



**Enset Innovation Institute Inc.**

*Advancing Indigenous Innovation for Food Security and Climate Resilience*

13200 Chestnut Dr, Bowie, MD 20720 | [www.ensetinnovation.org](http://www.ensetinnovation.org) | Email: [info@ensetinnovation.org](mailto:info@ensetinnovation.org)

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## **ENSET INNOVATION INSTITUTE (EII)**

### **Founding Journey: From Vision to Institution**

#### **Key Milestones (March 2024 – July 2026)**

##### **March–June 2024 – The Vision Takes Shape**

The journey of the **Enset Innovation Institute (EII)** began in **March 2024** with a strategic planning meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, bringing together **Wassie Gubena**, the leadership team of Habtech Solutions Plc, and **Asratie Teferra**, representing **Habtech Solutions Inc. (USA)**, where he served as the organization's **founding Chief Operating Officer (COO)** and helped build the organization from the ground up. This meeting marked the beginning of a shared vision to establish an independent international institution dedicated to advancing Ethiopia's Enset ecosystem through research, innovation, partnerships, and sustainable investment.

The discussions built upon an existing record of successful collaboration among several institutions working to strengthen Ethiopia's Enset sector.

Through funding provided by **SOS Sahel France**, significant progress had already been achieved by **Arba Minch University (AMU)** and **SOS Sahel Ethiopia** in developing improved Enset processing technologies and organizing **37 women-led and community-based Enset Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**. During this period, **Wassie Gubena**, serving as **East Africa Representative for SOS Sahel France**, provided regional oversight for the grant and supported implementation of these pioneering initiatives.

At the same time, **Arba Minch University** secured research funding from a **United Nations food systems research institution based in Italy** to advance research on developing a **non-additive Enset starter culture for fermentation**, representing an important scientific milestone toward improving the quality, consistency, safety, and commercialization potential of traditional Enset foods.

Recognizing the opportunity to build upon these achievements, a broader multi-institutional consortium was established to pursue a transformational **five-year Enset scale-up initiative valued at approximately US\$25 million**.



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The consortium included **SOS Sahel France**, where Wassie Gubena served as East Africa Coordinator, **SOS Sahel Ethiopia**, **Christian Aid**, **Arba Minch University**, and **Habtech Solutions Inc.**

By June 2024, the consortium had completed substantial technical and partnership preparations for the proposed scale-up program. The initiative was designed to advance Enset research, climate resilience, women-led enterprise development, food security, and sustainable livelihoods.

However, the anticipated USAID funding pathway was eliminated following changes in the U.S. administration and foreign assistance priorities. Rather than allowing the vision to end with the loss of that funding opportunity, the founders chose to continue the work by establishing EII as an independent U.S.-based organization capable of sustaining the vision beyond any single donor, project, or political cycle.

This turning point became the foundation for EII's institutional mission: to serve as a global convener, advocate, and partnership platform for Enset research, innovation, policy, investment, and implementation.

### **November 2024 – Building the Foundation**

A follow-up mission to Ethiopia further refined the concept through consultations with government institutions, universities, researchers, development organizations, and private sector stakeholders.

Initial discussions began on building long-term strategic partnerships and positioning Enset as an international opportunity crop.

### **April 2025 – Refining the Institutional Strategy**

Additional consultations in Ethiopia strengthened EII's institutional vision and clarified its strategic role in supporting Ethiopia's emerging Enset economy.

The founders refined EII's organizational framework, partnership strategy, governance model, and long-term institutional roadmap. During this period, the Institute's mission evolved from concept development toward becoming a global platform for research, innovation, partnerships, investment, and implementation support for Ethiopia's Enset ecosystem.



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## **July 2025 – Supporting Ethiopia's National Enset Development Flagship Program**

A defining milestone in EII's institutional journey occurred in **July 2025**, when Ethiopia's **National Enset Development Flagship Program** was officially launched at the Skylight Hotel in Addis Ababa.

**Wassie Gubena**, representing the Enset Innovation Institute (EII), participated in the launch event and formally expressed EII's commitment to supporting the successful implementation of the National Enset Development Flagship Program through international partnerships, resource mobilization, scientific collaboration, and institutional capacity building.

