

ETHIOPIAN COMMUNITY IN ITALY

No one could miss the significant role the Diaspora could play in achieving sustainable development. Taking this into account, the Ethiopian government has been doing its level best to engage the Diaspora in the country's over all development endeavors. Members of the Ethiopian Diaspora like all other Ethiopians have become beneficiaries of the fruits of development.

In addition to the consistent effort of the government to lure the Diaspora, the role of the Ethiopian community members themselves, is significant in persuading Ethiopians to come to their country and undertake various activities.

In this respect, the Association of Ethiopian Community in Italy (ECI) has been carrying out various activities to encourage Ethiopians living in Italy to get involved in development activities in the country. Dr. Tarekegne Teka, president of the Association of Ethiopian Community in Italy spoke about the activities, which have been undertaken by his association. Dr. Tarekegne has served as Assistant Director General of FAO. He worked in different capacities for over 30 years before retiring in 1990.

Here is an excerpt from an interview he gave to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Newsletter.

Newsletter - *When was the Association of Ethiopian Community in Italy founded?*

Dr. Tarekegne - The Association of the Ethiopian Community in Italy was established in 1990 with the aim of contributing its part in socio-economic development endeavors of Ethiopia.

Diaspora Forum

Newsletter - *What initiated you to form the Association?*

Dr. Tarekegne - Actually, without being organized in an association, we were engaged in supporting our compatriots at different times. For instance, during the great famine of Ethiopia in 1984, we organized an ad hoc committee to mobilize resources to our compatriots who were suffering from the effects of the drought. This committee proved to us that we could cooperate as Ethiopians living abroad to do something concrete to help our people and country. Consequently, we organized the Ethiopian community members and formed the Ethiopian Association to help victims of famine. Then, in due process, a lot of young Ethiopians began to come to Italy and they were facing different problems. So, we decided to help them by imparting information about the host country, their rights and obligations as foreigners.

Newsletter - *Do you give information on the current situation in Ethiopia to members of the Diaspora?*

Dr. Tarekegne - Yes. First of all, our association is open to all Ethiopians regardless of their political views. We do not discriminate against people for having different opinions or positions. And we all meet at the Ethiopian embassy and have discussions on the social, economic and political situations in the country. In these discussions, we always try to give the Ethiopian community members information on what is really going on in our country. In this respect, for instance, we make available information to the Ethiopian community members about opportunities for investment, tourism and other matters of interest. The number of Ethiopians who want to know about the existing investment opportunities has been rising. Our Association helps Ethiopians get in contact with the Ethiopian embassy and benefit from the services it renders. As a result, following the contact, a lot of them have come and witnessed the progress registered and others are planning to do so.

Diaspora Forum

Newsletter - *How would you describe the Association's relation with the Ethiopian embassy in Rome?*

Dr. Tarekegne - There is a strong relation between the association and the Ethiopian embassy in Rome. In the first place the embassy has assisted us a lot when we formed the association. Secondly, it always provides us information about our country and we also organize discussion forums in the compound of the embassy. So, we have been working closely with the embassy.

Newsletter - *Do you have a message for the Ethiopian diaspora?*

Dr. Tarekegne - My message is now that the Ethiopian new millennium has brought to us an important opportunity to change our image, it must be an occasion to exploit to narrow our differences and work for the prosperity of our country and its people. The Ethiopian Diaspora must scale up its involvement in the country's development efforts. We Ethiopians, who live abroad, should contribute our part for the betterment of the life of our people.