SUPPORT TO DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES

Financial support has been extended to disadvantaged families in the sub-zones of Gala-Nefhi, Mai-Temenai, Akria and Paradizo, Central region.

According to report, in Sela’e Daero administrative area, Gala-Nefhi sub-zone, over 355 thousand Nakfa was distributed to disadvantaged families in the area, in Mai-Temenai sub-zone 67 thousand Nakfa, in Akria sub-zone over 139 thousand Nakfa and in Adi-Sogdo, Paradizo sub-zone, 69 thousand Nakfa.

Similarly, 149 thousand Nakfa contributed by Tesfa Sport Club was disbursed to war disabled veterans in 11 sub-zones in the Central region.

ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Two patients have been diagnosed positive for COVID-19 in tests carried out on August 20 at Adhara Quarantine Centre in Gash Barka Region.

The two patients are nationals who returned from Sudan recently.

On the other hand, thirteen patients who were receiving medical treatment in hospitals in Gash Barka Region have recovered fully and were released from these facilities.

The total number of recovered patients to-date stands at 274.

The total number of confirmed cases in the country to-date is 306.

Ministry of Health
Asmara
20 August 2020

NEW SCHOOLS UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN FORTO SAWA SU-ZONE

Two new elementary schools are under construction in Ribda and Aleti administrative areas, Forto Sawa sub-zone. The construction of the schools is expected to play significant role in reinforcing the teaching and learning process in the area, Mr. Abubakar Idris, administrator of the sub-zone indicated.

Each of the schools that are being constructed with the cooperation of the Ministry of Education branch in Gash Barka region and the Western Command Development Front include 4 class rooms, administrative and teacher’s offices, as well as storehouse and toilet. 90% of the construction of the schools has been finalized, the report added.

Pointing out that the progress of education has been hampered in Forto Sawa sub zone due to remoteness of villages, nomadic lifestyle, and backward traditions among others, Mr. Abubakar Idris, administrator of the sub zone said that thanks to the integrated efforts being made, encouraging results are being registered and that students’ school enrolment is on the increase.

Documents of Forto Sawa sub zone indicate that there are 28 educational institutions including two boarding schools ranging from preschool to high school.

CONSTRUCTION OF DAMS IN ADI-KESHI AND ADI-GEBRU

Two newly constructed micro-dams in Adi-Keshi and Adi-Gebru, Central region, were inaugurated on 15 and 16 August.

The dams that have the capacity of holding from 35 to 50 thousand cubic meters of water will have significant contribution in ensuring water supply both to the residents and livestock as well as in the development of irrigation farming in the areas.

The project coordinators Eng. Abel Woldegabir and Eng. Abraham Daniel commended the strong participation the residents remonstrated during the construction.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Mr. Zerit Tewoldebrhan, managing director in the Central region, indicating the significance of the dams in the development effort in general and agricultural development in particular, said that the 124 dams and micro-dams in the Central region have the capacity of holding 74 million cubic meters of water.

The residents on their part expressed readiness to expand vegetables and fruits farming and play due part in stabilizing the markets beyond their areas.

COMMUNITY BASED SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION ACTIVITY

The residents of the sub-zones of Afabet and Shieb, Northern Red Sea region, are conducting soil and water conservation as well as construction of water diversion schemes.

Accordingly, the residents of Afabet sub-zone are engaged in the construction of terraces, water diversion schemes as well in renovation of dirt roads that have been damaged due to flooding.

Similarly, the residents of Shieb sub-zone are also engaged in similar activity with a view to enrich the soil and underground water there by boosting agricultural production.

Ms. Asmeret Berhane, Governor of the Northern Red Sea Region, called on agriculture experts to come up with permanent solution to the damaged water diversion schemes in Shieb sub-zone.

Ms. Asmeret made the call during an inspection tour she conducted to the sub-zone on 13 August to oversee the flood damaged water diversion schemes. Farmers of the sub-zone are making efforts to renovate the damaged water diversion schemes on their own.

The Governor also commended the farmers for their strong effort in soil and water conservation activities as well as renovation of water diversion schemes.

Indicating that farmers in Shieb sub-zone are involved in constructing water diversion schemes with the view to increase agricultural produce, Mr. Abubakar Ibrahim, administrator of the sub-zone, said that the damage is beyond the capacity of the farmers and called for machinery support.

