

# Questionable figures behind the Yara award

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*The fertilizer giant Yara offers an award for “green revolution” in Africa to the controversial prime minister, Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, based on figures collected from a research institute under the control by the Ethiopian prime minister himself, and not by international organizations, such as the FAO or the World Bank.*

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The first Yara award for “green revolution” in Africa has been met with a storm of criticism from human rights organizations and from Ethiopian exile groups. Yara claims that they wish to focus upon positive efforts in Ethiopian agriculture, but they have done this by honouring the very controversial prime minister of Ethiopia, Mr. Meles Zenawi, who is well known for his breaches of human rights. Mr. Zenawi arrives in Oslo, September 3, in order to accept the award and a check for around one million Norwegian Crowns (U. S. Dollar 200,000).

Yara has made a controversial political decision, but also the figures for the positive development in Ethiopian agriculture that is emphasized in the justification for the award, are rather questionable. One of the reasons why Mr. Zenawi receives the Yara award, as stated in Yara’s home page and the press release, is that the agricultural production throughout the last three years in Ethiopia has increased with around eight percent annually. Furthermore, it states that Ethiopia throughout the last ten years has more than doubled its food production; from 6.3 million tonnes (1993) to 14.3 million tonnes (2004).

Norwatch has for an extended period of time attempted to find out from where these exceptionally positive figures for agricultural development in Ethiopia derive. By now it is clear that these figures do not coincide with those from the greatest authority in the field, the World Food Bank Organization (FAO), but instead from a government controlled research institute in Addis Ababa, named EARO – Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organization. This is a research institute that is under the direct control by Mr. Zenawi’s own government.

In other words, the award winner’s own research institute has provided the information, which is included into the justification for the selection of the award winner. Furthermore, the Yara figures paint a rosy development, which cannot be found in any of the data possessed by FAO.

## **No Agricultural Revolution**

The world’s Food and Agriculture Organization, the FAO, actually operates with quite different figures than those provided by Yara’s press release. Norwatch has asked for and been given an Ethiopian statistics report from FAO’s African office in Ghana. This indicates that no agricultural revolution has taken place in Ethiopia under Mr. Zenawi’s rule.

The production of important food products, such as grain, vegetables, fruits, beans, and legumes have increased with around one and a half percent annually on the average during the last few years (2002 – 2004), according to FAO’s own calculations. This is far below the growth in the population, which stands at around 2.36 percent. And this is far away from Yara’s claim about an annual growth rate of eight percent.

The only kind of agricultural products that have experienced a great expansion is that of sugar cane (+4.9 percent), and products made for export, such as cotton (+20 percent), and sesame seeds, which are used for oil production (+25.7 percent). But the volume of cotton and sesame seeds is small, and as a whole, these do not affect the statistics significantly.

With regard to meat, milk, and eggs in Ethiopia, the production has declined the last three years at the average of two to three percent annually.

### **Increased Growth in Population**

Norwatch's own analysis of figures from FAO's base of statistics (FAOSTAT) reveals that if we consider the production volume for important food products, such as grain, sugar, vegetables, roots, and legumes during the last three years, there has been a decline of a couple of percents during 2002, and almost one percent during 2003. However, there was an increase of slightly above four percent during 2004. We find roughly the same development if we include all other agricultural products into our calculations (-1.98 percent, -0.58 percent, and +4.28 percent).

However, there is an indication of increase in the agricultural production from 1993 to 2004 of around 60 percent. In other words, the figures reveal a strong growth pattern, even though the growth does not represent "more than a doubling of the production of food" according to Yara. On the other hand, the agricultural production was particularly sluggish in Ethiopia during the years 1993 to 1995, since the country had just emerged from the war with Eritrea (which received independence in 1993).

If we consider the year 1996 as a point in time when the agricultural production had again increased to a more normal level, then the development reveals a very different pattern. This is because since 1996 no great development in the food production in Ethiopia has taken place. The increase in volume is totally less than fifteen percent. This corresponds to barely 1.9 percent annually – again far below the rate of population growth.

A number of different statistics and uneven weighting of the components therein are the basis for the statistics. According to Yara's own background material used for the award, and which Norwatch has received, the World Bank operates with a decline in agricultural production in Ethiopia of 2.3 percent in 2002 and as much as 12.3 percent in 2003. In other words, Yara itself possesses data, which stand in sharp contrast to the numbers given in the justification for the award.

