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Parallel to the 23rd annual National Education Conference held recently in Dire Dawa, another conference aimed at forging links between universities and schools took place. Education Minister, university presidents and founder of Gelfand Family Charitable Trust (GFCT) convened at the conference and discussed ways of rendering supplementary summer vacation education to senior primary and high school students in the country allowing them access to nearby campus facilities.

GFCT Founder Mark Gelfand said that in so doing the nation will soon lead Africa in areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education. “The over all effect will be great. If every university visits the worst-performing secondary schools in their municipality, engage a few university students in community service, fix up problems related to school labs and provide guidance to teachers, challenges one by one the national education system will be the envy of Africa,” Gelfand added.

Pertaining to STEM, he noted two years ago GFCT had began pilot programmes to outreach students from senior elementary and junior secondary schools at Bahir Dar and Axum

universities. A special exam was prepared to screen out students who will be embraced in the universities' STEM outreach programmes, Gelfand added.

This reporter approached professor Fekadu Beyene Wellega University President for his comment. He said that students from grade seven to twelve were benefiting from the programme and it was proved that it is helpful indeed. The students were very innovative. Getting the opportunity to do experiments in the lab, discussing with their colleagues and instructors, they showed the passion to excel in Science and Mathematics. In this regard, the programme promises to assist in the development of capable generation.

Professor Fekadu noted that the programme is being implemented by the joint effort of GFCT, different universities and the government. However, this kind of project requires the involvement of all stakeholders. So, parents too need to come on board and support the move towards scaling up the excellence of their children and the subsequent growth of the nation.

Commenting on the issue, Mizan Tepi University President, Dr. Mebratu Gebre- Mariam on his part said that the programme is vital as junior and high school students become forearmed about university life while still at junior secondary and high school level. This makes them to get mentally and psychologically prepared for the challenge that awaits them ahead. Yet, he underlined, lack of coordination among state bureaus need to be addressed.

Tigray Development Association Director, Tadele Hagosse said that education plays crucial role in transforming nation from agricultural led economy to industry. "This is unthinkable without improving STEM education. So, the association in collaboration with GFCT, had trained, in Axume University, students in the state . In this respect, to sustain the programme Ministry of Education and Universities must own it," Tadele remarked.