

# WALKING BETWEEN WORLDS

## *Diaspora, Identity, and Ethiopia's Global Future*

Discussion Manuscripts for Ethiopia's Office of Diaspora Affairs and  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Key:**    **Section highlight**    **Has policy relevance**

I wrote this book for young people trying to understand where they belong. But I also wrote it for institutions, leaders, and communities willing to ask a larger question: How do we build an Ethiopian future expansive enough to include all its children — wherever they may live in the world?

## Core Book Launch Talking Points

### Opening Frame

- This book was born from a personal question that became a collective one:

*What does it mean to belong to more than one world at the same time?*

- *Walking Between Worlds* is not only about migration. It is about identity, inheritance, memory, language, responsibility, and the emotional experience of being Ethiopian across borders.
- The book speaks especially to the next generation of the Ethiopian diaspora — young people growing up balancing multiple identities, expectations, and realities.
- It is written as a series of reflections and letters because the Ethiopian story has always traveled through conversation: between generations, between families, and between worlds.

# Central Themes of the Book

## 1. Identity Beyond Geography

- Ethiopian identity does not end at the border.
- Diaspora identity is not “less Ethiopian”; it is a different lived expression of Ethiopian continuity.
- The next generation should not feel forced to choose between cultures. They can carry both.

## 2. Memory and Responsibility

- Diaspora communities inherit both pride and pain.
- We inherit stories of resilience, migration, conflict, sacrifice, and hope.
- The question is not only “Where do we come from?” but also “What responsibility do we carry forward?”

## 3. Bridging Generations

- Many young Ethiopians abroad understand Ethiopia emotionally before they understand it historically or politically.
- Older generations often communicate survival stories; younger generations seek belonging and clarity.
- The book creates space for dialogue instead of judgment between generations.

## 4. Diaspora as a Living Bridge

- Diaspora communities are not outsiders looking in.
- They are cultural ambassadors, investors, translators, advocates, innovators, and connectors.
- Ethiopia’s global future will increasingly depend on how effectively it engages its diaspora communities.

## 5. Healing Through Conversation

- The Ethiopian diaspora reflects the divisions and wounds of the homeland.
- But it also holds enormous potential for reconciliation and renewal.

- Honest storytelling creates empathy where politics alone often cannot.

## **Audience Engagement Questions**

- What does Ethiopian identity mean in a global generation?
- How do we preserve culture without freezing it in the past?
- What responsibilities does the diaspora have to Ethiopia?
- How can Ethiopia better engage younger generations abroad?
- What role can storytelling play in national healing and global connection?

# **DISCUSSION EVENT: ETHIOPIA'S OFFICE OF THE DIASPORA**

## **Strategic Framing**

This audience will likely care about:

- diaspora engagement,
- national connection,
- investment,
- cultural continuity,
- youth participation,
- trust-building,
- and long-term diaspora relations.

The framing should emphasize:

- connection,
- partnership,
- intergenerational continuity,
- and constructive engagement.

# Tailored Talking Points

## 1. The Diaspora Is Not Peripheral — It Is Part of the Nation

- The Ethiopian diaspora is one of Ethiopia’s greatest global assets.
- Diaspora communities contribute economically, culturally, intellectually, and diplomatically.
- But beyond remittances, the diaspora carries emotional and historical continuity.

Key line:

“The diaspora should not only be seen as a resource to mobilize, but as a community to meaningfully engage.”

## 2. The Next Generation Requires a New Engagement Model

- Second- and third-generation Ethiopians abroad experience identity differently from their parents.
- Traditional engagement models often focus on nostalgia.
- Younger generations are searching for relevance, inclusion, and participation.

Discussion expansion:

- language preservation,
- cultural literacy,
- heritage travel,
- internships,
- digital engagement,
- youth leadership exchanges.

Key line:

“The question is no longer whether the next generation remembers Ethiopia exactly as their parents did. The question is whether they still feel invited into Ethiopia’s future.”

### 3. Storytelling Is Nation-Building

- Books, films, music, and personal narratives help sustain identity across distance.
- Cultural diplomacy begins inside families before it reaches institutions.
- Diaspora storytelling can strengthen belonging and reduce alienation.

