

Dear Melaku

January 10, 2026

Thank you so much for reconnecting! Much appreciated! I will respond separately regarding your query on professional engagements and possibilities for collaboration.

A book is being reviewed for publication at AAU with a subtitle: Letters to the Next Generation of the Ethiopian Diaspora. I wrote the book. In it, my praise for you and your colleagues took up 95% of the two-pager reflection on teaching at CPS ... and 5% to make a claim (sort of) that I did a decent job (without proof). You provided such proof today. Thank you mightily! I have appended my two-pager entry (extracts from page 302/303 in the book) to your message below.

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Dear Dr. Aynalem

I hope you are doing well. This is Melaku Fekadu, your former MSc student in Population Studies (Demography) at Addis Ababa University. I studied under you during 2011–2013, and I want to sincerely thank you for the inspiration and support you gave us during those years—your dedication to teaching, your encouragement, and the way you challenged us to think critically had a lasting impact on me and helped shape the direction of my academic and professional growth.

I noticed that you are currently at California Department of Public Health, and I wanted to reconnect. I have recently relocated to the U.S. and am working in data analytics and statistical research, with a strong focus on population health and health-care financing, including health economics and analyses of catastrophic health expenditures.

I would really value any advice you may have on academic, research, or professional opportunities in this space, and I would be grateful if you could let me know if there are any openings or collaborations you think I should be aware of.

Thank you for your time, and I hope to stay in touch.

Best regards,
Melaku

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Chapter Five — Subsection 5.3: 2012 and 2013 Teaching at the Center for Population Studies (CPS)

When I began teaching at the Center for Population Studies (CPS) at Addis Ababa University, I felt as though the arc of my professional and personal journeys had finally aligned. I had left Ethiopia in the late 1980s, studied and taught abroad for decades, and now returned with a perspective that could bridge the gap between theory and lived reality. The students I encountered at CPS were eager, intelligent, and profoundly hungry for something new.

Abstract models seemed detached from the fields, towns, and households they knew so well. My mission, unspoken but deeply felt, was to connect theory to those ground-level truths, to show that demography was not only about equations or fertility tables, but about families like theirs, villages like the ones they came from, and the country whose destiny was their responsibility.

The first class I taught was on migration and urbanization. For many of these graduate students, urbanization was not just an academic subject—it was their lived experience. Many had themselves come from rural households and felt both the opportunities and dislocations of Addis Ababa's rapid expansion. I asked them to share stories of their own journeys, of brothers and sisters who had left home, of cousins who had taken the perilous routes through Sudan or Libya in hopes of reaching Europe or the Gulf. What began as a lecture became a dialogue, alive with examples and debate.

Many said later, they felt as if the classroom was not separate from the street outside but deeply connected to it. In my nutrition and health classes, I pressed the importance of linking policy to practical outcomes. We would analyze tables on infant mortality, and I would ask: 'What does this number mean in a kebele health post?

What does it mean for a mother who cannot afford transport to the nearest clinic?' The answers were sometimes hesitant, but gradually students began to engage, to think beyond the numbers and recognize that each statistic represented a life lived—or lost. The excitement was contagious.

One student later told me, 'You forced us to think like policymakers, not just scholars.' That comment has stayed with me. The culmination of my time at CPS came not in the exams or final papers, but in the send-off ceremonies my students organized. They pooled their limited resources to buy me traditional gifts: a woven scarf, a wooden cross, and fresh flowers. What moved me most was not the gifts themselves, but the words they spoke. They emphasized that they were partners in learning rather than passive recipients. They said I had given them tools that felt useful, tools they could carry into their careers in government ministries, NGOs, or local administrations.

And yet, there was a shadow alongside the joy. Not long after these ceremonies, I was quietly told that my services would no longer be required at CPS. No reason was given. I have often wondered why. Was it simply institutional inertia? I will never know for certain. What I do know is that, for that brief period, I saw what Ethiopian higher education could be at its best—vibrant, engaged, and deeply rooted in the country's realities. Looking back, I see CPS not as a closed chapter but as part of a longer story of what education in Ethiopia must become. If the country is to rise above its cycles of division and conflict, it will need teachers willing to break old molds and students empowered to see themselves not just as learners but as leaders. That was the gift those young men and women gave me: the chance to believe again in the power of education to shape the future of a nation.

January 11, 2026

Dear Dr. Aynalem, thank you so much for your warm response — I truly appreciate it. I opened the PDF, and I am genuinely honored and humbled to be included in your upcoming book.

I also want to say, from the depth of my heart, that you remain one of the most humble and inspiring professors I have ever met. Beyond your academic

excellence, your character stood out — the respect you showed students, your simplicity, and the way you supported us with sincerity. Your dedication to return home and contribute to your community and country is deeply touching and continues to inspire me to pursue work that has real impact. Congratulations again on this remarkable milestone. I am proud of you and grateful to have learned from you.

Warm regards,
Melaku

January 12, 2026

Dear Dr. Aynalem,

This is Dr. Sena Adugna Beyene. I studied under your guidance from 2011 to 2013, and I would like to sincerely thank you for your dedication to teaching, encouragement, and consistent emphasis on critical thinking. I particularly value your teaching philosophy, which emphasized strong preparation, critical discussion, and the practical application of concepts beyond the classroom. Your approach—encouraging deep engagement with academic readings and linking theory to real-world public health challenges—has strongly influenced my own teaching practice at the university level, as well as my work in research and consultancy.

By training, I hold a PhD in Public Health (Reproductive Health), an MSc in Population Studies (Demography) with a focus on Reproductive Health, a Certified MSc in Biostatistics, and a BSc in Statistics. I am currently a Senior Lecturer and Assistant Professor at Jimma University, a researcher, and the Founder and Managing Director of ASC Consulting PLC, where I focus on evidence-based health and development initiatives.

I would greatly appreciate any advice you may have regarding academic, research, or professional opportunities in public health, biostatistics, and population and development studies. I would also be grateful if you could share any potential openings, collaborations, or professional networks that you believe may be relevant. In addition, thank you very much for your willingness to write a LinkedIn recommendation for me. A brief and reflective recommendation focusing on your experience teaching and mentoring me, and the professional impact of your courses,

would be deeply meaningful—particularly in relation to my current work in public health, biostatistics, and population and development research projects.

Thank you again for your time, continued support, and inspiration. I truly appreciate it and would be delighted to stay in touch.

Warm regards,

Dr. Sena Adugna Beyene, PhD

Assistant Professor

Researcher & Managing Director, ASC Consulting PLC