SPARK

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"Everything begins with an idea"

HE Muferihat Kamil

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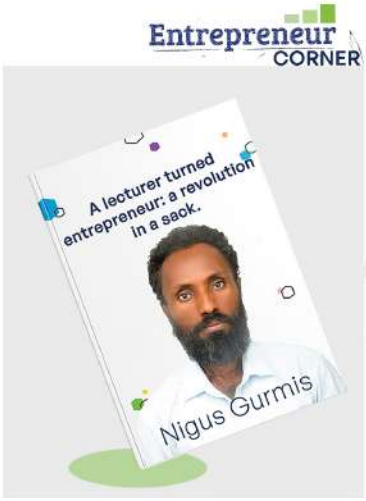
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Entrepreneurship Development Institute

Inspire Disrupt Transform *Biannual Magazine*

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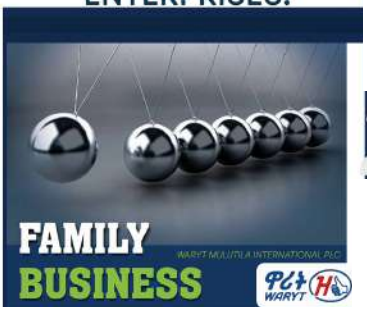


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MESSAGE *from the* EDITOR

Welcome, Change-Makers, Innovators, and Entrepreneurs!

The wait is over — the very first edition of EDI E-Magazine is here! Bursting with ideas, bold conversations, and fresh insights, this quarterly publication is your new home for everything entrepreneurship in Ethiopia. Think of it as your compass, your spark, and your toolkit, all rolled into one.

Entrepreneurship isn't a smooth ride — and we're not here to pretend it is. Whether you're running a thriving company or sketching your first business idea in a notebook, the road will test you. That's why we've created this platform: to speak openly about the challenges, to share solutions that work, and to keep the fire of innovation burning bright.

In this debut issue, we take you behind the headlines in our News Article section, revealing the full stories shaping Ethiopia's entrepreneurial ecosystem. You'll sit down with H.E. Muferihat Kamil in Our Guest for an inspiring conversation about startups and related issues.

Entrepreneur's Corner is stocked with practical tools and tips to fuel your business growth, while Family Business spotlights the remarkable journey of Waryt Mulutila International PLC., a true homegrown success story. Need quick wins? Quick Fact delivers bite-sized tools, templates, and industry insights you can use today. And in Programs & Projects, you'll discover workshops, networking events, and funding opportunities led by EDI to help you take your next big leap. In our Insight Page is your voice — a place to share your views, experiences, and big ideas about Ethiopia's entrepreneurial future.

EDI E-Magazine isn't just something you read — it's something you're part of. We want your stories, your feedback, and your passion. This is where innovators meet, collaborate, and create the momentum that will move our nation forward.
So dive in, get inspired, and let's shape the future together — one bold idea at a time.

Communication and Partnership Department Team



MESSAGE *from the* CEO

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the newly designed EDI E-Magazine.

This publication is dedicated to sharing the stories, ideas, and opportunities that define the entrepreneurial journey in Ethiopia.

The Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI) was formally established in 2021 to catalyze the adoption of innovative and disruptive solutions to power the realization of Ethiopia's dream of robust economic growth and social transformation.

It is a quasi-governmental institution, one of its kind in the country, serving as bridge between the private sector and the public sector.

We are committed to building a vibrant and dynamic ecosystem where creativity, creative problem-solving at scale, experimentation, growth, and opportunity can flourish.

To this end, we are closely collaborating with the government, private sector, development partners to shape Ethiopia's entrepreneurial future through various initiatives. We're also pioneering the Public Entrepreneurship Program, a first-of-its-kind initiative in the country focused on promoting efficiency, anticipatory and future-proof leadership, collaboration, and the adoption of disruptive solutions within government institutions to create a more supportive environment for SMEs and startups.

Inside this issue, you will find stories of the programs that are helping entrepreneurs across the country turn their dreams into reality, quick facts, Family business, and insight from experts and more.

I hope you enjoy this first edition. Let's shape the future of entrepreneurship in Ethiopia, together.

Sincerely,
Dr. Hassen Hussien, CEO
Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI)

News Articles

A New Era for Innovation, Ethiopia Ratifies Groun breaking Startup Proclamation!



Shaping Tomorrow: Ethiopia's Senior Leaders Embrace Innovation and Strategic Vision in Bishoftu

A New Era for Ethiopian Innovation, Ethiopia Ratifies Ground breaking Startup Proclamation!

Addis Ababa –2025
The Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI) is delighted that the House of People's Representatives (HoPR) unanimously ratified Ethiopia's first-ever Startup Proclamation on July 17, 2025.



This landmark legislation is a monumental step forward, bringing much-needed legal clarity and robust support to our nation's vibrant startup ecosystem. This is a shared victory for every innovator and entrepreneur working to build a more resilient and inclusive economy. This proclamation is a game-changer, directly addressing the key challenges that have held back our entrepreneurs.

In a pointer decision set to transform its innovation landscape, Ethiopia has officially enacted its first-ever Startup Proclamation, a bold legislative move aimed at nurturing a thriving, inclusive startup ecosystem. Unanimously approved by the House of People's Representatives, the proclamation introduces a clear legal and policy framework to support early-stage businesses and drive innovation-led growth.

Legal Recognition and Institutional Backing

The law formally defines startups and innovative businesses, providing them with access to tax incentives, legal protections, and tailored support. Entities must apply for official labels to qualify for benefits. A three-tier institutional structure—including the National Startup Council, Technical Advisory Board, and Startup & Innovation Unit—will oversee implementation.

Financial Incentives and Market Access

Key incentives include:

- Tax exemptions (up to 5 years), customs relief, and loss carry-forward provisions.
- Startup Innovation Fund and an 80% National Credit Guarantee Scheme to unlock capital.
- Regulatory sandbox for testing products without full compliance requirements.
- Start-up Leave for employees to build ventures while retaining job security.

Focus on Inclusion and Local Innovation

The proclamation prioritizes youth, women, and rural entrepreneurs, expanding support to regional hubs and improving digital access. It also opens up public procurement to startups, boosting market entry and demand for homegrown solutions.

EDI's Role

The Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI), under the Ministry of Labor and Skills, played a central role in shaping the law through policy input, stakeholder consultations, and ecosystem building. EDI proudly celebrates the ratification of the Startup Proclamation as a national achievement.

Looking Ahead

The proclamation is seen as a strategic shift in Ethiopia's economic direction—from traditional models to a startup-powered economy aligned with its Ten-Year Development Plan (2020–2030). While implementation challenges remain, optimism is high as Ethiopia joins the ranks of nations investing in innovation as a driver of sustainable development.

