CRPP

CENTER FOR RESPONSIBLE AND PEACEFUL POLITICS

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF FRAMING A SHARED NARRATIVE AFFIRIMING THE NEED AND OUTLINING THE FRAMEWORKS FOR ITS INSTITUATIONALIZATION IN ETHIOPIA

PROCEEDING

JANUARY 12-13,2026

JIMMA-ETHIOPIA

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1 Executive Summary

National Conference on a Shared National Narrative
Jimma, 12–13 January 2026

The National Conference on a Shared National Narrative, convened in Jimma on 12–13 January 2026, represented a timely and strategic national intervention to address one of Ethiopia's most fundamental governance challenges: the absence of a broadly shared framework of national meaning capable of sustaining legitimacy, cohesion, and inclusive governance in a deeply diverse society.

Held at a moment of profound political, social, and institutional transition, the Conference responded to growing recognition that Ethiopia's recurrent crises cannot be explained solely by constitutional design, ethnic diversity, or institutional weakness. Rather, participants converged on the insight that Ethiopia faces a crisis of meaning. Competing and fragmented narratives about history, identity, statehood, and belonging have hardened into political fault lines, undermining trust, weakening institutions, and limiting the state's capacity to mobilize society around shared goals.

The Conference brought together 289 participants drawn from federal and regional governments, legislative and judicial bodies, academia, civil society, media, faith institutions, cultural practitioners, elders, youth, and women's organizations. This broad and deliberate inclusivity reflected a core principle of the Conference: a Shared National Narrative cannot be authored by elites or institutions alone. It must emerge through collective engagement that reflects Ethiopia's multiple histories, experiences, grievances, contributions, and aspirations.

Participants affirmed that Ethiopia's diversity is not the problem. Diversity is an enduring and irreversible reality and a potential source of resilience. The central challenge lies in the absence of a shared civic framework that allows diverse narratives to coexist within a common political project. In the absence of such a framework, narratives have increasingly been weaponized, producing grievance politics, identity polarization, contested legitimacy, and declining social trust.

The Conference underscored that dialogue, while essential, is insufficient on its own. Comparative international experience from South Africa, Tunisia, Northern Ireland, and Colombia demonstrates that dialogue succeeds only when it is anchored in institutional, legal, cultural, and communicative frameworks that sustain shared meaning over time. A Shared National Narrative provides this anchoring framework. It does not impose a single story or erase difference. Rather, it integrates plural histories into a shared civic reference point that explains why institutions exist, how coexistence is justified, and what collective future is being pursued.

Importantly, the Conference did not seek to define or finalize Ethiopia's Shared National Narrative. Instead, it pursued three strategic objectives. First, it affirmed the national necessity of a shared narrative as a core pillar of legitimacy, cohesion, and democratic stability. Second, it mapped the enabling frameworks required for responsible narrative development, including institutional, policy, academic, cultural, and media dimensions. Third, it outlined a sequenced pathway for moving from dialogue toward institutionalized consensus, emphasizing coordination, partnership, and safeguards against elite capture and fragmentation.

Discussions consistently highlighted that narratives endure not through declarations, but through institutions and practice. Universities and research institutions were identified as custodians of historical rigor and ethical reflection. Media and cultural institutions were recognized as powerful carriers of collective memory and legitimacy, requiring ethical, plural, and evidence-based standards. State institutions were urged to treat communication and narrative coordination as governance responsibilities rather than peripheral concerns.

The choice of Jimma as the host city carried deep symbolic meaning. As a historic center of trade, scholarship, and cultural exchange, Jimma embodied Ethiopia's long traditions of coexistence and interaction. Hosting the Conference outside the capital reinforced the principle that national narratives are built through regional and local participation, not from the center alone.

The Conference concluded with the adoption of the Jimma Consensus Statement, alongside a Framework Roadmap and a Partnership and Process Map to guide post-conference action. Participants departed with a shared understanding that the Conference marked a milestone rather than an endpoint. Its success will ultimately be measured by sustained engagement, institutional follow-through, policy alignment, and the ability to translate dialogue into shared meaning embedded in education, media, governance, and public life.

In sum, the National Conference reframed the Shared National Narrative not as a slogan, myth, or imposed story, but as civic infrastructure for coexistence. It affirmed that Ethiopia's task is not to silence voices, but to turn many voices into harmony through a shared framework of meaning capable of sustaining peace, legitimacy, and development.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background and Rationale of the National Conference on a Shared National Narrative

The National Conference on *"Framing the Shared National Narrative,"* convened in Jimma on 12–13 January 2026, was a deliberate and timely national intervention aimed at addressing one of Ethiopia's most persistent and consequential challenges: the absence of a broadly shared framework of national meaning. The Conference was organized at a moment of profound political, social, and institutional transition, marked by heightened debates over identity, legitimacy, governance, and the future direction of the Ethiopian state. In this context, questions of national cohesion and inclusive governance have moved from the margins to the center of public and policy discourse.

Ethiopia's contemporary political landscape is deeply shaped by its long and complex historical trajectory. From the imperial era, through the revolutionary period, and into the current federal experiment, the country has experienced repeated cycles of political consolidation, rupture, and reconfiguration. Each historical phase has generated its own dominant narratives—about statehood, identity, inclusion, exclusion, and resistance—that continue to influence how Ethiopians understand their past and imagine their future. These narratives are not merely symbolic or academic; they have directly shaped constitutional arrangements, governance models, patterns of political mobilization, and the evolving relationship between the state and society.

In recent years, the coexistence of multiple, often competing narratives has intensified. These narratives are rooted in differing historical memories of state formation, marginalization, struggle, and contribution. While Ethiopia's diversity—linguistic, cultural, religious, and regional—has historically been a source of richness and resilience, the lack of a shared interpretive framework has allowed these narratives to harden into political fault lines. Rather than coexisting within a common civic story, narratives have increasingly functioned as instruments of political contestation, contributing to declining trust, contested legitimacy, and growing social fragmentation.

This fragmentation has had tangible consequences. It has weakened social cohesion, complicated governance, undermined confidence in public institutions, and limited the capacity of the state to mobilize society around shared goals. In such an environment, policy reforms and institutional restructuring alone have proven insufficient. Without shared meaning, even well-designed institutions struggle to command legitimacy or sustain public trust.

Against this backdrop, the central challenge confronting Ethiopia is not whether diversity can be accommodated within its political system—diversity is an enduring and irreversible reality—but how shared meaning, mutual recognition, and collective purpose can be cultivated across difference. Addressing this challenge requires deliberate engagement with memory, narrative, and identity as foundational elements of governance and state legitimacy. The Conference was therefore conceived as a space to confront these issues openly, analytically, and constructively.

2.2 National Dialogue and the Imperative of a Shared Framework

The ongoing National Dialogue process represents a rare and critical opportunity for Ethiopia to engage constructively with long-standing questions of identity, governance, justice, and coexistence. Dialogue

creates space for listening, recognition, and negotiated understanding among diverse actors and communities. It allows grievances to be articulated, experiences to be acknowledged, and pathways to consensus to be explored.

However, both Ethiopia's historical experience and comparative international evidence demonstrate a consistent lesson: dialogue, on its own, is not sufficient to resolve deep-rooted national challenges. Without a shared framework to guide the interpretation, communication, and institutionalization of dialogue outcomes, agreements risk remaining fragmented, vulnerable to political contestation, and difficult to sustain over time. In such circumstances, dialogue may produce momentary consensus without generating lasting legitimacy or public ownership.

A Shared National Narrative provides such a framework. It does not replace dialogue, nor does it predetermine its outcomes. Rather, it offers a common reference point that helps integrate diverse perspectives into a coherent national story—one that recognizes Ethiopia's plural histories while articulating a shared civic purpose. Without this anchoring framework, dialogue outcomes can be selectively interpreted, politicized, or disconnected from broader governance processes.

Comparative international experience reinforces this imperative. In South Africa, constitutional negotiations were complemented by truth-telling and reconciliation mechanisms that reshaped public consciousness and embedded moral accountability within the transition process. In Tunisia, the National Dialogue produced durable outcomes because reform commitments were anchored in clear legal and institutional pathways. In Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement institutionalized mutual recognition and parity of esteem, transforming identity conflict into structured coexistence. In Colombia, dialogue outcomes were protected through constitutional and institutional safeguards that ensured continuity beyond electoral cycles.

Across these cases, dialogue succeeded not because consensus was easy, but because it was deliberately connected to institutional, cultural, and communicative frameworks that sustained shared meaning over time. The lesson for Ethiopia is clear: National Dialogue must be intentionally linked to structures, processes, and institutions capable of translating negotiated consensus into lasting practice.

2.3 Purpose and Significance of the Conference

The National Conference on a Shared National Narrative was convened in direct response to this national imperative. Jointly organized by the Center for Research and Policy Practice (CRPP), the Ministry of Peace, Jimma University, the Oromia National Regional State Office of the President, and the Jimma City Municipality, the Conference served as a high-level national forum for reflection, analysis, and forward-looking engagement on Ethiopia's narrative landscape.

The Conference did not seek to define, finalize, or impose Ethiopia's Shared National Narrative. Such an outcome would neither be realistic nor legitimate. Instead, its purpose was intentionally foundational and strategic. Specifically, the Conference aimed to:

- Affirm the national necessity of a shared narrative as a core pillar of legitimacy, cohesion, and inclusive governance.
- Identify the enabling frameworks—policy, institutional, intellectual, cultural, and communicative—required for the responsible development of such a narrative over time; and

- Clarify the roles and partnerships among government institutions, academia, civil society, media, and cultural actors in sustaining this national endeavor.

By situating narrative-building within the broader agendas of peacebuilding, governance reform, and inclusive development, the Conference elevated narrative from a symbolic or rhetorical concern to a strategic governance priority. It framed the Shared National Narrative not as a fixed story to be declared, but as an evolving national project—one that must be collectively authored, institutionally supported, and democratically sustained.

In doing so, the Conference laid the groundwork for moving Ethiopia's national conversation from fragmented discourse toward shared meaning, and from episodic dialogue toward durable legitimacy.

2.4 Objectives of the Conference

The National Conference on a Shared National Narrative was guided by three closely interrelated objectives. Together, these objectives were designed to move the national conversation beyond diagnosis toward clarity, alignment, and practical direction, while respecting the inclusive and consultative nature of Ethiopia's ongoing National Dialogue process**.**

2.4.1 Affirming the National Importance of a Shared National Narrative

The first objective of the Conference was to establish broad-based recognition and consensus on the national importance of a Shared National Narrative. Participants examined why shared narratives are not merely cultural or symbolic constructs, but foundational elements of political legitimacy, social cohesion, and long-term stability.

Deliberations highlighted that in the absence of a unifying narrative framework, societies are more vulnerable to fragmentation, zero-sum identity politics, and cycles of mistrust. Competing and unmediated narratives can weaken confidence in public institutions, undermine policy coherence, and constrain collective action for development. Conversely, a shared narrative—when inclusive and credible—can strengthen trust between citizens and the state, provide moral and civic orientation, and enable cooperation across difference.

The Conference therefore sought to affirm that Ethiopia's diversity requires not narrative uniformity, but a shared civic framework within which multiple histories and identities can coexist with dignity and mutual recognition. This affirmation was intended to create a common point of reference for future dialogue, reform, and institution-building.

2.4.2 Mapping the Enabling Frameworks

The second objective focused on identifying the enabling frameworks required to support the future development, adoption, and sustainability of a Shared National Narrative. Participants recognized that narratives do not endure through declarations alone; they are shaped, transmitted, and reinforced through institutions, policies, and public practices.

Accordingly, the Conference examined a range of interlinked frameworks, including:

- Institutional frameworks, particularly the roles of peace- and dialogue-related bodies in anchoring narrative development within reconciliation and trust-building processes.
- Policy and legal frameworks, necessary to provide clarity of mandate, coherence across sectors, and protection against politicization.
- Intellectual and academic frameworks, recognizing universities and research institutions as custodians of historical rigor, ethical reflection, and evidence-based knowledge.
- Cultural and media frameworks, emphasizing the responsibility of media and cultural institutions to promote balanced, fact-based, and inclusive public discourse.

Special attention was given to how these frameworks must interact rather than operate in isolation. Participants stressed that fragmented institutional efforts risk reproducing the very narrative fragmentation the Conference sought to address. Mapping these enabling frameworks was therefore a critical step toward coherence and sustainability.

2.4.3 Defining the Pathway to Consensus

The third objective of the Conference was to outline a realistic and sequenced pathway for moving from dialogue to institutionalized consensus. Participants acknowledged that consensus is not a single event, but a process that unfolds over time through deliberate coordination, partnership, and learning.

Discussions focused on identifying:

- Appropriate partnership models among government institutions, academia, civil society, media, and cultural actors.
- Sequencing strategies that ensure dialogue outcomes are consolidated before institutional restructuring or policy adoption.
- Coordination mechanisms capable of aligning efforts across national and regional levels and across sectors.

The Conference emphasized that premature closure, elite capture, or fragmented implementation could undermine legitimacy and public trust. Defining a clear pathway to consensus was therefore seen as essential for translating deliberation into sustained national practice, while keeping the process open, adaptive, and inclusive.

Together, these three objectives provided the strategic backbone of the Conference, ensuring that discussions remained anchored in national priorities, institutional realities, and long-term impact.

2.5 Participation and Inclusivity

The National Conference brought together 289 participants, representing a deliberately broad and balanced cross-section of Ethiopian society and its key institutions. Participants included senior officials from federal and regional governments; members of legislative and judicial bodies; scholars and researchers from public universities and research institutes; leaders of civil society organizations; media

professionals; representatives of youth and women's organizations; cultural practitioners; respected elders; and leaders of faith-based institutions.

This diversity of participation was not incidental but central to the Conference's design and purpose. A Shared Narrative cannot be legitimately articulated or sustained by a single institution, political actor, or social group. It must emerge through inclusive engagement that reflects Ethiopia's multiple histories, lived experiences, grievances, contributions, and aspirations. Broad participation was therefore essential to ensuring credibility, legitimacy, and national ownership.

In practice, inclusivity was reflected not only in who attended, but also in how deliberations were conducted. The Conference emphasized respectful dialogue, balanced representation of perspectives, and equal opportunity for contribution across plenary and breakout sessions. This approach reinforced the principle that narrative-building is a collective national responsibility rather than an elite or technocratic exercise.

By bringing together voices from governance, knowledge production, community leadership, and public communication, the Conference modeled the kind of collective authorship and shared responsibility that a Shared Narrative requires in order to take root and endure.

2.6 Jimma as Host City: Symbolism and Significance

The selection of Jimma as the host city carried both practical relevance and deep symbolic meaning. Historically recognized as the birthplace of coffee and a long-standing center of trade, scholarship, and cultural exchange, Jimma occupies a distinctive place in Ethiopia's historical and cultural geography. For centuries, it has served as a meeting point of peoples, ideas, and economic networks, embodying traditions of interaction, coexistence, and mutual exchange.

Jimma's history reflects Ethiopia's broader capacity to transform diversity into cohesion through dialogue rather than domination, and through exchange rather than exclusion. As such, the city provided a fitting environment for a national conversation centered on shared meaning, mutual recognition, and inclusive nationhood.

Hosting the Conference in Jimma also carried an important political and institutional message. It underscored that national narratives are not shaped from the center alone, but are constructed through the active participation of regions, cities, and local communities. By convening the Conference outside the capital, organizers affirmed the central role of regional experiences, histories, and voices in shaping Ethiopia's national story.

In this sense, Jimma was not merely a venue. It functioned as a living metaphor for the Conference's core message: that Ethiopia's unity must be built through engagement, inclusion, and shared ownership across all regions and communities.

2.7 Methodology and Structure of the Conference

The Conference adopted a structured, participatory, and policy-oriented methodology designed to balance analytical depth with practical relevance. The approach ensured that discussions were grounded in evidence and comparative experience, while remaining focused on actionable outcomes.

The methodology comprised four interlinked components:

- Keynote and plenary presentations, which framed the national challenge of narrative fragmentation and introduced conceptual, historical, and comparative perspectives. These sessions provided a shared analytical foundation for all participants.
- Expert panel discussions, which examined the historical, political, governance, media, and institutional dimensions of shared narratives. Panels enabled in-depth exploration of risks, opportunities, and lessons drawn from both Ethiopian experience and international cases.
- Breakout sessions organized around thematic areas including policy and institutions, coordination and sequencing, knowledge and culture, and media and capacity building. These smaller-group discussions allowed participants to translate broad ideas into concrete proposals, identify institutional gaps, and formulate actionable recommendations.
- Plenary synthesis sessions, during which rapporteurs presented consolidated findings from breakout discussions. These sessions enabled collective reflection, validation of emerging consensus, and refinement of key messages and outputs.

Together, this methodology ensured coherence across sessions, encouraged broad participation, and supported the Conference's core objective: moving from reflection and dialogue toward clarity, alignment, and practical pathways for institutionalizing a Shared National Narrative.

2.8 Synopsis of Conference Sessions and Key Presenters

2.8.1 Session One: Historical and Comparative Context

Session One grounded the Conference in a rigorous examination of Ethiopia's political settlements and the narratives that have shaped state formation, governance, and national identity across different historical periods. The session provided the intellectual and analytical foundation for the Conference by linking history, memory, media, and comparative experience to the question of national legitimacy.

Key presentations included:

- **Prof. Bahru Zewde**, Emeritus Professor of History, who examined *The Struggle for a Shared National Narrative in Ethiopia*. His presentation traced the evolution of Ethiopia's National narrative, assessed the achievements and limitations of professional historiography, and highlighted the tension between continuity and exclusion in historical storytelling.
- **Dr. Tesfaye Beljige Dara**, who presented on *National Identity, Shared Memory, and State Legitimacy: The Ethiopian Experience and Current Directions*. He explored Ethiopia's long political tradition,

state formation processes, and the persistent legitimacy challenges arising from distorted narratives and weak consensus.

- **Munira Abdelmenan Awel**, who delivered a presentation entitled *Media, Memory, and the Construction of a Shared National Narrative in Ethiopia: Exploring Media's Role in Shaping Collective Identity and National Legitimacy in Contemporary Ethiopia*. The presentation examined how media functions as a carrier of collective memory, how fragmented narratives undermine trust, and how responsible media mediation can support reconciliation and National Dialogue outcomes.

- **Dr. Assefa Leake Gebru**, Assistant Professor of Political Science, who presented a comparative analysis of *South Africa, Tunisia, Northern Ireland, and Colombia*, highlighting how national dialogues were paired with institutional, legal, and communicative frameworks to ensure durability beyond moments of negotiation.

Together, these presentations established that shared narratives are historically grounded, institutionally consequential, and increasingly mediated through modern communication ecosystems.

2.8.2 Session Two: Mapping Need and Risks

Session Two shifted the focus from historical foundations to contemporary and forward-looking concerns. The session examined the risks posed by fragmented national discourse in the absence of a shared narrative anchor and assessed the political, social, and economic implications of unmediated and competing narratives.

The session featured plenary presentations and moderated discussions, including:

- **Ambassador Lencho Bati**, who addressed *the risks of fragmented national discourse without a unifying narrative*, emphasizing the implications for governance, diplomacy, national cohesion, and Ethiopia's international standing.

- **Professor Brook Hailu Beshah**, who examined *the potential political, social, and economic dividends of an agreed or shared narrative*, highlighting how coherent national narratives contribute to trust-building, policy coherence, social mobilization, and economic confidence.

- **Dr. Birhanu M. Lenjiso**, who contributed perspectives on *governance, security, cultural identity, and development policy*, focusing on Ethiopia's diversity dilemma and the promise of shared narratives in overcoming governance challenges.

The session was moderated by **Dr. Yonas Adaye and Ms Blen Mamo**, who facilitated integrated discussion among panelists and participants. Deliberations reinforced the conclusion that narrative fragmentation poses tangible risks across governance, security, and development domains, while an agreed narrative offers measurable national dividends.

2.8.3 Session Three: Enabling Frameworks (Breakout Sessions)

Session Three was conducted entirely through structured breakout sessions, translating conceptual consensus into practical design questions. Participants were organized into thematic groups to examine the enabling frameworks required to support the future development of a Shared National Narrative.

Breakout discussions focused on:

- Policy and institutional reforms necessary for narrative stewardship
- Structural arrangements for inter-ministerial and multi-sector coordination
- The role of academia and cultural institutions as intellectual and ethical custodians
- The responsibilities of media in building a balanced, fact-based, and inclusive public communication ecosystem

Each breakout group appointed rapporteurs who presented synthesized findings during plenary reporting, highlighting areas of convergence, priority reforms, and institutional gaps.

2.8.4 Session Four: Building Momentum and Partnerships (Breakout Sessions)

Session Four also took place through interactive breakout sessions, with an emphasis on implementation readiness, sustainability, and partnership building.

Participants examined:

- Roles and mandates of key actors across government, academia, civil society, and media
- Resource mobilization and capacity-building strategies
- Mechanisms for sustaining momentum beyond the Conference
- Sequencing and coordination required to move from dialogue toward institutionalized consensus

The breakout outcomes emphasized the importance of partnership models, shared ownership, and safeguards against elite capture, reinforcing that narrative-building is a long-term national process.

2.8.5 Session Five: Synthesis and Adoption of the Jimma Consensus

Session Five consolidated the Conference's deliberations into concrete outputs. A draft Jimma Consensus Statement was presented, discussed, refined, and endorsed by participants. The Statement affirms the national importance of a Shared National Narrative and outlines guiding principles for its future formation.

Participants also reviewed and endorsed:

- A **Framework Roadmap** identifying priority reforms and institutional measures across policy, governance, academia, and media; and
- A **Partnership and Process Map** detailing roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms for post-conference action.

2.8.6 Closing Session

The Closing Session of the National Conference was both reflective and symbolic, bringing together substance, commitment, and cultural meaning. The session was memorably graced by the live performance of the historic song **"ቤትሽ ጀማ ነው ወይ"** by the legendary artist **Neway Debebe**, whose unexpected presence deeply moved participants. Its performance reinforced the Conference's central message that narratives are carried not only through policy and institutions, but also through music, art, and lived cultural experience.

Following this symbolic moment, reflections were delivered by Dr. Abdulaziz Dawud, Head of the Oromia National Regional State Office of the President. In his remarks, Dr. Abdulaziz underscored the strategic importance of the Conference outcomes and reaffirmed institutional commitment to advancing the agreed principles, frameworks, and follow-up actions. He emphasized that the responsibility for sustaining momentum now rests with all stakeholders—government institutions, academia, civil society, media, and regional actors—working in coordinated and complementary ways.

The Closing Session highlighted a shared understanding among participants that the National Conference was not an endpoint or a one-time event. Rather, it marked a decisive milestone in a longer national process aimed at creating the institutional, intellectual, and communicative conditions necessary for the legitimate, inclusive, and sustainable emergence of Ethiopia's Shared National Narrative.

Participants departed with a reinforced sense of collective responsibility, recognizing that the true measure of the Conference's success would lie in continued engagement, policy alignment, institutional follow-through, and sustained dialogue beyond Jimma.

3 National Conference on the Shared Narrative – Welcome, Opening and Keynote Address

3.1 Welcome Remarks

Ato Zerihun Teshome, Board Chairman,

Center for Responsible and Peaceful Politics (CRPP)

In his welcome remarks, Ato Zerihun Teshome, Board Chairman of the Center for Responsible and Peaceful Politics (CRPP), welcomed distinguished federal and regional officials, scholars, religious leaders, civil society representatives, and participants from across the country to the National Conference on the Shared Narrative held in Jimma.

He expressed his appreciation to the Oromia National Regional State, the Federal Ministry of Peace, Jimma University, the Jimma City Administration, and the Jimma Zone Administration for their collaboration and commitment in organizing the conference. He noted that the joint effort of these institutions reflected a growing recognition that Ethiopia requires deeper dialogue and institutional reflection on the question of shared narratives and national cohesion.

Introducing the genesis of the conference, Ato Zerihun explained that the initiative emerged from ongoing reflections within the Center for Responsible and Peaceful Politics on the challenges posed by competing narratives in Ethiopia's political and historical discourse. While diversity of perspectives is natural in any society, he noted that the absence of a shared interpretive framework has often complicated efforts to build trust, strengthen mutual understanding, and sustain national cohesion.

The national conference, he explained, was therefore conceived as an intellectual and policy-oriented platform that would bring together scholars, policymakers, and public leaders to reflect collectively on how Ethiopia might cultivate a shared narrative that acknowledges diversity while reinforcing national unity and democratic coexistence.

Ato Zerihun emphasized that the gathering was not intended to be a one-time event but rather the beginning of a broader national conversation. Its purpose was to provide a platform where voices from different sectors of Ethiopian society could engage with the conceptual, historical, and institutional dimensions of shared narrative construction.

He then introduced the structure of the conference program, explaining that the proceedings would include keynote addresses, thematic presentations, scholarly reflections, and structured discussions among participants. These sessions, he noted, were designed to explore both the theoretical foundations and the practical pathways for developing and institutionalizing shared narratives in Ethiopia.

He further stated that the program was designed to encourage open, constructive, and forward-looking dialogue among participants. The discussions were expected to help identify common principles that could support the development of inclusive national narratives and strengthen Ethiopia's broader national dialogue process.

Ato Zerihun also noted that the deliberations of the conference were expected to culminate in the adoption of the Jimma Consensus, a shared statement intended to capture the key reflections, guiding principles, and collective commitments emerging from the conference discussions.

In concluding his remarks, he expressed his hope that the conference would deepen intellectual engagement around national dialogue, strengthen understanding among diverse stakeholders, and generate ideas that contribute to Ethiopia's ongoing efforts toward peace, democratic governance, and national cohesion. He thanked all institutions and individuals who contributed to organizing the conference and wished participants fruitful and constructive deliberations.

3.2 Welcome Remarks

H.E. Dr. Jamal Abafita

President of Jimma University

In his welcome remarks, H.E. Dr. Jamal Abaraya, President of Jimma University, warmly welcomed government officials, scholars, intellectuals, civil society representatives, and all participants to the historic city of Jimma. He noted that Jimma had long been recognized as a symbol of peace, love, and unity, and that for generations the city had served as an important center for dialogue, learning, and community engagement. He remarked that it was therefore both meaningful and appropriate for the national conference to be held in such a city.

Speaking on behalf of Jimma University, Dr. Jamal extended his sincere welcome to all participants and emphasized that the theme of the conference was both timely and highly relevant to the ongoing national efforts to shape a shared national narrative and to strengthen the institutional foundations of Ethiopia's national dialogue process.

Dr. Jamal observed that political discourse and public debates in Ethiopia had often been shaped by competing historical interpretations, contested narratives, and differing visions regarding the country's future. He explained that such differences had sometimes contributed to divisions in the national conversation and had made it challenging to develop a common understanding of the country's collective journey.

He stressed that under such circumstances the effort to construct a shared and inclusive national narrative had become not only important but increasingly urgent. According to him, developing such a narrative was essential for promoting mutual understanding, strengthening trust among citizens, and creating a foundation upon which future generations could build a more peaceful and cohesive society.

Dr. Jamal further explained that the conference was intended to go beyond conventional discussion forums. Rather, it was designed as a meaningful platform where participants could engage in thoughtful reflection and principled dialogue on how shared national narratives could be articulated responsibly, grounded in ethical principles, and institutionalized in ways that would endure across generations.

He noted that the objective of the gathering was not merely to exchange views but also to explore frameworks through which the country's collective memories, values, and national aspirations could be discussed, debated, and eventually translated into institutional forms capable of strengthening the national dialogue process.

Highlighting the role of higher education institutions, Dr. Jamal emphasized that universities carry a particularly important responsibility in such national processes. He stated that universities serve as spaces where ideas can be critically examined, where diverse perspectives can be debated respectfully, and where complex national questions can be studied with intellectual rigor.

In this regard, he affirmed that Jimma University recognized its responsibility to contribute to the national effort. Universities, he noted, must play a leading role in facilitating knowledge-based dialogue, generating research, and helping to institutionalize processes that promote constructive national conversations. By providing platforms for thoughtful debate and scholarly inquiry, universities could help ensure that the development of shared narratives is guided by evidence, ethical reflection, and academic integrity.

Dr. Jamal further remarked that anchoring such processes within universities and research institutions would allow the work of national dialogue and shared narrative construction to become a sustained intellectual and institutional undertaking capable of being transmitted from one generation to the next.

In conclusion, he expressed his hope that the conference would provide an opportunity for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to engage in meaningful discussions and constructive exchanges on the country's shared memories, values, and national aspirations. Through respectful dialogue and open engagement, he believed that the forum would contribute to generating ideas that strengthen mutual understanding, national cohesion, and collective purpose.

Dr. Jamal concluded by expressing his sincere wish that the deliberations of the conference would be fruitful, productive, and intellectually enriching, and that participants' stay in Jimma would be both meaningful and successful.

3.3 Opening Address

H.E. Obboo Kefyalew Tefera, Head of Prosperity Party – Oromia Chapter

In his opening address, H.E. Obboo Kefyalew Tefera, Head of the Prosperity Party Oromia Chapter, welcomed the distinguished participants of the National Conference on the Shared Narrative held in Jimma. He acknowledged the presence of senior federal and regional officials, scholars, religious leaders,

elders, artists, members of civil society, and representatives from across Ethiopia who had gathered to deliberate on the question of framing a shared national narrative.

He began by expressing deep appreciation for the collaboration that made the conference possible, particularly the joint efforts of the Oromia National Regional State, the Federal Ministry of Peace, Jimma University, the Jimma City Administration, and the Jimma Zone Administration. He noted that this partnership had enabled the convening of a historic national dialogue aimed at articulating a shared national vision that he described as essential for Ethiopia's future trajectory.

H.E. Obboo Kefyalew observed that the wide representation of participants from different regions and sectors reflected a growing recognition that Ethiopia currently stands at a defining historical moment. He emphasized that the gathering should not be seen merely as a ceremonial event but as a consequential national engagement designed to reflect collectively on Ethiopia's past, present, and future.

In his remarks, he stressed that nations do not endure through institutions alone but through shared meaning among their citizens. According to him, shared memories, values, and aspirations form the foundation of national cohesion. When such shared meaning weakens, he warned, institutions themselves become fragile, trust erodes, and political life becomes increasingly unstable.

Reflecting on Ethiopia's long and complex history, he noted that the country has produced multiple narratives, including narratives of achievement, resistance, unity, diversity, pride, and suffering. While recognizing the legitimacy of these narratives, he argued that when they exist in isolation or compete without a common interpretive framework, they risk fragmenting the collective national understanding that sustains political legitimacy and governance.

He explained that the purpose of the conference was therefore to address a fundamental national question: how Ethiopia might cultivate a shared narrative that recognizes diversity without institutionalizing division and that strengthens national legitimacy rather than undermining it. He underscored that the emphasis on the term "shared" was deliberate, noting that a national narrative that is not collectively owned can easily be perceived as imposed or exclusionary. A shared narrative, by contrast, reflects collective authorship and democratic legitimacy, acknowledging that no single community, region, or political tradition has exclusive ownership of Ethiopia's story.

In discussing the philosophical foundations of such a shared narrative, H.E. Obboo Kefyalew referred to the concept of Medemer, articulated by Prime Minister H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed. He described Medemer as both a governing philosophy and a national ethic that recognizes Ethiopia's strength in complementarity rather than uniformity. According to him, Medemer encourages Ethiopians to add value to one another, to acknowledge differences without fear, and to transform diversity into synergy rather than competition.

He further noted that Medemer rejects zero-sum approaches to politics, identity, history, and development, and instead promotes a logic of cooperation, accumulation, and shared responsibility. In the context of narrative-building, he highlighted three key lessons derived from the philosophy. First, Medemer provides an ethical framework for engaging with history by integrating diverse experiences into a shared civic future rather than denying grievances or injustices. Second, it emphasizes that unity must be practiced through institutions, policies, and social relations rather than merely proclaimed rhetorically. Third,

Medemer redefines political legitimacy as emerging from inclusion, fairness, and trust rather than from dominance or coercion.

Turning to the significance of the conference venue, H.E. Obboo Kefyalew explained that the choice of Jimma was both meaningful and appropriate. He described Jimma as a historically significant center of trade, scholarship, and cultural exchange, as well as the birthplace of coffee, symbolizing Ethiopia's long tradition of dialogue and interaction among diverse communities. In this sense, he suggested that Jimma represented an appropriate setting for a national conversation focused on shared understanding and collective purpose.

He also emphasized Oromia's role in hosting the conference. Oromia's historical experience, demographic significance, cultural richness, and contributions to the Ethiopian state, he noted, position the region as central to the national story. By hosting the conference, Oromia was demonstrating its commitment not only as a venue but also as an active partner in shaping Ethiopia's shared national narrative.

H.E. Obboo Kefyalew further noted that a shared narrative cannot be constructed from a single perspective. Rather, it must emerge from the lived experiences of Ethiopia's peoples, including communities from both rural and urban areas, youth and women, elders, professionals, and cultural leaders. National cohesion, he argued, can only be sustained when people see their histories, sacrifices, and aspirations reflected in the broader national story.

Clarifying the purpose of the conference, he explained that the gathering was not intended to finalize Ethiopia's shared narrative. Instead, it aimed to achieve several foundational objectives. These included affirming the necessity of a shared narrative, identifying the principles that should guide its development, outlining institutional frameworks capable of sustaining it over time, and clarifying the roles of government institutions, academia, civil society, media, and citizens in advancing the process.

In concluding his address, H.E. Obboo Kefyalew emphasized that Ethiopia does not lack history, identity, or narratives. What the country requires at this historical moment, he stated, is a shared framework through which these narratives can coexist, enrich one another, and guide the nation's collective future with confidence and legitimacy.

He expressed the hope that Jimma would be remembered as the place where Ethiopia chose dialogue over division, inclusion over exclusion, and shared meaning over fragmentation. With these remarks, he officially declared the National Conference on the Shared Narrative open and wished participants fruitful deliberations and lasting impact.

3.4 Keynote Address

H.E. Mohamed Idris

Minister - Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Minister of Peace.

In his keynote address, H.E. Mohamed Idris, expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the national conference on the shared narrative, held in the beautiful, green, welcoming, and culturally diverse city of Jimma. Speaking on behalf of himself and the Ministry of Peace, he conveyed his sincere

gratitude to the organizers for inviting him to deliver the opening keynote on an issue of such national significance.

The Minister began by reflecting on the meaning and power of narrative. He noted that narratives shape how national events, collective history, culture, and social values are understood and transmitted. In his view, narratives can play a constructive role by bridging generational gaps, strengthening social understanding, and contributing positively to national consensus. At the same time, he cautioned that narratives can also have negative consequences when they deepen misunderstanding, weaken intergenerational trust, and expand divisions among citizens.

He further emphasized that a narrative that overemphasizes difference while neglecting togetherness, or that minimizes diversity in favor of an absolute and rigid unity, cannot serve the cause of durable peace. Instead, he argued, Ethiopia needs a unifying and inclusive narrative grounded in the country's lived realities and centered on multinational solidarity, inclusiveness, justice, and equality.

H.E. Mohamed Idris stated that a shared national narrative should not be understood as one that merely glorifies or condemns the past. Rather, he explained, it should help society preserve what is useful and constructive from history while correcting those narratives that expose citizens to division and hostility. In this sense, he described the construction of a shared narrative as an essential instrument for fostering reconciliation and social healing. He therefore underlined that building such a narrative is a key national task for strengthening both state-building and multinational unity in Ethiopia.

Reflecting on Ethiopia's historical experience, the Minister observed that Ethiopians are peoples who, over many generations, have made immense sacrifices to preserve national unity and sovereignty. He noted that the country has passed through both periods of pride and moments of trial, and that citizens have at times suffered conflict and hardship because of competing narratives of unity and difference. Yet despite these difficulties, Ethiopians have preserved their sovereignty and independence. At the same time, he pointed out that although Ethiopia is a country with a rich civilization and an indigenous democratic tradition, competing historical interpretations and divisive narratives have often limited the ability to forge broad national consensus. For this reason, he argued, it is necessary to replace divisive narratives that have held the country back and to ensure Ethiopia's full national advancement.

Turning to the present government's approach, H.E. Mohamed Idris stated that the government believes the philosophy of **Medemer** offers a path beyond stagnation and fragmentation. He explained that the government sees Medemer as a framework for fostering both intellectual and cultural transformation. In particular, he noted that it is being advanced as a way of confronting divisive ideologies, including ethnic chauvinism and narrow group-based politics, which pose challenges to the country's social cohesion and national existence. According to him, the philosophy emphasizes that unity and togetherness are foundational to Ethiopia's collective prosperity.

In this context, the Minister highlighted that the government has initiated and supported several large-scale national development projects that serve not only economic purposes but also strengthen collective ownership and shared purpose among citizens. He referred to projects such as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, the Yelemat Tirufat initiative, the Green Legacy campaign, and corridor development as examples of undertakings that mobilize citizens across regions and sectors around common national goals. He indicated that such projects help strengthen shared narratives and reinforce national unity.

H.E. Mohamed Idris further stressed that if Ethiopians are to advance toward greater multinational solidarity and national progress, they must be prepared to think beyond individual or group interests and to organize around common agendas rooted in both their shared past and shared future. He called for patriotic commitment and collective responsibility in this effort.

He then outlined a number of practical directions for advancing shared narratives in Ethiopia. These included the need to develop policy-supported institutional and structural mechanisms; to integrate the construction of shared narratives into the education system from the earliest levels of schooling; to make greater use of media institutions in building shared narratives; to encourage intellectuals to work in a more coordinated and collaborative manner; to promote a democratic political culture in which political parties strengthen togetherness rather than division; and to enhance the contribution of religious leaders and elders in transmitting ethics, coexistence, forgiveness, peace, and humanity to younger generations. He also underlined that all stakeholders should act with a sense of shared responsibility and patriotism so that the country's common values may be cultivated and strengthened.

