be both direct and indirect, via the impact it will have on the industrial countries. It is also expected to change relationships between countries creating new dependence and interdependence. Whether the impact is mainly positive or negative has become a source of debate, ranging from those who believe the new technology "can help in bridging the gap between the poor and rich nations by making the former 'leapfrog' both economic and social development."[3] to those who maintain that the complexities and characteristics of this technology makes it an insurmountable and undesirable task for developing countries to even attempt a development path equal to the north. According to Wad, the view of countries 'leapfrogging' themselves to a take-off position "has some conceptual problem. It assumes that the principal cause of underdevelopment is technical in nature and hence can be addressed if the correct *technical fix* can be identified. The real causes of underdevelopment lie in political, economic and social factors that in turn influence technical conditions in the developing countries. It is entirely unrealistic that technology alone can solve problems that essentially require a transformation in the *status quo* before a solution can be envisaged."[4]

These are extreme views. It is true that IT cannot provide a *deus ex machina* solution to the problems of underdevelopment. However, equating IT with other technologies to conclude the same negative outcome, as, for instance with the green revolution, will be totally misleading. Unlike other technologies the benefits of IT is not limited to just very few sectors; there is no human activity that is unaffected by this technology.

When properly implemented IT will allow limited resources to provide greater benefits with less cost. To mention some of the sectoral benefits:

- IT positively affects the way instructors teach and students learn by providing access to a wide range of educational resources. Distance education, tele-teaching, virtual universities, virtual libraries, on-line distribution of teaching materials and tutorials, access to libraries and research institutions are some powerful tools that benefit the education sector.

- Dissemination of research findings and weather and market information greatly benefit the agricultural sector and help raise the income of the rural population. Land Information Systems (LIS) can be developed to collate information concerning soil, water, rainfall as well as other factors to support the most effective use of agricultural land, anticipate potential problems such as crop failure and provide vital policy-making tools.

- IT permits valuable professional expertise to be made available to more remote areas and assist the exchange of information between health professionals. Health Informatics and telemedicine do increase the efficiency of health professionals in delivering their services to an even wider public.

- Computer-Aided Design (CAD) and Computer-Aided Manufacturing (CAM) are changing the way products are manufactured and thereby helping industry to become more productive. They enable consistency of quality even with large-scale manufacture.

- Electronic-mediated business activities such as e-business, e-commerce and e-money, coupled with the introduction of IT in management information systems, provide access to global market, enhance efficiency and thereby increase the competitiveness of firms.

- In government the use of IT contributes a lot in managing resources, executing functions, measuring performance and in service delivery. The use of IT in the public sector enhances accountability, transparency and god governance.

- Due to the sophistication of business and its reliance on state-of-the-art communication services, those countries with better IT infrastructure will have an advantage in the competition to attract foreign investment. This is reflected in the relationship between Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and communication infrastructure - the more telephone lines per capita, the greater FDI per person.

Finally, IT is an economic sector in its own right. The building up of IT industry can help developing countries participate in the

information economy as providers of IT goods and services. The relatively low salary levels of the developing countries can be used to an advantage in promoting the development of the IT industry, particularly software industry. There is a lot to be learned from the examples of India and some Latin American countries.

The annual turnover of the global IT industry in 1998 was valued at about $1.4 trillion, and the sector "is expanding at twice the rate of the rest of the world economy".[5] Positioning oneself to have a share in this huge and expanding market will be a wise decision for a developing country to make. India is one example of such a success story. In 1993-94, the Indian software industry generated revenues of more than $500 million, and it is growing at an astonishing rate of 25% annually[6]. Beside software, another niche of the industry in which developing countries have been successful is *teleporting*, a system by which data processing services are provided over telecommunication links. The Caribbean countries and the Philippines, by helping US and Canadian banking, insurance and airline industries to meet their data processing needs, earn an estimated $30-$40 billion annually[7].

It is self-evident that, though not a panacea to the problems of underdevelopment, IT provides the means to cost-effectively assist in overcoming them and, for those that have the will and the foresight to build an IT industry, provides an expanding export market.

## 2 Information Technology in Ethiopia

As already pointed out in the Introduction of this paper, Ethiopia, with 85% of its population living in rural areas, and with subsistence agriculture constituting the main sector of the economy, has been ranked, by all economic and social indicators, as one of the poorest countries in Africa.

"Infrastructure development has been hampered by topography, manmade and natural disasters. The seventeen-year civil war between 1974-1991 devastated the economy and the huge cost of the war meant little money was available for maintenance let alone development of the existing infrastructure."[8]

Since the fall of the *Dergue*, the country is moving along a new course. Planned economy has given way to free market. "The ruling EPRDF party has recognized in its five year program, the importance of infrastructure development in promoting economic growth. . . . There is a growing recognition of the importance of information and communication to the overall development of Ethiopia, both between the federal states, and in the wider African and global context."[9]

## 2.1 Situation:

### 2.1.1 Telecommunications

Telecommunications is the key infrastructure that creates an enabling environment for the widespread and development of IT.

The Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation (ETC) is responsible for providing all telecommunications services in Ethiopia. Currently it provides telephone, telex, telefax and Internet services.

Ethiopia, with a teledensity of 0.25 per 100 inhabitants, is among the countries with very poor telecommunications infrastructure, compared to 13% for world average, 1.6% for Kenya and 1.6 % for African average.[10]

In 1995, there were about 150,000 telephone lines in the country. Of these 90% were connected to automatic exchanges while the rest were connected to manual or semi-manual exchanges. Out of those connected to automatic exchanges, 58% were connected to analog switches while the remaining 42% to digital ones. More than 65% of the telephone lines were in the capital city, Addis Ababa, and the surrounding area.[11]

There has always been an imbalance in the availability of telephone services between the urban and rural areas. The waiting time for a telephone line can be up to five years. The few public telephones that exist are virtually non-operational. Operator assistance is like seeking personal favor[12].

Ethiopia has not developed its own national communications network, which has restricted the flow of information between various

organizations in the country and has dwarfed the development of information technology and related services.[13]

Some institutions, however, are setting up providing their own solutions in order to fill this gap:[14]

- Until the introduction of internet, the only e-mail service available was provided by the Pan African Development Information Service (PADIS), which was followed by the Capacity Building for Electronic Communications in Africa (CABECA) project that established a low-cost Store-and-forward FidoNet system in 24 African countries, including Ethiopia. This provided connectivity to 2,500 users in Ethiopia out of whom 20% lived outside Addis Ababa.

- The National Computer and Information Center (NCIC) of The Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission has established a satellite node under the PADIS network, which links 20 research and academic institutions in Ethiopia.

- The medical community has access to health information via the HealthNet satellite since April 1994. A number of health, research and training institutions are connected.

- Ethiopia has also joined the UNCTAD Global Trade Points Network. This provides connectivity and access to obtain trade-related information for the benefit of those engaged in foreign trade.

The parallel developments being planned by local organizations show the need for institutional networks to be coordinated into a national effort in order to avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts and maximize benefits. The need for coordination is more pronounced and looks a matter of urgency when one considers the overlap in objectives and user domains among the NCIC, AAU and the HealthNet networking projects.[15]

The quality of telephone services will determine the ability for computer users to benefit from high speed, reliable data transmission facilities, both locally and long distance. While significant gains can be had from the use of computers in the standalone mode, the major

benefits will not be realized until networking and communications are widely available. For the present, national data banks and wide area data communication networks do not exist. The state of telecommunication in Ethiopia is holding back both IT consumption and IT production.

### 2.1.2. Information Systems

Ethiopia today is at the initial phase of the information technology adoption continuum in which computing is departmental by nature, and the strategic relevance of information as strategic business and national asset is unknown. The idea of information system is reduced to bookkeeping and accounting. Management in general is unaware of, or indifferent to, the value of information and the use of information technology, thereby hindering the progress towards enterprise networking and use of IT.[16]

Advanced business applications such as decision support systems, national databases, and wide area data communication networks are unknown. The concept of data communications is still limited to the use of old modems and outdated dial-up systems.[17]

In a number of organizations computerization projects have resulted in failures or, at best, have produced simple databases. Though the main reason for these failures can be attributed to having decision-makers and managers who are unable to appreciate what computers can and cannot do, there are other contributing factors:

- Organizational or institutional problems: Successful information system implementation is dependent upon the existence of a systems infrastructure on which to build. The technology as such has an in-built organizational concept, and its design caters to needs and skills seldom found in many organizations in Ethiopia. Existing procedures should have been looked into and redundant ones removed. Only then can IT be introduced for better efficiency. However, many computerized systems are a replication of the old manual system.

- Inappropriateness of advice from consultants: the cause of some of the problems is bad and inappropriate advice from consultants in developed countries. Their stays are short – usually a month.

For them, Africa is, at best, safari, elephants and jungles; at worst, it is draught, famine and civil war. With this view they design 'simple and sustainable' systems 'appropriate to local conditions'. This *simplicity trap* ends up implementing simple databases that go under the name of 'information systems', thus curtailing effective use of information technology.

- Solution-oriented solution *vs.* problem-oriented solution: In many instances computerization projects are initiated because computers or funds are made available through donations or grants. "We have these PCs that have newly arrived, why don't some of you prepare terms of reference for a system developer so we can use them." A number of projects have started this way. There was no observed problem that required solution or needed to be addressed; the objective of the project is basically just to 'have the PCs in use', and what the terms of reference says is just an afterthought. In such cases, as long as the PCs or whatever else are 'in use' the project is considered to be a 'success'.

The government has not yet developed, implemented and promoted Information Standards across both public and private sectors to avoid duplication of efforts and to maximize information sharing. In the mean time, vast sums are being spent on the purchase of computer hardware and software for processing data that are untimely and often irrelevant.

In the near future large-scale integration of a wide range of applications both within and outside government will be a necessity. This means that the country needs to initiate standardization of basic data. The strategic nature of IT must be recognized and consistency, connectivity and interoperability must be ensured. At present, data are captured in an *ad hoc* manner. A data item like citizen name and address is captured by a number of government institutions in different ways. Such non-standardization makes it difficult to integrate and co-ordinate usage of data by different institutions, though the same data item may be required for multiple government services like property registration, voter registration, pension and taxpayer identification. Standards can help create predictable architecture ensuring the manageability, connectivity, interoperability and portability of systems.

### 2.1.3. Information culture

Information sharing has never been a tradition in this country. As a source of power and wealth, information has been a jealously guarded secret. This was the case in government, business and even private life.

- Information culture in government: Up until now governmental departments had remained the private domains of incumbent officials. Transparency, accountability and efficiency in government are recent ideas that are yet to be introduced through the planned public service reform. Some of the components of this reform are:

  — *Increased efficiency*
  — *Decentralization*
  — *Increased accountability and*
  — *Improved resource management*

  In pursuing this reform, information will become the basic ingredient in managing resources, executing functions, measuring performance and in service delivery. The work of government will then be information-intensive requiring the following four types of formal information:

  — *Information to support internal management*
  — *Information to support public administration and regulation*
  — *Information to support public services*
  — *Information made publicly available*

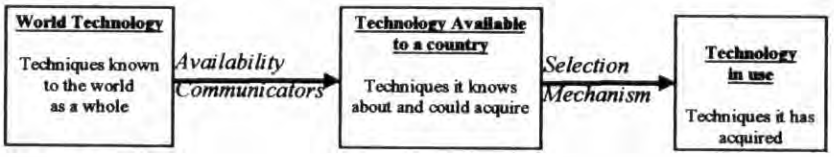
  Moving towards information age requires a new culture of information sharing.

- Information culture in business: The introduction of planned economy during the decades of military rule had almost wiped out private businesses. Whatever managerial skill there was either stagnated or completely disappeared. Information-driven management practice and the value of information systems are unknown. Awareness of managers both of the value of information to business and the power of IT in providing this

information is the main prerequisite for the success of implementing IT. This lack of awareness has prevented management from investing in appropriate systems.

### 2.1.4. IT Industry

The existence of an indigenous IT industry is a prerequisite for the transfer and optimal usage of the technology. *Technology available to a particular country* is all those techniques it knows about and could acquire, while *the technology in use* is that subset of techniques it has acquired. Technology available to a country depends on the weakness or strength of *availability communicators* - trained manpower and indigenous firms. Weak availability communicators mean that a particular country only knows part of the total techniques known to the world as a whole and thus has limited technological choice.




Source: adapted from Par Lind, "Computers, myths and development," *Information technology for Development,* Volume 1, No. 2, 1986.

The technology in use can be appropriate or inappropriate. It can be inappropriate because world technology is inappropriate, or because an inappropriate subset is available to the country, or because an inappropriate selection is made. *Appropriate use of technology* does not only require a selection to be done but also adaptation to technical as well as socio-economic environments.

In Ethiopia, where non-European languages and the Geez characters are used, software practices assume new dimension. The appropriate use of applications, word processors for example, was only made possible through technical adaptation.

Local IT firms play an important role as availability communicators, in the selection and the technological adaptation process and hence accelerate the pace of technology transfer.

Encouraged by the economic policy of 1992, a number of local IT firms are now operating in the country.[18]

*Hardware and peripheral equipment suppliers*

A sizable number of the private firms belong to this category. In terms of financial returns this group is most successful. The services they provide include installation, configuration, maintenance and sometimes PC networking. The last two activities require hardware and electronics skill.

*Training companies*

There has been a rapid increase in the number of Ethiopian training firms. There are two main types: those that focus on training almost exclusively and those which use training as a way of making ends meet when their other activities (often.software development or selling hardware) fails to do so. IT training courses are in high demand, particularly among school leavers and university graduates, because they are seen to increase one's chances of getting a job. Parents are, therefore, willing to pay the high charges levied in the hope that it will give their child an advantage in the crowded labor market.

Rather than using in-house staff, training companies contract outside lecturers and IT specialists to deliver the training, thus providing the latter with a source of additional income. All the courses come with some form of certificate, diploma or, in some cases, accreditation, and most are well attended despite the cost. Course charges range from Birr 200 to Birr 450 for a four-week, two-hours-per-day, three-days-per-week course.

Some training companies provide poor return on the training investments being made.

*Software firms*

In addition to one medium-sized (15 employees) software firm, Ethiopia has a number of one- and two- person software firms with low turnovers. These are often set up by IT professionals who have left one of the government institutions, or by recent IT graduates. Their work ranges along a capability continuum:

- from developing an integrated large system
- through custom-building software to meet the needs of PC users in the small but growing market of small enterprises, government organizations and home users
- and custom-building software packages for the same market (building databases and spreadsheets using, application programming languages like Visual Basic, Visual FoxPro, and/or adding an Amharic interface to the package),
- to simply trading imported software packages.

The first of these activities is highly skilled, the second, followed by the third, relatively skilled and the last requires few, if any software skills.

There are no software multinationals operating locally, and yet Ethiopian software firms are facing challenges from two quarters:

- pirated software: usually accounting packages, because they are cheap and foreign

- international consultants: though most of these consultants are not better qualified than their Ethiopian counterparts, they somehow tend to grab the best job, thus denying the Ethiopians the chance to apply their skills to and gain experience from a demanding task.

This problem needs recognition since it will have an adverse effect in the building of strong software industry.

The skill demonstrated by the few local software developers is, by any standard, quite impressive. Developing software locally, in addition to

increasing independence and self-reliance, is the best way for mastering the technology. Given the right policy framework there seems to be no reason why this industry cannot mature to an export industry.

### 2.1.5 IT Manpower

There is an acute shortage of skilled and experienced IT professionals. The Electrical Engineering Department and the Computer Science Unit of the Mathematics Department, both of the Addis Ababa University, are the only higher institutions producing IT professionals. Faced by shortage of all sorts, the quality of education these institutions offer leaves much to be desired.

IT education at school level is still unknown. And there is no policy on the introduction of computer education in schools. This is because:

- there is lack of IT resources for schools;
- computer studies is not in the curriculum;
- computing is treated as an isolated topic, with use of IT not integrated into other parts of the curriculum.

There are few higher level institutions that are focused on IT manpower development. A list of talented but overburdened institutions include:[19]

- The Electrical Engineering Department has been active in the area of communication and computer engineering though its impact is very limited.
- The Computer Science Unit of Department of Mathematics is the only institution that offers Bachelor Degree courses in computer Science.
- The School of Information Studies in Africa, is established in 1990 to help Southern and Eastern African countries build their human resource capacity in Information Science.
- The Ethiopian Telecommunications Training Institute provides basic training in plant maintenance, telegraph and telex, switching, traffic and management of telecommunication networks.

- The National Computer and Information Center plays an important role in promoting IT and has been successful in:[20]

    - providing training and consultancy services to organizations on the development of computer based documentation and information systems;
    - developing the science and technology network Ethionet;
    - linking over 20 science and technology institutions, mostly in rural areas.

The training institutions, however, suffer from one or more of the following problems:

- inadequate resources: computer labs, equipment, text books, teaching staff;
- inappropriate general content: teaching theory rather than practical skills;
- inappropriate skills content: teaching skills that are outdated or too complex to be ever used in the work place.

The private training companies share the credit for creating IT awareness among the general public. Though these private companies are playing such pivotal role, the absence of a responsible organization for curriculum development in IT has affected the quality and relevance of the courses they offer.

The single most important input to the IT production process is skilled labor. Increased IT consumption level is also dependent on the available skilled workforce. Limitations on IT skills and IT training therefore represent a major constraint to a more IT-intensive future.

### 2.1.6. IT Policy

According to the findings of '*Informatics Policy Study in 10 African countries*', that includes Ethiopia:[21]

- None of the countries had formulated and implemented an integrated policy on informatics.

- Economic reform programs of the last few years have resulted in a new socio-economic environment more conducive to the growth of informatics, with specifically easing of the restrictions and difficulties in importing informatics products.

- While there is more awareness of the importance of informatics for development, there are no examples of integrated approaches which bring together national perspectives with national resources and institutional capabilities.

- All had policies and instruments to promote the development of human resources in information technology, but implementation was difficult due to lack of trained manpower and other policy and sectoral constraints on the import of hardware and software.

- At the policy level (and this is changing in some countries over the last half year), none of the countries saw the policy importance of linking national information systems to external network; nowhere was there awareness of the importance of regional networking. Only one country [Nigeria] had started a database for policy makers (although all had statistical databases).

- There was a total absence of policies to promote the development of software industries (despite low salary levels and unemployed technical graduates everywhere) and virtually no research programs in informatics (except as applied to national languages). Nowhere were there policies to promote the use of IT as a private sector development activity.

The main objective of a national IT policy is to cost effectively acquire and optimally use information technology, as an integral factor in all sectors of national development. Without an IT policy responsiveness to the implication of the new IT and more effective participation in regional and international information systems will be impaired.[22]

### 2.1.7. Available means of linking to the Global Information Infrastructure

Since 1996, ETC has become the sole Internet service provider in the country. Currently it provides service to not more than 2000 subscribers and many more are on its waiting list. Compared to the size of the population the number of subscribers might seem insignificant but it is far beyond the modem capacity of the Internet server. The quality of service offered cannot justify the exorbitant connectivity charges.

## 2.2 Competence

### 2.2.1. Awareness of the of the technology's capabilities

There are serious constraining factors to the level of awareness of the technology's capabilities:

- absence of information culture;
- absence of IT education in schools;
- scarcity of experienced and talented software and management personnel trained in IT and modern business management.

### 2.2.2. Skills

The level of skill demonstrated both by users and IT professionals is adequate enough to handle the tasks that are so far assigned to them. The most common reason for delay in implementation or inefficient operation is the lack of high level managers with an appreciation for the benefits and costs of information systems. The importance of having decision-makers and managers that are skilled enough to appreciate the values of information systems and the conditions for successful utilization has often been overlooked. Computerization strategy, system requirements and choice of options are all decided by managers and require skill and understanding of IT.

## 2.3 Cost:

### 2.3.1. Equipment

The increasing number of hardware suppliers, due to the free market policy pursued by the government, is matched by decreasing prices for computers and their peripherals.

The tax rate that was 50% for computers and 80 percent for accessories was reduced to 24 and 40 percent respectively. But still, the import tariff charges are considered to be, after Zambia, one of the highest in Africa.[23]

### 2.3.2 Software and content

The major cost components of an information system implementation project are costs of software and hardware - software cost representing about 75 percent of the total. In planning system implementation, decision-makers in many organizations have shown lack of awareness of this fact. In the end, the allotted budget is disbursed on hardware and a poor substitute for the required software.

The critical resource of an information system is data not just the equipment. Rarely enough attention is given to the end product of information that ultimately justifies the information system investment. In 'data-rich' countries information system implementation is finalized by data conversion, whereas in 'data-poor' societies system implementation needs data collection and verification. In Ethiopia, whatever required data is either readily unavailable or is stacked somewhere in unstructured formats in paper files. These data and their sources must be identified, gathered, verified and converted into electronic format before a system comes into operation. The cost associated with these activities is enormous. This issue, being often overlooked or ignored both by system designers and decision-makers, results in the absence of pertinent data critical to the optimal functioning of the system.

### 2.3.3. Line and connectivity charges

Volume of tele-traffic, number and duration of calls, is price sensitive. The volume of international calls was increasing at an annual growth rate of 34.8% between 1984 and 1993. However, due to tariff increase in 1994 (more than 100% for international calls), number and duration of calls decreased by 0.5% and 8.5% respectively.[24]

Internet connectivity for an individual costs a flat rate of US$19 per month for a maximum of 8 hrs/month usage, and US$4 for every hour above the maximum allowed per month. Compared to the US rate of US$10 per month this is expensive. This means, regular Internet use on an individual basis is not a short-term option in Ethiopia. Alternative ways have to be found. One promising option is the development of telecentres where communities can make use of Internet facilities by sharing the necessary technical infrastructure.

