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HER EXCELLENCY MRS. ROMAN TESFAYE AND ESTABLISHING A PLATFORM

A case study of the George W. Bush Institute's First Ladies Initiative

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INTRODUCTION

The George W. Bush Institute's First Ladies Initiative engages and supports First Ladies from around the world to effectively use their unique platforms to advance pressing issues for women and children in their countries. This case study describes the programs championed by Her Excellency Mrs. Roman Tesfaye, First Lady of Ethiopia, and the initial impact of the Bush Institute's First Ladies Initiative on her work.

THE FIRST LADY AS AN ADVOCATE

Mrs. Roman Tesfaye has been the First Lady of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia since September 2012, following the national election for Prime Minister.

A well-educated and active First Lady, Mrs. Roman holds two master's degrees in economics and leadership. Prior to her position as First Lady, she served as the economic advisor of South Region's administration. Mrs. Roman has also previously held high level roles within the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, and for two terms, Mrs. Roman served as an active member of Southern Regional State Parliament.

Utilizing her unique background and expertise, Mrs. Roman has focused her attention on building economic opportunities for Ethiopian women, addressing nutrition and education for youth, and promoting the global health initiative, Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon that combats cervical and breast cancer, the leading causes of cancer deaths among women in sub-Saharan Africa.

"I plan to work tirelessly...to represent our great nation in [the] good light it deserves and to the betterment of our people in all aspects of life".

– H.E. Roman Tesfaye

AFRICAN FIRST LADIES SUMMIT: INVESTING IN WOMEN: STRENGTHENING AFRICA

On July 2-3, 2013, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, the Bush Institute, in partnership with ExxonMobil, convened an African First Ladies Summit, *Investing in Women: Strengthening Africa*, to highlight the critical role First Ladies play as advocates for women and girls. The Summit put the spotlight on success stories and best practices, and provided an opportunity to discuss public-private partnerships that have the power to advance women's health, education, and economic opportunity in Africa.

Mrs. Roman and seven other African First Ladies joined President George W. Bush, Mrs. Laura Bush, First Lady Michelle Obama, and more than 200 leaders from corporations, foundations, government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) at the Summit. The convening highlighted the critical role First Ladies play as advocates for women and girls, especially in the areas of health, education, entrepreneurship, and economic opportunity. Emphasizing the connections between the inclusion of women in all areas of society and the stability and prosperity of countries, panel discussions engaged experts, practitioners, and First Ladies to provide examples of successful interventions for women and girls that could be adopted and replicated to transform communities. A Networking Village spotlighted successful programs—created by both NGOs and private corporations—that are advancing opportunities and the overall welfare of women and girls.

ESTABLISHING A FIRST LADY'S PLATFORM

Mrs. Roman noted that she found inspiration at the Summit. The Summit was the first international event she attended in her role as First Lady, and at a roundtable discussion, Mrs. Roman sought advice on finding a focus and setting a platform. Mrs. Bush offered the recommendation to begin with the areas you know best, your expertise and interests. Applying the insight provided during her time in Tanzania, and leveraging her unique background, Mrs. Roman established her platform. In seeking to improve the lives of women and children in Ethiopia, she is focusing on the areas of economic opportunity (entrepreneurship and skills training), nutrition, and cervical and breast cancer prevention.

Economic Opportunity

The role of women in Ethiopian society is still largely dictated by traditional gender perceptions and cultural norms. Ethiopian women often encounter roadblocks while they seek economic opportunities, such as access to loans and other services from financial institutions.¹ There is also a gender gap in education and skills training, especially in rural areas, as it is more common for boys to attend school than for girls.²

¹ "Ethiopia: Leave No Women Behind." *Advancing Gender Equality: Promising Practices*. UN Women, 2013. Web. 13 Sept. 2014.

² Ibid.

According to UNESCO, for every 100 boys enrolled in secondary school in Ethiopia, only 77 girls have access to the same level of education. In 2009 alone, 1.8 million girls were out of school³. And while 42 percent of men over the age of 15 can read, barely 18 percent of women in the same age group are literate,⁴ as noted by UN Women.

To help address the gender disparity in both enterprise and education, the Office of the First Lady partnered with the Center for Accelerated Women's Economic Empowerment (CAWEE), government ministries, and NGOs to increase women's access to economic resources and information. The mission of CAWEE is to encourage women to become entrepreneurs, and to support them in their business endeavors. CAWEE builds the capacity of women through training, advisory services, business consulting, product development, mentoring, and information sharing. Additionally, CAWEE provides women entrepreneurs with market access to sell their products both domestically and internationally. CAWEE organizes national, regional, and international trade fairs, trainings, workshops, and study tours to further familiarize women entrepreneurs with the market environment. CAWEE also popularized women's entrepreneurial associations which provide a support and information network to female business owners.