In the final part of his address, the Minister stated that the present moment is the right time to address the contradictions produced by long-standing distorted narratives and to strengthen national understanding. He urged participants and citizens alike to set aside narrow and polarizing histories and narratives, and instead to use the past primarily as a lesson. He called on Ethiopians to work diligently in the present while living with hope and unity for the future, to cultivate a culture of working together, to engage in healthy competition of ideas on issues where differences exist, and to assign shared national meaning to their collective struggles and sacrifices. He also stressed the importance of reaching common understanding on critical historical moments, shared heroes, symbols, and emblems.

In this regard, he emphasized that the ongoing National Dialogue process should be treated as an important national opportunity. He argued that, alongside national dialogue, Ethiopians should continue to work diligently on state-building tasks that can produce broader national understanding, connect the current generation with both its historical inheritance and future aspirations, and gradually correct the contradictions embedded in history and narrative. By strengthening what has already been improved, expanding positive experiences, and transmitting them to future generations, he said, Ethiopians should strive to build a greater history in the present, just as they had done in the past, and thereby realize the country's aspirations.

In closing, H.E. Mohamed Idris expressed appreciation to the Office of the President of Oromia National Regional State, the Jimma City Administration, the Center for Responsible and Peaceful Politics, and Jimma University for their contribution in organizing what he described as a highly valuable national conference. He concluded by expressing his heartfelt wish that the discussions would be successful and officially announced the opening of the forum.

4 The Struggle for a Shared Narrative in Ethiopia

Prof. Bahru Zewde
Emeritus Professor of History

Paper presented at the National Conference on Framing the Shared Narrative
Jimma, 12 January 2026

4.1 Executive Summary

This paper addresses one of the most persistent and consequential challenges facing contemporary Ethiopia: the absence of a broadly accepted, inclusive, and operationalized shared national narrative. Although Ethiopia has long affirmed the ideals of unity in diversity and a common national story in official discourse, these principles have remained largely rhetorical. They have not been consistently translated into political practice, institutional design, educational systems, or everyday social interaction. The result is a widening gap between proclaimed national ideals and lived political realities.

Drawing on several decades of professional historiography, Professor Bahru Zewde examines the historical foundations, evolution, and limitations of Ethiopia's "grand narrative." He traces its development from royal chronicles and early modern historical writing to the emergence of professional historiography in the 1960s. While early narratives provided continuity and a sense of civilizational depth, they were also shaped by dynastic priorities and geographic selectivity, resulting in exclusion and imbalance. The rise of professional historiography corrected many of these distortions by expanding geographic coverage, legitimizing oral sources, and introducing methodological rigor. However, these scholarly advances have not been sufficiently integrated into public discourse, education, or policy frameworks.

The paper argues that Ethiopia's narrative crisis is not simply an academic debate over history, but a deeply political and institutional problem. Competing historical memories, ethnicized interpretations of the past, and the post-1991 institutionalization of identity politics have fragmented the national narrative space. These dynamics have reinforced grievance-based mobilization, weakened civic identity, and undermined shared legitimacy. Yet, the historical record also reveals strong evidence of long-standing interdependence, regional integration, poly-ethnic state formation, and repeated moments of pan-Ethiopian solidarity—particularly during periods of external threat and national crisis.

Professor Bahru emphasizes that a viable shared national narrative cannot be constructed through denial, nostalgia, or imposed uniformity. Instead, it requires deliberate methodological shifts toward inclusive social and economic history, recognition of interaction and coexistence, and balanced engagement with both written and oral traditions. Crucially, the paper stresses that scholarly effort alone is insufficient. Constructing a shared narrative demands political courage and institutional commitment, including reforms in the constitution, education policy, and public communication. These reforms must subordinate ethnic absolutism to a civic national identity grounded in objective scholarship, indigenous knowledge systems, and shared historical experience.

The paper concludes by offering a historically grounded roadmap for policymakers, scholars, and national dialogue actors. It calls for moving Ethiopia beyond rhetorical consensus toward actionable unity—where

shared narratives are not merely discussed, but embedded in institutions, transmitted across generations, and reflected in the everyday relationship between the state and its citizens.

4.2 Key Messages

1. There is a *formal* consensus on unity in diversity, but lacks mechanisms to operationalize it.
2. The traditional grand narrative created continuity but also entrenched exclusions.
3. Professional historiography has corrected many distortions, yet remains weakly disseminated.
4. Historical evidence strongly supports interdependence, regional integration, and poly-ethnic statehood.
5. Counter-narratives emerged from real grievances but have often hardened into divisive ideologies.
6. A shared narrative must be inclusive, objective, and focused on common historical experiences.
7. Political intervention—especially constitutional and civic reform—is unavoidable.
8. Scholarly initiatives like the Association of Ethiopian Historians (AEH) demonstrate feasibility but require sustained institutional support.

4.3 Conceptual Framework: The Formal Consensus

For several decades, Ethiopia has articulated a formal and rhetorical consensus around two closely linked ideas: ኅብረ ብሔራዊ አንድነት (unity in diversity) and የጋራ / የወል ትርክት (a shared national narrative)**.** These concepts have been repeatedly affirmed across official government statements, constitutional debates, academic discussions, cultural productions, and public commemorations. At the level of principle, there has been little disagreement that Ethiopia is both diverse and historically interconnected, and that its future stability depends on holding these realities together within a common national framework.

This formal consensus has expressed itself in multiple institutional and symbolic forms. State-sponsored and academic forums—including conferences, workshops, and symposia—have regularly addressed questions of national identity, shared history, and coexistence. National celebrations such as millennium commemorations, flag days, and major historical anniversaries have been used to symbolically reaffirm unity and continuity. In the cultural sphere, music, literature, and popular art—often blending languages, styles, and regional influences—have reflected widespread social aspirations for collective belonging that transcend political divisions.

Yet, despite this apparent convergence at the level of rhetoric and symbolism, Ethiopia has struggled to translate consensus into practice. The principles of unity in diversity and shared narrative have not been consistently embedded in institutions, governance systems, education, or political behavior. Instead, they often remain abstract ideals invoked selectively, rather than operational commitments guiding policy choices and public conduct.

This gap between agreement in words and fragmentation in reality raises a fundamental question: **Why has Ethiopia repeatedly failed to "walk the talk"?** Why does rhetorical alignment not result in institutional coherence, inclusive political practice, or sustained social cohesion? The persistence of competing narratives, politicized history, and identity-based mobilization suggests that formal consensus alone is insufficient without mechanisms that transform ideas into lived governance realities.

This unresolved tension between proclaimed unity and experienced division frames the core argument of the paper. It sets the agenda for both scholarly inquiry and policy-relevant debate by shifting attention

from whether Ethiopia agrees on unity in diversity, to how that agreement can be institutionalized, operationalized, and protected from political distortion.

4.4 The Longevity of the Ethiopian "Grand Narrative"

The Ethiopian grand narrative is not a modern construction, nor a product of recent political debate. It has deep historical roots that extend across centuries and is among the longest continuous state narratives in Africa and the world. Its earliest formulations emerged through royal chronicles, which documented dynastic succession, territorial authority, and the moral legitimacy of rulership. These chronicles presented Ethiopia as an ancient, continuous polity, grounded in civilization, sovereignty, and sacred authority, and they played a central role in shaping early conceptions of national identity.

Over time, this indigenous narrative tradition was complemented by external scholarly engagement. Foreign writers most notably early European scholars, helped transmit Ethiopian history to wider international audiences, reinforcing Ethiopia's image as an ancient and independent civilization. While these accounts varied in accuracy and perspective, they contributed to situating Ethiopia within global historical consciousness and further consolidating its sense of historical distinctiveness.

The Ethiopian pioneers of change of the early twentieth century built upon these foundations, gradually bridging traditional historical writing with emerging modern historiographical methods. This transition marked an important evolution: history began to move from court-centered narration toward more systematic inquiry. As a result, a historiographical continuum developed linking royal chronicles, early intellectual interpretations, and eventually professional historiography. This continuity played a crucial role in sustaining a shared sense of Ethiopian statehood across generations, even amid political change and external pressure.

However, the longevity of the grand narrative also carried structural limitations. The same narrative that promoted continuity and national pride simultaneously institutionalized exclusion. It privileged particular regions, cultures, languages, and political centers, while marginalizing others or rendering them invisible. Large segments of Ethiopia's diverse societies experienced the national story not as inclusive recognition, but as selective representation.

These exclusions were not merely symbolic; they shaped political power, social hierarchy, and historical memory. Over time, marginalized experiences accumulated into grievances that challenged the legitimacy of the dominant narrative. As political conditions changed, especially in the twentieth century these silenced histories re-emerged as counter-narratives, contesting both the content and authority of the traditional grand narrative.

Thus, Ethiopia's grand narrative is best understood as both a source of historical continuity and a seed of later contestation**.** Its endurance demonstrates the strength of Ethiopia's state tradition, but its exclusions explain why that tradition has repeatedly been challenged. This dual legacy is central to understanding the current struggle for a shared national narrative that preserves continuity while correcting historical imbalance.

4.5 Limitations of the Grand Narrative

Despite its longevity and role in sustaining a sense of historical continuity, the traditional Ethiopian grand narrative exhibits significant structural and methodological limitations. These limitations have constrained its inclusivity, credibility, and capacity to function as a unifying national framework in a diverse society.

Methodologically, early grand narratives particularly royal chronicles lack the standards of scientific historical inquiry. Their primary purpose was not critical analysis but dynastic legitimation. As a result, they often prioritized political glorification over empirical accuracy, presenting history as a linear story of rulers and victories rather than a complex social process. Objectivity was limited, and alternative perspectives, especially those that challenged central authority, were largely absent.

Geographically, the grand narrative was heavily skewed toward northern and central political centers. Regions outside this focus were frequently underrepresented, selectively portrayed, or omitted altogether. This imbalance produced a national history that appeared territorially comprehensive but substantively narrow, leaving many communities without meaningful representation in the national story.

Equally significant was the narrative's reliance almost exclusively on written sources, particularly court records, ecclesiastical texts, and official documents. This approach overlooked Ethiopia's rich oral traditions, which preserved historical memory among societies with strong non-written cultural systems. Oral histories carried knowledge of migration, trade, conflict resolution, governance systems, and inter-community relations—yet these voices were largely excluded from the canonical narrative.

A notable and important exception to this pattern was Hiruy Wolde Selassie's *Ityopya-na Matamma*, which consciously incorporated oral traditions and local accounts. This work anticipated later methodological advances by recognizing oral history as a legitimate historical source. However, such approaches remained rare and did not fundamentally reshape the dominant narrative framework at the time.

These combined limitations, methodological bias, geographic imbalance, and exclusion of oral memory, rendered the grand narrative increasingly vulnerable to critique. As political awareness expanded and marginalized communities sought recognition, the narrative came to be seen not as a shared national story but as a selective account reflecting power rather than experience.

Over time, this gap between official history and lived memory fueled the rise of counter-narratives. While many of these challenges were grounded in legitimate historical grievances, they also fragmented the national narrative landscape. The failure of the traditional grand narrative to adapt inclusively thus became a key driver of Ethiopia's contemporary narrative crisis.

In this sense, the limitations of the grand narrative are not merely academic shortcomings; they are structural weaknesses with lasting political consequences underscoring the urgent need for a more inclusive, methodologically sound, and socially grounded shared national narrative.

4.6 The Birth of Professional Ethiopian Historiography

A decisive turning point in Ethiopian historiography occurred in 1963, a moment that can be described as a "double bonus" in the country's intellectual history. That year witnessed the establishment of two foundational institutions at Haile Selassie I University: the Department of History and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES)**.** Together, these institutions transformed the study of Ethiopia's past from a largely traditional and semi-traditional practice into a professional academic discipline.

The creation of the Department of History institutionalized formal historical training, introducing structured curricula, peer review, and rigorous research methods grounded in comparative and interdisciplinary scholarship. For the first time, Ethiopian history was taught and studied systematically within a university setting, producing historians trained not only in narrative description but also in critical analysis, source evaluation, and theoretical reflection.

In parallel, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies served as a national intellectual hub dedicated to the collection, preservation, and study of Ethiopia's historical, cultural, and linguistic heritage. IES assembled archives, manuscripts, oral histories, artifacts, and ethnographic materials that had previously been scattered, neglected, or inaccessible. By doing so, it provided the empirical foundation necessary for serious historical research and broadened the evidentiary base beyond royal chronicles and official records.

Together, these institutions marked Ethiopia's transition from court-centered and elite-driven historiography **to** professional, evidence-based historical inquiry. They institutionalized scholarly standards, research ethics, and methodological rigor, while encouraging critical engagement with previously unquestioned narratives. Importantly, they also legitimized new research themes, including social history, economic structures, regional dynamics, and state–society relations.

Equally significant was their role in nurturing a new generation of Ethiopian historians. Through senior essays, graduate theses, and doctoral research, students were trained to investigate Ethiopia's past using both written and oral sources, comparative perspectives, and interdisciplinary tools. This generation would later play a central role in revising national historiography, challenging exclusions, and expanding the historical record to include marginalized regions and communities.

The birth of professional Ethiopian historiography thus represented more than an academic milestone. It constituted a structural shift in how national history was produced, interpreted, and contested. While this transformation did not immediately resolve the tensions embedded in Ethiopia's grand narrative, it created the intellectual tools and institutional foundations necessary for a more inclusive, critical, and plural understanding of the past, an essential precondition for constructing a credible Shared National Narrative in the present.

4.7 Achievements of Professional Historiography

The emergence of professional historiography in Ethiopia produced several transformative and lasting achievements that fundamentally reshaped the understanding of the country's past. One of the most significant advances was geographical expansion. Historical inquiry moved decisively beyond a narrow northern focus to incorporate regions that had long been excluded or marginally represented in national history. Southern, eastern, western, and lowland societies increasingly entered scholarly analysis,

correcting earlier imbalances and revealing Ethiopia as a historically interconnected and plural political space.

Methodologically, professional historiography introduced a major innovation by legitimizing the systematic use of oral sources. Oral traditions, genealogies, songs, and community narratives—long dismissed as unscientific—were subjected to rigorous cross-checking and contextual analysis. This significantly expanded the evidentiary base of Ethiopian history and allowed historians to reconstruct perspectives and experiences that written sources alone could not capture, particularly those of non-literate societies and marginalized communities.

Student research played a decisive role in this transformation. What began as Senior Essays at undergraduate level evolved into Master's theses and doctoral dissertations, producing a substantial and diverse body of original scholarship. These works often broke new ground, drawing on local archives, oral testimonies, and interdisciplinary methods. Collectively, they formed the backbone of modern Ethiopian historiography and contributed to the professionalization of historical inquiry.

Thematically, historians moved beyond a narrow preoccupation with dynastic politics, ecclesiastical history, and elite actors. New areas of inquiry emerged, including economic history, land tenure systems, social stratification, urbanization, trade networks, and state–society relations. These perspectives revealed patterns of interaction, interdependence, and adaptation that challenge simplified narratives of domination and resistance.

Despite these substantial achievements, important limitations remain. Ethiopian historiography continues to be disproportionately concentrated on the modern period, particularly the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, leaving earlier historical continuities underexplored. This temporal imbalance weakens efforts to demonstrate long-term patterns of coexistence and shared development.

More critically, the impact of professional historiography has remained largely confined to academic circles. Its findings have not sufficiently penetrated public discourse, school curricula, media narratives, or policy debates. As a result, historically grounded insights that could inform reconciliation, identity formation, and governance remain disconnected from the arenas where narratives are actively constructed and contested.

This gap between scholarly knowledge and public understanding represents one of the central challenges confronting efforts to build a Shared National Narrative. The achievements of professional historiography provide a strong intellectual foundation, but without deliberate institutional, educational, and communicative bridges, their transformative potential remains underutilized.

4.8 Salient Historical Conclusions

Professional Ethiopian historiography has generated a set of robust and empirically grounded conclusions that are directly relevant to contemporary debates on national identity and shared narrative formation. These conclusions challenge dominant simplifications and provide a factual basis for reframing Ethiopia's history in more integrative and constructive terms.

First, historical scholarship confirms the remarkable longevity and institutional continuity of the Ethiopian state. Despite periods of fragmentation, regime change, and external pressure, Ethiopia has maintained a recognizable political core across centuries. State institutions evolved, adapted, and reconfigured rather

than disappearing altogether. This continuity distinguishes Ethiopia from many postcolonial states and provides a strong historical foundation for national coherence and legitimacy.

Second, professional historiography demonstrates that region has historically been more significant than ethnos in shaping political identity and social organization. Ethnic categories, as understood today, were often fluid, situational, and overlapping rather than fixed and exclusionary. Identities such as "Amhara" and "Oromo" functioned less as rigid ethnic boundaries and more as social, political, and cultural markers that changed over time and context. This historical fluidity directly contradicts contemporary narratives that treat ethnic identities as primordial and immutable.

Third, historical evidence reveals deep and sustained patterns of interaction among Ethiopia's peoples. Extensive intermarriage occurred across communities at both elite and popular levels, fostering social integration and shared cultural practices. Case studies from regions such as Salale, and Kestane (Soddo Gurage) illustrate the permeability of social boundaries, where language, lineage, and political affiliation intersected dynamically rather than reinforcing separation. These interactions produced hybrid identities and shared local histories that resist binary classification.

Fourth, Ethiopian governance has historically been characterized by a poly-ethnic ruling elite rather than domination by a single group. Amhara, Tegrawai, Oromo, and other elites participated jointly in state administration, military leadership, and court politics across different historical periods. This plural composition of power challenges narratives that portray the Ethiopian state as the exclusive project of one ethnic community and underscores a tradition of shared political stewardship.

Collectively, these findings undermine simplistic ethnic dichotomies that frame Ethiopian history as a continuous struggle between homogeneous and opposing groups. Instead, they reveal a historical reality marked by interaction, accommodation, adaptation, and shared statehood. Importantly, these conclusions do not deny episodes of exclusion, violence, or inequality; rather, they contextualize them within a broader historical pattern of coexistence and interdependence.

For contemporary Ethiopia, these historiographical insights provide empirical foundations for a Shared Narrative grounded in historical fact rather than political myth. They demonstrate that unity and diversity are not competing principles, but historically intertwined realities. Reclaiming and communicating these conclusions is therefore essential for moving beyond polarized narratives and toward a shared understanding of Ethiopia's past and future.

4.9 Manifestations of the Pan-Ethiopian Ideal

Pan-Ethiopian consciousness has been a constant, albeit dormant feature of Ethiopia's political life; it has emerged most clearly and forcefully during moments of existential threat and collective challenge. At such critical junctures, diverse communities have repeatedly demonstrated a capacity to transcend regional, ethnic, and cultural differences in defense of shared sovereignty and national survival.

Historically, the Battle of Adwa (1896) stands as the most powerful symbol of this collective consciousness. Faced with the threat of Italian colonialism, Ethiopians from different regions, languages, and social backgrounds mobilized under a shared purpose. Adwa forged a unifying memory of resistance, independence, and dignity that continues to resonate in national and continental narratives. Similarly, the resistance against Italian Fascist occupation (1936–1941) reinforced a shared sense of injustice and

collective struggle, as communities across the country contributed to a prolonged and coordinated effort to restore sovereignty.

In the post-imperial period, moments of external aggression again activated pan-Ethiopian sentiment. The defeat of Somali irredentist aggression (1977–1978) and the Badme War (1998–2000) demonstrated that, despite deep internal political divisions, national solidarity could still be mobilized in defense of territorial integrity. In each case, national identity was reaffirmed not through abstract ideology, but through shared sacrifice, collective mobilization, and common cause.

Importantly, pan-Ethiopian ideals have not been expressed only through warfare and crisis. They have also taken shape in cultural, social, and symbolic domains that reflect everyday experiences of unity. National political icons—drawn from diverse backgrounds—have served as symbols of shared struggle and aspiration. Artistic expressions, including music, literature, and visual arts, have long crossed linguistic and regional boundaries, creating shared emotional and cultural reference points.

Sports have similarly functioned as powerful vehicles of national identification, providing moments when Ethiopians celebrate collective achievement regardless of background. In parallel, the transformation of regionally rooted cuisines into nationally embraced dishes illustrates how cultural practices evolve into shared symbols of belonging. These forms of unity are not imposed; they emerge organically from interaction, exchange, and mutual recognition.

Together, these manifestations reveal that pan-Ethiopian identity is not merely a political construct or elite project. It is a lived experience, activated under certain conditions and sustained through shared memory, cultural expression, and collective action. While such moments have often been episodic, they demonstrate the latent potential for a Shared Grand Narrative grounded in historical experience rather than imposed abstraction.

The challenge for contemporary Ethiopia, as Prof. Bahru's analysis suggests, is not to invent pan-Ethiopianism anew, but to institutionalize and normalize these moments of unity—transforming crisis-driven solidarity into a durable civic framework that supports peace, legitimacy, and inclusive statehood in everyday governance.

4.10 The Counter-Narrative

The rise of counter-narratives in Ethiopia must be understood as the product of both objective historical shortcomings and subjective political dynamics. These counter-narratives did not emerge in a vacuum; they developed in response to genuine exclusions, silences, and distortions embedded within the traditional grand narrative.

From an objective standpoint, the historic grand narrative failed to achieve inclusivity. While it emphasized state continuity, dynastic legitimacy, and civilizational antiquity, it often obscured or minimized the experiences of many communities affected by state expansion, political centralization, and uneven incorporation. Episodes of coercion, dispossession, cultural marginalization, and localized resistance were either underrepresented or framed in ways that denied their lasting social and psychological impact. This absence of recognition created a legitimacy gap, particularly among communities whose historical experiences did not align with the dominant national story.

From a subjective and political perspective, counter-narratives were shaped by liberation ideologies that prioritized mobilization over historical balance. Throughout much of the twentieth century, political movements framed history primarily as a tool for resistance, identity construction, and moral justification. In this context, history became less a field of inquiry and more a vehicle for grievance articulation. Complex historical processes were simplified into binaries of oppressor and oppressed, center and periphery, victor and victim. Over time, this produced a powerful but rigid grievance narrative that extended across generations and hardened into political identity.

The post-1991 political order significantly intensified these dynamics. The period created unprecedented space for ethno-historical scholarship and the public articulation of previously marginalized histories. This development represented an important corrective to earlier silences and contributed to a more plural understanding of Ethiopia's past. Communities gained voice, memory was reclaimed, and historical injustice was publicly acknowledged.

However, the proliferation of ethno-histories also produced unintended consequences. In the absence of an overarching interpretive framework, historical narratives increasingly evolved in parallel rather than in dialogue. Competing accounts hardened into mutually exclusive claims of authenticity, victimhood, and moral authority. Rather than enriching a shared understanding, historical memory became fragmented and politicized, reinforcing zero-sum interpretations of the past.

As a result, Ethiopia's historical discourse entered a paradoxical phase: greater inclusion of voices coincided with deeper narrative fragmentation. While counter-narratives succeeded in exposing exclusions and correcting distortions, their institutionalization within political structures risked replacing one form of historical absolutism with another.

Prof. Bahru's analysis underscores a critical lesson: counter-narratives are historically necessary and intellectually valid, but they become destabilizing when they evolve without methodological restraint, ethical responsibility, and integrative intent. The challenge, therefore, is not to suppress counter-narratives, but to situate them within a broader, evidence-based, and dialogical historical framework—one capable of transforming grievance into recognition and plurality into shared meaning.

4.11 Ingredients of a Shared Narrative

A viable Shared National Narrative cannot be constructed through rhetorical compromise alone; it must be grounded in methodological rigor, ethical responsibility, and empirical evidence. At its core, such a narrative must be inclusive**,** objective, and deliberately oriented toward commonalities rather than divisions. Inclusion ensures that diverse historical experiences are recognized without hierarchy; objectivity safeguards the narrative from political instrumentalization; and a focus on common ground enables collective ownership and legitimacy.

Methodologically, this requires a decisive shift away from narrowly framed political and military histories that emphasize conquest, domination, and resistance as the primary drivers of the past. While political history remains important, its dominance has often reinforced zero-sum interpretations of state formation and identity. A shared narrative must instead elevate social and economic history as central analytical lenses.

Such a reorientation brings into focus historical processes that demonstrate interaction rather than separation. Long-distance trade routes connected highlands and lowlands, linking diverse regions through

exchange rather than coercion. Commercial entrepôts—urban and semi-urban centers of trade—functioned as spaces of cultural mixing, economic interdependence, and negotiated coexistence. Intermarriage patterns, evident across regions and communities, reveal sustained social integration at both elite and popular levels, challenging rigid ethnic boundaries. Similarly, linguistic borrowing, religious coexistence, and shared cultural practices underscore the depth of everyday interaction that characterized Ethiopian societies over centuries.

This perspective reframes Ethiopian history not as a sequence of isolated or antagonistic communities, but as a dense web of relationships shaped by mobility, exchange, and adaptation. It reveals that interconnectedness has been the historical norm, while rigid identity boundaries are comparatively recent political constructions.

Importantly, a shared narrative does not require the erasure of conflict or injustice. Rather, it contextualizes these experiences within a broader historical fabric that recognizes both pain and partnership. By foregrounding patterns of cooperation alongside episodes of contestation, such a narrative enables recognition without polarization and memory without acrimony.

In policy terms, adopting this methodological shift has far-reaching implications. It informs curriculum reform, public history initiatives, media programming, and national dialogue processes. It provides a scholarly foundation for civic identity that is neither homogenizing nor fragmenting. Ultimately, a shared narrative built on these ingredients offers Ethiopia a pathway from competing memories toward a historically grounded, ethically integrated, and forward-looking national consciousness.

4.12 Comparative Insights

Comparative international experience demonstrates that constructing shared historical narratives is both profoundly difficult and politically indispensable, particularly in societies emerging from conflict or deep polarization. Across regions and political systems, efforts to reconcile competing memories reveal a common lesson: while historical agreement may never be complete, structured engagement with the past is essential for legitimacy, stability, and peaceful coexistence.

At the multilateral level, the United Nations Security Council's 2014 debate on historical reconciliation explicitly recognized that unresolved historical grievances can constitute ongoing threats to peace and security. The debate affirmed that memory, history, and narrative are not peripheral cultural concerns, but core components of conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery. Similarly, UNESCO's shared history initiatives have sought to promote cross-border and multi-perspective historiography, particularly through joint textbooks and curriculum frameworks, emphasizing dialogue over uniformity and mutual recognition over erasure.

The Council of Europe's "Shared Histories: For a Europe without Dividing Lines" project offers a particularly relevant model. Rather than attempting to impose a single authoritative narrative, the initiative encourages plural historical perspectives anchored in common democratic values, human rights, and ethical responsibility. This approach acknowledges diversity of experience while establishing shared interpretive principles—a balance that is especially instructive for multi-ethnic and federal contexts.

Bilateral and regional initiatives further illustrate both the potential and constraints of such undertakings. The Chinese–Japanese Joint History Committee, established to address contested interpretations of wartime history, demonstrated that sustained scholarly dialogue can narrow the range of historical

disagreement, even when political consensus remains elusive. Likewise, the Peace Research Initative in the Middle East and the Scholars' Initiative on Yugoslav controversies have shown that academically grounded engagement can challenge denial, reduce misinformation, and create spaces for reasoned debate, even in highly polarized environments.

As is now common knowledge, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) represent one of the most visible institutional mechanisms for addressing contested pasts. While TRCs have played an important symbolic role in acknowledging suffering and creating public records of abuse, their long-term impact has often been limited. Divergent perceptions of historical truth, selective acceptance of findings, and weak integration of outcomes into education, media, and governance systems have constrained their transformative potential. Experience suggests that truth-telling alone is insufficient unless it is embedded within broader institutional, educational, and communicative frameworks.

Taken together, these comparative experiences reinforce a critical insight for Ethiopia: shared narratives cannot be manufactured through decree, nor resolved solely through short-term dialogue processes. They require sustained institutional commitment, scholarly integrity, and communicative responsibility. Most importantly, successful approaches focus not on producing a single "correct" history, but on establishing shared rules for interpreting the past, recognizing harm, and framing collective futures.

For Ethiopia, these lessons suggest that the pursuit of a Shared Grand Narrative must prioritize process over proclamation, inclusion over unanimity, and institutional anchoring over symbolic gesture. Only through such an approach can shared history become a resource for unity rather than a terrain of perpetual contestation.

4.13 The Example of the Association of Ethiopian Historians (AEH)

The re-establishment of the Association of Ethiopian Historians (AEH) on 2 March 2021 (Adwa Day) represents one of the most concrete and institutionally grounded efforts to rebuild shared historical understanding in contemporary Ethiopia. As it turned out, the choice of Adwa Day turned out to be symbolically significant, anchoring the revival of the Association in a moment of widely shared national memory associated with collective resistance, sovereignty, and unity across difference.

Following its reconstitution, AEH undertook a series of practical and policy-relevant initiatives aimed at addressing the fragmentation of historical narratives. One of its most notable achievements was the restoration of the common history course that used to be offered to incoming university students in order to provide them with a shared foundational understanding of Ethiopian history while incorporating multiple perspectives. This was made possible by the production of a module that moved beyond earlier polarized approaches and created a basis for a common understanding of Ethiopian history.

AEH has continued to facilitate consensus-building among historians on core curriculum modules, identifying key themes, periods, and methodological principles that could be taught nationally without erasing diversity or legitimizing exclusion. Importantly, these modules were not treated as static. The Association instituted iterative revisions based on feedback from the various history departments of the country directly involved in teaching the course, demonstrating a commitment to reflexivity and academic accountability.

In addition, AEH organized a series of workshops on interdependence and interaction in Ethiopian history, publishing the selected papers in both Amharic and English. It also organized a workshop on contested

issues in Ethiopian historiography, where frank and incisive debates were held on such questions as inclusivity, heroes and villains, identity, and borders/boundaries. Rather than seeking premature consensus, these discussions emphasized methodological transparency, respect for complexity, and the distinction between scholarly inquiry and political mobilization.

These workshops were not mere academic exercises. They contributed to national policy processes by providing substantive inputs to the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission (ENDC), as the association anticipates historical issues to be among the top agenda of the dialogue process. In doing so, AEH demonstrated how scholarly institutions can serve as bridges between academic knowledge and national governance processes.

Despite these achievements, the Association's impact has been severely constrained by limited financial, institutional, and logistical resources. The absence of sustained funding, limited outreach capacity, and weak integration with national education and media systems have restricted AEH's ability to scale its initiatives beyond select academic and professional circles. As a result, its potential contribution to shaping public discourse and informing policy remains underutilized.

The AEH experience offers a critical lesson for Ethiopia's pursuit of a Shared Grand Narrative: intellectual consensus-building is possible, but it requires institutional support to be socially transformative. Without deliberate investment and formal linkages to education, media, and dialogue institutions, even the most rigorous scholarly efforts risk remaining confined to elite spaces. Strengthening and resourcing bodies like AEH is therefore not an academic luxury, but a strategic necessity for grounding Ethiopia's shared narrative in credible knowledge and professional integrity.

4.14The Need for Political Intervention

Prof. Bahru Zewde underscores a central and unavoidable conclusion: scholarly consensus, however rigorous, cannot by itself resolve Ethiopia's narrative crisis**.** While professional historiography has made substantial progress in correcting distortions and illuminating shared historical experiences, its influence remains limited without corresponding political and institutional action. The construction of a Shared Grand Narrative therefore requires deliberate political intervention at the highest levels of the state.

At the core of this intervention is the need for constitutional and governance reform. Prof. Bahru argues that Ethiopia's current constitutional and political arrangements have unintentionally reinforced ethnic absolutism by elevating identity from a social reality into a primary organizing principle of politics. He calls for a recalibration that subordinates ethnic identity to a pan-Ethiopian civic identity, without denying diversity or rolling back hard-won recognition. The objective is not assimilation or erasure, but the creation of a political framework in which citizenship, equality before the law, and shared responsibility take precedence over exclusive identity claims.

Closely linked to this is the need to shift from identity-based politics toward political pluralism. Prof. Bahru cautions that when political competition is structured primarily around ethnicity, history becomes a weapon and grievance becomes a mobilization tool. This dynamic entrenches polarization and undermines the possibility of shared national purpose. Political pluralism—organized around ideas, programs, and policy alternatives—offers a pathway for transforming historical diversity into democratic competition rather than existential conflict.

Beyond formal political reform, Prof. Bahru highlights the strategic importance of indigenous knowledge systems as reservoirs of shared experience, ethical norms, and conflict-management practices. Ethiopia's diverse societies have long traditions of coexistence, mediation, interdependence, and collective problem-solving that predate modern identity politics. Revitalizing and integrating these traditions into contemporary governance and civic education can provide culturally grounded foundations for shared meaning and legitimacy.

Ultimately, Prof. Bahru concludes, Ethiopia's narrative challenge is structural rather than rhetorical. It cannot be resolved through symbolic gestures, academic publications, or dialogue alone. It demands courageous political choices, institutional alignment, and sustained commitment to building a civic national identity grounded in historical truth and mutual recognition. The envisaged National Conference, he argues, must therefore move beyond diagnosis and generate concrete, actionable recommendations capable of reshaping constitutional practice, political behavior, and public consciousness over time.

4.15 Conclusion

Prof. Bahru Zewde's paper provides a clear, historically grounded, and intellectually balanced framework for understanding Ethiopia's ongoing narrative crisis. It demonstrates that the problem is not the absence of history, identity, or national symbols, but the failure to translate historical knowledge into inclusive political meaning and institutional practice. Ethiopia possesses deep traditions of statehood, interdependence, and shared struggle, yet these realities have not been adequately integrated into a common civic framework.

By linking professional historiography with contemporary politics, media dynamics, and the National Dialogue process, the paper bridges the gap between academic scholarship and national governance. It shows how distorted, selective, or exclusionary narratives—whether inherited from imperial traditions or produced through modern identity politics—have weakened legitimacy and social cohesion. At the same time, it offers strong empirical evidence that Ethiopia's past is marked as much by interaction and integration as by conflict.

The paper challenges scholars to move beyond academic correction alone and urges policymakers to recognize narrative-building as a core governance task. It calls for courage to confront sensitive constitutional and political questions, restraint in the use of history for political mobilization, and commitment to building a civic national identity that accommodates diversity without fragmenting the state. In doing so, Prof. Bahru reframes the shared narrative not as a nostalgic return to the past, but as a forward-looking project essential to Ethiopia's stability, democracy, and future development.

4.16 Next Steps and Policy Implications

Drawing from the paper's analysis, several concrete and actionable policy directions emerge:

1. **Educational Reform -** Shared and inclusive history modules should be systematically integrated into national education curricula at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. These modules should emphasize interdependence, coexistence, and shared historical experiences, rather than exclusive or zero-sum narratives. Teacher training and curriculum oversight are essential to ensure consistency and quality.

2. **Institutional Support for Historical Scholarship -** Institutions such as the Association of Ethiopian Historians (AEH) require sustained public support, including funding, research grants, and institutional recognition. Strengthening these bodies will enable professional historians to continue producing balanced scholarship and to engage more effectively with public discourse and policy processes.
3. **Constitutional and Legal Review -** Identity-related constitutional provisions should be carefully re-examined to ensure an appropriate balance between the recognition of diversity and the consolidation of a shared civic identity. This review should be inclusive, evidence-based, and aligned with democratic principles and long-term national cohesion.
4. **Integration with the National Dialogue Process -** Historical scholarship must be embedded within the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission (ENDC) processes. This includes using historians as resource persons, grounding dialogue themes in historical context, and ensuring that negotiated outcomes are informed by credible and inclusive historical understanding.
5. **Public Communication and Knowledge Translation -** Academic findings should be translated into accessible formats—such as policy briefs, media content, documentaries, and public lectures—to reach wider audiences. Effective public communication is essential for transforming scholarly consensus into shared societal understanding and ownership.

Together, these steps reinforce Prof. Bahru Zewde's central message: a Shared Narrative will not emerge spontaneously. It must be deliberately built through aligned educational reform, institutional support, constitutional reflection, informed dialogue, and responsible public communication.

5 National Identity, Shared Memories, and State Legitimacy: The Ethiopian Experience and Current Directions

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5.1 Executive Summary

This paper examines the relationship between national identity, shared memory, and state legitimacy in Ethiopia, focusing on why a country with deep civilizational roots, long state continuity, and rich cultural diversity continues to face persistent legitimacy and cohesion challenges. It argues that historical depth and diversity, while valuable assets, do not automatically generate stable national consensus. Legitimacy

must be actively constructed through inclusive governance, credible institutions, and shared narratives that resonate with citizens' lived experiences.

Drawing on theories of national identity and state formation, the paper traces how shared memories in Ethiopia have historically developed through interaction rather than isolation. Trade networks, religious coexistence, collective resistance to external threats, migration, and shared hardship played central roles in shaping a sense of belonging across regions and communities. These processes demonstrate that Ethiopian identity has long been relational and layered, rather than singular or static.

At the same time, the paper highlights how distorted or selective historical narratives, weak institutional consolidation, and inconsistent approaches to managing diversity have undermined state legitimacy. Competing interpretations of history and identity—often politicized—have weakened trust between the state and society. This has resulted in contested national symbols, fragile consensus around constitutional arrangements, and recurrent cycles of political instability.

The paper situates Ethiopia's current challenges within a broader crisis of legitimacy rather than a crisis of identity alone. It argues that legitimacy depends on whether citizens perceive the state as inclusive, fair, and reflective of shared values and memories. When narratives exclude or marginalize certain experiences, institutions lose moral authority, regardless of their legal foundation.

Within this context, the paper presents the Medemer (Synergy) governance approach as a strategic effort to rebuild national cohesion. Medemer is framed as a governing philosophy that seeks to align peacebuilding, unity in diversity, economic sovereignty, and consensus-based politics. By emphasizing complementarity, cooperation, and shared responsibility, Medemer offers a framework for reconciling diversity with collective national purpose.

The paper concludes that sustainable state legitimacy in Ethiopia cannot be achieved through institutional reform alone, nor through symbolic appeals to history. It requires deliberate alignment between historical understanding, governance practice, and inclusive national narratives. Only by integrating credible history, responsive institutions, and shared meaning can Ethiopia rebuild trust, strengthen legitimacy, and lay the foundations for durable peace and development.

