



Prof. Dr. Afework Kassu Gizaw, He has served as a State Minister at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Science and Technology of Ethiopia, Experience in Japan & USA (YOU KNOW THAT I worked at University of Colorado Denver as postdoctoral fellow. Today, the Director General of the Armauer Hansen Research Institute (AHRI) in Ethiopia. This interview highlights his expertise in biomedical sciences, his experience in Japan, and his vision for Ethiopia's scientific future.

Interview with Prof. Dr. Afework Kassu Gizaw

Director General, Armauer Hansen Research Institute (AHRI), Ethiopia

Former State Minister of Science and Technology (October 2015 – May 2018)

Keynote Speaker, Children of the Nile Initiative Theme: "Bridging Science, Youth, and Regional Unity"

Interviewer: Prof. Dr. Afework Kassu, thank you for joining us. As a keynote speaker for the Children of the Nile Initiative, what significance does this platform hold for you?

Prof. Dr. Afework Kassu: Thank you for having me. The Children of the Nile Initiative represents a pivotal moment for the youth of the Nile Basin to come together, transcending national borders, and collaborate on shared challenges and opportunities. This initiative aligns with my longstanding commitment to fostering scientific collaboration and youth empowerment across Africa. It is an honor to

contribute to a platform that emphasizes unity, innovation, and collective progress.

Interviewer: Your distinguished career bridges Ethiopia and Japan. Could you share how your experiences in Japan have influenced your approach to scientific research and collaboration?

Prof. Dr. Afework Kassu: My time in Japan was transformative. I pursued my Ph.D. in biomedical sciences at the University of Tokushima, supported by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). This experience not only deepened my scientific knowledge but also exposed me to Japan's meticulous approach to research and innovation. The emphasis on precision, discipline, and collaborative spirit in Japanese research institutions has profoundly shaped my perspective on scientific endeavors. These principles have been instrumental in my leadership at AHRI, where we strive to foster a culture of excellence and international collaboration.

Interviewer: You have also served as the State Minister of Science and Technology. How did your tenure influence Ethiopia's national scientific agenda?

Prof. Dr. Afework Kassu: Serving as State Minister of Science and Technology from October 2015 to May 2018 allowed me to translate scientific expertise into national policy. I focused on strengthening research infrastructure, promoting STEM education, and facilitating partnerships between Ethiopian institutions and international collaborators. This role reinforced my belief that scientific innovation and policy must go hand in hand to drive sustainable development and regional cooperation.

Interviewer: As Director General of AHRI, what initiatives are you leading to enhance Ethiopia's role in global health research?

Prof. Dr. Afework Kassu: At AHRI, we are committed to addressing pressing health challenges through innovative research. One

of our key initiatives is the Data Science Without Borders (DSWB) project, which recently concluded a hackathon focused on AI-based solutions for health data challenges. This initiative aims to harness local talent to develop context-specific technological solutions. Additionally, we are actively involved in global health dialogues, representing Ethiopia in forums such as the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), where we advocate for sustainable vaccine production and equitable access to healthcare.

Interviewer: Your leadership has been recognized internationally, including receiving the "Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star" from the Government of Japan. How do you perceive the role of international recognition in advancing Ethiopia's scientific agenda?

Prof. Dr. Afework Kassu: International recognition serves as both an honor and a responsibility. It underscores the importance of Ethiopia's contributions to global health and science. Such accolades enhance our credibility, attract partnerships, and open avenues for collaboration. However, the true value lies in leveraging these opportunities to advance our national scientific agenda, build capacity, and address the health needs of our population.

Interviewer: Looking ahead, what is your vision for the future of scientific research in Ethiopia?

Prof. Dr. Afework Kassu: My vision is to position Ethiopia as a hub for innovative health research in Africa. This involves strengthening our research infrastructure, fostering partnerships with international institutions, and investing in human capital. By focusing on areas such as infectious diseases, vaccine development, and data science, we aim to contribute solutions that are not only globally relevant but also tailored to the unique health challenges of our region.

Interviewer: In your keynote address, how do you plan to address the youth of the Nile Basin and inspire them to take active roles in regional collaboration?

Prof. Dr. Afework Kassu: I intend to encourage the youth to view the Nile not just as a geographical feature but as a shared heritage and a unifying force. By emphasizing the importance of education, innovation, and cross-border collaboration, I hope to inspire them to become ambassadors of peace, science, and sustainable development. The youth hold the key to a prosperous future, and it is imperative that they are equipped with the knowledge and tools to lead.

Interviewer: Finally, what message would you like to convey to the young scientists and researchers in the Nile Basin?

Prof. Dr. Afework Kassu: To the young scientists of the Nile Basin, I say: embrace curiosity, pursue excellence, and collaborate across borders. The future of science is global, and your contributions can have a profound impact. Stay committed to your research, seek mentorship, and be open to learning from diverse perspectives. Together, we can build a healthier and more prosperous future for Ethiopia and the world.