Source : ENA, EDI, Addis Insight, MoLS, MiNT websites and pages



Shaping Tomorrow Ethiopia's Senior Leaders Embrace Innovation and Strategic Vision in Bishoftu

Bishoftu, Ethiopia — Against the serene backdrop of Lake Bishoftu, Ethiopia's most influential public leaders gathered for an extraordinary three-day executive program that signals a new era in governance. From July 31 to August 2, 2025, the lakeside resort town transformed into a hub of innovation, dialogue, and forward thinking, as ministers, state ministers, and institutional heads came together for an Executive Training on Public Entrepreneurship, Systems Thinking, and Strategic Foresight.

Jointly organized by the Ministry of Labor and Skills, the Prosperity party, and the Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI), the training brought together senior officials from five key ministries—Health, Education, Labor and Skills, Women and Social Affairs, Culture and Sport, Innovation and Technology, and Tourism—each tasked with shaping the future of Ethiopia's public service.

A three-day executive training titled "Building the Future through Public Entrepreneurship and Innovation"

was successfully conducted, bringing together ministers and approximately 60 high-level officials, including state ministers, director generals, and deputy director generals.

This was not a traditional training. It was an immersive leadership experience designed to challenge assumptions, inspire innovation, and foster collaborative problem-solving. Over the course of three intense days, leaders were guided through hands-on exercises, global policy case studies, and strategic foresight simulations, each crafted to sharpen their ability to think beyond the present and prepare for an uncertain, complex future.



Sessions on systems thinking encouraged participants to see the bigger picture—how different elements of government and society interconnect, and how lasting change requires a shift from reactive policies to proactive design. Through these lenses, leaders explored how to create citizen-centered solutions, anticipate challenges before they arise, and redesign public services to be more inclusive, responsive, and resilient.

One of the most memorable highlights of the program was the vibrant Story Night, held on the evening of Friday, August 1. In a warm, lantern-lit atmosphere, Ethiopia's public figures stepped away from the formal setting and shared heartfelt personal stories of leadership, struggle, and triumph. There was blended storytelling, experience sharing and moments of deep reflection that reminded all present of the human spirit at the core of public service.

These intimate exchanges broke down hierarchies and built bridges of trust, unity, and shared purpose.

Throughout the training, the tone was one of urgency—but also hope. The world is changing fast, and Ethiopia is rising to meet that change. Participants left Bishoftu not only with new knowledge but with a renewed sense of mission—to lead boldly, think differently, and work collaboratively across ministries for the good of all Ethiopians.

This landmark program is a powerful reflection of Ethiopia's growing commitment to building a modern, agile, and innovation-driven public sector. By investing in leadership development at the highest levels, the government is planting the seeds of transformative change—change that EDI is proud to support and nurture.

As these senior leaders return to their respective ministries, they carry with them the tools, inspiration, and shared vision needed to turn ideas into action—and challenges into opportunities. The ripple effects of Bishoftu will be felt far beyond its tranquil lakeshores, shaping policies, programs, and mindsets across the nation.



The feedback from the trainers was overwhelmingly positive—described as heartwarming, deeply moving, and profoundly humbling.

In his remarks, Dr. Hassen Hussen, EDI CEO extended his heartfelt gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of the program—both those directly involved in the delivery and those who provided essential support behind the scenes.



OUR GUEST



“Everything begins with an idea”

Her Excellency the Minister of Labor & Skills
Muferihat Kamil Ahmed

Building a Thriving Entrepreneurial Ecosystem: The Role of Skills and Innovation in a Dynamic Entrepreneurial Landscape

"Everything begins with an idea, then an individual, and finally an institution. The value given to Idea has demonstrated that the government's style of thinking and language, particularly His Excellency the Prime Minister's involvement in taking on the ice-breaking leadership role, gave the government ownership and a solid foundation to move forward"

H.E Muferihat Kamil

In April 2024, Ethiopia gave the green light for close to ten policy adjustments to attract startups and entrepreneurs. The changes include a simpler office setup, a special legal sandbox—a legal framework that allows startups to experiment with new ideas and business models without having to worry about all of the usual regulations—the ability to retain all foreign currency earned from service exports, and the introduction of both tax incentives and tax holidays.

EDI's Communications sat with Her Excellency Mufriat Kamil, Minister of Labour and Skills of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, at the Science Museum Ethiopia Startup Exhibition to discuss policy modifications.

EDI: In your view, which of the announced reforms is greater for you or will have the most significant impact on startup growth in Ethiopia?

It's tough for me to choose just one because some of them we've never tried before, and the influence they'll have may have a broader connotation, such as access to finance. It was a country where ideas were dreaded; to be honest, knowing the power of ideas, realizing the strength of ideas, and viewing ideas as collateral were limitations in the nation.

And the government's readiness and deep belief in using ideas as collateral were incredible, because everything begins with an idea, then an individual, and finally an institution.

Startups and entrepreneurs have only ideas. Their capability is the height and depth of their ideas. In the last five to six years, I've been impressed by the value that the country places on ideas. The same is true for our sector, and it tells me Ethiopia's bright future; therefore, I'm moved to ideas. Ideas are more important than access to capital, and because the country has a large population and diversity, we can expect an unbroken growth pattern and cycle. This human capital is one of its potentials, and diversity is a source of richness and value rather than a curse, and valuing ideas is one instrument for realizing this potential.

A quest to construct a democratic, wealthy, and prosperous society began with the tune of ideas, and all other policy modifications have an impact on building an ecosystem with high stakeholder involvement. We faced some challenges while working together, but when we launched the NEST, Next Ethiopian Startup, a brand new initiative launched in October 2023 to support and empower startups in the country, the collaboration of stakeholders to make it a reality was incredible, and this is what the much-anticipated startups and entrepreneurs require.

EDI: In your view, which of the announced reforms is greater for you or will have the most significant impact on startup growth in Ethiopia?



Overall, the value given to Idea has demonstrated that the government's style of thinking and language, particularly His Excellency the Prime Minister's involvement in taking on the ice-breaking leadership role, gave the government ownership and a solid foundation to move forward. The reform has also brought together various fragmented action efforts and actors from across the board at the same table, which has become increasingly impactful as we progress through the journey.

> The government's readiness and deep belief in using ideas as collateral were incredible, because everything begins with an idea..."
>
> Her Excellency Mufriat Kamil

EDI: What value would these policy recommendations, which may be viewed as pillars, provide to the Ministry's long-term objective of building a thriving and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Ethiopia? How can EDI help to achieve this vision?

These reforms are like pillars; they are few, but a house may stand on them. As a result, these modest number pillars have the objective of creating permanent decent jobs while indulging in endless innovation, which will also boost the country's competitiveness by serving as a fulcrum. The new gauge around the globe includes the number of unicorns and decacorns. And this reform will put Ethiopia on the map. A dynamic journey that compels us to honor our promises.

These are significant promises that must be translated and broken down into actionable steps. Recently, the Council of Ministers has adopted a new policy for the development of SMEs.