5.2 Key Messages

1. Ethiopia's national identity is rooted in ancient civilization, independence, and diversity, yet remains contested.
2. Shared memory has historically been forged through struggle, interaction, and collective experience.
3. State formation in Ethiopia has been long and conflict-driven, leaving unresolved legitimacy challenges.
4. Weak consensus over symbols, history, and governance undermines state–society relations.
5. Managing diversity through a civic national framework is essential for stability.
6. The Medemer approach seeks to reconcile identity, legitimacy, and development through inclusive governance.

5.3 Conceptual Framing and Purpose

This paper is conceptually framed around the interdependence of national identity, shared memory, and state legitimacy in the Ethiopian context. It seeks to move beyond abstract or ideological debates by examining how these elements interact in practice and how they shape the relationship between the state and its citizens.

Specifically, the paper addresses four closely connected questions. First, how have Ethiopian identity and collective memory historically been formed through interaction, conflict, cooperation, and shared experience? Second, how has the Ethiopian state emerged and evolved over time, and how have different models of state formation influenced perceptions of belonging and authority? Third, why do challenges of legitimacy persist despite Ethiopia's long history of statehood and rich civilizational foundations? Fourth, what strategic directions are currently being advanced to address these challenges and rebuild national cohesion?

The analysis treats identity and legitimacy not as fixed or inherited conditions, but as constructed and contested outcomes shaped by historical experience, institutional performance, and political choice. National identity is understood as a lived and evolving process, reinforced—or weakened—by education, governance practices, public narratives, and collective memory. Similarly, state legitimacy is examined as a function of trust, inclusion, and perceived fairness, rather than legal authority alone.

By adopting this framework, the paper emphasizes that Ethiopia's current challenges are not inevitable products of diversity or history. Rather, they reflect the cumulative effects of how history has been narrated, how institutions have governed, and how political power has been exercised. This conceptual approach provides a foundation for identifying practical pathways toward rebuilding legitimacy through inclusive narratives, responsive institutions, and shared national purpose.

5.4 Ethiopia: Civilizational Foundations and National Context

Ethiopia's national identity and legitimacy debates are rooted in an exceptionally deep civilizational history. Unlike many modern states, Ethiopia's political and cultural foundations extend across millennia, shaping a strong sense of historical continuity, resilience, and collective self-awareness. These foundations provide both an asset and a responsibility: they offer rich material for a Shared Narrative, but they also require careful, inclusive interpretation to avoid selective memory and exclusion.

5.4.1 Ancient Origins and Human Heritage

Ethiopia occupies a unique place in global history as the Cradle of Humankind. Archaeological discoveries such as Lucy (Dinknesh) and Ardi situate the country at the very origins of human existence. These findings are not only of scientific importance; they also contribute to a deep sense of historical rootedness and civilizational pride shared across communities.

This ancient human heritage reinforces the idea that Ethiopia's story predates modern political divisions and identity categories. When responsibly incorporated into national narratives, it provides a unifying

foundation that transcends ethnicity, region, and religion, anchoring Ethiopian identity in a shared human and civilizational beginning.

5.4.2 Independence and Collective Memory

Ethiopia's preservation of independence is a central pillar of its collective memory and national consciousness. Over centuries, Ethiopians resisted external domination, confronting Egyptian and Ottoman incursions and later European colonial ambitions. This resistance culminated in defining historical moments such as the battles of Gundet and Gura, the Victory of Adwa (1896), and the sustained struggle against Italian occupation between 1936 and 1941.

These experiences forged enduring symbols of sovereignty, dignity, and collective resilience. Adwa, in particular, holds global significance as a symbol of African resistance to colonialism and continues to resonate as a shared national and continental reference point. When framed inclusively, these memories offer powerful narrative resources for unity, confidence, and legitimacy.

5.4.3 Plural Civilizational Centers

Ethiopia's historical development was not shaped by a single political or cultural center, but by multiple interconnected civilizations. Centers such as Aksum, Roha (Lalibela), Gibe, Ifat, Hadiya, Gofa, Kafa, Dawro, Harar contributed distinct political traditions, economic networks, religious institutions, and cultural expressions.

Together, these civilizations illustrate that Ethiopian history is both shared and plural. They demonstrate long-standing interaction through trade, religion, migration, and governance, rather than isolated or competing trajectories. Recognizing this plural civilizational foundation challenges narrow or exclusionary narratives and provides empirical grounding for a Shared Narrative that acknowledges diversity while affirming a common historical trajectory.

5.5 Political Tradition, Diversity, and National Potential

Ethiopia's capacity to construct a Shared Grand Narrative is closely linked to its political traditions, cultural diversity, and development potential. These elements constitute both the foundation of the Ethiopian state and the context within which legitimacy has been contested. When aligned through inclusive governance and shared meaning, they represent powerful national assets. When mismanaged or fragmented, they become sources of instability and mistrust.

5.5.1 Continuity of Statehood and Governance Traditions

Ethiopia's political tradition is distinguished by its remarkable continuity across historical eras—from the Aksumite state to the modern federal system. This continuity has fostered a deep-rooted sense of political identity and statehood that few countries possess. While forms of governance have changed, the idea of an Ethiopian polity has endured, shaping collective expectations about authority, order, and legitimacy.

Alongside centralized state traditions, Ethiopia has also developed rich indigenous governance systems. The Gadaa system, in particular, reflects sophisticated traditions of collective decision-making, leadership

rotation, accountability, and social contract. Similar customary institutions across the country have historically regulated conflict, managed resources, and sustained social cohesion at the community level.

5.5.2 Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Ethiopia is among the most culturally and linguistically diverse countries in the world, comprising more than 76 nations and nationalities and languages belonging to four major families: Semitic, Cushitic, Omotic, and Nilo-Saharan. This diversity is not merely demographic; it is deeply embedded in social organization, religious traditions, artistic expression, cuisine, and systems of knowledge.

Historically, this diversity coexisted through interaction, exchange, and interdependence. Trade routes, religious institutions, migration, and intermarriage connected communities across regions, creating layered identities that were both local and national. However, in the absence of a shared interpretive framework, diversity has increasingly been politicized, turning difference into division.

A Shared Narrative does not seek to homogenize this diversity. Rather, it provides a civic framework within which cultural plurality is recognized, respected, and integrated into a common national purpose. When diversity is framed as a shared national resource rather than a zero-sum political claim, it strengthens social trust and democratic legitimacy.

5.5.3 Natural Endowments and Demographic Promise

Ethiopia's national potential extends beyond history and culture to its significant natural and human resources. As the Water Tower of East Africa, Ethiopia plays a critical ecological and strategic role in the region. Its fertile highlands, varied climates, and rich biodiversity offer strong foundations for agriculture, renewable energy, tourism, and sustainable development.

Equally important is Ethiopia's demographic profile. A large and youthful population presents both opportunity and risk. With appropriate education, employment, and civic inclusion, this demographic dividend can drive innovation, productivity, and national renewal. Without legitimacy, opportunity, and shared purpose, however, it risks fueling frustration, migration, and instability.

Realizing Ethiopia's national potential therefore depends not only on economic policy, but on governance legitimacy and shared meaning. Development outcomes are shaped by trust, cohesion, and collective confidence. A Shared Narrative can align Ethiopia's political traditions, diversity, and demographic promise around a common vision of progress, transforming structural assets into sustainable national strength.

5.6 Structural Contradictions and Enduring Challenges

Despite Ethiopia's deep historical roots, cultural richness, and development potential, its national trajectory has been shaped by persistent structural contradictions. These contradictions—manifesting in cycles of conflict, institutional weakness, and contested legitimacy—have repeatedly disrupted efforts to build stable governance and shared national meaning. Understanding these enduring challenges is essential for appreciating why a Shared Grand Narrative is not merely desirable, but necessary.

5.6.1 Conflict and Political Discontinuity

Ethiopian history is marked by recurrent conflict and abrupt political transitions. From the Era of the Princes (Zemene Mesafint) to revolutionary upheavals and contemporary conflicts, power has frequently changed through force rather than negotiated transition. Each major political rupture—imperial collapse, socialist revolution, regime change in 1991, and subsequent conflicts—has been accompanied by a tendency toward political "reset," in which previous institutions, symbols, and narratives are rejected rather than reformed.

This pattern has weakened institutional memory and continuity. Instead of building incrementally on past governance arrangements, successive regimes have often sought legitimacy through rupture and replacement. As a result, institutions remain fragile, norms of compromise are underdeveloped, and political competition tends toward zero-sum outcomes.

External invasions and regional conflicts have further compounded these dynamics. While resistance to external threats has at times strengthened national solidarity, prolonged insecurity has also diverted attention from institutional development and reinforced militarized approaches to governance. Over time, conflict has become both a cause and a consequence of weak legitimacy and fragmented narratives.

5.6.2 Poverty and Institutional Weakness

Despite abundant natural resources and a large population, Ethiopia has experienced persistent poverty and uneven development. Structural factors—including limited industrialization, dependence on rain-fed agriculture, inadequate infrastructure, and vulnerability to climate shocks—have constrained economic transformation. These challenges have been exacerbated by rapid population growth and recurrent conflict.

Institutional weakness lies at the heart of this problem. Weak administrative capacity, inconsistent policy implementation, limited accountability, and politicized institutions have reduced the state's ability to deliver services equitably and predictably. In turn, poor service delivery has undermined public trust and reinforced perceptions of exclusion and marginalization.

Poverty and institutional weakness also interact with narrative fragmentation. When development gains are unevenly distributed or poorly communicated, communities interpret economic hardship through competing historical and identity-based lenses. In such contexts, grievances are easily mobilized, and economic challenges become politicized, further weakening cohesion.

5.6.3 Crisis of State Legitimacy

At the core of Ethiopia's enduring challenges lies a fragile and contested legitimacy consensus. Fundamental elements of national life, including the constitution, national symbols, historical narratives, and collective heroes—are subject to competing interpretations and political contestation. These disputes are not symbolic alone; they directly affect how citizens relate to the state and to one another.

For many communities, the state is perceived as distant, exclusionary, or partisan. For others, reforms aimed at recognizing diversity are viewed as threats to national unity. The absence of a shared interpretive framework has allowed legitimacy debates to harden into identity-based confrontation, eroding trust between state and society.

This legitimacy crisis complicates sovereignty and unity. Without broadly shared meaning, legal authority alone is insufficient to secure loyalty or compliance. Governance becomes reactive rather than consensual, and stability depends increasingly on coercion rather than consent.

A Shared Grand Narrative offers a pathway to address this legitimacy deficit. By integrating diverse experiences into a common civic framework, it can help re-anchor authority in mutual recognition, shared responsibility, and collective purpose—conditions essential for durable peace and effective governance.

5.7 National Identity and Shared Memory

National identity and shared memory are central to the question of state legitimacy and social cohesion in Ethiopia. They shape how citizens understand who they are, how they relate to one another, and how they perceive the state. In contexts of diversity and historical contestation, identity and memory can either serve as foundations for unity or become sources of division, depending on how they are framed, transmitted, and institutionalized.

5.7.1 Conceptualizing National Identity

National identity refers to a shared sense of belonging to a political community. It is rooted in common history, shared values, collective experiences, and agreed aspirations for the future. At its core, national identity reflects the belief that "we are one," not because we are identical, but because we recognize ourselves as members of a shared civic project.

In Ethiopia, national identity has never been singular or static. It has evolved through interaction among diverse communities, cultures, and political traditions. However, when identity is defined narrowly—whether through ethnicity, religion, or ideology, it risks excluding others and weakening collective belonging. A viable national identity must therefore be inclusive, civic, and flexible, allowing multiple cultural identities to coexist within a shared political framework.

5.7.2 Theoretical Perspectives

Two main theoretical perspectives help to explain how national identity forms and changes over time.

Primordialism views identity as deeply rooted and inherited anchored in language, culture, ancestry, and shared origin myths. This perspective helps explain the emotional power of identity and its persistence across generations. In Ethiopia, primordial attachments have sustained community cohesion but have also been mobilized politically in ways that intensify division.

Constructivism, by contrast, understands identity as historically shaped and socially constructed. From this perspective, identities are not fixed; they are formed through institutions, policies, education systems, and political narratives. This approach highlights the role of leadership, governance choices, and communication in shaping how people understand belonging.

The Ethiopian experience demonstrates the relevance of both perspectives. While identities draw strength from deep cultural roots, they are also reshaped by state policies, historical interpretation, and political mobilization. A Shared Narrative must therefore engage inherited identities while consciously constructing a civic framework that encourages coexistence and mutual recognition.

5.7.3 Mechanisms of Identity Construction

National identity does not emerge spontaneously. It is produced and reproduced through specific social and institutional mechanisms.

Education plays a foundational role by transmitting history, values, and civic norms to younger generations. Curriculum content, language of instruction, and pedagogical approaches significantly influence how citizens understand the nation and their place within it.

Media and public communication shape everyday narratives about belonging, difference, and legitimacy. Through framing, repetition, and symbolism, media influences which histories are emphasized, and which voices are amplified or marginalized.

Shared symbols and rituals—such as flags, commemorations, national holidays, and public ceremonies—create emotional bonds and shared reference points. When inclusive, these symbols foster unity; when contested, they can deepen division.

Collective responses to common threats, including war, famine, or external pressure, have historically strengthened Ethiopian common identity. Moments of shared struggle often generate solidarity that transcends internal differences, revealing the latent capacity for national cohesion.

These mechanisms have shaped Ethiopian identity unevenly, at times reinforcing unity and at other times entrenching fragmentation, depending on how inclusively they have been managed.

5.7.4 Historical Drivers of Shared Memory

Shared memory in Ethiopia has been forged through long processes of interaction rather than uniform experience. Trade networks connected regions and communities, fostering economic interdependence and cultural exchange. Religious traditions, particularly Christianity and Islam, created overlapping moral frameworks and transregional identities.

Wars and victories, most notably the Victory of Adwa, became powerful symbols of collective resistance and sovereignty, embedding pride and resilience in national memory. Migration and settlement patterns produced intermarriage, linguistic exchange, and hybrid identities, challenging rigid boundaries between communities.

State formation and administration, despite their contested nature, generated shared experiences of governance, taxation, military service, and law. Finally, shared hardship—including famine, conflict, and displacement—has produced collective trauma, but also mutual awareness of vulnerability and interdependence.

Together, these drivers demonstrate that shared memory in Ethiopia is not the product of homogeneity, but of long-standing interaction. Recognizing and integrating these interconnected histories is essential for building a Shared Narrative that reflects lived reality rather than imposed abstraction.

5.8 State Formation and State-Building in Ethiopia

Understanding Ethiopia's current governance and legitimacy challenges requires a clear distinction between state formation and state-building. While Ethiopia has achieved early and enduring state formation, the task of building an inclusive, legitimate, and trusted state remains incomplete. This gap lies at the heart of the contemporary narrative crisis.

5.8.1 Theoretical Approaches

Scholarly approaches to state formation generally fall into several broad categories. Coercive theories argue that states are formed through war, conquest, and the concentration of power—summarized by the principle that "war makes the state."

Voluntaristic theories emphasize consent, negotiated authority, and social contracts as the basis of state formation.
Other perspectives invoke divine legitimacy, tradition, or evolutionary processes, where states gradually emerge through administrative and economic integration.

In practice, most states combine elements of these models. However, the dominant pathway of state formation shapes long-term legitimacy, institutional trust, and the narratives through which citizens interpret state authority.

5.8.2 The Ethiopian Trajectory

Ethiopia's historical experience aligns most closely with the coercive model of state formation. The consolidation of the modern Ethiopian state in the late nineteenth century—particularly under Emperor Menelik II—was achieved through military expansion, territorial incorporation, and administrative centralization.

This process successfully secured Ethiopia's sovereignty, resisted colonial domination, and laid the foundations of a territorially unified state. From the perspective of state survival, it was historically effective and internationally significant.

However, this mode of state formation also generated enduring challenges. Integration into the expanding state was uneven and, in many cases, coercive. While political authority was consolidated, social and cultural integration lagged behind. Many communities experienced state expansion as domination rather than negotiated inclusion, leaving unresolved questions of belonging, recognition, and equity.

As a result, Ethiopia achieved state formation without full nation-building—a condition that continues to shape political debate and narrative contestation today.

5.8.3 Persistent State-Building Deficits

The central weakness of Ethiopia's political development lies not in the absence of statehood, but in the incompleteness of state-building. Several interrelated deficits persist.

First, nation-building has remained fragmented. There has been limited agreement on a shared national identity that integrates diversity within a common civic framework. Competing narratives—unitary, ethnic, and grievance-based—have filled this vacuum.

Second, institutionalization has been uneven. While state structures exist, their legitimacy, consistency, and reach vary across regions and social groups. Weak trust in institutions undermines governance effectiveness and compliance.

Third, identity consensus remains fragile. Core national symbols, historical interpretations, and constitutional arrangements continue to be contested, preventing the emergence of stable legitimacy.

Finally, state–society relations remain strained. The state is often perceived as distant, partisan, or exclusionary, rather than as a shared public authority serving all citizens equally.

These deficits explain why governance reforms alone have not resolved Ethiopia's challenges. Without a Shared National Narrative that reframes statehood as a collective civic project—rather than a legacy of domination or a zero-sum identity contest—state-building efforts will remain vulnerable.

In this sense, narrative-building is not secondary to state-building; it is central to it. A shared narrative can provide the moral and symbolic foundation necessary to complete Ethiopia's unfinished state-building project.

5.9 Fundamental Questions and Root Causes

This paper raises a set of closely connected and fundamental questions that lie at the heart of Ethiopia's recurring governance and legitimacy challenges.

First, how have Ethiopian identity and collective memory historically been formed? The paper emphasizes that identity did not emerge in isolation, but through long processes of interaction, conflict, cooperation, trade, migration, religious exchange, and shared hardship. These experiences produced overlapping identities and interdependence, yet they have often been selectively remembered or politically reframed.

Second, how has the Ethiopian state emerged and evolved over time, and how have different models of state formation shaped perceptions of belonging and authority? Ethiopia's state was consolidated primarily through coercive expansion and centralization. While this secured sovereignty and continuity, it also generated uneven integration and unresolved grievances, shaping competing understandings of citizenship, inclusion, and legitimacy.

Third, why do legitimacy challenges persist despite Ethiopia's deep civilizational roots and long history of statehood? The paper argues that historical depth alone does not guarantee legitimacy. Legitimacy weakens when state authority is not accompanied by inclusive narratives, trusted institutions, and a shared sense of ownership over the national project. Repeated political ruptures and unresolved identity debates have prevented the consolidation of a stable legitimacy consensus.

Fourth, what strategic directions are being advanced to address these challenges and rebuild national cohesion? The paper situates current reform efforts—particularly dialogue-based and consensus-oriented

approaches—as attempts to realign identity, governance, and development within a shared civic framework. However, these efforts remain fragile without sustained institutional and narrative support.

The paper identifies several root causes underlying Ethiopia's difficulty in sustaining civilizations, preventing conflict, and translating cohesion into modern governance and development. These include:

- A political culture that has often prioritized power struggles over consensus and long-term institution-building.
- Distorted and selective historical narratives that reinforce grievance, exclusion, or nostalgia rather than shared understanding.
- Weak management of diversity, where difference is politicized rather than integrated into a civic national framework.
- Underutilization of national resources, both human and material, due to fragmented governance and low trust.
- Limited technological adaptation, which constrains state capacity, service delivery, and inclusive participation in a rapidly changing global environment.

Together, these factors explain why Ethiopia's challenges are not rooted in the absence of history or identity, but in the failure to align memory, legitimacy, institutions, and development within a shared national vision. Addressing them requires not only reform of structures, but also deliberate reconstruction of the narratives that give those structures meaning and public acceptance.

5.10 Strategic Directions of the Medemer (Synergy) Government

The Medemer (Synergy) approach is presented in this paper as a strategic response to Ethiopia's long-standing challenges of identity fragmentation, legitimacy deficits, and uneven development. Rather than treating peace, identity, and development as separate policy domains, Medemer seeks to integrate them within a single, cohesive national framework.

First, peace-building and national reconciliation are positioned as foundational conditions for legitimacy. The Medemer approach recognizes that unresolved grievances, conflict-related trauma, and displacement undermine trust in institutions and weaken national cohesion. Peace is therefore treated not merely as the absence of violence, but as an active process of healing, dialogue, and reintegration.

Second, unity in diversity is advanced as both a principle and a practical governance approach. Medemer rejects forced uniformity as well as unchecked fragmentation. Instead, it promotes mutual recognition, respect for difference, and institutional arrangements that allow diversity to flourish within a shared national purpose.

Third, ideas-based political competition is emphasized as a corrective to identity-driven politics. The approach calls for political contestation grounded in policy alternatives, development strategies, and governance performance, rather than mobilization based on ethnicity, grievance, or historical resentment. This shift is essential for democratic maturity and institutional stability.

Fourth, Ethiopian-style consensus democracy draws on indigenous traditions of dialogue, deliberation, and accommodation. Rather than relying solely on majoritarian rule, this model values compromise, negotiation, and broad-based agreement on core national issues—particularly those related to identity, federalism, and national unity.

Finally, economic sovereignty is identified as a critical foundation for legitimacy. The paper argues that citizens are more likely to identify with and trust the state when governance delivers tangible improvements in livelihoods, employment, and opportunity. Economic inclusion, productivity, and shared growth therefore function not only as development goals, but as unifying national narratives in their own right.

Taken together, these strategic directions aim to realign identity, governance, and development within a shared national framework, where legitimacy is earned through inclusion, performance, and shared meaning.

5.11 Conclusion

Aligned with Prof. Bahru Zewde's historiographical analysis, this paper reinforces a central conclusion of the Conference: Ethiopia's legitimacy crisis is not the result of a lack of history, identity, or civilizational depth. Rather, it stems from unresolved integration challenges, fragmented narratives, and weak alignment between memory, institutions, and governance practice**.**

Ethiopia's diversity, long state tradition, and shared historical experiences provide a strong foundation for national cohesion. However, without a shared civic narrative that integrates these elements, diversity risks becoming politicized and legitimacy remains fragile. Sustainable legitimacy therefore requires deliberate reconciliation between diversity and unity, between historical truth and forward-looking governance, and between institutional reform and shared national meaning.

The paper underscores that identity, memory, and legitimacy are not abstract concepts. They are continuously shaped by political choices, educational systems, public communication, and development outcomes. Addressing Ethiopia's challenges thus requires not only structural reforms, but also narrative transformation grounded in historical understanding and inclusive dialogue.

5.12 Next Steps and Policy Implications

Building on the analysis, the paper proposes the following priority actions:

1. **Narrative Reform -** Promote objective, inclusive, and evidence-based national history across state institutions, education systems, and public communication platforms. Historical narratives should emphasize interaction, coexistence, and shared experience rather than exclusion or grievance.

2. **Governance Reform -** Strengthen a consensus-oriented political culture that values dialogue, compromise, and institutional continuity. Political competition should be anchored in ideas and policy performance rather than identity-based mobilization.

3. **Education Policy Reform -** Embed shared memory, civic identity, and peace education within national curricula at all levels. Education should equip future generations with the capacity to engage diversity constructively and responsibly.

4. **National Dialogue Integration -** Ensure that debates on identity, legitimacy, and historical memory are fully integrated into the formal National Dialogue process. Scholarly insights and historical evidence should inform dialogue outcomes and recommendations.

5. **Development Strategy Alignment -** Link economic sovereignty, inclusive growth, and development planning to national cohesion. Economic narratives that emphasize shared progress and opportunity can serve as powerful anchors for a Shared National Narrative.

Together, these steps offer a practical pathway for translating Ethiopia's rich history and diversity into a durable foundation for legitimacy, unity, and sustainable development.

6 Media, Memory, and the Construction of a Shared National Narrative in Ethiopia: Exploring Media's Role in Shaping Collective Identity and National Legitimacy in Contemporary Ethiopia

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6.1 Executive Summary

This paper examines the decisive role of media in shaping collective memory, national identity, and state legitimacy in Ethiopia. It advances the central argument that political stability and social cohesion are not sustained by institutions, laws, or policies alone, but by the narratives through which societies interpret their past, make sense of their present, and imagine a shared future. In this sense, media is not a peripheral actor in nation-building; it is a core arena where legitimacy is constructed, contested, or undermined.

In Ethiopia's context of deep cultural diversity, contested historical interpretations, and rapid political change, fragmented and polarized narratives have significantly weakened public trust. Competing media framings, often driven by political alignment, grievance-based storytelling, or sensationalism, have contributed to identity polarization, mutual suspicion, and a fragile relationship between citizens and the state. The paper argues that without responsible media mediation, even well-designed institutional reforms and dialogue processes risk losing credibility and public ownership.

The paper situates the ongoing National Dialogue process as a rare and important opportunity to reconcile divergent memories and perspectives. However, it cautions that the success of dialogue depends not only on what is agreed at the negotiation table, but on how those agreements are communicated, interpreted, and internalized by the public. Media plays a critical gatekeeping and framing role in this process. It determines whether dialogue outcomes are perceived as inclusive and legitimate, or as elite-driven, distorted, and contested.

A key contribution of the paper is its emphasis on media as an interpreter of meaning, rather than a neutral conveyor of information. Through editorial choices, framing, language, imagery, and repetition, media actively shapes collective memory and national identity. In divided societies, this power can either connect fragmented memories into a shared civic understanding, or deepen polarization by reinforcing mutually exclusive narratives.

By tracing the evolution of communication from oral traditions, to print and broadcast media, and now to the digital and social media era, the paper highlights how each phase has reshaped memory, authority, and identity construction. While digital platforms have democratized voice and expanded participation, they have also weakened editorial gatekeeping, accelerated misinformation, and amplified emotionally charged narratives. These dynamics pose serious risks to social cohesion if left unaddressed.

The paper concludes that a viable Shared National Narrative for Ethiopia cannot be imposed, manufactured, or reduced to slogans. Instead, it must be carefully mediated through ethical, fact-based, and inclusive media practices that connect multiple memories into a mutually intelligible civic framework. Responsible media engagement is therefore not optional, but essential to reconciliation, legitimacy, and sustainable peace.

6.2 Key Messages

1. National identity and state legitimacy are narrative-based, not institutional alone.
2. Ethiopia's fragmented narrative landscape undermines cohesion and public trust.
3. Media plays a decisive role in shaping collective memory and political meaning.
4. The National Dialogue process depends on ethical and contextual media mediation.
5. Shared memory is built by connecting diverse experiences, not erasing them.
6. Responsible media practice is essential for reconciliation, legitimacy, and unity.

6.3 Introduction and Rationale

In Ethiopia, national identity and state legitimacy are shaped not only by formal institutions such as constitutions, laws, and policies, but equally often more powerfully by narratives. These narratives frame how citizens understand their history, interpret state actions, assess fairness and inclusion, and locate themselves within the national community. Institutions may define authority on paper, but narratives determine whether that authority is accepted, trusted, or contested in practice.

Ethiopia's current political and social challenges are closely linked to a fragmented narrative environment. Competing historical accounts, polarized memories of state formation, and mutually exclusive interpretations of identity have become embedded in public discourse. These narratives are frequently mobilized in zero-sum ways, reinforcing grievance, fear, and mistrust across communities. In the absence of a shared interpretive framework, diversity rather than serving as a source of strength has increasingly been experienced as a source of division and instability.

This narrative fragmentation poses a direct risk to state legitimacy. When citizens encounter fundamentally different stories about who belongs, who has suffered, and who bears responsibility for the past, it becomes difficult to sustain a common sense of purpose or collective responsibility. As a result, even legitimate reforms, peace initiatives, or development programs may be rejected or misinterpreted through polarized lenses.

The National Dialogue process emerges in this context as a rare and consequential opportunity. It provides an institutional platform for acknowledging grievances, recognizing multiple experiences, and negotiating shared understandings about Ethiopia's past and future. However, dialogue outcomes do not speak for themselves. Their meaning, credibility, and durability depend heavily on how they are communicated to the wider public.

This is where media becomes decisive. Media does not simply report dialogue outcomes; it interprets them. Through framing, emphasis, language choice, and repetition, media shapes how citizens perceive the intentions, fairness, and implications of the dialogue. Responsible, contextualized reporting can help translate complex negotiations into accessible public understanding, build trust, and encourage national ownership. Conversely, selective, sensationalized, or politicized coverage can distort dialogue outcomes, deepen suspicion, and undermine legitimacy.

Therefore, the rationale of this paper is clear: any effort to build a Shared National Narrative in Ethiopia must place media at the center of analysis and reform. Without ethical, fact-based, and inclusive media engagement, narrative fragmentation will persist, and the transformative potential of the National Dialogue process will remain fragile. Media is not merely a messenger in this process it is a co-architect of national meaning, cohesion, and legitimacy.

6.4 National Identity, Collective Memory, and State Legitimacy

6.4.1 National Identity Shaped by Collective Memory

National identity is not a fixed or natural condition; it is socially constructed over time through shared memories, symbols, and narratives. Collective memory determines how societies remember their past, interpret key historical moments, and assign meaning to both achievement and suffering. Through this process, collective memory shapes fundamental questions of belonging, who is considered part of the national "we," whose experiences are recognized, and whose stories are marginalized.

In the Ethiopian context, collective memory has been formed and transmitted through multiple channels. Oral traditions, religious institutions, cultural rituals, and community storytelling have long preserved historical experience across generations. Formal education systems have also played a role in shaping historical understanding, though often unevenly and inconsistently. In recent decades, media, particularly broadcast, print, and digital platforms—has become one of the most powerful forces in shaping and reshaping collective memory.

Media influences national identity by deciding which historical events receive attention, how they are framed, and which voices are amplified or silenced. Editorial choices, language use, imagery, and repetition all contribute to establishing certain memories as central while pushing others to the margins. In doing so, media does not merely reflect identity; it actively constructs it.

When media practices are responsible and inclusive, they can help connect diverse memories into a shared civic framework, fostering mutual recognition and a sense of common belonging. However, when media selectively emphasizes grievance, victimhood, or exclusivity, it can entrench division and reinforce fragmented identities. In Ethiopia's polarized narrative environment, this dynamic has had a direct impact on how national identity is understood and contested.

As a result, the construction of a Shared National Narrative depends heavily on how collective memory is mediated. National identity will remain fragile if memories are treated as competing claims rather than interconnected experiences. Responsible media engagement is therefore essential not only for accurate representation of the past, but for shaping an inclusive sense of belonging that underpins state legitimacy and social cohesion.

6.4.2 State Legitimacy and Public Trust

State legitimacy is grounded not only in constitutional authority or legal mandates, but fundamentally in public trust. Citizens judge the legitimacy of the state through everyday perceptions of fairness, inclusion, responsiveness, and credibility. When people believe that state institutions act impartially, respect diversity, and reflect shared national values, legitimacy is reinforced. Conversely, when governance is perceived as exclusionary, coercive, or disconnected from lived realities, legitimacy erodes regardless of the technical quality of policies or laws.

In Ethiopia, legitimacy has often been contested because political authority has been interpreted through competing historical narratives and identity-based lenses. Policies and reforms, even when well-intentioned, may be rejected if they are seen as serving particular groups or narratives rather than the collective interest. This highlights the fact that legitimacy is as much a narrative and communicative construct as it is an institutional one.

Media plays a decisive role in shaping these perceptions. The way state actions are reported, framed, and debated frequently influences public trust more strongly than the substance of the actions themselves. Media narratives determine whether policies are understood as inclusive national efforts or as partisan or exclusionary projects. Selective reporting, lack of context, or sensational framing can amplify suspicion and mistrust, while balanced, contextualized, and fact-based reporting can strengthen confidence in public institutions.

As a result, sustaining state legitimacy requires more than effective governance; it requires responsible communication. Media must act as a bridge between the state and society, helping citizens understand not only what the state is doing, but why it is doing it and how it connects to shared national goals. Without this mediating role, mistrust fills the gap, and legitimacy becomes increasingly fragile.

6.4.3 Fragmentation and Political Instability

When collective memory becomes fragmented, national narratives lose their integrative function and instead become sources of division. Competing interpretations of history, often rooted in selective remembrance, unresolved grievances, or politicized identities, create parallel narrative worlds that rarely engage with one another. In such environments, history is not a shared reference point, but a contested battlefield, where different groups advance mutually exclusive claims about victimhood, legitimacy, and entitlement.

This fragmentation fuels political polarization. Narratives framed around grievance and exclusion tend to harden group identities, reduce empathy across communities, and normalize zero-sum thinking. Political actors may exploit these divisions by mobilizing support through emotionally charged historical claims, reinforcing cycles of resentment and mistrust. Over time, this dynamic weakens the capacity of institutions to mediate conflict and undermines efforts at consensus-building and reform.

Fragmented memory landscapes also weaken national unity by eroding shared symbols, reference points, and aspirations. When citizens no longer recognize themselves in a common story, loyalty shifts from the national project to narrower identity groups. This diminishes social cohesion and increases the likelihood of recurring instability, as political competition becomes centered on identity defense rather than policy choices or collective problem-solving.

In such contexts, legitimacy becomes contested not only in political terms, but narratively. The authority of the state is questioned because different groups interpret its actions through incompatible historical lenses. Even neutral or reform-oriented policies may be rejected if they are perceived as reinforcing one narrative over another. As a result, governance becomes fragile, trust declines, and the foundations of peaceful coexistence are weakened.

Addressing political instability in Ethiopia therefore requires confronting narrative fragmentation directly. Building a Shared National Narrative is not an abstract cultural exercise; it is a practical necessity for restoring legitimacy, reducing polarization, and creating the conditions for sustainable peace and inclusive governance.

6.5 The National Dialogue Process: Opportunities and Challenges

The National Dialogue process represents one of the most consequential institutional initiatives in Ethiopia's recent political history. It offers a structured space to confront long-standing grievances, reconcile competing narratives, and renegotiate the relationship between the state and society. At the same time, the process faces significant challenges arising from deep historical wounds, polarized identities, and the fragile narrative environment within which dialogue takes place.

6.5.1 Opportunities for Inclusion

The National Dialogue provides an unprecedented platform for broad-based inclusion. It enables diverse social groups, across regions, generations, identities, and political orientations, to articulate their perspectives, grievances, and aspirations within a recognized national framework. For many communities and individuals who have historically felt excluded from decision-making, the dialogue offers formal recognition and visibility.

By bringing together voices that rarely engage one another, the process creates opportunities for mutual listening and learning. It allows different historical experiences to be expressed side by side, helping participants understand the complexity of Ethiopia's past and the multiplicity of lived realities that shape contemporary political claims. This inclusive engagement is essential for restoring dignity, rebuilding trust, and laying the groundwork for shared understanding.

Importantly, the dialogue also opens space to move beyond elite-driven narratives. When effectively designed and communicated, it can shift national discourse from polarized slogans toward substantive discussion of common challenges, shared responsibilities, and collective futures.

6.5.2 Challenges of Reconciliation

Despite its inclusive intent, reconciliation through dialogue is inherently difficult. Ethiopia's historical grievances are deep, emotionally charged, and often transmitted across generations. Many narratives are

rooted in experiences of violence, marginalization, or perceived injustice, making them resistant to compromise or reinterpretation.

In this context, some narratives are viewed not merely as alternative perspectives, but as existential threats to identity, autonomy, or survival. This perception heightens defensiveness and suspicion, limiting openness to mutual recognition. As a result, dialogue risks becoming a space for restating entrenched positions rather than transforming them.

Another challenge lies in managing expectations. Dialogue alone cannot resolve all historical injustices or political disagreements. When participants expect immediate redress or definitive closure, disappointment can undermine confidence in the process. Reconciliation requires time, patience, and complementary institutional measures, including justice, reform, and symbolic recognition.

6.5.3 Risk of Misinterpretation

The outcomes of the National Dialogue are highly vulnerable to misinterpretation and politicization. Partial reporting, selective emphasis, or deliberate distortion can undermine public confidence and fuel suspicion about the process's intentions and credibility. In a fragmented media environment, dialogue messages can easily be reframed to reinforce existing biases or mobilize opposition.

Media framing therefore plays a decisive role in shaping public perception of the dialogue. Responsible, contextualized reporting can help translate complex deliberations into accessible narratives that emphasize inclusion, compromise, and shared purpose. Conversely, sensationalized or partisan framing can deepen mistrust and amplify polarization.

If dialogue outcomes are perceived as opaque, imposed, or captured by specific interests, their legitimacy will be weakened regardless of their substantive value. Safeguarding the integrity of the dialogue thus requires not only inclusive participation, but also clear communication strategies, transparency, and ethical media engagement to ensure that the process contributes to unity rather than further fragmentation.

6.6 Media's Role in Shaping Shared Narratives

Media occupies a central position in the construction, circulation, and contestation of national narratives. In Ethiopia's polarized and rapidly evolving communication environment, media institutions influence not only what citizens know, but how they interpret events, assign meaning to history, and relate to one another as members of a shared political community. The role of media therefore extends well beyond information delivery; it is a core actor in shaping identity, trust, and legitimacy.

6.6.1 Media as Transmitter of Information

At its most basic level, media functions as a channel for transmitting information, reporting events, conveying official decisions, and providing platforms for public voices. In the context of national dialogue and narrative-building, this role is essential. Citizens cannot engage meaningfully with collective processes if they lack access to accurate and timely information.

However, in fragile political environments such as Ethiopia's, this function is often distorted by structural and commercial pressures. The prioritization of speed over verification, and of sensational headlines over

contextual explanation, increases the risk of misinformation and partial understanding. Complex historical or political issues are reduced to simplified soundbites, while emotionally charged content spreads more rapidly than careful analysis.

When media transmission lacks depth and balance, it can unintentionally amplify rumors, reinforce stereotypes, and escalate tensions. Effective transmission therefore requires adherence to professional standards of accuracy, verification, and proportionality, especially when reporting on sensitive identity- and history-related issues.

6.6.2 Media as Interpreter and Framer

Beyond transmitting facts, media plays a powerful interpretive role. Through framing, language choice, selection of sources, and narrative emphasis, media actively shapes how audiences understand reality. It influences which issues are seen as urgent, which actors are portrayed as legitimate or threatening, and which histories are remembered or forgotten.

In the Ethiopian context, where multiple and often competing narratives coexist, media framing becomes decisive. Ethical and analytical reporting can help connect fragmented stories, place grievances within broader historical and social contexts, and highlight shared experiences alongside difference. Such framing supports dialogue by reducing fear, humanizing opposing perspectives, and encouraging reflection rather than reaction.