The pricing policies of telecom providers in Africa has been one of the most inhibiting factors in expanding connectivity. Ethiopia is no exception.[25]

## 3. Solving major problems

IT represents a major opportunity for developing countries that can access and use it effectively and a threat to those that cannot.[26]

But IT does not come freely. The problems facing the expansion of information technology in Ethiopia include:[27]

- absence of a national information technology policy;
- lack of awareness of the current state of the global information society and its consequences on countries like Ethiopia among policy makers as well as the general public;
- scarcity of experienced and talented software and management personnel trained in IT and modern business management;
- a small and parochial private sector;

- a small and weak middle class with very low purchasing power;
- a weak but expensive telecommunication infrastructure.

These are serious problems. Their solution requires the formulation and implementation of an integrated IT policy.

An Integrated IT policy must primarily seek to synchronize IT consumption and IT production for appropriate use of the technology in line with the overall national development strategies. The objectives of the policy should therefore be development of:

- IT awareness
- IT manpower
- telecommunication infrastructure
- Wide spread usage of IT
- IT industry
- Regulatory frame work

IT awareness and availability of IT manpower are essential for efficient use of the technology. In this regard, the possibility of creating institutions for training IT professionals and introduction of IT education in the curriculum of other disciplines in all the universities in the country should be looked into. In addition the universities should be encouraged to mount a number of courses to retrain existing IT professionals and to create IT awareness among top managers. Funds should be made available to employ extra consultants for training in specialized topics, such as client-sever computing, network computing, object-oriented techniques and business process re-engineering. The introduction of IT in secondary and, eventually, in primary schools, with the aim of developing IT culture among students, must also be considered.

The improvement of the telecommunications infrastructure must proceed along information age requirements. That is:

- expanding telephone penetration at affordable price;
- enhancing quality of existing connections in terms of higher efficiency, higher data transmission rate and less error rate, etc.;
- allowing the private sector to provide value added services such as Internet, voice mail, video conferencing, etc.

Wide spread usage of IT can only be realized if only the government takes the leading role. Government being the major consumer and provider of information, it can influence the propagation of IT at national level by having an IT master plan for IT consumption in the public sector. The main sectors of the economy should be identified and the way IT can help these main sectors should be worked out. Public sector computerization should also be aimed at strengthening local IT firms. The objectives of the IT master plan for use in the public sector should be to:

- deliver services efficiently and cost effectively;
- rationalize and share data across the public service;
- ensure value for money for IT related projects in government;
- encourage IT diffusion at national level;
- encourage local IT firms.

The master plan should at least incorporate:

- standardization of basic data to ensure consistency, connectivity and interoperability;
- Development of national IT technical and software standards in order to ensure system compatibility, labor mobility, and scale economies in training and purchase;
- training of government employees in at least change management, business process re-engineering, technology management, etc., for adoption and implementation of IT in government;
- procurement guidelines and contract framework to enable the state use its purchasing power to positively influence the direction of industrial development. Government institutions are already heavily investing in IT. However, there has been no strategic purpose to this procurement and no sense in which externalities are sought from procurement decisions,
- computerized inventory system for recording best solution providers and their track record. Awarding contracts to solution providers based on the merit of their past performances, besides assuring value for money for IT related projects in government, encourages firms to compete on the basis of the quality of services and products they deliver. Healthy competition atmosphere is a prerequisite for the successful growth of an IT industry.

The benefits of having a strong IT industry is already touched upon. Some of the benefits of having a strong IT industry are:

- as availability communicators they can help expand the range of technological choice and improve the appropriateness of the selected technology by proving efficient selection mechanism;
- through technical adaptation they can improve the appropriateness of the technology in use;
- they can raise the technological absorption capacity of the country from the human and organizational capacity side for effective technological transfer;
- improve the degree of independence and self-reliance;
- with proper support and encouragement software firms in particular can mature to become exporters.

The IT policy, therefore, should include measures to promote the development of IT industry in general and software industry in particular. Software development is a sector in which Ethiopia can build its ability to fully participate in the information technology revolution. Since this is a labor-intensive activity, Ethiopia should have a comparative advantage in this area.

The policy should address the problems that are already facing the existing struggling firms. Before doing anything else, it means that there should be a comprehensive survey of the current status, trajectories and needs of the Ethiopian software industry. Having done this, a menu of constraints that need to be addressed is likely to emerge. Some of these can be addressed by government promotional interventions. They include:

- Finance: The Ethiopian government needs to simulate the supply of working and venture capital to software firms. Existing financial institutions are too bureaucratic and find it hard to incorporate software's intangibility.

- Education and training: Although it needs to work alongside other providers, the state is likely to remain the prime source of fundamental skills relevant to software industry development. It needs particularly to try to target the analytical and managerial skills that Ethiopia's software industry lacks. In addition, some

accreditation scheme for private training firms, or the use of international certification schemes for skills should be introduced.

To promote the use of IT in Ethiopia and in order to make a smooth transition to the information age requirements the existing laws need be revised. Changes in key areas of law such as:

- intellectual property;
- data confidentiality and privacy;
- computer misuse;
- electronic banking;
- software protection; and
- rules of evidence

should be looked into. Unnecessary constraints on the use and production of IT should be avoided in future legislation. There is, therefore, a need to amend existing laws to adapt them to IT and include new ones to cater for new problems due to the introduction of IT.

## 4 Conclusion

Through proper implementation strategy IT, the country can reap the benefit of IT within a short time. There are a number of interdependent factors that hamper wide spread of IT in Ethiopia. The solution requires formulation of an integrated IT policy.

What this paper attempts to reinforce is that the State continue to play an essential role in the process of industrial development. However, the State's role needs to be one of promotion, not the old extreme of supplanting the private sector nor the possible new extreme of leaving everything to market forces.

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# Private Enterprise and Public Access to Information

**By Berhane Mewa**

## Business Enterprises and Development

A nation's development is mainly based on its economic progress, which in turn is the subject of business. No development can be envisaged without creating the appropriate economic environment enabling business enterprises to respond to local and international demands, and to benefit from the country's comparative advantage. Business operation nowadays has become a global activity highly influenced by the emerging concept of liberalization and involving intense competition. Whether this is advantageous to developing countries or not remains a point of contention.

Whatever its effects on the developing countries, globalization and liberalization are *the rule of the game*, which has already started with the World Trade Organization playing the policing role, the multinationals and developed nations acting as legislators and caretakers, and the developing nations as subjects.

We have said that business is the key to development and that it is subject to the liberalized global environment. This involves unfair competition for the developing nations. We can thus conclude that it has become very difficult for the developing nations to succeed in developing their business sector. This is a fact, and however unpalatable it may be to these nations, they have to live with it. The question now is: how can developing nations enhance their business performance? The answer is: in addition to creating a conducive operating environment, developing nations have to open their economies to the private sector.

## The role of the Private Sector in Development

Modern development strategies envisage the private sector as the *engine of growth*. This is especially true in a competitive business environment. Its organizational setup, coupled with the drive to profit maximization, discourages inefficiency in its operation. This is a fundamental issue in increasing competitiveness.

However, unlike the public sector, the private sector is very sensitive to the political environment. New policies, rules, regulations and directives could very easily affect the sector resulting in lack of confidence and even disruption of its operation. In severe cases, this will not only hinder new investment but could also result in dis-investment. Thus before taking any measures involving the private sector, it is important to examine what their effect will be on the sector.

The private sector in its formal and informal modes of organization employs most of the working force of the nation. Its contribution to the national economy is thus considerable. The environment in which it is operating is responsible for its sectoral development and for its contribution to national socio-economic growth.

*Information and transparency* are among the very important environmental factors that help the private sector to develop. They have a direct implication on the efficiency of the sector. *Information could mean many things in general, but it means everything to the private sector.*

## Private Enterprise and Information

As we have noted above, private enterprise plays a vital role in a country's development. Information is crucial to the effectiveness of private enterprise. Information is required at different levels of the enterprise process.

**At the point of inception**: The idea for the enterprise may be originated by the entrepreneur, investor, developer, on the

consultant. What it requires is information on the market , economic trends in the industry, political and social conditions, etc.

**Establishment of the enterprise**: The enterprise may be established by investors and developers, financing institutions, suppliers, consultants or underwriters. They all will need information on technology, the market, economic trends, government rules and regulations, sources of funds, the labor market.

**Operation of the Enterprise**: The managers, technical and production personnel, sales and marketing people, suppliers, customers, etc. will need information on technical and technological development, customer response, new products, financial position of customers, the market, etc.

**Expansion of the Enterprise**: The expansion of the enterprise may be undertaken by investors, financiers, suppliers, consultants, etc., who all need information on social, political and economic changes, source of funds, technological development, market size, resources, etc.

The information required at each level differs, but it has to pass through different phases to be valuable, namely:

- access - collection;
- interpretation;
- evaluation.

The information is used at different levels of the enterprise, especially at the entrepreneurial, managerial and operations levels.

The sources of information are as diversified as their types. In general, they may be produced by *local, national* and *international channels*. They can also be classified as *general* and *specific*.

For any private enterprise, at all levels, appropriate information is required for efficient and effective decision making. It is not only the

quality of information that matters, but timing is also a significant element both I terms of freshness and accessibility.

In today's global economy, the role of information has become so vital that it is highly complicated and yet technically advanced. No nation can afford to neglect upgrading its level of information technology. The subject itself has emerged as a highly developing science and technology. Modern businesses are acquiring the necessary electronic tools to enable them to access information easily.

Nowadays, it has become clear that information is an essential element of production and services; it is a matter to be considered next in importance to sources of funding for any successful project.

*For private enterprises in developing countries, accessing information is not as simple as it should be.* The main factors contributing to this difficulty could be outlined as follows:

- *low level of infrastructure development in general, and information infrastructure in particular;*
- *lack of transparency in the political and administrative system;*
- *lack of awareness and know-how at enterprise level.*

## Problems in Accessing Information

### Information Infrastructure

In general basic infrastructure is important for development. Transportation - airline, postal, road transport and train services are among the most essential. Their effectiveness contributes to the flow of information.

In this age of information, the information infrastructure is becoming more complicated and more efficient. Information is bringing the world together, and it is now a matter of seconds to access information if the appropriate infrastructure is acquired.

Information infrastructure can be classified into two main parts:

- information sources;
- information transport.

**Information sources:**

⇒ Public and business libraries are among the local sources. In this country, libraries available to the general public are so few in number and poor in facility that the option of using such libraries is not open to us. A wealth of information useful for businesses was supposed to be stored in the libraries of the chambers of commerce. Unfortunately, the chambers either do not have libraries at all, or if they do, attention is not given to them and they are very crowded and outdated. Other public libraries have almost the same problem in addition to their inaccessibility to the public.

Libraries in the various public institutions, ministries and companies are not well furnished with updated information. And in most cases they, too, are not accessible to the public.

Specialized libraries are not popular so far. The university library and the libraries at the various colleges cannot serve even their regular students.

Regular informative publications are also not popular. Specialized information on market prices and technology in the various trades are not regularly produced. Even if they are published on occasional basis, their circulation is usually restricted. This clearly shows how difficult it is to access published information in Ethiopia.

⇒ The other local source consists of the various public and private institutions, including ministries and government agencies, to which one can make direct visits.

The problem here starts with lack of information on where to get the proper information. Especially, when the information request is from

private enterprises, the problem becomes even more serious. In some cases, even members of the institutions concerned either do not know the information or where one can find it.

It is proper at this point to mention that in general, in Ethiopia, access to information, especially for private enterprises, *is considered a privilege and not a right.* Lack of transparency starts from not making clear to the customers the procedures of services given by the institutions. Clearly indicating the rights and responsibilities of those who are seeking services has not yet become a culture. Therefore, it has been customary to seek information in an informal way almost in all processes.

This, in some cases, could lead, in fact is leading, to *corruption.* In most places, there are no information desks; even if there were, the service provided is limited to giving information on the office number to go to, and only if you are lucky enough to mention the appropriate department. When you go the office in question, nobody may be willing to talk to you. If you are seeking information, you will be referred to somebody else, and this goes on till you are finally told that is difficult to give out the information you are seeking. It will take days if not weeks, depending on the type of information you require till you get it officially.

*Of course, you have always an option to get information if you wish to use the back door, at the cost of 'corruption', or if you are willing enough to pay the required price.*

### Information transport:

⇒ The postal service is improving from year to year. However, the question of delay of delivery and security is still a serious problem to deal with.

It is very common to receive envelopes, especially if small and thick in size, which have been tampered with, often stamped with the remark: "Received in this condition." *Newsweek, Time, The Economist* and other periodicals are not coming any more delivered

directly into the boxes "for security reasons"; they are collected from Window No. 34. This shows us the degree of the problem of security we have in our postal system.

⇒ Probably in the present global competition, with internet service emerging as the most used and accessible information source, with e-mail as the simple-to-use, effective communication medium, the Fax as the most handy document-transfer system, telecommunication service has become the most valuable media system in accessing and disseminating information from international as well as local sources.

One can very easily understand the level of information accessibility by evaluating the level to which the telecommunication system is developed.

Regrettably, this infrastructure is o unfairly poor that we are lagging behind our competitors, and it has terribly affected our competitiveness in the global market.

Any justification could be given to the underdevelopment of this sector, but the unfairness could not be denied. We find ourselves in the middle of global competition on an unfair ground, and we are thus deprived of our rights to access information:

- *should you desire to access the internet during working hours, give it 2-3 hours;*
- *should you desire to add a telephone line, give it 2-3 years, and so on.*

This is not the only problem. The cost of telephone service from Ethiopia to the outside world is incredibly high. To make a simple comparison, we pay 17 birr/minute to call to the US, whereas our customers or suppliers fro the US pay less than 8 birr/minute, and we are expected to be competitive in such an environment.

Speaking of the telecommunication service, you find that your right to privacy is violated by the local internet service providers, whereby you are forced to reveal your pass word not to the system but to the office. This will make users of the service vulnerable to any number

developed infrastructure in our country could be due to different factors, but the major one is our economic weakness, a result itself of the modes of governance that we had and still have. However, identification of our priorities and appropriate utilization of the resources we have could assist us in the achieving our economic objectives. At this point, what is essential is the capacity to understand how the game is played the global competition for development that we find ourselves in. The significant role of Information in development should be underscored, and proper attention should be given to the development of the physical infrastructure which accounts for and supports its effective utilization.

It is, therefore, highly recommended that policy-makers take infrastructure, especially those areas which facilitate information transfer, as one of the national development priorities. In addition to this, involving the private sector in the process of designing a proper policy should be seriously considered.

The formation of a national information networking system on a sectoral basis is also a matter that should be given due attention. The trade point, which is under the Ministry of Trade and Industry, though young, is still not visible to community it ought to serve. Very little is known about it and only by a very small number of privileged businessmen. That, too, should be given due attention such as to make it more visible and transparent.

The telecommunications system should be open to private investment, as this will result in providing cheaper and reliable services. The quality of this sector's services has to be improved so as to be more customer-oriented.

The chambers of commerce should restructure themselves such that they would be able to cater to the information needs of the business community. The leadership has to be more open and responsive to the information dimension of the requirements of private enterprises.

On the part of the government, it should have a clear policy on information dissemination and management activities. It should make

of unforeseen consequences. However, the technology has surpassed the prevailing mentality of the provider so that free and safe e-mail addresses are accessible on the internet.

⇒ The electronics media system constitutes another instrument by means of which private enterprises can disseminate and /or gather information. The lack of competition in the monopolized media system has made private enterprises victims of unfair exploitation. With the new draft proclamation presented to the parliament, we hope this problem would receive due attention.

⇒ A business guide was prepared by the Ethiopian Private Industries Association. The experience observed during the compilation of the booklet can be a good example of the bureaucratic problems involved in accessing information.

The lack of confidence exhibited by technocrats with regard to releasing information which is supposed to be public domain is so frightening that one would be tempted to sympathize with the system. Not only are these people afraid but they also do not have some of the details which they ought to know. The formality of the process to get the information which is supposed to be published in the form of brochures on their part is so tedious that one feels that one is extracting information from an atomic bomb manufacturing plant.

But we should equally mention that there are institutions which we have found to be more cooperative and efficient in providing information; banks in general, and the Ethiopian Investment Authority are among the few worth mentioning.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

Our level of poverty is so high that we are deprived of the basic benefits that we should have as human beings. The irony is that we are subjected to global competition in the absence of these basic requirements. The world has become very small as a result of the revolution in information technology, a technology, moreover, that is itself a subset of proper infrastructure development. The lack of

sure that access to information is not a privilege but a public right to those who demand it.

The government should also make it clear that any public officer who denies citizens their right to get information which is valuable for public consumption shall be prosecuted by law.

All public institutions rendering information services should make their procedures transparent and absolutely accessible in different forms.

There should be no partiality in releasing business-related information.

*Finally, information is the strongest weapon that private enterprises have at their disposal in their competition in the global market. But it is also the measure of the degree of democratic freedom in one's country.*

# Development Planning and Access to Planning Information in Ethiopia

**Getachew Adem**

## Background

The phenomenal spread of national development planning since the end of World War II has left few countries of the world without some kind of plan or planning organization. From about the early 1960s, the diffusion of development planning has become world-wide.

Ethiopia being the first African country to introduce five-year development plans at the beginning of the 1960s, it has had so far a number of planning exercises of differing orientations as well as scope and depth. The three consecutive five-year plans of the Imperial regime (1957- 1973), the development campaigns of the early years of the *Derg* (late 1970s) and the rolling plans within the framework of the Ten-Year Perspective Plan (1984/85-1993/94), and the Five-Year Peace Democracy and Development Programs spearheaded by the Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) strategy can be cited as such exercises.

For any planning to be successful, we need information.[1] When we talk of development needs we must have a proper notion of what to base our thinking on so as to undertake a proper evaluation of societal needs. Although all the inventories of Ethiopia's planning experiences cited above have been fraught with problems of socioeconomic data and information gaps, these problems have not been as severe as in the 1960s and 1970s, during which no mainstreamed surveys and censuses of national scope had been conducted in Ethiopia.

Socioeconomic data problems have been greatly alleviated since the early 1980s as a result of the launching of a package or umbrella statistical program - "National Integrated Household Survey Program (NIHSP)" - by the Central Statistical Authority (CSA). This has been augmented by the conducting of the first ever Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia in May 1984. These two events have extensively

facilitated the preparation of the Ten-Year Perspective Plan (TYPP) and the partly aborted rolling plans supposed to be implemented within the framework of the TYPP. The 1980s are believed to have 'revolutionized' the Ethiopian socioeconomic planning information scene.

Although the NIHSP has been continued since then, and the second population and Housing Census was conducted in October 1994 after a lapse of ten years, data gaps in terms of non-availability, limited scope and coverage, and reporting lags still persisted and needed to be addressed in subsequent years.

Radical changes have been introduced in the political, economic and social spheres of the country since the demise of the *Derg* in 1991. One of the most important measures undertaken by the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, and later further strengthened by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), is the decentralization of the administrative and socioeconomic set up of the country, thereby laying the foundation for regional self-rule (Proclamation No. 46/1993). Regional governments are responsible, *inter alia*, for the preparation, follow-up and implementation of short- to medium-term development plans within the framework of the country's overall development strategy. The private sector which had been marginalized during the *Derg*'s tenure is now being allowed to participate in the development endeavors of this country.

The kind of planning that is being adopted by the FDRE is one that serves as a regulatory mechanism in which the government is expected to act as a facilitator rather than as the sole actor in the development endeavors. The existing database and the overall information infrastructure need to be re-oriented in such a way that they adequately and efficiently serve both government planners at all levels and a host of other users of planning information, including the emerging private sector.

The government seems to have recognized its role as provider and user of information, facilitator of diffusion of information technology, provider of information and communication infrastructure as well as generator of policies for information dissemination at the national level. This is reflected in its conscious budgetary relaxation for statistical programs and in its attempt to formulate a Medium-Term

National Statistical Program (currently in its draft stage) covering the period (1999/2000-2003/04).

One of the major objectives of this paper is to identify socioeconomic data and information gaps that are currently being faced by planners at all levels. It also aims to explore the mechanisms that need to be devised towards mainstreaming the flow of planning information as necessitated by the many-faceted development approaches currently adopted in Ethiopia. The paper will highlight the prevailing 'poverty of information' in Ethiopia, which manifests itself in many ways - for example: planning without facts, poor information support systems for macroeconomic and sectoral policy formulation and monitoring, and limited access to planning information by researchers and higher education institutions. Given the "decentralized" nature of planning in present-day Ethiopia, it is hoped that the resolutions that would come out of this forum will help further sensitize the government on the importance and timeliness of the issue and the need for a national policy for the systematic storage of information and its accessibility by planners, the private sector, and other interested parties.

## Evolution of the Data Generating System

In general, data and information required on any socioeconomic activity can be generated from either of two sources: statistical service-rendering organizations which conduct censuses and surveys and specialized government administrative units (at all levels) plus private business operators.

The former type of producers of data and information are national official statistical organizations whose mandate, among others, is the generation of basic economic and socio-demographic statistics that are important in many applications and which should be available to all kinds of users through a standard dissemination mechanism for the sake of consistency and comparability across users. This kind of statistics is, at least in principle, easy to find in a timely and efficient dissemination system (as a 'public good') and is defined as 'official statistics'.

The second type of producers are those that generate statistics for only a limited group of users, or even for one single user, and these normally include government line ministries, commissions, authorities

and departments, public enterprises, etc., most of which need the data for internal use in the course of rendering their services.