Mr. Hasen Jimie, head of the Office of Agriculture in the sub-zone on his part, stating that 24 water diversion schemes have been damaged due to heavy flooding, said that only 660 hectares of the potential 8272 hectares of farm land is being cultivated.

Two patients have been diagnosed positive for COVID-19 in tests carried out on August 20 at Adhara Quarantine Centre in Gash Barka Region.

The two patients are nationals who returned from Sudan recently.

On the other hand, thirteen patients who were receiving medical treatment in hospitals in Gash Barka Region have recovered fully and were released from these facilities.

The total number of recovered patients to-date stands at 274.

The total number of confirmed cases in the country to-date is 306.

Ministry of Health
Asmara
20 August 2020

SUPPORT TO DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES

Financial support has been extended to disadvantaged families in the sub-zones of Gala-Nefhi, Mai-Temenai, Akria and Paradizo, Central region.

According to report, in Sela’e Daero administrative area, Gala-Nefhi sub-zone, over 355 thousand Nakfa was distributed to disadvantaged families in the area, in Mai-Temenai sub-zone 67 thousand Nakfa, in Akria sub-zone over 139 thousand Nakfa and in Adi-Sogdo, Paradizo sub-zone, 69 thousand Nakfa.

Similarly, 149 thousand Nakfa contributed by Tesfa Sport Club was disbursed to war disabled veterans in 11 sub-zones in the Central region.

ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Two patients have been diagnosed positive for COVID-19 in tests carried out on August 20 at Adhara Quarantine Centre in Gash Barka Region.

The two patients are nationals who returned from Sudan recently.

On the other hand, thirteen patients who were receiving medical treatment in hospitals in Gash Barka Region have recovered fully and were released from these facilities.

The total number of recovered patients to-date stands at 274.

The total number of confirmed cases in the country to-date is 306.

Ministry of Health
Asmara
20 August 2020
Memories

(Part I)

Dr. Fikrejesus Amanhazion

I recently read Billion Tenesgen’s article, “How must Sawa have been in 2020”, which was featured in the last edition of Eritrea Profile (published on August 19). I found the piece extremely insightful and very enjoyable. Eloquent and well-written, it presented a detailed and interesting perspective of life in Sawa. It also evoked a flood of memories of my own experiences at the institution. As I was reading, I found myself being transported back into time, reliving some of the things she discussed and also being reminded of so many other things that made my Sawa journey so special.

Taking the cue from Billion’s recent contribution, the following article briefly shares some of my memories of Sawa. I should point out that many of the experiences I discuss here are of things that are often forgotten, less recognized, or do not instantly come to mind. Additionally, with so many different things to share about my experience, I thought it would be a bit easier to “organize” and present my memories alphabetically. Thus, the following presents the first part of my experiences, with entries categorized from the letter A through to the letter H. Part II and Part III will be presented in the next several editions of Eritrea Profile.

A is for Addes: One of the staples of the Eritrean diet is addes, or lentils. The same is true of meals at Sawa. Addes is extremely easy to prepare, healthy, full of protein, and very tasty. Personally, I had to ensure that I always had a small towel and a large cup of cold water to drink nearby, since addes was usually prepared with different types of spices (including red hot berbere, the undisputed king of the spices) that left me sweating, open-mouthed, and panting.

B is for Bitsainet: Bitsainet can be roughly translated as “camaraderie” or “comradeship”. In many ways, it is a term that perfectly encapsulates much of our time in Sawa. We do pull through everything – classes, lessons, assignments, work, exercises, drills, and chores – together. Moreover, we make sure to support and take care of the person next to us, calm in the knowledge that our comrades will likewise support and take care of us. Bitsainet malet!

C is for Cultural Nights: Among my most favorite things in Sawa are the cultural nights. Several times per month we all gather for live music, dance, poetry, and drama performances. Generally, these are conducted by students although special guests from around the country sometimes visit in order to perform. Cultural nights, which showcase our country’s rich history, diversity, identity, and culture are about far more than “just” fun and entertainment. They also have other important benefits.

