

## Hands that are Greening a Nation

If global events in the past weeks have not convinced us that climate change is happening, then nothing else can. Across the globe, countries have been confronted with extreme weather conditions, flooding, wildfires, powerful storms, unprecedented heat waves, increased desertification and many other phenomena. We are observing the frequency and intensity of such climatic events impacting people's livelihoods and wellbeing all around the world. In our own backyard, the East African and Horn Region is experiencing climate change induced drought. At home, climate shocks have contributed to drying up water sources and caused severe droughts in some parts of the country.

While the climate change discourse has evolved over many years, today as a global community we have reached a critical point where we are living the reality. Beyond conferences and summits, addressing the climate change challenge requires tangible action. It takes commitment and proactive engagement at all levels of society. Perhaps, this is one defining moment where Ethiopia has been successful in mobilizing at every level.

When in 2019 we announced the Green Legacy Initiative, we launched with the intention of positively impacting basin development, increasing forest cover, expanding agroforestry, enabling eco-tourism and enhancing urban greening. Every corner of our great nation took up the national call to plant 20 billion seedlings in a four-year period. More than 25 million Ethiopians across the country rolled up their sleeves and have shown up to prepare seedlings, dig pits, plant and then nurture them to survival and growth.

Each year we surpassed the annual target and together with the final year of the four-year challenge, Ethiopia has planted 25 billion seedlings of agroforestry, forestry, ornamental varieties, surpassing the set ceiling. A nationwide green culture has since 2019 taken root, evolved and grown over a span of four years, resulting in a significant decline in the rate of deforestation and the formation of new forests. These new forests will be essential in carbon sequestration as Ethiopia forges ahead in efforts to tackle climate change.

Scientific evidence emerging since the mid-19th century has demonstrated the ways in which gases, including carbon dioxide, trap heat. Human activities have accelerated the release of carbon dioxide into earth's atmosphere, further intensifying the heat trap that has been causing variability in weather patterns. We now know that rapid climate change is manifesting in the rise of global temperatures, frequent extreme natural events, increasing sea levels and many other occurrences. Unfortunately, the African continent has little to do in terms of being a net producer of greenhouse gases, yet experiences its harsh realities. In tandem with other climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, other African countries can take Ethiopia's Green Legacy Initiative as a best practice.

There are many ingredients to our success as there are lessons derived from the Green Legacy Initiative within the four-year period since we began. For example, when the massive tree planting program was launched in 2019, there were less than 40,000 nurseries nationwide, with very low production capacity. In the current year - 2022, the number of nurseries in Ethiopia surpasses 121,000, with a cumulative capacity of producing 7.6 billion seedlings of various species.

These tree species also include fruit varieties, mainly avocado, mango and papaya, aimed at making the Green Legacy Initiative improve access to food and nutrition and enhance export ambitions.

A second example is the progressive change introduced by the initiative in improvement of site selection and site preparation, including early pitting, which has facilitated early planting. This year for instance, around 1.8 million ha of land has been identified for planting, of which more than 200,000 is georeferenced. A key catalyst for our success, however, is political will and demonstrable commitment at all levels of leadership.

While much still remains, there is no shred of doubt that the Green Legacy Initiative has delivered results, the most important of which is a 'green culture'. We have no doubt that this new culture will be a legacy preserved for Ethiopia's future generations. Many cities throughout the country are now being conscious of the need to nurture green spaces and enhance forest cover in conducive areas. We could not have been able to ignite this consciousness amidst fast paced urbanization without the commitment of millions of citizens for whom service to the nation has been of paramount importance. Beyond the new culture taking shape, the Green Legacy Initiative has thus far directly created more than 767,000 jobs, mostly for women and youth, as part of a green economy taking shape.

Ethiopia is still a developing nation with an eager youth population, great ambitions and untapped potential. In a fast-changing global environment, we recognize that our growth needs to be environmentally sustainable, climate resilient and anchored in principles of green growth. While our tree planting endeavors as one means of sequestering carbon continues, we are also cognizant that much effort will need to be put into halting cutting down of old forests for use as firewood in rural communities. Inevitably, Ethiopia's investments in renewable energy from hydroelectric, wind, solar and geothermal sources will soon rectify this. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that future generations will reap the seeds we are sowing today through the Green Legacy Initiative.

It is my call and that of Ethiopia's that other African countries and the global community in general, initiate such practical actions as a means of collectively tackling the adverse effects of climate change. I implore my African counterparts to invest more in planting as one solution, than is invested in conferences to discuss the problem.

**May God Bless Ethiopia and her Children!  
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