This milestone reflected the alignment of EII's mission with Ethiopia's national vision for advancing Enset as a strategic platform for food security, climate resilience, women's economic empowerment, scientific research, and sustainable economic development. It also marked the beginning of EII's ongoing engagement with the Ministry of Agriculture to explore opportunities for long-term collaboration in support of the Flagship Program.

## **November 2025 – Grounding the Vision in the Field**

A comprehensive field mission across Southern Ethiopia provided firsthand engagement with Enset farming communities, women's enterprises, processors, researchers, universities, and local government leaders.

These consultations transformed EII from a conceptual organization into a practical catalyst platform built around food security, climate resilience, women's economic empowerment, indigenous knowledge, biodiversity conservation, research and innovation, enterprise development, and global investment.

## **Building National and Global Partnerships (2025–2026)**

Throughout 2025 and 2026, EII significantly expanded its national and international network.

Major partnerships and engagements included the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture, Arba Minch University, University of Gondar's Center for Digital Health & Implementation Science, SOS Sahel Ethiopia, Columbia University Center for Climate Systems Research, University of Chicago Development Innovation Lab, University of



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Vermont, and numerous philanthropic organizations, research institutes, and international development partners.

Among the most significant scientific milestones was a half-day strategic working session at the Columbia University Center for Climate Systems Research in New York with Dr. Cynthia Rosenzweig and her research team. The meeting explored positioning Enset as a globally significant climate-resilient food system and established the foundation for future scientific collaboration.

EII also held a series of strategic discussions with the **Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics and International Programs** at the **University of Maryland**, including **Jimmy Smith** and **Cheng-I Wei**. These discussions explored opportunities for academic collaboration, international research partnerships, student engagement, and strengthening the global profile of Ethiopia's Enset food system through university-based cooperation.

Building on that momentum, EII held a strategic consultation with **Dr. James Borrell**, one of the world's leading authorities on Enset biodiversity and conservation. The discussion focused on international scientific collaboration, strengthening the global Enset research agenda, supporting Ethiopia's National Enset Development Flagship Program, and advancing EII's role as a global convener connecting research, policy, and investment.

EII also held a series of strategic discussions with **Tilahun Amede**, a senior scientist with the **Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa** and one of Africa's leading experts in sustainable agriculture and soil health. These discussions explored opportunities for collaboration on Enset systems, soil fertility, climate resilience, regenerative agriculture, and institutional partnerships. Dr. Amede's encouragement has helped shape EII's thinking on how to position Enset within broader African agricultural transformation and climate adaptation agendas.

Another important milestone was receiving a personal letter of endorsement from **Professor Gebisa Ejeta**, 2009 World Food Prize Laureate and internationally recognized plant scientist. Professor Ejeta expressed his support for EII's vision to advance Enset as a strategic crop for food security, climate resilience, and economic development, while encouraging the Institute's efforts to build global partnerships and strengthen Ethiopia's leadership in Enset research and innovation. His endorsement represents an important validation of EII's mission from one of the world's most respected agricultural scientists.



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EII also benefited from the guidance and encouragement of **Jessica Fanzo**, an internationally recognized food systems scientist. During discussions regarding EII's governance, Dr. Fanzo expressed her willingness to support the Institute as a member of its Global Advisory Board. While she was unable to accept a formal Board leadership role due to her relocation to Italy and existing professional commitments, she affirmed her interest in continuing to advise EII and support its long-term mission.

### **Spring 2026 – Expanding EII's International Presence**

During Spring 2026, EII significantly increased its international visibility through participation in major global events, including the IMF–World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington, D.C.; networking with development finance institutions and global foundations; engagement with the Development Innovation Lab at the University of Chicago; academic outreach with the University of Vermont; and participation in the Climate Reality Leadership Corps Advocacy Training in Nashville, Tennessee from April 30 to May 2, 2026.

### **2026 – From Vision to Implementation**

Although still in its organizational start-up phase, EII has already evolved beyond concept development into an active international consortium builder, institutional convener, and implementation partner.

Recognizing that lasting impact requires more than individual projects, EII has focused on building the institutional capacity, strategic partnerships, and knowledge systems necessary to support Ethiopia's National Enset Development Flagship Program and position Enset within the global agenda for climate resilience, food security, and sustainable development.

### **Strategic Knowledge and Institutional Assets**

In preparation for long-term implementation and investment, EII developed foundational institutional assets designed to strengthen planning, partnership development, fundraising, and program delivery.

