Access Capital adds its own to the on-going debate on Ethiopia's economic performance

By Keffyalew Gebremedhin

Access's view of two pillars of development

Access Capital just published its third Ethiopia: Macroeconomic Handbook 2011-2012, to sell its views and ideas on prospects and problems of Ethiopia's economy. The handbook contains several useful data on activities of the different sectors of the national economy, accompanied by analyses from a business perspective that Access Capital truly represents with lots of hunger and drive.

Clearly, much in the same way as the government's view, Access bases its optimistic outlook for 2011-2012 on strong performances of the agricultural and non-agriculture sectors. The purpose of this article is not to litigate the merits of Accesses's perspectives, save where I have serious disagreements with certain issues or when its proposals seem strictly designed in the firm's self-interests that come at the expense of the nations.

I seized this opportunity to review the salient ideas in this handbook, which is the flagship publication of Access Capital, in the notion that its recommendations and the direction it wants to take Ethiopia's growth is entirely Access's view, and not in any way attached to conspiratorial finality, as being alleged in the media since it came into circulation!

As a company that is in the process of expanding itself in so many areas at the same time, at least no less than 15 companies under it, clearly Access is hungry for growth more for its own sake than benefitting from the country's wholesome development. For instance, while I like the five recommendations it has made in respect of smallholder agriculture, even then there are indications that the intention is not at all to address rural Ethiopia's accelerated agro-technological transformation, as it claims, but to make gains for itself as an investment firm. There is also the nationalization proposal, to which it has failed to make serious case.

What Access and the government share in common is self-interest. When they are focused on what they need, they both ignore many prerequisites and essentials. A case in point is the plight of those citizens in the food insecure districts. Access believes that their situation is incapable of limiting or stopping growth. To that end, it takes the government's figure of more than 4.6 million "food-insecure individuals" and drops them out of existence, stating their situation "does not contradict expectation of strong overall agricultural growth figures, which reflect output in food-producing and food-surplus regions of the country." This is hard to take since it is also detached from the country's reality that needs changing.

Therefore, such considerations force the question what kind of growth Access Capital is talking about? In other words, broad-based growth or growth for the few?

Why Access Capital's analysis generates controversy

If the tenor of the debates regarding the developmental state paradigm is taken as an indicator, there are several experts that would disagree with Access Capital's approach of scavenging what is good for it, although its disdain for the regime's policies and approaches to development is no secret. Therefore, this duality and its far-reaching recommendations, such as nationalization of the country's few remaining major assets, are cause for concern. It seems to me that, owing to its cherry picking approach of what is good for it has made Access's analysis miss an opportunity to come up with more meaningful proposals, beneficial for both itself as investment company and the country's needs to give better life for its citizens, possibly when government becomes or is accountable.

That not being the case, the very basis of its approach in forecasting growth and suggesting alternative approaches seem to me half-backed, obviously ignoring with amazing ease the destructive role of drought and famine, climate change, environmental deterioration, conflicts, lack of appropriate institutions, etc., that primarily affect agricultural production, over which the firm has predicated its growth forecasts for the economy.

In respect of those 4.6 million individuals in 290 non-self-supporting woredawoch (districts), I disagree with Access's presumption that either those people do not exist, or since they are off government budget they do not matter. True, economic targets may be achieved, as Access has indicated. Nevertheless, it would only confirm that such growth in the first place is for the few and privileged — in other words not broad-based. Hence, the concern is that this leaves millions to perpetuate in the throes of deep-seated poverty.

Not surprisingly, this has also been the government's attitude, although in programmatic terms, poverty eradication has been its means of seducing the international donor community. Therefore, with the prime minister as its chief spokesperson, the government has either been ignoring those people shouldered to date by PSNP when it feels like, or using them to send out message that nobody is dying of hunger in Ethiopia, as if the country's economic growth has been taking care of everyone. The fact is that they are being taken care of through international humanitarian assistance.

Incidentally, it should worry us all, including Access, now since the international aid these people have depended on is likely to terminate someday, possibly in 2014. It means that the government would have to take responsibility for their sustenance after that, an indication to Access Capital that their problem is not disappearing or can be ignored with ease. As an investment firm run by economists, lawyers and management specialists this ought to be one of their preoccupations, if growth is to be employing all available resources. The effort here is to establish the differences between change at the counter and several millions of people who have been shut out of economic activities.

