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Projects & Project Management in Ethiopia Today

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Zemen - A Light of Hope for Project Management in East Africa

Ethiopia, the most populous nation in the horn of Africa, is known for its frequent famine and hunger. Its picture in the western mainstream media is full of deprivation and impoverishment. It is always associated with poverty, disease, and starvation. Yet, truth be told, the nation is not all about what is being attached with. It is rather a place of ancient history and culture. Its eighty plus ethnicities, living harmoniously in a democratic way, has made it the fountain of cultural diversity. Its rich religious and cultural practices have made it the tower of history. Not least, Ethiopia is the source-place of human beings as evidenced by the finding of Ardi, *Ardipithecus Ramidus*, the oldest ever hominid estimated to be 4.4 million years old.

Nevertheless, as any other nation, the rich history of the nation is filled with ups and downs. For long years, the nation has been bogged down in the anarchic rule of kings. With all government power in their hand, the kings were the mighty power

sources. Their decision would not be retreated. Their word functions as a rule of the land. Surprisingly though, they had been acting as “project managers” for many historical projects, most of them involving churches, monuments and palaces. That historical fact could still be witnessed at Axum, Lalibela, Yeha, and many other historical places around the country.

With the downfall of the imperial regime, there by the end of kings’ rule, came the most suppressive and bloody regime of the military junta, Derge. Everything was centrally planned. Development has back-pedaled to the level that the state of the nation was expressed by worst figures in every known development indicator. By then, project management was put into the shadow of functional operation. Provided that every decision is made by political personnel, the leverage of the project manager towards controlling the cost, time and quality of his/her project was little, if any. This era marks lost years in terms of catching up with other Sub-Saharan nations to adopt standard project management.

In 1991, the time has come for freedom and democracy to get into the life of Ethiopians. Afterwards, free market economy has become the reality of the day. Decentralization, self-determination and freedom of expression have materialized for the first time in the history of the nation. With that, every discipline and profession has got the right to develop itself, including project management. In its traditional form, project management has started to be used in many sectors from telecommunication to hydropower, from road to healthcare, and from software development to capacity building. Yet, provided that the effort starts from scratch, standardized project management is still at its infant stage in the country. None of the 21 public universities do provide project management at Diploma, Bachelor, Masters or PhD level. There is no project management association in the country, let alone a subsidiary of IPMA or PMI. Short-term trainings in project management are hardly existent.



It is in the middle of this grim situation that one visionary Ethiopian, Solomon Seleshi, started to pay back his motherland by bringing internationally acclaimed project management diploma programme through his training institute, Zemen Development and Management Institute (ZDMI). The programme, called International Diploma in Project Management (IDPM), is a collaborative effort of the University of Cambridge, 4cPM Ltd. and ZDMI. As an Ethiopian partner of the programme, ZDMI envisions to create a competent project management and development professionals in the horn of Africa. Its has set "the provision of quality and standard short term as well as full version trainings in project management and development to its clients in Ethiopia and the horn" as its mission.

ZDMI is also trying to expand opportunities for Ethiopians by creating partnership with Castle College Nottingham in UK. Furthermore, it is planning to start full-fledged Masters Degrees in Project Management, Business Administration and Development Studies by partnering with different national and international higher education institutions.

Expanding his participation in international project management platform, CEO of ZDMI, Solomon Seleshi, has attended the IPMA annual congress held in Helsinki, Finland from 15th-17th June, 2009. In his stay in Finland, he has created a strong network of working relationship with IPMA officials and other delegates from wide-ranging backgrounds. Back from the congress, he is initiating an Ethiopian Project Management Association. For that, Getachew Teklemariam, an International Correspondent of PM Forum and PM World Today in Ethiopia, is working closely with him.

By bringing such a big endeavor, ZDMI is writing its own chapter in the history book of project management in Ethiopia. As the IDPM programme is a very flexible qualification programme, it has opened a window of opportunity to those Ethiopians, who were thirsty of international project management qualification. The programme has over 190 students by this time. ZDMI has a plan to extend its reach to Djibouti and Southern Sudan. It has a broad base of clients from NGOs to Public Agencies, and from Faith Based Organizations to Private Companies. The short and full fledged project management courses of the institute have made it the best option to build an internationally acclaimed project management profession.

As Ethiopia is witnessing a 7th consecutive year of double digit economic growth, the introduction of IDPM through ZDMI has ended the isolation of the country from the international project management discourse as it has brought the light of hope of internationalization.

For more information about the International Diploma in Project Management or Zemen Development and Management Institute, have a look at www.zemeninstitute.com

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