#### **Enset SME Database**

EII developed a growing database of women-led and community-based Enset Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) across Ethiopia.



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The database supports:

- Enterprise mapping
- Investment planning
- Market linkage development
- Program implementation
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)
- Future impact measurement

This resource provides an important foundation for scaling women-led enterprises within Ethiopia's emerging Enset economy.

### **Grant Intelligence Database**

Recognizing that sustainable financing requires systematic engagement with global donors, EII also developed a comprehensive **Grant Intelligence Database**.

The database identifies and categorizes:

- International philanthropic foundations
- Bilateral development agencies
- Multilateral organizations
- Corporate philanthropy
- Impact investors
- Research funding opportunities
- University funding mechanisms

The Grant Intelligence Database now serves as EII's principal resource mobilization and partnership development platform and has already informed multiple international grant submissions and donor engagement strategies.



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Together, these institutional assets position EII to move beyond project development toward coordinated long-term investment in Ethiopia's Enset ecosystem.

### **Major International Grant Proposals Submitted**

Although still operating without institutional funding, EII has already helped develop or coordinate several major international funding opportunities.

#### **2024 Consortium Initiative**

Approximate Value:

**US\$25 Million**

Partners:

- SOS Sahel France
- SOS Sahel Ethiopia
- Christian Aid
- Arba Minch University
- Habtech Solutions Inc.

Purpose:

Five-year Enset scale-up initiative focused on climate resilience, research, women's economic empowerment, enterprise development, and sustainable livelihoods. Which is now dead.

### **New Major international grant proposals submitted include:**

#### **Google.org AI for Science Challenge – AI for Health**

Lead Institution: University of Gondar

EII Role: Consortium Convener, International Partnership Coordinator, Organizational Implementation Partner, Resource Mobilization, and Strategic Communications.

#### **Google.org AI for Science Challenge – AI for Climate**

Lead Institution: Arba Minch University

EII Role: Consortium Convener, Organizational Integrator, Partnership Development,



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Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, Strategic Communications, Implementation Coordination, and Resource Mobilization.

**FCI4Africa Open Call — European Union**

EII submitted a proposal to validate sustainability data collection, analysis, and digital knowledge systems for Ethiopia's Enset value chain through partnerships with universities, women-led SMEs, and local communities.

**Swedish Foundation Proposal**

EII submitted a proposal to document indigenous knowledge and traditional Enset processing systems while preserving cultural heritage and strengthening intergenerational knowledge transfer.

**Organizational Development**

Since its establishment, EII has successfully completed the institutional foundations necessary for long-term growth.

Major accomplishments include:

- Legal incorporation as a U.S. nonprofit organization
- Organizational Bylaws
- 2025–2030 Strategic Plan
- Governance Framework
- Financial Operations Manual
- Operational Policies
- Partnership Framework Agreements
- International Board of Directors
- Global Advisory Board
- Senior Volunteer Leadership Team
- Enset SME Database





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- Grant Intelligence Database
- Grant proposal development systems
- Institutional branding and communications platform
- International partnership strategy
- Donor engagement strategy
- Launched its website: [www.ensetinnovation.org](http://www.ensetinnovation.org)

Collectively, these achievements position EII to transition confidently from institution building to implementation and growth.

### **Founder Commitment**

Before receiving any institutional funding, EII has been built entirely through volunteer leadership, personal financial sacrifice, and unwavering commitment to Ethiopia's future.

Co-founders **Askale Shiferaw** and **Asratie Teferra** have committed up to **US\$25,000** from their personal retirement savings to establish EII until sustainable institutional funding is secured.

As of July 2026, **US\$11,227.95** in verified out-of-pocket expenditures has been documented through receipts and financial records.

These expenditures include:

- Legal incorporation
- Organizational development
- Travel
- Partnership development
- Meetings
- Communications
- Outreach



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- Administrative expenses

Actual founder contributions exceed this documented amount because several early organizational expenses were not formally recorded.

In addition,

- No founder has received salary or compensation.
- Askale Shiferaw and Asratie Teferra continue to devote substantial time and leadership without compensation.
- Wassie Gubena serves in a full-time volunteer leadership capacity.
- Two senior economists—one based in the United States and one in Ethiopia, both former senior leaders at Abt Associates—continue to provide strategic organizational and economic advisory support while assisting in the refinement of EII's 2025–2030 Strategic Plan.