Conversely, irresponsible framing—characterized by inflammatory language, selective storytelling, or uncritical repetition of partisan narratives—can harden divisions and legitimize zero-sum thinking. When media outlets consistently frame political debates in terms of winners and losers, victims and perpetrators, they reinforce polarized identities and undermine the possibility of a shared civic narrative.

For Ethiopia to move toward a Shared Narrative, media must consciously adopt a responsibility-oriented approach to framing. This does not imply uniform messaging or suppression of dissent, but rather a commitment to context, balance, and ethical judgment. In doing so, media can serve as a bridge between diverse memories and perspectives, helping transform narrative competition into narrative coexistence within a shared national framework.

6.7 The Medium and the Nature of Memory

The way societies remember their past is closely shaped by the communication mediums through which memory is transmitted. Each historical communication era carries its own logic of storytelling, authority, and interpretation, influencing how collective memory is formed, preserved, and contested. Understanding these dynamics is essential for appreciating both the opportunities and risks facing Ethiopia's efforts to build a Shared National Narrative.

6.7.1 Oral Societies

In oral societies, collective memory is transmitted through storytelling, rituals, songs, proverbs, and the authority of elders. Memory in this context is deeply communal and relational. It is shaped by lived experience and shared social interaction rather than fixed texts.

Oral memory is flexible and adaptive. Stories are retold, reinterpreted, and adjusted to changing circumstances, allowing communities to negotiate meaning over time. This flexibility can foster inclusion and dialogue, but it can also allow selective remembrance or embellishment. In Ethiopia, oral traditions have preserved rich histories across diverse societies, especially where written records were limited. These traditions remain an essential source of historical knowledge and cultural continuity, and they provide valuable material for constructing inclusive narratives that reflect lived realities.

6.7.2 Print Era

The introduction of print fundamentally transformed collective memory. Written texts standardized historical accounts and fixed narratives in durable form, enabling wide dissemination across time and space. Print allowed the creation of national histories, textbooks, and official records that could be taught, archived, and referenced consistently.

However, this standardization also reduced interpretive flexibility. Once printed and institutionalized, particular versions of history gained authority, often marginalizing alternative perspectives. In many contexts, including Ethiopia, dominant political or cultural groups were better positioned to define these written narratives. While print helped consolidate national consciousness, it also contributed to exclusion by privileging certain voices and experiences over others.

6.7.3 Mass Communication Era

The rise of radio, television, and newspapers introduced mass communication and national audiences. These mediums created shared reference points, common news events, national ceremonies, and collective moments that strengthened a sense of belonging.

At the same time, mass media often reinforced centralized or official narratives. Editorial control and state influence limited pluralism in many periods, shaping memory from the top down. While this helped promote unity and coherence, it sometimes suppressed dissenting memories and unresolved grievances. In Ethiopia, mass media played a significant role in shaping national identity, but its centralized nature also constrained open debate about contested histories.

6.7.4 Digital Age

The digital era has radically altered the nature of collective memory. Social media, online platforms, and algorithm-driven content have decentralized narrative production. Memory is now fragmented, rapidly reproduced, and continuously contested. Multiple and often contradictory narratives coexist in real time, each finding its own audience.

Algorithms amplify emotionally charged content, often favoring grievance-based or polarizing narratives over nuanced analysis. As a result, historical memory becomes less mediated by professional standards and more vulnerable to distortion and manipulation. In Ethiopia, this has intensified polarization, accelerated the spread of misinformation, and complicated efforts to build shared understanding.

At the same time, digital platforms offer opportunities for inclusion by amplifying previously marginalized voices and democratizing storytelling. The challenge lies in managing this openness responsibly. Building a Shared National Narrative in the digital age requires media literacy, ethical

standards, and institutional frameworks that can navigate plurality without allowing fragmentation to harden into permanent division.

6.8 Media as the Carrier of National Meaning

Media functions as the primary channel through which societies interpret history, narrate identity, and construct national meaning. It is through media that abstract ideas about the nation are translated into stories, images, symbols, and everyday conversations. As a result, those who shape media narratives significantly influence how a nation understands itself, how citizens relate to the state, and how collective purpose is defined.

In Ethiopia, media plays a particularly decisive role because it mediates between state actions and public interpretation. Policies, reforms, and dialogue outcomes do not speak for themselves; they acquire meaning through how they are framed, explained, and debated in the public sphere. Responsible media can strengthen legitimacy by clarifying intent, acknowledging complexity, and fostering trust. Conversely, distorted or polarized media narratives can erode legitimacy by amplifying suspicion, grievance, and misinformation. Media is therefore not peripheral to nation-building; it is central to how legitimacy is formed or undermined.

6.8.1 Shared Memory: Connection Rather Than Creation

Shared memory is not about inventing a single, uniform story or forcing consensus on contested histories. Rather, it is about connecting diverse memories into a framework that allows mutual recognition and coexistence. Ethiopia's challenge is not the existence of multiple memories, but their isolation from one another.

Media has the capacity to act as a bridge between these memories. Through balanced storytelling, contextualization, and inclusive representation, media can show how different experiences intersect within a broader national story. When media instead treats memories as competing and incompatible, narratives harden into antagonistic identities, increasing the risk of conflict. A shared national narrative therefore depends on media practices that emphasize connection, dialogue, and relational understanding rather than rivalry and exclusion.

6.8.2 Layered, Shared, and Rebranded Identities

Identity is inherently layered. Individuals simultaneously belong to ethnic, religious, regional, linguistic, and civic communities. These identities are not mutually exclusive; they coexist and interact in daily life. However, political narratives often reduce this complexity, presenting identity as singular and oppositional.

A viable shared national identity must be civic in nature. It should provide a common political framework within which multiple cultural identities can thrive without fear of erasure. Media plays a critical role in shaping whether identities are framed as complementary or conflicting.

Reframing identity can be constructive when it promotes inclusion, healing, and shared responsibility. It becomes harmful when it denies lived experiences, suppresses memory, or imposes artificial uniformity. Media decisions, what stories are told, whose voices are amplified, and how differences are explained largely determine which outcome prevails. In Ethiopia's context, responsible media framing is essential

to ensure that identity rearticulation supports unity without sacrificing dignity, recognition, or historical honesty.

6.9 Historical Grievances and Political Mobilization

Historical experience plays a powerful role in how communities interpret present political, social, and economic challenges. Memories of injustice, exclusion, resistance, and sacrifice carry deep emotional weight and often become central reference points for political identity. As a result, historical grievances are frequently mobilized by political actors to build solidarity, legitimize claims, and rally support.

Acknowledging historical suffering is both necessary and ethical. Denial or erasure of past injustices undermines trust and deepens alienation. However, governance and political mobilization that rely exclusively on grievance narratives carry serious risks. When the past is continuously framed in terms of unresolved victimhood and blame, societies can become trapped in cycles of resentment, zero-sum politics, and moral absolutism. This weakens the ability to imagine shared futures, negotiate compromise, or build inclusive institutions.

Media plays a critical mediating role in this delicate balance. Responsible media practice requires recognizing historical pain while exercising restraint in how grievances are framed and amplified. Media should contextualize grievances within broader historical processes, highlight shared experiences alongside suffering, and avoid language that inflames fear or hostility. By doing so, media can help transform memory from a tool of mobilization for division into a resource for understanding, reconciliation, and forward-looking dialogue.

6.10 State Power, Media, and Memory Across Regimes

The relationship between state power, media, and collective memory in Ethiopia has evolved significantly across political regimes. Each period shaped how history was narrated, whose experiences were legitimized, and how national identity was constructed.

6.10.1 Imperial Era

During the imperial period, state power relied on centralized narratives that emphasized dynastic continuity, civilizational antiquity, and hierarchical order. Media and historical accounts largely reflected the perspectives of the ruling elite, privileging certain regions, cultures, and political traditions. Alternative histories and local experiences were often marginalized or excluded. While this narrative fostered a sense of continuity and sovereignty, it also laid the foundations for later contestation by failing to reflect the full diversity of Ethiopian society.

6.10.2 Derg Period

The Derg replaced imperial narratives with a revolutionary ideological framework rooted in Marxism-Leninism. Media became a tightly controlled instrument of state power, used to promote class struggle, revolutionary legitimacy, and centralized authority. Historical memory was reshaped to delegitimize the imperial past and suppress dissenting voices. This period intensified trauma and mistrust, as media functioned less as a space for public reflection and more as a tool of coercion and control.

6.10.3 EPRDF Era

The post-1991 period marked a major shift. Ethnic federalism formally acknowledged Ethiopia's diversity and legitimized previously marginalized histories. Media spaces expanded, and ethno-historical narratives flourished. While this corrected earlier exclusions, it also produced new challenges. Competing narrative frameworks often developed in parallel, with limited integration into a shared national story. In some cases, media and political discourse reinforced fragmentation by presenting histories as mutually exclusive rather than interconnected.

6.10.4 Digital Era

The digital era has fundamentally transformed the media–memory relationship. Highly decentralized media platforms have weakened traditional editorial gatekeeping and enabled rapid dissemination of diverse perspectives. While this has democratized voice and visibility, it has also intensified polarization. Algorithms reward emotionally charged content, often amplifying grievance-based narratives and simplifying complex histories. In this environment, memory becomes fragmented, accelerated, and contested in real time.

This context heightens the responsibility of media institutions, regulators, and communicators. Without deliberate efforts to promote ethical standards, media literacy, and inclusive framing, digital media risks deepening division rather than supporting shared understanding.

6.11 Conclusion

This paper reinforces a central insight shared across the Conference: media is not a peripheral actor in nation-building, but a core institution shaping identity, legitimacy, and social cohesion. In Ethiopia's current context, fragmented and polarized narratives—amplified by both traditional and digital media—pose serious risks to national unity, public trust, and political stability. When left unmanaged, these narratives deepen grievance, harden divisions, and undermine the credibility of state institutions and dialogue processes.

At the same time, the paper demonstrates that media holds transformative potential. When practiced responsibly, ethically, and with historical awareness, media can connect diverse memories, humanize difference, and support reconciliation. A Shared National Narrative for Ethiopia must therefore be inclusive, civic in orientation, historically honest, and clearly future-focused. Such a narrative cannot be imposed by the state or manufactured through propaganda. It must emerge gradually through inclusive dialogue and be sustained through credible, professional, and trust-based media practice.

Ultimately, the success of Ethiopia's National Dialogue and broader governance reform efforts will depend in significant part on how media interprets, frames, and communicates national conversations. Media responsibility is therefore not only a professional obligation, but a national governance imperative.

6.12 Next Steps and Policy Implications

1. **Media Policy Reform -** Review and strengthen media policies to promote ethical, conflict-sensitive, and dialogue-supportive reporting. Legal and regulatory frameworks should balance freedom of expression with clear standards for responsibility, accuracy, and public interest.

2. **Capacity Building for Journalists -** Invest in continuous professional development for journalists, with particular emphasis on historical contextualization, narrative integration, peace-sensitive reporting, and ethical storytelling. Strengthened capacity is essential for informed and balanced public discourse.

3. **Dialogue Communication Strategy -** Integrate media engagement into the design and implementation of the National Dialogue process. Clear communication strategies should be developed to explain objectives, manage expectations, and prevent misinterpretation or politicization of dialogue outcomes.

4. **Public Education and Media Literacy -** Promote media literacy programs through schools, civic education, and community platforms to help citizens critically assess information, recognize misinformation, and engage constructively with diverse perspectives.

5. **Institutional Coordination -** Strengthen coordination among media institutions, the education sector, peace and dialogue bodies, and government communication offices to ensure consistent, inclusive, and coherent narrative development across sectors.

Together, these measures can help reposition media as a pillar of trust, inclusion, and sustainability in the long-term construction of Ethiopia's Shared National Narrative.

7 Risks of Fragmented National Discourse Without a Unifying Narrative

Ambassador Lencho Bati
Paper presented at the National Conference on Framing the Shared Narrative
Jimma, January 2026

7.1 Executive Summary

This paper analyzes the strategic, political, and developmental risks that arise when a country lacks a coherent and shared national narrative. Drawing on diplomatic practice and governance experience, Ambassador Lencho Bati argues that fragmented national narratives produces a polarized social formation that obstructs and undermines elite and social cohesion leading to ineffective institutions and weak state.

In the Ethiopian context, competing and unmediated narratives weaken state legitimacy, undermine policy coherence, erode social trust, and diminish the country's credibility and influence in regional and international arenas.

The paper demonstrates that, in the absence of a unifying narrative framework, states struggle to articulate a clear national purpose. This lack of clarity affects domestic governance by producing inconsistent policy signals, weakening public confidence in state institutions, and intensifying political polarization. When different actors project conflicting interpretations of history, identity, and national direction, governance becomes reactive rather than strategic, and reform efforts lose coherence and public ownership.

At the international level, fragmented narratives complicate diplomatic engagement and strategic communication. They expose the country to misinterpretation, reduce predictability in foreign relations, and weaken the state's ability to project its interests, values, and priorities with confidence. For countries under heightened global attention, narrative incoherence can translate directly into reduced influence and diminished negotiating power.

Ambassador Lencho situates this analysis within Ethiopia's current context, marked by internal contestation over identity, history, and political direction, alongside growing regional and global scrutiny. He cautions that without a shared narrative anchor, even well-intentioned reforms and national dialogue initiatives risk being misunderstood, politicized, or undermined by competing interpretations. The paper concludes that constructing and institutionalizing a coherent national narrative is not optional, but a strategic necessity for effective governance, national unity, and sustained international standing.

7.2 Key Messages

- Fragmented national discourse is a strategic vulnerability, not a neutral condition.
- Competing narratives weaken state legitimacy and undermine public trust in governance.
- Policy coherence depends on a shared understanding of national purpose and direction.
- Diplomatic credibility requires clarity, consistency, and confidence in national messaging.
- A unifying narrative strengthens both domestic cohesion and external engagement.

7.3 Fragmented Narratives as a Governance Risk

Ambassador Lencho Bati underscored that narratives fundamentally shape how societies interpret authority, evaluate policy choices, and define national priorities. When multiple and uncoordinated narratives compete in the public sphere without a shared interpretive framework, governance loses strategic direction and becomes largely reactive. Institutions send mixed and often contradictory signals, citizens receive inconsistent messages, and political debate hardens into zero sum struggles over identity and legitimacy rather than constructive problem solving.

In such an environment, policy initiatives are easily politicized or misunderstood. Reforms tend to be assessed not on their substance or long term value, but on their perceived alignment with competing narratives. This dynamic weakens implementation capacity, undermines public confidence in state institutions, and erodes trust between the state and society. Over time, it fuels recurring cycles of contestation that consume political energy and divert attention from development priorities and institutional consolidation.

The Ambassador emphasized that Ethiopia's diversity is not the problem. On the contrary, it is a potential source of strength if managed through narrative coordination rather than narrative competition. Without deliberate efforts to connect diverse historical experiences and perspectives within a shared national story, differences risk becoming drivers of fragmentation instead of pluralism. A coherent and inclusive narrative framework is therefore essential to transform diversity into a foundation for unity, strategic governance, and sustainable development.

7.4 Implications for State Legitimacy and Social Trust

Ambassador Lencho Bati emphasized that state legitimacy is sustained not only by constitutional authority, legal mandates, or periodic elections, but by citizens' belief that the state embodies a shared collective project. Legitimacy is ultimately relational and interpretive: it rests on whether people recognize the state as representing their histories, aspirations, and sense of belonging. When this shared understanding is absent, formal authority loses its moral and social grounding.

Fragmented national narratives directly undermine this foundation. Competing and uncoordinated stories about identity, history, and national purpose create uncertainty about who the state serves, what it represents, and where it is heading. In such conditions, citizens struggle to locate themselves within the national project. The state is no longer perceived as a common home, but as an arena captured by rival groups advancing incompatible visions.

The Ambassador argued that when citizens repeatedly encounter contradictory narratives from political leaders, public institutions, and media outlets, trust erodes rapidly. Mixed messages weaken confidence in policy intentions and institutional integrity. As trust declines, citizens increasingly retreat into narrower ethnic, regional, or ideological identity frameworks, using them as sources of certainty and protection. National institutions are then viewed with suspicion rather than ownership, seen as instruments of others rather than shared civic platforms.

Over time, this dynamic weakens social cohesion and amplifies the appeal of exclusionary or grievance-based mobilization. Political actors find it easier to mobilize support by appealing to fear, historical injury, or identity threat than by offering inclusive policy solutions. This creates a vicious cycle in which fragmented narratives fuel polarization, and polarization further entrenches fragmented narratives.

Ambassador Lencho stressed that legitimacy cannot be rebuilt through coercion, administrative efficiency, or technical reform alone. While legal and institutional reforms are necessary, they are insufficient without a narrative foundation that reconnects citizens to the state. Restoring legitimacy requires a shared national story that allows diverse communities to see themselves reflected in the national narrative, while also accepting coexistence within a common civic framework. Only when citizens recognize the state as both inclusive and purposeful can social trust be rebuilt and sustained over time.

7.5 Effects on Foreign Policy and International Standing

From a diplomatic perspective, Ambassador Lencho Bati underscored that fragmented national discourse poses serious and often underestimated risks to a country's foreign policy effectiveness and international standing. Diplomacy depends heavily on clarity, consistency, and credibility. Ambassadors, diplomats, and international partners interpret a country's priorities, commitments, and red lines through official statements, policy documents, and public narratives. When these signals are contradictory or unstable, external actors struggle to understand the country's direction and reliability.

Ambassador Lencho noted that inconsistent domestic narratives weaken Ethiopia's ability to advocate for its national interests in international arenas. When different state institutions, political actors, or media platforms project competing stories about identity, governance, or strategic priorities, diplomatic messaging loses coherence. This undermines negotiation leverage, complicates alliance-building, and reduces confidence among partners who seek predictability and continuity in engagement.

He further emphasized that fragmented narratives expose the country to external misinterpretation and selective framing. International media, foreign governments, and multilateral institutions often fill narrative gaps with their own assumptions or agendas. In such contexts, Ethiopia risks being defined by external narratives rather than shaping its own image and strategic story. This increases reputational vulnerability and limits the country's capacity to counter misinformation or hostile portrayals effectively.

In an increasingly interconnected and competitive global environment, internal narrative coherence is inseparable from external influence. A state that lacks a clear and shared understanding of itself struggles to project a coherent national vision abroad. As Ambassador Lencho concluded, a country that cannot clearly explain its purpose and direction to its own citizens will find it even harder to explain itself to the world, defend its interests, and exercise meaningful influence on the international stage.

7.6 National Purpose and Strategic Communication

Ambassador Lencho Bati emphasized that a shared national narrative serves as a compass for governance. It provides orientation by clarifying national purpose, defining strategic priorities, and connecting short-term policies to long-term collective aspirations. In the absence of such orientation, governance becomes fragmented. Institutions pursue parallel or even conflicting agendas, policies appear episodic rather than strategic, and citizens struggle to understand how individual reforms relate to a broader national direction.

He stressed that strategic communication should not be confused with propaganda or message control. Rather, it is a discipline of coordination. Effective strategic communication aligns messaging across government institutions, ensures coherence between domestic discourse and foreign policy positions, and grounds public communication in shared values, agreed objectives, and credible evidence. Its purpose is

not to silence debate, but to provide a common interpretive framework within which debate can occur constructively.

Ambassador Lencho argued that Ethiopia's ongoing reform and national dialogue efforts would gain depth and durability if they were anchored in a clearly articulated narrative framework. Such a framework should explain not only what policies are being pursued, but why they matter, how they relate to Ethiopia's historical experience, and how they contribute to a shared national journey. When citizens and international partners understand the purpose behind reforms, trust increases, resistance declines, and implementation becomes more effective.

He concluded that without narrative coordination, even well-designed policies risk being misunderstood, politicized, or reduced to technical exercises disconnected from public meaning. Strategic communication, rooted in a shared national narrative, is therefore a core function of state capacity and an essential tool for sustaining legitimacy, cohesion, and long-term national direction.

7.7 Conclusion

Ambassador Lencho Bati's contribution makes clear that the struggle for a shared national narrative is not a peripheral cultural or academic concern, but a core issue of state capacity and strategic governance. In contemporary Ethiopia, fragmented and uncoordinated national discourse weakens state legitimacy, disrupts policy coherence, and erodes social trust. When institutions communicate inconsistent messages and political debates are framed through competing narratives, governance becomes reactive, implementation falters, and citizens disengage from the national project. At the international level, the absence of a coherent narrative further undermines credibility, complicates diplomacy, and limits Ethiopia's ability to project its interests with clarity and confidence.

Conversely, the paper demonstrates that a coherent, inclusive, and credible national narrative can function as a unifying strategic asset. By providing a shared framework of meaning, such a narrative strengthens public confidence, aligns institutions around common priorities, and enhances the effectiveness of both domestic policy and foreign engagement. A shared narrative does not eliminate debate or diversity; rather, it creates the conditions under which differences can be negotiated within a common civic horizon, reducing zero-sum contestation and reinforcing collective purpose.

This contribution reinforces a broader conclusion emerging from the National Conference: Ethiopia's long-term stability, legitimacy, and development effectiveness depend on its ability to move from competing and fragmented narratives toward a shared framework of meaning. Achieving this transition requires more than rhetorical appeals. It demands sustained political commitment, clear institutional coordination, and deliberate investment in strategic communication, dialogue, and public trust-building. Without these elements, reforms risk being misunderstood or contested; with them, Ethiopia can strengthen governance, rebuild confidence, and position itself more effectively at home and abroad.

7.8 Action Points and Strategic Recommendations

The paper concludes with a set of practical and forward-looking recommendations aimed at translating the concept of a shared national narrative into concrete governance capacity. These recommendations emphasize coordination, clarity, and institutional ownership, recognizing narrative coherence as a strategic requirement rather than a symbolic exercise.

1. Establish a coherent national narrative framework - Ethiopia should develop an inclusive national narrative framework that connects diversity to a shared civic purpose. This framework should articulate core national values, historical reference points, and future aspirations that can guide both domestic governance and foreign policy engagement. The objective is not to impose a single story, but to provide a common interpretive anchor within which multiple identities and experiences can coexist. Such a framework would help reduce zero-sum narrative competition and provide orientation for policy, reform, and dialogue processes.

2. Strengthen state communication capacity - The state must invest in professional and coordinated public communication systems. This includes building skilled communication units within key institutions, improving message clarity, and ensuring that policy objectives are translated into accessible language that resonates with citizens. Effective communication is not propaganda; it is a governance function that links policy intent with public understanding and trust.

3. Align national messaging across institutions - Fragmentation often arises when ministries, regional governments, and public agencies communicate independently without a shared reference. Clear mechanisms should be established to align national messaging across institutions, ensuring consistency in how policies, reforms, and national priorities are explained. This alignment reduces confusion, prevents contradictory signals, and reinforces institutional credibility.

4. Integrate narrative coherence into foreign policy - Domestic narrative coherence should be reflected in Ethiopia's external engagement. Diplomatic missions and international representatives require a clear and consistent national story to advocate effectively for Ethiopia's interests. Aligning domestic discourse with diplomatic messaging strengthens credibility, reduces vulnerability to misinterpretation, and enhances Ethiopia's strategic positioning in international forums.

7.9 Next Steps and Policy Implications

To operationalize these recommendations, the paper proposes the following priority steps:

1. **Integrate narrative considerations into governance reform and policy design -** Narrative coherence should be treated as a cross-cutting governance issue, informing how reforms are designed, communicated, and implemented.

2. **Build institutional mechanisms for coordinated state communication -** Formal coordination platforms should be established to align messaging across federal, regional, and sectoral institutions.

3. **Link National Dialogue outcomes to a clear narrative framework -** Agreements and recommendations emerging from the National Dialogue should be embedded within an overarching narrative that explains their purpose and national significance.

4. **Train diplomatic and public officials in strategic narrative alignment -** Capacity-building programs should equip officials with the skills to communicate consistently and strategically across domestic and international contexts.

5. **Monitor and address narrative fragmentation as a governance risk -** Narrative fragmentation should be recognized as an early warning indicator of governance stress, requiring timely policy and communication responses.

By addressing narrative fragmentation proactively, Ethiopia can strengthen internal cohesion, improve policy implementation, enhance external credibility, and lay a more stable foundation for peace, development, and inclusive statehood.

8 Comparative Experiences from South Africa, Tunisia, Northern Ireland, and Colombia on Pairing Dialogue with Institutionalization

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Paper presented at the National Conference on Framing the Shared Narrative
Jimma, January 2026

8.1 Executive Summary

This paper examines how national dialogues, when supported by strong institutional arrangements, have helped deeply divided societies move from conflict toward stability, legitimacy, and long-term peace. Drawing on comparative experiences from South Africa, Tunisia, Northern Ireland, and Colombia, the paper demonstrates that dialogue on its own is not sufficient to resolve entrenched national crises. While dialogue can open political space and reduce immediate tensions, its outcomes remain fragile unless they are anchored in legal, constitutional, and institutional frameworks that give negotiated agreements lasting force.

Across the examined cases, national dialogues functioned as inclusive negotiation platforms that redefined relationships between the state and society. They enabled previously excluded actors to articulate grievances, acknowledge past injustices, and participate in shaping new political settlements. Dialogue also played a central role in reframing national narratives, shifting societies away from zero sum identities toward shared understandings of citizenship and coexistence. However, these achievements endured only where dialogue outcomes were protected through constitutions, legislation, independent oversight bodies, and clearly defined implementation mechanisms.

The paper highlights that institutional safeguards were decisive in determining success. Where dialogue results were legally codified, shielded from political reversal, and supported by credible institutions, reforms gained durability and public trust. Where such safeguards were weak or absent, consensus quickly eroded, and old divisions resurfaced. Institutionalization therefore served as the bridge between moral agreement and practical governance.

For Ethiopia, which currently faces deep polarization and competing historical narratives, the paper offers important lessons. It argues that the National Dialogue process can become a transformative turning point only if it is paired with firm institutional guarantees, inclusive participation, and deliberate narrative work that connects diverse memories into a shared civic framework. Without these supports, dialogue risks remaining symbolic and vulnerable to politicization.

The paper ultimately positions institutionalized dialogue as a pathway to consensual legitimacy, collective healing, and sustainable peace. It emphasizes that peace is not secured by agreement alone, but by the systems that protect, implement, and renew that agreement over time.

8.2 Key Messages

1. National Dialogues are effective only when paired with legal and institutional guarantees.
2. Shared narratives are essential for transforming conflict into coexistence.
3. Inclusive mediation and elite buy-in are necessary but insufficient without structural follow-through.
4. Victim-centered approaches enhance social legitimacy and moral authority.
5. Institutional shielding protects peace agreements from political reversal.
6. Ethiopia can adapt comparative lessons without replicating foreign models.

8.3 Background Overview: National Dialogue as an Inclusive Negotiation Mechanism

National Dialogue has emerged globally as a vital mechanism for managing political transitions and addressing deep rooted national crises. Unlike narrow elite negotiations, National Dialogues are designed to be broadly inclusive. They bring together civil society organizations, women and youth groups, academia, media, traditional leaders, political parties, and state institutions within a single national process. This inclusivity is not symbolic. It is essential for building legitimacy and ensuring that dialogue outcomes reflect the lived realities of society.

The central purpose of a National Dialogue is to redefine the relationship between the state and society. In many cases, this process leads to a new or renewed social contract that clarifies rights, responsibilities, and the basis of political authority. A core element of this transformation is the development of a Shared Narrative. Such a narrative allows different groups to situate their historical experiences within a common national framework and to imagine a shared future that is not defined by exclusion or domination.

In multiethnic and diverse states, maintaining a coherent narrative environment is critical for national unity. When narratives are oversimplified or exclusionary, they amplify polarization. Collective memory then becomes a vehicle for transmitting unresolved grievances and rigid identities across generations. In the absence of a shared narrative, competing memories harden into antagonistic positions, weakening trust and increasing the likelihood of political instability and violence.

National Dialogues provide a structured pathway for moving grievances out of the streets and into institutional politics. They create formal spaces where demands can be negotiated rather than contested through force. Historically, successful dialogues have addressed three core mandates. These are political reform, peacemaking, and constitution making. However, dialogue by itself does not guarantee durable outcomes. Without institutional oversight, such as independent commissions, legal safeguards, and constitutional protection, agreements reached through dialogue remain fragile and easily reversed.

Against this background, the paper examines comparative international experiences to draw lessons relevant to Ethiopia's Pathway to Consensus. These cases demonstrate that dialogue succeeds when it is paired with strong institutions that translate agreement into lasting governance practice.

8.4 Comparative Case Studies: Moving from Dialogue to Structure

8.4.1 South Africa: Transforming Consciousness through Dialogue

South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy offers one of the clearest examples of how national dialogue can succeed when it is firmly anchored in institutions. Under apartheid, racial segregation was enforced through law, most notably the 1913 Land Act, which legalized dispossession and produced deep structural inequality. By the early 1990s, prolonged resistance, international pressure, and economic decline had created a situation in which neither the apartheid state nor the liberation movements could achieve outright victory. This hurting stalemate made negotiated transition unavoidable.

The transition in **South Africa** was largely homegrown. It relied on internal political leadership and negotiation rather than external mediation. Formal dialogue platforms, including the Convention for a Democratic South Africa and the Multi Party Negotiating Forum, brought together former adversaries to negotiate the terms of a new political order. These processes led to the 1993 Interim Constitution and the country's first democratic elections in 1994.

A defining feature of the South African transition was the decision to institutionalize compromise through an amnesty for truth arrangement. Rather than pursuing broad retributive justice, political leaders prioritized stability and coexistence. This choice was operationalized through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which functioned as both a moral and narrative bridge. The Commission enabled public truth telling, acknowledged suffering across communities, and embedded the principle of restorative justice, grounded in the philosophy of Ubuntu, into the emerging national identity.

Crucially, dialogue outcomes were not left at the level of moral agreement. They were codified through a strong constitutional framework, the creation of independent oversight institutions, and the establishment of a Constitutional Court with real authority. This institutional anchoring ensured that reconciliation was not symbolic or temporary, but translated into enforceable rules, durable rights, and long term political legitimacy.

8.4.2 Tunisia: Legal Anchoring of Democratic Reform

Tunisia's political transition began with the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, which brought an end to decades of centralized authoritarian rule. While the revolution opened political space and led to competitive elections, early reliance on electoral legitimacy alone proved insufficient to govern a deeply polarized society. Political competition quickly became zero sum, state institutions weakened, and the country entered a period of institutional paralysis marked by political assassinations and widespread public mistrust in 2013.

At this critical moment, the intervention of the Tunisian Quartet transformed crisis into opportunity. The Quartet, a coalition of four respected civil society organizations, emerged as a credible and neutral mediator at a time when political actors had lost public confidence. By facilitating dialogue among rival political forces, the Quartet shifted the basis of legitimacy from electoral dominance to consensual legitimacy, emphasizing compromise, restraint, and national responsibility over partisan victory.

The National Dialogue Roadmap provided a clear and structured pathway out of crisis. It led to the resignation of the partisan government, the formation of a technocratic interim cabinet, the establishment

of independent electoral management bodies, and agreement on a constitutional timetable. These steps rebuilt minimum trust among political actors and restored public confidence in the transition process.

The adoption of the 2014 Constitution marked the institutional consolidation of dialogue outcomes. The constitution enshrined civil liberties, gender equality, separation of powers, and limits on executive authority. By embedding dialogue agreements within a clear legal and constitutional framework, Tunisia reduced the risk of democratic reversal and institutionalized pluralism beyond the immediate political moment.

The experience of **Tunisia** demonstrates two critical lessons. First, civil society can play a decisive role when political institutions lose credibility, provided it enjoys public trust and organizational independence. Second, dialogue outcomes achieve durability only when they are translated into constitutional and institutional arrangements that bind political actors over time.

8.4.3 Northern Ireland: Institutionalized Mutual Recognition

The conflict in **Northern Ireland**, commonly known as *The Troubles*, was an ethno nationalist struggle centered on sovereignty, identity, and political belonging. For decades, competing British and Irish national identities, combined with exclusionary governance and sectarian violence, produced deep mistrust between communities. Early peacemaking initiatives failed largely because they excluded key actors and lacked credible guarantees, yet they helped clarify the conditions necessary for a durable settlement.

The 1998 Belfast, or Good Friday, Agreement marked a decisive shift from conflict management to institutionalized peace. The Agreement did not seek to impose a single national identity. Instead, it recognized the legitimacy of multiple identities through the principle of parity of esteem. Individuals were entitled to identify as British, Irish, or both, without political or legal disadvantage. This recognition of plural belonging became the moral and political foundation of the peace process.

Peace was sustained through a carefully designed institutional framework. Power sharing arrangements ensured that major communities participated jointly in governance. Proportional representation reduced political exclusion and encouraged coalition building. External guarantees from the United Kingdom and Ireland provided reassurance that commitments would be upheld beyond domestic political cycles.

The Three Strands architecture further anchored the settlement. One strand addressed internal governance within Northern Ireland, another focused-on cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and a third regulated relations between the British and Irish governments. This multi-level design acknowledged the complexity of identity and sovereignty claims rather than suppressing them.

Security sector reform played a critical supporting role. Policing institutions were restructured to become representative, accountable, and rights based, helping rebuild trust between citizens and the state. These reforms translated narrative recognition into lived institutional change.

Northern Ireland demonstrates that shared narratives do not emerge through enforced unity, but through mutual recognition embedded in durable institutions. Peace endured because identity pluralism was not treated as a threat, but as a legitimate foundation for shared governance.

8.4.4 Colombia: Victim-Centricity and Structural Shielding

Colombia's armed conflict lasted for more than five decades and was driven by deep land inequality, political exclusion, and violence linked to the drug economy. Repeated negotiation attempts failed because they focused narrowly on elite bargaining and lacked social legitimacy. The Havana Peace Process, conducted between 2012 and 2016, represented a clear break from this pattern by placing victims and affected communities at the center of the peace effort.

The process was carefully designed to protect trust and coherence. It began with a confidential exploratory phase that tested political willingness and defined clear rules of engagement. This was followed by structured public negotiations with a defined agenda and sequencing. A core principle guided the talks: nothing was considered agreed until everything was agreed. This prevented partial deals from collapsing the process and ensured that compromises were balanced across issues

Peace implementation extended beyond national level agreements. Territorial peace initiatives were introduced to address local grievances, land issues, and community level reconciliation. This helped bridge the gap between elite negotiation and lived realities on the ground.

Institutionalization was achieved through the creation of the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non Repetition. This system integrated truth seeking mechanisms, restorative justice approaches, reparations for victims, and guarantees against future violence. Importantly, these mechanisms were anchored in constitutional and legal frameworks, protecting them from political reversal.

Victim participation was not symbolic. Victims directly engaged negotiators and shaped priorities, giving the process strong moral authority. Gender inclusion and international verification further strengthened credibility and trust.

Colombia's experience demonstrates that durable peace requires more than negotiated agreements. It requires institutional systems that recognize suffering, restore dignity, and convert moral consensus into enforceable public policy.

8.5 Comparative Analysis: Shared Strategies across Diverse Contexts

Despite significant differences in history, culture, and political systems, the experiences of South Africa, Tunisia, Northern Ireland, and Colombia reveal a set of shared strategies that explain why their national dialogues produced lasting impact rather than temporary compromise. In all four cases, dialogue emerged only after a clear recognition that no actor could achieve total victory. This recognition of stalemate created the political space for negotiation and reduced incentives for continued confrontation. Dialogue was therefore not driven by goodwill alone, but by the practical realization that coexistence was the only viable option.

A second common feature was the pairing of elite level agreements with inclusive mediation. While political elites were central to decision making, their agreements were shaped and legitimized by the involvement of civil society, victims, religious actors, and independent mediators. This combination helped prevent dialogue from becoming a closed elite bargain detached from society. Third, all cases anchored dialogue outcomes in legal and constitutional frameworks. Agreements were translated into

constitutions, laws, independent institutions, and oversight mechanisms. This step transformed moral or political consensus into enforceable public commitments and protected reforms from reversal.

Finally, each case invested deliberately in constructing shared narratives that replaced zero sum identities with frameworks of mutual recognition. These narratives did not deny past suffering but reframed it within a shared future oriented story. At the same time, the cases also reveal important limitations. Socio economic grievances were not fully resolved, elite capture remained a risk, and implementation required sustained political commitment long after agreements were signed. These limitations underline that dialogue and institutionalization are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for lasting peace.

8.6 Lessons for Ethiopia: From Grievance to Collective Healing

Ethiopia currently faces a deeply polarized narrative environment, often framed as a tension between Pan Ethiopian and Ethno Nationalist perspectives. Historical experiences are frequently simplified and weaponized, producing rigid victim perpetrator narratives that harden political positions and weaken trust. Comparative experience suggests that Ethiopia's National Dialogue can only succeed if it moves deliberately from grievance based politics toward collective healing.

First, individual and community experiences must be validated through narrative truth. Acknowledging pain, loss, and exclusion is essential for restoring dignity and trust. Second, these individual truths must be connected into a shared collective memory that recognizes mutual responsibility and interdependence. This does not require uniform agreement on history, but a willingness to situate different experiences within a common national story. Third, legitimacy must shift from majoritarian dominance to consensus based governance. Durable peace depends not on numerical strength, but on broad acceptance and inclusion.

Fourth, principles of mutual recognition must be embedded in governance architecture, including constitutional interpretation, public institutions, and political practice. Finally, victim participation must be treated as a core pillar rather than a symbolic gesture. When those most affected by conflict shape outcomes, dialogue gains moral authority and social legitimacy. Together, these lessons point toward a model of dialogue that heals rather than merely manages division.

8.7 Final Reflections: Building a National Narrative in Ethiopia

Dialogue must be understood as a starting point, not an endpoint. Without constitutional, institutional, and cultural reinforcement, even the most inclusive dialogue risks becoming a symbolic exercise with limited impact. Ethiopia's experience, like those examined comparatively, shows that shared narratives do not sustain themselves. They require institutions that protect them, policies that reflect them, and communication systems that transmit them responsibly.

Preventing elite capture is especially critical. This requires a partnership model that brings together the Ministry of Peace, regional governments, civil society organizations, media, academia, cultural institutions, and opposition actors. Each has a distinct role in sustaining inclusion, accountability, and credibility. Institutionalizing dialogue outcomes is not about freezing consensus, but about creating durable processes that allow shared meaning to evolve without returning to violence.

Ethiopia stands at a historic crossroads. One path leads toward continued fragmentation, competing narratives, and recurring crisis. The other leads toward a shared future grounded in justice, dignity, and peace. The decisive factor will be leadership that prioritizes national survival and collective wellbeing over narrow political interests.

8.8 Next Steps and Policy Implications

To ensure that the National Dialogue leads to durable peace, legitimacy, and national cohesion, its outcomes must be translated into concrete policy and institutional action. The following steps outline priority directions for implementation, drawing on both comparative experience and Ethiopia's governance context.

1. Establish constitutional and legal safeguards for dialogue outcomes - Dialogue agreements should be formally anchored in constitutional interpretation, legislation, and binding policy frameworks. Legal recognition protects consensus from political reversal, leadership change, or short term partisan interests. This requires reviewing existing laws and, where necessary, introducing new legal provisions that clearly recognize dialogue outcomes as part of Ethiopia's evolving social contract.

2. Create independent oversight commissions for implementation - Independent and credible oversight bodies are essential to monitor implementation, ensure accountability, and resolve disputes. Such commissions should have clear mandates, operational autonomy, and representation that reflects Ethiopia's diversity. Their role is not only to track progress, but also to sustain public trust by ensuring transparency and inclusivity.

3. Institutionalize victim centered truth telling mechanisms - Truth telling processes must move beyond symbolic recognition and become permanent institutional practices. Victim centered mechanisms should provide space for acknowledgment, documentation, and restorative approaches that support healing. These processes strengthen moral legitimacy and help shift national discourse from denial or blame toward responsibility and reconciliation.

4. Embed shared narrative principles in education and media policy - Education curricula and media guidelines should be revised to reflect shared narrative principles, including inclusivity, historical balance, and civic identity. Schools play a long term role in shaping values and belonging, while media influences daily public perception. Aligning both sectors with shared narrative objectives is critical for intergenerational sustainability.

5. Align the National Dialogue with long term socio economic reform - Dialogue outcomes must be linked to tangible improvements in livelihoods, opportunity, and development. Without socio economic inclusion, narrative consensus will remain fragile. Policies on development, service delivery, and resource distribution should therefore reflect the values of equity, shared prosperity, and national solidarity articulated through the dialogue.

Taken together, these steps position the National Dialogue not as an isolated political event, but as a foundational process integrated into Ethiopia's constitutional order, governance practice, and development trajectory.

9 Potential Political, Social, and Economic Dividends of an Agreed / Shared Narrative

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9.1 Executive Summary

This paper examines the strategic role of an agreed or shared national narrative in strengthening political stability, social cohesion, and economic transformation. It argues that national narratives are not merely symbolic expressions of identity, but practical instruments of governance that shape how citizens understand the state, relate to one another, and respond to public policy. Narratives influence public trust, legitimize authority, guide collective behavior, and frame national development priorities.

Drawing on comparative international experience and Ethiopia's own historical trajectory, the paper demonstrates that countries with coherent and credible national narratives are better able to mobilize citizens around common goals, attract domestic and foreign investment, encourage innovation, and project confidence and influence externally. A shared narrative provides predictability and purpose, which are essential conditions for economic growth and effective governance. By contrast, fragmented or contested narratives weaken social trust, intensify political polarization, reduce policy coherence, and discourage long term investment.

In the Ethiopian context, the paper identifies strong foundations for a shared narrative, including a long civilizational history, collective anti colonial memory, and recent nationwide mobilization efforts around development initiatives. At the same time, it highlights serious challenges arising from competing identity based narratives, politicized history, and unresolved grievances that continue to undermine cohesion and legitimacy.

The paper situates the ongoing National Dialogue as a critical opportunity to address these challenges by facilitating the emergence of a bottom up Shared Narrative that acknowledges diversity while articulating a shared national purpose. It concludes that an agreed national narrative can generate significant political, social, and economic dividends by aligning identity, legitimacy, and development within a common framework, transforming diversity from a source of vulnerability into a strategic national asset.

9.2 Key Messages

1. Narratives are central to national identity, legitimacy, and development.
2. Strong national narratives correlate with political stability and economic performance.
3. Media and symbolism play decisive roles in shaping and sustaining narratives.
4. Fragmented narratives weaken trust, cohesion, and policy effectiveness.
5. Ethiopia possesses strong historical foundations for a shared narrative.
6. An agreed narrative can convert diversity into a source of resilience and growth.

9.3 Fundamentals of Narratives

9.3.1 What Narratives Are

Narratives are organized and meaningful accounts of events, actors, and values that help societies make sense of their experiences. At the national level, narratives answer fundamental questions about identity and purpose. They explain who belongs, what is valued, how the past is understood, and what kind of future is desired. In doing so, they provide continuity across generations and orientation in moments of uncertainty, crisis, or transition.

National narratives are especially important in complex and diverse societies because they offer a shared reference point that links different experiences into a common story. They shape how citizens interpret political events, assess the legitimacy of institutions, and understand their relationship with the state. Externally, national narratives influence how a country is perceived by international partners, investors, and institutions, affecting diplomacy, economic engagement, and global standing. A coherent narrative signals stability and purpose, while a fragmented one creates uncertainty and mistrust.

9.3.2 Cultural, Political, and Media Functions of Narratives

Narratives operate simultaneously across cultural, political, and communication domains. Culturally, they shape collective identity by transmitting shared values, norms, and symbols from one generation to the next. They influence how communities remember their past and how they interpret belonging, responsibility, and solidarity.

Politically, narratives play a central role in legitimizing authority and guiding public action. Governments rely on narratives to explain policy choices, mobilize citizens, and justify reform agendas. Political competition is often a contest between different narratives about national direction, justice, and development. When narratives are inclusive and credible, they strengthen trust and participation. When they are exclusionary or contradictory, they deepen polarization.

Media serves as the main channel through which narratives are produced, circulated, and reinforced. Through language, imagery, repetition, and symbolism, media translates abstract ideas into everyday meaning. Visual elements such as photographs and videos create emotional connection, while recurring symbols such as flags, monuments, and historic events anchor narratives in collective memory. Over time, these elements become embedded in public consciousness and shape how citizens interpret both routine governance and moments of crisis.

9.3.3 Dynamics of Narratives

Narratives are dynamic rather than fixed. They evolve in response to social change, political struggle, economic transformation, and generational shifts. They are constantly contested, revised, and sometimes displaced by alternative narratives. While frames highlight specific aspects of an issue, narratives bring multiple frames together into a broader and more durable story that guides interpretation over time.

The expansion of digital media has fundamentally altered how narratives are formed and contested. Traditional editorial control has weakened, allowing a wider range of voices and perspectives to enter public debate. This has created opportunities for inclusion and correction of historical silences. At the

same time, it has increased the spread of misinformation, emotional mobilization, and fragmented meaning. Algorithms often reward speed and outrage rather than accuracy and reflection.

In this environment, narratives, media, and national interest are closely interconnected. Strategic communication has become a core element of modern governance and soft power. States that fail to engage responsibly in narrative shaping risk losing control of public meaning, while those that invest in credible, inclusive, and forward looking narratives are better positioned to build trust, cohesion, and long term stability.

9.4 Comparative National Narratives: Selected Country Experiences

Comparative experience shows that strong and coherent national narratives are closely linked to social cohesion, political stability, and sustained economic development. Across different political systems and levels of development, successful states have invested consciously in narratives that give meaning to national identity and provide direction for collective effort.

In the United States, the narrative of E Pluribus Unum emphasizes unity built from diversity, grounded in democracy, freedom, innovation, and global leadership. This narrative has helped sustain confidence in institutions and encouraged individual initiative, even during periods of internal division. China advances a narrative of national renewal that highlights collective effort, rapid development, and technological advancement. This story links historical humiliation to contemporary resurgence and has been central to mobilizing society around long term development goals.

European and East Asian experiences also illustrate the role of narrative. Germany projects an image of stability, quality governance, rule of law, and multilateral leadership. This narrative reinforces trust at home and credibility abroad. Japan combines deep respect for tradition with a strong emphasis on modern technology, quality, and innovation, allowing continuity without stagnation.

Emerging economies similarly rely on narrative power. India presents itself as the world's largest democracy and a rising economic and technological force, blending civilizational depth with future ambition. Singapore emphasizes disciplined leadership, meritocracy, and a clear national vision, which has supported rapid transformation despite limited natural resources. South Africa's Rainbow Nation narrative sought to heal a deeply divided society by emphasizing unity in diversity after apartheid. Brazil combines a narrative of Global South leadership with cultural influence, using sports and arts as soft power.

The common insight across these cases is that coherent national narratives build confidence, mobilize citizens, and align public institutions and private actors around shared development strategies. Where narratives are fragmented or lack credibility, cohesion and long term planning suffer.

9.5 How Narratives Influence Economic and Social Development

Narratives influence how individuals and societies make decisions. At the individual level, they shape attitudes toward consumption, saving, investment, education, and career choices. When a national story emphasizes opportunity, innovation, and collective progress, citizens are more likely to take risks, invest in skills, and participate productively in the economy.

At the structural level, narratives can unlock new sectors and industries by redefining what is possible and desirable. Development narratives that promote entrepreneurship, industrialization, or technological adoption help shift behavior and expectations. Governments routinely rely on narratives to justify policy choices, whether framed as developmental state approaches, home grown economic models, or synergy based governance strategies.

Compelling narratives also matter externally. Investors, tourists, and development partners respond not only to technical indicators, but to stories about stability, direction, and national purpose. A credible narrative reduces perceived risk and increases confidence in long term engagement.

Socially, shared narratives strengthen cohesion by providing a common language of belonging. They transmit values and norms, encourage participation in public life, and create space for inclusion of marginalized groups. At the same time, counter narratives can play a constructive role by challenging limiting beliefs such as dependency, inevitability of conflict, or fatalism. When managed responsibly, they open space for reform and renewal rather than division.

Overall, narratives function as internal drivers of economic and social change. They shape behavior, expectations, and trust, making them as important as formal policies and institutions.

9.6 Political Mobilization and Narratives

Political mobilization is deeply narrative driven. Political actors and movements use narratives to define collective identity, frame problems and solutions, and sustain commitment during periods of difficulty. Narratives simplify complex political realities into stories that people can understand and relate to emotionally.

Through narrative framing, political leaders explain why change is necessary, who is responsible for past failures, and what kind of future is possible. A strong and credible narrative often proves decisive in motivating voters, maintaining support through setbacks, and influencing policy outcomes. In this sense, political competition is not only a contest of programs and institutions, but also a contest over meaning and interpretation.

When political narratives are inclusive and forward looking, they can mobilize support without deepening division. When they rely on fear, exclusion, or grievance alone, they may generate short term mobilization but undermine long term stability.

9.7 Narratives as Tools of Social Mobilization

Beyond formal politics, narratives are powerful tools for social mobilization. They create a sense of belonging and shared purpose that motivates collective action. Personal stories humanize abstract issues such as inequality, environmental protection, or social justice, making them emotionally resonant and morally compelling.

Effective social movements rely on strategic framing that connects individual experiences to broader social goals. Coherent narratives help sustain momentum over time, especially when immediate results are limited. Global experiences, from environmental advocacy to human rights campaigns, show that narrative clarity and emotional resonance are often more important than resources alone.

Where narratives are fragmented or inconsistent, mobilization tends to dissipate quickly. Where narratives are clear, inclusive, and aligned with lived experience, they can influence public opinion, reshape policy agendas, and produce lasting social change.

9.8 Dividends of an Agreed / Shared Narrative

An agreed or shared national narrative produces significant political, social, and economic dividends that reinforce one another over time. These dividends are not abstract or symbolic. They translate into practical gains for governance, stability, and development.

9.8.1 Trust and Understanding

A shared narrative strengthens trust by creating space for listening, recognition, and mutual acknowledgment. When groups see their histories and experiences reflected within a common national story, suspicion and fear are reduced. This does not require uniform interpretation of the past, but it does require a framework that validates different experiences while affirming collective belonging. Trust built in this way improves state society relations and enhances confidence in public institutions.

9.8.2 Common Ground for Problem Solving

Shared narratives provide a common reference point for dialogue and negotiation. They make it easier to identify shared interests and values, even when disagreements persist. In the absence of a shared narrative, political debate often becomes zero sum and emotionally charged. With a shared framework, compromise becomes more acceptable and problem solving more constructive. This is especially important in diverse societies where governance depends on continuous negotiation across difference.

9.8.3 Enhanced Leadership and National Influence

A coherent national narrative strengthens leadership by offering clear direction and purpose. Leaders who speak from a shared national story are more likely to command credibility and legitimacy. Internally, this helps align policies and mobilize public support. Externally, it improves a country's standing by projecting clarity, stability, and confidence. States with coherent narratives are better positioned to attract investment, build partnerships, and exercise diplomatic influence.

9.8.4 Improved Cohesion and Participation

Shared narratives deepen social cohesion by fostering a sense of belonging and collective responsibility. They encourage citizens to participate in civic life, public debate, and national development efforts. This participation strengthens social capital, which in turn enhances resilience during times of crisis. When people feel part of a common story, they are more willing to contribute, cooperate, and sacrifice for the public good.

Taken together, these dividends create virtuous cycles. Trust supports cooperation. Cooperation improves governance outcomes. Improved outcomes reinforce legitimacy and confidence. Over time, an agreed or shared narrative becomes a stabilizing force that aligns identity, authority, and development within a sustainable national framework.

9.9 Ethiopia and the Construction of Shared Narratives

9.9.1 Foundations to Build On

Ethiopia enters the task of constructing a shared national narrative with important strengths. Its ancient history and long tradition of statehood provide a deep sense of continuity and civilizational confidence. Across centuries, diverse communities have lived, traded, intermarried, and governed together, creating dense networks of social and cultural interaction. This long coexistence offers rich material for a narrative centered on interdependence rather than separation.

Ethiopia's anti colonial experience is another powerful foundation. The collective memory of resisting foreign domination, especially the victory of Adwa and the struggle against Italian occupation, remains one of the strongest unifying references across regions and identities. More recently, national development initiatives have demonstrated the continued capacity for collective mobilization. The National Ethiopian Renaissance Dam became a symbol of shared aspiration, sacrifice, and sovereignty. Similarly, the Green Legacy Initiative showed how environmental stewardship can be framed as a national responsibility that cuts across political and cultural divisions. These experiences confirm that Ethiopians can rally around shared goals when narratives emphasize common purpose and future oriented achievement.

9.9.2 Challenges

Despite these strengths, Ethiopia faces serious narrative challenges. Competing visions of identity, particularly between ethnic nationalism and pan Ethiopianism, have hardened into opposing camps. Historical narratives are often politicized, selectively interpreted, and mobilized to justify exclusion or grievance. This has contributed to mutual mistrust, contested legitimacy, and recurring cycles of conflict.

Unresolved historical grievances continue to shape public discourse, often framed through simplified victim and perpetrator narratives. When these narratives dominate, they reduce space for empathy, compromise, and collective responsibility. In such an environment, diversity is perceived as a threat rather than an asset, and national institutions struggle to maintain authority and coherence. Without deliberate efforts to connect diverse memories within a shared framework, fragmentation risks deepening further.

9.9.3 Current Efforts

The ongoing National Dialogue represents a significant attempt to address these challenges. It offers a structured platform for acknowledging grievances, hearing diverse perspectives, and rebuilding trust through inclusive engagement. Importantly, the Dialogue provides an opportunity to move toward a bottom up National Narrative that integrates multiple histories rather than suppressing them.

For this effort to succeed, the Dialogue must go beyond negotiation of immediate political issues. It must also contribute to narrative reconstruction by recognizing pain, affirming shared experiences, and articulating a collective vision of the future. When linked to education, media, and institutional reform, the Dialogue can serve as a foundation for a durable shared narrative that supports peace and legitimacy.

9.10 Looking Ahead: From Diversity to Strength

Ethiopia's central challenge is not diversity itself, but how diversity is interpreted and governed. An agreed or shared narrative does not erase differences in culture, language, or historical experience. Instead, it provides a common frame within which these differences are understood as part of a larger national story.

By consciously shifting from narratives of competition and exclusion to narratives of interdependence and shared destiny, Ethiopia can transform diversity into a source of strength. Aligning identity, legitimacy, and development under a shared national story can improve trust in institutions, strengthen social cohesion, and support long term economic progress. This requires sustained commitment, inclusive leadership, and institutional follow through.

9.11 Conclusion

This paper reinforces a central insight echoed throughout the conference: narratives matter deeply. They shape how societies understand themselves, how authority is legitimized, and how collective action is mobilized. For Ethiopia, constructing an agreed or shared national narrative is not a symbolic or rhetorical exercise. It is a strategic necessity for peace, governance, and development.

If approached inclusively, grounded in historical honesty, and supported by strong institutions, a shared narrative can help Ethiopia move beyond fragmentation. It can transform diversity into resilience and shared aspiration into sustained national progress.

9.12 Next Steps and Policy Implications

The construction of an agreed or shared national narrative requires deliberate policy choices and sustained institutional commitment. The following priority actions outline how narrative building can be translated into practical governance outcomes in Ethiopia.

1. Integrate Narrative Strategy into Governance - Narrative building should be treated as a core element of governance rather than an auxiliary communication task. Public policies, reform agendas, and national programs need to be communicated through a consistent narrative that reflects shared national values, collective responsibility, and a forward looking vision. Government institutions should align policy messaging with principles of unity in diversity, civic equality, and mutual recognition, ensuring that official communication reinforces trust rather than deepening division.

2. Strengthen Media Capacity - Media institutions require targeted capacity building to support ethical, inclusive, and conflict sensitive storytelling. Journalists and editors should be equipped with skills in historical contextualization, verification, and narrative integration so that reporting connects diverse experiences without inflaming grievance. Strengthening professional standards and editorial independence will help media serve as a bridge between dialogue, policy, and public understanding, reinforcing cohesion and legitimacy.

3. Embed Shared Narratives in Education - Education policy plays a decisive role in shaping long term national identity. Shared narratives should be systematically integrated into curricula at all levels, emphasizing civic identity alongside cultural and linguistic diversity. Teaching materials should highlight

interdependence, shared historical experiences, and common aspirations, helping younger generations develop a sense of belonging that complements, rather than competes with, local identities.

4. Leverage Collective National Initiatives - Large scale national initiatives provide practical anchors for shared narratives. Development projects, environmental programs, and social campaigns should be framed as collective achievements that require joint effort and shared sacrifice. By linking national projects to inclusive narratives of progress and dignity, the state can reinforce confidence, mobilize participation, and translate abstract unity into lived experience.

5. Institutionalize Dialogue Outcomes - The outcomes of the National Dialogue must be embedded within policy, legal frameworks, and institutional practice. Narrative consensus should inform governance reform, education policy, media regulation, and peacebuilding initiatives. Clear mechanisms are needed to ensure continuity beyond political cycles, including oversight bodies and regular review processes. Institutionalizing dialogue outcomes will help transform negotiated understanding into durable national practice.

Taken together, these steps position shared narrative building as a strategic driver of legitimacy, cohesion, and development. By embedding narrative consensus across governance, media, education, and national initiatives, Ethiopia can move from episodic dialogue toward sustained unity and collective progress.

10 Ethiopia's Diversity Dilemma: The Promise of Shared Narratives in Overcoming Governance Challenges

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10.1 Executive Summary

Ethiopia's current governance challenges are often explained through the lenses of ethnic diversity or disagreements over the appropriate governance model. This paper advances a different and more foundational argument. The central challenge is not diversity itself, but a narrative vacuum. Ethiopia lacks an inclusive and widely shared national story that can bridge competing historical interpretations, political identities, and collective memories. In the absence of shared meaning and mutual recognition, diversity becomes politicized and governance becomes fragile.

Drawing on Ethiopia's political history from imperial centralization, through socialist unitarism, to the experiment with ethnically informed federalism, the paper demonstrates that institutional design alone cannot resolve governance crises. Each governance phase introduced new structures but failed to establish a shared narrative capable of generating legitimacy across society. As a result, political debate has hardened into opposing camps. One draws on nostalgia for a unitary past, while the other is shaped by narratives of historical marginalization and victimhood. The interaction of these narratives has produced polarization, zero sum politics, and recurring instability.

The paper argues that a shared national narrative, developed through inclusive National Dialogue, offers a credible pathway out of this impasse. Such a narrative does not deny past grievances, nor does it impose a single historical interpretation. Instead, it acknowledges harm and difference while elevating common symbols, shared experiences, and collective aspirations. In this way, diversity is reframed as a source of strength rather than division.

The paper conceptualizes this process as a Covenant, a binding moral and political commitment among Ethiopia's peoples to coexist within unity, recognize one another's dignity, and jointly shape the future. Through deliberate and sustained consensus building, Ethiopia can move from fragmented voices toward harmony, transforming chaos into chorus and restoring the foundations of legitimate and inclusive governance.

10.2 Key Messages

1. Ethiopia's governance crisis stems from a narrative vacuum, not diversity itself.
2. Competing narratives of nostalgia and victimhood fuel polarization and instability.
3. Federal arrangements alone cannot substitute for shared meaning and recognition.
4. Inclusive dialogue can forge narratives that harmonize diversity within unity.
5. A shared narrative functions as a covenant of mutual commitment and legitimacy.
6. National Dialogue is the primary pathway for transforming multiplicity into harmony.

10.3 Core Argument

Ethiopia's persistent governance challenges are rooted less in the design of institutions and more in the absence of an inclusive and credible national narrative. Competing historical interpretations and identity claims have produced a fragmented narrative landscape, weakening state legitimacy and eroding trust between citizens and public institutions. In this environment, governance is contested not only through policy and power, but through conflicting stories about who belongs, who has suffered, and who holds rightful authority.

This narrative vacuum has pushed political debate toward two opposing and limiting positions. On one side is nostalgia for a centralized and unitary past that emphasizes order and cohesion but often overlooks historical exclusion. On the other side are narratives of victimhood grounded in experiences of marginalization that seek recognition and redress but can harden into zero sum claims. Neither position, on its own, provides a sustainable basis for inclusive governance.

The paper argues that Ethiopia's stability depends on moving beyond these binaries. Inclusive and well structured dialogue offers a pathway to develop shared narratives that acknowledge difference while building common ground. Such narratives can support governance through recognition rather than domination, and through legitimacy rather than coercion.

10.4 Central Thesis

Shared narratives, when deliberately developed through inclusive and credible dialogue, can harmonize Ethiopia's diversity and address its governance challenges. A shared narrative provides citizens with a sense of belonging, affirms mutual recognition across communities, and strengthens the moral foundations of state authority.

By anchoring governance in shared meaning rather than competing grievances, inclusive narratives can support democratic practice, peaceful coexistence, and effective statehood. They do not erase diversity or silence dissent, but create a civic framework within which plural identities can coexist and cooperate. In this sense, narrative construction becomes a core element of sustainable governance and national cohesion.

10.5 Ethiopia: Nation-State or Multinational Mosaic?

Ethiopia is home to more than eighty nations and nationalities, with long histories of coexistence, interaction, and cultural exchange. This diversity has shaped social life, trade, religion, and political organization for centuries. Yet despite these deep traditions of pluralism, Ethiopia continues to face serious governance challenges linked to how diversity is understood and managed.

These challenges are driven by several interrelated factors. Contradicting narratives and competing identity claims shape political debate and public perception. Repeated shifts in governance models, from imperial centralization to socialist unitarism and later to ethnic federalism, have attempted to manage diversity primarily through institutional arrangements. At the same time, unresolved resentments, recurring conflicts, territorial disputes, and fears of fragmentation continue to strain national cohesion.

Each governance model sought to resolve diversity through structural change, but none fully addressed the deeper narrative divide over Ethiopia's identity and statehood. As a result, institutional reforms have often outpaced consensus building. The absence of a shared national story that integrates multiple historical experiences into a common civic framework remains a central obstacle to legitimacy, unity, and effective governance.

10.6 Historical Context

Understanding Ethiopia's current narrative and governance challenges requires situating them within the country's successive political settlements. Each historical period attempted to manage diversity and authority through different models, yet each also produced unresolved grievances that continue to shape contemporary discourse.

10.6.1 Imperial Era (Pre-1974)

During the imperial period, state building was driven largely by assimilationist policies that elevated a dominant culture, language, and historical narrative as the core of Ethiopian identity. Political authority, education, administration, and cultural expression were centralized around this dominant framework. While this approach succeeded in consolidating territory and projecting a unified state image, it did so at a significant social and political cost.

Many peripheral groups experienced exclusion from political power, limited access to resources, and marginalization of their languages and cultures. Over time, these experiences generated deep resentment and fostered insurgencies that challenged the legitimacy of the imperial state. The central weakness of this era was not the pursuit of unity itself, but the attempt to achieve unity through cultural uniformity rather than inclusion and recognition. This laid the groundwork for later resistance narratives centered on injustice and exclusion.

10.6.2 Derg Regime (1974–1991)

The Derg overthrew the imperial system and replaced it with a Marxist-Leninist unitary state that promised equality, social justice, and liberation from feudal oppression. In theory, class solidarity was expected to transcend ethnic and cultural differences. In practice, however, governance under the Derg relied heavily on coercion and centralized control.

Widespread repression, most notably during the Red Terror, along with forced resettlement and villagization programs, inflicted severe social trauma. Rather than resolving historical grievances, these policies deepened mistrust between the state and society. Ethnic based liberation movements gained strength as communities sought protection and recognition outside the state framework. As a result, the Derg period intensified fragmentation and reinforced narratives of victimhood, further weakening national cohesion.

10.6.3 The Rise of Ethnically Informed Federalism

The collapse of the Derg in 1991 marked a decisive rupture in Ethiopia's political history. The new order introduced under the EPRDF sought to address long standing grievances by recognizing ethnic identities as the primary basis of political organization. This approach was constitutionally formalized in the 1995 Constitution through ethnic federalism and the right to self-determination.

Ethnic federalism represented a major corrective to earlier assimilationist and unitary models. It expanded cultural recognition, language rights, and regional autonomy for historically marginalized groups. However, it also institutionalized ethnicity as the central axis of political competition. Over time, this contributed to boundary disputes, zero sum politics, and competing historical narratives tied to claims of ownership, victimhood, and entitlement.

While the federal system addressed important questions of recognition, it did not sufficiently develop a unifying civic narrative to bind diverse groups together. As a result, Ethiopia entered the current period with stronger identity recognition but a weaker shared sense of national purpose, reinforcing the narrative vacuum identified throughout this paper.

10.6.3.1 Achievements

The introduction of ethnically informed federalism marked a significant departure from previous governance models and addressed several long-standing historical grievances. One of its most important achievements was the formal recognition of Ethiopia's diversity. For the first time, multiple identities, languages, and cultures were constitutionally acknowledged as legitimate foundations of political and social life.

The system also empowered groups that had historically been marginalized under imperial and unitary regimes. Regional self-administration expanded opportunities for cultural expression, local governance, and political participation. This recognition helped correct earlier patterns of exclusion and contributed to a stronger sense of dignity and visibility among many communities.

Constitutionally, the acknowledgment of self-determination represented a profound political statement. It signaled a commitment to voluntary unity rather than forced assimilation, and it aimed to rebuild state

legitimacy by anchoring authority in consent and recognition rather than coercion. In this respect, ethnically informed federalism addressed real historical injustices and responded to deeply rooted demands for inclusion.

10.6.3.2 Structural and Political Challenges

Despite these achievements, the federal system also generated serious structural and political challenges that have undermined national cohesion. Most notably, ethnicity became institutionalized as the primary political identity. Political competition increasingly revolved around ethnic affiliation rather than shared civic values, policy platforms, or national programs.

Ethnic based administrative boundaries contributed to territorial disputes and competing claims over land, resources, and political authority. These disputes often escalated into conflict, reinforcing narratives of exclusion and entitlement. At the same time, politics assumed a zero-sum character, where gains by one group were perceived as losses by another, weakening incentives for compromise and cooperation.

The dominance of ethnic parties further weakened the development of strong national political institutions. Cross regional and issue-based parties struggled to gain traction, limiting the space for inclusive, program driven politics. Perceptions of elite dominance during the period from 1991 to 2018 compounded these problems, as many citizens viewed the system as serving narrow interests rather than the collective good.

Most critically, while the constitutional and legal framework addressed recognition, it did not generate shared meaning or mutual recognition across groups. Legal structures alone proved insufficient to cultivate a common sense of belonging and purpose. The result has been a persistent narrative vacuum, in which institutions operate without an agreed national story capable of binding diversity into a coherent and legitimate political community.

10.7 Two Competing Political Camps

Ethiopia's current political debate is largely shaped by the confrontation between two dominant camps with fundamentally different interpretations of the state, history, and the causes of instability. These camps do not merely disagree on policy choices; they advance competing narratives about Ethiopia's identity and future. Their prolonged confrontation has deepened polarization and constrained the space for constructive compromise.

10.7.1 The Unitary Camp

The Unitary Camp views Ethiopia primarily as a single nation state with a long and continuous history of centralized authority. Supporters of this perspective emphasize historical unity, shared symbols, and a strong central government as the foundations of stability and national strength. Many within this camp express nostalgia for earlier periods when state authority appeared more cohesive and national identity more clearly defined.

From this viewpoint, ethnic federalism is seen as the principal source of contemporary instability. Critics argue that it has ethnicized politics by making identity the primary basis of political competition. They contend that linking territory to ethnicity has hardened boundaries, intensified intergroup suspicion, and

encouraged zero sum struggles over power and resources. In their assessment, ethnic federalism has weakened national institutions, undermined shared citizenship, and fragmented loyalty to the state.

As a result, the Unitary Camp often calls for stronger central authority, the reassertion of common national symbols, and a civic identity that downplays ethnic differentiation. However, this position is frequently perceived by others as dismissive of historical grievances and insufficiently attentive to past patterns of exclusion.

10.7.2 The Diversity Camp

The Diversity Camp understands Ethiopia as a nation of nations, formed through the incorporation of many distinct peoples with their own histories, languages, and political traditions. This camp emphasizes that centralized rule, particularly during imperial and military regimes, produced marginalization, cultural suppression, and unequal access to power and resources.

From this perspective, ethnic federalism is viewed as a necessary corrective rather than a cause of conflict. Supporters argue that recognizing identity and granting self-administration restored dignity, visibility, and political voice to historically marginalized groups. They maintain that current conflicts stem not from the federal model itself, but from poor implementation, weak democratic institutions, and uneven development.

Democracy, in this view, is still evolving. The solution lies in deepening democratic practice, strengthening institutions, and improving governance within the existing federal framework rather than abandoning it. Critics of centralization fear that a return to unitary arrangements would revive old injustices and reignite resistance.

10.7.3 Consequences of Polarization

The confrontation between these two camps has entrenched political polarization. Each presents itself as the true guardian of Ethiopia's survival and future, while portraying the other as a threat to national integrity. This mutual delegitimization has reduced political debate to identity based contestation, leaving little room for shared problem solving.

Most importantly, the dominance of these opposing narratives has crowded out the possibility of a shared national story that acknowledges both unity and diversity. Instead of fostering mutual recognition, the debate reinforces binary thinking and deepens mistrust. This polarization underscores the urgency of inclusive dialogue capable of moving beyond these camps toward a shared narrative grounded in recognition, coexistence, and collective purpose.

10.8 Covenant! — The Promise of Shared Narratives

Narratives shape how people understand who they are, where they belong, and how they relate to the state. As Benedict Anderson famously noted, nations are imagined communities formed through shared stories and meanings. In Ethiopia, deep polarization reflects a clash between two dominant narrative orientations: nostalgia for a unified past and narratives of victimhood rooted in historical marginalization. When left unmediated, these narratives harden into opposing identities and undermine trust.

Experience from other multi ethnic societies shows that stability is sustained not by suppressing difference, but by cultivating inclusive civic narratives that transcend zero sum identity politics. A shared Ethiopian narrative does not require the denial of grievances. Rather, it must acknowledge suffering and injustice while situating them within a broader story of coexistence, interdependence, and mutual recognition.

Ethiopia possesses powerful shared symbols and experiences that can anchor such a narrative. These include the Axumite legacy as an early center of civilization, collective anti colonial resistance, Ethiopia's global identity as the birthplace of coffee, and the broader idea of Ethiopia as a land of origins. When thoughtfully woven together, these elements can transform fragmented memories into a coherent civic story. The concept of Covenant captures this aspiration. It represents a binding moral and political commitment among Ethiopia's peoples to live together within unity while honoring diversity. In this sense, a shared narrative can turn chaos into chorus, many voices contributing to a single, harmonious national song.

10.9 National Dialogue as the Pathway

The National Dialogue provides a historic opportunity to address Ethiopia's unresolved questions of identity, governance, and justice. Its deeper purpose extends beyond institutional reform. At its core, the dialogue offers a platform for constructing a National Shared Narrative that embraces pluralism within a common civic framework.

For the dialogue to succeed, it must consciously confront two persistent obstacles. The first is nostalgia, which idealizes a centralized and unitary past while overlooking its exclusions. The second is victimhood, which frames politics primarily through grievance and resentment, limiting the space for forward looking compromise. Both narratives, when absolutized, trap political debate in binary positions.

By creating space for recognition, listening, and mutual accountability, the National Dialogue can move Ethiopian politics away from these extremes. In doing so, it can help establish consensual legitimacy rooted in shared meaning rather than domination or denial.

10.10 Conclusions: Resolving the Diversity Dilemma

Ethiopia's diversity is not the source of its instability. On the contrary, it is one of the country's greatest assets. However, in the absence of shared narratives and mutual recognition, diversity has become politicized and fragile. Federalism, whether ethnic or geographic, cannot by itself resolve governance challenges without democratic practice, inclusive institutions, and shared meaning.

The path forward lies in deliberate consensus building that constructs an inclusive national identity. Strengthening the covenantal foundation of federalism through mutual commitment, recognition, and responsibility can transform Ethiopia's diversity dilemma into an opportunity for renewal. Shared narratives provide the connective tissue that allows institutions to function, trust to grow, and citizenship to deepen.

10.11 Call to Action

Ethiopia stands at a decisive crossroads. The National Dialogue must be used not as a procedural exercise, but as a transformative process that converts multiplicity into harmony and fragmentation into cohesion.

This requires a credible and inclusive dialogue process, a willingness to acknowledge historical grievances while elevating common ground, and leadership that prioritizes shared futures over narrow political interests. By harmonizing its many voices within a shared civic narrative, Ethiopia can turn chaos into chorus and lay durable foundations for stability, legitimacy, and effective governance.

10.12 Next Steps and Policy Implications

Translating the insights of the National Conference and the National Dialogue into lasting impact requires deliberate policy choices and institutional follow through. Shared narratives must move from discussion into practice, shaping how governance is designed, how institutions operate, and how citizens experience the state. The following policy directions outline practical next steps.

1. Embed shared narrative principles into National Dialogue outcomes - Outcomes of the National Dialogue should explicitly reflect agreed narrative principles such as unity in diversity, mutual recognition, and shared responsibility. These principles should be articulated in final reports, consensus statements, and implementation frameworks so that dialogue results are not treated as isolated recommendations, but as part of a coherent national story guiding reform.

2. Align governance reforms with narrative legitimacy and inclusion - Governance reforms should be assessed not only for technical efficiency, but also for their narrative impact. Policies, laws, and institutional arrangements must reinforce inclusion, fairness, and belonging across communities. Reforms that ignore narrative legitimacy risk deepening mistrust even when they are administratively sound.

3. Integrate shared history and civic identity into education and media - Education curricula and media programming should consciously promote balanced historical understanding and civic identity alongside cultural diversity. This includes revising textbooks, supporting public history initiatives, and encouraging media content that connects diverse experiences within a common national framework. Such integration is essential for shaping long-term attitudes, especially among younger generations.

4. Strengthen federalism through democratic practice and mutual recognition - Federalism should be reinforced through democratic norms, respect for diversity, and recognition of shared citizenship. Moving beyond zero-sum identity politics requires institutional practices that encourage cooperation between federal and regional levels, protect minority rights, and affirm the legitimacy of multiple identities within one state.

5. Institutionalize dialogue outcomes to sustain consensus over time - Finally, dialogue outcomes must be anchored in durable institutions. This includes establishing clear mandates for follow up, creating coordination mechanisms across government and society, and ensuring regular review and adaptation. Institutionalizing consensus helps prevent reversals driven by political cycles and ensures that shared narratives remain living frameworks rather than symbolic declarations.

Together, these steps provide a practical pathway for converting shared understanding into sustained legitimacy, effective governance, and long-term national cohesion.

11 Panel Discussions

11.1 Panel Discussions I

Discussant: Ambassador Dina Mufti

The discussant expressed strong appreciation to all presenters, noting that the papers were highly relevant to Ethiopia's current moment and addressed issues of immediate national importance. The presentations were described as timely, analytically rigorous, and deeply engaging, particularly in their treatment of governance, identity, and national narratives.

The discussion session itself was acknowledged as substantive and reflective, moving beyond surface level commentary to engage with underlying structural and historical questions. Participants demonstrated a shared concern for Ethiopia's long term stability and emphasized that narrative fragmentation is not a peripheral issue but a central governance challenge. Overall, the exchange was characterized by intellectual seriousness and a clear sense of urgency.

11.1.1 Key Discussion Points and Observations

11.1.1.1 Balance Between Internal and External Factors

Participants observed that much of the discussion understandably focused on internal political, historical, and institutional factors shaping Ethiopia's current challenges. However, a critical question was raised regarding the relative absence of sustained attention to external influences.

Several participants emphasized that Ethiopia's trajectory cannot be fully understood without considering broader global dynamics. These include colonial and post colonial global structures that shaped regional borders, economic dependency patterns, and international norms. The role of major powers and shifting geopolitical interests was also highlighted, particularly in relation to security, aid, investment, and diplomatic pressure.

In addition, participants noted that international media narratives, global policy frameworks, and external economic constraints often shape how Ethiopia is perceived and how it perceives itself. These external narratives can amplify internal divisions or distort domestic reform efforts.