The first conference of African Statisticians held in Addis Ababa in October 1959 gave further impetus to the creation of a systematic statistical service in Ethiopia. In June 1960, the Central Statistical Office (CSO) started functioning as a unit in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia. Later in January 1963, the CSO was established as an independent organization under the supervision of the 'Planning Board' which was under the Prime Minister's Office. Following its establishment, the CSO functioned as an autonomous organization under the National Planning Body (1966-1986) until 1987, when CSO was renamed as the Central Statistical Authority (CSA) and directly put under the Council of Ministers' Office.

One could safely say that the statistical system in Ethiopia has been and still is organized under a relatively more centralized statistical system with overall responsibility entrusted to the CSA to conduct all statistical activities of national scope through surveys and censuses. Still, the system is also relatively decentralized in terms of the activities being undertaken by the specialized departments at all levels of government (federal, regional, zonal, *woreda, kebele* levels) in the areas of statistical works pertaining to their responsibility. Currently, the CSA is an autonomous federal statistical organization mandated by law (the 1972 Statistics Act) to "organize and coordinate all statistical activities in the country." Moreover, with the new federal set up of the country, the CSA is expected to strongly re-establish its links with government departments as well as specialized agencies and the private sector both at federal and regional levels, and exercise the power to approve and provide methodological and organizational guidelines to all statistical service rendering units and government departments.

With the initiation of the National Integrated Household Survey Program (NIHSP) during the early 1980s, which marks a turning point in the development of statistical services in Ethiopia, a statistical infrastructure (regional offices) was established under the CSO, now CSA, so as to be able to conduct integrated socioeconomic and demographic surveys on a sustainable basis. Before the early 1980s, data collection by CSO was conducted on an ad hoc basis as survey

undertakings were considered on an individual basis to meet specified needs. Survey designs varied from one survey to another and lacked harmonization in concept, definition, classification as well as methods of data collection. There was no coordinated data collection program. Currently, there are 22 branch offices under the Head Office (CSA) across all regions of the country. Their responsibility is currently limited to the management of survey and census activities within their jurisdiction under the central supervision of the CSA. They are also expected to provide statistical services to Regional States and Administrations under whose jurisdiction they are operating.

Outside of the CSA, various federal and regional government agencies and organizations are involved in the collection of data pertaining to their own activities. For instance, parallel with data collected through CSA's annual surveys on crop (major crops) and livestock (limited to the highlands) production, the Ministry of Agriculture up until 1993 (now Regional Agricultural Development Bureaus - RADBs) also collects agricultural data using its extension staff to assess the performance of its extension programs. However, the results of the CSA and the MoA/RADBs have not been compatible with the results of the latter, mostly being on the high side, especially in terms of the volume of production and size of area cultivated with the major crops (cereals, pulses and oilseeds). Hence, if the data have to be used for planning both at federal and regional levels, their collection and analysis need standardization and harmonization with the works of the CSA.

Statistical work has also been conducted by other agencies such as the Agricultural Marketing Corporation and its successor the Ethiopian Grain Trading Enterprise (EGTE), which provides data on stocks, purchase and sales. The National Meteorology Service Agency collects data on rainfall, temperature, wind speed, humidity, etc., which are all crucial for planning and policy analyses. The Customs and Excise Authority (CEA) also routinely collects and compiles data on foreign trade (statistics on imports and exports) as part of its regular activities. Its recently introduced data management program, the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA), is an example of an innovative approach by the CEA towards facilitating the dissemination of external trade information among policy makers and the business community alike. A considerable volume of statistical data is also being generated in the health, education and social sectors.

The main task of the CSA in these areas is the provision of technical and methodological support to standardize and harmonize the data collection done outside of the CSA in order to avoid confusion on the part of the users of these data. Although the CSA has a legal mandate for this (1972 Statistics Act), it needs to do a lot to exercise its power in the standardization of methodologies of data collection as well as compilation and analysis by specialized administrative agencies (both at federal and regional levels).

## Profile of Information Users

The overthrow of the *Derg* by the EPRDF forces in May 1991 and the concomitant reorganization of the administrative setup of the country also called for the restructuring of the executive organs (ministries of federal government and regional bureaus). These two events have had a direct bearing on the scope and breadth of socioeconomic activities and on the magnitude and spatial distribution of planning information users which are also producers of certain types of administrative statistics pertaining to their activities.

The 1974 revolution and the period following the fall of the *Derg* had both dramatically changed the administrative landscape of the country. This had also brought about a considerable change in the profile of users of planning information. During the period of the *Derg*, the administrative set up and the centralized nature of economic management have had implications on the profile of information users and producers alike.

According to the prevalent administrative setup and socioeconomic organization of the country, the major users of planning information in Ethiopia could be institutionally classified into the following broad categories:

1. Federal level policy makers, such as the various committees of the House of People's Representatives and the House of Federation, the Prime Minister's Office and its various departments;
2. Federal planning agencies, such as the Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation (MEDaC);
3. Other federal ministries, agencies and commissions, and public enterprises;

4. Planning and Economic Development Bureaus and other sectoral bureaus of Regional States and Administrations;
5. Higher education institutions and research organizations;
6. Private business organizations;
7. External donors and NGOs (both indigenous and foreign).

Following the devolution of both political and economic powers to regional states, the latter are responsible, among other things, for formulation of development programs and projects at regional level. Hence, the planning scene in present-day Ethiopia can be characterized as decentralized planning, in contrast to the centralized planning of the *Derg* days. The users of planning information during the period of the *Derg* had been concentrated in the central planning agency - the Office of the National Committee for Central Planning (ONCCP). Although regional planning offices were also established during the later period of the *Derg*, no meaningful development planning had been exercised at this level, as the administrative units had no real command on resources. Resources were centrally managed since only an operating budget was allocated to run the day-to-day routine activities of each administrative unit in the country.

As decentralized planning is highly information-intensive, efficient and equitable flow of information in all directions is a real challenge that Ethiopia faces today.

## The Need for Standardization and Coordination of Statistical Work

When talking about data needs for planning, not all developing countries face the same type of problems. In some countries, basic data on socioeconomic activity are lacking. There are also circumstances in which a lot of information exists but is not usable due to inconsistencies among sources and lack of spatial, sectoral or institutional disaggregation. Inconsistencies over time for changes in scope or organizational structure are also commonly encountered problems in developing countries like Ethiopia,

The agricultural statistics being generated by MoA and RADBs and those produced by CSA lack harmony. For instance, production of cereals and pulses according to CSA's Annual Agricultural Sample Survey results for 1995/96 Main Season stood at 101%, 91.4%, 91%,

and 70% of that reported by the MOA and RADBs[2] for Oromia, Amhara Tigray and Southern Nations and Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), respectively. According to CSA's Annual Agricultural Sample Survey results, cultivated area under these crops also stood at 81.4%, 75.3%, 54.6%, and 51.6% of that reported by the MOA/RADBs for the respective regions for the same period. Also, according to results of the CSA's surveys (Table below) these regions altogether account for 96% of total cereal and pulse production and 93% of total area cultivated under these crops during the same period.

**Cereal and Pulse Production and Area Cultivated under Peasant Holdings, 1995/96 (Meher Season)**

| Region | Production According to: ('000 quintals) | | | Area Cultivated According to: ('000 hectares) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | CSA | MoA/ RADBs | CSA/MoA (%) | CSA | MoA | CSA/MoA (%) |
| Oromia | 46,371.8 | 45,905.0 | 101.0 | 3424.4 | 4206.7 | 81.4 |
| Amhara | 27,850.0 | 30,487.0 | 91.4 | 2762.4 | 3666.7 | 75.3 |
| Tigray | 52,56.2 | 5,805.0 | 91.0 | 473.7 | 868.1 | 54.6 |
| SNNPR | 9,265.0 | 13,284.0 | 70.0 | 696.9 | 1349.6 | 51.6 |
| Regions' Total | 88,743.0 | 9,5481.0 | 93.0 | 7357.4 | 10,091.1 | 73.0 |
| Regions' Share in the Total | 96% | 98% | | 93% | 98% | |

*Source*: Annual Agricultural Sample Survey (CSA), FAO/WFP (1996).

As can be seen in the above table, there are clear discrepancies in the production and area figures provided by the CSA on the one hand and the MoA/RBDs on the other. This creates confusion among planners in the government agencies, private business organizations (both foreign and local), and external donor organizations.

Apart from MoA and RADBs, organizations such as the Ethiopian Grain Trading Enterprise (EGTE) and the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC) also generate agricultural statistics within their domains. External donor agencies such as the UN Food

and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the World Food Program (WFP) also generate agricultural statistics, although the latter's data are in most cases 'hybrids' of the CSA and MoA/RADBs.

The livestock data generated by the International Livestock Research Institute (ICRI) and those supplied by CSA also reflect similar inconsistencies.

A case in point in this regard is the problem encountered in 1995/96 FY on reconciling the crop production data reported by CSA with those reported by the other agencies cited above. The question is: Which source of data should planners at the national level use? The major uses of these data include compiling national accounts, establishing the food supply balance sheet, determining the amount of food reserves required by DPPC and the Emergency Food Security Reserve Administration (EFSRA), and stabilizing the food grain price in favor of Ethiopian farmers in the face of the type of bumper harvest of 1995/96.

Hence, the demand for data from the wide range of users (Federal Government, Regional States, private businesses and external donors) has not been matched by the flow and supply of information generated by the producers of statistics (CSA and the other agencies). Although CSA is a federal institution entrusted with the supply of official statistics, the data generated by it have not been comprehensive. For instance, only the 'major' crops (cereals, pulses and oil seeds) are covered in its annual surveys. Other sources should then be pursued to satisfy the demand for such data.

Thus, there has been a wide gap between demand for and supply of data. The challenge here is how best to harness the different elements of demand by establishing a coherent and focused national program for the flow of information from producers to users. Putting together a constituency of users could be achieved through the establishment of users/producers committees that bring together official producers, including those generating secondary data, and potential users of these sources. There is, therefore, a need for establishing a broad-based user constituency that could interact with producers of statistics. However, these entities have been less than effective as experienced in some SSA countries, for they lack the means to formulate integrated and prioritized national statistical programs supported by adequately

budgeted resources (manpower, equipment and other material resources).

The divergent and competing needs of the different users need to be pieced together with the goal of establishing balanced and adequately funded statistical programs. Formulation of a multi-year national program for statistical development would require an articulation of priorities based on a systematic assessment of data needs against which the existing capacity for data generation could be evaluated.

For instance, the inconsistency and non-comparability of the statistics generated by the various sources of agricultural statistics has been the direct outcome of the differing methodologies of data collection and analysis as well as the scope and coverage of the data collected and published by each of the institutions. As CSA uses standard statistical methodologies in data collection and analysis, the tendency of most users (especially planners in the government arena) as well as institutions of higher learning and professional researchers is to use CSA sources. In circumstances where CSA data are not comprehensive, there is a natural need for augmenting or complementing it by data from other sources.

National statistical offices should have the responsibility to formulate principles and guidelines for the use of relevant international and national standards in the statistical work of any country. Statistical standards are the most important instruments to achieve national and international comparability of official statistics. The aim is to achieve uniformity in terms of method, classification, and definition to aid national, international and inter-regional comparison of official statistics.

## Pre- and Post-Revolution Planning Experiences

During the brief Italian occupation (1935-40), Ethiopia suffered a great deal from the destruction of life and property. Hence, one of the immediate tasks of the Ethiopian government after independence was to carry out certain reconstruction and rehabilitation programs.

Several development programs, albeit uncoordinated, were initiated and carried out by various departments of the government of Ethiopia.

During 1944-45, the then government initiated a Ten-Year Program[3] of industrial development, which was elaborated by the United States Technical Project Mission in Ethiopia.

During the subsequent years, sectoral development programs of varying duration were prepared for agriculture and forestry, transport and communication, foreign trade, education, and water resource development. These sectoral programs laid the foundation and paved the way for the subsequent initiation of a series of five-year development plans, the first of which was elaborated and adopted in 1957. This made Ethiopia the first African country to commence comprehensive planning for her economic and social development.[4]

The First Five-Year Development Plan (1957-61) was prepared by a team of Yugoslav experts. A special committee chaired by the then Minister of Commerce and Industry was set up to supervise the plan elaboration up to its completion. The major objectives of the First Five-Year Plan were to develop the infrastructure, to raise the level of education, and to accelerate the development of agriculture.

The Second Five-Year Development Plan, which covered the period 1963-1967, was better written and more internally consistent than the First Five-Year Development Plan and contained lofty objectives. The main objectives were to raise the productive capacity of the economy and enhance the transfer of technology.

The Third Five-Year Development Plan (1968-73) accorded high priority to agricultural development and set a target of 6 percent annual average GDP growth rate. It was definitely a more ambitious plan than the preceding two five-year plans, but was well elaborated and consistent at least at the macro level.

The 1974 popular revolution dramatically changed the ideological, political and socioeconomic landscape of the country. The declaration of Socialism as the governing principle of the state and the subsequent radical measures such as land reform, nationalization of the major means of production, the establishment of grass-roots institutions, the expansion and strengthening of direct control of economic activity by the government are the major political and socioeconomic changes witnessed soon after the 1974 revolution. These developments had naturally called for the centralized management of the economy.

During the 1974-78 period, no attempt was made to manage the economy in a coherent and comprehensive manner, in spite of the existence of the then Central Planning Commission. The annual budget was the only instrument available although its role was limited. It was merely used to determine the balance/imbalance between government expenditure and revenue, and to fix the level of deficit financing. There was no articulated mechanism to establish the macroeconomic implications of policy measures and other shocks on the real sector (GDP), the balance of payment (BOP), government deficit, and monetary aggregates.

The First-Year Development Campaign Program of the *Derg* was launched in January 1979 with strong government commitment to the expansion of state farms, utilization of excess capacity of existing farms, rehabilitation of those damaged by the Ethio-Somali war, and the improvement of grain trade. For the first time after the revolution, the First-Year Development Campaign Program was a separate document from the proclaimed annual state budget.

The First-Year Program was restricted in scope, concentrating mainly on agriculture, industry, trade, and social services. These sectors were considered as 'leaders' or 'campaigners' while the construction, transport, education, health, and water supply sectors were incorporated into the program as 'followers' or support rendering sectors. In accordance with the general purpose of the campaign, the overriding objective was to increase the production of mass consumption agricultural and industrial goods (e.g., food grains, clothing, and other basic consumer goods) so as to alleviate the then existing shortages and to consolidate power through the expansion of the scope of state participation in domestic and foreign trade. In sum, the Development Campaign was conceived as a program of rehabilitating the war-torn economy as a means of consolidating power under a banner called the 'green campaign'.

During the period 1978/79-1983/84, six annual Development Campaign Programs were formulated and implemented. A Two-Year Development Plan (1984/85-1985/86) was formulated within the framework of the Ten-Year Perspective Plan (1984/85-1993/94), whose targets remained largely unfulfilled owing to the 1984/85 severe drought. In fact, the Plan was superseded by the Natural

Disaster Action program whose implementation was monitored by the Political Bureau of the Workers Party of Ethiopia.

Later the Three-Year Rolling Development Plan encompassing the period 1986/87-1988/89 was also formulated with the major objectives of:

- raising food crop production;
- improving foreign exchange earnings;
- combating the adverse effects of drought;
- strengthening and expanding socialist production relations.

Apart from the few sectoral ten-year plans formulated immediately after World War II, Ethiopia's experience in preparing long term comprehensive plans during the pre-revolution period was limited. The Three-Five Year Development Plans in pre-Revolution Ethiopia were not based on any kind of long-term umbrella development plan.

In the post-Revolution period, long-term planning was originally conceived just for selected sectors which were considered to have great potential for growth or constituted critical bottlenecks. Eventually, because of complaints by sectoral ministries of being left out, the Ten-Year Perspective Plan was made more comprehensive contrary to its original conception.

The Ten-Year Perspective Plan (TYPP) encompassing the period 1984/85-1993/94 was formulated with the main purpose of providing a longer-term framework for the initiation and implementation of projects and programs which were expected to bring about structural changes in the economy. The Plan was prepared by setting up 19 sectoral task forces whose members were drawn from ministries, government agencies and higher education institutions. The setting up of task forces in this manner had enabled the then ONCCP to gather a wealth of information describing sectoral performances of the Ethiopian economy.

Though ambitious and largely aborted, the TYPP was a well documented blue print in terms of methodology, articulating objectives and strategies, setting targets, and identifying priorities. The Ten-Year Perspective Plan took the development of agriculture "as the foundation of the country's economy" and industry as the second

priority sector. Within agriculture, the expansion of irrigated farming was stated as a high priority area.

## Decentralization and Statistical Information Systems

The political and socioeconomic scene of the country has dramatically changed after the take over of power by the EPRDF forces and the subsequent establishment of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE), succeeded by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) in November 1995.

The new federal setup of the country has resulted in a multi-tier government: federal level, regional level, zonal level, *woreda* level and *kebele* level. The decentralization of economic power has called for the availability of the requisite data for planning at least at *woreda* level.

The power of Regional States in economic management has been expressed in fiscal decentralization (revenue sharing arrangements of the Federal Government and Regional States) and the formulation and implementation of development programs/projects. Since 1993/94, development programs and projects have been formulated and executed at two-levels - federal and regional. Regional States have also already embarked on the preparation of regional income accounts which are of paramount importance for development planning and macroeconomic analysis at the regional level. These developments have called for a huge data requirement at sub-national level. The data requirement of the emerging private sector and civic societies should not also be underrated. Decentralized planning is highly data-intensive.

In the face of these institutional and organizational changes, re-orientation and re-organization of planning information systems have to be effected to facilitate the transfer and multi-directional flow of planning information. In the area of official statistics, CSA has made such adjustments to meet these challenges. What has been most worrisome is the disruption of information flow between federal ministries and their counterpart bureaus at the regional level following the establishment of regional states and the Proclamation that defined the powers and responsibilities of National Regional States and central Government Executive Organs (Proclamation No. 46/1993).

Despite the provisions of the Proclamation for the transfer of information between executive organs in regional and federal institutions, the flow of official planning information has been discontinued since then. The flow of planning information between the planning agency at the center (MEDaC) and sectoral ministries responsible for the implementation of public projects within the jurisdiction of the Federal Government has also been discontinued since the establishment of the Public Enterprise Supervising Authority (PESA). The flow of planning information between Regions and Federal Government institutions, between the federal planning agency (MEDaC) and federal ministries, and between the federal ministries themselves is of paramount importance for the success of decentralized sub-national or multi-level planning.

One commendable step taken by the CSA in this regard has been the reporting of survey data on socioeconomic activities at sub-national levels by increasing the sample size that used to be administered before the change of government. The Annual Agricultural Sample Survey results are currently being reported at zonal levels[5] and by a group of zones. The results of the annual survey of Manufacturing and Electricity Industries, which covers both large and medium-scale manufacturing industries, and the recently conducted (1996) one-time survey of small-scale and handicraft/cottage industries have been reported by regions and urban centers. This has greatly facilitated planning at regional levels, for instance, in the compilation of regional income accounts. The results of the recently conducted Informal Sector (urban) and Distributive and Service Trade Surveys (1996) were also reported by regional urban centers. All these are encouraging steps which should be sustained in the subsequent years[6].

The reporting dimensions of the results of the 1994 Population and Housing Census are also very much convenient for decentralized multi-level planning. The only setback here is the non-availability of comparable data corresponding to the prevailing setup of the country, for the 1984 Population Census results were reported under a different administrative setup. As a result, inter-temporal comparison and trend analysis on major demographic variables at the regional level has been greatly hindered.

On the other hand, most of the recently conducted CSA surveys have taken the regional dimension into consideration. Data on some socioeconomic variables are already being reported at the zonal level as indicated above. In the future, the CSA is expected to report at *woreda* level as far as resources allow. The 1995/96 Household Income and Consumption Expenditure Survey (HICES) did not have a regional dimension. The HICES scheduled for 1999/2000 is expected to rectify this shortcoming and provide HICES data at the regional level. Still, the directory of information incorporated in the 1995/96 HICES is believed to have greatly facilitated planning exercises at the regional level.

Devising in-built mechanisms for an uninterrupted and efficient flow of administrative data between regions and federal executive organs and among federal ministries is also equally important for the success of multi-level, sub-national, area-specific, and people-specific development planning in Ethiopia. The formulation of a Medium-Term National Statistical Program by the FDRE is a step forward in this direction.

The review of historical developments of agricultural statistics would help judge the weaknesses of the database during the 1960s and 1970s and the improvements that have been achieved over time, especially since the 1980s. In the 1960s one was forced to arrive at crop output indirectly based on consumption norms.

During the preparation of the First-Five Year Development Plan of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, the estimation of the Gross Value Added of the crop subsector (grain crops) was arrived at by assuming a per capita consumption of two *injera*s per person per day established on the basis of the prevailing food consumption habits. This information had to be converted back to physical quantities of food grain in order to arrive at the total amount of production after making allowance for home processing and feeding, for seeding, wastage, and losses in storage. This gave a per capita annual food grain consumption of 182 kg. Multiplication of this by the population size of the corresponding year resulted in total food grain production for that year. After the gross production figure had been established in this manner, estimates for the production of individual crops were made by making use of technical coefficients (relative proportion of these crops in the preparation of *injera*). The details were worked out

in the draft document entitled "National Accounts of Ethiopia: 1961-63."

It is now obvious how unreliable the estimates had been. The weakness was further compounded by the non-availability of producers' price statistics. The price statistics were also rough, as they were not based on a national survey. Input quantities and prices were not also readily available. Hence, the then agricultural *value added* which was believed to account for some 60 per cent of GDP was based on four 'unknowns': output quantity, output price, input quantity, and input price.

