

Chapter 8

The Role of the Ethiopian Diaspora in Political Affairs of the Homeland: Implications for Inclusive Policy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explored the varied roles the Ethiopian diaspora plays in peacemaking, peacebuilding, and nation building in their homeland. It identified the policy implications of these engagements. Secondary data sources and reflections on the authors' personal experiences were used in this study, in the hope of providing conceptual constructs for future empirical studies. While it is noted in this study that members of the Ethiopian diaspora are behind major peace-building and nation building activities in the country, the authors call for a more strategic partnership between the diaspora and the government. Such intervention requires policymakers to be more creative and pragmatic in their approach to the nation's development. This approach will transform the current transactional relations (between the diaspora and the government) into a more focused, sustained, and strategic partnership that has the potential to transform Ethiopia.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the varied roles members of the Ethiopian diaspora play in peacemaking, peacebuilding and nation-building in their original homeland. It also identifies the policy implications of these engagements. In researching and writing this chapter, the authors relied on secondary data sources and reflections based on personal experiences (as Ethiopians in the diaspora) in the hope of providing conceptual constructs for future empirical studies.

The first section of the chapter deals with the context and characteristics of the Ethiopian Diaspora. The second explores the role of the diaspora in peacemaking and peacebuilding, while the third focuses on the nation building process. The last section is about concluding remarks.

BACKGROUND: THE ETHIOPIAN DIASPORA - CONTEXT AND CHARACTERISTICS

Given the composition and diversity of reasons and purposes in becoming a person in the diaspora, it is a challenge to offer a working definition of the concept, much less an operational definition for categorization purposes. The more pragmatic option is to adopt the African Diaspora Policy Center's definition which states that "Diasporas are transnational communities comprised of individuals who come together in a 'community far from home.' They are bound together by a collective memory, a desire to return and a commitment to the country of origin" (2017, p. 6). As Elizabeth Chacko and Peter Gebre (2009, p. 2) describe the construct, diasporas are groups of migrants who are residing and pursuing private lives "... in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin."

The Ethiopian diaspora fits this description. Also, it is not a monolithic entity, contrary to the assumptions of many. Its members vary, based on the conditions under which they left the country, when they left, and in some cases where they are settled. One feature of the Ethiopian diaspora is that as a phenomenon, it is a relatively recent development when compared to other nations. One can trace the evolution of migration from Ethiopia to the 1970s. Before the 1974 revolution that overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie, migration (known locally as *si'det*) was minimal and a taboo undertaking among many Ethiopians (Getahun, 2010). However, the 1974 revolution and the subsequent unusual developments in the history of Ethiopia including the extrajudicial killings by the Derg regime and the ethnic divisions that erupted in the nation changed everything. It is difficult now to find a country in which Ethiopians do not reside.

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