The discussion concluded that a credible shared national narrative must integrate both internal dynamics and external contexts. Ignoring global forces risks producing an incomplete and inward looking story that fails to explain Ethiopia's vulnerabilities, constraints, and strategic choices.

11.1.1.2 Modern Ethiopia and Development Narratives

There was strong agreement that any shared national narrative must be forward looking and grounded in development. Participants stressed that narratives centered exclusively on historical grievance or idealized past unity are insufficient for addressing present and future challenges.

Development was repeatedly identified as a unifying concern across regions, identities, and political positions. Economic opportunity, state capacity, infrastructure, education, and service delivery were seen as concrete reference points that can anchor a shared narrative in lived experience.

Participants argued that a modern national narrative should project Ethiopia as a country in transition, not frozen in historical conflict. Such a narrative should highlight resilience, collective effort, and the capacity to build institutions that deliver tangible improvement in people's lives.

A key question emerged repeatedly in the discussion. What kind of country is Ethiopia becoming. The consensus was that a shared narrative should help citizens locate themselves within a forward moving national project rather than competing memories of the past.

11.1.1.3 Media, Power, and the National Agenda

Participants highlighted the decisive role of media in shaping national priorities and public understanding. Media was described as a powerful actor that determines which issues receive attention, how events are framed, and whose voices are amplified or marginalized.

It was noted that national and local media often operate with different logics and incentives. Local media may reflect immediate community concerns, while national outlets may focus on elite political debates. Without coordination, these parallel discourses can reinforce fragmentation and deepen misunderstanding across regions and groups.

The discussion emphasized that media does not merely reflect reality but actively constructs it. In a polarized environment, uncoordinated media narratives can intensify mistrust and transform political disagreement into identity based conflict.

There was broad agreement that media should be consciously aligned with goals of national cohesion and dialogue. At the same time, participants stressed that this alignment must not compromise journalistic independence, professional ethics, or freedom of expression. The challenge is not control, but coherence grounded in responsibility.

11.1.1.4 Youth Centered Media and Capacity Building

The discussion underscored the central role of youth in shaping Ethiopia's narrative future. Participants noted that young people are not only the largest consumers of media but also increasingly its producers, particularly through digital platforms and social media.

Because youth often encounter national narratives first through online spaces, they are especially vulnerable to misinformation, emotional framing, and polarized content. At the same time, they represent a major opportunity for building inclusive and future oriented narratives.

Participants stressed the importance of investing in youth centered media training that emphasizes ethical reporting, fact checking, historical awareness, and civic responsibility. Empowering young communicators with these skills was seen as essential for reducing polarization and promoting constructive public debate.

It was also emphasized that all forms of media should be consciously people centered and responsive to youth perspectives, aspirations, and concerns. Media literacy for young audiences was identified as a long term safeguard against manipulation and narrative extremism.

The discussion concluded that strengthening youth capacity in media and communication is not only an educational priority but a strategic investment in national cohesion and democratic resilience.

11.1.2 Reflections by Dr. Aregawi Berehe

Dr. Aregawi emphasized that the gathering should not be seen as an endpoint, but as a beginning. He posed a direct and practical question to participants. What do we take forward from Jimma.

He stressed that ideas discussed during the conference must now move into action, institutions, and everyday practice. Without this transition, even the most compelling analysis risks remaining symbolic.

He also cautioned against elite only or overly abstract approaches. Inclusivity, local relevance, and practical grounding were highlighted as essential conditions for success. According to his intervention, a Shared National Narrative must be lived, tested, and adapted within communities, not only articulated in conferences or policy documents.

11.1.2.1 Ideas Led Development and Governance

A recurring theme across the discussion was that societies are ultimately led by ideas, not by force alone. Participants argued that sustainable governance depends on settled ideas that provide orientation and direction, rather than endless argument over fundamentals.

Knowledge was repeatedly emphasized as a national asset. Reading, research, historical understanding, and intellectual openness were seen as prerequisites for collective progress. Several participants noted that slogans and simplified narratives may mobilize temporarily, but they cannot sustain development or legitimacy.

A Shared National Narrative, therefore, requires intellectual seriousness. Ethiopia must know itself deeply, historically, socially, and institutionally, in order to move forward together with confidence and purpose.

11.1.2.2 Historical Foundations and Constitutional Continuities

Participants reflected on Axum as a foundational reference point in Ethiopian history, emphasizing that early Ethiopian statehood included systems of governance, law, and political order long before the modern era.

Specific reference was made to the use of Ge'ez as a constitutional and administrative language, the existence of early systems of law, translation, and codification, and the role of foundational texts and norms in organizing authority and legitimacy.

The discussion emphasized that Ethiopia's constitutional history did not begin with modern constitutions. Recognizing historical continuities was seen as essential for constructing a credible national narrative that

neither romanticizes the past nor dismisses it. History, when treated with care and evidence, can provide depth and legitimacy to contemporary governance debates.

The discussion reinforced that a Shared National Narrative must be development oriented and future focused, grounded in both internal realities and global context, mediated responsibly through ethical media, and centered on youth, inclusivity, and practical outcomes.

Most importantly, participants agreed that ideas must translate into institutions and action. Jimma was widely acknowledged as a meaningful starting point. However, the real test lies in whether insights generated here are carried forward into governance practice, education, media, and national dialogue processes.

11.1.3 Autonomy, Federalism, and Governance Design – Dr Dagnachew

Drawing on remarks attributed to Dr Dagnachew, the discussion clarified that autonomy in Ethiopia has never been absolute. Historically, regions and local authorities exercised relative autonomy that was shaped by context, negotiation, and power balance rather than rigid constitutional formulas. Authority shifted over time depending on political strength, security conditions, and economic relations, creating a layered governance tradition rather than a fixed model.

This historical perspective challenges simplified readings of federalism as either complete decentralization or total central control. It suggests that Ethiopian governance has long operated through accommodation and adjustment, even when formal structures appeared centralized. Participants emphasized that understanding this tradition is essential for contemporary debates, as it shows that flexibility and negotiation are not new or foreign to the Ethiopian political experience.

A central question emerged regarding whether constructing a Shared National Narrative requires revisiting the federal arrangement itself. The dominant view was that structural reform should not be the starting point. Participants argued that many of the current tensions arise from how federalism is narrated, practiced, and politicized rather than from its constitutional design alone. Narratives that frame federalism as either national betrayal or total liberation deepen polarization and block constructive engagement.

The discussion concluded that sustained and inclusive dialogue must precede any structural conclusions. Without a shared understanding of history, identity, and purpose, institutional redesign risks reproducing conflict rather than resolving it. Narrative clarification was therefore seen as a prerequisite for meaningful governance reform.

11.1.3.1 Northern-Centered Narratives and Epistemological Bias

Participants critically examined the long standing dominance of northern centered perspectives in Ethiopian historiography. Much of the written historical record has been shaped by sources, languages, and institutions rooted in northern regions, which has influenced how national history is framed and taught. As a result, experiences, memories, and knowledge from other regions have often been underrepresented or treated as secondary.

This imbalance has produced disputes not only over facts but over legitimacy itself. Certain narratives and sources were dismissed or contested not because they lacked substance, but because they did not fit established epistemological hierarchies. Participants noted that this has created deep mistrust toward academic and official histories among communities who feel excluded from the production of national knowledge.

The discussion expanded this concern into a broader reflection on narrative as an epistemological issue. Questions were raised about who defines what counts as knowledge, which sources are validated, and how power shapes historical interpretation. Participants stressed that narrative construction is never neutral. It reflects institutional authority, access to education, control over archives, and dominance in public discourse.

The group agreed that a credible Shared National Narrative must address these epistemological imbalances directly. This requires widening the range of accepted sources, including oral histories and local memories, and applying shared standards of evidence rather than inherited hierarchies of knowledge. Without this shift, narrative disputes will persist regardless of political reforms.

11.1.3.2 Historicization, Elites, and Fragmentation

A key concern raised during the discussion was the role of elite driven historicization in fragmenting national narratives. Participants observed that history is often mobilized by political, academic, or media elites to advance specific agendas. These narratives are frequently complex, abstract, and detached from everyday experience, making them inaccessible or alienating to the wider public.

This process has contributed to the proliferation of scattered and competing narratives, each claiming historical legitimacy while speaking to narrow constituencies. Instead of fostering shared understanding, elite discourse often deepens division by framing history as a contest between fixed camps of victims and perpetrators. Participants noted that this dynamic widens the gap between elite debate and popular understanding, weakening social cohesion.

Critical questions were raised about who creates dominant narratives and whose interests they serve. Participants emphasized that narratives are not only about the past but about power in the present. They shape claims to authority, entitlement, and moral superiority. When narrative construction is monopolized by elites, it risks becoming a tool of exclusion rather than a bridge for coexistence.

The discussion concluded that breaking this pattern requires democratizing narrative production. Ordinary citizens must see their lived experiences reflected in the national story, not only elite interpretations. A Shared National Narrative must therefore be grounded in everyday life, common struggles, and shared aspirations, rather than being imposed from above. Without this shift, narrative fragmentation will continue to undermine national cohesion and governance legitimacy.

11.1.4 Identity, Definition, and Democracy Dr Dereje Gerefa

Dr Dereje Gerefa framed the discussion by raising fundamental questions about Ethiopian identity. He asked how Ethiopian identity is defined, who has the authority to define it, and at what point identity becomes sufficiently settled to sustain a democratic system. These questions were treated not as abstract concerns but as core political issues shaping the country's stability.

Participants emphasized that identity in Ethiopia has remained fluid and contested across historical periods. Competing interpretations rooted in ethnicity, language, territory, and statehood continue to coexist without a widely accepted unifying framework. As a result, identity is often defined through political power rather than through inclusive public consensus.

The discussion highlighted that when identity remains unresolved, democratic institutions struggle to gain legitimacy. Elections, constitutions, and laws are interpreted through identity lenses, leading groups to accept outcomes only when they favor their own narratives. This dynamic weakens trust in democratic processes and encourages zero sum politics.

There was strong agreement that diversity itself is not the source of democratic weakness. Instead, the problem lies in the absence of an agreed civic identity that accommodates diversity while providing a shared sense of belonging. Without this foundation, democracy becomes fragile, polarization deepens, and legitimacy crises recur as different groups challenge the authority of the state and its institutions.

Participants concluded that democracy requires a minimum level of identity settlement. This does not mean eliminating differences, but rather establishing a broadly accepted framework in which political competition occurs within shared rules and mutual recognition.

11.1.4.1 Learning from Failure and the Question of Narrative

Participants stressed that meaningful political progress requires honest engagement with past failures, particularly missed opportunities since 1991. These failures were seen not only in policy outcomes but also in the inability to build inclusive institutions and shared national purpose.

A central question shaped the discussion on narrative. Participants asked what narrative means in the Ethiopian context and whether it should be grounded primarily in contested memories or in shared national goals. Many argued that the dominance of grievance based historical narratives has limited the country's ability to imagine a common future.

It was emphasized that national narratives should not erase history or silence past injustices. However, they should move beyond exclusive victimhood and selective memory. A constructive narrative should help society learn from past mistakes while directing attention toward collective aspirations such as peace, development, justice, and democratic governance.

Participants argued that future oriented narratives are essential for political renewal. When national goals guide how history is interpreted, history becomes a source of lessons rather than a tool for division. Such narratives can support reconciliation by acknowledging pain while preventing it from defining permanent political identities.

The discussion concluded that Ethiopia needs a shared narrative that links past experience with future ambition. Without this, learning from failure remains fragmented, and politics continues to recycle unresolved conflicts rather than transforming them into foundations for democratic growth.

11.1.5 Going Forward Toward a Shared National Narrative - Dr Samir

Dr Samir emphasized that further structured meetings are required to crystallize a Shared National Narrative. This process cannot be achieved in a single forum. It requires sustained engagement, conceptual clarity, and institutional follow-through.

The discussion identified the need to work through two interconnected but distinct discourses.

The first is the performative discourse. This concerns the active creation and building of a Shared National Narrative. It involves decisions about what is emphasized, how history is narrated, and how shared meaning is produced through public action, symbols, education, and dialogue. At this level, historisization is not passive recounting of the past, but a value driven process that connects history to present purpose and future direction.

The second is the existing narrative and strategic discourse. This focuses on methodology and diagnosis. It asks what narratives currently dominate public space, how they are produced, who controls them, and how they shape political behavior. This discourse is analytical and strategic. It is concerned with what should be done next, how narratives can be corrected, coordinated, or reframed, and what institutional mechanisms are required.

A central question raised was what an inclusive narrative actually looks like in practice. Inclusivity was not understood as symbolic recognition alone, but as grounded implementation. Participants stressed that narratives must be embedded in lived realities. This includes fairness in governance, democratic participation, economic opportunity, political representation, and reciprocal relationships between state and citizens. Without such grounding, narratives remain rhetorical and lack credibility.

The discussion also addressed how narratives can be implemented structurally. This includes integration into education systems, media practice, policy communication, and institutional norms. Narrative must be reflected in how the state acts, not only in what it says.

Participants asked what must be done to make the Shared National Narrative primary rather than secondary. It was argued that narrative must be treated as a core element of nation building, not as an afterthought. This requires political commitment, intellectual leadership, and institutional ownership.

The concept of Shared National Narrative as thick nation building was discussed. Thick nation building refers to deep shared meaning, moral commitment, and civic bonds that go beyond formal institutions. Participants debated whether this is possible in Ethiopia's context. While challenging, it was seen as necessary for long term stability and legitimacy.

At the same time, the need for thin level recommendations was emphasized. These include practical and achievable steps that can be implemented in the short to medium term. Examples include agreed narrative principles, methodological guidelines for history and media, coordinated state communication, and pilot programs linking dialogue outcomes to education and policy.

The conclusion was that thick nation building and thin recommendations are not alternatives. Thin steps are required to gradually build thick shared meaning. Both must proceed together if a Shared National Narrative is to become real, credible, and sustainable.

11.1.6 Monopoly of Voice and Narrative Power – Munira Abdulmenan

Munira Abdulmenan raised serious concerns about the concentration of narrative power, particularly in relation to media platforms and political authority. Participants noted that when a small group controls access to public discourse, certain voices are amplified while others are excluded. This creates an imbalance in how national conversations are shaped and understood.

The discussion emphasized that monopoly of voice weakens democratic culture. When alternative perspectives are silenced or delegitimized, citizens lose trust in public institutions and media credibility declines. This environment encourages polarization, as groups retreat into isolated spaces where only familiar narratives are reinforced.

Participants stressed that a shared national narrative should not be confused with a single dominant voice. Unity does not require uniformity. Instead, a shared civic frame should provide common democratic principles within which diverse experiences, opinions, and identities can be expressed openly and safely.

The group agreed that protecting narrative plurality is essential for democracy. Media freedom, inclusive public debate, and equal access to platforms were identified as necessary conditions for preventing narrative domination and ensuring that national dialogue reflects the full range of societal voices.

11.1.6.1 Religion, History, and Knowledge Production

Participants emphasized the importance of clear boundaries between faith, ideology, and scholarly inquiry in the study of religion and history. While religion plays a central role in social and cultural life, its study must adhere to academic standards when presented as historical knowledge.

There was broad agreement that faith based or ideological claims should not replace historical method. History requires evidence, critical analysis, and engagement with multiple sources. When belief systems are presented as unquestioned historical truth, knowledge production becomes politicized and credibility is undermined.

Participants stressed that historians have a professional responsibility to uphold scholarly rigor, even in sensitive areas involving religion and identity. This includes acknowledging complexity, contradiction, and uncertainty rather than producing simplified or celebratory accounts.

The discussion concluded that credible knowledge production strengthens social trust. When history is written transparently and responsibly, it provides a foundation for informed dialogue rather than becoming a tool for political mobilization or exclusion.

11.1.6.2 Questions, Challenges, and Ongoing Struggles

The discussion identified several unresolved challenges that continue to shape Ethiopia's political and intellectual landscape. Persistent struggles over who owns national narratives remain a central issue. Competing groups continue to claim authority over history, identity, and meaning.

Participants highlighted ongoing tensions between grievance based narratives and integrative narratives. While grievances reflect real experiences of exclusion and injustice, their dominance can hinder collective problem solving when they become the sole basis for political identity.

Weak democratic culture was also identified as a major challenge. The absence of broad consensus on rules of engagement, institutional legitimacy, and shared civic values limits the ability to manage disagreement constructively.

Participants agreed that these narrative struggles are not merely intellectual debates. They reflect deeper political and institutional deficits, including fragile institutions, uneven access to power, and limited democratic practice. Addressing narrative conflict therefore requires political reform, institutional strengthening, and sustained civic engagement, not only changes in language or interpretation.

11.1.7 Responses and Clarifications

In response to questions raised during the discussion, several important clarifications were made to correct common oversimplifications in historical interpretation. Participants emphasized that Ethiopian history should not be understood only through the lens of harm, domination, or grievance. Alongside episodes of violence and exclusion, the country's past also reflects resilience, coexistence among communities, and significant political and cultural achievements.

The Battle of Adwa was discussed as a key example of how history can be narrated more fully and responsibly. Participants noted that the Italian campaign involved considerable naval and logistical capacity, underscoring that the defeat was not minor or accidental. Italy's loss had consequences beyond Ethiopia, influencing regional power dynamics and contributing to global debates on colonialism and resistance.

At the same time, participants agreed that Adwa should be revisited through a more inclusive historical lens. The victory should not be attributed to a single group or region. Contributions from multiple regions and communities, including Oromia, were highlighted as essential to a truthful and unifying account. An inclusive narration of Adwa was seen as an opportunity to strengthen shared pride while respecting historical complexity.

11.1.7.1 Shared National Narrative and the Federal Question

The discussion returned to a central concern regarding the relationship between a Shared National Narrative and the federal system. Participants asked whether the idea of a shared national narrative is incompatible with federalism or whether it threatens regional autonomy and identity.

The prevailing response was that a shared narrative does not negate federalism. Rather, it can strengthen it. Federal arrangements require a minimum level of shared civic meaning to function effectively. Without common values, mutual recognition, and agreement on democratic rules, federal systems risk becoming arenas of permanent contestation.

Participants argued that a Shared National Narrative should operate at the civic and moral level, not as a cultural or historical uniformity. It should provide a framework that affirms diversity while reinforcing commitment to the state, democratic principles, and peaceful political competition. In this sense, a

shared narrative was seen as a stabilizing foundation within which federalism can operate more sustainably.

11.1.7.2 Historical Symbols and Shared Memory

Participants reflected on Adwa as one of the most powerful shared symbols in Ethiopian history. It was described as a moment that embodied courage, collective sacrifice, and African resistance to colonial domination. Beyond its military significance, Adwa was seen as a moral and symbolic resource that can anchor a shared national memory when narrated with accuracy and inclusiveness.

The discussion emphasized that Adwa should not be reduced to triumphalism or selective ownership. Its meaning lies in collective mobilization across regions, cultures, and social groups. When narrated inclusively, Adwa has the potential to reinforce shared dignity and mutual recognition rather than deepen division.

Comparative references were made to Korea and other post conflict societies to illustrate how nations have transformed traumatic histories into sources of forward looking national purpose. Participants noted that successful shared memory work does not deny suffering, but reframes it in ways that support reconciliation, resilience, and collective aspiration.

There was agreement that shared memory must move beyond selective celebration or grievance. When history is used only to glorify or accuse, it limits its unifying potential. A balanced and evidence based approach to memory was seen as essential for building a future oriented national narrative.

11.1.7.3 Religion, Contract, and the Limits of State Control

Religion was discussed not merely as a personal belief system, but as a form of social contract that shapes values, identity, and moral authority. Participants emphasized that religious life operates at family, community, and societal levels, and cannot be treated as a private matter alone.

It was widely agreed that the state cannot and should not attempt to fully contain or manage religion. Excessive state control risks undermining religious freedom and generating resistance. Instead, the proper role of the state is to guarantee equality, freedom of belief, and peaceful coexistence, while preventing exclusion, discrimination, or domination by any religious group.

Participants highlighted that legitimacy is often formed long before it reaches national institutions. Families, religious communities, and local networks shape how citizens understand authority, justice, and belonging. National narratives that ignore these moral and social foundations were seen as abstract and disconnected from lived reality.

The discussion concluded that sustainable legitimacy requires respectful engagement with religious institutions and traditions, without politicizing faith or allowing it to override constitutional principles.

11.1.7.4 Neutral State, Diversity, and Comparative Lessons

The concept of a neutral state was examined critically. Participants agreed that neutrality does not mean the absence of values or identity. Rather, it refers to equal respect and protection for diverse groups within a shared political framework.

Kenya was cited as a comparative example where state neutrality has been used to manage ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. While the Kenyan experience has had mixed outcomes, it was considered instructive in showing both the possibilities and limits of neutrality in deeply plural societies.

Language and culture were identified as central elements of regional identity and belonging. Participants stressed that recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity is essential for dignity and inclusion. However, such recognition does not undermine national cohesion when embedded within a shared civic narrative that emphasizes common citizenship and equal rights.

The discussion emphasized that diversity becomes a strength when institutions are perceived as fair and inclusive. Without a shared civic framework, however, diversity can become politicized and divisive.

11.1.7.5 Media, Legitimacy, and Narrative Power

Media was repeatedly highlighted as a decisive force in shaping political legitimacy and public trust. Participants cautioned against viewing new media as a solution in itself. Digital platforms often reproduce existing inequalities and amplify polarization rather than encouraging dialogue.

It was argued that media monopoly concentrates narrative power and leads to dominance of opinion, marginalizing alternative perspectives. At the same time, unregulated pluralism can result in fragmentation, misinformation, and parallel realities that undermine shared understanding.

Participants agreed that what is required is balanced, ethical, and dialogic media practice. Media institutions should provide space for diverse voices while adhering to professional standards of accuracy, responsibility, and fairness.

Legitimacy, the discussion concluded, is deeply influenced by how narratives are framed, repeated, and contested in the media space. When media ecosystems encourage reflection and dialogue, they strengthen democratic culture. When they promote exclusion or sensationalism, they erode trust and deepen division.

11.1.7.6 Narrative Direction, Pluralism, and Epistemology

In remarks attributed to Dr Dereje, participants emphasized that narrative must be directional in two senses. It must look backward to acknowledge historical experience, responsibility, and loss. At the same time, it must look forward to guide collective action, political choice, and national purpose. A narrative that only looks backward risks trapping society in grievance, while one that ignores history lacks legitimacy.

There was strong agreement that monopoly of narrative produces domination by silencing alternative voices and fixing meaning through power. At the opposite extreme, total relativism was seen as equally

damaging. When all interpretations are treated as equally valid, shared understanding becomes impossible and collective decision making is paralyzed.

Participants argued that Ethiopia requires plural but disciplined discourse. Pluralism should allow multiple perspectives, memories, and interpretations to coexist. Discipline requires shared standards of evidence, method, and ethical responsibility. Without this balance, narrative either hardens into ideology or dissolves into incoherence.

The concept of narrative epistemology emerged as a central theme. Participants stressed that history is a form of knowledge production and must follow scholarly method, rely on evidence, and remain open to revision. Selective or ideological history weakens national understanding and undermines trust, while rigorous historical inquiry supports learning, dialogue, and reconciliation.

11.1.7.7 Identity, External Factors, and State Formation

Participants discussed Ethiopian state formation as a process shaped by conflict, negotiation, and interaction over time. This was not seen as unique. Many modern states, including Germany and Italy, were also formed through war and consolidation. The key difference, participants argued, lies not in the presence of conflict, but in how post conflict processes are managed and institutions are built.

External interventions were identified as major drivers of conflict across Africa, including in Ethiopia. Colonial legacies, regional geopolitics, and global power competition have all influenced internal dynamics. However, participants emphasized that external factors alone cannot explain persistent instability.

Internal failures of inclusiveness, equality, and justice were acknowledged as equally significant. When political systems exclude certain groups or distribute power unevenly, grievances deepen and become vulnerable to manipulation. Participants stressed that sustainable state formation requires confronting both external pressures and internal shortcomings.

Across the discussion, several core values were repeatedly emphasized as essential foundations for national renewal. These included inclusiveness, equality, justice, peace and reconciliation, and a clear orientation toward the future rather than perpetual conflict over the past.

11.1.7.8 Democracy, Civilization, and Universal Values

Democracy was described as universal in aspiration but contextual in practice. Participants rejected the idea that democracy belongs to a single civilization or cultural tradition. Forms of collective decision making, accountability, and rule based governance were noted to exist across societies, including within Ethiopian historical experience.

The discussion challenged civilizational hierarchies that portray some cultures as inherently democratic and others as incompatible with democratic norms. Participants argued that such views obscure local traditions of consultation, consensus, and shared authority.

Civilization itself was described as plural rather than singular. Ethiopia's history contains multiple centers of culture, governance, and knowledge. Recognizing this plurality was seen as essential for building a national narrative that respects difference while affirming shared values.

Participants concluded that democracy in Ethiopia must be grounded in universal principles such as dignity, equality, and participation, while being shaped by local history and social realities. A plural understanding of civilization strengthens, rather than weakens, the case for an inclusive and legitimate democratic order.

11.1.7.9 Learning from History and Moving Forward

Participants reflected on historical shifts in other countries to illustrate how nations can deliberately redefine identity and purpose. Changes in China after 1870 and during the period between 1921 and 1949 were cited as examples of how deep crisis can be followed by intentional reform, institutional rebuilding, and narrative reorientation.

The discussion emphasized that transformation does not occur automatically after conflict. Peace must be intentionally designed, supported by clear structures, and protected by institutions. Dialogue was seen as necessary but insufficient on its own. Without translation into rules, policies, and accountable institutions, dialogue risks remaining symbolic.

Participants stressed that reconciliation must be future oriented. While acknowledging past harm is essential, reconciliation should aim to enable cooperation, trust, and shared goals rather than permanent moral division. Equality, justice, and fraternity were repeatedly emphasized as guiding principles that should shape how national narratives are constructed and communicated.

11.1.7.10 Knowledge Production and Methodology

Strong emphasis was placed on the role of methodology in shaping credible national narratives. Participants agreed that how knowledge is produced matters as much as what is produced. Evidence, critical reasoning, and transparency were identified as essential standards.

There was broad agreement that history departments alone cannot carry the burden of national narrative construction. National understanding requires bridges between disciplines including history, political science, sociology, law, theology, media studies, and cultural production. Artists, educators, religious leaders, and policy makers all have roles in translating ideas into practice.

Participants also stressed the importance of critically examining foreign narratives and external interpretations of Ethiopian history. While comparative learning is valuable, uncritical adoption of external frameworks risks distortion and dependency. National narratives should be informed by global scholarship but grounded in local evidence and lived experience.

11.1.7.11 Ethiopian Identity and Constitutional Ambiguity

A recurring concern throughout the discussion was the ambiguity surrounding Ethiopian identity, particularly as reflected in constitutional language and public discourse. Participants argued that unclear framing of identity weakens social cohesion and complicates democratic practice.

Ambiguity was seen to create space for competing and often conflicting interpretations of citizenship, belonging, and state authority. This undermines trust in institutions and makes political compromise more difficult.

Defining Ethiopian identity was not framed as an act of exclusion. Rather, participants viewed it as a necessary step toward shared understanding, stable governance, and democratic legitimacy. A clear and inclusive civic identity was seen as essential for managing diversity and sustaining federal and democratic arrangements.

11.1.7.12 Peace, Structure, and Comparative Experience

In remarks attributed to Dr Asefa Leake, participants emphasized that peace requires both lived experience and institutional structure. Peace cannot rely solely on goodwill or temporary agreements. It must be embedded in systems that manage conflict, distribute power fairly, and uphold justice.

Ethiopia's experience of repeated wars was contrasted with China's approach to managing diversity among its many ethnic groups. While acknowledging significant differences in political systems and context, participants noted that long term national transformation strategies played a role in reducing fragmentation and strengthening state capacity.

The key lesson drawn was that peace is sustained through deliberate design. Institutions, narratives, and development strategies must align around shared goals if conflict cycles are to be broken.

11.1.7.13 Cultural Heritage and Political Potential

Participants highlighted Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage as an underused resource for social cohesion and political imagination. Sites such as Abajifar Palace were referenced as examples of historical depth, local governance traditions, and cultural achievement.

It was emphasized that cultural heritage is not only symbolic. When narrated responsibly, it can strengthen pride, belonging, and mutual respect. Heritage can also serve as a bridge between local identities and national narratives, showing how diversity has historically contributed to shared political life.

Participants agreed that investing in heritage preservation, research, and inclusive storytelling can unlock social and political potential that remains largely untapped.

11.1.7.14 Key Conclusions from the Discussion

First, the discussion affirmed that narrative is a foundational epistemological, political, and democratic issue. It shapes how knowledge is produced, how power is exercised, and how political legitimacy is built. A shared national narrative is therefore central to democratic stability and cannot be treated as secondary or symbolic.

Second, Ethiopia's governance and legitimacy challenges are deeply linked to narrative fragmentation. Ambiguity around national identity weakens democratic practice and social cohesion, while elite monopoly over narrative undermines trust and inclusion. Diversity itself is not the problem. The absence of shared civic meaning is.

Third, history must be approached with humility, plurality, and strong respect for evidence. No single group can claim ownership of the past. History should be evidence based, inclusive, and future oriented, allowing acknowledgement of harm without locking politics into grievance or myth.

Fourth, a shared national narrative must be civic, inclusive, and revisable. It should coordinate diversity rather than suppress it, enabling coexistence without enforcing sameness. Inclusion depends on shared rules of interpretation and mutual recognition.

Fifth, media and communication were recognized as instruments of governance rather than neutral spaces. Media power directly shapes public trust, legitimacy, and political behavior. Ethical, plural, and responsible narrative practice is therefore essential.

Sixth, dialogue was identified as the primary mechanism for resolving narrative disputes. However, dialogue must lead to institutional structures, policy outcomes, and changes in practice. Suppression and exclusion deepen division, while dialogue without institutionalization remains ineffective.

Finally, federalism and democratic governance require shared meaning to function sustainably. Institutional design alone is insufficient without a common civic foundation. Peace, justice, and equality were affirmed as non negotiable foundations for any durable national narrative and political order.

11.2 Panel Discussion II

11.2.1 Discussion and Reflections Shared National Narrative, Governance, and Ethiopia's Diversity Dilemma

11.2.1.1 Overview of the Discussion Session

The discussion session brought together a diverse group of scholars, diplomats, military leaders, and practitioners to critically examine the role of a shared national narrative in addressing Ethiopia's governance, legitimacy, and cohesion challenges. Participants approached the topic from different professional and intellectual backgrounds, allowing for a wide range of perspectives on history, identity, federalism, media, and state building.

Despite these differences, there was broad agreement on a central diagnosis. Ethiopia's current crisis is not rooted in diversity itself. Diversity was repeatedly described as a historical reality and a potential strength. The core problem, participants argued, lies in the absence of a shared interpretive framework that can hold this diversity together within a common civic project.

Participants observed that competing understandings of the past, the state, and citizenship have hardened into parallel narratives that rarely intersect. This fragmentation has weakened the ability of citizens to see themselves as part of a shared political community. As a result, political disagreement often escalates into existential contestation rather than remaining within democratic bounds.

A strong convergence emerged around the insight that narrative fragmentation has become a structural governance problem. It affects political legitimacy by undermining trust in authority. It weakens policy coherence by preventing reforms from being understood as part of a shared national direction. It erodes

social trust by reinforcing suspicion across groups. It also limits state capacity by making coordination and collective sacrifice more difficult.

11.2.1.2 Narrative Vacuum as a Governance Challenge

Several contributors emphasized that Ethiopia is experiencing a narrative vacuum rather than merely competing narratives. This vacuum refers to the absence of a widely accepted story that explains what the Ethiopian state represents, how it came to be, and where it is going. In the absence of such a story, multiple partial narratives compete without a shared reference point.

This vacuum was described as manifesting in several ways. Conflicting interpretations of history coexist without agreed standards for evaluation. Identity claims are increasingly politicized and treated as zero sum. State messaging lacks coherence and consistency across institutions. Reform initiatives are often disconnected from public meaning, making them appear technocratic, imposed, or suspicious.

Participants stressed that governance cannot function effectively when citizens, institutions, and leaders operate with incompatible stories about the state itself. Laws, policies, and institutions depend on shared assumptions about authority, obligation, and collective purpose. When these assumptions differ fundamentally, even well designed reforms struggle to gain acceptance.

A recurring observation was that institutions alone cannot substitute for shared meaning. Constitutional provisions, federal arrangements, and administrative reforms remain fragile when they are not embedded in a credible national story. Such a story must explain why these arrangements exist, whose interests they serve, and what collective future they are intended to build.

Participants concluded that addressing Ethiopia's governance challenges requires filling the narrative vacuum with an inclusive, evidence based, and future oriented civic narrative. Without this foundation, political reform risks remaining shallow, contested, and vulnerable to reversal.

11.2.2 History, Memory, and the Problem of Historical Narrativization

11.2.2.1 Historicization and Fragmentation

Several discussants noted that selective historicization, understood as the practice of narrating the past through narrow political lenses, has contributed significantly to Ethiopia's current polarization. History has often been rewritten or reframed by political elites to serve immediate interests rather than long term understanding. This has frequently occurred without methodological rigor, plural sources, or openness to scholarly debate.

Participants identified this practice as a major driver of grievance politics, identity based mobilization, and deep intergenerational mistrust. When historical narratives are used to justify present day claims of entitlement or victimhood, they harden identities and reduce space for compromise. Younger generations inherit not only selective memories, but also unresolved accusations that shape political behavior.

There was strong agreement that history should be written by historians and grounded in evidence, method, and critical inquiry. Political actors may engage with history, but should not weaponize it. Participants emphasized that moral judgments about injustice or suffering must not be confused with

empirical claims about what happened, when, and how. Conflating these undermines both truth and reconciliation.

11.2.2.2 Memory and History

A strong consensus emerged around the need to clearly distinguish between memory and history, while recognizing that both are essential. Memory was described as carrying pain, pride, trauma, and identity. It reflects lived experience and emotional truth and must be treated with respect and dignity.

History, by contrast, was defined as a disciplined form of knowledge that requires verification, evidence, comparison, and contextual analysis. Its purpose is not to validate feelings, but to establish credible accounts of the past that can be debated and revised.

Participants agreed that ignoring memory produces alienation, as communities feel erased or disrespected. At the same time, ignoring history produces myth, which can become politically dangerous. A shared national narrative must institutionalize both. It should allow space for memory and dignity, while maintaining scholarly discipline and openness to correction.

11.2.3 Federalism, Identity, and the Diversity Question

11.2.3.1 Ethnically Informed Federalism and Its Limits

Participants acknowledged that ethnically informed federalism addressed real historical exclusion and enabled formal recognition of Ethiopia's diversity. It provided space for language rights, cultural expression, and regional self administration that had previously been denied.

At the same time, there was wide agreement that the model produced serious unintended consequences. Ethnicity became the dominant political identity, often overriding civic and class based affiliations. The territorialization of identity intensified boundary disputes and localized conflict. National political parties weakened as regional and ethnic loyalties took precedence. Political competition increasingly took on zero sum characteristics, replacing civic negotiation with existential struggle.

Crucially, discussants stressed that federalism failed not only because of design flaws or implementation gaps. It also failed because it was not accompanied by a shared national narrative capable of anchoring unity. In the absence of such a narrative, federal institutions became sites of contestation rather than cooperation.

11.2.3.2 Nation State and Multinational State Debate

The long standing debate over whether Ethiopia should be understood as a unitary nation state or a multinational state was repeatedly referenced. Participants agreed that this binary framing has limited analytical and political value.

The discussion moved toward a more substantive concern. The real challenge, participants argued, is not choosing between institutional models, but building a covenantal narrative that makes coexistence legitimate regardless of form. Such a narrative would define mutual obligations, shared values, and acceptable limits of political competition.

Participants emphasized that institutions cannot resolve identity conflict on their own. Without a shared sense of political community, any constitutional arrangement risks becoming fragile. A covenantal narrative was seen as essential for transforming diversity from a source of instability into a foundation for democratic coexistence.

11.2.4 Media, Power, and Narrative Authority

11.2.4.1 Media as a Narrative Arena

Media was widely recognized as a central arena in which national narratives are formed, contested, and amplified. Participants expressed serious concern about the growing concentration of narrative power in a limited number of outlets and platforms. Media monopolization of voice was seen as restricting debate and shaping public perception in ways that privilege certain interests over others.

Politicized storytelling was identified as a major problem. News and commentary often blur the line between reporting and advocacy, making it difficult for citizens to distinguish evidence from opinion. The rise of algorithm driven media systems was also highlighted as a factor that amplifies polarization by rewarding sensationalism and reinforcing echo chambers.

Participants noted that young people are particularly vulnerable in this environment. Exposure to emotionally charged and simplified narratives can contribute to radicalization, cynicism, or disengagement from democratic processes.

There was strong agreement that media neutrality alone is insufficient. Simply providing equal airtime does not address deeper issues of accuracy, responsibility, and intent. What is required is ethical, plural, and evidence based storytelling that is aligned with civic values rather than factional agendas. Media was seen not only as a reflector of society, but as a shaper of political culture and legitimacy.

11.2.4.2 Strategic Communication and Propaganda

Several contributors emphasized the need to clearly distinguish strategic communication from propaganda. Strategic communication was described as coordination rather than manipulation. Its purpose is to ensure that policies, reforms, and public messages are coherent, understandable, and grounded in shared national meaning.

Participants observed that the absence of narrative coordination across state institutions leads to mixed policy signals, public confusion, and loss of trust. Different branches of government often communicate in isolation or contradiction, undermining credibility at home and abroad.

This lack of coherence also creates diplomatic vulnerability. External actors interpret inconsistent messaging as weakness or division, reducing the state's ability to defend its interests.

A shared narrative framework was therefore seen as essential. Such a framework would allow the state to explain not only what it is doing, but why those actions matter within a common national journey. Participants stressed that transparency and accountability must remain central, so that strategic communication supports democratic legitimacy rather than eroding it.