For one, they help to instill within us a strong sense of pride in being Eritrean. As put by the prominent Black social activist and civil rights campaigner Malcolm X decades ago, “Just as a tree without roots is dead, a people without history is dead, a people without history is a people without roots.” Additionally, getting to know the colorful culture. For me, seeing different aspects of our country’s understanding by exposing us all to social cohesion, tolerance, and equality – my

D is for Dikas: In Sawa, dikas, or sleep, is deep and peaceful. In fact, I don’t think I have ever slept as well anywhere else as I did in Sawa. It may sound trite but “like a baby” is a pretty accurate description about dikas in Sawa.

E is for Equality: The promotion of equality is a fundamental goal in Eritrea, and Sawa is a key part of achieving that aim. For example, Sawa promotes equitable access and equality of opportunity for all, which is important for traditionally marginalized or minority groups (such as females, low-income individuals, and others). Equality is reflected in other ways as well; in Sawa, for instance, everyone is treated equally, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status or other distinctions.

F is also for Fisa: When you hear the sound of the fisa, or whistle, it means that you have to quickly get to where you need to be – in line, class, study, chores, exercises, field, or a meeting. During the traditional midday nap, the fisa serves as an alarm clock, telling you it is time to wake up.

G is for Gash Barka: Sawa is located within Zoba Gash Barka. There are six zobas, or provinces, in Eritrea: Anseba, Macekel, Debub, Gash Barka, Northern Red Sea, and Southern Red Sea. Gash Barka is located in the west of the country. In addition to Sawa, other big towns and cities in Gash Barka include Barentu, Agodert, Haikota, Tesseeni, Goluj, Shambuko, and Omhajer. Of course, it should not be forgotten that Badme, one of the triggers for the destructive 1998-2000 war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and which remains under illegal occupation by foreign forces, is also located in Gash Barka.

Interestingly, shortly after Eritrea’s independence, the country’s existing administrative regions were restructured into the current six zobas. This was done in order to promote socio-economic development, ensure equitable distribution of and access to resources and services and eliminate harmful divisions along ethno-linguistic or religious lines. The great importance of this latter focus is highlighted by the mayhem, upheaval, and terrible conflicts related to sharp ethnic divisions and hatred currently occurring within many parts of Africa.
Eritrea’s National Service – A National rite of Passage

Sara Tesfay

Thousands of Eritrean youth, who make up the 33rd round of National Service (NS), completed the last year of high school and military training, and added to the large pool of their compatriots who graduated before them. The annual graduation activities that take place at the Sawa Training Center keep both young and old, those both in the country, and in the Diaspora who are unable to participate in person, glued to the television screen to watch the ceremonies. The fact that the much maligned training center was not interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic engulfing the globe, and was able to complete its programs with even greater results, added yet another example of its significance, as a source of resilience of the society at large. The two events, graduation from the technical school and completion of the specific round of national service, are important national celebrations, the magnitude of which is annually evidenced by the presence of President Isaias Afwerki, and other senior Government and Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) and the public at large although the format was somewhat adjusted this year for obvious reasons.

While the people of Eritrea celebrate the NS, it has become the target of intense vilification and misinformation, and remains the most maligned institution. At the UN Human Rights Council hearing on 16 July 2020, the NSP seemed to be the issue mentioned the most by those who insist on misrepresenting Eritrea. The statement read by Ms. Nathalie Olijslager the representative of the Netherlands was very telling. She said: “...On behalf of the core group consisting of Austria, Australia, Belgium, France, Germany and Netherlands, I have the pleasure to introduce Resolution L.8 on the human rights situation in Eritrea...last year the original sponsors were no longer in a position to present this initiative, the core group stepped in...we are worried with the continued practice of indefinite national service...”

That sentiment was echoed by the representative of Germany, speaking on behalf of the European Union, who also flogged concern for the “indefinite national service”. As for the original sponsors, acting on behalf of the TPLF regime in Ethiopia were Somalia, Djibouti, and Nigeria- the “African faces”. With the TPLF regime removed, the dynamics in the region have changed, hence the change in the stance of the original sponsors. It and individuals that are referenced in the Special Rapporteurs reports and which received funding from western agencies will suffice. Labeling them “human rights defenders” will not hide their true agendas.

