

Hello Ato Zerfu,

Since my return from Ethiopia and Tanzania in Fall 2007, I have tried to find ways for making connections that may prove helpful for special projects or a class of recurring problems. In January 2008, I made some remarks regarding the desirable need to engage in more technology transfer from the US to Africa at a meeting of the International Activities Committee of the American Association of Engineering Societies (AAES) in Washington, DC. AAES represents the collection of professional engineering associations such as ASCE, ASME, ASEE, IEEE, etc. I am a member in both ASCE and ASEE. Other agencies and organizations such as USAID, Corps of Engineers, UNESCO etc also attend the AAES International Activities Committee meetings. My comments were well received and I was subsequently invited to give a presentation at the following meeting of AAES on May 9, in Washington.

The thrust of my proposal was to suggest that we establish linkage between AAES and engineering societies in African countries. Taking ASCE as a starting point, I indicated that there are 67 agreements of cooperation between ASCE and foreign engineering societies, of which 6 are with countries in Sub Sahara Africa; Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. I further suggested that we begin with Ethiopia to develop and refine the process and extend a similar linkage to the other countries. In principle, we will form a consortium among academic, government agencies, consulting members of AAES to provide need based technology transfer and engineering capacity building. On the Ethiopian side, the initial engagement can start with one or two projects from the Ethiopian Roads Administration (ERA) with other projects and specialties to follow in subsequent stages. The feedback I have received following my presentation has been positive and encouraging.

Moving forward, we will try to find other ASCE professional members of Ethiopian origin to serve as lead facilitators for cooperative projects. Each lead facilitator will acquire the special visa allowed for expatriates of Ethiopian origin to be able to work and travel freely and also to become a corresponding member of the Ethiopian Engineering Society. On the US side, the facilitator will coordinate the engagement of an expert task group that would be formed to address the special needs of the project. We will set up an office that can serve as a point of contact to locate and transfer information from sources in the US or elsewhere. Computer programs and training to perform analyses and design, lab equipment and test methods, GIS/GPS software, field methods in different civil engineering disciplines can be general areas we can attempt to cover. A counterpart facilitator on the Ethiopian side will serve as a point of contact and project coordinator.

The overall concept embodies linkage for tech transfer and capacity building between engineering societies or Engineers to Engineers that we can refer to as E². Ideally, it will empower engineers to do better and do more with available resources. The infrastructure and capacity we put in place for one project will remain to be used for several other projects. We had discussed the main features of this idea when I was in Addis and also Ato Daniel Nebro and I have communicated by email on the same theme. In dealing with the Addis – Adama or the Abay projects, ERA would have had much broader resources

under this scheme. I hope we can move quickly to formalize an arrangement through a memorandum of understanding (MOU). We can collaborate in drafting an MOU through email and follow up with formal signing.

Trust all is well and I look forward to hear from you.

Sincerely,
Dawit