

## Reflections on the Birth and Growth of the Ethiopian Journal of Agricultural Sciences

Brhane Gebrekidan

*Vice President, Ethiopian Academy of Sciences*

*P.O.Box 3228, E-mail: [bgebrekidan@gmail.com](mailto:bgebrekidan@gmail.com), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*

Dr. Fentahun Mengistu, Director General of the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), Dr. Adugna Wakjira, Deputy Director General of the EIAR, and Colleagues:

It gives me great pleasure and satisfaction in making this key note address at this momentous occasion of “Institutionalizing the Ethiopian Journal of Agricultural Sciences” after 35 years of its first publication. Since I served as the first editor of the EJAS during its formative years, I am a personal witness of the initial challenges and tribulations the Journal went through during its formative years. It is indeed gratifying to see that EJAS has survived and indeed thrived for over three decades under the difficult challenges.

At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the organizers of this Inaugural Ceremony, in particular Dr. Getinet Alemaw, the current Editor-in-Chief of EJAS, for inviting me to give these opening remarks.

### **The Birth of EJAS**

The period of 25-27 April 1978, the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the National Crop Improvement Conference (NCIC), marks the critical time of the birth of the first Agricultural Journal of Ethiopia. During that time, the leading crop scientists of the country assembled in the Conference Hall of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), representing the then Institute of Agricultural Research (IAR), Alemaya College of Agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture and other national entities with agricultural interest agreed unanimously to establish a national scientific Ethiopian Journal on Agriculture. After a critical debate, the participants, mostly crops scientists, agreed to give the future journal the all agriculture inclusive name as the Ethiopian Journal of Agricultural Sciences in lieu of a narrower crop focused one.

The three main objectives of the Journal as listed then were:

- To establish professional communication among agricultural scientists within and outside the country.
- To provide an instrument for orderly dissemination of agricultural research information to extension agents, development agencies and to the farming community as a whole.
- To promote the application of agricultural research findings and development experiences in the teaching process of all fields of agriculture.

## **History of EJAS**

In January 1979, 35 years ago, Volume 1 Number 1 of EJAS was first printed making it one of the oldest scientific Journals in Ethiopia, comparable to SINET published by the Faculty of Science of Addis Ababa University. The fact that EJAS has continued to be published for over three decades continuously, despite some interruptions, is a credit to all those who have served as members of the succeeding Editorial Boards of the Journal.

## **Reputability of a Scientific Journal**

One of the main criteria used to measure the reputability of a scientific journal is its track record to produce high quality publications without interruption over a long period of time. What is the perceived reputation of EJAS based on this criterion? Compared with other scientific journals in the country, such as SINET and the Medical Journal of Ethiopia, the reputation of EJAS among the Ethiopian Scientific Community is not bad. However, the interrupted publication numbers contribute to negative perceptions about the reputability of the Journal which must be rectified in the future.

## **Good Quality Articles**

Another important criterion about the reputability of a scientific journal is the quality of its published articles as judged by peer reviewers. EJAS has been committed to this practice from its inception, despite the difficulty of finding and engaging willing and committed reviewers. The active and continuous participation of the Ethiopian Professional Agricultural Community collectively both as peer reviewers and other supporting activities is essential to keep EJAS in good quality standing.

## **Timeliness and Regularity**

Timeliness, regularity and longevity of a scientific publication is another essential characteristic of a reputable journal which should not be compromised. In its 35 years of existence, EJAS should have published 35 Volumes of the Journal but the latest Volume Number is merely 23. This is definitely a danger sign on the reputability of EJAS which has to be rectified.

## **Voluntarism and Professionalism**

EJAS has been primarily dependent on voluntary services throughout much of its operations. Professional volunteers for the diverse activities of the Journal are often elected and designated by the stakeholders of the Journal. Over the three decades of the EJAS experience demonstrates that this approach has to be modified in the direction of our discussion of today.

## **Authors**

Contributing authors of technical articles are the life line of any reputable journal. Such authors are attracted to contribute articles to the journal by its demonstrated

track record of its past performance and reputability. It is obvious that EJAS has to strengthen this aspect of its responsibility.