One more point is that this figure of 4.6 million is the lowest threshold and even that is not cast on iron. It moves to any higher end, when cyclical drought and famine hit the country with the severity they are capable of and their frequencies of occurrences growing shorter. For instance, in 2002/03 the number of affected population shot up to 15 million, most of them to the verge of death. Who knows what would happen next time?

The danger is that these natural shocks, induced by decades of man's mishandling of nature and society's capacities and internal dynamics, is increasing over time with continued forest destruction of millions of hectares, including in those areas protected by law. The worst consequences of this problem is that, with the exception of Tigray, the country's afforestation programs are poorly managed due to unenforceable government laws, policies and regulations, misplacement of professionals lured into political duties with perks as cadres and lack of appropriate institutions at all levels of local governments. Because of that actions rehabilitation of tired lands and protecting usable ones has taken backseat.

Today and tomorrow these problems, unlike Access's indifference as above, would have impact on economic growths and development of the country. Without these addressed seriously and sufficiently, the country cannot and would not be able to exploit its enormous growth potentials. If today's focus is strictly on what can be gained today, growth cannot become the engine of development.

What Access's a growth scenario have not foreseen?

There is the problem of conflicts and rising popular protests in all their manifestations, as expressions of public dissatisfactions that have escaped Access's radar. Its analysis and elements of growth forecasts ignore the fact that 2011 had been, in the now famous parlance, Ethiopia's Annus horribilis, (from the Latin for a horrible year, just because of the high number of conflicts in Ethiopia. There is no evidence that this would disappear in 2012. What kind of growth should one contemplate in the circumstances is the question of the day that must accompany any growth scenarios.

The causes and implications of these conflicts have been the subjects of critically important scholarly seminars and discussions over the years. Those that disagree with Access are likely to refer to numerous media reports and pull strands of their personal experiences, knowledge's and arguments from expert studies and speak of the number of ethnic and religious conflicts, as witnessed lately, some of them spilling over internally across regional states and international boundaries with repeated frequencies especially to Kenya and some along the common borders between Ethiopia and the new nation of South Sudan, adjoining Gambella and Beninshangul-Gumuz, emerging hubs of economic activities.

In that connection, I invite Access's attention to an already existing study that shows these conflicts have their origins in the competition for land and water among settled communities and over livestock in nomadic pastoralists. Most of these conflicts have implications to agriculture, on which the investment firm has festooned its forecasts of robust economic growth in 2012 and beyond.

Further, Access must be aware that conflict is one of the reasons why in 2011 Ethiopia's Minister of the Interior Shifferaw Tekle-Mariam was compelled to take the long journey to Beijing in search of Chinese help and advice on handling the conflict problems, according to media reports.

Although we do not exactly know what he got, he did not return empty-handed. China's Wang Gang, a member of the political bureau CCP Central Committee and vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference assured that he China is "willing to step up exchange and cooperation with the EPRDF."

What causes these conflicts in developing countries such as Ethiopia keeps experts increasingly intrigued by the phenomena. But they seem to get good clue of it in Ethiopia's case. For instance, Fiona Flintan and Imeru Tamrat in Spilling Blood over Water? The case of Ethiopia published in Scarcity and Surfeit: The Ecology of Africa's Conflicts have established that development is the crux of the problem. They argue that development is the real source of conflict, aggravated by the partitioning of the country along ethnic and language lines that started following the country's political and administrative reorganization. This in mind, the two experts observe:

Development-oriented conflicts include: disagreements between different users over the allocation of waters, land rights, or maintenance issues; conflicts between users and the authority responsible for the project over inappropriate design of infrastructure, peasant relocations, water charges, or management issues; conflict between project beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries; and, conflict between donor agencies and the recipient country over design, management, environmental impact, and financial issues.

In addition, those who subscribe to this view take the issue of increased fragmentation of farmlands and inadequacy of lands to accommodate the needs of the growing army of small agricultural holders that now number 12,896,910, excluding nomadic pastoralists, according to the 2010 Agricultural Abstract of Ethiopia's Central Statistics Agency (CSA). These various grievances associated with change and development are believed to be further fueling conflicts, some of them taking religious and ethnic characteristics.

Moreover, it is also the concern of the two experts that, in face of the many conflicts the country has witnessed and with increasing frequencies, the danger to Ethiopia lies in, "Traditional values of reciprocity and resource sharing [] threatened by growing individualism and protectionism."