Launching her first major initiative as First Lady, Mrs. Roman, in partnership with CAWEE, implemented a collaborative project in February 2014, "Connecting 1,500 Women and Girls to the Export Market." The focus of the project is to empower women and girls to develop entrepreneurial skills and to connect them to market opportunities to increase the trade of their goods. Working with 10 government ministers and 30 women-owned export companies, these 1,500 women and girls (many of whom are HIV positive) are provided with skills training in industries such as leather, weaving, basketry, embroidery, gemstones, and spinning. In a few short months, training curriculum has been developed focusing on four of these six specified areas of industries. Participants are provided with a formal certificate after they have completed their training courses. According to Nigest Haile, Executive Director and Lead Project Coordinator for CAWEE, the program goes "beyond doing business"; by empowering women and girls, entire communities are improved. This initiative, championed by Mrs. Roman, is an example of the value in investing in women.

Nutrition

Ethiopia suffers from high rates of malnutrition which affect the population's mortality rates and productivity. This phenomenon seems paradoxical given Ethiopia's robust agriculture industry and plentiful livestock supply. However, issues of drought, a growing population, and a lack of nutrition education have exacerbated the issue.⁵

³ "UNESCO Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education - One Year On." [UNESCO](#) last modified May, 2012. Web.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Sanders, Edmund. "Hunger Is Once Again Stalking Ethiopia." *Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles Times, 05 Aug. 2008. Web. 13 Sept. 2014.

Hunger and malnutrition have severely impacted Ethiopia. Two out of every five Ethiopian children experiences stunted growth.⁶ Malnutrition affects a child’s ability to learn, impacting their ability to contribute to society as an adult. It is estimated that Ethiopia loses 16.5 percent of its annual GDP because of the effects of childhood hunger.⁷

“Major efforts are needed to rapidly and sustainably improve the health and nutritional status of the population, which would have a positive impact on economic growth and development [in Ethiopia].”

— *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*

Moreover, those who are hungry and malnourished are more susceptible to illness, or death, which results in health care services that are costly and hard to access.⁸

To address this issue, the First Lady was appointed the “Nutrition Ambassador of Ethiopia” by the Federal Ministry of Health, and is the champion of a national nutrition initiative which seeks to strengthen nutrition education and opportunities for women. This initiative is operated through a partnership with the Ministry of Health, nine government ministers, private and nonprofit organizations, and development partners. The program recently implemented school feeding programs, which provide children with meals at school to address issues of malnutrition and stunting. Ethiopian infants and children often remain malnourished because of a lack of nutritional knowledge within communities. To address this challenge, participating schools hire and train local mothers to prepare meals for students. Through this program, women are steadily employed and learn valuable information regarding childhood nutrition.

Cervical and Breast Cancer Prevention

Cervical and breast cancer are the leading causes of cancer deaths among women in sub-Saharan Africa. In Ethiopia, cervical cancer accounts for 16.5 percent and breast cancer accounts for 24.7 percent of cancer deaths in women. The impact of these cancers is economic and social in nature and has led the First Lady and Ethiopian government to identify prevention and awareness of women’s cancers as priority areas of focus.

Seizing the opportunity to support Africa’s second-most populous country to prevent and treat women’s cancers, Ethiopia is one of the newest country partners to be a part of

⁶ Benson, Todd. *An Assessment of the Causes of Malnutrition in Ethiopia*. Rep. International Food Policy Research Institute, 2005. Web. 13 Sept. 2014: 15-16

⁷ *The Cost of Hunger in Ethiopia: Summary Report*. Rep. UN Economic Commission for Africa and the World Food Programme, June 2013. Web. 09 Jan. 2015.

⁸ Benson, Todd, 4-5.

Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon®. Key to the partnership's success in addressing cervical cancer in Africa is the engagement of high-level champions. In the case of Ethiopia, Mrs. Roman serves as this advocate, bringing national attention to women's cancers. In partnership with the Federal Ministry of Health in Ethiopia, she has reached out to parliamentarians to build understanding and advocate for increased funding for women's cancers in country.

In January 2014, she initiated the National Cancer Committee composed of governmental institutions, NGOs, and various development partners, to support ongoing initiatives and to enhance prevention, early detection, quality treatment services, and palliative care. In addition, the nation's infrastructure of more than 30,000 health extension workers and the "health development army," the government's commitment to equip five regional teaching hospitals for cancer treatment, and the presence of numerous local and international organizations that are working to improve women's health are all factors that offer great promise for Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon engagement in Ethiopia.

MOVING FORWARD, TOGETHER

Mrs. Roman worked with the Office of the Prime Minister to formally establish the Office of the First Lady, the first in the history of Ethiopia and a task which was completed in July 2013. In spite of Mrs. Roman's achievements, the Office of the First Lady still faces a number of challenges, including the need for technical and financial resources. Currently, her office is comprised of two employees, Office Director Biniyam E. Mekonnen and Special Assistant Eyerusalem Hailu. This structure is insufficient to support her work, and she has plans to hire additional staff and increase internal capacity.