11.2.5 External Actors and International Narratives

Participants noted that Ethiopia's narrative fragmentation has significant external consequences. Inconsistent domestic narratives weaken diplomatic credibility and make it easier for external actors to impose their own frames and interpretations. This reduces the country's ability to shape international understanding of its history, politics, and priorities.

Comparative examples from Germany, Japan, China, and India were cited to illustrate how coherent national narratives enhance international influence, even in societies marked by deep diversity and historical trauma. In these cases, internal consensus around national purpose has strengthened diplomatic positioning and long term strategic planning.

A recurring insight emerged from the discussion. A country that cannot explain itself to its own citizens cannot explain itself to the world. Participants concluded that internal narrative coherence is not only a domestic governance issue, but a prerequisite for effective diplomacy and international engagement.

11.2.6 Inclusivity, Justice, and the Future Orientation of Narratives

11.2.6.1 Beyond Guilt and Nostalgia

Participants warned against two opposing but equally limiting narrative traps. The first is nostalgia, which idealizes a centralized past and presents it as a lost order to be restored. Such narratives often ignore historical exclusion and silence alternative experiences, making them incompatible with plural society.

The second trap is victimhood, in which politics becomes permanently anchored in grievance and injury. While acknowledging harm and injustice is necessary, freezing political identity in victimhood can prevent reconciliation and reduce politics to moral accusation rather than collective problem solving.

Participants agreed that neither nostalgia nor victimhood provides a sustainable foundation for coexistence. A shared national narrative must be capable of acknowledging harm, injustice, and responsibility without creating permanent enemies or fixed hierarchies of suffering. Narrative should open space for repair and cooperation rather than endless moral contestation.

11.2.6.2 Future Oriented Justice

Justice was framed not only as the correction of past wrongs, but as the prevention of their repetition. Participants emphasized that justice must be forward looking, aimed at building institutions and norms that reduce the likelihood of renewed exclusion, violence, or domination.

Equality, dignity, and fraternity were repeatedly cited as foundational commitments. These values were seen as enabling society to hold different interpretations of history while remaining united in political life. Disagreement over the past need not undermine shared commitment to equal citizenship and mutual respect.

Participants concluded that future oriented justice allows memory and accountability to coexist with reconciliation. When justice is framed in this way, narratives can support inclusion and stability rather than deepen division.

11.2.7 National Dialogue as a Narrative Institution

The National Dialogue was widely viewed as a historic opportunity to address Ethiopia's deep political and social divisions. Participants emphasized, however, that dialogue should not be treated as a one time event or a purely procedural exercise. Without narrative integration, dialogue risks producing reports and recommendations that lack lasting impact.

To be transformative, the dialogue must generate shared interpretive reference points. These include agreed ways of understanding history, identity, citizenship, and the purpose of the state. Such reference points allow disagreement to occur within a common framework rather than across incompatible worldviews.

Participants stressed that the outcomes of the dialogue must be translated into education curricula, media practice, and governance norms. If dialogue remains confined to elite forums, its legitimacy and reach will be limited. Institutionalization was seen as essential. This means embedding dialogue outcomes in laws, policies, and public institutions so that they shape everyday political life.

Process legitimacy was emphasized as equally important as content legitimacy. Transparency, inclusiveness, fairness, and public trust in how decisions are made were seen as prerequisites for acceptance of the results. A dialogue that is perceived as biased or closed cannot produce a shared narrative, regardless of the quality of its conclusions.

11.2.8 Converging Takeaways from the Discussion

Across diverse interventions and perspectives, several core insights converged.

First, Ethiopia's crisis was identified as fundamentally a crisis of meaning rather than a crisis of diversity. Diversity was seen as a given reality, while the absence of shared meaning was identified as the destabilizing factor.

Second, narrative fragmentation was recognized as a major source of weakened legitimacy, incoherent governance, and social distrust. Without a shared frame of interpretation, institutions struggle to function effectively.

Third, participants agreed that history must be evidence based, plural, and ethically framed. Respect for memory must coexist with scholarly discipline.

Fourth, federalism was seen as requiring a shared civic narrative to function sustainably. Institutional arrangements alone cannot manage diversity without shared political meaning.

Fifth, media and communication were recognized as instruments of governance rather than neutral spaces. How narratives are framed and circulated directly affects trust and legitimacy.

Sixth, a shared national narrative must be future oriented, inclusive, and open to revision. Fixing meaning permanently was seen as neither possible nor desirable.

Finally, participants concluded that dialogue must culminate in institutionalized narrative consensus. Conversation is necessary, but without translation into structures, norms, and practices, it cannot produce

11.2.9 Concluding Reflection

The discussion reaffirmed that a shared national narrative is neither a slogan nor a myth, and it cannot be imposed through authority or persuasion alone. It is best understood as infrastructure for coexistence. It functions as a public knowledge system that allows diverse peoples to inhabit a common political space with dignity, mutual recognition, and shared purpose.

Participants emphasized that such a narrative does not require uniform memory or identical interpretation of the past. Instead, it provides a shared framework within which disagreement can occur without threatening the political community itself. In this sense, narrative supports democratic life by setting the boundaries within which contestation remains legitimate.

A recurring metaphor captured the challenge facing Ethiopia. The task is not to silence voices, but to turn many voices into harmony. Harmony was understood not as sameness, but as coordinated diversity guided by shared values and civic commitments.

The path forward was described as deliberate, difficult, and unavoidable. Moving from competing narratives to a shared framework of meaning requires sustained dialogue, institutional commitment, and ethical leadership. Yet participants agreed that without this effort, peace, legitimacy, and development will remain fragile and reversible.

11.2.10Synthesized Discussion Insights - Conference Reflections on Narrative, Governance, and National Dialogue

The discussions following the formal presentations reinforced the central thesis of the conference. Ethiopia's governance crisis was consistently described as a crisis of narrative rather than merely a constitutional, ethnic, or institutional problem.

Participants emphasized that fragmented narratives distort historical understanding, turning selective memory into political weaponry. Identity becomes politicized when narrative boundaries replace civic ones, and this weakens both legitimacy and social trust. Institutions struggle to function when citizens and leaders lack a shared understanding of the state's purpose and moral foundation.

Across sessions, a common conclusion emerged. Addressing governance challenges requires more than legal reform or administrative restructuring. It requires rebuilding shared meaning through evidence-based history, inclusive dialogue, responsible media, and institutionalized narrative consensus.

Participants concluded that national dialogue, if properly designed and integrated, offers a rare opportunity to rebuild this shared meaning. However, success depends on translating dialogue into education, governance practice, and public communication. Narrative renewal was thus framed not as an intellectual exercise, but as a foundational task for Ethiopia's democratic future.

12 Session Three: Enabling Frameworks

Session Three focused on translating conceptual agreement into practical and actionable design questions through a series of structured breakout discussions. The session examined the concrete policy, institutional, and coordination mechanisms required to enable the future development and sustainability of a Shared National Narrative.

Participants explored the policy and legal reforms necessary to anchor narrative development within Ethiopia's governance architecture, emphasizing the need for clarity of mandates, coherence across sectors, and safeguards against politicization. Particular attention was given to the structural arrangements required for effective inter-ministerial and multi-sector coordination, recognizing that narrative stewardship cuts across peacebuilding, education, culture, media, and governance institutions.

The discussions also underscored the critical role of academia and cultural institutions as intellectual stewards responsible for ensuring historical rigor, methodological integrity, and inclusivity in narrative formation. Universities, research centers, museums, and cultural bodies were identified as essential spaces for evidence-based reflection, dialogue facilitation, and the cultivation of shared meaning across generations.

In addition, the session examined the responsibilities of media institutions in shaping a balanced, ethical, and fact-based public communication ecosystem. Participants highlighted the need to strengthen media professionalism, conflict-sensitive reporting, and public trust, while safeguarding freedom of expression and ensuring accountability.

Overall, Session Three provided a bridge between dialogue and implementation, identifying the enabling frameworks required to transform shared understanding into durable institutional practice.

12.1 Group 1 Report: Policy and Institutions - Creating the Right Policy and Institutional Foundation for a Shared National Narrative

12.1.1 Introduction

The development of a Shared National Narrative in Ethiopia is fundamentally a question of governance, policy coherence, and institutional design. While dialogue processes create space for engagement and recognition, narratives that endure are shaped, reinforced, and transmitted through formal institutions—laws, policies, education systems, media environments, and public administration practices.

Group 1 was tasked with examining the policy and institutional foundations required to enable the emergence, legitimacy, and sustainability of a Shared National Narrative. The group's deliberations were guided by the understanding that fragmented narratives, winner–loser historical framings, and weak institutional coordination have significantly undermined social trust, state legitimacy, and peacebuilding efforts.

The central guiding question for Group 1 was: **What policy and institutional reforms are required to develop and sustain a Shared National Narrative in Ethiopia?**

12.1.2 Key Issues Identified

Group discussions identified several interrelated structural and policy challenges that currently constrain shared narrative development.

12.1.2.1 Absence of Consensus-Based Narrative Construction

Narratives in Ethiopia have often emerged through political dominance, grievance articulation, or reaction to perceived exclusion. The absence of a consensus-based narrative framework has resulted in parallel and competing stories that lack mutual recognition. This has intensified polarization and limited the possibility of a shared civic identity.

12.1.2.2 Winner–Loser Historical Framing

Historical interpretation frequently relies on binaries of victor and victim. While acknowledging historical injustices is essential, framing national history exclusively as a contest between perpetrators and victims perpetuates resentment and undermines collective ownership of the past. Such narratives inhibit reconciliation and block forward-looking governance.

12.1.2.3 Weak Transmission of Peace and Civic Values

The education system—particularly at early and primary levels—does not sufficiently prioritize peace, unity, shared values, and civic responsibility. As a result, younger generations often inherit polarized narratives without exposure to integrative national values.

12.1.2.4 Fragile Institutional and Legal Environment

Civil society organizations, media institutions, and academic bodies operate within legal and policy environments that are often restrictive, ambiguous, or poorly aligned with peacebuilding and narrative stewardship. This limits their effectiveness as partners in shaping shared meaning.

12.1.3 Policy and Institutional Reform Priorities

Group 1 identified the following priority areas for reform:

12.1.3.1 Consensus-Based Narrative Development

Narratives must be intentionally developed on the basis of shared understanding and agreement, rather than imposed interpretations. A Shared National Narrative should emerge through negotiated meaning, reflecting Ethiopia's diversity while affirming collective ownership of the national project.

12.1.3.2 From Winner–Loser History to Shared History

Policy frameworks should promote **shared historical narratives** that:

- Recognize suffering across communities
- Acknowledge complexity and interaction
- Avoid zero-sum interpretations
  This shift is essential for transforming memory into a resource for unity rather than division.

12.1.3.3 Peace-Oriented Education Reform

Ethiopia's education system should be reorganized—starting from early childhood education—to systematically teach:

- Peace and non-violence
- Unity in diversity
- Shared civic values
- Constitutional literacy and citizenship

This requires curriculum reform, teacher training, and institutional accountability mechanisms.

12.1.3.4 Strengthening Civil Society Institutions

Civil society organizations should be recognized as strategic partners in peacebuilding and narrative development. This requires:

- Legal review and reform to expand civic space
- Financial and technical support
- Protection from politicization and undue restriction

12.1.4 Gaps in Existing Laws, Policies, and Mandates

12.1.4.1 Media Freedom and Responsibility Gap

While media freedom is constitutionally protected, current frameworks insufficiently define the boundary between freedom and responsibility. The absence of clear conflict-sensitive media standards allows misinformation, inflammatory narratives, and polarization to proliferate.

12.1.4.2 Higher Education Mandate Limitations

Universities are legally mandated to teach and conduct research, but their potential role as:

- Centers of peacebuilding
- Hubs for integrative narrative development
  is not sufficiently recognized, funded, or coordinated at the national level.

12.1.4.3 Post-Dialogue Institutional Reform Vacuum

Institutional creation and restructuring often occur without adequate alignment with outcomes of national dialogue processes. New institutions must be designed after and informed by consensus, and reflect Ethiopia's historical and social realities.

12.1.5 Alignment of Roles Across Key National Institutions

12.1.5.1 Peace, Reconciliation, and Transitional Justice

National reconciliation, transitional justice, and the dignified return of internally displaced persons are foundational to shared narrative development. Without addressing trauma and displacement, narratives lack moral credibility.

12.1.5.2 Government Communication Capacity

Government capacity in public relations and strategic communication remains limited. This weakens public trust and allows non-state actors to dominate narrative spaces. Strengthening state communication is essential for legitimacy.

12.1.5.3 Distinguishing Government from State

A clear distinction must be maintained between:

- The government of the day, and
- The permanent state system

Shared narratives must serve national continuity rather than partisan agendas.

12.1.6 Proposed Reform Directions

12.1.6.1 Forward-Looking Narrative Orientation

Ethiopia must move beyond exclusive focus on past victim–perpetrator narratives and invest in **collectively shaping the future**, recognizing that all communities have experienced harm and loss.

12.1.6.2 Economic-Centered Integrative Narrative

The Shared National Narrative should be economically anchored, emphasizing:

- Growth and productivity
- Shared prosperity
- Opportunity creation

Economic development is a powerful unifying force that transcends identity fragmentation.

12.1.6.3 Education and Language Policy Reform

Education policy should:

- Strengthen peace and unity education
- Give strategic emphasis to Arabic language capacity, including:
    - Training Arabic-speaking diplomats
    - Establishing Arabic-language media outlets

12.1.6.4 Digital Media Governance

A strong digital media law is required to:

- Address misinformation and incitement
- Balance freedom with accountability
- Consider mechanisms such as regional veto powers where appropriate

12.1.6.5 Rule of Law and Peace as Non-Negotiables

The rule of law must be applied consistently and impartially. Peace must prevail under all political options and circumstances.

12.1.7 Additional Institutional Design Recommendations

12.1.7.1 National Council of Elders

A nationally representative Council of Elders should be institutionalized to provide moral authority, mediation, and cultural legitimacy.

12.1.7.2 Review of Religious Institutions

The organization, mandate, and accountability of religious institutions should be reviewed to ensure alignment with peacebuilding and social cohesion.

12.1.7.3 Strategic Engagement with the Arab League

Ethiopia should actively pursue membership in the Arab League, recognizing its cultural, linguistic, historical, and geopolitical relevance.

12.1.8 Conclusion and Call to Action

Group 1 concludes that Ethiopia's challenge is not diversity, but the absence of coherent policy, legal, and institutional foundations capable of transforming diversity into shared purpose.

A Shared National Narrative requires:

- Consensus-based narrative construction
- Peace-oriented education
- Responsible and free media
- Strong civil society
- Rule of law and reconciliation
- An economic vision that unites

Group 1 calls upon policymakers, institutions, and stakeholders to treat narrative development as a core governance reform agenda, essential for peace, legitimacy, and sustainable national transformation.

Only through aligned policy, capable institutions, and shared values can Ethiopia move from fragmented memory toward a common future grounded in unity, dignity, and prosperity.

12.2 Group 2 Report - Coordination and Sequencing - Roles, Institutional Coordination, and Process Design for a Shared Narrative

12.2.1 Introduction

The development of a Shared National Narrative in Ethiopia requires more than agreement on ideas. It requires clear leadership, well-defined roles, strong coordination, and a carefully sequenced process. Without these elements, even well-intentioned dialogue outcomes risk fragmentation, duplication, or politicization.

Group 2 examined how different actors—government institutions, political actors, media, civil society, academia, and cultural institutions—should work together in a coordinated and orderly manner. The focus was on who should do what, when, and how, to ensure that the Shared National Narrative moves from discussion to sustained national practice.

The central question guiding the group's work was: **Who should do what, and in what order, to develop and institutionalize the Shared National Narrative?**

12.2.2 Key Actors and Their Roles

Group 2 identified five major groups of actors whose roles must be clearly defined and aligned to avoid confusion and conflict.

12.2.2.1 Government – Primarily Legislative Bodies

Legislative bodies at federal and regional levels play a foundational role. A Shared National Narrative cannot be sustained unless it is legally recognized and protected.

Key responsibilities include:

- Providing the legal basis for recognizing the Shared National Narrative as a national framework.
- Passing laws that require the integration of the narrative into:
    - Education policy
    - Governance practices
    - Public communication and symbolism
- Ensuring parliamentary oversight so that implementation remains inclusive, non-partisan, and accountable.

Legislative action gives the narrative legitimacy and continuity beyond changes in political leadership.

12.2.2.2 Media and Arts

Media and cultural institutions are essential because narratives live in stories, images, music, and everyday communication, not in policy documents.

Their role includes:

- Turning abstract national values into relatable stories and symbols.
- Producing films, music, theater, documentaries, and digital content that reflect shared experiences.
- Running public awareness campaigns that reinforce unity, peace, and shared purpose.
- Helping citizens emotionally connect to the narrative.

Without media and arts, the narrative remains elite-driven and fails to reach ordinary citizens.

12.2.2.3 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Including Religious Institutions

Civil society organizations ensure that the Shared National Narrative is **rooted in communities**, not imposed from above.

Their responsibilities include:

- Facilitating dialogue at community level.
- Ensuring inclusion of women, youth, elders, and marginalized groups.
- Translating national values into local realities.
- Religious institutions, in particular, help frame the narrative using ethical and spiritual language that resonates deeply with communities.

CSOs help transform the narrative into lived social practice.

12.2.2.4 Political Parties

Political parties shape public discourse and political behavior. Their role is critical in preventing narrative fragmentation.

Key responsibilities include:

- Integrating the Shared National Narrative into party platforms and political messaging.
- Avoiding the use of history and identity as tools for division.
- Committing to a shared national vision that transcends short-term electoral competition.

Without political discipline, narratives risk becoming tools of polarization rather than unity.

12.2.2.5 Elites and Academic Institutions

Academics, researchers, and intellectual leaders provide credibility, balance, and evidence-based guidance.

Their role includes:

- Conducting research on history, identity, and social cohesion.
- Documenting shared experiences and contested memories.
- Evaluating the impact of narrative initiatives.
- Offering constructive critique and refinement.

Universities and think tanks serve as spaces for reflection, learning, and dialogue.

12.2.3 Institutional Coordination Mechanisms

Effective coordination is essential to ensure coherence and consistency across sectors.

12.2.3.1 Inter-Ministerial and Cross-Sector Coordination

A formal coordination mechanism is needed to:

- Align policies and programs across ministries.
- Prevent duplication and contradictory messaging.
- Ensure efficient use of resources.

This coordination body should include representatives from key ministries and stakeholder institutions.

12.2.3.2 Ministry of Peace

The Ministry of Peace should serve as the central coordinating anchor.

Its responsibilities include:

- Linking the Shared National Narrative to reconciliation and social cohesion.
- Leading trust-building initiatives.
- Coordinating dialogue processes at national and local levels.
- Ensuring alignment with transitional justice and peacebuilding efforts.

The narrative must be grounded in healing and inclusion.

12.2.3.3 Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education plays a long-term role by shaping future generations.

Key responsibilities include:

- Revising curricula to reflect shared values.
- Training teachers to deliver peace and civic education.
- Promoting national citizenship alongside local identity.

Education ensures sustainability across generations.

12.2.3.4 Ministry of Government Communication

This ministry ensures that the narrative is communicated clearly and consistently.

Its role includes:

- Coordinating public messaging across government institutions.
- Countering misinformation and harmful narratives.

- Supporting public awareness campaigns.

Effective communication builds trust and credibility.

12.2.4 Sequencing Steps Toward Institutionalizing the Shared National Narrative

Group 2 emphasized that institutionalization must follow a logical sequence.

12.2.4.1 Step 1: Definition and Consensus-Building

- Clearly articulate shared values, key historical references, and future aspirations.
- Conduct inclusive consultations across sectors and regions.
- Ensure broad national ownership and legitimacy.

This step establishes trust and shared understanding.

12.2.4.2 Step 2: Legislative and Policy Framework

- Translate consensus into laws and policies.
- Define institutional mandates and responsibilities.
- Allocate resources and monitoring mechanisms.

Legal grounding protects the narrative from political fluctuation.

12.2.4.3 Step 3: Sectoral Implementation

- Integrate the narrative into:
  - Education systems
  - Public service training
  - Media and cultural production
- Align national development programs with shared values.

Implementation turns ideas into daily practice.

12.2.4.4 Step 4: Decentralization and Localization

- Adapt the narrative to regional and local contexts.
- Empower local governments, CSOs, and community leaders.
- Maintain flexibility while preserving core national values.

Localization ensures relevance and legitimacy.

12.2.5 Conclusion: Sustaining the Shared National Narrative

Group 2 concludes that a Shared National Narrative cannot be built through isolated actions. It requires:

- Clear roles

- Strong coordination
- Proper sequencing
- Continuous dialogue and learning

Institutionalization is an ongoing process, not a one-time event. Sustained success depends on ownership, inclusivity, and coordination across all levels of society.

Only through deliberate coordination and disciplined sequencing can Ethiopia transform dialogue into durable national cohesion and shared purpose.

12.3 Group 3 Report - Knowledge, History, and Culture in Building a Shared National Narrative

12.3.1 Introduction

A Shared National Narrative cannot be built through political agreement alone. It must be intellectually credible, historically responsible, and culturally resonant. Knowledge systems, particularly academia, research institutions, intellectual communities, and cultural producers—play a decisive role in shaping how societies understand their past, interpret their present, and imagine their future.

Group 3 examined how universities, scholars, historians, artists, and cultural institutions can responsibly support the emergence of a Shared National Narrative in Ethiopia. The group focused on the ethical use of history, the management of collective memory, and the contribution of arts and culture in translating shared meaning into lived experience.

The guiding question was: How can knowledge and culture responsibly support the development and sustainability of a Shared National Narrative?

12.3.2 The Role of Academia and Research Institutions

12.3.2.1 Knowledge as a Public Good

Universities and research institutions hold a unique responsibility as custodians of evidence-based knowledge. Their work must serve the public interest rather than partisan agendas.

Key roles include:

- Producing rigorous, multidisciplinary research on Ethiopian history, society, and governance.
- Documenting shared experiences, interactions, and interdependencies across regions and communities.
- Challenging simplistic, selective, or politicized interpretations of the past.

Academic credibility helps anchor the Shared National Narrative in truth rather than ideology.

12.3.2.2 Universities as Spaces for Dialogue and Reflection

Higher education institutions should function not only as teaching centers but also as platforms for national reflection and dialogue.

This includes:

- Hosting inclusive debates on contested historical and identity issues.
- Encouraging respectful engagement between differing perspectives.
- Training students to think critically rather than dogmatically.

Universities help cultivate a generation capable of navigating complexity without polarization.

12.3.2.3 Research–Policy Linkages

Academic work must be connected to policy and practice.

Recommended actions include:

- Establishing structured channels between researchers and policymakers.
- Translating research findings into accessible policy briefs.
- Supporting evidence-based decision-making in peacebuilding, education, and governance.

Without this linkage, knowledge remains isolated and underutilized.

12.3.3 Responsible Use of History and Collective Memory

12.3.3.1 Moving Beyond Winner–Loser Narratives

Group 3 emphasized that history should not be framed as a winner–loser or victim–perpetrator competition.

Key principles include:

- Recognizing multiple historical experiences without ranking suffering.
- Shifting from zero-sum narratives to shared historical trajectories.
- Emphasizing interaction, coexistence, and mutual influence.

A Shared National Narrative must be built on **shared history**, not selective triumph or grievance.

12.3.3.2 Ethical Management of Collective Memory

Collective memory shapes identity and political behavior. When misused, it fuels resentment and division.

Responsible memory work requires:

- Acknowledging historical injustices without weaponizing them.

- Avoiding denial, glorification, or erasure of painful pasts.
- Encouraging forward-looking reflection rather than perpetual grievance.

Memory should serve healing, not mobilization for conflict.

12.3.3.3 From Blame to Shared Responsibility

Group discussions highlighted the need to move away from exclusive claims of victimhood.

This entails:

- Recognizing that multiple communities have experienced harm.
- Letting go of rigid offender–victim binaries.
- Redirecting attention from yesterday's blame to tomorrow's shared destiny.

A Shared National Narrative must be future-oriented while remaining historically honest.

12.3.4 Contribution of Culture and the Arts

12.3.4.1 Culture as a Carrier of Shared Meaning

Arts and culture translate abstract ideas into emotion, imagination, and belonging.

Their contribution includes:

- Music, literature, film, theater, and visual arts that reflect shared values.
- Storytelling that humanizes diverse experiences.
- Cultural expressions that emphasize connection rather than separation.

Culture reaches where policy language cannot.

12.3.4.2 Artists as Social Interpreters

Artists often capture social realities before institutions do.

Their role includes:

- Interpreting complex social issues in accessible forms.
- Creating safe spaces for dialogue through creative expression.
- Challenging stereotypes and simplistic narratives.

Supporting artistic freedom is essential for authentic narrative development.

12.3.4.3 Cultural Institutions as Bridges

Museums, archives, theaters, and cultural centers should be strengthened as sites of shared memory.

Recommended actions include:

- Curating inclusive exhibitions that reflect Ethiopia's plural history.
- Supporting multilingual and multicultural programming.
- Preserving oral histories alongside written records.

Cultural institutions help institutionalize shared memory.

12.3.4.4 Knowledge, Culture, and National Cohesion

Group 3 emphasized that knowledge and culture must work together to:

- Strengthen social trust.
- Reduce misinformation and historical distortion.
- Promote civic identity alongside cultural diversity.

When knowledge is credible and culture is inclusive, narratives gain legitimacy and durability.

12.3.5 Key Challenges Identified

- Politicization of history and scholarship.
- Weak dissemination of academic knowledge beyond universities.
- Limited support for independent cultural production.
- Fragmented institutional responsibility for memory and culture.

Addressing these gaps is critical for sustainability.

12.3.6 Proposed Directions for Action

Group 3 recommendations

1. Strengthening academic independence and research funding.
2. Establishing national platforms for historical dialogue and memory work.
3. Supporting universities as peacebuilding and narrative centers.
4. Investing in arts and cultural institutions as narrative carriers.
5. Integrating scholarly and cultural inputs into national dialogue and education systems.

12.3.7 Conclusion and Call to Action

Group 3 concludes that a Shared National Narrative must be intellectually honest, ethically grounded, and culturally alive. Academia, intellectuals, and artists are not peripheral actors, they are central architects of shared meaning.

Ethiopia's future cohesion depends on how responsibly it engages with its history, knowledge, and culture today. Stakeholders are therefore called upon to:

- Protect academic freedom,
- Invest in cultural expression,
- And place knowledge and culture at the heart of national reconciliation and unity.

Only through responsible knowledge and inclusive culture can a Shared National Narrative take root and endure.

12.4 Group 4 Report - Communication, Trust, and Sustainability in Building a Shared National Narrative

12.4.1 Introduction

A Shared National Narrative can only endure if it is communicated responsibly, trusted by the public, and sustained through adequate capacity and resources. Media institutions and communication systems therefore occupy a central place in the success or failure of this national endeavor.

Group 4 examined the role of media in shaping public understanding, preventing polarization, and supporting inclusive dialogue, as well as the resource and capacity-building requirements necessary to sustain the narrative beyond the conference and dialogue phases.

The guiding question for this group was: **How can media and resources sustain an inclusive national narrative over time?**

12.4.2 Media Responsibility and Fact-Based Public Communication

12.4.2.1 Media as a Public Trust Institution

Media institutions are not merely information channels; they are custodians of public trust. In a fragmented narrative environment, the credibility of media becomes decisive.

Key responsibilities include:

- Providing accurate, verified, and balanced information.
- Separating facts from opinion and analysis from advocacy.
- Avoiding sensationalism, inflammatory language, and unverified claims.

Fact-based reporting is essential for reducing suspicion, fear, and rumor-driven conflict.

12.4.2.2 Framing National Issues Responsibly

Media framing shapes how citizens interpret events and policies.

Responsible framing requires:

- Contextualizing historical and political issues rather than simplifying them.
- Reflecting multiple perspectives without legitimizing hate or incitement.
- Highlighting shared challenges and collective solutions.

A Shared National Narrative depends not on uniform messaging, but on fair and ethical interpretation.

12.4.3 Preventing Misinformation and Polarization

12.4.3.1 The Challenge of Digital Media

The expansion of digital and social media has:

- Weakened traditional editorial gatekeeping.
- Accelerated the spread of misinformation.
- Amplified divisive and emotionally charged narratives.

Unchecked, these dynamics undermine social cohesion and trust in institutions.

12.4.3.2 Strengthening Safeguards Against Misinformation

Group 4 emphasized the need for:

- A strong and clear digital media legal framework.
- Professional standards for online journalism.
- Platforms for fact-checking and rapid correction of false information.

Such measures must balance media freedom with responsibility, ensuring that regulation does not become censorship.

12.4.3.3 Media Literacy and Public Awareness

Preventing misinformation is not only a media task.

Recommended actions include:

- Integrating media literacy into education and civic programs.
- Equipping citizens to critically assess information sources.
- Encouraging ethical digital citizenship.

An informed public is the strongest defense against manipulation.

12.4.4 Media's Role in Building Trust and National Cohesion

12.4.4.1 From Polarization to Dialogue

Media can either deepen divisions or foster dialogue.

To support cohesion, media should:

- Provide platforms for constructive debate.
- Amplify voices that promote reconciliation and coexistence.
- Reduce zero-sum narratives and identity-based hostility.

Trust grows when citizens feel heard rather than targeted.

12.4.4.2 Public Communication and Government Credibility

Effective public communication is essential for legitimacy.

Group discussions highlighted:

- The need to strengthen government public relations capacity.
- Clear distinction between government communication and partisan messaging.
- Transparency and consistency in public information.

When communication is weak or defensive, misinformation fills the gap.

12.4.5 Resource Mobilization and Capacity-Building Needs

12.4.5.1 Institutional Capacity Gaps

Many media institutions face:

- Limited technical and financial resources.
- Insufficient training in conflict-sensitive reporting.
- Weak regional and local coverage capacity.

Without addressing these gaps, responsible communication cannot be sustained.

12.4.5.2 Capacity-Building Priorities

Group 4 identified priority areas:

- Training journalists in peace-sensitive, ethical, and data-driven reporting.
- Supporting multilingual and regional media platforms.
- Investing in digital infrastructure and content production.

Capacity building should be continuous, not project-based.

12.4.5.3 Sustainable Financing and Partnerships

To ensure sustainability, the group emphasized:

- Diversified funding models that protect editorial independence.
- Partnerships with academia, civil society, and cultural institutions.
- Support mechanisms for public-interest media content.

Sustainability requires long-term investment, not short-term campaigns.

12.4.6 Media, Resources, and the Longevity of the Shared Narrative

A Shared National Narrative cannot survive if:

- Media institutions are weak or politicized.
- Resources are insufficient or unevenly distributed.
- Trust between citizens, media, and the state remains fragile.

Media and capacity-building efforts must therefore be integrated into the broader national dialogue and governance reform agenda.

12.4.7 Key Recommendations

Group 4 recommends:

1. Strengthening legal and ethical frameworks for digital and traditional media.
2. Investing in media literacy and public awareness.
3. Building professional capacity for conflict-sensitive journalism.
4. Improving government public communication systems.
5. Ensuring sustainable and independent funding for public-interest media.

12.4.8 Conclusion and Call to Action

Group 4 concludes that media and resources are the lifelines of a Shared National Narrative. Without credible communication, trust cannot form. Without capacity and resources, narratives cannot endure.

Stakeholders are therefore called upon to:

- Protect media freedom while enforcing responsibility.
- Invest in professional capacity and infrastructure.
- Treat communication as a core pillar of peace, unity, and development.

Only through trusted media and sustained capacity can Ethiopia's Shared National Narrative remain inclusive, resilient, and future-oriented.

13 THE JIMMA CONSENSUS STATEMENT

Session Five marked the intellectual and procedural culmination of the National Conference, translating two days of intensive reflection, debate, and exchange into shared commitments and actionable outcomes. The session was designed to ensure that the Conference moved beyond analysis and dialogue toward clearly articulated points of convergence capable of guiding future institutional and policy action.

At the center of this session was the presentation of the Jimma Consensus Statement, delivered with clarity and symbolic resonance by the renowned artist Tilahun Gugsa. His presentation underscored an important theme that had emerged repeatedly throughout the Conference: that shared narratives are not the exclusive domain of policymakers or scholars, but are also carried, interpreted, and legitimized through cultural voices that speak to broad public experience. The delivery itself reinforced the idea of collective ownership and accessibility of the Consensus.

THE JIMMA CONSENSUS STATEMENT

Adopted at the National Conference on the Shared Narrative
Jimma, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
12–13 January 2026

Preamble

We, the participants of the National Conference on *"Framing A Shared Narrative – Affirming the Need and Outlining the Frameworks for its Institutionalization in Ethiopia,"* convened in Jimma on 12–13 January 2026, comprising representatives of federal and regional governments, constitutional institutions, academia, civil society, faith communities, the media, the private sector, youth and women's organizations, and independent intellectuals,

Guided by Ethiopia's long civilizational history, rich cultural diversity, and shared aspirations for peace, dignity, justice, and prosperity.

Mindful of the country's complex political trajectory, marked by successive political settlements, contested historical interpretations, and periods of both unity and fragmentation.

Recognizing that sustainable peace, democratic legitimacy, and effective governance require not only institutional reform and policy coherence, but also shared meaning, collective memory, and a unifying national framework.

Affirming that Ethiopia's diversity—linguistic, cultural, religious, regional, and historical—is a foundational reality and a potential source of strength rather than division.

Acknowledging the ongoing National Dialogue process as a critical platform for addressing grievances and fostering reconciliation, while noting that dialogue alone must be supported by enabling institutional, intellectual, and communicative frameworks.

Inspired by Ethiopia's indigenous philosophical traditions, including the principle of *Medemer*—the ethic of synergy, inclusion, and collective responsibility.

hereby adopt this Jimma Consensus Statement as a shared national commitment and guiding reference.

Affirmation of the National Importance of a Shared Narrative

1. We affirm that Ethiopia requires a Shared Narrative as a unifying national framework capable of:
    - Integrating diverse historical memories within a shared political community.
    - Providing moral and civic coherence across generations and regions.
    - Strengthening national unity without erasing difference.
    - Anchoring governance legitimacy, constitutionalism, and democratic practice.
2. We emphasize that a *Shared* Narrative differs fundamentally from imposed or exclusive narratives. It must be:
    - Collectively authored rather than centrally imposed.
    - Inclusive rather than hierarchical.
    - Dynamic and evolving rather than fixed or doctrinal.
3. We recognize that the absence of such a shared framework increases the risks of:
    - Fragmented national discourse.
    - Zero-sum identity politics.
    - Weak institutional legitimacy.
    - Cycles of mistrust, polarization, and instability.

Guiding Principles for the Formation of the Shared Narrative

The future formation of Ethiopia's Shared Narrative shall be guided by the following principles:

1. Inclusivity and Collective Ownership - All communities, regions, generations, and social groups must see themselves reflected in the national story, with equal dignity and voice.

2. Plural Memory within a Shared Framework - The Narrative shall acknowledge multiple historical experiences, achievements, grievances, and contributions—without privileging or silencing any single account.
3. Commitment to Dialogue and Mutual Recognition -The process shall be grounded in sustained dialogue, ethical listening, and respect for difference, rejecting coercion, exclusion, and historical absolutism.
4. Alignment with Constitutional and Democratic Values - The Narrative shall reinforce constitutional principles, human rights, equality before the law, and democratic governance.
5. Institutional Anchoring and Sustainability - The Narrative must be supported by durable institutions and policies, rather than relying on personalities, political cycles, or temporary initiatives.
6. Future-Orientation and Shared Responsibility -While grounded in history, the Narrative shall primarily orient Ethiopia toward a shared future, collective responsibility, and intergenerational solidarity.

Frameworks for Institutionalization

We agree that the Shared Narrative shall be supported through coordinated frameworks across the following domains:

1. Policy and Legal Frameworks - Integration of shared narrative principles into national development strategies, peacebuilding policies, civic education, and public communication guidelines.
2. Institutional Coordination - Clear mandates and coordination mechanisms among relevant ministries, constitutional bodies, regional governments, and dialogue institutions.
3. Academic and Intellectual Stewardship - Strengthening the role of universities, research institutes, historians, and cultural practitioners in producing balanced, evidence-based scholarship and public knowledge.
4. Media Responsibility and Communication Integrity - Promotion of ethical, fact-based, and inclusive media practices that contribute to national understanding rather than polarization.

Partnership and Process Commitments

1. We endorse a Partnership and Process Map that defines complementary roles for:
    - Government institutions.
    - Peace and Dialogue Commissions.
    - Academia and cultural institutions.
    - Civil society and faith-based organizations.
    - Media and communication platforms.
    - Youth, women, and emerging leaders.
2. We commit to a sequenced and consultative process, moving from dialogue to institutional consolidation, avoiding premature closure or politicization of the Narrative.
3. We recognize the Ministry of Peace, CRPP, and Jima University as central facilitators in sustaining national engagement and ensuring continuity beyond this Conference.

Commitment to Implementation and Follow-Up

1. We commit to translating this Consensus into concrete actions through policy alignment, institutional coordination, and sustained national dialogue.
2. We call for:
    - Adequate political support and administrative leadership.
    - Resource mobilization and capacity-building.
    - Periodic review mechanisms to assess progress and inclusivity.
3. We agree that the Shared Narrative shall remain an evolving national project, open to reflection, renewal, and democratic refinement.

Conclusion

The Jimma Consensus affirms that Ethiopia's unity cannot be decreed, nor its future secured through silence or exclusion. A nation endures when its people recognize themselves in a shared story—one that honors memory, embraces diversity, and commits collectively to a common destiny.
Adopted in Jimma—symbolically a city of dialogue, exchange, and renewal—this Consensus stands as a national commitment to build Ethiopia not through imposed sameness, but through shared meaning, mutual responsibility, and inclusive governance.

Adopted by acclamation on 13 January 2026, Jimma, Ethiopia.