## Strategies for the Development of Statistical Work in Ethiopia

Being a single aggregate measure of economic activity, GDP and its components are the most important ingredients for undertaking any planning exercise. Data requirements at sectoral levels ultimately boil down to the estimation and build-up of this single most important indicator. Hence, an attempt towards filling data gaps through designing a comprehensive national statistical program should at least take the data requirement of national income accounting as a bench-mark. This should also be complemented by outlining the data requirements of non-governmental users through the interactions of user-producer committees, as has been already suggested.

A number of government organizations have been responsible for the compilation of GDP estimates since the late 1950s. The National Bank of Ethiopia pioneered the compilation of some crude estimates based on export statistics (as data on production was not available), the CSO, under the supervision of the Planning Commission, undertook the statistical work until 1976. In 1976, the task was officially transferred to the Office of the National Committee for Central Planning (ONCCP) and then to its successors – the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development MoPED), now the Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation (MEDaC).

Cognizant of the critical problems of statistical data-generating systems in Ethiopia in the face of the socioeconomic transformation in recent years, the FDRE set up a task force of experts drawn from MEDaC and the CSA to formulate a Medium-Term National

Statistical Program for Ethiopia spanning the period 199/2000-2003/04. The Task Force benefited from the inputs of other line ministries at the federal level via sector departments of MEDaC. The draft Program will be discussed at a workshop scheduled for the coming months and finalized based on the feedback from a wide range of users and producers of administratively generated and survey-based statistics.

This Program would help to re-orient the data generation, dissemination and reporting systems that used to be practiced in the command economic system so that proper channeling of administrative data and supply of primary (survey/census-based) data would be possible to users both in the public and private sectors. The program would be one step forward in bringing together users' and producers' constituencies, thereby making the statistical data-generating system user-oriented.

## Salient Features of the Draft Medium-Term National Statistical Program

The formulation of the Medium-Term Program involves the following four interrelated tasks for each 'sector' of the economy for both administratively-generated and survey-based socioeconomic data needed for planning, policy formulation and economic analysis.

1. Review of data requirements;
2. Review of the existing database;
3. Identification of data gaps;
4. Formulation of checklists of proposed statistical programs to alleviate the data gap problems being identified;
5. Identification of prioritized statistical programs to be implemented in the Medium- Term (1999/2000-2003/04).

The 'sector' approach has been adopted in the process of reviewing data requirements, assessment of the existing database, identification of gaps, and program formulation. The program formulation process has been further facilitated by categorizing activities or variables into two major groups: macroeconomic statistics and sectoral statistics. This has helped track down checklists of data requirements and gaps in each category in an exhaustive manner in order to devise umbrella programs.

Macroeconomic statistics are understood in this program document as data-generated and supplied by macro institutions, such as the Ministry of Finance (government financial statistics), the National Bank of Ethiopia (balance of payments and monetary statistics) the Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation (national accounts statistics), and the CSA (price indices). Sector statistics follows the traditional activity classification, such as Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources, Industry, Trade and Tourism, Mining, Energy, Water, Construction, Transport and Communication, and Population. This setup of sectors may not strictly follow the International Standard Industrial Classification of Economic Activities. It rather adopts the prevailing structural organization of the executive organs of the FDRE.

Formulation of macro and sector programs has been preceded by a thorough review of data requirements (from the planning point of view), assessment of the existing database and identification of data gaps for each "sector" of the economy at the sub-sector level which is deemed appropriate for the purpose.

As to the prioritized Medium-Term Programs, the relevance of the socioeconomic data in assessing and monitoring the impact of the ongoing stabilization and economic reform programs, priority accorded to sectors in line with the ADLI strategy, whether or not any one survey or census has been conducted so far in relation to the activities of the sector concerned, and economies of scale that may be enjoyed in the data collection process were the major prioritization bench-marks adopted while ranking the various programs. The procedure applies to all newly proposed programs with the understanding that ongoing programs will proceed as already scheduled (by CSA) unless the need for merging programs is necessitated in the event that the new program is of a wider scope and coverage and accommodates the ongoing one.

The main actors (data-generating institutions) in the execution of the survey and census- based program is either the CSA alone or the CSA in collaboration with other government agencies or the respective government agency in collaboration with the CSA.

## Reflections on the Medium-Term National Statistical Program

With the decentralization process taking shape in Ethiopia, proper monitoring and management of the economy both at the federal and regional levels entails a huge data requirement. Understanding the breadth and depth of the activities of the emerging private sector also calls for an interrupted and timely flow of basic data on key macro and sectoral variables.

Thus, data collection, generation, dissemination, and reporting systems that used to have been practiced in the command economic system have to be re-oriented so that proper channeling of administrative data and supply of primary data is possible to users both in the public and private sectors. In this regard, assessment of users' demand in terms of levels of aggregation, frequency, timeliness and comprehensiveness both for administrative (secondary) and primary data is critical. The existence of users'/producers' committees is a crucial step towards establishing a statistical system for an efficient, uninterrupted flow of statistical data in the country.

The Central Statistical Office (up to 1987) and the present-day Central Statistical Authority had been conducting surveys and censuses of different scales under the umbrella of the National Integrated Household Survey Program (NIHSP) launched since the onset of the 1980s. These survey and census programs have been financed from the government treasury through the annual budget allocated for the development of statistical infrastructure and database in the country. Most of the statistical programs executed so far have been traditionally initiated by the CSA and approved by the government through its budget allocation for the execution of the survey program. There have not been comprehensive national statistical programs that took users' data requirements into consideration so far.

The preparation of this draft National Prioritized Statistical Program is the first serious attempt in statistical development with a wider scope and coverage in the country's history. The hallmark of this Statistical Program is the incorporation of users' data requirement in the establishment of data checklists and subsequent formulation of umbrella survey programs. Statistical programs are classified into two major categories. These are survey- and census-based primary data

collection programs and administrative data (secondary data) compilation and dissemination strategies. All administrative data-generating institutions that generate data in the course of executing their routine activities are within the domain of this program. This program envisages an in-built mechanism for the dissemination of these statistics to users outside of the institution concerned. The data requirements of Federal Government Ministries, Regional Bureaus, the private sector, NGOs and external donors are all considered in the program formulation and prioritization process. If this blue print is going to be implemented, this would be a turning point in the history of statistical work in Ethiopia.

## The Need for Planning Information Systems in Ethiopia

In the development planning context; an information base that is oriented towards both 'identifying problems' and 'finding solutions' is essential. All these would suggest that an information system has to be purposive. In a multi-objective framework, as in decentralized planning, there could, therefore, be a number of information systems which, however, must relate to each other. According to planning experts, the information system for multi-level planning may be conceived in two broad contexts:

a) As a general purpose system which could be utilized by a heterogeneous group of users concerned with policy-making and planning at the regional and local levels (i.e. a policy- and planning-oriented information system). This can help handle the planning tasks of diagnosis (i.e. problem identification) and macro framework building for the plan (i.e. the setting of goals, strategies, priorities and targets) which constitute the first stages in a planning cycle;

b) A specialized individual action-oriented system focusing on specific requirements (i.e. designed for sectoral planning and other specific planning orientations). For this, one must start with identifying the various program/ project segments associated with each sector of planning and their objectives. In this regard, one should design the information system appropriate to that segment of planning. A geographic information system (GIS) would,

for instance, fall in this special category dealing with spatial data set, the sources for which may include field surveys, aerial photography, remote sensing, satellite imagery, and existing maps and records.

In the Ethiopian context, neither of the non-specialized or specialized individual action-oriented categories is well developed within itself. The former group may constitute those that collect mainstreamed official statistics like that of the CSA, which is mainly destined for policy-making and planning both at the federal and regional levels. This system, along with its regional offices, needs to be further strengthened in terms of both manpower (skilled) and materials (equipment, especially at the level of regional offices) in order to minimize reporting lags. The CSA should also endeavor towards standardization and harmonization of methodologies for statistics collected and compiled by other bodies which are believed to complement the supply of data by the CSA. The latter sub-system (specialized category) is believed to be at a stage of infancy in Ethiopia. Specialized data sets on natural resources, spatial data sets (GIS), data sets of research organizations, etc., should be systematized. More important of all, the elements within the sub-systems and among the sub-systems need to be integrated. The recently launched Agricultural Information System by the MOA seems to be a good start, and other sectoral public organizations such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Road Transport Authority are expected to follow suit.

These are steps towards the establishment of well integrated and decentralized information systems that are mutually complementary. The data infrastructure for a country must be useful to all those who may be interested in using it. The data system need not be necessarily monopolized by government or public sector planners. A good information system is one that also supplies information to those in the private sector, who may be industrialists who want to decide where to locate industries, foreign investors who want to decide whether or not to invest, or people who are looking for a concentration of educated or young uneducated labor, and so on. This seems to be timely, as Ethiopia has currently embarked on privatization policies through different privatization modalities.

Poverty alleviation and its ultimate eradication being the long-term overriding objective of the FDRE, empowerment of women in every aspect of socioeconomic life, especially in education, is expected to facilitate the achievement of this objective. Hence, the designing of a workable specialized information system should give due emphasis to the gender dimension so as to facilitate the compilation of a well dis-aggregated data set on indicators that distinctly show the contribution of women in socioeconomic development.

Access to planning information by the wide range of users could be facilitated through a coordinated and integrated function of the various sets of planning information systems. The existence of a well-established information base and an appropriately designed information technology are pre-requisites for the realization of this lofty objective. Overcoming the numerous existing constraints and establishing such pre-requisites at one stroke would be a tall order for a poor country such as Ethiopia. Experiences of developing countries such as India have shown that a feasible and useful approach in this direction could be a compromise, such as the 'blending' of old and new technologies and a gradual adoption of the new information technology. This should be accompanied by a formulation of a 'national information policy' which incorporates information technology as an explicit and major component of the policy. The policy should spell out the 'what', 'where', and 'how' of the adoption and utilization of this new technology in the country's development context, particularly the emerging 'planning task environment' in Ethiopia. The fact that developing countries are moving towards the information age in a 'policy vacuum' is a risky venture.

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[1] Unless otherwise stated, "information" here refers to socioeconomic planning information.

[2] Computed on the basis of the Report of FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to Ethiopia, December 1996.

[3] Proceedings of the Conference on Population Issues in Ethiopia's National Development, 1989.

[4] Imperial Ethiopian Government. First Five-Year Development Plan, 1957-61, P.1.

[5] The results of the Agricultural Sample Survey for Oromia have been reported by the Zones since the 1997/98 survey. The results of other regions are being reported by a group of zones.

[6] These are inventories of surveys of different frequencies that are being conducted by the Central Statistical Authority within the umbrella of the National Integrated Household Survey Programs (NIHSPs).

# Social Science Research and Access to Information

**Yeraswork Admassie**

## Introduction

This paper discusses the issue of social science research and access to information in Ethiopia. Its chief concern is the accessibility of information sources in the public sector, as opposed to that of information sources in the private sector. The paper does not claim to cover the issue from all angles. It neither attempts to discuss at the theoretical level concepts central to the subject of information access, such as privacy and confidentiality, nor does it pretend to capture the experiences of all social science researchers in relation to information access. The modest objective of the paper is to identify the major problems commonly faced by social science research and researchers, and the factors behind these problems, based on the author's own experience as it relates to the Ministry of Agriculture, the predicaments of colleagues that have been communicated to him over the years, and recent discussions with knowledgeable persons at the collection and supply end of information sources[1].

## Social Science Research and Development

Whichever way 'socioeconomic development' is defined, it refers to a protracted process involving the complex interaction between people and the material world around them, on the one hand, and among people themselves on the other, as mediated by social behavior, structures and institutions. It is this complex interface that social science research claims as its proper domain of investigation and, hence, the important contribution of social science research to social development cannot be overstated. The complexity and fluidity of this interaction, as well as the very special quality of human beings as rational and motivated actors whose behavior is socially-embedded, makes social science research challenging and, at times, imprecise. Yet the description and explanation it strives to offer concerning social phenomena is crucial in guiding development intervention.

It is not surprising, then, that the assertion that no planning and implementation of development intervention can be effectively carried out without a thorough knowledge and understanding of the human environment has long been accepted both on theoretical and empirical grounds. Likewise, the few who, by omission or commission, fail to accord to social science research its rightful place in the development process are made to pay dearly for their oversight or obstinacy.

Almost all of the social science research that is conducted in this country is, in fact, applied research, i.e. research carried out with the main objective of direct application of its findings. It appears to this writer that three factors have conspired together to make social science research in this country heavily skewed in favor of applied research to the detriment of basic or pure research. The three factors are: the centrality to the country of issues of underdevelopment and change; the progressive political orientation of the emerging class of social researchers; and, above all, the relative availability of funds for this type of research through the commissioning of research by donors and the Government, which is the most common arrangement in the funding of research in this country.

## Types of Data and Information Sources in the Social Sciences

Social science research is the investigation of social facts according to the rules of scientific methodology. However, the social facts it investigates come to it not in one single form but in different types, and social science accepts them and the challenge thereof as they come. Information about social reality can take the forms of quantitative or qualitative, extensive or intensive, census or sample survey data, and so on. When considered from the angle of the topic of this paper, it is essential to focus on the distinction between data on the basis of their origin.

Whatever the purpose of a particular social research - exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory - the process of research involves two steps: data collection and data analysis. Data, on the other hand, are divided into two broad types on the basis of their latest origin: primary and secondary. At the risk of belaboring the obvious, let us note in passing that primary data refer to information sets that are generated by a given research project itself. Secondary data, on the other hand, refer to all pre-existing sets of information that were not generated by or for the specific

purpose of the given research project, but are nonetheless brought in for secondary analysis, either singularly or together with the primary data.[2]

In social science research, primary data is normally collected from persons, and they constitute the measure or scores attained by each one of the cases for a certain dimension along which they vary, i.e. a variable; these scores can also be aggregated later on in order to describe the distribution of the dimension (variable) among social groups such as residents of regions, cities, *kebele*s, and the like. At this point, it is necessary to make note of the fact that the classification into primary and secondary data does not necessarily depend on whether the particular data is obtained directly from the informant (say through an interview or questionnaire) or from some material record she/he left (such as personal letters, pictures and videotapes, property records that are not made public by being published or by being deposited with a public custodian, etc.). This distinction is important since it reveals the significant fact that the association between secondary data and written material is only apparent, as some written sources of information can qualify as primary material.

On the contrary, in the opinion of this writer, a more persistent association exists between primary data and private sources, on the one hand, and secondary data and public sources of information on the other. Thus, by private sources of information we shall mean information that is in the possession of private persons, regardless of the form in which it is deposited, and the kind of information the collection of which usually involves the rules and techniques of primary data collection. By public sources of information we shall mean those sources that do not belong to any private person or organization, but by the very nature of their collection, stewardship, and utility are public. These normally include existing data sets generated through censuses and surveys; published and unpublished studies reporting the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data; reports of various kinds, including work plans, progress reports, in-house and external evaluation reports; consultation papers; drafts of legislation, agreements and decisions; and other similar documents.

It is through research that social science primary data is generated, and soon enough converted into secondary data, as it is put to use in another research project. Hence, if we accept the existence of a close association between primary data and private sources, on the one hand, and secondary data and public sources of information on the other, it then

follows that the transformation of private sources of information into public sources can be considered to be a process that is mediated by the activities of the social science researcher.

Public sources of information are as important to social science research as the latter is to the generation of public information from private sources. Without knowledge of and access to public sources of information, even the social researcher who is planning to collect fresh data would be unable to carry out three operations that are all crucial to his investigation. Firstly, the investigator would be unable to effectively undertake what is known as a literature review, and therefore, she/he would be in the dark concerning the need and relevance of his investigation, i.e. she/he would have no way of telling about the state of research concerning her/his particular research problem. Secondly, the researcher would be unable to carry out secondary analysis of existing quantitative and qualitative data. Finally, it would be impossible to take heed of conclusions arrived at through previous research.

As to the social researcher who is not in a position to generate his/her own data either due to the nature of the phenomena under investigation or a limitation in resources, his/her query can only take the form of documentary research. Since there can obviously be no documentary research without documentary, i.e. secondary, material to refer to, lack of access to public sources of information would simply lead to the termination of that particular research project.

Before we move on to consider other things, let us make one observation concerning a type of information source that is not covered by what we have referred to as private and public in the foregoing paragraphs. We must concede that a certain gray area exists between the two domains of sources of information presented above: private and public. This middle ground is held by sources of information about the public and social phenomena that are in the possession of private interests, such as business firms, that may not wish to make it public as part of their legitimate competitive business practice.

The above described type of private-business sources of information is quite marginal to social research in present-day Ethiopia, mainly due to the underdeveloped nature of the economy, which, by the way, is behind the virtual absence of commercial information providers such as polling firms. For this reason, we shall not deal any further with this type of

information sources, but focus our discussion on public sources of information proper.

## Deposition, Preservation, and Retrieval of Information

### *The Custodians of Public Sources of Information*

In Ethiopia, most ministries and other governmental bureaus, authorities, agencies, at both the federal and regional levels, are empowered to collect, store and disseminate information relevant to their tasks and activities through the respective proclamations by which they were created. Obviously, each of these organizations has one or more units through which it discharges the collection, storage and dissemination of information. In addition to these specialized units, practically all departments, units and teams participate to one extent or another in the production and transfer of information. At a minimum, the whole of the bureaucracy is expected to participate in the ritualistic exercise that leads to the preparation of periodic work reports and their compilation upward through the organizational pyramid.

Thus, quality aside, the sheer volume of information that is being continuously produced, moved about and stored by governmental agencies alone must be of gargantuan proportion. However, firstly, most of this information is a result of 'reproduction through repetition' that is achieved as one level receives similar data from several units under it and repeats them as it compiles and passes them upward to the next level, and so on. Secondly, the units within the bureaucracy that are charged with the specific task of deposition and safekeeping of sources of information relevant to research, such as libraries or documentation centers, are few and not well organized.

To the information that is generated by governmental organizations, one can add that which is produced by non-governmental organizations. NGOs, which have gradually gained prominence in the development arena of this country particularly since the famine of the mid-eighties, have engaged themselves in the generation of data through commissioned studies, particularly in-house and external evaluation reports.

The third group of custodians of information is institutions that are active

not just in the collection and storage of information but also in the production and reproduction of knowledge. These range from international research institutions to national and regional-level educational and research institutions. The libraries of universities, colleges, and their research institutions are major actors in the field. As far as social science research and the collection of information in this field is concerned, research institutes within Addis Ababa University, such as the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) and the Institute of Development Research (IDR), are prominent.

Finally, the National Library deserves to be mentioned separately for the following reason. Although hardly enforced, it is the National Library in Addis Ababa, which is empowered by law to be the national custodian (depository) of all printed materials. The law apparently places a mandatory requirement on anyone who publishes or prints his work to deposit two copies at the National Library. This law is so obscure that the only knowledge that even people in academia have about it comes from the occasional reference that is made to it in the media.

The basic problem regarding the genuine and functional custodians of information in this country is that there are simply too few of them. For this reason, the rule of numbers reduces the chance that a certain material can survive by being deposited and preserved if not by one then by any other custodian of public information sources.

### *Common Problems of Depositing Information*

The term deposition here refers to the act or process by which sources of information are entrusted to, or are collected by, a custodian agent for safekeeping or storage. In this country, the deposition of sources of information is, in practice, an unregulated business, and becomes even more so as the distance between the producer of the material and the custodian institution increases. This is to say that as long as the researcher/author is within the same institution with a certain library/documentation center, the deposition process is likely to be compulsory and part and parcel of the process of information generation and dissemination. However, when the two are not organizationally connected, the deposition of research output is likely to assume a casual, personalized and irregular character.

Due to the above-mentioned state of affairs, the social researcher who is interested in making his piece of work available and accessible to the public while at the same time he/she preserves it for posterity needs to make the extra effort of taking the initiative of deposition, to actually carry the copies to the place of deposition, and probably also to see to it that his/her piece of work is deposited at the right place, and even check out whether or not it is catalogued. Although going around with one's own work and repeatedly asking for it to be deposited and catalogued at a certain library is not the kind of task that many find pleasant, lamenting over this is not at all the point we want to make here. What we find most worrying is that as a result of the absence of a regularized mechanism of deposition of new sources of information, many research results are not put in the right place and in the right order and numbers, thereby endangering their safety as well as their future availability and accessibility.

In spite of the existence of the earlier mentioned custodians and some institutional arrangement governing the deposition of printed material, loss of public sources of information due to lack of deposition or improper deposition is a major factor behind the eventual unavailability, inaccessibility, or even outright loss of information sources.

Improper deposition, though a pervasive and critical problem, has a more pronounced impact when it comes to unpublished material in general, and that which is not commercially available in particular. It is common knowledge that most of the reports of social science research in this country do not see the light of day other than in the form of research reports or working papers. Being unpublished and hence commercially unavailable, their circulation is limited. Therefore, their preservation for posterity would not be assured unless extra effort is made to get them to places and institutions that matter most.

It is often said that there are more information sources and records prepared for the Ethiopian government in the last four decades in the Library of Congress in Washington, DC than in Ethiopia. This state of affairs is a result of the aggressive and painstaking effort the Library of Congress has made in indiscriminately collecting material produced by the Ethiopian government - including "gray literature" which is usually ignored here in Ethiopia.

The following case illustrates well the kind of sad situation brought

about by the improper deposition of research output: failure to deposit research reports with the right custodians and with several of them.