Perhaps what Flintan and Tamrat could not foresee is the fact that the Ethiopian state would intensify by choice the tension, engaging in a foolhardy manner, as has been happening since 2008, in 'land grabbing.' This has forced the relocation, rather throwing small-scale farmers and pastoralists from the lands they have been using. A few thousands were put into villagization, with promises services would be provided to them there. The purpose of this disorganization of the lives of defenseless people is simply to handover large connected fertile agricultural lands mostly to foreign investors in agriculture.

As to commercial agriculture that Access Capital pushes so vigorously, it is obvious that the current policy has exposed the government of Ethiopia to accusations around the world as 'land grabber.' Unfortunately, pushing the human costs of this aside, Access observes that all the current arrangements such as cheap land fees, long leases with fixed prices, tax holidays, duty-free imports, etc., "make for very favorable supply-side factors which, alongside equally favorable demand-side factors (rising populations, incomes, and urbanization), make for very positive prospects for rising commercial farm production." Its message seems to resonate with urgency, as if the end of the world is coming.

I am not opposed to commercial farming, save the whimsical manner the government handled the whole thing, displacing settled farmers, the practice of which is still continuing. There is also the destruction of centuries-old forests and the consequences to the environment thereon. The government moved in to attain some benefits we cannot understand to this day. What is clearly visible is the rural poor have been exposed to exploitation, their being no legal safeguards to protect their rights. The whole undertaking has become serious indictment against the government's policy, with the rural people working in these farms complaining that they could not even get sufficient daily food for a given days, at a rate of less than a dollar a day. Not that anyone is listening to these people; on the contrary the Meles government has been out in full force denying that their complaints have origin in reality.

Obviously, I understand that Access seems to be making a case to advance its own interests. It is one of those upcoming domestic investors in commercial agriculture, engaged in large-scale commercial cotton farming in South Omo, cattle fattening, live animal and meat exports to Middle East, and export of pulse, etc.

I respect that. The only thing that worries me is that, in unleashing their huge economic, financial and intellectual powers on a poor country with millions of illiterate citizens, they do not seem interested in leaving small space to reflect that there are some differences between their interests as individuals and companies and that of the nation's future, as home for the great majority of the 85 million people who are unlikely to benefit from their successes whatsoever.

I am not all disagreements with Access Capital. As a matter of fact, I am a strong supporter of their five recommendations pertaining to small-scale agricultural producers. These refer to:

(a) Fertilizer subsidies: Access gives its estimate that a "1 percent of the budget" allocation to fertilizer subsidies could provide 180,000 tons of extra fertilizer or, alternatively, cut the cost of fertilizers by more than half (by 68 percent to be exact), making ordinary farmers beneficiaries.
(b) Seed supplies and subsidies: Access argues that sizable and sustained subsidies in improved seed supplies are likely to be more than offset by prospective agricultural yields and income gains for ordinary farmers.

(c) Farming equipment subsidies: The virtual absence of modern farming tools and technologies is one major factor behind low farm yields in other countries and implementing subsidy programs to facilitate the purchase of agricultural equipment by affording individual farmers or as a group can go a long way in facilitating rural agricultural technologies.

(d) An Agricultural Bank: Access believes that the key value-added of such an institution (relative to existing commercial banks, for example) would be its ability to specialize solely in agriculture-related financial products, which should allow it to offer tailored funding for small-scale farmers and potentially for others in the agricultural value chain.

(e) Seed supplies and subsidies: The large-scale supply of high-yielding and soil-appropriate seeds at low-cost is worthy national project to break away from past norms and to overcome the natural disincentives to invest in high-yielding seeds.

Certainly, Access has come out with these interesting recommendations not because it has become pro-small-scale farmers. It is because it sees its own business interests therein too. There is nothing wrong with that, so long as the farmers also benefit in a more calibrated manner.

The only problem is that the ruling party has both its political and economic interests in rural Ethiopia and it may not be willing to let the farmers benefit from this. It worries that they may declare their independence from it! That has been the real drag on Ethiopia's agriculture this long, notwithstanding that the country has been pumping money into agriculture, without the regime in 20 years being able to improve productivity. It has not managed even to set up decent and functional seeds and other input distribution system.

Access foresees growth in the non-agricultural sector

In the non-agricultural sector, Access anticipates strong growth of services on the back of expanding government budget and the "continued demand-driven growth in private services such as wholesale/retail trade and transport/communications (which together make up one-third of the total services sector)."

In the past years, from the prime minster down to his communications affairs minister denied that the constant breaks in power supply had any impact on economic growth, even when its adverse effects were showing on industry GDP, which stayed lower. Now everyone in government is saying electricity supply is reliable and growth would go ahead normally.

Perhaps rightly, this time Access also capitalizes on that. It states, "Normal supplies of electric power should help the manufacturing sector, which was in the previous two years hit by lengthy cuts in this critical service."

The other pieces of the growth puzzle Access tries to disentangle are embodied in the GTP related activities such as construction of public enterprises and industrial projects propelling economic activities. There is also the mining sector, with several scores of international mining companies competing for the piece of the tantalizing cake, although investments they have brought in (foreign direct investment—FDI) is not matching the fanfare surrounding mining.

Perhaps here too Access Capital is better positioned to know better in stating, "Mining output continues to rise rapidly", as it put it, "driven by new entrants and high international prices (mining sector growth was the 58 percent last fiscal year and the first quarter export figures suggest a continued strong output growth for this year as well)."

Another area foreseen by Access, as driver of growth is the 'emerging export industries' (mining, manufacturing), which has already been briefly touched upon. What Access refers to as exportable services deals with bright prospects of the services of Ethiopian Airlines, Ethiopian Shipping Lines and EPPCO in particular. In a moment, we would see that it recommends these should be put at the auctions block for privatization!

High inflation & its unlikely source of offsets

Access Capital's analysis does impinge on its concern over the high inflation the country has been suffering from, because of the consequent compression of real incomes in urban centers, domestic demand for some manufactured goods. Going forward, Access believes that this may weaken during 2011-2012 and much tighter bank credit conditions that have begun to emerge in the second quarter of the fiscal year (beginning October 2011) would temper growth in the private manufacturing and especially construction sectors.

There is no doubt that inflation above the lower single digits is sign of trouble all over. But, as Access has put it, it has been a terrible challenge for Ethiopia, a county that has experienced "the worst inflation record in Africa." No matter what, the December 2011 inflation level bears no good news, although some declines have been reported. However, inflation still stands at 35.9 percent, with food inflation as high as 46.5 percent.

There should be no pretending that this is serious impediment not only to meaningful economic growth but also to human dignity. Although Access hopes that it would significantly decline in a few quarters, it would remain obstacle for the country's growth in 2011/12 fiscal year.

One thing I find striking is that Access Capital's sees offsets for losses in inflation in the most unlikely of places — Industrial growth. Its analysis could have been more credible had it looked elsewhere. Instead it chose a sector that in all these years of economic growth has been riddled by policy problems of all sorts, which makes the whole idea of growth look like a car without engine.

Notwithstanding that Access keeps its optimism high and hinged in the so far unrealized "strong overall industrial growth", a sector without strong track during the past eight years of economic growth, averaging only a low of 13.0 percent. In fact, in GDP terms industrial growth has shown consistent declines from a peak of 14 percent in 2003/04 to the lower 10's percent, from which it has not recovered since, according to the macroeconomic report of the ministry of finance and economic development.

Nevertheless, since Access states confidently that industry can be a major force not just for meeting the public's needs for housing but also for generating widespread economic activity and employment, I am willing to wait and see.

One thing, however, I want to add here is that, if only Access had known probably that the National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE) would lower reserve requirements, which it did at the beginning of the new year to 10 from 15 percent and liquidity requirements to 20 from 25 percent, it could have foreseen that as source of increased economic activity and safer side of things for its analysis on offsets.

Bear in mind that even there, reactions of commercial banks to the five-percentage point lowering of the rate are not one of optimism. They still ache from the combination of the recent raise in banks' capital base to ETB500 thousand and the 27 percent of all their transactions they are required to pay for the Renaissance Dam. Such is the soreness of the banking sector on that score, the latest news indicates that board chairpersons of all commercial banks are preparing to protest in petition to the prime minister that this 27 percent pay (ETB 11 billion Access research, some dispute and reduce it to ETB6.5 billion) is killing their businesses, according to The Reporter.

Access Capital's recommended solutions to the bottlenecks to Ethiopia's economy

Key in Access Capital's recommended solutions to the fundamental problems of Ethiopia's economic growth is government getting out of businesses. In that regard, it states, "With government divesting its holdings in key areas of the economy, there would be a healthy rebalancing of ratios such as private investment-to-GDP and private manufacturing-to-GDP. This would be all the more important since (as noted in Chapter 1) some new parastatals are already emerging or expanding well beyond their traditional tasks."

