

Diaspora Forum

The Ethiopian Diaspora: Untapped Resources to Enhancing Development

The number of Ethiopians living abroad is estimated to be around 1.5 million. They include skilled professionals, researchers, businessmen, employees of international organizations and many others. Until sixteen years ago, the Ethiopian Diaspora never had any opportunity to come home even for an ordinary family visit let alone to contribute to development efforts in the country.

The downfall of the Dergue regime provided a new perception about and in their the Diaspora. Every Ethiopian living abroad has the unrestricted right to come home. In deed, that everyone is also duty bound to play his/her due share in the country's development endeavours; the struggle against poverty, backwardness and the HIV/AIDS endemic. It has been widely acknowledged that progress and democratization can only materialize through the participation of all social forces of the country. This includes the Ethiopian Diaspora.

There is no dispute that the government alone cannot produce progress and development. Well aware of this fact, the Government has created suitable conditions for the Ethiopian Diaspora to come home and participate in the development endeavours of the country. As a result, the numbers of the Ethiopian Diaspora coming back to the country and working for the betterment of the nation is increasing from day-to-day. The foreign currency flowing to the country in the form of remittances is also on the increase. Returning Ethiopians are also important because they come back home with knowledge, experience and various technological skills that are badly needed. According to a report by the Ethiopian Investment Commission for example, Ethiopians and Foreign Nationals of Ethiopian Origin have invested USD 865,174,560.47 (7,483,760.00 Birr) on development projects which in such sectors as agriculture, construction, health, hotels and tourism, manufacturing, real estate, trade and other business areas.

The government on its part has taken into account the importance of the Diaspora and has devised and implemented privilege packages to benefit other citizens of Ethiopian origin. The packages of privileges include the import into the country of personal effects and machinery free of taxation; the right to acquire plots of land with or without leases for the construction of residential houses, the issuing special identity card to people of Ethiopian origin that enables them enjoy all the rights accorded to Ethiopian nationals residing in the country.

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According to available information the number of people who have received investment licenses in the last three months has shown a dramatic increase. In July 2007 alone 43 investors took at investment licenses. This increase is largely due to the Ethiopian nationals who have returned in great numbers to celebrate the new Millennium with their compatriots.

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ethiopia is making every effort to realize fundamental changes in its bid to establish a democratic order and ensure rapid development. In line with the national vision, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs mainly focuses on economic diplomacy, pivotal to ensure Ethiopia's national interest and security in the diplomatic arena; the Ministry pursues "diplomacy for development" with all the resources at its disposal.

Vision

The Ministry's vision is building a country that plays an exemplary role in regional as well as Africa's peace, economic development and integration, and raising the number of development partners.

Mission

Implementing successful economic diplomacy based on careful consideration and analysis of all available options for the realization of Ethiopia's national interests.

Motto

Diplomacy for Development, Democracy and Peace.

Some of the Major Activities and Services Provided by the Ministry

With the view to contributing its share in realizing speedy economic development, a democratic order and stability in the country, the Ministry focuses on the following major activities:

1. Engages in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy to promote, advance and defend the country's national interest.

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2. Conducts public diplomacy to ensure that the country's domestic strategies in the fight against poverty receive wide and effective support internationally, both from governments and civil society; and carries out public relations activities among citizens and nationals so that the country's diplomacy stands in strong domestic support.
3. In collaboration with, different government offices, recruits and provides the necessary support to potential investors, promotes trade and tourism and solicits additional development finance and technical support.
4. Extends support to Ethiopians in the Diaspora and foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin to bolster their participation in the democratic and development endeavors of the country.

Major Services of the Ministry

1. Dispensing equitable and efficient consular services:
 - Verification of incoming and outgoing documents.
 - Issuing of diplomatic and service passports.
 - Issuing of diplomatic as well as service visas.
2. Rendering different services to the Ethiopian Diaspora and foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin.