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Project Management Education: What the Ethiopian Higher Education fails to recognize

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I would rather quote an Ethiopian saying “Kemetemtem temheret yekdeme”. Though not perfect, it could literally be translated, as “it is better to learn the detail, before assuming a priest’s post”. Our forefathers, while saying this, are telling us that we have to learn the detail of any profession, before holding a post in the discipline. It is a saying, which underlines the importance of education.

Undeniably, the education sector has evidenced a huge structural transformation in Ethiopia in the past 17 years. The reform efforts range from changing the previous policy to efforts aiming to ensure universal access to primary level education. Nevertheless, by the time that we are colorfully celebrating our unique millennium and the achievements, we have forgotten one big educational element: **Project Planning and Management**.

How would our graduates in engineering, IT, Agriculture, Education, Business and Economics, Medical science, Social sciences...etc, be competent to realize our development policies and strategies without learning sufficient “project planning and management” courses? How would we, as a country, be in a position to efficiently use our scare financial resources without well-trained “Project professionals”? How comprehensive is our higher education system without providing project-oriented specialization in different fields of study? Why are we ignoring it? What will the consequence be?

I have read that Ethiopia is one of the first African countries to start economic planning. There was a planning commission in the imperial era by 1963. Since then, the trend of undertaking development efforts in categorically planned way has continued, though the way things get done varies. Meanwhile, it remains to be plausible (even wide-ranging) to realize development efforts through projects.

At this time, at the time when we are colorfully celebrating our unique millennium surrounded by fruitful achievements in development, we have a national level long-term development plan, medium-term development plan, sectoral development strategies, and regional development frameworks as road maps to know where we are going. We have seen another two digit economic growth, for a fifth time. We are witnessing incredible, and even once seemingly impossible, growth in construction, energy, health, agriculture, banking, information technology, tourism, mining and other sectors. With this all in mind, though, by this historical moment, we have chosen to stay away from an internationalization arena in one aspect: **Project Planning and Management.**

It was my delight to hear before four or five years that the government of Ethiopia is planning to open 13 new universities in different parts of the country. Oh! How would it not impress me to understand that the people of Ethiopia are going to enjoy the fruit of such big development? But you know what, the reason behind my pleasure was not only of knowing about such a development, but rather the hope that I could see, and also be one of, the graduates of other fields of study, which are getting a global hit by this time, like project management, programme management, development planning and management. Nay, my expectations could not hold water, as I have understood that the new universities will not introduce such fields of study. Rather they joined the prevailing club, which provides operationally oriented courses.

The contribution of these graduates, for an economy as poor as Ethiopia, towards national prosperity is indubitable. But, what should have been given due concern, prior to everything, was the capability of the graduates in converting our development policies and strategies (which are largely being realized in projectised way) into tangible economic outcomes by integrating their technical knowledge with managerial skill on time, with justifiable cost and upon specified quality standards. It is while answering this question that the dire need for a project-oriented educational system will come to light.

While I was writing some paper related to this issue, I have read that, the 1st Doctorate Degree of project management in UK was done around 48 years ago, nearly by the time that the planning commission was established in Ethiopia. In the dynamic world of today, project management is being

learned at Masters Degree, Undergraduate Degree, Diploma, Work-based Certificate, Secondary, and Primary levels. Besides, universities, colleges, institutes, and private companies are struggling to get recognized by international project management certifying bodies like PMI and IPMA, as registered PM training providers. Where is the position of our Ethiopian universities in this respect? What are they really doing?

In a situation where the public, private and international sectors crave to get experienced project managers, why do we fail to incorporate project-oriented specialties in different fields of study? Why do we prefer to ignore it?

Day in, and day out we are listening, reading and watching projects lagging behind their finishing date, requiring up to 100% cost overrun, causing troubles due to poor design and implementation, achieving little or none of the intended outcomes...so on and so forth. Isn't the big problem lack of skilled project managers, project coordinators, project counterparts, schedule developers, risk analysts, impact analysts, and monitoring and evaluation specialists? I hope we do agree on this fact. If so, what shall be done?

All in all, we are facing a lot of challenges while celebrating our unique millennium. In confronting and winning over them, I believe that PM has a lot to offer. Thus, it shall be accorded strategic level attention in our educational system. **Happy Ethiopian Millennium!!!** But let us not forget our assignment.



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