In a way, a report that has all through seen government expenditures today accelerating growth turns around and asks government to get out of business. As bait, it specifically throws its frontal rejection of government's role in three public enterprises: railways, sugar factories, and a large metal industries conglomerate.

The rationale: "These three activities are areas from which governments around the world have long removed themselves and where private sector involvement—through green-field investments by domestic or foreign groups, through public-private partnerships, or through project finance ventures—would have been possible and preferable." To play the role of devil's advocate, I ask, if the movement of others is the criteria for divestment, what does Access say of those governments in developed countries that still own, for instance, their national carriers?

There is a pertinent point I would like to make in this connection. It relates to ownership of the economy, which in our case Ethiopians do not at this point in time. A closer look shows that already significant portion of the economy is foreign-owned. We do not see economic conditions for millions of Ethiopians getting any better or the country heading toward food self-sufficiency.

Perhaps, before one takes position either way on solutions recommended by Access Capita, it may be necessary to re-examine clearly and carefully the path our country has traversed from 1974 to 2011. That history is mainly characterized by the first 17 years of nationalization of properties, following the 1974 revolution. In 1975, we were happier believing that, among others, the 1975 rural lands proclamation, which turned all rural lands into public property, was breaking the back of feudalism.

Lands in excess of 10 hectares were nationalized without compensation. This law confirmed to the peasants, as Prof. Dessalegn Rahmeto eloquently wrote in (Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia, 1985), the state is the giver. The peasants got the lands they needed. They were offered the power to organize themselves on 800 hectares of land in association and become the power they could be.

Turning themselves into power conflicted with their peasant mentality that used to believe the only power is the state. This opened the avenue and for power-hungry people to use the state to capture the peasant associations, as means of ensuring control by military regime.

When peasant mentality changed and needed power, the change in 1991 needed power more than the peasants. Consequently, after the 1991 change of government, while the TPLF kept the main land reform laws of the military government intact, it tinkered on the margins only to ensure that the provision in the 1975 proclamation on rural lands is changed from 'public property' to 'state property.' In so doing, the TPLF ensured its controls over the rural populace.

At the beginning of 2012, this has crossed over to urban lands to make sure that in the same manner the urban population falls under total control of the TPLF. As the peasant submitted because of its inability to separate from its land, the right to owning residence is now falling under threat for non-loyalty. The implication is that after certain period of time, the owner of a house would lose his or her dwelling place under the revised law that now changes ownership of lands to lease.

Moreover privatization measures after 1991 have not worked in the interests of Ethiopians. Wealthy individuals, both foreign and Ethiopian, mostly those connected with the ruling party took over nationalized state properties, disposed of cheap to whomever the ruling party favored.

In the process, Sheik Mohammed Al Amoudi, the world's 63rd billionaire and Saudi Arabia's second wealthiest person, according to the WikiLeaks release on 30 August 2011 of US government information, "cherry-picked the best of the companies sold to date", representing over 60 percent of them. In that respect, the US embassy cable to the State Department observed:

An examination of available information on privatized enterprises in Ethiopia shows that companies owned by, or affiliated with, Ethio-Saudi billionaire Sheik Mohammed Al Amoudi have purchased the vast majority (in terms of value) of enterprises. Nearly every enterprise of significant monetary or strategic value privatized since 1994 has passed from the ownership of the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) to one of Al Amoudi's companies. While the privatizations of these enterprises were for the most part competitive tenders, the dominance of Al Amoudi brings into question the true competitiveness of the process.
Not surprisingly, Access Capital advocates now that everything the government owns, especially what they calls the "BIG 5s" must be privatized. The BIG 5s are: Ethiopian Airlines, Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Insurance Corporation, Ethio Telecom, and Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation. As I stated above, I hope their intention is honorable, i.e., not wanting a repeat of the ugly experiences of the 1990s.

There is no doubt that this proposal would generate huge debates and anger. What we need to answer is whether privatization has so far in any way helped the Ethiopian people. The second criticism that would come from many quarters is whether a country should pursue privatization for its sake, because of ideological reasons, or the economic interests of such as those like Access Capital.

It makes a lot of sense if privatization is effected, when there is no other alternative. There is not objective to be served throwing good money after bad.