Unfortunately, the Special Rapporteurs have not been able to maintain their independence from the piper, and their reports remain a compilation of unsubstantiated allegations made by the piper and their anonymous informants. Eritreans have witnessed these conferences, wherein groups and individuals opposed to the Eritrean government are given platform to disseminate unsubstantiated allegations. Eritreans know about the various campaigns, demonstrations and petitions organized by these individuals and groups, who do not enjoy the support of the majority of Eritreans in the country, or in the Diaspora, where their regime change agenda, using human rights as a pretext, was dead on arrival. As the popular adage says, “he who pays the piper picks the tune”, so it is no wonder then that their reports do not reflect the truth about Eritrea - they are and remain out of tune with developments on the ground. So the chances of the Council receiving accurate and substantiated reports on Eritrea remains a pipe dream- inted perspective.

National Service did not begin with Eritrea, and there are many countries that have such programs, and each with its own historical background. As in Eritrea, programs like the National Youth Service (NYS) in Kenya, National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria, and Umuganda in Rwanda, are meant to help foster national unity, promote development in neglected areas, and foster understanding in ethnically and religiously diverse populations. But each has its own unique history and its programs vary. Some have a military component, and some do not. Eritrea believes that in addition to basic skills, academics, technical, discipline, and citizenship, it is the National Youth Service did not begin with Eritrea, and there are many countries that have such programs, and each with its own historical background. As in Eritrea, programs like the National Youth Service (NYS) in Kenya, National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria, and Umuganda in Rwanda, are meant to help foster national unity, promote development in neglected areas, and foster understanding in ethnically and religiously diverse populations. But each has its own unique history and its programs vary. Some have a military component, and some do not. Eritrea believes that in addition to basic skills, academics, technical, discipline, and citizenship, it is the youth that, in all the 20 years since the signing of the Algiers Agreements between Eritrea and Ethiopia in December 2000, agreements which were witnessed and guaranteed by the European Union, the “core group” voiced little concern for its implementation. Indeed, until 2018, they instead provided the majority regime in Ethiopia the diplomatic, economic, and political support and shielded as it flouted international law and the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission’s final and binding delimitation and demarcation decisions. For all their repetitive feigns of concern for Eritrea’s youth, they omit the root cause for the “indefinite service”, the belligerence and lawlessness of the TPLF regime that they propped up for 20 years. The damage caused by TPLF and its handlers cost the lives of thousands in the region. It will take time to assess the exact toll and reverse all the wrongs perpetrated on Eritrea’s youth. In this respect, the ‘core group’, neither have the moral authority, nor the legal mandate to point fingers at Eritrea, the victim of their wrong policies for the region.

Eritrea’s right to self-determination, defense, development and preservation of cultural rights are enshrined in the UN Charter, as well as the UN Declaration on Human Rights. Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR) says the following: “...Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. Creation draws on the wealth of cultural traditions, but flourishes in contact with other cultures. For this reason, heritage in all its forms must be preserved, enhanced and handed on to future generations as a record of human experience and aspirations, so as to foster creativity in all its diversity and to inspire genuine dialogue among cultures...”

And UNESCO says: “...Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and skills concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts...The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next...The importance of intangible cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and skills concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts...The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. Continued on page 5

Disclaimer: articles published in this column do not reflect the stance or opinion of Eritrea Profile.
**August in the History of Eritrea**

_Simon Weldemichael_

In the historical calendar of Eritrea, the month of August is filled with major events that have great significance in the course of history of the Eritrean people. For the moment I have selected four historical events that happened in August.

**August 2, 1889 – the occupation of Asmara by Italy:**

In 1885 Italians expanded their control from Assab to Massawa. The desire to expand their colonial possession and control of the highland was met with stiff resistance, and it took them an additional four years to reach Asmara. Finally, the Italians entered Asmara on August 2, 1889 and occupied much of the southern and western parts of Eritrea. By a decree issued on January 1, 1890, Italy proclaimed Eritrea her colony.

In their march to Asmara and their attempt to consolidate their rule over Eritrea, the Italian colonial army was confronted by the local people. The traditional political elites of Eritrea organized their people and showed considerable amount of resistance. But the resistance of Eritreans did not last long for lack of effective organization and coordination. At that time, the Eritrean people were suffering from famine, known by Eritreans as _zebene akahida_, that lasted until 1892. Besides the social and economic strife caused by the famine, the Eritrean people became victims of various Tigrean warriors, notably Ras Alula, who inflicted enormous damage. War and famine drained the strength of the population, and it was under such circumstances that Italy occupied Asmara.