At the end of the 1970s a number of socio-economic studies were carried out on important state forests in this country. The coordinator of the group responsible for these studies (Socio-Economic Study and Implementation Group [SESI Group]) was a Swedish expert assigned to FaWCDA under whose auspices the studies were carried out (see the first six items in the Reference list for reports produced by FaWCDA). Then, in 1983, after the departure of this expert, the MoA's Land-Use Department together with FAO embarked on a major land reclamation study known as the Ethiopian Highland Reclamation Study (EHRS). The author of this paper and his colleagues, who were conducting the sociological survey of the EHRS on behalf of IDR, which was sub-contracted for the purpose by the MOA and FAO (Yeraswork *et al* 1983), kept hearing about a number of interesting socioeconomic studies carried out by a certain Swedish expert, but were not able to find even a list of the reports of these studies let alone copies of the reports themselves. Getting desperate for reference materials, the IDR team kept chasing the mirage of these reports, which everybody seems to have heard of but nobody could say what their titles were or where they were to be found. Even interventions by Ato Berhanu Debele, who was at the time Head of the Land-Use Department and *ex-officio* responsible for the EHRS on the MoA's side, was unable to help. FaWCDA simply could not help but put the blame for the apparent disappearance of these reports once on the departure of the Swedish socioeconomist, and then on a possible mix-up in filing in the course of moving their office to their new premises. As a result, this group of socioeconomic studies, definitely carried out at a great cost and effort only two to three years earlier, were not at all used for the benefit of the sociological study informing the EHRS.

The sequel to this story is even more illustrative of how absurdly personal and casual access to important sources of information can get in the absence of institutionalized deposition of research outputs, particularly where expatriate staff (or for that matter any group of staff with a high turnover rate) are involved. In 1993, the same writer of this paper had the good fortune of being involved in the preparation of the Ethiopian Forestry Action Plan (EFAP) and worked in a two-man team with none other than Bo Ohlsson, the Swedish socioeconomist who headed the FaWCDA studies a decade earlier. Of course, the EFAP

study (Yeraswork and Ohlsson 1993) was able to benefit from the FaWCDA socioeconomic studies as Ohlsson had brought on diskettes all of the reports with him. We should add, in all fairness to Ohlsson, that after hearing the story of this writer's earlier chase after the same material, he was only too glad to leave a print-out of the reports in question with the EFAP office. What has become of these reports at the end of the EFAP exercise is of course a different matter and we can only guess.

The problem with deposition is particularly serious in the case of those numerous "working papers" reporting the findings of studies that are carried out to prepare the ground work for larger planning projects. In such cases, after the important findings and conclusions have been summarized and put together in a few volumes labeled as "final", "synthesized" or "consolidated" reports, interest in the original detailed working papers is lost. From the point of view of the officials concerned, they have outlived their usefulness. It is also very common for the study or planning unit that had been set up to oversee the particular process in question to be disbanded in haste and without making provision for the orderly transfer of all the detailed materials to the appropriate custodians. Thus such materials are usually not deposited at all and hardly as a single collection, which makes locating them difficult for future users. That is why, for instance, it is not currently possible to find the majority, let alone the complete sets, of the working papers, task-force reports and documents submitted by consultants for the EHRS or EFAP at any library or documentation center - the MoA library included, as this writer has recently discovered.

Another problem in the deposition of useful sources of information arises when, after a certain study report has been printed in a few copies, it is distributed to a select few persons, usually officials, who appropriate it as a sort of "trophy", whereas important institutions that are potential custodians are neglected. It is common for officials who come across useful materials in this way to treat them as their personal property or to simply let them lay around without ever serving any purpose other than decorating their offices. This could probably be due to a tradition that attaches importance to personalities that are in positions of power, on the one hand, and the absence of a culture that upholds the institutionalized build up of knowledge as its lofty practice on the other.

### *Common Problems of Preserving Information*

Problems of deposition/collection of information sources, serious as they are, constitute only an aspect of the incapacity that this country displays in terms of optimally utilizing its sources of information. The second aspect refers to the failure to preserve public sources of information that are already preserved.

It was earlier noted in this paper that in this country, libraries are not the only custodians of research-related public sources of information. All sorts of offices in the state and regional administrative apparatus are empowered to and do keep such sources in their various units, including their libraries and documentation centers. The state of the already deposited/collected sources is therefore to a large extent dependent upon the stability and continuity of the administrative apparatus. Unfortunately, for well over a quarter of a century now, reorganization has remained the marching order of most of the ministerial organizations, state authorities, agencies and even parastatals in this country. This restructuring of organizations has brought about destabilization of all sorts. It has led to the periodic reshuffling of personnel and materials, and has had a more pronounced impact on sensitive assets such as the dedication and motivation of personnel, and the preservation of irreplaceable documents. To illustrate this point we shall describe the history of the reorganization of the Ministry of Agriculture and the negative impact this has had on the well-being of its invaluable collection of sources of information. In order to make the narration easily comprehensible, we shall set the stage with a brief description of this ministry's reorganizations over the last two decades or so.

The Ministry of Agriculture has been reorganized on several occasions in the course of its long existence. During the last two decades alone, it has experienced some six major waves of restructuring. In 1977 the State Forestry Development Agency was removed from the Ministry and reorganized as a semi-autonomous agency called the Forest and Wildlife Conservation and Development Authority (FaWCDA). In 1979, the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration and the old Ministry of Agriculture were merged to form a super-ministry still called the Ministry of Agriculture. Then, in 1984, this ministry again underwent a major restructuring with the creation of new departments that were placed under two main-departments. FaWCDA was dissolved and its

functions were merged with those of the Soil and Water Conservation Department (SWCD) to form two new departments, the Community Forestry and Soil Conservation and Development Department (CFSCDD) and the State Forestry Conservation and Development Department (SFCDD), which were themselves placed within the Natural Resources Conservation and Development Main-Department that was headed by a Vice Minister. In 1992, following the fall of the *Derg*, the MoA was designated as the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection and Development (MoAEPD). In 1993, that ministry was broken up into two, leading to the formation of the present Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and the now defunct Ministry of Natural Resources Development and Environmental Protection (MoNRDEP).

As far as the Library and Documentation Services Department of the MoA was concerned, the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 90s were its golden years. After years of slow but steady development, the Ministry's library had finally come of age together with the Ministry's long-awaited relocation at its newly built spacious Bole-road premises. In addition to the newly acquired space and equipment, it had begun to be served by a trained and well-motivated group of young librarians. Hence, this library was acquiring state-of-the-art storage and retrieval facilities, including automation, in order to make its collection easily accessible to users. Also, lists of new arrivals were periodically published and sent out to potential users.

Unfortunately, this situation proved to be only a brief episode. In 1993, the then Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection and Development (MoAEPD) was split into two: The Ministry of Agriculture, on the one hand, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Development on the other hand.

Although the MoA was by then already a veteran at restructuring itself, this was the first time it was undergoing a veritable dismemberment, being literally split into two almost down in the middle. What this meant in practical terms was that, whereas most of the functional departments could be assigned to either one of the two emerging ministries on the basis of their functional appropriateness, each and every one in its support units, on the other hand, had to be divided into two halves (actually, in a ratio of 60 to 40 in favor of the MoNRDEP) and allocated accordingly.

As one of the support units of the old ministry, the Library suffered the same fate of dismemberment as the rest. Just as in the case of the other units, its personnel as well as its materials were divided up between the two new ministries. Yet, the very special nature of the material, equipment and personnel of a library made the execution of the partition more heavy-handed and brutal, and its outcome clearly deleterious.

Its books and documents, too, did not escape this crude operation. They were divided up into two in a haphazard manner and arbitrarily assigned to either one of the two new ministries, sometimes without due consideration to their subject matter. Hence, in some cases it has happened that different volumes of the same work were dispatched to different ministries.

Some of the library staff suggested an alternative course of action. They preferred to keep the whole collection intact with either one of the new ministries - whichever one it may be - and let the other one start afresh. These librarians were ready to see the whole collection go to the ministry to which they themselves were not assigned, their main concern being the safety and integrity of the collection. Yet, even this obviously sensible solution was rejected. The partisan atmosphere created by the division into two ministries and the combative spirit thereof did not allow considerations of a higher order such as this to be entertained.

The books, documents, and other library-related equipment that were thus arbitrarily allocated to the newly created MoA, as its inheritance had to be evacuated hurriedly and in an equally haphazard manner as the Bole-road premises were at the time assigned to the other ministry, the MoEPD. Everything was transported to the cramped and run-down old-MoA compound at "Casa-INCIS" and dumped into a narrow hall, as this was the maximum space that the new ministry could afford for the purpose. Thus, valuable books and rare documents were torn and expensive equipment including computers were broken in the course of this disorderly partition.

The value of some of the documents in the collection that was abused in the above manner is illustrated by the following incident. After the repeated attempts of a certain private person to get hold of the only copy reporting the findings of a study conducted on a certain river-basin several years back for one governmental agency had been foiled by vigilant library attendants, it was learnt that that particular copy of the

report was one of the last two surviving copies. It was also realized that the private interest that was so persistently after the MoA library's only copy was none other than the person who was in possession of the second surviving copy and who was demanding to be paid a hefty sum of money before making it available to another governmental agency for whom access to this report had suddenly become critical, as it was then engaged in the development of the same river-basin. The attempt to get hold of the copy at the MoA library was nothing but a stratagem by a private interest to further secure its already tight grip on material that was by right government-cum-public property.

The sad saga of this collection does not end here. In a strange irony of fate, one of the two newly created ministries and the very one that was awarded with 60% of the old ministry's estate, namely, the Ministry of Natural Resources Development and Environmental Protection (MoNRDEP), was dissolved in May 1995, after what was probably a record short existence for any ministry in the ninety-year long history of ministerial administration in this country.

The MoNRDEP was dissolved by being split three-ways. A section went on to form a newly constituted rump environmental agency called the Ethiopian Environmental Protection Authority (EPA). A good deal (some 80% according to one estimate) of its personnel and material went back to the MoA, and those of its departments and units that had to do with water joined the Ministry of Water Resources Development (MoWRD).

In line with the above, the library and documentation of the MoNRDEP was divided up also three-ways, each of the portions being dispatched to the EPA, the MoA, and the MoWRD, respectively. However, as this division took place during a period of relative calm, when reason prevailed over emotion, it was effected with due consideration to factors such as subject-matter appropriateness, likelihood of utilization, and fairness.

The MoA's library was then faced with a problem of a completely different nature. All of a sudden it had its hands full of useful books and documents received from the disbanded MoEPD, but with no storage space to accommodate even a fraction of the new arrivals. This was due to the perennial problem of the MoA regarding building space, and initially the whole lot of material had to be deposited into a store.

Although, at present, at least the very useful ones among it are already sorted out, rearranged and made once again accessible to users, the problem of lack of space still remains with the library.

Moreover, when functional departments of the MoA were abolished or transformed into new entities following the incessant reorganizations of the ministry, this had several unintended outcomes. One of this was that their staff lost their sense of organizational attachment and together with it their interest and motivation. This in turn led people to become indifferent about the whereabouts and the future of important reports and documents, and as a result they were lost.

Regionalization and the devolution of responsibility for certain agricultural development programs have had a similar effect on research related information sources. When projects were taken over by regions, it happened that the regional bureaus were more interested in their equipment and not in their documents, and records were ignored or even discarded.

The above assertion is well illustrated by the case of the once acclaimed III[rd] Livestock Project. This project was dissolved with the understanding that the regional states would takeover its tasks and activities in their respective geographical areas. Whereas there was no shortage of claimants for the equipment of the project, no one showed interest in its rich collection of documents, which included valuable socioeconomic records of pastoralist groups. While not much is known as to what has happened to its documents that were already in the regions, the Project's collection in Addis Ababa was salvaged in the nick of time, thanks to the efforts of its last Director who saw to it that the collection was moved to the MoA library. This was truly a case of last minute deliverance, since by the time the people from the MoA library were out at the old Project premises, they found the collection already deposited outside under the open sky by the agency to which the building had been allocated.

Currently, the MoA library appears to have the worst behind it. In fact, there are several developments pointing to better times coming. Through a recently launched project - the Technical Cooperation Program, which among several other things provides for improvements in the state of the library - it is hoped that it will get a good start in terms of new equipment and information networking. Also, a computer search system, the creation of a web-site for the MoA, short-term training on using

automated services for MoA personnel, are planned to be implemented in the near future. Finally, following the recommendation of a symposium held recently, work is proceeding to establish a National Agricultural Information System, first at a pilot level, and then at the national level. Still, the library has to overcome its perennial problem of space, which has become even more acute with the arrival of additional materials from the disbanded MoEPD and the III[rd] Livestock Project.

### *Common Problems of Retrieving Information*

As has already been pointed out, a large number of important social studies have been carried out over the years, either directly under governmental offices and agencies, or by NGOs and other development-oriented organizations. The output of these studies, which were carried out as part of a larger project such as a planning exercise, have not been deposited with the right custodians, and when they were well deposited they have not been preserved. But, appropriate deposition and proper storage do not necessarily guarantee its retrievability, i.e. its availability and accessibility.

It has been quite common to duplicate studies due to ignorance concerning the very existence of information sources which report the findings of previous research carried out at great cost. Also, some information sources are left unused as a result of lack of awareness as to just how useful they really are.

The first common hindrance on the retrievability of social science research-related sources of information in the public sector is the failure by custodians to keep at least up-to-date lists of their collections. This pitfall is what limits the availability of research related material. In the absence of a proper listing which is up-dated through the regular publishing of new arrivals or additions, it is impossible for users to realize what material is available and what is not. If a library or a documentation center cannot provide a listing of its collection, then in the absence of this most basic library tool, users will easily overlook useful material. Under such a condition, availability will depend solely on the knowledge and goodwill of the library attendants that are themselves subject to leave their posts through transfers, retirement, or dismissal, taking their precious knowledge with them. Furthermore, due to the virtual impossibility or difficulty of employing proper library mechanics for identifying relevant sources, researchers are forced to rely

on cross-referencing from the few material at their disposal which they then supplement with suggestions of colleagues experienced in the field. Although quite useful as a supplementary or an "also-run" technique, cross-referencing is an inadequate means of systematically identifying important sources of information for any given research project.

The second common problem in retrieving information sources arises from the absence of proper catalogues, manual or automated. In this country, findings of social science research are rarely published but remain printed as monographs. In most cases they are not out even as occasional papers but as research reports and working papers. They are thus part of what is known as "gray literature" and suffer from the shortcomings of this type of material. Firstly, gray literature is usually left uncatalogued. Hence, the existence of many gray-literature materials is not even known to the user (i.e. not available), and even when available, they are not accessible to the ordinary user. That is why, today, the researcher who is in Addis Ababa can locate faster such sources of information with the help of the Library of Congress' catalogue in Washington, DC by communicating over the internet, than he can do it here. Secondly, gray literature is generally not commercially available, a factor which further limits its accessibility. Thirdly, some gray-literature materials are left unused, since on top of their being uncatalogued, their presentation or format makes their content obscure, thereby making their value unappreciated.

Due to the above, the availability and accessibility of this important group of information sources have remained largely dependent on the disposition of library attendants and their clients. The knowledge and attitude of library attendants, on the one hand, and the position as well as the personal connections of users on the other, influence their interaction and working relations and are crucial in determining whether or not one is able to learn of the existence of a certain useful information source and/or to have access to it. Whereas it is justified to hope that the gradual automation of the library/documentation services might go a long way in overcoming this bottle-neck, one should not pin one's hope on computerization alone, since improvements in the legal and ethical domains are as much crucial.

Finally, researchers might not be able to get access to data even when the existence, whereabouts and relevance of their source are known to them. In spite of the fact that the information contained in the particular source

is absolutely crucial to the particular research effort, and even when this effort is part of government-sponsored, development-oriented task, access can be refused on grounds of confidentiality.

Denial of access on grounds of confidentiality is serious because of lack of specification that makes it wide open to different and arbitrary interpretations. Ethiopia does not have clear guidelines that differentiate records which are deemed confidential from those that are not, or that clearly fix and enumerate the types of information and records that are judged confidential on the grounds of state security, individuals' privacy, and so on. Neither are there statutes fixing the period of confidentiality to be enjoyed by different information sources.

Due to lack of specification, the "rule" of confidentiality has been abused by bureaucrats and persons in charge of information centers as an efficient technique for barring certain researchers from access to their records. In some cases. confidentiality is invoked in the most dubious circumstances, as in the case of the prominent researcher who was denied rainfall data of bygone years. In 1986, in the course of his involvement with the Addis-Bah Fuelwood Study, this writer was denied by the CSA access to population data as per peasant association on the same grounds of confidentiality. However, when the study's team-leader, who happened to be a European, showed up at the door of the CSA, he was given within less than an hour the population data together with sketch maps of the peasant associations in question.

Sometimes, confidentiality is invoked as a cover-up device by officials. They use it when they think that allowing access to the source of information is likely to lead to the exposure of certain actions or omissions for which they are responsible, such as the violation of agreements made with donors, etc. One researcher, for instance, was denied access, on grounds of confidentiality, to data on payment distribution to households that were displaced in order to make way for the reservoir of a hydroelectricity dam under construction in southern Ethiopia. But the real reason for the refusal, as it was learnt from the displaced people, was that the compensation money was not paid at all.

## Concluding Remarks

Taken together, our earlier discussions concerning access to social science research sources of information in this country indicate the

following

1. There is a serious paucity in terms of custodians of information sources in general, and those with satisfactory capacity and stature in particular. Unfortunately, there are very few of them that are up to the task.

2. The deposition/collection of social science research output is undertaken at best in a haphazard manner through the efforts of individuals. Important research reports that could serve as valuable sources of information at a later stage are lost due to the absence of guidelines and proper institutional arrangements for deposition. The problem is serious because the type of material that suffers most from lack of proper deposition - the so-called gray literature - is precisely the most common form in which social science research findings are reported in this country.

3. Even after information sources and records have been deposited/collected by custodians, their preservation is not guaranteed. Invaluable materials are lost *en masse*, particularly in the course of the reorganization of whole ministries or their branches and departments, and also during the regionalization of programs.

4. Finally, even when they do exist in the possession of custodians, sources of information are not always retrievable by potential users. Firstly, in the absence of as much as a list of the actual collection of some libraries/documentation centers, and given the fast turnover rate of library staff, it becomes quite impossible to realize what is there and what is not. Secondly, the failure to catalogue useful materials, particularly gray literature, together with the absence of computerized search devices, makes even the sources that are known to exist in a collection difficult to access.

5. The predicament of the potential users may not end at that, since it also happens that officials sometimes refuse access to any information source on grounds of confidentiality. The experience of many researchers confirms the assertion that this undefined and unregulated prerogative exercised by officials is used at random and often as a pretext for cover-up.

In sum, the absolutely essential two-way traffic between research and

information sources in the public sector is not flowing as it should in this country. As a result, existing research output is unnecessarily duplicated at great cost to society and to governmental, non-governmental and business organizations that usually commission research.

This state of affairs has to end if the cause of research is to be better served, and if social science is to deliver on its promise of making effective contribution towards the better guidance of developmental intervention.

The general outline of the solution is obvious. There is not much one can do regarding future reorganizations of ministries and departments, or the takeover of programs by regions. The same holds true for the fast turnover rate of librarians. Therefore, attempts at addressing the inaccessibility of information sources in the public sector ought to concentrate on the preparation and implementation of sound and efficient policy, together with clear guidelines, aimed at:

i. increasing the number of custodians of sources of information, as well as improving their quality;

ii. introducing a clear deposition scheme that makes it mandatory for institutions and individuals to surrender a number of copies that are immediately distributed to a select number of libraries, which are themselves required to accept and include them in their catalogues;

iii. encouraging ministries, state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and all other development and research-oriented institutions to establish their respective serialized "occasional papers" in order to regularize and give form to the release of their research findings, consultants' reports, records, etc., rendering them easily traceable and accessible to users;

iv. providing guidelines by which the collection of any library/documentation center is transferred safely to another appropriate custodian in the event of its closure or the dissolution - be it through reorganization, regionalization or any other process - of the unit to which it has been attached;

v. supporting the emergence of a nation-wide library/documentation network to facilitate the emergence of a shared search system, inter-library borrowing, standardization and compatibility of systems, including cataloguing systems and computer systems;

vi. encouraging the collection and cataloguing of the hitherto overlooked gray literature and other types of important records that may not even be properly printed; and

vii. clarifying, through legislation, the citizen's right of access to public sources of information, explicitly spelling out the statute of limitations, if there is going to be any.

The application of existing knowledge may be cause for concern to investigators for a number of reasons, such as inappropriate use or misleading interpretations. However, there is also the danger of not using knowledge for its maximum potential benefit. It is possible for failure to utilize new knowledge for the benefit of development to occur on account of the shortcomings of the originators of the knowledge or those of the development administrators. However, it is sad when the failure is due to a breakdown in communication between researchers and administrators, and truly tragic when it is a matter of researchers themselves being unable to use new knowledge that is generated by each other.

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[2] At the symposium where this paper was read, some of the participants strongly objected to the classification of published data-sets such as census and survey data generated by agencies such as the Central Statistical Authority as 'secondary data' when used by other researchers. The writer of this paper, however, still stands by the view that secondary data include all sorts of data that exist in some published (or, may we say, public) form and are, therefore, referred to by some as 'documentary' information. Anthony Giddens, one of the social scientists who prefers to use the term

'documentary material' and 'documentary research' for secondary data and secondary analysis, respectively, defines documentary research as "the systematic use of printed or written materials for investigation" (1989:675). As if out to clarify the issue in question here, he further makes the following observation:

> A major sub-type documentary research consists of the reanalysis of *data sets* - recorded research findings - generated by other investigators. Governments and other organizations regularly publish 'official statistics' on a multitude of social phenomena: population, crime, marriage and divorce, suicide, rates of unemployment, and so forth. From the early development of sociology these have been used as a basis for sociological research. Researchers can utilize or reanalyse data derived from such statistics, applying the material to help resolve a give research problem (1989:676).

