

THERE IS NO ME WITHOUT YOU!

A call for the needy:

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This is title of a love song by The Manhattans (Edward Bluins) for people in romantic relationships. However, I will take the liberty of using the title for something different: to convey the need for a helping hand to those who deserve, and a pay-back by those who owe.

Let me tell you a little bit about my upbringing to explain why “there is no me without you.”

In our village of Jajura, I found myself between two Christian believers – and who wasn’t a believer? – the ancient Orthodox Christians and the newly introduced Catholics. As an Orthodox Christian, I was taught the words of God from Old and New Testaments. The first thing I visualized was the Promised Land as an Eden Garden of milk and honey, fruits and sweets, souls free of sins and bodies free of crimes.

When I look back 50 years later, at that time the village of Jajura/Andaya was the Eden Garden I read of in Genesis, which seemed a perfectly reasonable description of the world I had been born into. I could not imagine a place more beautiful than my village in Soro District of Hadiya Zone in the highlands of southern Ethiopia. The sun never failed to rise, even in the rainiest of the seasons. Everything grew big: the Enset plant, the Digiiba (Zigba) indigenous tree, bananas, avocados, sweet potatoes, corn, millet, teff, wild fruits such as homba, dubana (plums), gorra (blue berries); unending plenty.

There were rivers separated by a couple of kilometers, Lintala (meaning the Clean), Hinjana, and Gombora to name a few, and plenty of other streams feeding the already fat rivers. Rivers Lintala and Hinjana originate from the foot of the famous Mount Shonkola. It is the tallest mountain in the Hadiya Zone, and perhaps the second in the Southern Kilil, next to the Bale Mountain. Shonkola is a stand-alone mountain which has features similar to those of Mount Kilimanjaro of Tanzania. It was covered with thick forest when a young American friend, Jim, asked me and my friend, Tekle Ayano, to climb to the top of Mount Shonkola. We made it to the top, but it took us more than six hours to climb. We reached a spot where helicopters land when people do mapping surveys, and each of us carved our names on stones. On the top of Mount Shonkola, you felt as if you saw the ends of the world in all directions. We saw the backs of the flying birds; even clouds were beneath us. On return, my guests were in trouble because I felt sick from eating too much breakfast and honey. Jim, I am still alive, if you happen to read this piece. The following two pictures remind me of the good old days.





Nature had protected these rivers by giving them umbrellas: the shadows of thick forests on both banks of the rivers. There was little loss of water from evaporation. The forests were also breeding grounds for many, many animals—like apes, monkeys, wild pigs and hogs, antelopes, cheetahs, gureza and dikula, lions, to mention a few. It was more than a national park, but without protection. My dad told us that when he was young, his dad, my grandfather (Debalkie) together with a few other people (Delkesso, Bonkola, Sibammo) used to sing in Hadiyigna in short lyrics: “mannaa waarie, waarie; mochaa giibie, giibie”. A crude translation would mean: “humans come here; and wild animals go away”. Once a year, around the Orthodox Christian Easter time, the community got organized and went out for hunting. It was the famous Hocha in which pedestrians and horsemen participate to kill edible animals such as kukusicho, demalicho (female antelope) and gibicho (male blackish antelope) and others like pigs. It was a cultural exercise where teens and adults were proud, if they killed or captured one. I, for one, enjoyed participating in this annual Hocha event.

In my village, no parent thought of sending children to school because there was none within a walking distance. Fortunately, there arrived the Roman Catholic Missionary, Abba Silvester, who immediately put up a church and K-2 school. Gashie Buruno and Gebrehana Lambamo were teachers, though they hardly completed grade 8. A few of us joined the school, Gebre Mariam Tohebo, Francis Madorie, Bartholomew Mathewos, Mery Mengesha, to remember some. The school was about 8 km from my residence and I had to walk about 16 km every school day. There was no transportation, no electricity, no books; but we were equipped with determination and wanted to go to Hossana, the capital city of the zone, for middle school. Hossana is more than 40 km from my village. Most of us succeeded, but the conditions remained the same. We encountered another challenge, yet another pledge not to give up, and another pledge to go to another better city in another province for our high school education thinking that it may have better facilities. Some of us dropped out from the race, a few of us continued. Life and the challenge continued. Hope never died. The Hadiya Zone remained green and fertile to feed the inhabitants and support us in education. For the inhabitants it was the Eden Garden. That was then.

But now ...

As in any Eden Garden, there was a snake. It stung not humans but the environment the humans inhabited and infused poison. The snake was the cause of environmental degradation that ruined the fertility of the soil. It was the cause of population explosion where the zone had more people than it could possibly feed. The snake was the cause of the greed where few get richer and the majority gets poorer; the haves do not want to pay back, the greed of not wanting to serve your own people that paid taxes to educate you.

A few years ago I visited the Jajura/Andaya village. There is electricity, not only in Hossana, but in Jajura also. I drove by the foot of Mount Shonkola. Alas, the slopes of Mount Shonkola are no more covered with forest. Instead I saw rocks after rocks in place of the thick forest on its slopes. The rivers have become dry creeks – no forest, not a single indigenous tree, to protect them against evaporation. Only a few eucalyptus trees here and there between the crowded village huts. All the wild animals are gone with the forest. Houses are everywhere, making you wonder where the farm land is. It is gone. There is no plot big

enough for a family to grow enough crops to sustain the household. The few oxen used to plow are so skinny; they are unable to pull themselves, let alone the machinery. Half a century ago, the population of Ethiopia was about 20 million, and the population of the Hadiya Zone might have been a couple of hundred thousand. Now the Ethiopian population is about 80 million (grew 4 times) and the Hadiya population is nearing 1.5 million (perhaps grew about 6 times). And I noticed the following:

Now people need, more than any time in the past, health centers to prevent communicable diseases, assist pregnant women to deliver safely, get immunization vaccines for kids, to get advice on health issues such as family planning, HIV/AIDS, nutrition values, child care, birth control, etc.

Now the people in Hadiya Zone need agriculture experts to educate them so that they prevent soil erosion, deforestation, to use irrigation and crop cycling, use natural organic fertilizers rather than chemical fertilizers that kill friendly worms that keep soil fertile, to plant trees, use the meager plots wisely.

Now they need not only schools everywhere, but qualified teachers, books, laboratories and other facilities. Now the Hadiya people need a 21st-century school system that produces students that compete locally, nationally and internationally.

The snake in the Eden of Hadiya is something we cannot fight alone. It requires a holistic approach from all corners, by all people of the zone. By eradicating the causes and removing the poison, we can repair and restore the Hadiya Zone. Yes we can! (Yichalal!). These are all contained in the mission and vision of **Hadiya Development and Rehabilitation Network (HDRN)**.

Unless sons and daughters of the people from Hadiya Zone living in Ethiopia and abroad come together and **pay back** by contributing to the efforts to rehabilitate the culture and environment, support the needy students who are future leaders of the zone and the nation, educate people about health and agriculture, etc. the snake will not die. It will become stronger, and destroy more. The poison will pervade the country.

Here is what the people residing in the Hadiya Zone are saying in one voice:

- Show us the way to rehabilitate our values
- Help us to rehabilitate our deteriorating soil fertility and become farm-wise.
- Assist us to maintain our health
- Educate our children – our future leaders

This is a call for all people, Ethiopian and others, to contribute whatever you can to help the needy people of the Hadiya Zone. Please contact Dr. Kassamo Dayemo:

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Because in one voice, they say “**there is no me without you!**”. Please hear their voice.

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