When the Italians occupied the highland and the western lowland they eliminated the Eritrean traditional political elites. According to Zemhret Yohannes’s _Tigrinya book, “The Italian colonization”,_ between 1890 and 1891, the Italians killed 800 Eritreans, twelve of whom were traditional political elites. Through summary execution or imprisonment, the Italians eliminated the leading traditional political elites and their supporters.

After 52 years of Italian occupation, Asmara was taken by British Forces on April 1, 1941 and was ruled by them for a decade. On May 24, 1991 the Eritrean People’s Liberation army liberated Asmara and Eritrea became independent.

**August 3, 1961 – Establishment of Asmara Theater Association:**

In the same year that Eritrea’s armed struggle started by Hamid Idris Awate, Asmara Theatre Association was established. This historical coincidence is indicative of the association’s future role in the cultural front. It provided an outlet for the frustrated Eritrean population. Asmara Theater Association was the most successful cultural association in Eritrea that left an indelible mark on Eritrean society. Although the works of the association were subjected to censorship by the Ethiopian colonial authorities the artists were usually able to skillfully mask the political content of their works. Songs of veteran Eritrean singers such as Tewelde Reda’s _Shigey habamni_ (give me my torch), Atwerberhan Segisl’s _Aslamay Kitanay_, Alamin Abdelleli’s _Fatuma Zahra_, Osman Abdulrahim’s _xebhi som_ and Tebereh Tesfahuney’s _Abi Hidmo_ are some of the immortal songs of the 1960s with double meaning that have serious political messages against Ethiopian hegemony.

Tikabo Weldemarian and Tewelde Redda, veteran Eritrean singers, were regarded as important figures in the establishment of Asmara Theater Association. The cultural association played a great role in the development of national culture and served as an outlet to express Eritrean identity and nationalism. The association included artists from different ethnic groups and gave appropriate attention to women’s participation. Some of the well-known Eritrean women singers in the association include Tebereh Tesfahuney, Tsehaytu Beraki, Algenesh Kiflu, Amleset Abbai, Genet Teferi, Hiwot Tedla, Letebrehan Dagnew and Tegbaru Teklai.

The association had in its membership well-known singers, writers, musicians, and comedians, including Solomon Gebregziabher, comedian and playwright, Ateses Tessaema, musician, Asmerom Habtemariam, playwright and announcer, Osman Abdulrahim, singer, Negusse Haile, a playwright, and legendary singers such as Yemane Gibrremichael (Baria), Alamin Abdulatif and Tebereh Tesfahuney.

Asmara Theater Association toured across Eritrean towns and Ethiopia. In describing the performance of the theatre association in Addis Ababa, Mengistu Gedamu, an Ethiopian journalist, said: “There were thousands of people crowded around the entrance to the hall… Women who had paid 25 Birr for their hairstyles found their hair disordered by the crush. The entrance fee was 5 Birr but many people were willing to pay 25 Birr to enter the hall… Even though I could not understand the language (Tigrinya) or the message, I enjoyed the way the play and the music were performed. In fact, it was the best I have ever seen. Alemay Kachas performed the Italian Toto and Tebereh Tesfahuney sang like the American Doris Day.”

Members of Asmara Theater Association lived under constant surveillance of Ethiopian colonial security authorities. Almost all were sent to prison for some time. Through their performance the artists were able to influence the public to join the liberation struggle. During 1970s, the majority of the members of the association joined the ELF and the EPLF. The Eritrean revolution produced many revolutionary artists that fought against the colonial and decadent culture. In his book, ‘The Wretched of the Earth’, Fanon wrote: “To fight for national culture first of all means fighting for the liberation of the nation, the tangible matrix from which culture can grow.” Eritrean artists as cultural combatants have fired liberator cultural bullets to liberate the nation- culturally, psychologically and politically. Today many young artists sing the 1960s and revolutionary songs of Eritrea.