The policy aims to maximize the potential of SMEs and their alignment with startups. Acts, decrees, rules, and other changes will derive from the overall policy. Regarding implementation, various governmental stakeholders are collaborating to make it a reality. The recently formed digital transformation council, led by the deputy prime minister, is meant to coordinate the efforts of startups and enterprises while also providing growth opportunities that will foster an atmosphere receptive to innovative businesses.

In terms of EDI and its entrepreneurial culture and mindset, creation and development are progressing rapidly. The institute has been transformed from a project over the last two to three years, and we are witnessing outcomes and impacts. The institute has contributed to the revolutionization of TVTs and the promotion of entrepreneurship as a thinking tool in the country, and these efforts must continue and be strengthened.

EDI has also played an important role in the development of NEST as one of the MoIs' families. EDI's contribution to the entrepreneurial ecosystem and follow-up are also encouraging.

"EDI has contributed to the revolutionization of TVTs and the promotion of entrepreneurship as a thinking tool in the country"
Her Excellency Mufriat Kamil

"These reforms are like pillars... a house may stand on them...creating permanent decent jobs while indulging in endless innovation... This reform will put Ethiopia on the map."
Her Excellency Mufriat Kamil

EDI: How does the Ministry plan to monitor and evaluate the impact of these reforms on the entrepreneurial landscape? If so, how can EDI contribute to this process?

Continuous learning, research, measurement, and evaluation are essential components of the startup journey at every stage. One of the NEST components is academic formation. EDI can also start its own research wing and conduct research. Developing entrepreneurship as a way of thinking and culture takes time. Overall, EDI plays a role. What is delivered or not and even the quality of the delivered items can be questioned. EDI and others can also make contributions in this regard.

EDI: How will these reforms benefit women, individuals with disabilities, and the informal sector?

Inclusiveness is a key component of the reform. Women make up the majority and serve as the foundation of a family. Strong families build strong nations. So much is expected of us in creating an enabling atmosphere for Ethiopian women. Because women play many roles in their families, communities, and as productive members of the workforce, Women have roles and abilities; thus, all of our actions aim to remove barriers. And, as a ministry, we have an inclusive policy regarding skill development and employability.

It is not only women but also those with disabilities who, despite their physical limitations, have the potential to do so. Accessibility and inclusiveness are some of the areas we prioritized in the employment creation reform, as well as other industries where significant growth is anticipated. Inclusiveness is about justice and maximizing a nation's potential. It's not about donating.

In terms of the informal sector, the most current SME policy addresses it by making it profitable and competent rather than a daily hand-to-mouth issue. The reform concept goes beyond SME survival. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for 40% of GDP.
We conducted several studies on SMEs and provided recommendations for establishing an enabling environment. EDI can also play a role in boosting awareness and developing their talents, as most SME have an entrepreneurship seed in them, which is growing.





EDI: In light of the reforms, how can the Ministry collaborate with EDI and other stakeholders to ensure the Ethiopian workforce has the nec essary skills to thrive in the evolving business environment?

Skill is an entry point. Skill development is given paramount attention. Institutions are set up like EDI is on the soft side and the other on the hard side. TVTs are directed towards the fact that recent policy training and education focus on different skills, including life skills. Reforms have been underway for the past two years. The EDI is playing an irreplaceable role in regards to soft skills, including entering television. EDI is also expected to respond to the demands and continue capacitating itself. In regards to reachability, digital content is also meant to create awareness among the public about improving skills.

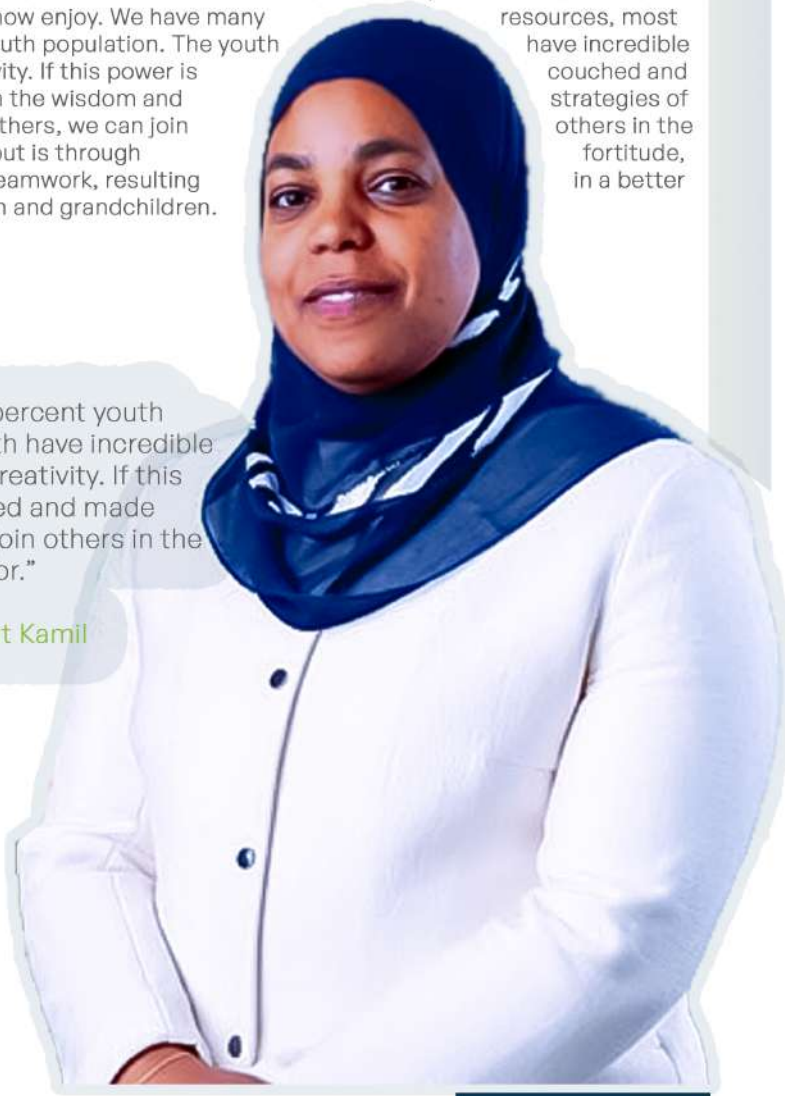
EDI: In light of the changes, how can the Ministry and other stakeholders cooperate to ensure that the Ethiopian workforce has the skills it needs to flourish in the changing business environment?

Skills are the starting point, and growing them is our main focus. Institutions are set up in the same way that EDI operates on the soft sills and others like TVTs on the hard sills. TVTs are aimed at ensuring the recent policy on training and education, which focuses on various skills, including life skills. Reforms have been underway for the past two years, and a lot of promising changes are starting to emerge. The EDI is incomparable in terms of soft skills, particularly in entrepreneurial TVTs. EDI is also expected to meet the demands and continue to build its capacity. Regarding reachability, digital content is also needed to create awareness among the public.