The question, nevertheless, is why should superbly performing company such as the Ethiopian Airlines be privatized, when it has proved its best achievements under difficult and different governments and ideological clouds? This should be answered with a beautiful American expression that says, if it ain't broke, don't fix it!

Similarly, in respect of those that have become milkable cows to powerful persons, the solution may not necessarily be privatization of this or that cut. It should be working a bit harder to be governed as a nation by the rule of law, with citizens empowered to promote or depose their leaders with their democratic vote—one man one vote—not one man too many votes!

Finally, let me say here, after years of experience and the lessons Ethiopia has provided us in all their details, I am not particularly sanguine with government being at the same time political and representative of the people, defender of the national interests, the judiciary (because the TPLF have command powers over the courts in Ethiopia) and now the top businessperson of the nation.

Each situation must be judged on its merits. I hope I am wrong, but I fear that Access is only making the case for privatization to get a piece of the action, just à la Sheik Mohammed Al Amoudi.

Privatization & the marriage between Ethiopian politics & money

If what is written here sounded bitter, it has nothing to do with Access Capital. It is a reflection of my disappointment by a 22 December event organized by Sheik Mohammed Al Amoudi to promote a controversial book by the controversial government minister of communication affairs. It showed me the tip of the iceberg of corruption and the intimacy between Ethiopian politics and real sweaty sizzling wealth. This is a product of nationalization in a situation where there is no rule of law.

Is the body language making statement about a new protocol or is it about the depth of Bereket Simon's gratitude?
Surprises never end. On the 8 January issue of Addis Fortune the minister appeared to warn all Ethiopians, "The mother of all problems in Ethiopia is rent seeking."

It is unfortunate that the honorable minister has not heard what Ethiopians are asking of him with loud and clear voices. If one reviews the few remaining independent media publications on this, the people are asking the minister to tell them what they should do with influence peddlers in top circle of the government to the world's top ranking tycoon!

I did not fabricate this event. What should we call it when a government minister gets his hospital bills in foreign country paid by a tycoon, or his book and that of his brother-in-law published in Nairobi, the costs fully paid by the same person? In any country governed by the rule of law this is corruption, bribery–the worst scandal that entails resignation of the individual and all those associated with that, or summary dismissal from position and subject to prosecution.

Ethiopia's laws provide for the same kind of punishment. For instance, Proclamation No.414/2004, which replaced the 1957 Penal Code and the Revised Special Penal Code of the Military Government of 1982, has extensive provisions against crimes committed by public servants against public office.

The article specifically provides:

(1) Any public servant who, for the performance of an act proper to his office, solicits or obtains an advantage or exacts a promise before or after the performance of such an act, is punishable, according to the circumstances of the case, with simple imprisonment for not less than one year, or with rigorous imprisonment not exceeding seven years and fine not exceeding ten thousand Birr.
(2) Where the extent of the advantage received or the official capacity or powers of the person corrupted renders the case of particular gravity, the punishment shall be rigorous imprisonment from five years to fifteen years and fine not exceeding thirty thousand Birr."

The problem is who could enforce the laws, where everyone is tainted?

Otherwise, the minister was confident when he acknowledged in his words that payment has been made to his benefit and those close to him. Here is what he said in his words to show his defiance against Ethiopia's laws:

የእኔ ሥራ መጽሐፉን መጻፍ ብቻ ነበር፡፡ የእኔንና በቅርቡ አቶ መዝሙር ፈንቴ (የባለቤታቸው ወንድም) የተረጐሙትን መጽሐፍ አልአሙዲ እንዲያሳትመው መመሪያ ብቻ ነው የሰጠሁት፡፡ ደወልኩ እና እነዚህን መጽሐፎች ታሳትማቸዋለህ አልኩት"
"My task was to write the book. I called Al Amoudi and gave him the instruction to get my book and that of Mr. Mezmur Fente's translated work (his brother-in-law) to get published."

This chronicle of the December 220 Sheraton spectacles was put into the records for all to see by an invited guest, who wrote his observations on Addis Admas newspaper. Of the amenities this same writer observed he had seen nothing of the sort. In fact, he put it in luscious language: "በሸራተን ምን ጠፍቶ" በሚያስብል ሁኔታ ተበልቶ አይደለም ተደፍቶ የማያልቅ ምግብም ተዘጋጅቷል፡፡" ("Everything was done to show Sheraton lacks nothing. So much food has been prepared that it could not even be finished dumping it, much less eating it.")

http://transformingethiopia.wordpress.com/