**August 4, 1984 – Launching Eritrean Festival in Bologna:**

Before Eritrea’s independence the annual Eritrean festival was held in Bologna, Italy. Eritreans from all over the world used to assemble in Bologna to celebrate the Eritrean culture and to express their support for the struggle for independence. The festival served as a vehicle of mobilization and construction of Eritrean national identity. The festival in Bologna has a symbolic value in the history of Eritrea. It was not merely a cultural event or celebration; it was rather a continuation of the struggle for independence in a diplomatic frontline. The festival provided a common ground for interaction and strengthened Eritreans’ solidarity. As a cultural event, it gave an opportunity to celebrate and appreciate the diversity of the Eritrean culture. After independence, the national festival is celebrated annually in Asmara.
Eritrea’s National Service...

The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a State, and is important for developing States as for developed ones...”

The NSP in Eritrea is an intangible cultural asset that should be respected by all. Nobody can define for Eritrea which cultural heritage and norms that cultures and traditions are passed on from one generation to another. The National Service Program is one way of transferring these national values - intangible national assets, inherited from our forefathers. Indeed, while certain values and principles were refined during the 30 year long struggle for independence, they find historical roots in Eritrean society. But cultural values cannot be preserved and transferred to the next generation without sustained education and nurturing.

In neighboring Ethiopia, UNESCO placed the Gada System in its list of intangible cultural assets. For those who do not know what is important or beneficial for Eritrea’s development or the development of its people. The people of Eritrea recognize the National Service Program as a birth right, a rite of passage, and a cultural heritage and nobody can decide for them whether or not such practice is part of their heritage, no more than they can decide for them what constitutes as their culture, religion, history etc. High time the world respected the aspirations and wishes of the Eritrean people... and not that of the pipers and their sponsors.

Knowledge about the Gada system is transmitted to children in the home and at school...”

Cultural heritage is a representation of our history and our identity; our bond to the past, to our present, and the future, and it is not only limited to material objects that we can see and touch, like the UNESCO World Heritage structures found in Asmara, the Eritrean capital, but also consists of immaterial things like Eritrea’s harmonious culture of ethnic and religious respect and tolerance, and the knowledge and skills transmitted from generation to generation, and, preserved.

Nobody has the right to dictate what is important or beneficial for Eritrea’s development or the development of its people. The people of Eritrea recognize the National Service Program as a birth right, a rite of passage, and a cultural heritage and nobody can decide for them whether or not such practice is part of their heritage, no more than they can decide for them what constitutes as their culture, religion, history etc. High time the world respected the aspirations and wishes of the Eritrean people... and not that of the pipers and their sponsors.

Eritrea’s impressive social capital; these measures depended fully on adherence and respect the guidelines in the entire country. The UNDP Resident Coordinator in Eritrea in his May 2020 article explained:

“...COVID-19 has so far defied logic by voraciously impacting poor and rich countries with equal measure. But in Eritrea only 39 infections and zero deaths have been reported so far, this may be largely due to the country harnessing its social capital... In the African context, social capital – also called ‘Ubuntu’, ‘Undugu’or ‘Ujamaa’ - means the interpersonal relationships and network that give people a sense of identity, shared responsibility and collective accountability...”

Social capital in Eritrea is a result of cultivation and preservation of time tested values and principles engrained in the hearts and minds of all in Eritrean society. It is about expectations and obligations and most of all, it is about trust.

Much has been said about Eritrea’s harmonious culture of ethnic and religious tolerance and respect, but how is this culture nurtured and passed on from generation to generation? How are these values and principles transferred from one generation to another? Social scientists tell us that it is through education, information and social norms that cultures and traditions are passed on from one generation to another. The National Service Program is one way of transferring these national values - intangible national assets, inherited from our forefathers. Indeed, while certain values and principles were refined during the 30 year long struggle for independence, they find historical roots in Eritrean society. But cultural values cannot be preserved and transferred to the next generation without sustained education and nurturing.

In neighboring Ethiopia, UNESCO placed the Gada System in its list of intangible cultural assets. For those who do not know what is important or beneficial for Eritrea’s development or the development of its people. The people of Eritrea recognize the National Service Program as a birth right, a rite of passage, and a cultural heritage and nobody can decide for them whether or not such practice is part of their heritage, no more than they can decide for them what constitutes as their culture, religion, history etc. High time the world respected the aspirations and wishes of the Eritrean people... and not that of the pipers and their sponsors.

