

The Need for Paradigm Change - II

By G. E. Gorfu

Sometime back we wrote on the important changes Ethiopia needs to implement in order to be more effective in solving its serious problems. One of these was infusing new blood into politics, and it appears steps have now been taken to form a Youth League. This is a first step in the right direction. Kudos! To continue on the need for paradigm change:-

One serious issue is making sure Ethiopia is free from hunger and poverty. In spite of the many years the government worked hard to eliminate poverty, Ethiopia still seems to be a long way from self sufficiency in food production and is dependent on food aid from abroad. Many farmers have become dependent on imported fertilizers which may be subsidized, but do not seem to solve the problem of low food production. There are those who are advocating the return to traditional farming techniques and crop rotation rather than the dependence on fertilizers. They may have a point, and it may be wise to look at that option seriously. Not everything we copy from the west is good, or to our advantage.

While we are looking at agriculture, a paradigm change is also needed for farmers to be encouraged to focus on food production for the local markets first and foremost and the growing of coffee, flowers, chat, and other similar crops to take second and third places. Cash crops are important for export which brings in foreign currency, but at what cost? It is for buying cars and other imported items. But if the people do not have enough to eat, what good is it? Gas, cars, and other imported items are luxury, but food is essential.

Another serious problem is the ever growing population which the government does not seem to have a handle on. The mindset of our peasants is still in producing as many children as possible since every child is potentially seen as an additional farm hand to help, as well as an insurance policy for old age to support the parents. It is still common for girls to marry at very young ages of ten and eleven in various parts of Ethiopia, and the Fistula Hospital can attest to this fact with all the new young girls that continue to come for treatment. Early marriage is a major contributing factor in population growth.

To give the Ethiopian government its due credit, there have been a measure of Family Planning programs over the last few years in many parts of the country, but these do not seem to affect the population growth. If China can declare "A Cultural Revolution" and stop the "Feet-Binding" of young women which was traditional for hundreds of years, why can't the government take the leadership and with the help of enlightened religious leaders teach our people to limit the number of children to a maximum of two or three, and effect a real mind change? Ethiopia's population is approaching eighty million, and except for the few at the very top, there is a serious poverty all around the country, and even malnutrition and hunger in many parts, even in the streets of Addis Ababa. For how long are we going to depend on donor food aid from western countries? And what are we waiting for before we fight population growth tooth and nail, and put it under control?

Unless serious steps are quickly taken to curb population growth which appears to have gone totally out of control, there is little doubt what the outcome will be. Big population means a much higher death toll in times of drought and famine. We saw it twice in our own lifetime and God forbid that we should see it again. It can be prevented!