Even though FAO's data base FAOSTAT is an authority in the field, FAO has a number of different reports as well. This makes it possible to operate with different figures with regard to the development (different time periods, with or without the products for exports, etc.). But none of the reports in the possession of FAO that have been made accessible to Norwatch, reveal figures that resemble the rosy development described by Yara in their justification for the award. Rather to the contrary.

### **An Institute Controlled by the Government**

Just because of the disagreement between the various figures, Norwatch wanted to find out from where and how Yara has derived its numbers. The first answer from Yaras chief director for communication gives the impression that the sources were centrally placed international organizations:

– With regard to sources a number of different sources have been utilized as parts of the discussion. This, combined with personal interviews and accumulated knowledge among the four expert representatives in the award committee, provided the basis for the decision. The primary sources are: the World Bank, UNDP (Human Development Report 2004), FAO (among other The State of Food and Agriculture 2003 – 04 and Earth trends). In addition, there is material collected by the Millennium Project, as well as material provided by those who nominated the different candidates.

After yet another week with several contacts, and through which Norwatch pointed out to Yara that these numbers cannot be found with FAO, it was revealed that the figures in the justification for the award do not derive from the above mentioned international institutions, but from an Ethiopian organization named EARO:

– With regard to your inquiry about the growth in food production, these figures derive from the Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organization, EARO, Cartridge writes to Norwatch in an e-mail.

EARO is shown to be a research institute, which is controlled by the Ethiopian government. Its home page states that it was founded by decree, June 1997, and that it is placed directly under the control of the Ministry

of Agriculture and Rural Development.

In other words, the impressive figures regarding the growth in food production do not derive from the greatest authority in the field, the World's Food Production Organization – FAO. Nor do they derive from the World Bank or the development program of the UN, UNDP, but from an Ethiopian research institute controlled by the government of the same person, who receives the award for his extraordinary contribution to fight hunger in the country.

### **Overall approach**

By the time Norwatch published this article we have not received any answer from the company director for communications of Yara, Mr. Arne Cartridge, with regard to why Yara in their justification for the award has chosen to use the numbers from EARO, which is directly under the control of Mr. Zenawi's own government – and not the figures from either FAO or the World Bank. Nor is there any answer to the question if the idea of fetching numbers from an institution, which lies directly under the award winner's own government, without being clearly affected by a problem of lack of objectivity.

Mr. Cartridge emphasized during earlier contacts that the figures for agricultural development were not the major reason behind awarding Mr. Zenawi the prize.

– Statistic material is not the main reason behind the selection of the award winner. While statistics and figures play an important role as a basis for the decision, it is important not to get confused by numbers. The “Yara Prize for a Green Revolution in Africa” establishes a focal point upon an overall approach and on the initiatives and programs which have been started. What Yara wishes to accomplish this year, is to start a debate about what must be done in order to improve the food security in Ethiopia, and for the future to eliminate hunger and poverty, to which the country has been exposed, Mr. Arne Cartridge tells Norwatch.

Mr. Cartridge states that Mr. Zenawi receives the award because Ethiopia has made the fight against poverty and hunger into a major issue in the political agenda.

– Ethiopia has progressed far compared to neighbouring countries, such as Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan. And the Board decided that Ethiopia deserved publicity around the matters that they have accomplished. But the issue has developed in a quite lop-sided way, with only focus upon the negative political issues in Ethiopia. We must not forget that Ethiopia was a feudal society only fourteen years ago, and that the process of democratisation takes time, says Mr. Cartridge.

### **Signs of Self-Criticism?**

– If Yara wanted to emphasize the positive initiatives taken in Ethiopia, was it then not possible to select an independent institution or an agricultural expert, who may have given an important contribution? Why select an approach that provides a great political reward to such a controversial statesman?

– This has been a lengthy and difficult discussion. The Board wished to emphasize the political aspects of the struggle against poverty and hunger this year. We wanted this year to emphasize the importance of the countries own political decisions to defeat poverty and hunger. Another time we may emphasize something else, according to Mr. Cartridge.

– But does not Yara have anything to criticise itself for in connection with this award?

– We knew that the selection of award winner was controversial. First of all, we have to receive criticism in connection with the selection of an award winner this year, and we have to accept that. Second, we have to consider if we have made a poor effort with regard to the choices that we have taken, and our method of communicating this. We are open for this, Mr. Cartridge underscores.

However, Mr. Cartridge is clear about one issue:

– We have done an inadequate job in presenting this debate properly.