Allan G. Johnson, in his Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology, further clarifies the issue as follows:

> Secondary analysis is the practice of analyzing data that have already been gathered by someone else, often for a distinctly different purpose. . . .
>
> The sources of data for secondary analysis are increasingly varied and extensive, especially as survey researchers, government agencies, corporations, and other organizations continue to gather far more information than they can possibly analyze themselves . . . (247).

# Archives and Historical Research

**Bahru Zewde**

## Archives as Primary Source

The great German historian, Leopold von Ranke, is generally regarded as the father of modern historiography. He earned this distinction because he identified two cardinal principles of the historian's craft. The first of these is the principle of developing an empathy for the subject under investigation, an attitude which he expressed with the German word *einfühlen*. The second is the principle of documentation, or substantiating one's statements by citing a pertinent and authoritative source. These principles have remained up to now the cornerstone of all good historical research.

Nothing helps the historian more to develop that empathy or *einfühlen* so strongly recommended by Ranke than getting access to what historians characterize as primary source. Primary sources are sources that are contemporary to the event being investigated. They are sources generated at the time and place being described and have thus the character of being mute witnesses of the past, undoctored and uncensored. They are data which transport the historian to the period he is studying and allow him, so to say, to eavesdrop on his subject. They are data that help him both to reconstruct the past and to re-interpret it. Such re-constructions and re-interpretations constitute the major challenges of the historical profession, the agony and the ecstasy (as it were) of historical writing.

Most archaeological excavations - monuments, coins, pottery, and other utensils - fall into this category. Likewise, official and private correspondence created at the time under study are illustrations of this kind of source. Thus, there is a world of difference between reading an account of what Tewodros is reported to have written to Queen Victoria in 1862 and reading the actual letter itself. The latter helps to get back to the time of Tewodros, read into that emperor's mind, feel his aspirations and gauge his prejudices.

It is such letters that constitute what we call archives. It is important to indicate here that there are two perceptions of archives. The first and, one might perhaps add, vulgar understanding of the term refers to that part of a government department or a private organization where the correspondence emanating from or destined to it are kept, the first in copy and the second in the original. Some experts prefer to call these *records* rather than *archives*. A repository of such records is best expressed by the Amharic term *mäzgäb bet*. These are what jealous guardians of those documents refer to as *active files* and are thus generally inaccessible to researchers.

The second perception is that of a central repository where documents whose current utility has lapsed are stored, sorted, catalogued and made accessible for historical research. These are documents that the government archivists often refer to as *dead files*. Dead they might be to the archivists. But to the researcher, they are the data that bring the past to life. Such repositories are often referred to as National Archives. They have come to be known in Amharic as *abyatä mäzagebt*.

There is a group of documents that do not strictly pertain to this category of archives but are nonetheless important primary sources for the reconstruction of Ethiopian history. These are manuscripts. As a country with a long history of an established Church, Ethiopia has been famous for its rich collection of manuscripts kept in churches and monasteries that often go back hundreds of years. To a lesser extent, Islamic religious and educational centers, such as those in Harar, have also accumulated Arabic manuscripts.

The value of these manuscripts is essentially religious. But, for historians, they have the added value of providing insights into the past. The items of historical interest are usually found scribbled either in the margins or at the end of the text. They are known as *marginalia* or *colophons*, respectively. These marginal or end notes usually deal with land inheritance or transactions and have thus provided valuable stuff for social and economic historians. It is to be noted that the forthcoming important book on *gult* by Professor Donald Crummey is based primarily on such notes.

## National Archives

Most states have institutionalized the distinction between the current and the historical, between *mäzgäb bet* and *betä mäzagebt*. This is usually done by specifying the number of years after which government records are handed over to a central repository which, after performing the necessary sorting operation known as *record management*, makes them available to public scrutiny. The number of years after which such open access is possible usually varies from thirty to fifty years. In the United States, one can theoretically get access to more recent documents by invoking the Freedom of Information Act.[1]

The most famous of such central repository of government documents, a model of its kind, is the Public Record Office (PRO) in London. Established in 1838, it has become a veritable shrine of historical research attracting researchers and scholars from all corners of the globe. Its new sumptuous premises at Kew Gardens and combination of electronic accessing and prompt delivery have turned historical research into a delightful experience rather than an onerous duty. Many a Ph.D. thesis in modern history owes its rich documentation to the records of that office. The initials of the various departments that have turned over their documents to this central repository adorn the footnotes of these theses: FO (Foreign Office), CO (Colonial Office), WO (War Office).

Other countries have similar repositories, though they have not all achieved the degree of sophistication or open access achieved by the PRO. Ethiopian and Ethiopianist historians doing advanced research have often included in their itinerary the continental archives in Italy and France. These are mainly the Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (or the Foreign Office Archives known by its acronym ASMAE) and Archivio Storico del Ministero dell' Africa Italiana (the Colonial Office Archives, ASMAI) in the former, and the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (MAE in short, an equivalent of the Foreign Office) in the latter. Occasionally, they have had recourse to the United States National Archives located in Washington, DC.

In our continent as well, there are few countries that do not have a central repository of one kind or another - one of the more benign

legacies of colonial rule. In my own experience, I have been impressed by two such repositories: the Central Records Office (now National Records Office) in Khartoum and the National Archives of Zimbabwe in Harare. The former has in its custody not only the records of the period of British rule (1898-1954) but also those of the Mahdist period (1881-1898). Having used the colonial records for my Ph.D. thesis on the Ethio-Sudanese borderland, I could testify to the greater depth and detail that they gave to the narrative than would have been the case if I had depended only on the Foreign Office records.

Although I did not have the need to use the National Archives in Harare, I had the chance to visit both the reference section and the large repository where records were managed after they had been handed over by the various ministries. I was particularly fascinated by the photographic collection of the Archives, a collection which makes the task of illustrating historical accounts so much easier. The Archives are also reputed to have a rich collection of oral material, transcribed and indexed to facilitate consultation by researchers.

## The State of Archives in Ethiopia

When we turn to our own country, we are struck by how much we have remained behind in the organization of state archives and in making past records accessible for research. What one can characterize as the *Great Anomaly* still persists, although there are now hopeful signs that it may finally come to an end. That anomaly is the fact that Ethiopia, which boasts millennia of a literate culture, still does not have a National Archives. Nothing is more embarrassing to an Ethiopian historian than to confess in front of other African colleagues, who are often so beholden to the ancient heritage of Ethiopia, that his/her country does not have a National Archives and that, instead, he/she has to rely on foreign (mostly European) archival material for historical reconstruction.

The fact that there is no National Archives in Ethiopia does not mean, however, that there have been no archival collections. The Ethiopian royal court has traditionally had a scriptorium which also kept record of royal correspondence and other important documents. The first such organized collection is the inventory of royal revenue and arsenal kept at Tewodros's last stronghold, Maqdala. These

finally became part of the loot taken away by the Napier expedition in 1868.[2]

Under Emperor Menilek, the *tsahafe te'ezaz* or imperial secretary became the holder of the royal seal and custodian of court records. In 1907, when the emperor set up ministries, this traditional office assumed a modern garb as the Ministry of the Pen. All the correspondence between Menilek and European rulers, the various treaties signed with other parties, as well as a large body of court rulings particularly on land cases found their way to this important office. The office of *tsahafe te'ezaz* remained in effect until the 1974 revolution. The most powerful holder of that office was *Tsahafe Te'ezaz* Walda-Giyorgis Walda-Yohannes (1941-1955).

Access to the records of the Ministry remained confined to the imperial secretariat, court historians and favored researchers. *Balambaras* Mahtama-Sellase was able to compile his highly valuable *Zekra Nagar*, a veritable gold mine of information for the social and economic history of early twentieth century Ethiopia, largely because, as the son of *Tsahafe Te'ezaz* Walda-Masqal, he had unrestricted access to the records of the Ministry of Pen. In the days of the *Derg*, the popular historian Pawlos Ñoñño managed to get privileged access to the records which enabled him to write his biography of Menilek.

The 1974 revolution brought about a major change in the fate of the Ministry of Pen. As an institution closely associated with the palace, it and the Ministry of the Imperial Court became redundant with the overthrow of the emperor and the subsequent abolition of the monarchy. While the staff were absorbed into other ministries, notably the newly established Ministry of Culture, nobody could claim responsibility for the archives. The keepers of those archives, who were fortunately retained, had poignant memories of the difficulties they faced protecting the documents from the wrath of some over-zealous *Derg* members, who were convinced that such "reactionary documents" deserved no other fate than to be burned. Many people still vividly remember the television debate between a Ministry of Information official and a University academic on the fate of historical records, when the former had the temerity to suggest that old records had no value whatsoever and should therefore be consigned to the flames.

An even worse fate awaited the records after the change of regime in 1991. The keepers, who had guarded them jealously throughout the turbulence of the 1970s and 1980s (even if access was denied to all but the privileged), disappeared from the picture. The records were left to the mercy of rodents and intruders. People in the Department of History were shocked to learn that an Eritrean expatriate had free access to the records in the months subsequent to the change of regime. It is not known how much he appropriated of those records permanently. He certainly appeared with copies of some of the royal correspondence at a later stage.

And it is a miracle that, despite such intrusions and the hazards of nature, quite a few of the documents are still extant, as some of us discovered to our pleasant surprise during a recent visit. Part of the explanation for their miraculous survival is their location in premises which are off-limits to ordinary mortals. An effort is now underway to salvage the records and eventually make them accessible to researchers.

Of the other ministries, it has been the old Ministry of Interior (later re-named Ministry of Internal Affairs) that has managed to keep its records in good order up to at least 1991. What is more, it was accessible to researchers, including students writing their MA theses. Given the centralized character of administration under Hayla-Sellase and the *Derg*, it is not difficult to imagine the wealth of information to be obtained from those archives. Almost all correspondence relating to provincial administration at various levels - whether it be in the administrative, financial or security spheres - found its way to this central office. A recent visit has confirmed that most of the records are still in good order, although they bear some evidence of tampering as a result of their being used liberally in connection with the trials of former government officials. Part of the explanation for the good state in which they are found is to be sought in the immaculate cupboards in which they are kept.

But the fate of the records has been hanging in the balance since the abolition of the ministry under the new federal arrangement. The archives have been sealed, with custody transferred to the Prime Minister's Office. One dreads to think what would happen to the

archives if the premises are sought for some other purpose that may be deemed more essential than keeping old documents.

Other categories of state records have had an even more checkered career. As we all know, in less than two decades, the country saw two major transformations, the first in 1974 and the second in 1991. Both events have taken their toll of state records, for whom stability and security are the only guarantees of survival. Records were destroyed, sometimes willfully, as the agents of change vaunted to write the new and glorious history on a clean slate, "to start from zero", as it were. More often, records were damaged out of neglect. Shortage of space and the redundancy of state organizations have often had an adverse effect on records. In the first instance, they have either been destroyed to leave space for new records or put away in a "shelter", which exposes them to all the vagaries of nature. A good example of this is the depot in Shola where old and historically valuable records of the Ministry of Finance were kept. It is doubtful if anything is left of those records now. And this would no doubt be a tragic loss to all who wish to reconstruct the fiscal history of the Ethiopian state.

In the second instance, records found themselves in the unenviable position of a flock without a shepherd. Particularly vulnerable in this regard have been military records in the post-1991 situation. Thus, we have reports that most of the records of the old Imperial Bodyguard and those of the Third Division in Harar are lost for good. The former were taken out of their repository and sold in bulk to shops for wrapping material. It was through the energetic efforts of the Chief Librarian of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies of Addis Ababa University, who scoured the Janmeda neighborhood to purchase back as many documents as he could lay hands on, that some of them were salvaged and deposited in the IES Library.

The IES staff did an equally commendable job in retrieving quite a few records from Harar in the heady days of the 1974 Revolution. Those records formed the backbone of the Library's Manuscript Collection, which now includes an impressive microfilm collection of European archival material pertinent to Ethiopia going back to the middle of the nineteenth century.

A 1988 report of a committee set up to recommend the establishment of National Archives provided an interesting, and in many instances alarming, survey of the condition of state records. The survey covered the capital Addis Ababa (specifically the records of the Ministries of Internal Administration, Education, Foreign Affairs, and the City Council), and the administrative regions of Hararge (including the records of Lej Iyyasu), Shawa, Kafa, Eritrea (including records of the Italian period, which were subsequently reported to have been transferred to the Italian Embassy), and Wallaga.

The survey indicated the years when field visits were made to the various record centers, the annual increase in the volume of records, the area occupied by the records, the total number of files or folders, and the condition in which the records were found. It painted in general a rather dismal picture of the state of records that usually fall into the category of *dead files*. They were mostly found consigned to some improvised shelter, quite often made of the popular corrugated iron sheets so lethal to paper, often strewn on the ground without any folder, covered with dust and often left as fodder for rodents and vermin.

## Efforts to Set up a National Archives

All the above is not to say that there was no awareness of the need to set up a central state repository which could assume responsibility for the custody of records of permanent value. As a matter of fact, there are few issues in Ethiopian public life that have been talked and written about as much as the need for National Archives. But, as is so often the case, words have not been matched by deeds.

In the last years of the Hayla-Sellase regime, proposals for the establishment of National Archives were made by the Institute of Public Administration and UNESCO. The UNESCO report, which was compiled after a two-week survey of state and church documents in 1968, recommended the immediate establishment of a National Archives. As a follow-up to that recommendation, someone was sent to England and Ghana for a six-month training in archival management. On his return, the trainee filed a long report urging the setting up of a National Archives and enclosing the organizational

structure of the institution. This led to the appointment of a succession of committees to examine the matter, but nothing concrete came out of the exercise.

On the other hand, greater success has been registered in conserving manuscripts. A project of Syracuse University launched on the eve of the revolution managed to microfilm a large number of the manuscripts kept in some of the famous churches and monasteries. This is what later came to be known as the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (EMML). Copies of these manuscripts are kept both in the United States and here in Ethiopia, at the Ministry of Culture and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. They have been catalogued and thus made easy for consultation through the indefatigable scholarship of Dr. Getachew Haile. A microfilm copy of the Maqdala manuscripts looted by the Napier expedition of 1868 has also been deposited at the IES Library.

In the very last year of the imperial regime, a bill on national archives was actually presented to Parliament. But it was overtaken by the 1974 revolution, which opened a perilous chapter in the conservation of documents. The situation became so alarming that the *Derg*, once it had sobered down after the initial euphoria of the revolution, had to issue a directive to a number of ministries and government departments instructing them to guard all documents until such time that an authority is set up to take charge of them.

Such an authority was set up within the Ministry of Culture and Sports Affairs with the rather pompous designation of "National Archives". But, the unit scarcely had the material or human resources to exercise its mandate. Up to now, it has had enough space only for records transferred from the old Ministry of the Imperial Court and the Office of the Crown Prince and the private papers of *Dajjazmach* Dr. Zawde Gabra-Sellase confiscated by the *Derg* when he chose to exile himself after the execution of high government officials in November 1974.

Cognizant of its own limitations, the unit, which had become a division within the Ministry, submitted a number of reports, and even a draft proclamation for the establishment of a National Archives, to the Council of Ministers. But the studies could not pass beyond the Council's Legal Department. Finally, in the last days of

the *Derg*, two major reports, complete with draft proclamations for a National Archives, were submitted to the government, the first in September 1988 and the second in July 1989.

The first was the result of the work of a committee chaired by the Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Culture and Sports and with members from the Ministry, the University, the Ministries of Information, Foreign Affairs, and Justice, and the Management Institute as well as the Science and Technology Commission. The report underlined the importance of national archives for research and development, surveyed the perilous condition of state records, and described the experiences in archival organization of various European and African countries.

The 1989 report was compiled by a committee chaired by a representative of the Council of Ministers and included members from the various ministries and commissions, the University, and the Management Institute. The report focused on the condition of state records. Underscoring the generation of massive data by the state bureaucracy in the preceding years, it emphasized the urgency of records management to sift the essential from the non-essential so as to solve the problem of space and save for posterity those records that are valuable. It even went as far as proposing a schedule for the disposal of records, setting the number of years that records should be kept with the generating authority and distinguishing those that should be disposed of by that authority from those that should be transferred to the National Archives that was recommended to be set up.

Both reports attached a draft proclamation for the establishment of a National Archives. Except for slight variations here and there, the drafts were identical. They envisaged the establishment of the National Archives as an autonomous authority under the Council of Ministers. It was to be governed by a Council chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for Social Affairs and led by a General Manager and his deputy.

The 1988 report went even further and provided the specifications for the National Archives building as well as the equipment and human resources required. It provided for a three-story building with a basement serving as the storage for the records. The human

resource allocation envisaged an organization headed by a Director-General and a budget of just under 1.5 million *birr*. As in 1974, these proposals were overtaken by the events attending the fall of the *Derg*.

There is now some hope that this long saga of the quest for National Archives might probably be approaching its finale. A draft proclamation establishing "The National Archives and Library Agency" has reached the House of People's Representatives and was the subject of a prolonged public discussion convened by the pertinent Committee before it is submitted again to the House for final promulgation. I am also informed that the design for a building to house the new body has been completed.

The draft proclamation differs from its two predecessors discussed above (those of 1988 and 1989) in two important respects. First, it envisages the establishment of a National Archives *and* Library. It is difficult to justify the lumping together of these two relatively independent functions other than the fact that the department of the Ministry of Information and Culture, which drafted the bill, has always borne that name. Secondly, the bill places the National Archives under the Ministry of Information and Culture, whereas the earlier drafts had made it accountable to the Council of Ministers.

The Advisory Council in the new bill also shows some different features. It is to be chaired by an unspecified representative of the Ministry of Information and Culture, and its membership, unlike the earlier ones, has representatives of only three ministries. Instead, room is made for representatives of two professional associations, the two major religious bodies and the Mapping Authority.

The bill establishes a 25-year limit for the currency of records, which at the moment means that only records before 1974 are to be transferred to the Agency. This effectively excludes all documents pertaining to the *Derg* period, thereby precluding original historical research on the period 1974-1991. In as much as the trial of officials of the *Derg* regime on various crimes is still not over, this is partly understandable. Yet, at the same time, it underlines the need for the urgent conclusion of that process so that the year 1991 can serve as a historical cut-off point. In the meantime, it seems fairly reasonable to insert a clause giving the Agency a special dispensation to make

records of the *Derg* period accessible to researchers, in somewhat the same manner as American researchers are granted access to documents falling below the mandatory year limit.

The public discussion of the bill in Parliament proposed a number of suggestions for improvement. The major thrust of the recommendations centered on the two issues raised above. These are the non-advisability of lumping together two institutions which have different mandates, "National Archives" and "National Library", and the wisdom of making the Agency accountable to the Prime Minister's Office rather than just one ministry. It is to be hoped that both the Committee and the House will give careful thought to these well-considered recommendations before the bill becomes law. In a way, we have reached a point where anything is better than nothing. Yet, it is better to pass legislation that can stand the test of time than be forced to go through yet another legislative exercise because of glaring inadequacies. As has been shown above, the quest for a National Archives has been a long and frustrating one. Its resolution, when it comes, should be commensurate with both the strivings of past generations and the rich historical heritage of the country. One can only conclude by hoping that access to historical records, long denied or capriciously granted, would finally be within public reach.

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[1] As Harold Marcus was able to do when writing his book, *Ethiopia, Great Britain and the United States*, US documents pertaining to the abortive 1960 coup were still not "of age" at the time of writing but Marcus was able to get access to them on the basis of that Act.

[2] See Girma-Selassie Asfaw and Richard Pankhurst, *Tax Records and Inventories of Emperor Tewodros of Ethiopia (1855-1868)* (London, 1979).

# Access to Information: A Gender Perspective

**Alem Seged Herouy**

Traditionally, access to information has been a jealously guarded male preserve, since possession of information was, and still remains, an important aspect of the power to dominate physically and psychologically. Women, considered insignificant in such social structures, received trickles of information through the male members of their households, and only when it was deemed necessary.

Such unbalanced access to information prevails in Ethiopian society and plays a retrogressive role in national development as a whole and that of women in particular. This situation is aggravated by educational attitudes, which have not only barricaded girls in traditional patterns of behavior, but have also denied them the benefits of available communication technologies.

In the industrialized and, to a great extent, in the semi-industrialized countries, where gender gaps in the socio-political and economic spheres have been narrowed, a visible transformation in the lives of women is evident. The major contributing factors in this process have been the facilitation of women's access to information, the incorporation of gender-related information into the educational system, and the broad variety of communication media at the disposal of women. Women living in such environments are placed in a position where they can establish their identities as equal gender partners, protect their rights from being by-passed in national decision-making processes, and play an effective role in all development endeavors.

Against this general background, this paper briefly reviews a number of issues within the Ethiopian context. These relate to: impact of information on women; the situation of women vis-à-vis access to information; prevailing conditions and attitudes in our media structures, especially the electronic media such as radio; existing constraints; and potential openings that encourage women to adopt

innovative attitudes towards information networks and new media technologies.

The first major manifestation of the "women and media" paradigm occurred in Addis Ababa in 1975, when women came out in the thousands from their restrictive domestic enclaves in direct response to information which they considered vital for their development and for their future. They marched to demand recognition of their equal rights as women, freedom from domestic enslavement, equal pay for equal work, and equal access to education and work opportunities. By this collective public action, they demonstrated that the time had come for them to get rid of the double oppression they suffered, i.e. gender and class.