In order to inform the First Ladies Initiative's support of First Ladies, each principal and her staff are directly asked about their needs via a targeted Needs Assessment. In December 2013, Mr. Mekonnen responded to the assessment request, identifying a distinct need for technical and financial support, which can be applied to infrastructure for preventing and treating cervical cancer and to resources and services for women entrepreneurs, such as startup capital or marketing expertise. In regards to building the capacity of the First Lady's staff, the Assessment identified the need for: trainings specific to office structure and management, public-private partnership development and implementation, communications strategy and implementation, and fundraising strategy and financial management; and short in-country knowledge exchanges with other African First Ladies' offices.

In terms of assisting and advising the First Lady, the Assessment highlighted an interest in Ethiopia-based workshops to identify possible solutions to critical country issues, guidance from communications professionals on how to help the First Lady be an

effective advocate for pressing issues, and opportunities for interaction between the Office and funding agencies, public and private organizations, and NGOs.

With the aim of addressing these and other needs identified by First Ladies' Offices across Africa, the Bush Institute's First Ladies Initiative is convening conferences, meetings, and trainings for First Ladies and their Senior Advisors.

These include, but are not limited to, the following activities in 2014:

- ***Investing in Our Future at the U.S. - Africa Leaders Summit***
As part of the U.S. – Africa Leaders Summit, the Office of the First Lady, the George W. Bush Institute, and the U.S. Department of State hosted *Investing in Our Future at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit*, a day-long spouses forum at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The forum brought together First Lady Michelle Obama, Mrs. Laura Bush, African First Ladies from nearly 30 countries, leaders from nongovernmental organizations and nonprofits, private sector partners, and other leading experts. The forum emphasized the critical role first spouses play and focused on the impact of investments in education, health, and public-private partnerships, further growing the First Ladies' robust network.
- **First Ladies Initiative Luncheon**
Mrs. Bush hosted a luncheon in New York City for African First Ladies and several corporations and NGOs that are working on the African continent to support women and girls. The luncheon highlighted the work of Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon and the impact First Ladies can have on improving women's health in their respective countries.
- **First Ladies Roundtable**
The First Ladies Initiative convened First Ladies, Senior Advisors, and select private sector organizations for a roundtable discussion in New York City. To help foster introductions and identify mutual areas of interest, attendees briefly shared the main initiatives and areas in which they work. The group dialogue was followed by break-out discussions to provide First Ladies and organizations with an occasion to meet and determine if there are potential opportunities for partnership.
- **Advisor Training Program**
Capacity building enables First Ladies' staff members to support the First Ladies' agenda and platform. In 2014, the Bush Institute's First Ladies Initiative launched the Advisor Training Program, hosting inaugural sessions for First Ladies' senior staff in Washington, D.C. and New York City. Welcoming the participation of advisors from seven countries across Africa, recent curriculum

focused on “Strategic Planning for Effective National Programs” and “Creating a National Plan for Cervical Cancer”.

Additionally, as part of the Initiative’s goal to foster sustainable public-private partnerships, opportunistic matching guidance, and a network of internal and external relationship, members of the Bush Institute participated in an informational visit to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in June 2014. During the visit, participants met with the First Lady and her staff and representatives from public and private sector organizations with proven track records of impact in the areas of nutrition and economic empowerment, both issues of focus for Mrs. Roman.

Women in leadership roles matter. While she may be relatively new to the position of First Lady, Mrs. Roman has already demonstrated her dedication to empowering vulnerable communities in Ethiopia. Her background as a public servant, her expertise in economics, and her passion for the advancement of women and girls in her country are enormous assets as she builds her platform projects.

The Bush Institute’s First Ladies Initiative looks forward to engaging with Mrs. Roman and her staff as she seeks to build on her work to improve the lives of women and children in Ethiopia.

FIRST LADIES INITIATIVE

The George W. Bush Institute’s First Ladies Initiative is a program that supports First Ladies from around the world, with the initial focus in Africa, to effectively use their platforms to promote issues and programs that improve the lives of women and children in their respective countries. The First Ladies Initiative helps prepare First Ladies’ senior advisors and staff through training sessions that build capacity and skills to effectively manage a First Lady’s office. Additionally, the First Ladies Initiative fosters public-private partnerships by connecting First Ladies with funding partners, corporations, and NGOs.

Objectives of the First Ladies Initiative:

- **Convene** First Ladies to promote best practice sharing and create a robust network
- **Partner** with First Ladies and advance pressing issues for women and children, including health, education, and economic opportunity in their respective countries
- **Prepare** their senior advisors by providing training sessions and the relevant tools to develop effective First Ladies’ offices, identify the most critical policy initiatives for their respective First Lady to adopt, and help their principal become an effective advocate for pressing issues

- **Foster** sustainable public-private partnerships by initiating introductions and access to potential partners, opportunistic matching guidance, and a network of internal and external relationships

The George W. Bush Institute is providing this case study as an educational public service to explore how First Ladies use their unique platforms to impact the lives of women and children. While the Institute strives toward this public service purpose in producing the case studies and focuses on specific works and activities, it does not necessarily endorse all of the methods, views, or opinions expressed by the First Lady or her country's government. Thus, this publication and the content discussed is intended solely for information purposes and is not to be construed, under any circumstances, by implication or otherwise, as an endorsement of national policies or government actions in Ethiopia.