Potential discussion angle:

- supporting diaspora writers,
- youth archives,
- oral history initiatives,
- diaspora cultural festivals,
- educational partnerships.

### 4. Building Trust Across Distance

- Many diaspora communities want deeper engagement but also want transparency, listening, and inclusion.
- Engagement cannot be one-directional.
- Long-term trust is built through sustained dialogue.

Key line:

“Diaspora engagement succeeds when people feel heard, not only mobilized.”

### 5. Diaspora Youth as Future Global Ambassadors

- Young Ethiopians abroad already represent Ethiopia in classrooms, companies, universities, media spaces, and international institutions.
- Investing in diaspora youth identity strengthens Ethiopia’s long-term global influence.

“If Ethiopia invests emotionally and intellectually in its diaspora youth today, it invests in global advocates for generations to come.”

# DISCUSSION EVENT: ETHIOPIA'S MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

## Strategic Framing

This audience will likely focus more on:

- diplomacy,
- soft power,
- international perception,
- diaspora influence,
- global partnerships,
- national image,
- and Ethiopia's geopolitical positioning.

The framing here should emphasize:

- cultural diplomacy,
- narrative power,
- transnational identity,
- and diaspora as strategic global actors.

## Tailored Talking Points

### 1. Diaspora Communities Shape Ethiopia's Global Narrative

- International understanding of Ethiopia is increasingly influenced by diaspora voices.
- Social media, academia, business, journalism, and cultural production amplify diaspora perspectives globally.
- Diaspora communities are informal diplomats whether institutions recognize it or not.

Key line:

“Today, national image is not shaped only in embassies. It is also shaped in communities, classrooms, podcasts, boardrooms, and digital spaces.”

## 2. Cultural Diplomacy Is Strategic Power

- Literature and storytelling are forms of diplomacy.
- Nations that successfully tell their stories shape how they are understood globally.
- Ethiopia possesses one of the world’s richest civilizational and cultural histories, but modern storytelling remains underdeveloped internationally.

Discussion expansion:

- supporting Ethiopian literature internationally,
- translation initiatives,
- diaspora intellectual networks,
- academic partnerships,
- cultural exchange programs.

## 3. Diaspora Identity Can Strengthen International Engagement

- Ethiopians abroad often understand multiple cultural systems and can serve as bridges between Ethiopia and global institutions.
- Diaspora professionals occupy influential roles in medicine, technology, finance, education, law, and diplomacy.

Key line:

“The diaspora is not only an extension of Ethiopia abroad — it is also a bridge between Ethiopia and the world.”

## 4. The Importance of Inclusive National Narratives

- Young diaspora audiences are highly sensitive to exclusionary rhetoric.

- Future engagement depends on creating narratives broad enough to include multiple experiences, ethnicities, languages, and histories.

Potential framing:

- unity through plurality,
- shared civic belonging,
- dignity across differences,
- dialogue over polarization.

## 5. Ethiopia's Future Is Increasingly Global

- Ethiopia's next chapter will be shaped not only inside Ethiopia, but across global Ethiopian communities.
- Diaspora engagement is therefore not only social policy — it is strategic foreign policy.

Key closing line:

“In the 21st century, a nation's strength is partly measured by its ability to remain connected to its people across borders.”

# PART I

## DISCUSSION MANUSCRIPT FOR ETHIOPIA'S OFFICE OF DIASPORA AFFAIRS

### Opening Remarks

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss *Walking Between Worlds: Letters to the Next Generation of the Ethiopian Diaspora*. Although the book begins with personal experiences, it ultimately evolved into a much broader reflection on identity, belonging,

memory, responsibility, and the future relationship between Ethiopia and its global diaspora.

At one level, the book is deeply personal. It traces a journey from childhood in Nekemt and Addis Ababa to student years abroad, then into decades of life and work in the United States. But as I wrote, I gradually realized that many of the questions I struggled with were not mine alone. They belonged to an entire generation of Ethiopians scattered across borders, languages, and cultures.

The central question became this:

What does it mean to belong to more than one world at the same time?

That question sits at the heart of the Ethiopian diaspora experience.