EDI: With a thriving startup environment, how can Ethiopia use these reforms to position itself as a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship in East Africa, and where do you see the country in 50 years?

After 50 years, I see Ethiopia as a peaceful, democratic, prosperous, and developed country. This could be a two-generation issue. A price must be paid. Our forefathers and mothers sacrificed their blood and bones to secure our freedom. What is asked of us is simply sweat, wisdom, and endurance; if that is the case, I do not want to bind Ethiopia in the horn alone because others have demonstrated this by starting from nothing and becoming frontiers.

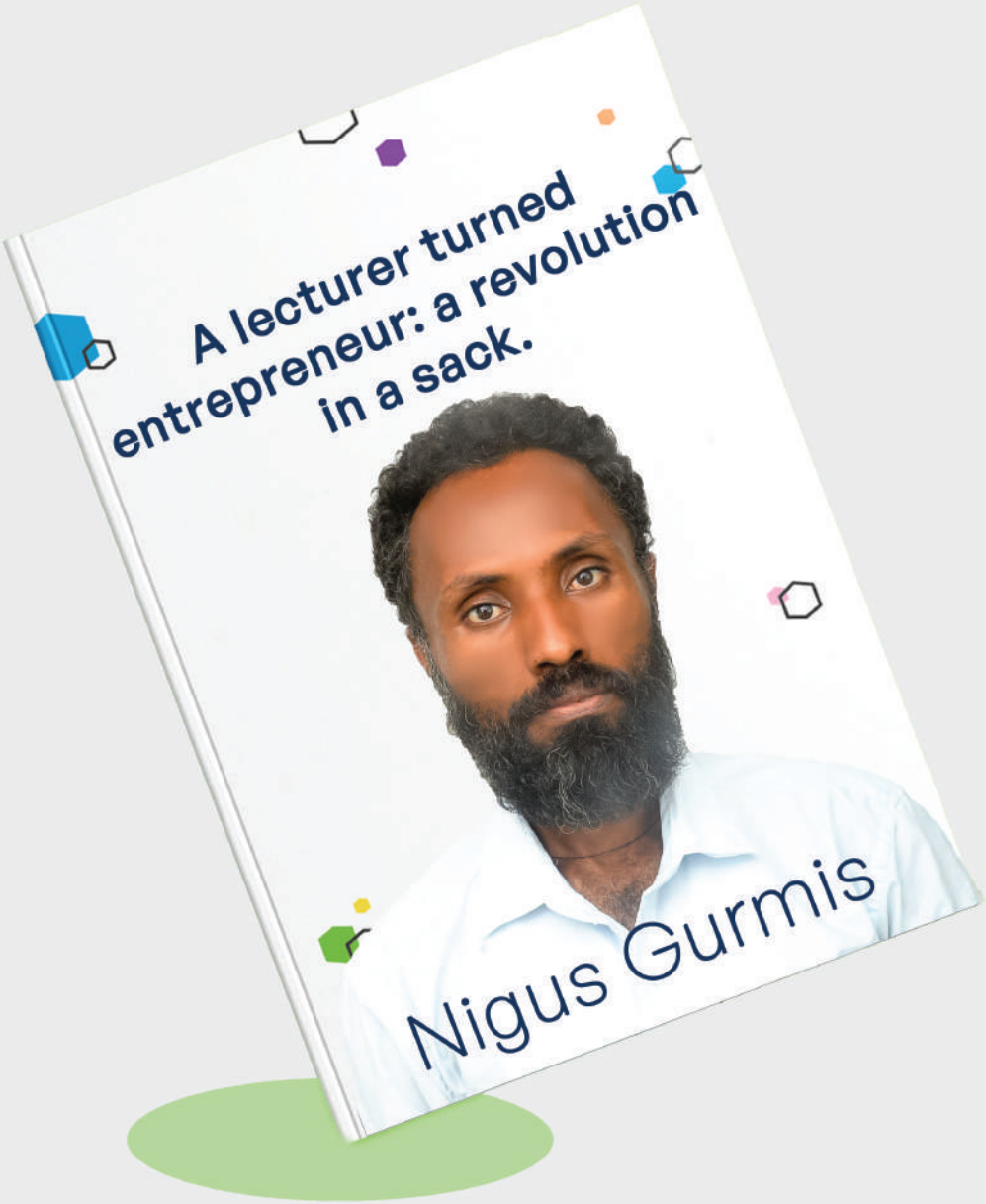
There is no reason why we cannot become like those countries, which lacked some of the amenities that we now enjoy. We have many resources, most notably a 70 percent youth population. The youth have incredible enthusiasm and creativity. If this power is couched and made effective through the wisdom and strategies of our forefathers and mothers, we can join others in the corridor. The only way out is through fortitude, bravery, tenacity, and teamwork, resulting in a better Ethiopia for our children and grandchildren.



"We have a 70 percent youth population. The youth have incredible enthusiasm and creativity. If this power is couched and made effective... we can join others in the corridor."

H.E Mufriat Kamil

Entrepreneur CORNER



A Lecturer Turned Entrepreneur:
Nigus Gurmis and the Animal Feed Revolution in Mizan Aman



Have you ever wondered what happens when knowledge meets purpose, and passion is ignited by opportunity? Nigus Gurmis, a soft-spoken former lecturer with a background in agricultural economics, has answered that question through action. His journey from the classroom to founding a pioneering animal feed processing plant in the heart of Mizan Aman is a story of transformation, tenacity, and trailblazing impact.

Once committed to shaping minds within the walls of a university, Nigus felt a growing urge to do more—to create something that would not only inspire change, but solve real problems in the agricultural community. That opportunity arrived when he enrolled in the Entrepreneurship Training Workshop (ETW) delivered by the Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI) through the SEED Program, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation.

But this wasn't your typical training.

The workshop's experiential learning approach went far beyond lectures and PowerPoint slides. It focused on behavioral transformation, equipping participants to think like entrepreneurs, act decisively, and build sustainable ventures. For Nigus, it was the spark he needed. He left that workshop not only with knowledge, but with a vision—and a team.

Together with five close colleagues who shared his drive, Nigus took a bold step. They identified a critical gap in the local economy: farmers in the region were struggling due to the lack of access to affordable, high-quality animal feed. This unmet need, coupled with the area's agricultural potential, presented both a challenge and an opportunity.

And they seized it.

Pooling together a modest capital of 250,000 birr, the team laid the foundation for what would become Dayen Animal Feed Factory—a pioneering enterprise in the Bench Sheko Zone. Their humble startup has since evolved into a flourishing business valued in the millions, producing over 5,000 quintals of animal feed every month, and providing permanent employment for 23 individuals, many of whom are local youth.

