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የጠቅላይ ሚኒስትር ጽሕፈት ቤት
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

PMO Editorial
March 2021

Beyond Aesthetic Values

“New and exciting opportunities will flood my home-town,” said Bekelech Ahmed, a widow and a mother of three, in the village of Koysha. She left her three kids and family behind to look for better economic opportunities in the capital. From its green hills and rolling plains to its lush forests, Koysha represents one of the many untapped investment potentials in Ethiopia. In addition to immense natural attributes that can be developed to generate tourism revenue, the area avails the opportunity for agro-processing industries to flourish. Rich with diverse fruit plants like mangoes, avocados, papaya, pineapples and apples, the potential for cultivating value added derivatives is immense.

As the Land of Origins and source of the Abay, the country boasts a remarkable array of natural, cultural, and historical gems that make it a unique and tranquil destination for tourism and other investments. While possessing these diverse and vast resources, the country has not fully managed to provide local communities, living in tourism sites like Koysha, the means to attain the lives they rightly deserve.

The launching of the ‘Dine for Ethiopia’ initiative by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has instilled new hope for many like Bekelech, separated from their communities to one day return home and find opportunities they desperately longed for.

An independent initiative by the Prime Minister, ‘Dine for Ethiopia’ mobilized local private sector to raise funds for the development of basic infrastructure like roads and electricity in three high potential sites identified. Unique in the approach, the Prime Minister’s initiative does not utilize public sector financing for the development of these sites. Rather, the contribution of citizens and private sector partnership has been instrumental in similar initiatives spearheaded to develop sites in Addis Ababa.

A town similarly blessed with a vast history and natural endowments is the historical port town of Gorgora. A 65-kilometer asphalt road from Gondar, the town predates the city of Gondar - one of the top 10 tourist destinations in the country. With its spectacular landscapes, ruggedness, and diverse community, the town was once home to a bustling market.

Many in Gorgora are now pensioners living off the small amount they receive from the government. Asayehegn Aschalew an elderly gentleman, is very hopeful that the 'Dine for Ethiopia' initiative will once again reinvigorate the disgruntled youth that has left the town in search of jobs. 'As an old man my days are numbered, but I hope the project will help the youth rebuild the city to its glorious past' says Asayehegn, optimistic of the changes to come.

Another key project identified by the government is the development of the Wenchi and Dendi. Home to beautiful crater lakes, hot springs, and waterfalls, the volcanic sites have known very little traffic for years. 'It is one of the most beautiful places in the world if only there were serious efforts to develop it' says Feyisa Degefa, a carpenter living in Wenchi. When speaking of his beloved town, he said he was glad to see the government identifying Wenchi as one of the development projects and hopes he can build his ailing business to cater to the expected outflow of tourists and other forms of visitors.

In 2019/20 period alone, more than 850,000 thousand international tourists visited Ethiopia, with the industry creating over 160,000 jobs. However, the emergence of COVID19 has been a stumbling block for the sector this past year. In the first few months of the pandemic, the income earned from tourism significantly decreased compared to the same period in the previous year.

Post COVID19, the industry is expected to make its grand recovery. In the coming ten years Ethiopia expects to more than triple the jobs created by the sector; doubling the number of domestic tourists, and increasing the number of international tourism by more than ten times the figures recorded in 2019/20.

Yet this critical endeavor is not without its trials, as the sector faces critical infrastructure, conservation, marketing, and management challenges. To address these and other issues, the country has listed developing tourism destination infrastructure and increasing the role of the private sector as focus areas in its 10 Year Perspective Plan. Initiatives like 'Dine For Ethiopia' by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed aimed at developing sites like Koysha, Gorgora, and Wenchi are manifestations of this continued focus to streamline the sector as one of the key sources of economic growth for the country. Additionally, all three sites offer the possibility for integrated investments in apparels manufacturing and agro-processing.

These projects have a considerable role to play in delivering sustainable development, stimulating both domestic and foreign investment in the sector; empowering marginalized populations; preserving cultural and environmental heritage; and promoting private-public partnerships within and across related sectors.

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