Cultural heritage is a representation of our history and our identity; our bond to the past, to our present, and the future, and it is not only limited to material objects that we can see and touch, like the UNESCO World Heritage structures found in Asmara, the Eritrean capital, but also consists of immaterial things like Eritrea’s harmonious culture of ethnic and religious respect and tolerance, and the knowledge and skills transmitted from generation to generation, and, preserved.

Nobody has the right to dictate what is important or beneficial for Eritrea’s development or the development of its people. The people of Eritrea recognize the National Service Program as a birth right, a rite of passage, and a cultural heritage and nobody can decide for them whether or not such practice is part of their heritage, no more than they can decide for them what constitutes as their culture, religion, history etc. High time the world respected the aspirations and wishes of the Eritrean people... and not that of the pipers and their sponsors.

Eritrea’s impressive social capital; these measures depended fully on adherence and respect the guidelines in the entire country. The UNDP Resident Coordinator in Eritrea in his May 2020 article explained:

“...COVID-19 has so far defied logic by voraciously impacting poor and rich countries with equal measure. But in Eritrea only 39 infections and zero deaths have been reported so far, this may be largely due to the country harnessing its social capital... In the African context, social capital – also called ‘Ubuntu’, ‘Undugu’or ‘Ujamaa’ - means the interpersonal relationships and network that give people a sense of identity, shared responsibility and collective accountability...”

Social capital in Eritrea is a result of cultivation and preservation of time tested values and principles engrained in the hearts and minds of all in Eritrean society. It is about expectations and obligations and most of all, it is about trust.

Much has been said about Eritrea’s harmonious culture of ethnic and religious tolerance and respect, but how is this culture nurtured and passed on from generation to generation? How are these values and principles transferred from one generation to another? Social scientists tell us that it is through education, information and social norms that cultures and traditions are passed on from one generation to another. The National Service Program is one way of transferring these national values - intangible national assets, inherited from our forefathers. Indeed, while certain values and principles were refined during the 30 year long struggle for independence, they find historical roots in Eritrean society. But cultural values cannot be preserved and transferred to the next generation without sustained education and nurturing.

In neighboring Ethiopia, UNESCO placed the Gada System in its list of intangible cultural assets. For those who do not know what is important or beneficial for Eritrea’s development or the development of its people. The people of Eritrea recognize the National Service Program as a birth right, a rite of passage, and a cultural heritage and nobody can decide for them whether or not such practice is part of their heritage, no more than they can decide for them what constitutes as their culture, religion, history etc. High time the world respected the aspirations and wishes of the Eritrean people... and not that of the pipers and their sponsors.

Cultural heritage is a representation of our history and our identity; our bond to the past, to our present, and the future, and it is not only limited to material objects that we can see and touch, like the UNESCO World Heritage structures found in Asmara, the Eritrean capital, but also consists of immaterial things like Eritrea’s harmonious culture of ethnic and religious respect and tolerance, and the knowledge and skills transmitted from generation to generation, and, preserved.

Nobody has the right to dictate what is important or beneficial for Eritrea’s development or the development of its people. The people of Eritrea recognize the National Service Program as a birth right, a rite of passage, and a cultural heritage and nobody can decide for them whether or not such practice is part of their heritage, no more than they can decide for them what constitutes as their culture, religion, history etc. High time the world respected the aspirations and wishes of the Eritrean people... and not that of the pipers and their sponsors.

Eritrea’s impressive social capital; these measures depended fully on adherence and respect the guidelines in the entire country. The UNDP Resident Coordinator in Eritrea in his May 2020 article explained:

“...COVID-19 has so far defied logic by voraciously impacting poor and rich countries with equal measure. But in Eritrea only 39 infections and zero deaths have been reported so far, this may be largely due to the country harnessing its social capital... In the African context, social capital – also called ‘Ubuntu’, ‘Undugu’or ‘Ujamaa’ - means the interpersonal relationships and network that give people a sense of identity, shared responsibility and collective accountability...”

Social capital in Eritrea is a result of cultivation and preservation of time tested values and principles engrained in the hearts and minds of all in Eritrean society. It is about expectations and obligations and most of all, it is about trust.

