

Suffian Mahdi

Founder and CEO

Ask International Trading was founded in 1994 by a former agriculture, Mr. Suffian Mahdi; who has been graduated, B.Sc., in Agriculture from Alamaya Agricultural University In the early seventieth years. After certain years of interruption due to the unrest of student movement against the Monarchy rule. So, he was unable to follow his education. But, instead he was obligated to take a job in a commercial printing press, as a junior accountant in Addis Ababa. And this opportunity has given to him to directly involved in the business world.

He replaced and took the footsteps of his father, who had been sick, to take care of brothers and sisters in their school except his two immediate brothers. After one year of engagement in the printing press, in Addis Ababa, he made the decision to move to Dire Dawa, his hometown as he got the opportunity of an employment in a British Company, Michell Cotts and Co. (Nov,1973). And this has created the chance also to closely follow up the family affairs in total.

The big difference and change in his life started in working in this Company. Being the Company Internationally recognized and the Head Office was in Addis Ababa. It incorporates all the major sectors of business such as Automotive, Technical and Technology, Commodities Trade, and Merchandise, Clearing and Forwarding, etc. So, he got the opportunity of employment in the branch office that was located in the Dire Dawa. It is obvious that the Branch Office incorporate all types of the business, and being Dire Dawa also his birth place, he had entertained a wide range of connections to all people, business groups and cultures to make a deal very easily and in a short time. Indeed, this situation has become a favorable incidence to learn, almost all the type of works the Branch office is undertaking. Starting from accounting, salesperson, technical, foreign communication and forwarding has been easily covered by him to become the second person of the Branch Office in short time.

His salary and benefits has increased significantly and that has also, contributed to become economically strong enough to support his family members get the best education in the Private Schools for his Brothers and Sisters. Moreover the Company supported him to complete his University Education while he is on job.

In 1974 the Monarchy Rule was over thrown by the Military Coup (Derg) and due to the changes of the government in the country, The Economic Polices

of the has been also changed. The Nationalization of the big farms, factories and private houses has taken place and as the result of this situation the companies owned big agricultural farms were also nationalized among which this Company owns, Tendaho Cotton Plantation and WushWush Tea Farm. Due to this as a result the principal Management of Mitchell Cotts and Co. downsized their overall activities that used to be entertained extensively by the Company. However, the Company remained active but operating with in a soft precautions stage. He was married in this year, at the age of 25 years to Miss. Ayni Mahamed, still his partner, has beard two boys and a girl so far. The business of Michell Cotts in the year 1980 seized.

To operate and the Branch Office activities passed over to the staff willing to continue with exchanges of the compensation entitled. His and the other five took over the business started to operate, off course with a close relationship to the Main Office. But the situation of the provision of obtaining foreign currency for the purposes of imports we are conducting gradually started to decline and finally, it was fully stopped. The way out from this situation was to rent the warehouses to the third party, and managed to exist temporarily in this situation. In the early year when the Branch ownership, passed over to him and colleagues, He had stipulated that the situation with his partners would not be fruitful in the long term, and he had decided to establish his own business, a business he thought feasible was to establish the Milling Industry of Food Grains in the area of his residence, where at that time there was no such service providing enterprise in the locality and to make the establishment he has purchased two grinding mills and kept it in his custody.

In 1991 the situation of the war of the Government and the EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party) reached the decisive stage and The Military Junta Government (Derg) overthrown and change of Government took place. The new Economic Policy was declared and with the newly established ruling Government, he managed to establish his own Milling Service and Grain Distribution Firm. The time, a second dramatic change took place. Milling and Grinding, and selling the different grains products proved profitable and it has secured the economic demand of both his families.

His father has passed in the early years of the new Government. His wife has contributed much in smooth operation of the Milling and Grinding Grains established and his duties were limited only procurement of the various food Grains for sale. It became monotonous and not challenging job to him. So, he started to think of a new optional industry or sector that might be challenging but realistic, and he found out with change of the Economic Policy of the new Government, the Export Sector would be at frontline, and Coffee the basic commodity available for export.