Today, at least a million Ethiopians and children of Ethiopians live outside the country. Some left as students. Others fled war, political instability, economic hardship, or family separation. Some were born abroad and have never physically lived in Ethiopia, yet carry Ethiopia emotionally inside them every day.

This means the Ethiopian diaspora is no longer temporary. It is no longer peripheral. It is now part of the extended national story.

And because of that reality, Ethiopia faces an important challenge:

How do we sustain meaningful connection across generations, across borders, and across very different lived experiences?

That is one of the major reasons this book was written.

## **The Diaspora Is Not Peripheral — It Is Part of the Nation**

Diaspora engagement around the world has often been discussed primarily in economic terms: remittances, investments, foreign currency inflows, property purchases, business networks, and charitable contributions.

Those contributions are undeniably important. Ethiopia's diaspora has supported families, funded schools, contributed to health projects, and sustained local economies during difficult times.

But the diaspora is more than an economic resource.

It is also a reservoir of memory, identity, knowledge, relationships, and emotional continuity.

The Ethiopian diaspora carries Ethiopia into classrooms, hospitals, universities, boardrooms, churches, technology companies, media institutions, and civic spaces across the world.

Whether in Washington DC, London, Toronto, Stockholm, Melbourne, Dubai, Johannesburg, or Minneapolis, Ethiopians abroad continuously negotiate the meaning of Ethiopia in their daily lives.

This is especially true for the next generation.

Second-generation and third-generation Ethiopians abroad may not experience Ethiopia in the same way their parents did. Their Ethiopia may be inherited through stories, music, food, language fragments, summer visits, religious traditions, and emotional memory.

Yet that connection remains real.

And that reality requires a new understanding of diaspora engagement.

The diaspora should not only be seen as a resource to mobilize. It should also be seen as a community to meaningfully engage.

That distinction matters enormously.

People who feel emotionally connected are more likely to remain invested over the long term. But people who feel reduced to economic instruments eventually disengage.

Meaningful engagement requires listening, inclusion, dialogue, and mutual respect.

It requires institutions capable of understanding that identity itself has changed.

## The Next Generation Requires a New Engagement Model

One of the strongest themes throughout *Walking Between Worlds* is intergenerational transition.

The first generation of Ethiopian immigrants often carried survival memories. They carried trauma, sacrifice, displacement, homesickness, and economic struggle.

Many worked multiple jobs. Many struggled with immigration systems. Many sacrificed comfort to educate their children. Many lived emotionally divided lives — physically abroad while psychologically anchored in Ethiopia.

But the next generation experiences Ethiopia differently.

Young Ethiopians abroad often understand Ethiopia emotionally before they understand it historically or politically.

They inherit fragments:

- stories,
- songs,
- warnings,
- pride,
- silence,
- conflict,
- nostalgia,
- and expectation.

Yet many are also navigating broader questions:

- Who am I?
- What part of Ethiopia belongs to me?
- Can I be fully Ethiopian and fully American, Canadian, British, Swedish, Australian, or German at the same time?
- What responsibilities do I carry toward a country some of us barely know directly?

Traditional diaspora engagement models are often built around nostalgia.

But nostalgia alone cannot sustain second-generation identity.

Young people seek participation, relevance, and belonging.

That means future engagement strategies must include:

- youth leadership programs,
- heritage travel initiatives,

- internship opportunities,
- digital engagement platforms,
- cultural literacy programs,
- language preservation efforts,
- academic exchanges,
- mentorship networks,
- and opportunities for meaningful civic contribution.

The question is no longer whether the next generation remembers Ethiopia exactly as their parents did.

The question is whether they still feel invited into Ethiopia's future.

That is the deeper issue.

Identity survives through invitation.

## Storytelling as Nation-Building

One of the ideas I emphasize throughout the book is that storytelling is not entertainment alone.

Storytelling is also nation-building.

Families transmit identity through stories. Communities sustain memory through stories. Nations preserve continuity through stories.

Long before institutions formalized history, societies carried collective memory orally.

Ethiopia has one of the richest storytelling traditions in the world.

Yet modern Ethiopian storytelling — especially global diaspora storytelling — remains underdeveloped internationally.

This matters because people increasingly understand nations emotionally through narrative.

Books, films, documentaries, podcasts, music, oral histories, and digital storytelling shape perception more powerfully than official statements alone.