Much has been said about Eritrea’s harmonious culture of ethnic and religious tolerance and respect, but how is this culture nurtured and passed on from generation to generation? How are these values and principles transferred from one generation to another? Social scientists tell us that it is through education, information and social norms that cultures and traditions are passed on from one generation to another. The National Service Program is one way of transferring these national values - intangible national assets, inherited from our forefathers. Indeed, while certain values and principles were refined during the 30 year long struggle for independence, they find historical roots in Eritrean society. But cultural values cannot be preserved and transferred to the next generation without sustained education and nurturing.

In neighboring Ethiopia, UNESCO placed the Gada System in its list of intangible cultural assets. For those who do not know what is important or beneficial for Eritrea’s development or the development of its people. The people of Eritrea recognize the National Service Program as a birth right, a rite of passage, and a cultural heritage and nobody can decide for them whether or not such practice is part of their heritage, no more than they can decide for them what constitutes as their culture, religion, history etc. High time the world respected the aspirations and wishes of the Eritrean people... and not that of the pipers and their sponsors.

Cultural heritage is a representation of our history and our identity; our bond to the past, to our present, and the future, and it is not only limited to material objects that we can see and touch, like the UNESCO World Heritage structures found in Asmara, the Eritrean capital, but also consists of immaterial things like Eritrea’s harmonious culture of ethnic and religious respect and tolerance, and the knowledge and skills transmitted from generation to generation, and, preserved.

Nobody has the right to dictate what is important or beneficial for Eritrea’s development or the development of its people. The people of Eritrea recognize the National Service Program as a birth right, a rite of passage, and a cultural heritage and nobody can decide for them whether or not such practice is part of their heritage, no more than they can decide for them what constitutes as their culture, religion, history etc. High time the world respected the aspirations and wishes of the Eritrean people... and not that of the pipers and their sponsors.
Can you please tell us about your experience in date palm farming?

It was during my teenage years when I was in Saudi Arabia that I started to know about date palm farming. I always believed that I would bring back my knowledge and experience to my country and share the harvest of this sweet and nutritious fruit with my own people. I came back here a couple of years after Eritrea’s independence and started my own farm.

Was it easy to manage the farm at the beginning?

I take growing date palms very seriously. For me, planting one date palm is the same as having a child; it needs my utmost care and input. But, of course, I had to get through a handful of challenges to be where I am at the moment. Besides, it was hard to differentiate between male and female plants, good or bad dates. I had to wait for ten years until the trees were fully-grown and started to bear fruit. Then I kept the good ones and cut off the bad ones.

What was the knowledge of the farmers in Eritrea like when you first came?

Date Palm is a relatively new plant in Eritrea, with only a few varieties being grown in a handful of orchards. So, with the little experience that I brought to Eritrea, I couldn’t find date palm farmers. I always believed that in any kind of farming in addition to the experts’ advice and assistance that you can get from the Ministry of Agriculture, it is always good to share experience with other farmers. I would dare say that I have come a long way as a lone farmer in this particular area, but the number is increasing these days and the cooperation is growing accordingly.

How did you find the quality of land and the climate in Eritrea for date palm?

From my experience, it is always good to know the type of tree you plant. As I told you, during the initial stage of my experience, I had to wait years till I knew the type of trees I had. In this case, the farmer always needs to know his trees and pollinate them accordingly from the good, sweet breed. Another important thing to know is the time and frequency of watering the farm. You also need nets and other protection covers to protect the fruits from birds. Like other plants, date palm also needs continuous care and spray of pesticides, especially against red ants, which are particularly very harmful to the trees.

What future plans do you have?

I have achieved my first plan. I saw the independence of my country and I am growing my own date palm plantation on my land. What remains now is to turn the entire coastal area of Eritrea green with date palm. Now that many individual farmers and organizations are engaged in date palm cultivation I am convinced we can achieve this by collaborating with one another and spreading the knowledge of growing date palms to the rest of the eastern lowlands. Dates are rich in nutritious contents and I always want to be a part of the contribution these trees can make to my people. I also want to advise my fellow countrymen, not only farmers, to plant at least two date palms at home. That way every household could be food secure.