This is more than a business—it's a beacon of innovation and a source of regional pride.

Behind this success lies not only grit and vision, but also strategic support. Recognizing the potential of their enterprise, the team pursued and secured lease financing from the Development Bank of Ethiopia, which played a crucial role in scaling operations.



One that began with a sack of feed but now feeds the dreams of an entire community.

Today, the plant is not only meeting the demands of local farmers but also transforming livestock productivity and contributing to the agro-economy of the region.

Nigus's story exemplifies what can happen when education, entrepreneurship, and ecosystem support converge. It is a story of purpose-led transformation—proof that when equipped with the right tools, young professionals can move from job-seeking to job-creating, from teaching theories to solving real-world problems.

At the Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI), we are deeply proud to have walked alongside Nigus on this journey. His success embodies the very mission we strive for: to empower individuals to build sustainable futures through entrepreneurship.

Indeed, what Nigus has built is more than a plant. It is a revolution—one that began with a sack of feed but now feeds the dreams of an entire community.



PROGRAMS & PROJECTS

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WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROJECT



The World bank Executive Directo
for Africa Group 1 Anne Kabagamb
visited WEDP client at Addis Abab

Empowering Women Entrepreneurs

Our Programs

Building Ethiopia's Next Generation of Entrepreneurs: EDI's Transformative Programs

At the Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI), our mission is clear: to empower people, strengthen businesses, and shape a thriving entrepreneurial future for Ethiopia. Over the years, we have developed a diverse portfolio of programs that not only equip entrepreneurs with essential skills, but also create the right conditions for startups, MSMEs, and institutions to innovate, compete, and grow sustainably.

Our **Training and Capacity Building Program** is the beating heart of this mission. Drawing from the globally renowned **UNCTAD EMPRETEC model**, we deliver hands-on, practical learning experiences that help entrepreneurs discover their inner drive, design value-driven ventures, and successfully launch and scale their businesses. Offered in English, Amharic, Afaan Oromoo, and Tigrigna, our programs reach entrepreneurs at all stages—supported by a rich catalogue of specialized training, from Training-of-Trainers (ToT) certifications to integrated programs for corporate and public organizations.

Through our flagship **Business Development Services (BDS) Program**, we enhance the quality and reach of business support services across Ethiopia, strengthening the country's entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem. From startups to large institutions, we work to ensure businesses have the expert guidance they need to excel.

We know that entrepreneurs thrive when the environment supports them. That's why our **Enabling Environment and Ecosystem Building** efforts focus on breaking systemic barriers, fostering collaboration, influencing policy, and building strategic partnerships that create a more resilient, inclusive entrepreneurial landscape.

Access to finance is another critical pillar. Too often, promising ventures stall due to a lack of funding—especially those led by youth, women, and marginalized groups. Our Access to Finance initiatives bridge this gap by working with financial service providers to design inclusive, innovative funding solutions, de-risking investment for entrepreneurs who need it most.

We are also embedding entrepreneurship where it matters most—the places where the next generation is learning and growing. Our Incubation Program Installation in Technical and Vocational Training (TVT) institutions and universities transforms them into vibrant innovation hubs, fostering system-based entrepreneurship ecosystems tailored to their unique cultural and economic contexts.

And at the heart of all our work lies **Diversity and Inclusion**. We are committed to breaking down barriers so that entrepreneurship is accessible to all—regardless of background, ability, or circumstance. Our strategies, programs, and leadership reflect the diversity of the communities we serve, ensuring no one is left behind in the journey toward economic empowerment.

Our Projects

Building Skills, Creating Jobs, and Powering Dreams: EDI's Transformative Projects

For over years, the Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI) has been a catalyst for change—turning ideas into enterprises, and potential into prosperity. Working hand-in-hand with global development partners such as UNDP, the World Bank, GIZ, TFO Canada, the Mastercard Foundation, and etc. EDI has implemented a diverse portfolio of innovative, donor-funded programs that empower Ethiopia's youth, women, and small businesses to compete and succeed in a fast-changing economy.

Each initiative under EDI's umbrella addresses a different but interconnected piece of the nation's economic puzzle. The Education and Skills for Employability (EASE) Project equips young people and women with short-term, market-driven skills that directly align with industry needs. The Sustainable Employment through Entrepreneurship & Enterprise Development (SEED) program, powered by the Mastercard Foundation, is ambitiously creating one million dignified jobs in just five years.

Other groundbreaking efforts include the UNDP-supported Entrepreneurship Development Program, which strengthens high-growth, job-rich SMEs; the EthioBDS Voucher System with GIZ, which gives SMEs affordable access to quality business development services; and the UNCDF-backed energy sector business plans, helping rural enterprises adopt sustainable technologies.

EDI's programs also focus on inclusion and sector-specific transformation—such as supporting women-owned businesses in Addis Ababa's leather sector with the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, improving one-stop service centers with IOM, and piloting FAO's sustainable agripreneurship curriculum to grow environmentally responsible agribusinesses.

These projects are not just about training and tools—they're about creating opportunities, fostering innovation, and reshaping Ethiopia's entrepreneurial landscape. And among these transformative initiatives, one stands out for its lasting impact on women-owned businesses across the country: the Women Entrepreneurship Development Project (WEDP).

In the following pages, we take a closer look at WEDP's journey, its achievements, and how it continues to open doors for women entrepreneurs—proving that when women rise, entire communities thrive.

Empowering Women Entrepreneurs:
Women Entrepreneurship Development Project (WEDP)

A quiet revolution is taking place in Ethiopia's vibrant urban streets and serene rural communities, driven by women's entrepreneurial fervor.

The Women Entrepreneurship Development Project, or WEDP, is paving the way for a new era of female empowerment and economic independence in a country where socioeconomic dynamics have historically been determined by traditional gender norms.

WEDP works to break down barriers and support the business goals of women in Ethiopia, including in 159 towns and 20 major cities.

This innovative project, led by governmental organizations, foreign organizations, and regional partners, seeks to empower female entrepreneurs by tackling structural barriers like restricted access to capital, expertise, and market prospects, as well as deeply ingrained cultural norms that prevent women from engaging in the business world.

A silent revolution is taking place in Ethiopia's vibrant urban streets and serene rural communities, driven by women's entrepreneurial fervor.





European Investment Bank (EIB) Dr. Werner Hoyer visited WEDP client Marshet Tsehay Workshp at Addis Ababa

The inability to obtain financing is a major obstacle faced by Ethiopian women entrepreneurs. In order to increase women's access to Finance, WEDP works closely with banks, financial institutions, and microfinance providers. As of June, 2025, WEDP has helped 26,668 WEDP clients receive loans totaling birr 11.35 billion, providing crucial financial support to women-owned businesses nationwide. WEDP is filling the funding gap and empowering women to achieve their business goals by providing loans that are specifically designed to meet the needs of female entrepreneurs.