That is why diaspora storytelling deserves institutional support.

The Ethiopian diaspora contains extraordinary untold stories:

- refugee stories,
- educational journeys,
- entrepreneurship,
- intermarriage,
- identity negotiation,
- language loss and recovery,
- political reconciliation,
- and transnational family life.

These stories matter not only culturally but strategically.

They humanize Ethiopia globally. They sustain belonging. They reduce alienation. They preserve historical continuity.

Supporting diaspora writers, youth archives, oral history projects, educational partnerships, and cultural festivals should therefore be viewed not merely as cultural activities but as long-term investments in national continuity.

## Building Trust Across Distance

Trust is one of the most important themes in diaspora engagement.

Many diaspora communities want deeper engagement with Ethiopia. But many also want transparency, listening, accountability, and inclusion.

Engagement cannot succeed if it feels one-directional.

Long-term relationships require reciprocity.

Diaspora communities want to feel:

- heard,
- respected,
- included,

- and emotionally recognized.

This becomes especially important in politically polarized environments.

The Ethiopian diaspora reflects many of the divisions and wounds of the homeland. Ethnic tensions, political conflicts, historical grievances, and ideological polarization often travel across borders.

Yet the diaspora also contains enormous potential for reconciliation.

People who live abroad often occupy spaces where multiple identities coexist daily. They develop skills of negotiation, adaptation, and cross-cultural communication.

Those capacities can become assets for national healing.

But healing requires dialogue.

Diaspora engagement succeeds when people feel heard, not only mobilized.

That sentence captures much of the challenge before us.

## **Diaspora Youth as Future Global Ambassadors**

Young Ethiopians abroad already represent Ethiopia in countless global spaces.

They are:

- physicians,
- engineers,
- lawyers,
- professors,
- software developers,
- artists,
- entrepreneurs,
- journalists,
- researchers,
- and civic leaders.

Even those who are not publicly visible still shape perceptions of Ethiopia through everyday interactions.

This means diaspora youth are already informal ambassadors.

Whether institutions formally recognize it or not, they influence how Ethiopia is understood internationally.

If Ethiopia invests emotionally and intellectually in diaspora youth today, it invests in global advocates for generations to come.

That investment should not focus only on elite leadership.

It should also focus on emotional belonging.

People advocate most strongly for places where they feel emotionally connected to.

The future strength of Ethiopian global influence will partly depend on whether younger generations continue to feel that connection.

## The Role of Universities and Intellectual Institutions

Universities have an especially important role in this process.

Institutions such as Addis Ababa University can serve as bridges between Ethiopia and the diaspora through:

- collaborative research,
- visiting scholar programs,
- digital classrooms,
- diaspora archives,
- joint publications,
- summer institutes,
- student exchange initiatives,
- and mentorship networks.

Diaspora youth often seek intellectual connection as much as emotional connection.

They want to understand Ethiopia historically, socially, politically, and culturally.

Universities can help create spaces where that exploration occurs thoughtfully and constructively.

This is one reason why the publication of *Walking Between Worlds* through Addis Ababa University Press carries symbolic importance.

It signals that diaspora experience itself is worthy of serious intellectual engagement.

## Closing Reflections for the Office of Diaspora Affairs

Ultimately, *Walking Between Worlds* is an invitation.

It is an invitation to young Ethiopians around the world to embrace complexity without losing connection.

We are shaped by multiple homes, multiple languages, multiple memories, and multiple identities.

But walking between worlds means we are bridges.

And perhaps that is the central opportunity before Ethiopia today.

Not merely to maintain contact with its diaspora, but to build an expansive understanding of national belonging capable of including all Ethiopians — wherever they may live.

## PART II

# DISCUSSION MANUSCRIPT FOR ETHIOPIA'S MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

### Opening Remarks

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss *Walking Between Worlds: Letters to the Next Generation of the Ethiopian Diaspora* in the context of Ethiopia's international engagement and global future.

Although the book emerged from personal reflection, it eventually became a broader meditation on diaspora identity, cultural diplomacy, national narrative, and transnational belonging.

At its heart lies a simple but increasingly important question:

**How does a nation remain connected to its people across borders in the twenty-first century?**

That question is no longer theoretical.