Following this, women became active subjects of information, albeit for a brief period of time, on the national media. This was a positive indication of how timely access to information that responds to a need can accelerate attitudinal changes in women, especially when they are considered as active subjects.

The second paradigm reflecting another type of relationship between the media and women - a relationship which still prevails to some extent today - was manifested in the national media coverage of the first celebration in Ethiopia of Women's Day on March 8, 1978. As a national event, there was no question about its historical significance, especially to women. Nevertheless, the national electronic media, i.e. the radio and television, quick on other occasions to bring to the public live coverage of political events, including football matches, held back on this occasion. The public was instead fed with watered-down information, trickles of which seeped down to rural and urban populations through word of mouth.

Referring to the link between government and an informed people, the famous American President, George Washington is quoted as saying: "Concealment is a species of misinformation." Concealment of information, considered as a national trait, has undoubtedly put a brake on the development of Ethiopian women. Redressing this situation is of utmost urgency if national development is to proceed at the accelerated rate required to allow the country to play a meaningful role at the global level. Women, who constitute more than half of the country's population, have a decisive role to play in these activities.

For this, they should have easy access to information dealing with a broad range of subjects: e.g., information on role models; on constitutional rights; on preventive health; on available basic and intermediate technology which can assist them in easing their workload inside and around their homesteads and in their agricultural activities; on skills needed to develop their potentials and improve their entrepreneurial skills.

Facilitating access to information corresponding to their needs, especially to the needs of the most marginalized rural and urban women, is an important means of stepping up their development. At the same time, however, women should be made aware that free access to information is also one of their fundamental rights and that they should participate in efforts undertaken to protect these rights.

For the past two decades, UNESCO, especially following the McBride Report (1980) which exposed gross discrepancies in the international information flow, has been providing a motive force in the free flow of information and the inclusion of women in the national information and communication structures.

Communication training being one of UNESCO's prime concerns, it sponsored, in 1987, a three-year media training program for senior media women under its International Program for Development of Communication (IPDC). During this period, 39 women from nine African countries (including two from Ethiopia) were provided with opportunities to upgrade their technical and managerial skills (IPDC 1987).

Similarly, some international broadcasting agencies and other non-government institutions organized special workshops and courses tailored to meet the needs of women. Others insisted on the participation of media women in the workshops and seminars that they organized nationally, regionally or internationally. The offshoot of these activities was that they encouraged women to form their own national and regional media associations.

In a continued interplay of international and national discussions on women and the media, the 4th Global Women Conference, which drew more than 34,000 women participants, was held in Beijing three years ago. For the first time in a conference of such magnitude,

communication and media featured as a focal point for planning and elaborating strategies to enhance gender equality in development.

Media experts (Pye, 1963; Thompson, 1981) attest to the fact that the mass media can assist in introducing and accelerating behavioral changes as well as in adopting new technologies even in societies that are tightly barricaded by deep-rooted traditional and cultural barriers. "Western movies project upon Arab Screens examples of female behaviour remarkable by any standard and revolutionary in their impact upon the traditional values of 'male vanity' culture" (Learner, 1978). "The process of change is being speeded up by one manifestation of Western civilization, above all the film, which expresses a way of life and a conception of the relations between men and women which are far from those prevalent in the Islamic world" (Hourani, 1978).

In recent years, such views have been used to some extent to accommodate women's special information needs within the existing radio and TV structures. The following information compiled by SELMA, a Women Communication Consultancy Service, indicates the current information opportunities offered to women by existing broadcasting facilities in Addis Ababa.

Table 1. Information Opportunities Available to Women through Radio Broadcasts

| Radio Station | Language | Broadcast days | Time | Women producers' no. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Radio Ethiopia* (Min. of Inf. & Culture) | Amharic | Saturdays | 8:15-8:50 | 4<br>2<br>3 |
| | Oromiffa | Mondays | 8:15-18:35 | |
| | Tigrigna | Mondays | | |
| *Radio Fana* (EPRDF operated) | Amharic | Mondays | 7:10-7:30 | 3 (1 M)<br>2 |
| | Oromiffa | Thursdays | 18:15-18:25 | |
| *Legedadi Radio* (Ministry of Education) | Amharic | Sundays | 12:30-12:45 | 4 |

As can be seen in Table 1 above, three radio stations broadcasting in three Ethiopian languages provide 2¼ hrs. of information distributed over four days of the week and organized by one male and 18 female radio program producers. Table 2, which is a one-month sample (January - February 1999) of radio programs, gives an insight into the type of information provided by the three radio stations.

Table 2. Type of Information Available to Women in Radio Broadcasts

| Radio station | Program | Topic |
|---|---|---|
| *Radio Ethiopia* | Amharic | ◆ Energy and women: problems related to time- and energy-consuming activities in search of fuel and water; possible solutions<br>◆ Micro credit schemes available to women<br>◆ Family and marriage conflicts (based on letters addressed to the Lawyers Association)<br>◆ "Kaki Wourdot" - a role model woman from Gurage region who emerges successful in a lone fight to attain her marriage right<br>◆ A discussion on Islamic and Sharia laws as they affect women<br>◆ (Source: Women Lawyers Association). |
| | Oromiffa | ◆ Harmful Traditional Practices<br>◆ Micro credit schemes available to women<br>◆ Women's participation in Agricultural Extension Program<br>◆ A discussion on the impact on women of Islamic and Sharia laws (Source: Women Lawyers Association). |
| | Tigrigna | ◆ Women in economic activities: women organizations and micro credit schemes<br>◆ Tigray women's participation in water and soil conservation activities and extension program<br>◆ Women in Congress<br>◆ A program of Women Lawyers Association<br>◆ Women in politics: participation in elections<br>◆ Women's activities in Afar Region. |
| | Amharic | ◆ Young girls: their educational outcomes and opportunities<br>◆ Educational situation of rural women: measures taken to increase their number and introduce improvements<br>◆ Women factory workers' activities regarding employment terms and period<br>◆ Women's participation in politics: problems confronted to enter politics and attempts made to facilitate their political participation<br>◆ Community assistance given to families of soldiers at the war fronts |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Radio Fana* | Oromiffa | ◆ Women's burdens in shouldering multiple household responsibilities<br>◆ Handicapped women and what they can do to minimize their handicap situation; role model: a blind woman's achievements<br>◆ Role of women in social and political affairs<br>◆ A program of Women Lawyers Association<br>◆ Projects reflecting ways of overcoming economic and political problems: the Hundee Project - a comprehensive integrated project. |
| *Legedadi Radio* | Amharic | ◆ Why girls trail behind in development<br>◆ Women's crucial role in development<br>◆ Workshop for women teachers<br>◆ Grandparents' influence on children: possible retrogressive impacts on the development of girls<br>◆ How to implement national policies affecting women<br>◆ Aids: a poem about how it affects prostitutes<br>◆ Steps needed to increase the participation of girls at school<br>◆ Guidance and counseling at school<br>◆ Confidence-building programs for girls. |

The above samples of radio programs reflect a considerable shift in program content. Subjects which were of paramount concern to women producers of radio programs a decade ago, such as home management, balanced diet, child care, etc., have given way to topics that reflect greater emphasis on enhancing women's awareness of their innate potentials and rights; the socio-cultural, economic and political constraints that dominate their lives; and options and opportunities that they can explore to overcome their problems and improve themselves. In these efforts, subjects hitherto considered taboo are being transmitted through the media and becoming topics of public and private discussions.

As a result, a cross section of women are becoming more vocal in expressing their opinions, in seeking legal protection against rape and/or sexual harassment; in seeking equality in marriage, property rights, litigation, and so on. There is also a growing awareness among women about certain patterns of behavior and practices which are culturally and traditionally imposed, and which have restrictive impacts on their development.

While the contribution made by women media practitioners in this process is appreciable, nevertheless, much of the credit for accessing such information to the public at large and, in particular, to the women

who need it most, goes to the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, and the National Committee on Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting Women and Children.

The 3-year old Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, which is dedicated to upholding the legal rights of women, operates with a core of committed members who go to great lengths to collect factual information and make it public property using a multiple of media outlets.

Similarly, the National Committee on Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting Women and Children is providing an invaluable service to the public, especially to the women and children who are the victims. By feeding the media with researched information on life-endangering mutilation practices such as the circumcision of young girls and other practices which cause permanent disfigurement of body parts, especially the face, this organization is paving the way for a concerted action against these age-old practices.

## Constraints

Despite such encouraging signs and openings, however, there are still numerous constraints that hamper the flow of much needed information to the majority of the marginalized women. Some of the outstanding constraints are briefly reviewed here.

### *Male-Dominated Ideologies*

First, media institutions are governed by male-dominated ideologies, which in turn are reflected in the male gender bias that permeates policy decisions affecting employment opportunities, program planning and implementation. Most important in our present context is the information content which affirms male dominance as well as female submission and influences subsequent male/female relationship from childhood onwards. "The media help to ensure that women's aspirations for work or education are frameworked within the structure of male authority and not autonomously" (Imam 1993).

In some African countries, women that assumed positions of responsibility have been able to make their professional inputs as well

as to respond with greater sensitivity to the needs of women working in the media and to women as information consumers. To cite a few examples, women have assumed various decision-making positions: as vice minister of information (Ethiopia), director of broadcasting institutions (Botswana, Ethiopia, Senegal), directors, heads or owners of media training institutions (Kenya, Nigeria), magazine owners, editors and publishers (Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia), newspaper editors (Tanzania), directors of publications (Tanzania), and more recently as a government spokesperson (Ethiopia). Nevertheless, it is important to note here that these are exceptions to the rule. Women still lag behind when it comes to assuming decision-making positions in media institutions.

In the majority of these countries, a national association of media women plays a key role in providing training opportunities for its members, advancing the cause of media women by increasing their visibility, audibility, credibility, and, most importantly, their integration in national development endeavors (Nkya, 1993).

In Ethiopia, an association of media women has just been established. It is hoped that this can promote the inclusion of capable women in decision-making positions, increase the mobility of women employees in the broad spectrum of activities related to information production and dissemination, and contribute to rectifying existing inequalities in media institutions.

### *Assumption of Women as a Homogenous Group*

The second outstanding constraint is the assumption in the media that gives little regard to women's heterogeneous make-up in terms of language, culture, social and economic status. Such an attitude encourages an elitist approach to women issues and aggravates the total reliance on restricted media outlets.

It is hoped that the long awaited national communication and media policy will make sufficient provisions allowing broader participation by private investors to expand the communication and media industries. This can open up new possibilities to meet specific information needs such as those of heterogeneous women groupings.

Efforts should be made, however, to ensure that the private media give due attention to women. In South Africa, for instance, the establishment in 1995 of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), which has been instrumental in the establishment of private broadcasting, is being used as an intermediary organ to ensure that "women benefit from the restructuring of the electronic media and that they are represented at the various levels of planning, management, and production. Women in the civil society must participate in organizations like media watch which was established to make information about the media available to women, as well as to monitor the positions and representations of women in the media" (Southern African Research and Documentation Center 1997).

### *Negative Media Projections of Women*

The indiscriminate importation and distribution of media materials that project and promote negative images of women is a third outstanding constraint that adversely affects women's struggles for gender equality and constructive development. Pornographic materials continue to be distributed under the counter and in the open market despite an unprecedented women's protest march in 1993 demanding control of the circulation of these materials.

Linked with this is the impact of some local radio and TV plays that depict women as manipulative, overly aggressive or weak, as money grabbers, etc. Furthermore, publishers and video rental shops that have access to a variety of trashy foreign media products and pornographic pictures are cashing in on the existence of hundreds of non-discriminating urban youth of both genders.

Random interviews were recently carried out with 25 young girls and women aged between 19-29, with educational backgrounds of 12$^{th}$ grade and above. The purpose was to find out their preferred information source and content. Almost all the interviewed girls indicated an overwhelming preference for "True Love" ("*Ye Ewnet Feker*"), movies that are abundant in the video shops throughout our cities. None of the interviewees were aware of women's programs on the radio; few were interested in current affairs programs. Yet all were familiar with at least four or five newspapers which have contents similar to those of the videos they watch regularly. Though these findings may probably be considered as normal among the youth of

similar age-groups in other parts of the world, they are discouraging when viewed against the pressing needs of building up informed groups of young women.

What are the cumulative effects of living on borrowed experiences? Do they influence behavioral attitudes between the sexes? Are abusive behaviors towards women encouraged by continuous exposure to degrading images of women as chattels of sexual pleasures? Do they instill seeds which promote gender respect and equality or gender bias and subordination? These questions urgently require investigation.

### *Exploitation of Women in Advertising*

The fact that women are also central figures of attraction in advertising gimmicks worsens the situation. It is women baring their legs that sell the body cream, young flaunting girls that sell condoms, and the submissive wives that sell the hair dye.

Although the advertisement business is still in its infancy in Ethiopia, the psychological link between advertised goods and cultural setting is so strong that the wholesale imitative adoption of goods, settings and behaviors is beginning to become evident. The following story is a telling illustration. An Ethiopian mother once discovered her three-year old daughter naked with one hand resting on her waist and her other outstretched hand holding a biscuit. Surprised to find her in this position the mother asked her daughter what she was doing. Her daughter responded silently by pointing at an open magazine lying on the floor next to her which showed a picture of the backside of a naked slim young woman in a pose similar to the one that the 3-year old child was trying to imitate. The picture of the naked woman was used to advertise a certain brand of slimming biscuits. An apt observation about Western advertisement ideology comes from a British advocate of women's liberation, Sheila Rowbotham: "In order to sell commodities, women have become commodities."

### *Lack of Research*

A fourth outstanding constraint is the problem of producing effective media programs due to lack of research on needs. Without appropriate and relevant data to support plans and projects, prospects

of their success are limited. For instance, a rural newspaper directed at women may discontinue after the first few issues if it is hastily launched without adequate feasibility data on the number of literate women in the area, their economic status and so on. Research should not be considered as a one-time activity, but as an integral component of the total communication process and as a determinant factor in preventing wastage of scarce material and human resources.

### *Lack of Resource Centers*

A fifth constraint is lack of appropriate resource centers. The only resource center focusing on women is the Center for Research and Training for Women in Development (CERTWID), which operates within Addis Ababa University.

Apart from this center, there are no other institutions in the country which focus on the collection, preservation, documentation and dissemination of information related to women or women groups, past and present. This lack has been identified as a constraint because it is important to put into proper perspective the roles that women have played in the historical development of their countries and which they continue to play - roles which are largely ignored. Recorded information that can be collected and made available in resource centers plays an important part in making women visible and tangible entities in the all-encompassing areas of societal development.

Information about eminent Ethiopian male figures exist in historical books, articles and the like written by male authors and made accessible to the public through a variety of outlets such as book shops, libraries, museums and so on. However, similar recorded information on women either in book form, film, or other media product that can be offered to the public is rare. An exception is a video documentary on Taitu Betul, wife of Emperor Menelik, produced by a woman, Almaz Dejene, for SELMA. Based on historical sources, two of whom are women - one an American writer (Chris Prouty), the other an Ethiopian (W/t. Muluwork W/Giorgis, who is an Assistant Lecturer in Addis Ababa University) - Taitu is brought into the open from her shadowy existence and presented to the public as a gender partner to Emperor Menelik in the historical events of the period.

Resource centers can be invaluable repositories of historical and topical documentation about the role of women in everyday life in their various cultural settings, in particular in situations such as wars and other disasters, as refugees and as professionals, etc. Such documentation in turn can allow many more women to follow suit and produce books, films and other media products which will finally establish women in the annals of history and in the present life.

## Future Prospects

Having briefly enumerated some of the outstanding constraints which impede women from getting access to information, and which in turn restrain their development, a few general observations are made below about some opportunities that are now available and that can encourage women to adopt innovative attitudes towards information sharing, networking, and using new technologies.

We live in a world which continuously affirms that information is as essential to development as it is for survival. Encapsulated in "the global village" by communication and information technologies which have revolutionized concepts of time and space, those same communication and information technologies are offering new opportunities for redressing the gross imbalance that exists between those who possess the information and those who are in desperate need of information for survival, development and, in the case of the over 25 million women of Ethiopia, for obtaining gender equality. The technologies are there, the information is also there; the question, however, is how the two can be brought together to ensure that women are provided with maximum opportunities to access the information they need.

Some of these opportunities for women could lie in the use of advanced communication and information technologies. For instance, rural communities in India and Tanzania, which include large segments of women, are recorded to have benefited from the use of new mobile units, videos, satellites, computers and the like, in efforts directed at meeting localized information needs (Hamelink, 1988).

"Demassifying" or decentralizing mass media systems are proving more effective in aligning information dissemination with specific information needs and specific recipients. Community radios, low

power TVs, audio and video-cassettes, local and community newspapers offer greater opportunities for using natural resources and, indigenous cultures permitting, "local talent to experiment with new formats under less demanding technical conditions" (Abuoga and Mutere, 1988).

How effective are such local productions? In a recent women's program screened on Ethiopian TV (March 13th 1999), a woman responsible for circumcising young girls admitted that she gave up her work after viewing on video in her local area the actual circumcision process and after being exposed to the after-effects of mutilation.

While video-technology has assumed a greater role in making local information accessible to women, especially the communication activities undertaken by audio-visual departments of some government ministries and NGOs, the use of computer for such purposes appears to lag behind. Although a growing number of women are beginning to use computers, the majority lack the skill on how to manipulate the computer, since, to them, it is no more than an extension of the typewriter. It is essential, therefore, that young women be provided with relevant training in this regard.

Innovative developments in information technologies are taking place in countries across Africa and this could revolutionize information structures in rural communities. These include the Multi-purpose Community Telecenters (MCTs) pilot projects, which have now become part and parcel of the communication activities in West Africa, geared to upgrade rural life. The 1996 ECA Conference of Ministers and International Telecommunication Unions on Regional African Telecommunication Development provided increased impetus for the creation of MCTs in other African countries.

MCT activities which revolve largely around the use of computers are planned to give a broad range of services tailored to meet identified needs. These needs include basic education, literacy campaigns, grass-root activities, access to virtual libraries, and teacher training (Cyranek, 1999). Provided that women are given full support to participate in the programs offered by MCTs, undoubtedly such access to information would contribute to their development.

However, whatever type of communication and information media are to be used, the most decisive factor is to ensure that women have full access to information commensurate with their various needs, bearing in mind that access to information includes the hardware, the technology, without which access is incomplete.

## Conclusion

For women, access to information is a determinant factor as well as a motive force for accelerating change and development, the ultimate purpose of which is to achieve gender equality and full participation. The challenge to women is to unite and work together to ensure that a free flow of information urgently becomes a reality; that prejudicial attitudes about women and technology don't exclude them from participating in information technologies that can transform their lives.

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# Access to Information and Press Freedom in Ethiopia

**Mairegu Bezabih**

Expressions such as "information is power," the "information revolution," the "information highway" and "the information society" are becoming household phrases in the learned community of our time. They all signify that the meaning of the term information has come to mean a number of things other than what its conventional and traditional meaning has been in relation to the discipline of mass communication.

To people in the mass media, information is a disclosure or revelation of a new happening or occurrence. It is the acquisition of fresh knowledge which neither the media operators nor the public at large knew before. It is, therefore, the communication or dissemination of new knowledge. It is the knowledge which one would use for the purpose of notification, revelation or announcement of a new development.

As far as the profession of journalism is concerned, information is the newly acquired knowledge, or what we might call is the *raw material* which is processed to become news. It is, therefore, the single most important ingredient or input for the production of news and other genres in journalism, such as the feature, commentary and the editorial.

We in Journalism believe that behind every good news item "there is an accurate and dependable piece of information." It is obtained either by a reporter himself personally witnessing an event or by acquiring it from a dependable and authentic source. Information is the latest message or factual input to news and it is, therefore, an extremely essential component in the functioning and operation of the mass media. Information is what poet Maxime Kumin calls the "informing material," without which there can be no news.

To information science students, on the other hand, information is a social activity which deals with facilitating information transfer by

means of the new technology, such as the use of computers and other telecommunication appliances. It involves the "storing, retrieving and transmitting of knowledge, including words, numbers and pictures" from one place to another instantaneously by using the telecommunication media (Debons, Horne and Coneweth, 1988). Thanks to the latest development in telecommunication technology, today, programs produced for radio and television stations, editorial materials prepared for newspapers, internal mail for companies, as well as monetary transactions between major business firms can be transmitted electronically rather than by the conventional and traditional physical means (Vickery and Vickery, 1987).

Human beings are endowed with the inalienable right of freedom of expression. This right is as inherent and as fundamental as the right to live. Equally important is the right of access to information because, only if this right is realized could human beings be in a position to know what goes on around them. People need accurate and up-to-date information and statistical data to make the right decisions in conducting their businesses.

The objective of this paper is to discuss the issues of access to information and freedom of expression and to indicate the extent to which these two important rights are respected in Ethiopia.

According to the scanty literature available on the history of the press in Ethiopia, it has been barely a hundred years since the print media was introduced in this country. However formative this particular era may have been in molding the history of modern Ethiopia, it is sad to note that the progress made in the area of mass communication has not been very encouraging, to say the least. There are a number of factors that have been, and still are, responsible for retarding the growth and development of a free and independent press, both quality and quantity wise, in this country. To begin with, the speed with which the socioeconomic transformation has been going on in this country has been rather dismally slow. To this one should add the recurrent interruptions of the social and economic development efforts as a result of the political upheavals, ethnic conflicts as well as the repetitive man-made and natural adversities that have taken place at least in the last three decades. These and the other misfortunes that have undermined the development efforts of the country have undoubtedly had a negative impact on the progress and improvement

of the media both in terms of qualitative improvement and in fulfilling their responsibility as a social institution.