Through Business Development Services (BDS), WEDP is committed to creating an enabling ecosystem that supports and nurtures female entrepreneurs at every step of their journey, going beyond training and loan. This includes the creation of networks, mentorship initiatives, and business incubation facilities where women can meet like-minded individuals, get advice from seasoned mentors, and obtain necessary tools and assistance. WEDP is promoting an innovative and empowering culture by creating a welcoming atmosphere that honors women entrepreneurs. WEDP highlights the incredible success stories of women who have overcome obstacles to launch prosperous businesses and improve their communities, amidst the challenges and victories of entrepreneurship.

In order to enable women entrepreneurs to reach their full potential and make a positive impact on their environment, WEDP has registered 61,565 clients as of June, 2025, and has given them training, loan and business development services (BDS). These women entrepreneurs, who run everything from tech startups in urban centers to small businesses in rural hamlets, are not only advancing the economy but also acting as role models and inspiration for upcoming generations of female entrepreneurs. The impact of the project is demonstrated by the higher profitability of women-led companies and their ability to hire a sizable workforce.

The vision of an inclusive and equitable society is becoming more real as the Women Entrepreneurship Development Project (WEDP) broadens its influence and reach throughout Ethiopia. In addition to unleashing economic potential, WEDP is promoting gender equality, social empowerment, and sustainable development by providing women entrepreneurs with access to training and loan. As we look to the future, let us be united in our determination to support and honor women's entrepreneurial spirit, as they are the change agents and advocates for advancement in Ethiopia and beyond. In the years to come, the project is anticipated to expand under EDI to include more major Ethiopian cities.

INSIGHT Page



Yonatan Yilma
Business Development Service Program Manager @EDI

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES (BDS):

A GAME CHANGER FOR ETHIOPIAN ENTERPRISES!

The Insight page is an open platform for sharing individual perspectives on topics related to entrepreneurship, innovation, and other relevant issues. The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as the official position of EDI. Anyone is welcome to submit and publish their views on this page.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES (BDS): A GAME CHANGER FOR ETHIOPIAN ENTERPRISES!

Entrepreneurs are curious individuals who seek better ways to solve problems and create new products. They are driven by the idea of opportunity, which is the ability to see a chance where others may not. Recognizing opportunities involves identifying needs, gaps, or ways to improve existing systems. Entrepreneurs often listen to their communities and think of ways to offer something better or different. This drive drives them forward, whether it's starting a new business, launching a new product, or offering a unique service. They constantly monitor changes, pay attention to missing aspects, and come up with solutions that make life easier or more enjoyable. Entrepreneurship is exciting because it offers numerous possibilities for those willing to look, listen, and act.



Tackling Inflation and Financial Uncertainty capability.

With inflation driving up costs and reducing consumer purchasing power, businesses must rethink pricing strategies, streamline operations, and find ways to improve efficiency. BDS programs offer critical financial literacy, budgeting skills, and cost-management strategies to help businesses weather the impact of rising expenses without compromising growth. Mastering cash flow management and strategic pricing, enterprises can stay ahead of economic volatility.

Navigating Currency Floatation and Market Shifts

Ethiopia's recent shift toward currency floatation presents both challenges and opportunities for businesses. Fluctuations in exchange rates can affect import costs, supply chains, and profit margins. Through expert-led BDS initiatives, businesses can develop risk mitigation strategies, diversify revenue streams, and explore local sourcing to reduce dependency on foreign exchange. Those who adapt quickly will gain a competitive edge in the evolving financial landscape.



Turning Economic Transitions into Business Opportunities

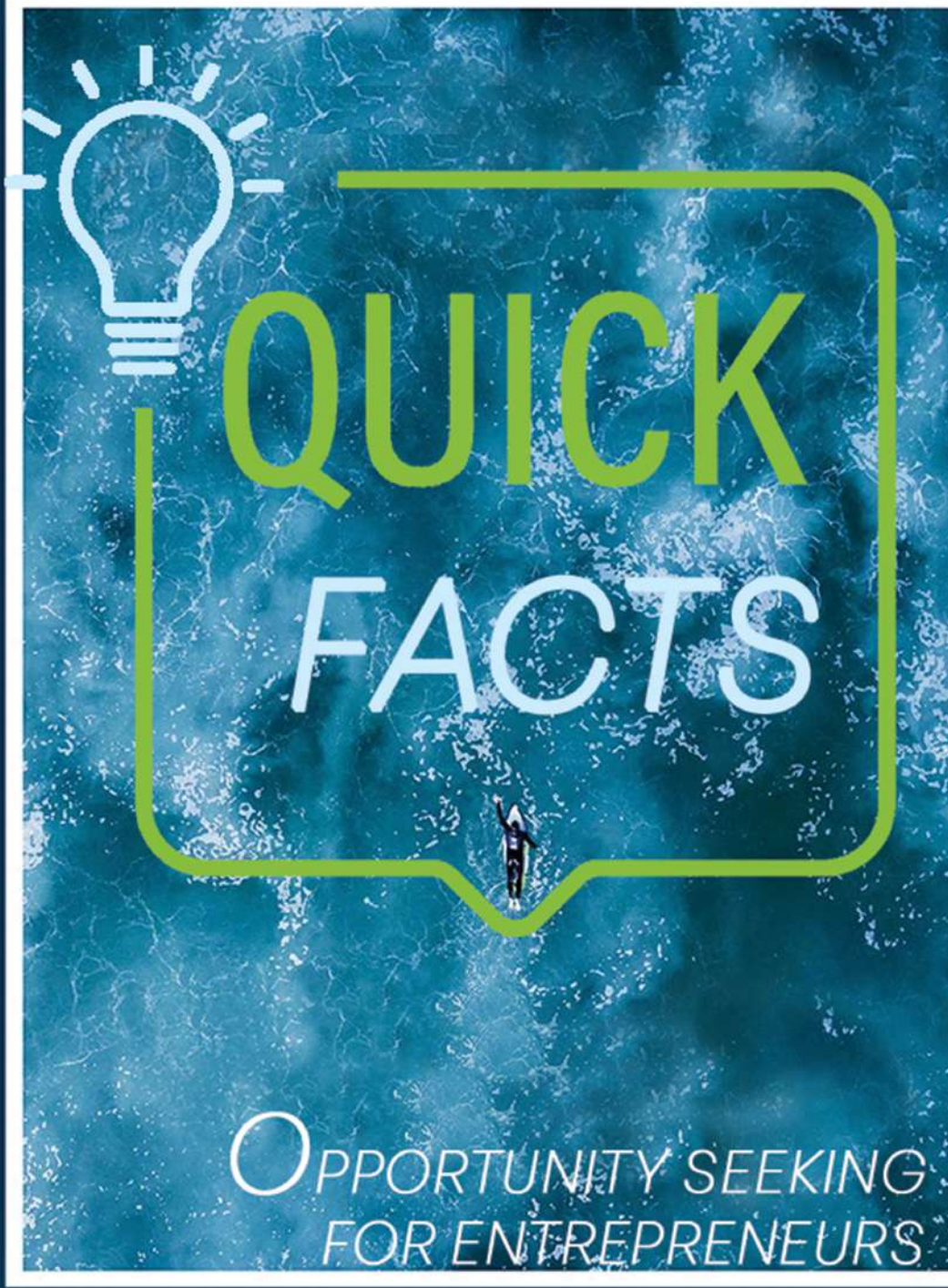
Macroeconomic changes, whether it is trade liberalization, new investment policies, or tax reforms, can be overwhelming for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and even large firms. However, with the right guidance, these transitions can become opportunities. BDS programs help businesses decode policy shifts, explore new sectors, and identify growth avenues that align with emerging economic trends.