### **Editors, Editorial Board, Advisory Board**

The teams of editors, editorial board, and advisors carry the heavy responsibility of overseeing that the Journal continues to function as stipulated in its establishment. Members under this category are qualified volunteers respected by the community of Ethiopian agricultural professionals. They collectively monitor and ensure that the Journal continues to survive.

### **Technical Reviewers**

From the very beginning, the shortage of committed and qualified technical reviewers has been a major bottleneck of the Journal. Very often reviewers do not return articles they have reviewed on a timely manner. Continuing reminders and professional pleas seem to be the only mechanism for overcoming this bottleneck. With the growing number of universities, research institutes, and individual agricultural professionals it is expected that this problem would have easier solutions.

### **Sources of Articles**

The number of potential authors for EJAS has obviously grown tremendously in the last three decades. The growth and expansion of the Ethiopian National Agricultural Research System (ENARS) following the strengthening and maturation of the federal Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), the establishment of the Regional Agricultural Research Institutes (RARIs) and the Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) have been the backbones of this growth. In addition, there are significant agricultural professionals and potential contributors of technical articles from the Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Centers located in the country, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture (FMoA), and the Regional Bureaus of Agriculture (RBoA). All these entities which must be tapped and exploited properly are potential partners and supporters of EJAS.

### **Relevance and Contributions**

Despite its shortcomings, EJAS has established itself as the premier agricultural professional journal in the country. Since it is the leading national agricultural journal that documents results of scientific investigations and technologies across the broad range of agricultural disciplines it has high respectability. It also serves as an effective venue for sharing and disseminating scientific findings and information throughout the country and beyond. The ever expanding HLIs must find the Journal as an essential source of technical information for their graduate training programs as well as an outlet for publishing research results of their students and faculty members. EJAS is obviously an effective mechanism for professional advancement for authors from all institutions. EJAS also contributes directly to national development through Registration of New Crop Varieties, Improved Animal Stocks, a Wide Range of

Improved Agricultural Technologies, Crop/Animal Management/Natural Resources Tools and Technologies, etc.

### **Distribution of Copies**

Over the years, one of the challenges of EJAS has been an effective distribution system of the Journal. Ideally the Journal should reach individuals, libraries, and organizations as soon as it is printed. However, this has been difficult to achieve as evidenced by the large number of carryover copies of almost all the past Volumes of the Journal. Selling and distribution outlets of the Journal at the national, regional, and international levels have to be strengthened.

### **Languages**

The official language of EJAS has been and continues to be English. It is mandatory to ensure that high standards of the language are maintained in all prints of the Journal. Although the primary target audience is the agricultural scientific community proficient in the English language, it is also essential now to consider the interests of end users whose primary language is not English, such as Ethiopian farmers. It is hereby suggested that each article published in EJAS in the future should also have abstract written in Amharic, the official Ethiopian language. This should give most Ethiopians with insufficient command of English to be exposed to the highlights of the primary contents of the Journal.

### **Financial Costs and Sources**

EJAS has relied on and benefitted from the generous financial contributions from the former Institute of Agricultural Research (IAR), the current EIAR, the former Higher Education Commission, the Agricultural Development Bank, the Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission among others. Were it not for these generous financial contributions over the years, EJAS could not have lasted this long.

### **Ownership**

Ideally EJAS should be owned and operated by the appropriate professional association such as the Ethiopian Association of Agricultural Professionals (EAAP) which has been struggling to sustain and run its own vital operations. An alternative sponsorship arrangement would have been to solicit the support of a relevant institution such as the EIAR or universities with strong agricultural programs. Since these and other potential arrangements have not worked in the past it is now essential to discuss and find a permanent home for EJAS. This is the primary objective of our meeting today.

### **Sustainability, Institutionalization, and the Future**

Fortunately the organizers of this meeting have completed all the essential leg work to help us all endorse a suitable arrangement for institutionalizing the future operations of the Journal. I understand that the EIAR has agreed to take EJAS under its wings and give it all the necessary home base facilities and operational support. This is

indeed a welcome news and consistent with what the IAR has done for EJAS in the early years of its existence. I would like to suggest that an appropriate mechanism be found for EAAP to be an active partner and partial owner of EJAS as well. EAAP can mobilize the support and participation of its members to give the Journal a strong professional backbone and credibility. This should be a win-win arrangement for all, i.e. EJAS, EAAP, and EIAR.