

## Way Forward Eritrea's Post graduate Education



Prof. Zemenfes Tsige

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The National Higher Education and Research Institute has always been exerting efforts to develop its human resources not only for the institutions of higher education but also for the sector ministries. We adopted three avenues of human resources development by opening both undergraduate and post graduate programs in Eritrea and by sending students abroad. We send students abroad for the programs for which we do not have at home. If we have a post graduate program at home, then the students will follow their studies inside the country. The third is through distance education. These are the three modalities that we have been using to develop our human resources. Prof. Zemenfes elaborated.

As regards the long term plans of the NHERI Prof. Zemenfes said as follows:

The long term plan is, as far as possible, to give training at master's level inside the country, and progressively we will move towards giving training at PHD level. The PHD level training is the very long term vision of the NHERI. We have been working on the Master's programs and we are trying to expand the kind of programs that we will offer in the post graduate studies.

We have a number of post graduate studies at the present time. At the Eritrea Institute of Technology (EIT) we have post graduate studies in four fields at master's level, at Hamelmalo Agricultural College we have five post graduate programs, at Adi-Keyih College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS) we have one post graduate program but we might start second and third programs in September. In Asmara College of Health Sciences, we have three post graduate

programs in Midwifery, Anastasia and in Pharmacy. These are the currently running post graduate programs inside the country.

Some of the programs started three or four years back and some of them started last year. But, there is quite substantial number of students who have graduated from these programs and who are also pursuing their studies.

The main advantage of the in country post graduate programs is relevance of curriculum. The curriculum is designed to serve the interest of the country. When students are sent to study abroad they have to fit into different curriculum. What is more, the cost of education is very low when compared to the cost of post graduate studies at master's level abroad. The cost here at home is much lower than the cost outside the country. If a student is sent for master's degree abroad, the average cost will be around 30,000 USD. Here in the country, it usually ranges between 17,000 and 18,000. So, there is a considerable saving in the cost of education.

As regards the benefits of providing post graduate education inside the country, Prof. Zemenfes said "We can monitor the quality of education that is provided to the post graduate students. We do not have any control on the curriculum and quality of education given by universities outside the country. But, we can ensure the quality of education given here. Another advantage is that these students will do researches related to Eritrean problems. Hence, these researches do have an added value for they can contribute towards the solution of the problems. Because of these advantages, our plan is to expand post graduate studies at home and the NHERE is working in that respect."

The second avenue is sending students abroad. Students have been sent abroad intended for higher studies for the last 10 years and up to now more than 600 students have been offered a chance to study abroad both at master's and PHD levels. "In this year, the coming September, we will be sending the highest number of students to study abroad. More than 100 students will go abroad for their post graduate studies. Some of the studies are full scholarship and some of them are partial scholarship." Prof. Zemenfes noted.

The Eritrean Government supports the students in many ways. For instance, if the stipend that the scholarship granting university gives is low, then the government tops up that salary. The amount of money that the Government of Eritrea spends on such cases is very huge. The Government's contribution towards the post graduate studies is quite extensive. The payment is in hard currency so you can imagine the burden the Government shoulders in this case.

Also according to Prof. Zemenfes, students have been sent to African and European universities, to the US and in Asia to India, China, Japan, and South Korea. Students go to a number of countries depending on the scholarships they get. When they go for higher studies, they sign a legal contract with the NHERE and according to that legal contract every person who goes abroad for study is

required to provide two years of service for every one year of training abroad. If the master's program takes two year, the student is required to come back and serve for four years. If the student fails to do so, the full cost of the scholarship should be paid back. But, we have not yet started to implement the legal contract up to now but definitely there will be a time to do so. People who failed to meet their responsibility will be held accountable based on the legal contract.

Eritrea has been developing partnership with different universities and institutions, to name; Finish universities, African universities like Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Indian universities like the University of New Delhi and so on. Linkages have been created with universities in Italy and the UK and also with some universities in the US. Until now the country has developed more than 30 linkage partnerships. But, it does not mean that all these linkages are very active. New partnerships have also been created with Chinese and Russian universities. So, partnership and training is dynamic and a continuous activity. For instance, this year Eritrea started a relationship with Hungary and also signed a memorandum of understanding.

The partnership is not limited to training and education in the post graduate studies only. In some cases joint researches that involve scientist from Eritrea and scientists from the partner institutions have been carried out. Sometimes there is staff exchange. Eritrean academics go and teach in the partner institutions and professors from the partner institutions come to Eritrea and teach in Eritrean institutions of higher education. "In some of the relationships we also exchange educational resources particularly digital ones. We get a lot of educational and digital resources from our partners. Sometimes they make their digital libraries accessible to Eritrean students and to Eritrean researchers. So, the focus and objective of the partnership varies from one partnership linkage to another." Prof. Zemenfes explained.

Reinforcement of linkages with institutions of higher education both inside and outside the country is among the areas of activities of the NHERI. In this regard, Prof. Zemenfes clarified saying:

We also encourage our colleges to develop linkage partnerships independently. Some of the colleges have already done this. The reason why we encourage these linkages is that because we get a lot of benefits from sharing experiences and exchange of staff. People who come from other universities will look at our curriculum and help us in revising and improving our curriculum. They also provide us access to their laboratories and libraries. They also create pressure on our institutions to maintain the quality of education and also train our young staff. For this reason, we always try to promote and strengthen our partnership with the institutions outside the country.

In terms of performance our students perform very well. They perform very well while studying at home and when they go abroad. Actually in many cases our

students do excel. The report we get from most of the universities is quite encouraging. Some Eritreans have made a name because of their excellence in their academic career. The reason for why many countries have been offering more and more scholarships every year like those offered by china is because of the excellence of the Eritrean students. There are few who decide to quit their studies not for academic performance but for other personal reasons.

“To the best of my recollection out the 600 student we have sent abroad only one student was expelled not for academic reasons but for misconduct. Their grades are excellent. They are always at the top. Because they perform well at the master’s level, the universities grant them the opportunity for PHD. This tells us the quality of education we give here at the undergraduate level is comparable to the quality of education that is offered in the other universities,” Prof. Zemenfes affirmed.

The impact that these people could make is significant. In the long term, if we continue at this rate, there will come a time when most of the institutions of higher education will be staffed by Eritreans and our dependence on expatriate staff will be minimized. The commitment of our Eritrean professionals is quite high. Because they feel responsible and that responsibility is important for the kind of commitment they have. So commitment, responsibility, professional integrity and professional ethics are reflected in our staff. Those who go to the ministries assume different positions. They are engaged in the formulation of ministerial plans, policy making and they are engaged in researches. Thus, the contributions they make to the country’s development programs are significant. That is why the Government takes human resources development at the center stage for the overall development of the country.

“The pace of development will depend on quality of our people, and the quality of our people depends on the kind of education we provide. The more we invest in education and the better quality we provide, the better contribution will be towards the socio economic development of the country.” Prof. Zemenfes underscores.

### *Eritrea Profile*