

# Ethiopia: The Unhealthy Nation

By  
Lemlem Tsegaw

As the American saying goes, “when it rains it pours” or the Ethiopian saying, “ke enkirt laye jero degif,” Ethiopians who are city dwellers were suffering from short of electricity, adequate medical care, and other items to meet their basic needs. In fact whether they live in rural Ethiopia or in the various cities, it is reported that people are going with empty stomach even at times taking turns to eat daily. Again for the last few weeks, it is reported that an acute epidemic is savagely affecting city dwellers many in Addis Ababa, read Mr. Peter Heinlein’s article cited below. The people of Ethiopia are not only gravely impacted by the current epidemic but by a system of governance that is poorly run to meet their daily needs including their safety.

This article will attempt to demonstrate the bigger picture, how the current Ethiopian condition is a system condition rather than a symptomatic epidemic.

“Thousands Felled by Diarrhea Outbreak in Ethiopian Capital ... People have been lining up at hospitals around Addis Ababa for more than a week to get help...U.N. Humanitarian Affairs office issued a bulletin expressing extreme concern that some residents, particularly children, might be especially vulnerable to infection because of malnutrition. Nationwide, estimates of people in need of emergency food aid have risen steadily in recent months to 6.2 million.” - Peter Heinlein, Addis Ababa, 31 August 2009. Also, Dr. Daddi Jima, deputy director general of the Ethiopian Health and Nutrition Research Institute is quoted to say that current endemic is ‘because of poor hygienic situation due to lack of enough water resource distribution, and low coverage of latrine use...happens every year in this country...’ (VOANEWS.Com)

According to World Health Organization (WHO) health is defined as, “Health a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” – ([www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/ac/00/slides/3591s1a/tsld016.htm](http://www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/ac/00/slides/3591s1a/tsld016.htm)). To make the Ethiopians healthy, the current government has published its

mission as, “to reduce morbidity, mortality and disability as well improve the health status of the Ethiopian people...” - Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH) - Ethiopia. ([www.moh.gov.et](http://www.moh.gov.et))

Given the WHO’s definition of health, is the mission statement of the Ethiopia’s FMoH adequate and effective? Such question is very important and need to be addressed within the context of health as defined by WHO. Furthermore, to evaluate the level of wellness/health of Ethiopians, this author suggests applying the MO Ibrahim’s Index of African governance ([www.moibrahimfoundation.org/the-index.asp](http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/the-index.asp)), which is:

- Safety and Security
- Rule of Law, Transparency and Corruption
- Participation and Human Rights
- Sustainable Economic Development
- Human Development

### **Statement of the problem**

Ethiopia is a country with a long history that survived both domestic and foreign conflicts including endemic events since biblical time. Today; however, Ethiopia is a victim of its own governance that imposed on her unhealthy conditions. Some of the unhealthy objective conditions/current problems are but not limited to:

- Undemocratic and closed system with corruption at all levels of governance, and who is dependent on international charity economic system
- Lack of independent Institutions to reflect the diversity of interests which promotes representation and as check and balance of power
- Tyrant and Ethnic bandstands states – ethnic “killil-istan”
- Poverty, old and new type of diseases, and increased illiterate population
- leadership vacuum, self distractive behavior in the part of the political elites, and lack of representation of the majority
- Fragmented contending political groups...etc.

## **What needs to be done?**

Given the above highlighted complex and surmount problems a new thinking, and new interventions is required. However, this author does not claim to have answers to all listed problems and acknowledge this short article could not offer complete alternative approaches but attempts to set a stage for interventions that could be entertained for both short term and long term solutions including by identifying responsible parties, who ought to implement and evaluate outcomes.

### **Possible Solutions:**

#### 1. Short term

- Non-political individuals, religious leaders and community leaders must come to gather and set guidelines on the issue of how the moral underpinning institutions and leaders to seek the truth and make individual leaders accountable. Political groups to brainstorm among themselves in order to resolve their difference to uphold the Ethiopian people wishes. No precondition terms allowed
- Women must be represented as equal in numbers excluding those who are members of any political groups unless they represent a given political party in lieu of the representative men. It is critical; however, women must step-up (demand) and take their place in society as political, business, social etc. leaders and challenge their male counterpart not to stand on the way. The Rwanda parliament can be taken as an example of stepping up. It is not number necessarily but power, it is not being a victim but knocking down doors, they should take it not expect to be given. Otherwise it would be used as a political game by filling seats.
- Intellectuals, those who are expert in social sciences must form independent advocacy institution and study methodologies must conduct an objective research and get the fact out based on safety and security..... perception survey/a comparative study of rural and urban dwellers in areas of - Safety and Security , rule of Law, Transparency and Corruption, participation and Human Rights,

