

The Environmental Activist

It was in the walks of my routine developmental journey that I came across meeting Yohannes. He is an inspiration for many young Ethiopians. He contributed towards recovering the nation's legacy as a country where close to half of its land mass covered with forests. Besides, his motivational and triggering initiatives played a significant role in mobilizing the society across all ways of life. With my limited knowledge and exposure to his work, I am grateful to acknowledge Yohannes's achievements as briefly explained underneath.

First and foremost his commitment towards recovering the disgraced land was indeed stirring. Ownership of the community and unreserved participation of the community towards the same



end entail a greater success which also demonstrates his integrated level of down to earth personality. With his initiative in rehabilitation of degraded lands in Wolaita, more than 600 hectares of land is covered by seedlings, and becomes a place where flora and fauna finds the best suiting habitat to live in. The forest covered areas have also contributed towards improving the livelihoods of the local community by providing pure natural water. His success as a University based instructor presents him as

one of the very few models of such an initiative to other Universities and communities across the nation. The area is also one of the areas where a number of government and non-governmental institutions visit the area as a matter of sharing the experience and scaling up to their own respective localities.

Through his policy level advocacy and campaigns, he was able to get and urged key political decision makers and influential personalities in the country. To mention, President of the country His excellence Girma Woldegiorgis, the Deputy Prime minister and Minister of Education, Ato Demeke Mekonen, regional presidents etc in support of a higher institutions targeted Green Environment Campaign. Through this engagement, with the support of the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia, he managed to reach 31 Universities where a total of half million students reside in. Subsequently, all of the universities are now preparing millions of seedlings that would potential change the ecology of their surroundings. It also created a micro level link between the higher institutions and the host communities and schools.

Yohannes further commits himself to the environment protection accompanied by adventures travels throughout the vast majority of country. He made two major travels on bicycle and motorbike consecutively. The first one was with a bicycle ride to the watersheds of the Blue Nile river. Through the journey, he engages in subsequent mass sensitization and awareness rising on the importance of rehabilitation of the watershed area to the River Nile as well as sustainability of our hydro electric dam which intends to benefit Ethiopia and region at large. With this

connection, he caused the establishment of hundreds of grass root nurseries in the watershed area. This adventures bicycle ride covers 1200 Kms and its prime motto was “Green Journey TO Green Abay/Blue Nile”

The second of this nature, in 2012 and 2013 travel with a motorbike targets higher institutions of the country with its inspiring motto ‘**Citizen Movement for Environment**’. This visit was indeed amongst his core achievements in that the Universities supported his initiatives towards engaging their community towards rehabilitating the environment in their respective host community.

In nut shell, his relentless endeavor towards regaining the legacy of the nation in terms of rehabilitating its environment in the past few years was a challenging yet exhibited tangible results. Through the versatile and wide reaching strategy which extends from grassroots communities to policy makers and influential leaders brought about a magnificent improvement in the lives of many including the flora, fauna, host local communities, in the rehabilitated lands. Through his campaign, advocacy and grassroots engagement, he ensures the establishment of thousands of community and school based grass root nurseries, green clubs in universities, colleges, schools, communities, private institutions etc.

Yohannes does not work for the community; he rather works with the community. Mobilizing the available human and material resources are his initial and running capital. It is indeed hard to believe, almost all the initiatives are driven by a vision and passion towards achieving a change, with no regular and sustainable funding opportunity. His success would make him one of the very few African Youth who are struggling to bring change where the means to support and encourage their initiative is a barren land. No financial institution is by their side to accompany their journey and share the risk. No funding agency is really interested to support such grassroots initiative with small and weak organizational structure. Survival of the fittest is, therefore at their own sake, and the saddest reality is always the biggest fish swallows the smaller ones, no matter how colorful, smart and fast they are.

In one of my discussions with Yohannes, he shared me his ‘Sky is the limit’ vision for Africa. Further, he is intending to engage the corporate sector to environmental protection issues and he of course have the ambition to excel his work with key political figures in Ethiopia and across the continent, through AU.

I would therefore conclude by forwarding key words. This is the time for African leaders, funding agencies and any likeminded organizations or interest group to look in to grassroots initiatives where the heartfelt needs are being addressed. It is also high time to have faith on and invest in the YOUTH. Through the acknowledgement and support of youngsters like Yohannes, I am optimist about the future of Africa and its citizens!

By Negash Tekelu, Director, PHE