Today, global Ethiopian communities influence how Ethiopia is understood internationally in ways that would have been unimaginable a generation ago.

Diaspora voices shape conversations about Ethiopia through:

- academia,
- journalism,
- social media,
- business,
- public policy,
- entertainment,
- technology,

- medicine,
- and civic leadership.

This means diaspora communities are no longer simply emigrant populations.

They are increasingly strategic global actors.

And because of that, diaspora engagement should be understood not only as social policy, but also as a major dimension of foreign policy.

## Diaspora Communities Shape Ethiopia's Global Narrative

Historically, national image was shaped primarily through state institutions:

- embassies,
- official media,
- diplomatic channels,
- and formal state communication.

But the twenty-first century information environment has changed dramatically.

Today, national image is not shaped only in embassies. It is also shaped in classrooms, communities, podcasts, universities, boardrooms, documentaries, social media platforms, and digital networks.

Diaspora communities play a central role in this process.

Young Ethiopians abroad often become the first interpreters of Ethiopia for classmates, colleagues, employers, journalists, and institutions.

Whether discussing history, politics, culture, development, cuisine, religion, music, conflict, innovation, or migration, diaspora communities increasingly mediate Ethiopia's image internationally.

This reality creates both opportunity and responsibility.

Nations that fail to engage their diaspora strategically often lose control of their own narrative.

But nations that successfully cultivate constructive relationships with diaspora communities gain an extraordinary form of soft power.

The Ethiopian diaspora already possesses:

- intellectual capital,
- professional expertise,
- global networks,
- multilingual capacity,
- and cultural credibility.

These are strategic assets.

## Cultural Diplomacy as Strategic Power

One of the major themes throughout *Walking Between Worlds* is the power of storytelling.

Storytelling is not separate from diplomacy. It is diplomacy.

Nations are increasingly understood through stories.

People form emotional impressions of countries through:

- literature,
- cinema,
- music,
- memoir,
- journalism,
- digital media,
- academic writing,
- and cultural production.

Countries that successfully tell their stories shape how they are perceived globally.

Ethiopia possesses one of the world's richest civilizational histories.

Its historical depth includes:

- ancient statehood,
- religious traditions,
- linguistic diversity,
- anti-colonial symbolism,
- philosophical traditions,
- literary heritage,
- artistic traditions,
- and geopolitical significance.

Yet modern Ethiopian storytelling remains underrepresented internationally.

Too often, Ethiopia enters global consciousness primarily during crisis.

This creates an imbalance.

The complexity of Ethiopian society cannot be reduced to conflict headlines.

That is why literature matters.

Books such as *Walking Between Worlds* help humanize Ethiopian experience internationally. They expand understanding beyond stereotypes. They create emotional connection. They generate empathy.

And importantly, they help younger generations of Ethiopians abroad maintain meaningful ties to their cultural inheritance.

Supporting Ethiopian literature internationally should therefore be viewed not merely as cultural activity, but as strategic diplomacy.

This could include:

- translation initiatives,
- literary festivals,
- academic partnerships,
- diaspora intellectual networks,
- cultural exchange programs,
- publishing collaborations,
- and support for emerging Ethiopian writers globally.

## Diaspora Identity as a Strategic Bridge

One of the distinctive strengths of diaspora communities is their ability to navigate multiple systems simultaneously.

Diaspora Ethiopians often understand:

- Ethiopian cultural frameworks,
- Western institutional systems,
- multilingual communication,
- cross-cultural negotiation,
- and transnational professional environments.

This positions them uniquely as bridges.

The diaspora is not only an extension of Ethiopia abroad. It is also a bridge between Ethiopia and the world.

Diaspora professionals already occupy influential positions globally:

- in medicine,
- engineering,
- academia,
- diplomacy,
- finance,
- law,
- media,
- technology,
- and public policy.

These networks can support:

- investment,
- educational exchange,
- research collaboration,
- technology transfer,
- tourism,

- institutional partnerships,
- and international advocacy.

But such relationships require long-term cultivation.

Diaspora engagement should therefore move beyond episodic mobilization toward sustained strategic partnership.

## Inclusive National Narratives Matter

One of the most sensitive themes throughout the book involves the importance of inclusive national narratives.