## Sustainable Economic Development, and Human Development and design a program to mitigate the negative findings

### 2. Long Term

- Reframe the structure of the government to deliver good governance and be transparent. There are some model of governance such as Botswana and other that could be used as a model, [www.gov.bw](http://www.gov.bw) and [usgovinfo.about.com/od/rightsandfreedom/s/u/gov101.htm](http://usgovinfo.about.com/od/rightsandfreedom/s/u/gov101.htm) as a case in point.
- The judicial branch should be independent so that it will not be packed by the given residing political power
- Have apolitical national army whose commander in chief is the current president of the country (no need of who should be the commander, just apolitical)
- A constitution must be a living document to serve Ethiopia as a nation with a transparent representation that reflects the wishes of the people not as a toll of an interest group, ethnic centered or otherwise.
- Reform the land ownership system – privatization must be a legitimate legislative matter not a political party decision to the benefits of its liking but public good
- Transparency is to be expected at all level of governance and should be measured by transparent index like MO Ibrahim's Index of African governance ([www.moibrahimfoundation.org/the-index.asp](http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/the-index.asp)), which
- The international community must be educated about the lack of rule of law in Ethiopia that is, in ways mutually beneficial. What is good for the developed world is good for Ethiopia and are expected to conduct their partnership process as such
- The reframed government will be mandated by law not to initiate war or interfere in its neighbors' internal affairs but promote the commonwealth of African nations

## Conclusion

For the nation of Ethiopia to be healthy, WHO's broad definition of health, "Health a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." –

([www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/ac/00/slides/3591s1a/tsld016.htm](http://www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/ac/00/slides/3591s1a/tsld016.htm) must be the guiding light. "Ethiopians deserve a transparent and accountable governance, and [can create) such a system that empower the people to exercises their inherited rights and liberties." - (Transparent Governance Watch) Furthermore, it is critical for Ethiopians/ friends of Ethiopians that good governance at all levels of the reframed government is a key to get out of the misery the country is facing at present. To that end the following list of players is suggested:

- Establish a formal advocacy empowering individuals – empower women (currently parliament members 42 women vs. 505 men)
- institutionalize Transparency
- create a Public Shame system and legal challenges to hold perpetrators accountable
- Create Independent investigative body and independent judiciary system that enforces the law and imposes negative /costly consequences upon the perpetrator

Who ought to bring the above suggestions into reality? Ethiopians are the main players. For example, political parties must educate the mass on the subject of citizen's role (responsibility and accountability) concerning corruption and how to get ready for leadership, and advocate for women issue that include education, trade, famine, media, agriculture, technology, than simply political issues. Furthermore, non-political movements must focus on specific institutions and their managers to explore facts about the damages they caused such as economic crime against the public, land ownership, bribing officials/practicing corruption that disables the public or negatively affects the public interest...etc. Others like Ethiopian- Americans including the young professionals, before being lured to invest and wanted to invest, they must do research from independent sources than relying on the corrupt system. Furthermore, they need to weigh the risk involved to invest in a corrupt system, and demand the need for transparency institutions before any

involvement. They also need to educate themselves about the type of laws in place, and negotiable tools used such as, transparency in investment, trade, expenditure, which is behind it...,etc.

Also, associations such as Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, International Ethiopian Women Association, and in general intellectuals in the Diasporas must create solidarity with African organized groups to voice their concern without fear by using facts such as officials' conflict of interest. Furthermore, identifying and listing public institutions such as NGOs owned by governing officials, agencies and their owners who literally export women to the Middle East, instead of advocating against the atrocity of the Arabs is critical. It is incumbent upon women who are in a position of influence to go after the source agencies and the owners including the various adapting agencies (22 at present) and those who are marginalizing and destroying the Ethiopian family structure.

Last but not least players are the international community which includes; Human right watch, Amnesty international, supporters...etc., need to focus on facts and make those who fund and enable the regime to be accountable. It will be relevant to go after the government human right commission and its managers instead of complaining for the PM and to demand fund recipients accountability by articulating their expectation of transparency on expenditures. When all is said and done, for Ethiopia to be healthy there ought to be a paradigm shift and reframing of the federal government structures, "... He who cannot change the very fabric of his thought will never be able to change reality." - Anwar Sadat

© Lemlem Tsegaw, September 1, 2009, the author could be reached, at ([ltsegaw@gmail.com](mailto:ltsegaw@gmail.com))