Embracing Digital Transformation for Growth

As can be observed from global megatrends and local megatrends, the future of business is going digital. Companies that integrate technology, from e-commerce platforms to AI-driven customer insight, are more likely to thrive in today's competitive environment. BDS programs provide practical training on digital applications in business operation, marketing strategies, and automation, enabling businesses to enhance efficiency, expand market reach, and future-proof operations.

Beyond Survival: Thriving in the New Economy

Business success is not just about surviving economic pressure, it's about thriving. Companies that invest in learning, innovation, and strategic growth will be the leaders of tomorrow. Through leveraging Business Development Services, Ethiopian enterprises can strengthen their foundations, improve decision-making, and capitalize on new opportunities in a changing economy. The message is clear: adapt, innovate, and grow. Those who embrace change and invest in their development will not only withstand economic shifts but emerge stronger than ever!


QUICK
FACTS
OPPORTUNITY SEEKING
FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Opportunity Seeking

Entrepreneurs are curious individuals who seek better ways to solve problems and create new products. They are driven by the idea of opportunity, which is the ability to see a chance where others may not. Recognizing opportunities involves identifying needs, gaps, or ways to improve existing systems. Entrepreneurs often listen to their communities and think of ways to offer something better or different. This drive drives them forward, whether it's starting a new business, launching a new product, or offering a unique service. They constantly monitor changes, pay attention to missing aspects, and come up with solutions that make life easier or more enjoyable. Entrepreneurship is exciting because it offers numerous possibilities for those willing to look, listen, and act.

Dear reader, if you see yourself as an entrepreneur, take a moment to reflect on these essential facts about opportunity seeking.

Jack Ma, Founder of Alibaba, was rejected from 30 jobs, including KFC. So who are you to give up? Rejection can be viewed as an opportunity for you to think beyond employment. Jack Ma is now one of the most successful entrepreneurs in the world!



Education is imperative. In this new era, competition is high. Therefore, it is essential to acquire at least a college degree before pursuing entrepreneurship. The chances of you being a Bill Gates or Mark Zuckerberg (in regards to dropping out of Harvard) are now becoming slimmer.



People are choosing entrepreneurship for opportunity, not necessity.
That is the whole essence of becoming an entrepreneur. Right?

Getting out of your comfort zone. Being an entrepreneur means that you are a risk taker. Take a leap of faith on your new venture and you never know what fruits it'll bear.

Success does not happen overnight. Remember that! It takes determination, hard work and perseverance to become a successful entrepreneur. Most importantly, you need to be patient. Success is most likely going to take longer than a year. Use your opportunities in any circumstance's.

Every day comes with new challenges.Nobody said it was going to be easy being an entrepreneur. In fact, this is probably going to be the toughest times in your life. But look on the bright side, hey? Use the challenges and Change it to opportunities .



FAMILY BUSINESS

WARYT MULUTILA INTERNATIONAL PLC

In this edition, we shine a spotlight on WARYT MULUTILA INTERNATIONAL PLC—a proudly Ethiopian, family-owned enterprise making a remarkable impact in the home and office furniture industry.

Founded in 1989, WARYT began its journey by addressing the unique challenge of opening a gas station, a venture that laid the foundation for its entrepreneurial spirit. Since then, the company has grown into a trusted household name, celebrated for its high-quality products—such as WARYT CERAGEM—and its unwavering commitment to exceptional customer service.

Over the years, WARYT has diversified into multiple sectors, including manufacturing, and the import and distribution of household and office furniture, water purifiers, and dispensers. Its extensive product line ranges from office, home, and children's furniture to various home appliances, serving a wide spectrum of customer needs.

WARYT's success extends beyond business performance—it is also a significant contributor to the Ethiopian economy, providing employment opportunities for approximately 280 people. The company's expansion includes the establishment of two sister firms—WARYT Woodworks and ZE Plash PLC—as well as a recent joint venture with international partners to produce luxury mattresses and hotel furniture.

More than a business, WARYT is a brand built on people, values, and trust. Guided by its motto, "WARYT for All and All for WARYT," the company demonstrates genuine care for its employees and community. With vision, quality, and heart at its core, WARYT continues to shape the future of family business in Ethiopia.

TIHITINA LEGESSE

Managing Director

We had the pleasure of conducting an insightful interview with Tihitina 'Mulushewa' Legesse, Managing Director of WARYT Furniture. During the conversation, she shared valuable insights into the organization's success and generously reflected on her experiences and leadership journey.

With over 27 years of hands-on experience, she rose through the ranks—from fueling cars at her family's station to leading one of Ethiopia's most respected furniture brands. Under her direction since 2013, WARYT has continued to thrive while preserving its values and expanding its impact.

A psychology graduate from Addis Ababa University and an MBA holder from Hult International Business School in London, Tihitina also serves as President of the Ethiopian Furniture Manufacturing Industries Association and actively contributes to community-focused initiatives. Her leadership style, shaped by early challenges and continuous learning.



"working hard and trying to get to the top is much easier—because if you fall, you'll know your way back up."

Leadership & Strategy



EDI
How do you balance professional management practices with the personal dynamics of a family business?

Tihitina
Balancing professional management with family dynamics starts with institutionalizing processes early. From the beginning, my parents led by example —treating every employee like family while maintaining clear expectations. Today, out of 280 employees, only my sister and I are blood-related, yet we foster a culture where everyone feels valued. For instance, we implement structured hiring (through referrals, headhunting, and open postings as well as agencies) and performance systems to ensure fairness. At the same time, we preserve personal connections through mentorship and open communication. This approach allows us to scale professionally while keeping the family business's warmth and trust.

EDI
What's your approach to making tough decisions when family interests and business interests don't align.

Tihitina
When family and business interests clash, we always prioritize the company's institutionalized principles—even over personal ties. For example, 17 years ago, my brother faced a salary deduction for being late, enforced by a non-family manager. Similarly, my own leave requests have been approved or denied purely based on policy. These decisions reinforce that no one is above the rules, which builds trust with all employees. While it's never easy, this approach ensures fairness and prevents partiality, ultimately strengthening both the business and family respect for its values. Moving forward, I remain committed to making unbiased decisions, even when they're difficult.

