

Conference Reports

Conference “Health and Development in Ethiopia”, 7 December 2010, Culture, History and Religions Department, Sapienza – University of Rome

The conference “Health and Development in Ethiopia” – carried out in Rome on December 7, 2010 within the initiative “Con l’Africa, 6-7 Dicembre” - was organized by the Department of History, Culture and Religions of Sapienza – University of Rome and by the Directorate General for Development Cooperation of Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs (DCGS - MAE) on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the decolonization of Africa. The purpose of the initiative was to promote a critical remark on the relations between Italy and Ethiopia, through a survey on some of the main Italian and international activities of Research and Cooperation. Participants were: Dr. Vincenzo Racalbutto and Dr. Simonetta Di Cori from DCGS – MAE, Professor Wolbert Smidt and Aklilu Habtu from Mekelle University (MU), Professor Pino Schirripa (also chairman) and Emanuele Bruni from Sapienza – University of Rome.

The first presentation, carried out by Dr. Racalbutto from DCGS – MAE, was on the main activities of an intervention run by the Italian Cooperation in several developing countries with a specific focus on the Italian Contribution to the Health Sector Development Project (HSDP) in Ethiopia, headed by Dr. Pasquale Farese. The new innovative approach of this project consists in implying a bigger information and coordination between the beneficiary government and other partners (donors, NGOs, civil society) and a harmonization of intervention in relation to the objectives, to the indicators and to the expected results. At the same time, this approach means also less visibility for partners but bigger sustainability of external help, with the purpose to obtain a real ownership of the beneficiary and a bigger flexibility of the kind of funding according to the intention of donors.

The purpose of Racalbutto’s contribution was to offer a critical glance on the conception of intervention itself. As a matter of fact, this perspective showed how most of the health interventions depend on understanding the local context and on offering a technical “sustainable” support, rather than a simple donation of resources that, although generous, could result in a dependency culture. The second contribution by Dr. Simonetta Di Cori from DCGS – MAE presented the activities of CinemArena, an educational and socio-health related campaign in the most disadvantaged areas of the world supported by the Italian Cooperation, based on the strong educational power of the image in some important health and development related issues. Started in Mozambique in 2002, CinemArena is an innovative cooperation project that brings information and prevention campaign on malaria, HIV-AIDS, leprosy

and maternal childhood health aside to projection of movies or sports events (i.e. the Football World Cup), into remote and rural areas of developing countries, such as in Angola, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal and Uganda, difficult to be reached by local media. CinemArena had a big success (an estimated ca. 10.000 members of audience only in the Mozambican campaign) and represents today one of the best practices of Italian Cooperation.

The presentation by Professor Wolbert Smidt from MU (Department of History and Cultural Studies) was on his studies on social holistic phenomena, which includes research on some medical traditions in Tigray. More deeply, Smidt analyzed some of the medical practices that make Ethiopian Traditional Medicine (*Habesha Bablani Medhani*) so unique and different, especially from biomedicine. Moreover, with the simple but effective help of a blackboard, Smidt stressed the performative importance of the written and spoken word in the ambit of the treatment of any case of sickness, especially those attributed to the spiritual-religious etiological sphere. The presentation of Aklilu Habtu from MU (Institute of Paleoenvironment and Heritage Conservation) was on a project on the interconnection of environment livelihood and development, carried out in the Abreha We Atsebaha village in Tigray, one of the most vulnerable areas prone to drought. Basing on the government's national policy on environmental rehabilitation and water conservation measures, this project consisted in coordinating a cooperation between the community and the local administration authorities, based on the relying on the available local resources, local knowledge and on the perception of local populations. As a matter of fact, farmers were active participants in solving their community's problems and the community has been embarked with massive rehabilitative activities aiming at establishing water banks and storage rising the underground water table and the construction of water harvesting ponds. This project can be considered, therefore, as a symbol of success of the anthropological approach in both contexts of social research and in community based climate change adaptation interventions.

In his presentation Professor Pino Schirripa – from the History, Religions and Cultures Department of University of Rome – presented some of the main researches on medical anthropology in Tigray, carried in the last three years by the Italian Ethnological Mission in Ethiopia – Tigray (IEMET) headed by himself. Started in 2007, the mission has already seen three years of five-months each fieldwork seasons. A fourth, still in progress, will be concluded in May 2011. Most of the researches were carried by master students, working on their theses on topics that concern medical anthropology and social sufferance. All these researches were supervised by Dr Gebreab Barnabas, Head of Tigray Health Bureau (THB). Moreover, Schirripa stressed on the importance of giving a restitution *in loco* of research results, even when these are still preliminary, which is the reason why all the researches were usually presented through conferences run in Mekelle at the end of any fieldwork phase.

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The last presentation was given by Emanuele Bruni, PhD candidate from Sapienza University of Rome. The main topic of the presentation was on the importance of medical anthropology in Global Health, with a focus on the researches that were conducted by Bruni in the last three years on Ethiopian Nosological System and the one, still in progress, that involves him together with MU in a Ethiopian National research project on an epidemic liver disease with an unknown aetiology that has been affecting a number of villages in North-Western Tigray (Ethiopia). Bruni concluded his contribution stressing on an approach of research and intervention that goes beyond the reductive focus on biological perspective in favor of a holistic approach, promoting more participative tools of research for the population.

A deep and stimulating discussion on all the contribution followed the presentations. The conference was concluded by the chairman Pino Schirripa who, on the behalf of „Sapienza” – University of Rome, recognized the strategic importance of International Development Cooperation, intended as the best international relation frame where the moral ethical and political efforts taken by the international community for the reduction of inequities – especially in health – and the solution of any kind of conflict take place. This new conception of development, therefore, must not be only based on a simple economic growing but must also be based on a human sustainable development, oriented to the participation and the collaboration between donors and beneficiaries.

Emmanuele BRUNI¹

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National Workshop on the Launching of *ITYOPIS*, *Northeast African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (NEAJ)*, 17 December 2010, Mekelle University

The opening speech was done by Mekelle University (MU) vice-president Abdelkader Kadir, followed by representatives of the College of Social Sciences and Languages (CSSL) and the Journal team, who were explaining how the project was started and what the main ideas of the Journal were – both concerning content and organisational structure. Ideas on the development of the logo were presented, and the history of discussions around the choice of the name by the team was told.

The main part of the workshop was devoted to both the national and international guests and their scholarly analysis. National guests, who presented papers, were the specialist of historical Ethiopian studies, Semeneh Ayelew (Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa), the linguist Dr Biniyam Sisay (Dean, Addis Ababa University), and the archaeologist Tekle Hagos (Addis Ababa University), in addition to members of the Journal team. The

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