The company was established 26 years ago, in May 1995 by three members. he remained being the Manager. Within one-year period time, one member as a result of his own reasons left the company while the other, a daughter and very close family member replaced her deceased father. Initially, before moving to its own constructed Coffee Processing Plant and Offices, the company has been operating, first in the Markato Area, called Tchew Berenda, then moved again to the Nefas Silk Area occupying only offices. To process its Exportable Coffees, it has concluded a processing agreement with Semachew Coffee Processing Plant and the Government Processing Plant. This period has been the most difficult and hardest time the Company has encountered. The inconveniences, mistreatment, proneness to theft, unaccountability, redundancy, inability of compliance, etc. has been the basic challenges the Company has experienced. To tackle these problems, it was believed to establish own processing plant. So, it was decided to gain the benefits of efficient management and flexibility of coffee processing, and increase productivity, decision that has been made became realistic by constructing one's own storage warehouse, a processing plant and office all together in one compound. That is how, the existing coffee processing plant of ASK International Trading, plc. was established.

Also, as a means of support, in order to secure the supply of own exportable coffee at Origins, the Company moved forward to engage directly procured Red Cherries of coffee directly from the farmer and commenced its own operation and it do not waited for the processed coffees that

would arrive at Auction Hall. This was the backward leakages system, and it became important that farmers recognized the company processing plant as a partner that offered them fair prices for their red cherries. Thus, the company has delivered social responsibility that created strong partnership with the farmer. So, the first washed coffee processing plant, known Kolla Washed Coffee Processing Plant, has paved the way for the company to establish another similar plant in different regions of South Ethiopia. Subsequently, based on the need and demand of the export volume of the Company, 4 other Processing Industries established at different coffee growing places the following years to come.

Furthermore, the following years the Company gained the reputation and the credibility by many Ethiopian Arabica coffee buyers, thanks to his brother Mr Mahdi who had been residing in Paris, who has aggressively promoted so that within a limited year the Company gained acceptance by coffee houses. For the first time in the history of export of Ethiopian coffee to the international market the request of Certified Ethiopian coffee was put forward by a well-known coffee house. The company has complied to the offer upon undertaking "The Organic Certification" project by incorporating about 5,000 small holder farmers in the system to gain the Certification, and generate extra premium for the quantity each farmer has sold to Kolla Washed Coffee Processing Plant. The Certification compliance Audit has been conducted in the history of Ethiopian Coffee Export Sector by ECOCERT institution. It was easily managed and complied to the criteria of Organic Certification requirements because the owner of the company, since he is an agronomist who has graduated from the oldest Ethiopian Agricultural university, all the project requirements have been handled precisely the Certifying body needs. This Certification Scheme also followed later after two years by Sidama Farmers Union. Moreover, the company owner, again due to the demand by a well-known European coffee buyer to get "Rainforest Alliance" Certified coffee, the project was conducted in Djimmah Coffee growing area for the first time not only in the history of Ethiopian origin, but for the first time in the whole African coffee production sector. 678 farmers were organized in the group of Manna, Djimmah coffee origins and the company being responsible in the chains of custody of the project, the Certification process conducted and the group certified. The premium generated had been distributed to all participants Farmers, and same time farm tools have been delivered to each farmer.

The Certification Scheme, due to the start of ECX commodity exchange system, imposed by the Government, it seized or stopped to undertake. Because the major criteria, Transparency of coffees growing and processed has become impossible to comply to the standards set by the certifying bodies. Whether Organic Certified, Rainforest Alliance Certified, UZH, Bird friendly certified, etc. the system stopped and no more certified coffee export from Ethiopia until very late two years ago. However, due to the undertaking and certifying the Ethiopian Coffees and marketing purely traceable certified coffees to well-known European Coffee Houses, it was no doubt that the company became very familiar in the international market and gained the confidence and reputation in the sector.

In the last 5 years, as a tactical strategy, diversification of the business became necessary due to the delicate nature of Coffee Export and being risky, in particular in the prevailing Ethiopian markets situation, the participation and engagement in the Hospitality Industry was chosen as the option still at an infant stage in Ethiopia that could keep up the company to become very active in the future. So, taking into account socioeconomic factors, such as Railway link to the Djibouti

Port, established Industrial Park, vicinity to Somalia, and very near to the old historical city of Harar, etc. Dire Dawa City was chosen the conducive and very appropriate place to construct and establish Star Rated Hotel. Therefore, the construction of B+G+5 Floors, Twin Winged Hotel constructed in Dire Dawa City, the main city in the East Ethiopia, at the center of the city. The furnished with high quality fittings and fixtures convenient to guests requiring high class rooms. It includes Ticket Office, Beauty and spa., Three types of Meeting Hall, Café, Restaurants, Business Center, etc that would be available easily to any visitors arriving into the city. At present, the hotel is in a soft opening and in the next month the Grand Opening will be launched.

Finally, ASK International Trading, plc. Will be expected to operate effectively by its management and keep up the credibility that has been gained in the past and do business efficiently.