Young diaspora audiences are highly sensitive to exclusion.

Many grow up in multicultural societies where identity is constantly negotiated. They are often deeply aware of issues involving:

- representation,
- dignity,
- pluralism,
- historical memory,
- and belonging.

Future engagement therefore depends partly on whether Ethiopia develops narratives broad enough to include multiple experiences, ethnicities, languages, and histories.

This does not require erasing differences.

Rather, it requires creating frameworks of shared belonging capable of accommodating diversity.

The Ethiopian diaspora itself reflects Ethiopia's pluralism.

Its future cohesion will depend on whether younger generations believe Ethiopia belongs to all of them.

This is especially important in digital environments where polarization spreads rapidly.

Young audiences increasingly reject rigid ideological narratives. They seek authenticity, complexity, dialogue, and emotional honesty.

That is one reason why personal storytelling can sometimes succeed where political rhetoric fails.

Storytelling humanizes.

It allows people to encounter complexity through lived experience rather than abstraction alone.

## The Digital Transformation of Diaspora Influence

The rise of digital communication has fundamentally altered the relationship between nations and their diaspora communities.

A generation ago, communication across continents was slow and limited.

Today, events inside Ethiopia are discussed globally within minutes.

Diaspora communities participate in national debates in real time.

This creates both opportunity and volatility.

Digital spaces can:

- strengthen connection,
- preserve language,
- facilitate collaboration,
- and democratize participation.

But they can also amplify:

- misinformation,
- polarization,
- emotional escalation,
- and division.

This means digital engagement strategy is now central to diaspora relations.

Countries that engage constructively online strengthen long-term credibility. Countries that ignore digital ecosystems often lose influence over their own narrative.

The next generation of Ethiopian diaspora engagement will therefore unfold largely through digital platforms.

The challenge is not merely technological. It is relational.

How do institutions create trust in highly fragmented information environments?

That question will shape the future of global Ethiopian engagement.

## Ethiopia's Future Is Increasingly Global

One of the central arguments of *Walking Between Worlds* is that Ethiopia's future will increasingly be shaped not only inside Ethiopia, but across global Ethiopian communities.

This is already visible.

Diaspora communities influence:

- investment,
- advocacy,
- public opinion,
- remittances,
- international partnerships,
- educational collaboration,
- philanthropy,
- and cultural representation.

As mobility increases globally, national identity itself becomes increasingly transnational.

This means foreign policy can no longer focus only on relationships between states.

It must also consider relationships between nations and their dispersed populations.

Diaspora engagement therefore becomes part of long-term geopolitical strategy.

In the twenty-first century, a nation's strength is partly measured by its ability to remain connected to its people across borders.

That connection cannot rely only on emotion.

It requires institutions, policies, dialogue, inclusion, and imagination.

## The Role of Literature in National Diplomacy

Literature plays a surprisingly important role in international perception.

Books often travel where official diplomacy cannot.

Readers who may never visit Ethiopia can still encounter Ethiopian experience through narrative.

That encounter shapes perception.

It shapes empathy. It shapes curiosity. It shapes understanding.

For diaspora youth especially, literature can provide a framework for identity formation.

It allows younger generations to understand:

- where they come from,
- what their families experienced,
- why memory matters,
- and how identity can remain expansive rather than fragmented.

That is one reason why supporting Ethiopian writers globally matters strategically.

Narrative power increasingly influences global influence.

## Closing Reflections for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ultimately, *Walking Between Worlds* is not only about migration.

It is about connection.

It is about the challenge of remaining emotionally, culturally, and intellectually connected across distance.

The Ethiopian diaspora is one of the country's greatest long-term strategic assets.

But diaspora relationships cannot be sustained through transaction alone.

They require meaning. They require dignity. They require participation. They require belonging.

I wrote this book primarily for young Ethiopians trying to understand where they belong.

But I also wrote it for institutions willing to ask a larger question:

How do we build an Ethiopian future expansive enough to include all of its children — wherever they may live in the world?

That question may ultimately become one of the defining questions of Ethiopia's global future.

And perhaps the answer begins with recognizing that walking between worlds does not necessarily weaken identity.

Sometimes it expands it.