It is common knowledge that investors, tourists, non-governmental organizations, governments, institutions of higher learning, international organizations and the like all need accurate and up-to-date information in the pursuit of their respective objectives. The two cardinal points one must raise in this connection, therefore, are: (a) Is access to information easy in Ethiopia or, inversely, is information easily available in this country for those who need it? (b) Is there freedom of expression, or is press freedom a reality in Ethiopia?

Although freedom of expression is an inherent right, non-democratic governments have always wielded political and legal control over its exercise. In most Third World countries, such as ours, the fight for freedom of expression is still an issue that is top on our political agenda. At this stage of our history, in particular, when we are engaged in a democratization process, the development and promotion of a free press is a political priority that cannot be compromised. Free press is one of the major instruments for safeguarding the human, political and legal rights of the society. It is an effective tool for fighting corruption and nepotism, which are major social evils afflicting Ethiopian society today more than at any other time in its history.

## Access to Information in Ethiopia

As pointed out earlier, access to information is such a vast topic to be discussed exhaustively in such a limited work. In the last thirty years or so, the word information has begun to be used in different ways from its traditional meaning in the mass media discipline. Information, as it concerns the UNESCO-sponsored debate on "the new information order," relates to the inequality of the international flow of information in the developed world vis-à-vis the Third World countries. It also relates to the unequal distribution of the information technology, but particularly "the new international electronic" order between the developed and the developing countries "(Smith, 1980). While this is a wider scope issue and not related to the topic of this paper, I would like to limit my presentation to the problems encountered by, to borrow Frank Barton's (1979)

expression, "the endangered species" - my fellow Ethiopian journalists in their day-to-day effort to collect information for the mass media.

In Ethiopia, as indeed in many other countries in the developing world, access to information is to a great extent hampered by a number of factors. The most common constraints are probably cultural, educational, technological and political.

### *Cultural Constraints*

Secrecy is generally a highly revered social norm in Ethiopia. A person has to have a good reputation for being able to keep secrets to oneself in order to acquire public office or promotion. It is one of the important qualities that qualifies a person to be trusted and respected by his boss and his colleagues in an organization.

While informally people tend to demonstrate openness or frankness, especially among friends and colleagues, they exhibit some kind of secretiveness when they are approached formally. When someone approaches people by identifying himself as a government agent, a journalist or a simple researcher, secrecy is sure to invade the scene. As the old Amharic saying goes "silence is golden."

Even in ordinary social gatherings such as the *Ikub* (a kind of savings association among friends) or the *Iddir* (a unique social security scheme) or in other social meetings like wedding parties or gatherings to make condolences to the bereaved, people are reluctant to continue with a discussion at hand as soon as they identify a stranger sitting among them. This cultural inhibition may be the result of the age old deprivation of the people of their right to exercise freedom of expression by the successive despotic rulers.

### *Educational Constraints*

One of the most important benefits of education is that it creates awareness of the importance of information. In fact, education itself is the process of receiving and assimilating information with the view to building a body of knowledge that would gradually entitle one to be an educated professional. It is the sum total of information that one receives through formal and informal education, as well as the

experience that one acquires in life, that molds one's behavior and personality.

Culture has its influence on all aspects of life. In Ethiopia our traditional way of bringing up our children has not been appreciative of the value and importance of information. Children are not encouraged at home to receive or impart information in the course of discussions that are conducted between grown up members of their families or their guests. Those who show interest in such discussions are often told that such discourses are for grown-ups. They are frowned upon when they come with new information they have acquired at school or in their playgrounds and are strictly prohibited from releasing that information to others. In fact, even at this age of "information explosion," children in traditional Ethiopian families are being brought up under constant advice and warning that they should never receive information from or release same to strangers. Thus giving information about somebody's address or other details related to his family or his own identity by children is a "forbidden fruit."

Apart from the political and cultural pressures which hamper the free flow of information at all levels of social strata, it seems to me that the educational system does not provide adequate knowledge and technique on how to receive and disseminate accurate and up-to-date information.

### *Technological Constraints*

As one of the poorest countries in the world, Ethiopia has not been, and still is not, an important beneficiary of the modern information revolution. If we take the report of the Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia (CSA, 1995:204, 207) dealing with the availability of radio, telephone, and television sets the households of Addis Ababa alone, the picture is rather gloomy. Addis Ababa, with an estimated population of over four million, had a total of 266,200 household radios, 59,876 television sets and 66,804 telephone receivers. It must be stated here that Addis Ababa, being the capital city and the largest urban center in the country, had been the biggest recipient of the country's modern amenities until the demise of the Derg in May 1991. This figure may have changed substantially since that time because of the market-oriented economic policy being pursued and the decentralization process that has been going on in the

country. With decentralization, each regional state demands additional telephone lines and other similar facilities. With increased economic activities in each regional state, people have better opportunities to buy more radio and television sets than before. The establishment of regionally-sponsored radio and television stations can also induce people to purchase more radio and television sets.

One must also add here the role that can be played by regional governments in extending credit facilities to more households for the purchase of radio and TV sets to facilitate the politicization of a larger segment of the population.

### *Political Constraints*

Dissemination of public information in Ethiopia is a highly centralized phenomenon. All important information items, such as the appointment, transfer or dismissal of public officials, are top secret. It is disclosed through the public media either by the head of state or government or by their representatives. Messages received by Ethiopian leaders from foreign governments or discussions carried out by government officials with foreign delegations are given prominent headlines in the government media but the substance of the matter is never revealed. No department head within the state apparatus can give information even to journalists of the state media without at least consulting his immediate boss. And the boss in turn has to consult his superior before he gives the green light to his subordinate. Sometimes obtaining permission for government information to be published in the state media has to go through such a long chain of command upwards that the issue is either deliberately delayed or forgotten. If and when the go-ahead sign eventually comes, the issue has already lost its currency to be used by the media.

This is a particularly harmful practice in the area of diplomacy in particular because journalists in general and foreign journalists in particular cannot wait for reaction from Ethiopian officials to an event that affects the country. Until such reaction is released through the usual slow bureaucratic process, the other side gets the upper hand. This weakness is often reflected in Ethiopian diplomatic efforts and that is why Ethiopia is shown in a bad light in the international media in comparison with its adversaries.

While the state media have some bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining information from government agencies and the business sector, the private press have no access whatsoever to government information. Even the private sector are reluctant to give any information to the private press because there is a general belief that the private newspapers either distort or misrepresent facts and figures in their reporting.

## Press Freedom in the Past

Ethiopia has a recorded history of over 3000 years of independent existence. But its political system has been dominated for centuries by the despotic rule of absolute monarchs who kept the country under severe political stagnation, endemic poverty and social and cultural decadence. It is also reputed for being the only country in black Africa that has a literary tradition with its own alphabet dating back to many centuries. However, during this long history of independence, there has not been a single evidence to suggest that the people had fully or partially exercised their freedom of expression on matters affecting them.

Both the governments of Emperor Haile Sellassie and the *Derg* regime had inscribed lofty provisions in their respective constitutions regarding the peoples' right to freedom of expression, but exercising this fundamental right had never been acceptable to these regimes. Both governments used the state-financed media as their propaganda machinery. Haile Sellassie's government used the media for over half a century to legitimize the unquestionable authority of the monarchy and to obtain absolute obedience of the entire populace.

Frank Barton (1979), an expert on the press in Africa, once wrote, "In any international table of travesties of the press, Ethiopia would come very near the top. In the era of the emperor, the whole country's media were no more than a massive public relations exercise for Haile Sellassie. Under the Army it is the worst form of Marxist mouthpiece on the continent." In the early days of the *Derg*, the public media were allowed to entertain a certain degree of freedom of expression by conducting dialogues between various opposing political groups. A number of relevant national issues such as democracy, land tenure and the form of government the country should have were openly discussed in the public media. That period, which Ethiopian

journalists call "the golden days of Ethiopian journalism," was unfortunately short-lived. The *Derg* took over total control of the media by assigning its cadres to supervise the day-to-day operation of the journalists working in the state print- and electronics-media. The *Derg* used the media to denounce the semi-feudal imperial regime it had overthrown and to consolidate the power of its socialist-oriented military regime. The media was also effectively utilized for condemning imperialism and capitalism as ruthless systems of oppression and exploitation and for praising socialism as the most fair and just social system.

Barton's observation about the situation of the press in Ethiopia is to a great extent as true today as it was when he wrote the book in 1979. The government still controls the media that are financed by tax payers' money. And the state media still serve as the mouthpiece of the government in power, as a result of which it seems they lack credibility among the great majority of the people. The only difference that one can see today is that unlike the period of the Emperor Haile Sellassie or that of the *Derg*, the right to publish a private newspapers has become a reality.

It must be stressed here, however, that Third World governments and the free press are irreconcilable by their very nature. Despite the generous provisions in their constitutions and the democratic pronouncements often made by the leaders of most Third World countries, especially African nations, press freedom still has a long way to go. While the duty of the press is to caution governments of their duties, to criticize their faults and failures, and often tell the disagreeable truth, governments take the private press as their adversaries. This state of affairs is true in Ethiopia today as it is in most other developing countries. Until this attitude changes press freedom will remain a political right that is very difficult to achieve for many generations to come, and the much talked about democratization process will simply be a futile exercise.

## The Post -*Derg* Press in Ethiopia

The demise of the *Derg* regime in May 1991 and the takeover of power by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the subsequent pronouncements and declarations by the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE), particularly its adoption

of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, were welcomed by people in all walks of life as heralding a new era of the democratization of the press in Ethiopia.

In comparison with the two previous governments, the TGE appeared as the most democratic system the country has ever witnessed in its long history. Under the Transitional Period Charter, adopted in June 1991, the Transitional Government openly declared its endorsement of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which assures the democratic right of citizens to freedom of expression. This move, among other things, encouraged the open expression of divergent political outlooks and opinions to complement the democratization process of the country. For the first time in the country's history, the government opened the media to the private sector, following which some 50 magazines and more than two dozens of private weekly newspapers began to appear in the streets of Addis Ababa. Most of those publications claim neutrality and independence from any political organizations or groupings, although some have been seen persistently supporting and even advocating certain political party lines.

In addition to this encouraging gesture, the government proclaimed that the state media would be open to the general public to allow different political parties and groupings to freely discuss and debate their respective positions, including views opposed to the government. This position is congruent with the generally held opinion that, as institutions financed with tax payers' money, the public media in Ethiopia should be accountable to the people and assist in educating and informing the public with a view to expediting the socioeconomic transformation of the country.

Unfortunately, this seemingly democratic gesture did not materialize in practice. The government media, true to their history and tradition, soon plunged into following the same path left behind by both the Imperial and the *Derg* regimes. Both the state-owned print- and electronic-media continued their traditional practice of glorifying the new government while engaging in an orchestrated campaign of vilifying the last government. They even went to the extent of embarking on a campaign of discrediting some of the highly cherished historical and cultural values of the country in an attempt to please the new political rulers. They became the major propagators of the ethnic

politics of the government in contradistinction with many political views and opinions which vehemently disapproved of it. As was the case in the past, the state-owned media became simply the propaganda machinery of the new government, launching violent verbal attacks on those political or ethnic groups that are ill-favored by the ruling circle. This unprofessional and unethical campaign against those who hold opinions that are incongruent with those of the government has undermined the credibility of the state media and put into question the seriousness of the so-called democratization program of the government.

This growing distrust and apathy by the general public against the state media was further aggravated by the government's promulgation of Proclamation 34/92. Some independent observers view this proclamation, which the government refers to as the Press Law, as a contradictory legal document produced more for political expediency than out of a genuine desire to promote press freedom in Ethiopia. Its preamble articulates that "the existence, promotion and expansion of a free and strong press are prerequisites for the full translation into practice of freedom of expression." But contrary to this lofty principle, its operative articles are so prohibitive and punitive that, while Proclamation 34/92 gives with one hand, it seems to take away with the other.

As a columnist by the name of Andnet Tesfaye (1993) once argued, "the contradiction of Proclamation 34/92 is that it claims to establish what it calls 'freedom of expression' and 'free press' while at the same time making this dream impossible to realize by imposing some of the most undemocratic and heavy handed penalties for 'offenses' that are considered petty even by the existing laws of the nation".

## Conclusion

The right of free expression or press freedom has been, and still continues to be, a highly controversial issue in many countries. Even in the so-called most democratic countries absolute press freedom does not exist. The publisher and owner of a newspaper has control over the editorial content of his paper, not to speak of the invisible boss - the advertiser who indirectly exercises some kind of influence and control of the paper through his advertisement revenue, which is a substantial income that keeps the paper running. As

Professor Parenti once wrote, even the press in America, the country regarded as the most democratic in the world, is by and large one-sided. Parenti argued that the American press, generally speaking, favors the Republicans over the Democrats, the Anglo-Saxon Protestants over the others, especially the Hispanic and the Afro-Americans, majorities over minorities, men over women etc. (1986).

In the developing countries, government control is direct and simply a political one. On the one hand, the media may be totally owned and controlled by the state, as was the case during the reign of the Emperor and later during the *Derg* regime. On the other hand, the private press may also be allowed to exist as they do now, but they are required to strictly comply with the letter and spirit of a press law which is primarily devised to curtail press freedom, particularly to prohibit the media from projecting the government in power in bad light. A distinguished scholar in the so-called "new information order" once wrote:

> The sadness of the situation of the press in many of the developing societies lies in the fact that its journalists, unable to reach out for their potential, really lead wasted lives. The professional training of the West has led to a widening of the gap between desire and opportunity without offering them a realizable set of goals, which a newer generation of Asian and African journalists are now painfully beginning to work out for themselves (Smith 1980:155).

The status of the media in Ethiopia, both state-owned and the private, is characterized by a degree of low quality professionalism and lack of press freedom. Most of the practicing journalists in the government media or the private press lack sound educational background, professional training, adequate experience and exposure to the working practice of the media in the highly industrialized Western society. The private newspapers are so poorly organized and equipped that they do not make sufficient economic sense even to be elevated to the standards of newspapers in the neighboring countries let alone compete with the international standards of Western newspapers. Although the private press seem to champion the people's right to free expression, their inability to maintain an acceptable standard of the profession - their consistent and continued failure to report news factually and accurately - makes them dismally inferior, with hardly any hope for improvement and growth. In order to improve the

quality and standard of the private press a new breed of financially sound entrepreneurs will have to emerge. A substantial amount of capital has to be infused into this yet untapped business enterprise, which currently lacks capital, trained and experienced manpower as well as sound management.

As far as improving the state media is concerned, press freedom and the prevalence of state-owned and state-controlled media are incongruent for democracy and good governance. Only by privatizing the state media and by relaxing the state editorial control on the private media could press freedom be ensured and good governance become the order of the day in this troubled, ancient land.

It would not be appropriate to conclude this paper without quoting a paragraph from the Declaration of Windhoek, Namibia, a mass media symposium held from 29 April to 3 May 1991:

> Consistent with Article 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation and for economic development.

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# Closing Remarks

*By H. E. Ato Asrat Bulbula*
*Commissioner, Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission*

**Dear Symposium Participants**

**Mr. Chairman:**

It is indeed an honor to make a remark after such a vibrant discussion on information and its accessibility to the public. It is also comforting to note that realization of information and its accessibility to its seekers is not a mere saying but approachable as a commodity: sometimes as a commercial item, at others at no cost at all (as we know it!).

The discussion has also underlined on the need for information policy. I would like to inform you that there is now an exercise going on in this regard as per the recommendation made at the symposium on information at the ECA about sixteen months ago. The draft policy document will be out for public debate and beefing up sometime in August this year. It is my assumption that all of you will making sure that public access to information is assured in that document - not as a matter of mere inclusion but as a matter of public right!

It would also be proper to mention to you that with respect to information infrastructure, of which the policy environment is one, is being addressed at the highest level possible as one of the six major capacity-building areas of the country.

On all other issues, such as networking of higher education institutions, research institutions, health service systems, agricultural and development sectors, activities are proceeding at a reasonable pace, but not with the speed that all of us would like to see.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity and thanks to the organizers and Ato Dessalegn of Forum for Social Studies. And with this I declare this symposium closed!

# Development and Public Access to Information: A Symposium

***SEMEIN HOTEL, Thursday 25 March 1999***

**Schedule**

*Morning Session*

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| 9:00 - 9:15 | Registration |
| 9:15 - 10:00 | *Welcoming Address*<br><br>Opening Address by:<br><br>H. E. Ato Woldemichael Chemu, Minister of Information and Culture<br>and<br>H. E. Ato Neway Gebreab, Chief Economic Advisor, Office of the Prime Minister<br><br>Statement by Mr. Michael Meier, Resident presentative, Friederick Ebert Stiftung |
| 10:00 - 10:30 | Coffee Break |
| 10:30 - 10:15 | Access to and Usage of Information Technology<br>*Ato Daniel Admassie*<br>*Manger, OMNITECH* |
| 10:50 - 11:10 | Private Enterprise & Public Access to Information<br>*Ato Berhane Mewa*<br>*General Manager*<br>*Processing of Poly Industrial Chemicals* |

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| 11:10 - 12:20 | General Discussion |
| 12:30 - 1:30 | LUNCH |
| *Afternoon Session* | |
| 1:30 - 1:50 | Development Planning and Access to Information<br>*Ato Getachew Adem*<br>*Ministry of Economic Development & Coop.* |
| 1:50 - 2:10 | Social Science Research & Access to Information<br>*Dr. Yeraswork Admassie*<br>*Sociology Dept., Addis Ababa University* |
| 2:10 -2:30 | Historical Research & Access to Public Information<br>*Prof. Bahru Zewde*<br>*History Department, Addis Ababa University* |
| 2:30 - 3:15 | GENERAL DISCUSSION |
| 3:15 - 3:40 | Coffee |
| 3:40 - 4:00 | Women and Public Access to Information *Wzo. Alemseged Herouy Senior Journalist and Member of SELMA* |
| 4:00 - 4:20 | Access to Information and Press Freedom<br>*Ato Mairegu Bezabih*<br>*Senior Journalist*<br>*Lecturer in Journalism, AAU* |
| 4:20 - 5:00 | GENERAL DISCUSSION |
| 5:00 - 5:10 | Closing Address by H. E. |

Ato Asrat Bulbula,
Commissioner, Ethiopian
Science and Technology
Commission

5:30 **RECEPTION**

# List of Prticpants

Abebe Demissie
IBCR
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Aberra Saule
Ethiopian Television
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Adeye Abebe
Christian Relief &Development Association
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Ahmed Addissie
Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Aklilu Kidanu
Miz-Hasab Research Centre
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Alemayehu Gedda
Economics Department
Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Alemseged Herouy
SELMA: Women's Consultancy and Communication Service
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Alula Pankhurst
Deparmtment of Sociology
Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Amare Teklu
International Livestock Research Institute (ILLIRI)
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Angela Walker
World Food Program
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Asrat Bulbula
Ethiopian Science & Technology Commission
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Awsaboo Shifferaw
Private Enterprise Association
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Bahru Zewde
History Department
Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Belay Tegene
Geography Department
Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Berhane Mewa
Processing of Poly Industrial Chemicals
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Bill Fraser
Governance Program
Department for International Development (DFID)
British Embassy
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Bob Hensen
Royal Netherlands Embassy
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Daniel Admassie
OMNITECH
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Degefe Tolossa
Institute of Development Research
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Dessalegn Rahmato
Forum for Social Studies

Duretti Haji
German Development Service (DED)
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Elfenesh Demissie
Ethiopian Human Rights Commssion (ERCHO)
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Etalem Mengistu
Forum for Social Studies
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fekade Azeze
Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Frances Guy
British Embassy
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Frank Hanes
CIDA
Canadian Embassy
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Getachew Adem
Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation (MEDAC)
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Getachew Birru
School of information Sciences in Africa
Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Girma Damte
Ministry of Agriculture
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Gizachew Woldeyes
Ethiopian Science &Technology Commision
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Hailu Habtu
Centre France des Etudes
Etioipenne
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Helen Bekele
Austrian Embassy
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Hirut Befecadu
SELMA: Women's Consultancy
and Communication Service
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Kaleb Tameru
Ethiopian Television
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Kifle Wadjo
Horn of Africa Peace Centre
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Konjit Fekade
Faculty of Engineering
Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Lishan Adam
Information Division
United Nations Economic
Commission for Africa
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Lissane Yohannes
USAID
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mairegu Bezabih
EC Delegation
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Makda Taffese
Christian Relief & Development
Association(CRDA)
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Meaza Ashenafi
Ethiopian Women Lawyers
Association
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Meheret Ayenew
Ethiopian Management
Professional Association
Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Melaku Tegegn
PANOS
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Melaku Demissie
Capital Newspaper
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Melaku Legesse
Ethipian Trade Point
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Michael Meirs
FRIEDRICH EBERT
STIFTUNG
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

ıion Milane
ıhiopian Investment Authority
Addis Ababa Ethiopia

Minas Hiruy
Hope Enterprises
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Morice Dideir
European Community
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mulugetta Aklilu
Ministry of Information and Culture
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Neway Gebreab
Prime Minster's Office
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Paula Heinon
Sociology Department
Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Ruth Abraham
United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Sebsebe Demissew
Science Faculty
Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Shiberu Tedla
Eco-Consult
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Shiferaw Bekele
History Department
Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Shiferaw Jamo
Oromia Office
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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History Department
Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Solomon Girma
ADNP
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Solomon Kassaye
Good Samaritan
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Solomon Mulugeta
College of Social Sciences
Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Steffen Tillander
Embassy of Sweden
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia