

International Workshop on “Culture, Environment and Development” at Mekelle University, 15 March 2012

The International Workshop on “Culture, Environment and Development” took place at Mekelle University on 15 March 2012. This was the second International Workshop organized by the Institute of Paleoenvironment and Heritage Conservation at Mekelle University, after the “International Workshop on Culture and Development” which took place on 13 August 2011. In this workshop, researchers from Ethiopia and abroad presented 18 papers from various fields and perspectives, united under the grand theme of “Culture, Environment and Development.” Among the guests in attendance were Dr. Kelali Adhana, the Director General of the Tigray Science and Technology Agency, and Ms. Hikari Nishimoto from the Embassy of Japan in Ethiopia.

After the opening remarks by a representative of Mekelle University, Dr. Kelali Adhana opened the workshop with a keynote address. In his speech, he commented on the importance of cultural diversity for development. He also commented on the unique context of this workshop, as it was conducted at the time when the Ethiopian Government had just declared the Climate Resilient Green Economy policy.

After the keynote speech, papers related to environment and changing climate were presented. Hailemariam Meaza, a lecturer in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Mekelle University, presented a paper entitled “Impact of Degraded Hillside Allocation for Tree Planting on Livelihoods of Landless Farmers in the Northern Highlands of Ethiopia.” He had studied the impact of allocating degraded hillside to landless farmers for tree planting, explaining that this allocation has resulted in significant increase in crop yield, livestock productivity and other sources of income, creating a positive impact on the livelihoods of landless farmers. Then, Dr. Kelemework Tafere, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology, Mekelle University, presented a paper titled “Pastoralism at Crossroads: Changing Features of Climate, Livelihood and Social Organization in East Africa.” He had studied the impacts of various challenges to pastoralism, such as increased frequency of drought, population growth, and loss of land due to changes in state policies on pastoralism, arguing that pastoralism could well be a matter of history in the next few decades. Then, Merhatbeb Teklemedhn, a lecturer in the Department of Law and Governance, Mekelle University, presented a paper titled “The Role of Public Interest Litigation in the Protection of the Environment in Ethiopia: the Law and the Practice.” He investigated the law and the practice of the emerging public interest litigation in the protection of the environment in Ethiopia, presenting a herald of public interest litigation case to protect the environment.

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After the discussion and a short health break, papers related to livelihoods and social protection systems were presented. Tsehaye Weldegiorgis, a lecturer in the Department of Economics, Mekelle University, presented a paper co-authored with Jayamohan MK, an Associate Professor in the Department of Economics, Mekelle University, titled “Livelihoods and Coping Strategies – Looking Beyond Income: A Study of Female Headed Households in Mekelle, Ethiopia.” The result of a survey of some female headed households and male headed households in Mekelle were presented, showing that female headed households were more disadvantaged than male headed households in various respects. Then, Aklilu Habtu, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology, Mekelle University, presented a paper titled “Urban Renovation and Livelihood Change in Mekelle: A Study of Conditions of Social Capital in Kebele 14.” He had studied Qebele 14 in Mekelle, which is going through urban renovation carried out by the state, and called for attention to social protection in relation to the process of urbanization.

After the discussion, Dr. Mushir Ali, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Mekelle University, presented a paper titled “Socio-economic Analysis of Poorest of the Poor Section of Society -Beggars: A Case Study from India.” He presented the results of an extensive field survey of beggars which he had conducted in Shahjahanpur city and its urban fringe in India, identifying the demography, socio-economic status, and the responsible factors for the beggar population, and suggested some remedial measures for this problem. Then, Osvaldo Costantini, a PhD candidate in Cultural Anthropology at Sapienza – University of Rome, presented a paper titled “An Informal Way to Social Protection. The Case of Eritrean Refugees in Rome.” He analyzed the movements and social interaction of Eritrean refugees, local networks, and Italian institutions in Rome, where the reception systems for these refugees are not adequate.

After the discussion and lunch break, papers related to history and archaeology were presented. Fisseha Hailu from the Adwa College of Teacher Education presented a paper titled “Tigrinya before the Birth of Christ.” He suggested his ideas on the Egyptian inscriptions in monuments of Queen Hatshepsut (1501-1479 BC) and King Tuthmosis III (1479-1447 BC) about Punt, and concluded that Tegarü as a speech community and Tigrinña as their language [or at least a predecessor language] have existed at least since 2000 B.C. Then, Dr. Wolbert Smidt, an Associate Professor in the Department of History and Cultural Studies, Mekelle University, presented a paper titled “The ‘Great Stela’ of Aksum in the Political Iconography of Tigray: New Archival Material on Its First Appearance in Modern Politics.” He showed that the Great Stela of Aksum now appears regularly in modern public iconography, from the crest of the federal police up to the seal of Mekelle University, and described how it first came into its new role as an important political iconographical symbol, replacing lions and crosses. Then, Yohannes Gebre

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Selassie, a PhD candidate at the University of Paris, Panthéon Sorbonne, presented a paper titled “New ‘Pre-Aksumite’ and Aksumite Archaeological Sites from Central Tigray and Their Significance for Tourism Development in the ‘Historic Route.’” He introduced Hinzet, Felhat, Addi Satra and Enda Ra’esi, which are largely unknown Aksumite or possibly Pre-Aksumite sites in Central Tigray, and commented on their potential for tourism and how best to protect and promote these sites.

After the discussion, papers related to architectural heritage were presented. Rumi Okazaki, a researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), presented a paper titled “A Study on the Historical District of Harar Jugol, Ethiopia.” She had studied the architectural heritage in Harer Jugol, analyzing the building typology as well as the housing conditions, and found that Harer is a unique city with the characteristic of woman-headed society with strong ties among them. Then, Professor Dr. Riichi Miyake, a Professor in the Department of Human Life Sciences, Fuji Women’s University, presented a paper co-authored with Nobuhiro Shimizu from Keio University and Yohei Mano from Hosei University and entitled “A Reconstructive Study on the Old Church of Asira Matira Monastery in Tigray, Ethiopia.” He explained that Asira Met’ira Monastery is one of the most important Stephanite monasteries, and that the team is aiming at a reconstructive study of the old Mika’él church. He presented such a reconstructive study of its *meqdes*, the sanctuary which had been demolished in 2009 before the intervention of the research team.

After the discussion and health break, papers related to medical anthropology were presented. Mitiku Gebrehiwot, a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology, Mekelle University, presented a paper titled “Insane Minds in Insane Places: Mental Illness and People’s Belief in Ethiopia: an Overview.” He had studied how mental illness is perceived and treated in Ethiopia, and found that it is most commonly perceived as diabolic attack, and thus most often treated by local remedies such as holy water and prayer. Then, Emanuele Bruni, a PhD Candidate at Sapienza - University of Rome and a lecturer at the College of Health Sciences, Mekelle University, presented a paper titled “Naming and Interpretations of Sickness in Mekelle, an Ethnographical Research on ‘Clashes and Overlapping’ in a Plural City.” He categorized how different sicknesses are named to six main nomination principles. Then, Professor Dr. Pino Schirripa, Department of History, Cultures and Religions at Sapienza – University of Rome, presented a paper titled “Pharmaceuticals, Traditional Drugs, Holy Water in Tigray. Policies, Strategies, Actors.” He described how western drugs, traditional drugs, and religious remedies such as holy water are marketed, perceived and used by the people of Tigray in Ethiopia.

After the discussion, papers related to cultural heritage and museums were presented. Dr. Kemal Abdulwehab from the Institute of Ethiopian Studies

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(IES) in Addis Ababa University presented a paper titled “The Shrine and Arabic / Islamic Literature of Anna, Rayya: A Call for a Joint Preservation and Conservation Project.” He introduced the significance of Islamic literature and architecture found in Anna, Rayya, explained their current situation, and urged their preservation and conservation. Then, Merkeb Mekuria, a lecturer, researcher, and curator at the IES Museum, Addis Ababa University, presented a paper titled “Museum and Change in Ethiopia: The Case of Public and Church Museums in Addis Ababa.” He showed how the public and church museums in Addis Ababa were created and changed over time, and what roles political and policy changes have played in the course of their development. Then, Wondimeneh Mammo, an Assistant Professor of Library and Information Science, Alpha University College, presented a paper co-authored with Zewednesh Dejene, a Senior Database Expert at the Authority for Research, Preservation and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH), titled “Status, Prospects and Challenges of ICT Based Cultural Heritage Information Systems in Ethiopia: The Case of the Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project (ECHP).” Using frameworks such as DeLone and McLean IS Success Model, the team assessed the database which was developed as a component of the Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project (ECHP) to inventorize and document cultural heritage information. Based on their findings, the team made some recommendations to improve ECHP.

After the rapporteur of the conference, Dr. James N. Bondla, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology, Mekelle University, made a short summary of the workshop, Professor Dr. Joachim Herzig, the President of Mekelle University, concluded the workshop with his closing remarks. He expressed his gratitude to all the participants, and hoped that this workshop will pave the way to further successful cooperative initiatives, to further programs and projects fostering Culture, Environment and Development, for the benefit of Ethiopia. After the workshop, all presenters were invited to a dinner, where they continued discussions from the workshop or otherwise formed networks with each other. As a member of the organizing committee, I would like to thank all the presenters and audiences, and sincerely hope this workshop was a good opportunity for all the participants from Ethiopia and abroad to discuss how we could contribute to the sustainable development of Ethiopia by reflecting back at our cultural and environmental heritages.

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