EDI
How do you ensure that the next generation is prepared to take on leadership roles?

Tihitina
We prepare the next generation by fostering organic leadership—not entitlement. When I joined, I wasn't promised a role when I rejoined the company in 2004; I earned it in 2013 after gaining 14years of experience. Now it's been 11 years since I took over the Managing Director role. Today, we immerse successors in the company's values by involving them in meetings as observers and encouraging them to contribute ideas even if it sounds silly. For example, mine and my siblings kids bring in solution to production, marketing, and upholstery gets to be implemented, boosting their confidence and team trust. Beyond exposure, we pair them with mentors and fund external training to build skills. This balance of hands-on learning and accountability ensures they're ready to lead—not just by name, but by capability.

Succession Planning

EDI
What has been your biggest challenge in planning for succession, and how are you addressing it?

Tihitina
Retention has been our biggest succession challenge. After spending years training someone, losing them to competitors or other opportunities can set us back. To mitigate this, we now prepare 2-3 candidates for critical roles through rotational assignments. We also conduct stay interviews, employee surveys to address concerns early. While it's resource-intensive, this redundancy ensures seamless transitions and reduces key-person risk—a tradeoff worth making for long-term stability.

EDI
How do you determine which family members are best suited for leadership roles within the company?

Tihitina
We now use a family constitution to objectively evaluate leadership readiness. Candidates must work externally for at least 1 year—exposing them to new ideas —and then prove themselves in entry-level roles before advancing. For example, I left the company for my MBA and had a chance to work for almost 2 years. Later I rejoined after working for a retail chain, and the outside perspective helped streamline our internal system. We also assess problem-solving skills, teamwork, and performance metrics before promoting anyone. If someone underperforms, we provide mentorship even one on one time with the top management, but leadership isn't guaranteed. This process ensures family leaders are respected and equipped to drive growth.



Governance & Structure

EDI
Do you have a formal governance structure (e.g., family council, advisory board), and how effective has it been?

Tihitina
Since 2014, our family board (owners board) and constitution have formalized board governance. The board meets quarterly, with voting rights for active shareholders, and we've got a plan to add independent advisors to avoid deadlocks. We also integrate spouses through regular gatherings to sustain alignment—though business decisions remain separate. This system has cut conflicts significantly and ensured smoother leadership handovers.

EDI
How do you handle conflicts within the family that affect the business?

Tihitina
We resolve conflicts through a principle of 'convince or be convinced'—open debate focused on the company's and family's shared goals. For instance, when we disagree on expanding into a new market, we required each side to present data to the Family Board. After review, we either reached consensus or deferred to our independent advisor's recommendation. This ensures no 'losers,' only decisions are made objectively.

Culture & Value

EDI
What values or traditions do you believe set your family business apart from others in your industry?

Tihitina
At WARYT, three core values define our competitive edge.
Integrity: Since its inception in 1989, our internal Rules and Regulations has mandated that every decision—from procurement to promotions—follows documented systems. Even as owners, we adhere to the same policy.

Accountability .... Our family constitution adhere for family members to earn rather than feel entitle to leadership roles. I spent 14 years proving my operational excellence before my managing director role—just like any external hire. Today, 99% of leadership roles are held by non-family professionals.

Legacy Through Accountability
....Monthly 'Values Audits' ensure policies live beyond paper. During Covid, we retrained 100% of our staff because our value system prioritises people alongside profit.

EDI
How do you maintain the original vision of the founding generation while still innovating and adapting to change?

Tihitina
At WARYT, we honor our founders' vision of 'Locally-grown excellence' through three living principles: First, we preserved our commitment to local sourcing (75% of materials from Ethiopian suppliers) while modernizing - like our Lebu and Kality factory that now combines traditional carpentry with automated machineries. Second, we institutionalized their values in our 2014 Family Constitution, requiring family member leaders - to start in entry-level roles regardless of their educational achievements, just as I did. Third, impactful operation to our Employees, Community and our environment.

Future Outlook



EDI
Where do you see the company in the next 10 years, and how do you plan to keep the family legacy alive while growing the business?

Tihitina
Over the next decade, WARYT will become Ethiopia's sustainable furniture and related product producer while preserving our family legacy—scaling production through expanding the WARYT Excellence center maintaining our founders' values via the Family Constitution's leadership transitions. We'll balance innovation introducing interior design and related activities so that client can use our service as a one stop shop. We also plan to have a non-family board to blend fresh perspectives with our core values. Every decision will continue answering our families core values which are employee impact, community benefit, and long term success, ensuring growth that honors our 36 year history as Ethiopia's 'Most Respected Family Business' while pushing for responsible industry standards.

Suggestion



EDI
In your view, how effective are family businesses in the Ethiopian context?

Tihitina
In Ethiopia, family businesses often struggle with informal structures and founder dependency, yet some successfully scale into conglomerates. At Waryt, we combine family legacy with professional governance—mandating leadership transitions, requiring external experience for successors, and applying equal standards to all. This structured yet values-driven approach has made us one of the local sustainable family-led enterprises.

EDI
What are the key benefits you have experienced from running a family business?

Tihitina
As an Ethiopian family business, WARYT has uniquely benefited from the generational trust—our 36 years anniversary today in 2025, drawn by our culture where 82% feel 'family' doesn't mean favoritism (2023 staff survey). Unlike startups, our family's deep community roots, like our communities Tena Tabiya walk way initiatives, gave us unmatched local insight, while our structured governance (featured in Ethiopian Business Weekly's article ensures we innovate without losing these advantages. 'Modernizing Family Enterprise' cover story 2017)

EDI
What impact do you believe family businesses have on the Ethiopian economy?

Tihitina
Family businesses like our company form the backbone of Ethiopia's economy, contributing significantly to employment, local value chains, and economic resilience. As one of Ethiopia's most enduring family enterprises, we demonstrate how structured family businesses can outperform: we employ 280+ Ethiopians with 82% retention on management (vs. 60% industry average), source 75% of materials locally, and reinvest 10% of profits into community upskilling—directly supporting the national industrialization journey. While many Ethiopian family firms struggle with informality, WARYT's model of institutionalized governance (featured in the 2023 Ethiopian Business Review) shows how blending family values with professional systems can drive scalable, ethical growth that lifts entire sectors.

EDI
What advice would you offer to those currently managing a family business to help them operate more effectively?

Tihitina
Founders will have to work on building the structure so that the next generation can dwell on what has been built. The mindset of the founder will also have to be an open minded mindset so that the next generation could work side by-side while the first generation is there as this will help sustain and build the family Legacy.

EDI
Thank You!

Tihitina
Me too.

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