Emory University has long been recognized as a leader in global engagement, creating new goals and visions for involvement in global education and international engagement. In 2013, the Office of Global Strategy and Initiatives (GSI) released "A Global Vision for Emory," providing Emory with a strategic blueprint, including goals to equip students to meet the opportunities and challenges of an increasingly interconnected world, lead and influence global scholarship, research and teaching, and position Emory as a university known for its global impact. These goals are targeted toward five priority countries: Ethiopia, Brazil, China, India, and South Korea, over a five-year time period, 2015-2020.

The Emory Global Health Institute (EGHI) has led the effort to promote activities supporting Ethiopia as a priority country for the university. To that end, EGHI and GSI hosted the first Emory Ethiopia Symposium on November 2nd. The goals of the symposium were to highlight Emory involvement in Ethiopia, foster sustained Emory engagement in Ethiopia, and facilitate networking opportunities for those currently working in or wanting to work in Ethiopia. Over 180 faculty, staff, and students from across Emory University and Emory-affiliated organizations came together to share knowledge about Ethiopia and make new connections.

The keynote speaker of the day was Dr. Amha Kebede, the Director General of the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) (featured in the August edition of the Emory Ethiopia Newsletter). Speaking to a standing room only crowd in the Rollins School of Public Health, Dr. Amha discussed Ethiopia’s preparedness and response to disease outbreaks, with the recent Ebola outbreak as a case study. The session was organized by the U.S. Office of the International Association of National Public Health Institutes (IANPHI), of which EPHI is a member. Prior to its reorganization in 2013, the Ethiopian Health & Nutrition Research Institute (the predecessor to
E PHI) largely focused on disease management after an outbreak occurred. Dr. Amha noted that the institute experienced a significant paradigm shift from “disaster management to risk management,” allowing the institute to proactively prepare for emerging public health threats rather than just provide reactionary responses to those threats.

Later in the day, Dr. Amha spoke about the formation of EPHI and specifically, the relationship between EPHI and Emory University. He noted that while there is currently a strong partnership between the two institutions, there is significant room for developing new programs and expanding upon the partnership.

Following Dr. Amha’s keynote address, EGHI hosted a panel of four Emory faculty to share a vision for Emory’s long term engagement in Ethiopia through strategic partnerships. Each faculty member is involved with significant programmatic work or research in Ethiopia. The panelists included: Dr. Lynn Sibley (School of Nursing); Drs. Henry Blumberg and Timothy Love (School of Medicine); and Dr. Matthew Freeman (Rollins School of Public Health). Additionally, Oumer Abdurahman, a current Foege Fellow in the Rollins School of Public Health, discussed his former role as program manager for Neglected Tropical Diseases in the Ethiopia Ministry of Health.

Another session of the Emory Ethiopia Symposium included a discussion of operational issues involved with working in Ethiopia, led by Vice Provost Philip Wainwright and Chris Rapalje from the GSI. Panelists Mindy Simon from the General Counsel’s Office, Jim Bezbetchanko from the School of Nursing, and Kim Pate from Emory’s central Finance office provided examples of and solutions to some of the operational challenges Emory has faced in setting up large research or service projects in Ethiopia.

In the evening, the symposium featured an Ethiopia project poster session and reception, celebrating both project achievements in Ethiopia and Ethiopian culture. The posters featured the diverse academic projects of faculty, graduate students, and Emory-affiliated organizations with topics ranging from Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) to Maternal and Child Health, and demonstrated Emory’s collaborative efforts for global engagement. The reception was a fantastic display of Ethiopian culture, serving authentic Ethiopian food and coffee from Messi’s Cafe (a new Ethiopian restaurant in Emory Village)—allowing guests to mingle and peruse the posters while listening to vibrant Ethiopian music.

The symposium ended with a screening of the documentary film “Town of Runners” and subsequent discussion led by Dr. Benjamin Stoff from the Emory Center for Ethics and the Emory University School of Medicine. “Town of Runners” tells the story of two young Ethiopia girls from the town of Bekoji – an Ethiopian highland town which has produced some of the world’s greatest runners. The film’s themes of hope for a better future, along with individual and collaborative work toward that future, were a fitting metaphor for Emory’s historical and continued engagement in Ethiopia.
engagement with Ethiopia.