

Celebrating the life of Dr. Taddessa Ebba Fido, A Scientist turned Freedom Fighter

An esteemed scholar, author, and determined leader left this life to join his comrades on May 1, 2022. Dr. Tadesse Ebba was especially respected among OSA members for his contribution as Gadaa Melba, the author of the widely-cited book, *Oromia: an Introduction*. He was a multi-dimensional man – a father, an author, a geneticist, a researcher and, above all else, an advocate for peace and freedom. He devoted every minute of his life to the cause he loved, the freedom of the Oromo people. Although his departure will leave a void in our hearts, his work will fill our spirits and inspire others to follow in his footsteps.

Dr. Fido's Educational Journey

Having overcome marginalization and associated obstacles in his youth, Dr. Fido's academic achievements are exemplary. Dr. Fido T. Ebba pursued secondary education at Jimma Agricultural High School and at Alemaya Agricultural College (currently Haromaya University), graduating with distinction with a B.Sc. degree in 1964. He was awarded a scholarship towards his graduate studies and earned an M.Sc. degree from Wisconsin State University, USA, and later a Ph.D. degree in Genetics from British Columbia University, Vancouver, Canada in 1974. Returning to Ethiopia, he served as a professor at Haromaya Agricultural College and later worked as a research leader at Ethiopian Research Institute until 1978.

Dr. Fido's Notable Research Work on Plant Genetics

In his role as a leading researcher and scientist, he pioneered the study of T'ef, an indigenous grain in the region. In a short period, T'ef/Xaaffi became a global phenomenon and has been hailed as a superfood today. Several American farmers have shown great interest in this superfood. It was at Harmoya University that Dr. Ebba began to focus on T'ef/Xaaffi and became a professor of Plant Genetics. His publications on T'ef/Xaaffi (*Eragrostis Abyssinica*), the staple food grain in the Horn of Africa, were published in 1969 and 1975. Dr. Ebba's pioneer scientific publications describe the agronomy and botanical characteristics of tef as well as the nutritional use and quality of t'ef for human and animal use. Dr. Ebba's research work on t'ef/xaaffi and scientific contributions are frequently referenced on Google Scholar in scientific publications by researchers in Oromia, Ethiopia, and internationally.

At the Ethiopian Research Institute, Dr. Ebba was the Founding Director of the Ethiopian Gene Bank, also known as Plant Genetic Resources Center, Ethiopia (PGRC/E), launched with financial support from the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the governments of Germany and Sweden. The main objective of the Gene Bank was to preserve valuable regional plant genetic resources from adverse climate and human impact, thereby supporting crop improvement programs in Oromia, Ethiopia and the world. While at the the Gene Bank he traveled throughout the Oromia region and the larger Ethiopian region collecting indigenous crop seeds. He conserved these invaluable resources and knowledge for future generations. The Center is currently named Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute (EBI) and has a collection of over 3842 T'ef/Xaaffi germplasm accessions in Finfinnee. He described several T'ef/Xaaffi cultivars such as: Dabi, gea lamme, kara debi, muri, and many more. He founded and

directed the Gene Bank from 1976 to 1978, a center that could easily bear his name for his exceptional contributions.

Forced into Exile

While he was the director of the Gene Bank, he was repeatedly harassed and detained by the Ethiopian government which ultimately forced him into self-exile to avoid tyranny in 1979, leaving behind his wife, two infants, and a career with significant impact as a scientist. In exile, he joined the Oromo Liberation Front leadership and tenaciously for over 40 years advocated for and fought for freedom and democracy of Oromo and other marginalized nationalities.

Dr. Fido Books and Scholarly Contribution

While in exile, he continued to publish scholarly works such as *Oromia An Introduction* by Gadaa Melbaa in 1988 and *Moggasa, Maqoota Oromoo fi Hiikota Isaanii*.

Dr. Ebba was beloved by many OSA members. He held OSA in high regard as a key institution for Oromo knowledge and academic discussion. He attended several OSA conferences. His internationally renowned scholarly contributions are noteworthy and will be the subject of further analysis and use on the OSA platform. His contributions will continue to benefit future generations. In his field and among his colleagues, Dr. Ebba will be sorely missed.