14 Closing

The Closing Session of the National Conference represented a deliberate convergence of reflection, commitment, and cultural affirmation, underscoring the Conference's central thesis that national narratives are sustained not only through policy decisions and institutional frameworks, but also through shared cultural experience and collective emotion. The session was memorably marked by the live performance of the historic songs "ሃገሬን አልረሳም" and "ቤትሽ ጂማ ነው ወይ" by the legendary artist Neway Debebe, whose unexpected presence generated a powerful emotional resonance among participants. The lyrics and symbolism embedded in these songs echoed the Conference's core messages of belonging, memory, and attachment to place, reminding participants that the idea of a shared national narrative is deeply rooted in lived experience rather than abstract formulation.

This cultural moment served an important analytical function within the Conference. It demonstrated how music and artistic expression operate as carriers of collective memory, capable of transcending political and ideological divisions. In a context where historical narratives are often contested and politicized, the performance illustrated the unifying potential of cultural forms that speak to shared emotions and widely recognized experiences. In this sense, the Closing Session reinforced a key insight emerging across the Conference deliberations: that sustainable national cohesion requires deliberate integration of cultural, artistic, and intellectual resources alongside legal and institutional reforms.

Following the performance, reflections were delivered by Dr. Abdulaziz Dawud, Head of the Oromia National Regional State Office of the President. In his address, Dr. Abdulaziz emphasized that the Conference outcomes carry strategic national significance and must be treated as inputs into an ongoing state-building and peace-building process. He reaffirmed institutional commitment to advancing the principles articulated during the Conference, including the development of enabling frameworks, partnership models, and follow-up mechanisms. Importantly, he stressed that ownership of the Shared National Narrative cannot reside with any single institution or level of government. Rather, it must be sustained through coordinated action among federal and regional authorities, academic institutions, civil society organizations, media actors, and cultural leaders.

The Closing Session also highlighted a shared recognition among participants that the National Conference was not designed to produce a finalized narrative or a closed set of conclusions. Instead, it marked a critical transition point from conceptual affirmation to practical responsibility. Participants acknowledged that the credibility of the Conference would ultimately be judged not by the quality of deliberation alone, but by the extent to which its insights are translated into policy alignment, institutional reform, public communication strategies, and sustained dialogue processes.

In this regard, the Closing Session functioned as both an endpoint and a beginning. It closed a concentrated period of national reflection while simultaneously opening a longer phase of implementation, learning, and adaptation. Participants departed Jimma with a reinforced sense of collective responsibility and a clearer understanding that building a Shared National Narrative is a cumulative process. Its success depends on continued engagement, ethical leadership, institutional follow-through, and the ability to nurture shared meaning across Ethiopia's diverse social and political landscape over time.

15 Biographies – Presenters and Moderators

Professor Bahiru Zewudie

Emeritus Professor of History
Addis Ababa University



Professor Bahru Zewde is Emeritus Professor of History at Addis Ababa University and one of Ethiopia's most distinguished historians and public intellectuals. He is internationally recognized for his authoritative scholarship on modern Ethiopian and African history, with a particular focus on state formation, intellectual history, and social transformation. His seminal works include A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991 (1991; 2nd ed. 2001), Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia (2002), and The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement (2022), which offers a critical analysis of revolutionary ideology, youth activism, and political change in Ethiopia.

Professor Bahru has held visiting academic appointments at leading universities in Europe and the United States and has served in key leadership roles at Addis Ababa University, including Chair of the Department of History and Director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. Beyond academia, he has played a central role in shaping national intellectual and policy debates as Executive Director of the Forum for Social Studies. He is a Founding Fellow and founding Principal Vice President of the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences, a Fellow of the African Academy of Sciences, and President of the Association of Ethiopian Historians.

Dr. Tesfaye Belijge Dara

Chief Whip Minister
Fedal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia



Dr. Tesfaye Belijge Dara is a senior Ethiopian public servant, scholar, and policy leader with extensive experience in governance and public administration. He holds a PhD in African Studies from Addis Ababa University, with a specialization in mobility and citizenship, alongside a Master's degree in Development Management and a Bachelor's degree in History. His academic background reflects a strong interdisciplinary grounding in state–society relations, citizenship, and development policy.

Dr. Tesfaye has served the Government of Ethiopia in various leadership capacities across different levels of government, contributing to policy formulation, legislative coordination, and executive oversight. He is currently serving as Government Chief Whip Minister, a role in which he plays a central part in strengthening coordination between the executive and legislative branches and advancing the government's reform agenda.

In addition to his public service, Dr. Tesfaye is an author and intellectual contributor. His book, ኢትዮጵያዊ ዴሞክራሲ ፍለጋ, reflects his engagement with Ethiopia's democratic trajectory and governance challenges. He is widely regarded as a practitioner-scholar whose work bridges academic insight and practical statecraft.

Dr. Yonas Adaye Adeto

Commissioner of the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission (ENDC)
Associate Professor of Peace Studies at the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS), Addis Ababa University



Dr. Yonas Adaye Adeto is a distinguished Ethiopian scholar and peace practitioner with more than three decades of experience in peace studies, security, and international relations. He holds a PhD in Peace Studies from the University of Bradford in the United Kingdom, alongside advanced academic training in research methods, security sector reform, international relations, and English literature and linguistics. He currently serves as Commissioner of the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission (ENDC), where he plays a central role in advancing inclusive national dialogue and consensus-building processes.

Dr. Yonas is also an Associate Professor of Peace Studies at the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS), Addis Ababa University, where he has taught, researched, supervised, and mentored graduate and doctoral students for over 30 years. His scholarly work includes numerous peer-reviewed journal articles and edited volumes on peacebuilding, conflict resolution, security sector governance, peace education, preventing violent extremism, diplomacy, and regional and global security. Widely respected for bridging theory and practice, he continues to contribute to peace and security scholarship and policy engagement in Ethiopia, Africa, and internationally.

Professor Brook Hailu Beshah

Adjunct Professor
Department of Political Science and International Relations at Addis Ababa University



Professor Brook Hailu Beshah, PhD, is a nationally and internationally recognized Ethiopian scholar, diplomat, media analyst, and public intellectual specializing in political communication, international relations, diplomacy, and global media. He holds a PhD in International Political Communications and an MA in Political Science and International Relations from Leipzig University, Germany, and a BA in Political Science and International Relations from Addis Ababa University.

Professor Brook currently serves as an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Addis Ababa University and as Senior Advisor to the African Leadership Excellence Academy. He has taught and held academic appointments at leading institutions in Ethiopia, the United States, and Europe, including Ohio University, Carnegie Mellon University, George Washington University, and the University of Maryland.

He brings extensive diplomatic experience, having served as Ethiopia's Special Envoy and Minister Plenipotentiary to the United States and UNESCO, where he contributed to landmark cultural heritage decisions, including the recognition of Harar and the return of the Axum Obelisk. A prominent media voice, he has conducted over 100 major international interviews and

Ambassdor Lencho Bati

Senior Diplomat and Political Analyst



serves as a political analyst for Voice of America. Professor Brook is widely respected for bridging scholarship, diplomacy, media, and civic engagement in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Lencho Bati is a senior diplomat, policy advisor, and scholar with extensive experience spanning foreign policy, development planning, academia, and public administration. He is currently a PhD candidate in Geography, Environment, and Society at the University of Minnesota, where his doctoral research examines Ethiopia's flagship developmental institution, Ethiopian Airlines. He holds a Master of Public Administration from Hamline University and a Bachelor's degree in Anthropology and Sociology from the University of Iowa.

Mr. Bati served as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ethiopia to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from April 2021 to July 2024. Prior to this, he was Foreign Policy Advisor to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Head of the Foreign Policy Unit at the Office of the Prime Minister. He also served as Senior Policy Advisor at the Ministry of Planning and Development, where he was part of the core team that prepared Ethiopia's Ten-Year Development Plan.
Academically, he was a Visiting Professor at Gustavus Adolphus College in the United States for more than a decade, teaching courses in political geography, development, nationalism, conflict, globalization, and public policy. Earlier in his career, he held senior public administration roles in the United States, including Director of the Office of Multicultural Services in Hennepin County, Minnesota.

Mr. Bati has published and presented widely on peace, conflict, governance, and development in the Horn of Africa. His notable publication includes Samatar and Bati (2006), Conflict and Peace in the Horn of Africa: A Regional Approach, published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation. He is a frequent contributor to international media and policy forums, and is fluent in Oromo, Amharic, and Swahili, with working knowledge of Somali.

Dr Abdulazi Dawud
Head
Oromia National Regional State
Office of the President

Dr. Abdulaziz Dawud is a senior public official, academic leader, and development expert with extensive experience in governance, planning, and higher education in Ethiopia. He currently serves as Head of the Oromia National Regional State Office of the President, where he plays a central role in strategic coordination, policy oversight, and the implementation of regional development priorities.

Prior to his current appointment, Dr. Abdulaziz served as Commissioner of the Oromia Planning and Economic Development Commission, leading the formulation and execution of major development strategies, investment frameworks, and socio-economic reform programs across the region. His leadership contributed to strengthening evidence-based



planning, institutional performance, and regional policy coherence.

Dr. Abdulaziz also served as Academic Vice President of Madda Walabu University, where he was responsible for academic governance, research coordination, and institutional capacity building. He has conducted and supervised wide-ranging research on development policy, economic transformation, and public sector performance in Ethiopia. His career reflects a strong integration of academic rigor and practical policy leadership, with a sustained commitment to inclusive development, institutional reform, and long-term regional transformation.

Dr Kairedin Tezera Adera

State Minister
Ministry of Peace of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia



Kairedin Tezera Adera (PhD) is State Minister at the Ministry of Peace of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and a nationally recognized expert in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and community development. He holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Bayreuth and MA in Social Anthropology from Addis Ababa University, reflecting strong academic grounding in culture, identity, and social transformation.

Dr. Kairedin has over eighteen years of experience spanning research, teaching, policy practice, and community service in Ethiopia and abroad. He is an Assistant Professor and Researcher at Addis Ababa University, where he has contributed extensively to teaching, research, and public engagement. His expertise includes conflict transformation, legal pluralism, communication, community development, and peacebuilding, with a particular focus on local and culturally grounded approaches to conflict resolution.
In public service, he is a Member of the Ethiopian Parliament and serves as Deputy Chairperson of the Human Resource Development, Labour, and Technology Standing Committee of the House of Peoples' Representatives. He previously held senior leadership roles as Head of Culture, Tourism, and Communication of the Siltie Zone, and as a Government Communication Coordinator. Earlier in his career, he worked as a journalist and program presenter at the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation.

Dr. Kairedin has published books, articles, and book chapters on indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and the culture and history of the Siltie people. He is also a regular contributor to national and international media, offering expert analysis on peacebuilding and regional integration in the Horn of Africa.

Zerihun Teshome Habtegebriel

Researcher And Political Analyst

Zerihun Teshome Habtegebriel is a seasoned researcher, senior political analyst, and media commentator with extensive experience in political thought, public discourse, and national policy debates in Ethiopia. He is a former philosophy lecturer at



Addis Ababa University, where he taught political philosophy and critical thinking, contributing to the intellectual formation of a generation of students engaged in public life.

He is the founder and owner of Zami Multimedia, a media and research platform focused on political analysis, governance, and societal transformation. Zerihun is widely recognized for his sharp analytical engagement with Ethiopia's political transitions, elite behavior, and narrative formation, both in academic and public forums. He has authored several books, most notably Kurkora: The Role of Political Elites in Shaping the Political Landscape of Ethiopia, which critically examines the influence of political elites on state formation, power dynamics, and national discourse.

Through his writing, media appearances, and research work, Zerihun Teshome Habtegebriel contributes actively to informed public debate and to efforts aimed at fostering inclusive governance, political accountability, and a shared national vision in Ethiopia.

Dr. Birhanu M. Lenjiso
Sociologist and Political Analyst



Dr. Birhanu M. Lenjiso is a distinguished Ethiopian sociologist, public intellectual, and policy practitioner whose work spans academia, research, media, and public service. He holds a BA and MA in Sociology from Addis Ababa University and a PhD in Development Studies from Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. He has served as a lecturer and researcher at Ambo University and as a PhD Fellow and Postdoctoral Scientist at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), with professional engagements across Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. He is the co-founder and former Deputy Director of the East African Policy Research Institute (EAPRI) and the founder and former CEO of Prime Media, contributing significantly to evidence-based policy discourse and public communication.

Dr. Lenjiso has also held senior public office as State Minister for Irrigation Development in Ethiopia's Ministry of Irrigation and Lowlands, where he contributed to national development planning and institutional reform. A prolific author and influential thinker, his recent book, ብሔር-ተኝነት (published in Amharic and Afaan Oromo), offers a rigorous reflection on nationalism, national identity, and self-determination. He is widely recognized for his intellectual leadership and sustained contribution to debates on governance, development, and social transformation in Ethiopia.

Dr. Assefa Leake Gebru

Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science and International Relations at Mekelle University



Dr. Assefa Leake Gebru is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Mekelle University, where he undertakes teaching, research, and community engagement. He holds a Doctor of Law in Political Theory from East China Normal University (2020) and earned both his Bachelor's degree in Political Science and International Relations (2003) and his Master's degree in International Relations (2009) from Addis Ababa University.

His scholarly work focuses on foreign policy and diplomacy, regional cooperation and integration, and regional peace and security frameworks. He has a strong research profile in post-war governance, political reconstruction, and conflict recovery processes. Dr. Assefa has led and contributed to applied studies on intra-community conflict mapping in post-war Tigray, as well as inter-community conflicts in the Tigray–Eritrea and Tigray–Afar border areas.

In addition to his academic work, he is an active public intellectual, regularly contributing to policy dialogues, academic forums, and media discussions on peace and security, democracy, and human rights. He is recognized for bridging academic research with practical policy and public discourse in Ethiopia's evolving political context.

Blen Mamo
Executive Director of Horn Review



Blen Mamo is a policy analyst, editor, and research professional with a strong focus on international security, governance, and regional affairs in the Horn of Africa. She currently serves as Executive Director of Horn Review, where she leads policy research, strategic analysis, and public engagement on geopolitical, security, and governance issues affecting Ethiopia and the wider region. She is also a Research Associate at the Institute of Foreign Affairs, contributing to policy-oriented research and advisory work, and serves as Chief Editor and Advisory Board Member at Pulse of Africa Media, shaping analytical content and public discourse.

Blen holds an LLB in Law and an MSc in International Security and Global Governance, combining legal training with advanced expertise in global and regional security dynamics. Her professional work bridges research, media, and policy, with particular attention to diplomacy, conflict analysis, and strategic communication. Through her leadership and editorial roles, she has contributed to elevating evidence-based debate and informed dialogue on Ethiopia's national interests and Africa's evolving geopolitical landscape.

Munira Abdelmenan Awel
Journalist | PR & Communication Specialist | Media & Advocacy Expert | Writer



Munira Abdelmenan Awel is a journalist, public relations and communication specialist, and media and advocacy expert with experience spanning international and local media platforms. She has worked with leading news organizations, including Anadolu Agency in Ankara, where she served as Vice Head of the English News Desk, contributing to editorial leadership, content management, and international news coverage.

Munira holds a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from Addis Ababa University and a Master's degree in Civilization Studies from Fatih Sultan Mehmet University in Istanbul. She is currently pursuing a second Master's degree in Public Relations and Strategic Communication at Addis Ababa University, further strengthening her expertise in strategic messaging, public engagement, and institutional communication.

Her professional interests center on narrative-building as a tool for social transformation, with a particular focus on social justice, inclusive development, and gender equality. Through journalism, communication strategy, and advocacy work, she has contributed to shaping informed public discourse and advancing inclusive perspectives within national and international media spaces.

16 List of Participants

No	Name of The Participant	Role	Organization
1	Behailu Alemayehu	Participant	CRPP
2	Kaleab H/Meskel	Participant	CRPP
3	Aba Weldesenebet Gebremareyam	Participant	Jimma City
4	Abadi Mohammed	Participant	Jimma Zone
5	Abba Giddi	Participant	jimma Zone
6	Abba Jihaad Abba Maccaa	Participant	Jimma Zone
7	Abdi Getachew	Participant	Jimma Influencer
8	Abdi Nuri	Participant	Jimma Mayor Driver
9	Abdi Ruberrre	Participant	OBN
10	Abdulaziz Raayya	Participant	Jimma Communication
11	Abdulhakim Abamecha (PHD)	Participant	Jimma University
12	Abdulkerim Abagero	Participant	Jimma City
13	Abduselam Worku	Participant	Jimma Communication
14	Abduuraazaaq Haasaan	Participant	Jimma Zone
16	Abebaw Zeleke Gebretsadik	Participant	Individual
17	Abebe Ano Alula(PHD)	Participant	Assosa University
18	Abubeker Rama	Participant	Jimma University
19	Adanech Alemayehu Abera	Participant	EBC
20	Aderajew Walle Beyleyegn	Participant	EBC
21	Adinat Darajjee	Participant	OBN
22	Adisu Beshah	Participant	
23	Admasu Damtew Belete	Participant	Fana Media Corporate
24	Adnun Kassim	Participant	Jimma Mayor Protocol
25	Afework Bedewi Hassen	Presenter	CRPP
26	Afework Temene	Participant	Jimma University
27	Ahmed Abaraya	Participant	Jimma City
28	Ahmed Zeynudin(Professor)	Participant	Jimma University
29	Akalu Baqala	Participant	OBN
30	Alebachew Tena (Engineer)	Participant	Jimma University
31	Alemayehu Kassa Kidane	Participant	individual Artist
32	Alemseged Abebe Worku	Participant	Yegeziew Media
33	Alemseged Aregay Gebru	Participant	WENAT Tigray
34	Almaz Gebretsadik Abay	Participant	Simret Party
35	Amdom Gebreslassie Asfha	Participant	ARENA
37	Amiilu Muzamiil	Participant	Jimma Zone
38	Amina Aba Nega	Participant	Jimma City
39	Andan Sehil	Participant	Jimma Communication

No	Name of The Participant	Role	Organization
40	Andinet Adinew Tesfaye	Participant	
41	Anwar Aba Sanib	Participant	Jimma City
42	Anwar Temame	Participant	Driver Jimma University
43	Aselfew Amedin Kabeto	Participant	Ministry of Women & Social Affairs
44	Ashagre Mamo	Participant	
45	Asma Redi Baleker	Participant	CRPP
46	Asraat Isheetee	Participant	Jimma Vice Mayor
47	Asrat Atsedeweyn Andargie PhD)	Participant	Gondar University
49	Ato Tamrat Dejene Dadi	Participant	Ethiopia Media Authority
50	Ato Yonas Fantaye Gessesse	Participant	Ethiopia Media Authority
51	Awol Seid Ebrahim(PhD)	Participant	Wollo University
52	B/General Kassaye Chemeda Gete	Participant	Individual
53	B/General Tesfaye Habtemariam	Participant	Individual
54	Bayissa Leta Danno (PhD)	Participant	Ambo University
55	Bekele Amene Serbessa	Participant	Private Media Personality
56	Belayeneh Tegegen	Participant	Jimma University
57	Beniyam Desse	Participant	Minister of peace
59	Bereket Belayneh Kebebew	Participant	opinion Maker
60	Berhanu Abadi Weldegiorgis	Participant	opinion Maker
61	Betelehem Fikeru Assefa	Participant	Horn Review
62	Birhanuu Tesfayee	Participant	Jimma Zone
63	Bisrat Melesse Berhanu	Participant	EBC
64	Biutum Gdissa	Participant	KKMO
65	Bizuayehu Jember	Participant	Jimma University
66	Brook Abdu Mohammed	Participant	Rift Valley Institute
67	Brook Kebede Demisea	Participant	NBC
68	Chala Fayisa	Participant	OBN
69	Chirotaw Ayele Gizaw (PhD)	Participant	Hawassa University
70	Daniel Yehulashet Alemu	Participant	
71	Dawit Endeshaw Fentie	Participant	Reuters
72	Dawit Kebede Bahta	Participant	Awramba Times
73	Debela wakejera	Participant	Jimma University
74	Demesse Abate	Participant	Minister of peace
75	Deriba Niguse	Participant	HOPR
76	Desalegn Wondemu	Participant	Culture and Tourism Bureau
77	Deseye Ashenaf Burju	Participant	CRPP
78	Diriba Eticha Tujuba	Participant	Gambella University
79	Dirirsa Wakumna Edo	Participant	Caffe Oromia
80	Dr Abdulaziz Dawud	Presenter	Oromia President Office

No	Name of The Participant	Role	Organization
81	Dr Gemachu Ararsa Regasse	Participant	Caffe Oromia
82	Dr Outukana Oda Wako	Participant	Oromia President Office
83	Dr Tesfaye Beljige Dara	Presenter	Minister, Government Chief Whip
84	Dr. Aregawi Berhe Gebremariam	Participant	National Renaissance Dam Coordination Project Office
85	Dr. Asnake Kefale Adegehe	Participant	AAU
86	Dr. Assefa Leake Gebru	Presenter	Mekelle University
87	Dr. Berhanemeskel Tena Zemnefes	Participant	Madda Walabu University
88	Dr. Birhanu Megersa Lenjiso	Presenter	
	Dr. Hussien Kasim	Participant	Somali regional state president office
89	Dr. Molla Reda Kahsay	Participant	
90	Dr. Muauz Gidey Alem	Participant	Mekelle University
91	Dr. Shewit G/egzabher G/hiwot	Participant	Mekelle University
92	Dr. Tamrat Haile Degeffa	Participant	Oromia President Office
93	Dr. Yonas Adaye Adeto	Presenter	AAU & National Dialogue commission
94	Dr. Zerihun Mohammed Ali	Participant	Horn Of Africa Regional Office
95	Dr.Semir Yesuf Teshale	Participant	Rift Valley Institute
96	Dr.Teklu Wegayehu Zara (PhD)	Participant	Arba Minch University
97	Efrem Wakjira (Engineer)	Participant	Jimma University
98	Elias Umata Karorsa	Participant	Caffe Oromia
99	Endalakachew Molla Chorek	Participant	NAMA
101	Engida W/Yohannes	Participant	OBN Jimma
102	Faris Delil Yesuf (PhD)	Participant	Wolkite University
103	Fasil Alemayehu Zewude	Participant	CRPP
104	Fasil Tesfaye	Participant	NBC
105	Firewu Baqale	Participant	Jimma Communication
106	Fiseha Belayneh Aragaw	Participant	OBN
107	Frew Amsalu (PHD)	Participant	Jimma University
108	Gaaroma Suuchaa	Participant	Jimma Zone
109	Gabre Urgesso Roba	Participant	Caffe Oromia
110	Garasuuu zeleke	Participant	Jimma University
111	Gebremichael Weldegebriel	Participant	Adigrat University
112	Gemechis File(Professor)	Participant	Jimma University
113	Gen. Hailu Gonfa Edosa	Participant	Oromia President Office
114	Genet Dejene	Presenter	CRPP
115	Getenet Almaw Tiruneh	Participant	Gat Media
116	Giddii Alfoggii	Participant	Jimma Zone

No	Name of The Participant	Role	Organization
117	Girma Batu Ayano	Participant	Ethiopia Orthodox Tewahdo Church
118	Girma Desissa Bedada	Participant	Oromia President Office
119	Girma Fiseha Teferdgn	Participant	Sheger Radio
120	Gobena Negese	Participant	General Hailu Gonfa driver
121	Guchie Gulie Sulla (PhD)	Participant	Wolaita Sodo University
122	H.E Dina Mufti Sid	Participant	Member of FDRE HOPR
123	H.E Dr. Endegena Abebe Gemta	Participant	State Minister, FDRE Ministry of Tourism
124	H.E Melake Tsehay Ferede	Participant	Ministry of Trade And Integration
125	H.E Nurelegn Koku Amare	Participant	Ministry Of Innovation & Techonology
126	Habetewelde Getachew	Participant	HOPR
127	Habtamu Tessema Habtegiorgies	Participant	NAMA
128	Hadush Abreaha	Participant	Ethiopia Press Agency
129	Hagos Gidey Tedla	Participant	Tegaru Initiatives for peace and Rehabilitation for Ethiopia
130	Haile Kejela	Participant	Communication Bureau
131	Hailu Adugne Namomsa	Participant	Communication Bureau
132	Haji Biya Aba Mecha	Participant	Jimma city
133	Hayalneh Haile	Participant	
134	Henok Girma	Participant	Jimma Communication
135	Hftamuu tgekkuu	Participant	Jimma University
136	Honorable Mr.Abuto Anito	Participant	Central Ethiopia Regional State Office of the President
137	Hunde Ahmed (Dr)	Participant	Jimma University
138	Ibrahim Abdulaziz Bushara	Participant	Vertex Media
139	Ibsitu AberaaDoyyo	Participant	Jimma Zone
140	Idrs Yeba (PHD)	Participant	Jimma University
141	Jawar Adem Omer	Participant	Prime Media
142	Jemal Abafita (PHD)	Participant	President Jimma University
143	Jemal Bashir Ahmed	Participant	Kings Of Abbay
145	Jemal Endris Ali	Participant	EBC
146	Jihad Husen	Participant	Jimma Communication
147	Kalab Gebrie Biadglign	Participant	Institute Of ForeignAffairs(IFA) Protocol
149	Kamil Mohammed (MR)	Participant	Jimma University
150	Kasahun Andualem	Participant	NBC
151	Kassahun Bekele	Participant	Jimma University

No	Name of The Participant	Role	Organization
152	Kassahun Enkosa	Participant	Jimma University
153	Kassahun Gonfa Hirpha	Participant	Addis Media Network
154	Keder Tilahun	Participant	Minister of peace
155	Kedja Hussen	Participant	Jimma Zone
156	Kelif Ahmed	Participant	Jimma city
157	Kemal Abdurahim Ahmed (PhD)	Participant	Assosa University
158	Kes Debela Bekela	Participant	Jimma City
159	Kezina She Umer	Participant	Jimma City
160	Kibrom Berhe Sibhatu	Participant	Baytona
161	Lalisaa Raffisaa	Participant	Oromia President Office
162	Lemi Sime Dame	Participant	Oromia Prosperity Branch
163	Lideya Abebe Negussie	Participant	Ahadu Radio
164	Lt/Genseral Yohannes G/Meskel	Participant	Individual
165	Mahammad Nureddin	Participant	Jimma Zone
166	Mahder Nesibu Woldemichael	Participant	Horn Review
167	Mamadamin Abafita	Participant	Jimma Zone
168	Manyazewal Endashaw	Participant	Artist GM,National Theatre
169	Masho Jima (PHD)	Participant	Jimma University
170	Mekouwanet Yisak Ereso	Participant	EBC
171	Melaku Gebremichael Gebreyesus	Participant	Raya Medhin Dirjit
172	Melkye Mesfin Andargie	Participant	EBC
173	Mengesha Ayene Ejigu (PhD)	Participant	Bahir Dar University
174	Mengesha Darge	Participant	NBC
175	Meron Mola Zewdu	Participant	Individual
176	Mesatawot Fayisa Wako	Participant	Caffe Oromia
177	Mesay Deslegn	Participant	Institute Of ForeignAffairs(IFA)
178	Meseret Atalay Berhanu	Participant	EMC
179	Mifah Abajehad	Participant	Zone Head Office
181	Mintsinot Yilma Abebe	Participant	EBC
183	Mohammed Hassen Awol	Participant	Hasab Meda
184	Ms Blen Mamo Diriba	Presenter	Horn Review
185	Ms Munira Abdelmenan Awel	Presenter	PR & Communication Specialist
186	Muaz Sultan	Participant	Jimma Zone
187	Muketar Teha Ahemed	Participant	Jimma City
188	Mulat G/Selassie Gebremariam	Participant	Semret Party
189	Mulu Abay Abera	Participant	Tegaru Initiatives for peace and Rehabilitation for Ethiopia
190	Mulualem Tadesse Woldemariam	Participant	Individual
191	Mulualem Tegegnework	Participant	EZEMA

No	Name of The Participant	Role	Organization
192	Muluberan Haile Teklehaimanot	Participant	Tigray Democracy party
193	Muluemabet Abera (PHD)	Participant	Jimma University
194	Musxaafa Abba Qannoo	Participant	Jimma Zone
195	Muzeyan Mama Kelil	Participant	EBC
196	Nardos Yosef	Participant	Reuters
197	Nati Getachew	Participant	OBN
198	Naziif Nagaash	Participant	Jimma Zone
199	Nejib Kedir	Participant	Jimma Chamber
200	Nestanet Abey Mekonnen	Participant	Jimma University
201	Netsanet Tadesse	Participant	Ethiopia Press Agency
202	Neway Debebe Gebreyes	Participant	Individual
203	Nezifa Ahmed	Participant	Jimma Zone
204	Nigatu Ayele Tefera	Participant	Private Researcher
205	Nigest kassahun Zewdede	Participant	Jimma University
206	Obboo Lencho Bati	Presenter	
207	Pastor Getahun Degffa	Participant	Jimma city
208	Prof.Ahmed Zekaria Abubeker	Participant	Researcher,AAU
209	Professor Bahiru Zewudie	Presenter	Researcher,AAU
210	Professor Bruk Hailu	Presenter	Researcher,AAU
211	Professor Kindeya G/Hiwot Lilay	Participant	State Minister, FDRE minister of education
212	Rashad Aba miliki	Participant	Jimma Vice Mayor Driver
213	Roba Megeresa	Participant	Oromia Prosperity Branch
214	Saali Seid	Participant	Jimma Communication
215	Sabiruu Zakiir	Participant	Jimma Zone
216	Sadik Kedir Abdu	Participant	Vertex Media
217	Samson Biratu	Participant	ACSO
218	Samson Mamo Gebregiorgis	Participant	Samson Advertising
219	Samuel Abate	Presenter	CRPP
220	Saron H/Silassie G/egzibher	Participant	Digital Media Tigray
221	Sawudaa Mohameedamiin	Participant	Jimma Zone
222	Seada Abdurahiman Habibe	Participant	Caffe Oromia Speaker
223	Seid Mohammed Ali(PhD)	Participant	Jigjiga University
224	Seife Deribe Endale	Participant	ENA
225	Seifu Mengistu	Participant	HPOR
226	Semelgne Belay Abdisa	Presenter	Oromia President Office
227	Semir Nuredin Aba	Participant	Jimma Communication
228	Serawit Fikre Mihirka	Participant	Individual(artist)
229	She Husse She Abduletif	Participant	Jimma Zone
230	She Mahammed Sh/Abdulqadir	Participant	Jimma Zone

No	Name of The Participant	Role	Organization
231	She Nebil Mussa	Participant	Jimma City
232	She Nehim Hassen	Participant	Jimma City
233	Shemsiya Awol Mohammed	Participant	Menaheria Radio
234	Shimeket Kassahun	Participant	Jimma University
235	Simeneh Bayafers Afre	Participant	Bayafers Media
236	Singitan Atnafu	Participant	Oromia President Office
237	Sisay Agena Gole	Participant	Lualawi Media
238	Sitina Hussen	Participant	Jimma city
239	Sitota Tilahun	Participant	Jimma University
240	Sofia Seid	Participant	Minister of peace
241	Solomon Asmelash Siyum	Participant	Individual
242	Solomon Tullu (PHD)	Participant	Jimma University
243	Surafel Shewabeza	Participant	NBC
244	Surafel zelalem Tadesse	Participant	Menaheria Radio
245	Tadesse Baye Wassie	Participant	FDRE Minister Of Education
246	Tadesse Embaye Adhana	Participant	Raya Medhin Dirjit
247	Tadesse Habtamu (PHD)	Participant	Jimma University
248	Tamirayehu Wondimagegnhu	Participant	EBC
249	Teame Aredom Bezabh	Participant	Semret Party
250	Teferi Alemu Haddis	Participant	Artist ,Sheger Radio
251	Teklu Tafesse (PHD)	Participant	Jimma University
252	Temesegen Getahun Adugna	Participant	Axumawit Media
253	Tesfalegen Yohannes	Participant	HOPR
254	Tesfaye Gudeta Amanu	Participant	Oromia President Office
255	Tesfaye Mulatu	Participant	Caffe Oromia
256	Teshome Mosissa Negassa	Participant	Oromia President Office
257	Tewodros Teshome Kebede	Participant	Teddy Studio
258	Tezera Meteku	Participant	EBC
259	Tibebu Belete Tefera	Participant	Ahadu Radio
260	Tibebu Tadesse Mekonnen	Participant	Ethiopia National Dialogue Commission
261	Tiblet Tesfaye Dejene	Participant	Brics Media
262	Tigest Alemu Kidanu	Participant	Axumite Media
263	Tijjannii Naasir	Participant	Zone Admin
264	Tilahun Gugsa Mengesha	Presenter	Individual(artist)
265	Tilahun Tafere Embafres	Participant	CEO TBS
266	Tsegaye Chama Didana	Participant	Global Black Center
267	Tsegazeab Kidanu Berhe	Participant	Digital Media Tigray
268	Tsigabu Kobae Meles	Participant	Tigray Democracy party
269	W/ro Serkalem Moges Gelagele	Participant	Ministry of Revenue

No	Name of The Participant	Role	Organization
270	Wako Abduba	Participant	Attorney General Bureau
271	Wasihun Tesfaye Mussie	Participant	EZEMA
272	Wondalem Gonfa	Participant	FDRE Minister Of Education
273	Wosenu Awegechew	Participant	EBC
274	Woubshet Taye Abebe	Participant	Addis Minch
275	Xahaa Kamefr	Participant	Jimma Mayor
276	Yalew Kebede Mekonnen	Participant	Global Black Center
277	Yared Ademasu	Participant	FDRE Minister Of Education
278	Yeabsra Million	Participant	FDRE Minister Of Education
279	Yesuuf Shaarw	Participant	Zone Vice Admin
280	Yitbarek Mesfin	Participant	FDRE Minister Of Education
281	Yonas Amare woldemariam	Participant	Reporter News Paper
282	Yonatan Simachew Nega	Participant	EBC
283	Yontan Mulugeta	Participant	
284	Zakir Awwol	Participant	Jimma University
285	Zehara Mohammedzin	Participant	Jimma Zone
286	Zelalem Abera Kebede	Participant	Bayfers media
287	Zelalem Woju	Participant	Jimma University
288	Zerihun Teshome	Presenter	CRPP
289	Zerubabel Alemayeu	Participant	Andafeta Media

17 National Conference Schedule

Time	Description of Activity	Time Allotted	Presenter / Speakers	Moderator / Chair
Pre-Conference Activities				
9:30 – 11:00 AM	Arrival at Jimma	2 hours	Organizing Committee	Organizing Committee
11:00 AM – 12:30 PM	Guests Check-in at Respective Hotels	1 hour 30 min	Organizing Committee	Organizing Committee
12:30 – 2:00 PM	Lunch	1 hour 30 min	Organizing Committee	Organizing Committee
2:00 – 5:00 PM	Field Visit	3 hours	Organizing Committee	Organizing Committee
6:30 – 8:30 PM	Cultural Evening and Networking Reception	2 hours	Jimma Cultural Troupe	Jimma University / Jimma Municipality
Day One – Monday, 12 January 2026				
8:00 – 8:45 AM	Arrival and Registration	45 min	OPO, CRPP, Jimma University Secretariat	CRPP / Protocol Team
8:45 – 9:00 AM	National Anthem	15 min	Organizing Committee	Ato Zerihun Teshome
9:00 – 9:45 AM	Opening Session and Welcome Remarks	45 min	Guests of Honor	Ato Zerihun Teshome
9:45 – 10:15 AM	The Struggle for a Shared Narrative in Ethiopia	30 min	Prof. Bahru Zewde	Ato Zerihun Teshome
10:15 – 10:45 AM	Coffee Break and Networking	30 min	Haile National Hotel	—
10:45 – 11:15 AM	National Identity, Shared Memory, and State Legitimacy	30 min	Dr. Tesfaye Beljige, Ms. Munira Abdelmenan	Ato Zerihun Teshome
11:15 – 11:45 AM	Risks of Fragmented National Discourse without a Unifying Narrative	30 min	Ambassador Lencho Bati (in place of H.E. Daniel Kibret)	Ato Zerihun Teshome
11:45 AM – 12:30 PM	Plenary Discussion	45 min	Conference Participants	Ato Zerihun Teshome
12:30 – 1:30 PM	Lunch Break	1 hour	Haile National Hotel	—
1:30 – 2:00 PM	Comparative Experiences on Pairing Dialogue with Institutionalization	30 min	Dr. Assefa Leake Gebru	Ato Zerihun Teshome
2:00 – 2:30 PM	Political, Social, and Economic Dividends of an Agreed Narrative	30 min	Prof. Brook Hailu Beshah	Dr. Yonas Adaye, Ms. Blen Mamo
2:30 – 3:00 PM	Governance, Security, Cultural Identity, and Development Policy	30 min	Dr. Birhanu Lenjiso	Dr. Yonas Adaye, Ms. Blen Mamo

Time	Description of Activity	Time Allotted	Presenter / Speakers	Moderator / Chair
3:00 – 3:30 PM	Coffee Break and Networking	30 min	Haile National Hotel	—
3:30 – 4:15 PM	Panel Discussion: National Identity, Shared Memory, and Political Legitimacy	45 min	Panel of Experts	Dr. Yonas Adaye, Ms. Blen Mamo
4:15 – 5:30 PM	Open Discussions	1 hour 15 min	Conference Participants	Dr. Zerihun Teshome
Day Two – Tuesday, 13 January 2026				
8:30 – 9:00 AM	Morning Coffee and Networking	30 min	Organizing Committee	Organizing Committee
9:00 – 10:45 AM	Session 3: Enabling Frameworks (Breakout Sessions)	1 hour 45 min	Groups	Dr. Abdulaziz Dawud
10:45 – 11:15 AM	Coffee Break	30 min	Haile National Hotel	—
11:15 AM – 12:45 PM	Session 4: Building Momentum and Partnerships (Breakout Sessions)	1 hour 30 min	Groups	Dr. Keyredin Tezera
12:45 – 1:30 PM	Session 5: Adoption of the Jimma Consensus Statement and Closing Ceremony	45 min	CRPP, Ministry of Peace, Jimma University, Oromia National Regional State	Steering Committee Chair Dr. Abdulaziz Dawud
1:30 – 2:30 PM	Lunch Break	1 hour	Haile National Hotel	—
2:30 – 5:30 PM	Departure	—	—	—