This extraordinary volunteer commitment reflects the founders' belief that institutions are built first through vision and service, with funding following demonstrated credibility and impact.

### **July 2026 – A Historic Milestone**

The inaugural meeting of the Board of Directors marks the successful completion of EII's institutional formation phase.

With governance now established, EII transitions from a founder-led initiative into a formally governed international nonprofit organization prepared to mobilize partnerships, research, investment, innovation, and implementation in support of Ethiopia's National Enset Development Flagship Program.

The inaugural Board also represents the beginning of a new chapter in which governance, strategic oversight, and institutional stewardship become shared responsibilities.



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## **EII By the Numbers**

**As of July 2026**

### **Organizational Development**

- **28+ months** of institutional development
- **1** legally incorporated U.S. nonprofit organization
- **1** inaugural Board of Directors
- **1** Global Advisory Board
- **1** Strategic Plan (2025–2030)
- **1** Financial Operations Manual
- Comprehensive governance, operational, and partnership policies completed

### **Founder Commitment**

- **US\$25,000** committed by the co-founders from personal retirement savings
- **US\$11,227.95** in verified founder expenditures documented through receipts
- Actual founder investment exceeds this documented amount due to additional early-stage expenses not formally recorded
- **0** salaries paid
- **3** senior volunteer leaders working without compensation: Askale Shiferaw, Asratie Teferra, and Wassie Gubena
- **2** senior economists from Abt Associates providing pro bono strategic and economic advisory support

### **Ethiopia Engagement**

- **4** major planning and stakeholder missions to Ethiopia:
  - March 2024



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- November 2024
- April 2025
- November 2025

Various stakeholders engaged, including government ministries, universities, researchers, farmers, women's SMEs, NGOs, and international organizations.

### **Strategic Partnerships**

Active collaboration or partnership development with:

- Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture
- Arba Minch University
- University of Gondar
- SOS Sahel Ethiopia
- Columbia University Center for Climate Systems Research
- University of Maryland
- University of Chicago Development Innovation Lab
- University of Vermont Center for Agro-Ecology
- International research institutions such as the Royal Botanic Garden-KEW
- Addis Ababa University
- Global philanthropic organizations

### **Scientific Leadership**

EII has developed relationships with internationally recognized leaders in agriculture, climate science, and food systems, including:

- **Dr. Cynthia Rosenzweig**, Columbia University and World Food Prize Laureate.



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- **Professor Gebisa Ejeta**, World Food Prize Laureate, who provided a personal letter of endorsement supporting EII's mission.
- **Dr. James Borrell**, internationally recognized Enset scientist and biodiversity researcher.
- **Dr. Tilahun Amede**, senior scientist at AGRA, through ongoing strategic discussions on regenerative agriculture, soil health, and Enset systems.
- **Jessica Fanzo**, who agreed to support EII as an advisor while transitioning to new responsibilities in Italy.

### **International Engagement and Recognition**

EII has participated in the IMF–World Bank Spring Meetings, Climate Reality Leadership Corps Advocacy Training, Columbia University research collaboration, international university partnership meetings, and foundation and donor networking events.

### **International Recognition**

- 2 World Food Prize Laureates actively engaged with EII
- 1 personal endorsement letter received from a World Food Prize Laureate
- Growing network of internationally recognized scientists and academic leaders

### **Institutional Assets**

- 1 Enset SME Database
- 1 Grant Intelligence Database
- Hundreds of prospective funding opportunities identified and categorized
- Institutional knowledge systems supporting fundraising, investment planning, partnership development, and implementation



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## **Grant Development**

### **Four major funding efforts developed or submitted**

- Google.org AI for Health- \$3M
- Google.org AI for Climate- \$3M
- FCI4Africa Open Call- EU 50,000
- Swedish Foundation Indigenous Knowledge Grant - \$15,000

EII serves as consortium convener, organizational integrator, partnership coordinator, resource mobilization lead, strategic communications lead, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning partner.

## **Looking Ahead (2026–2027)**

### **Priority objectives include:**

- Formalize partnership with Ethiopia's Ministry of Agriculture
- Secure EII's first major institutional grants
- Expand international research partnerships
- Support implementation of Ethiopia's National Enset Development Flagship Program
- Expand women-led Enset enterprise ecosystems
- Launch the International Enset Research and Innovation Network
- Convene the First Global Enset Partnership Forum
- Position Enset as one of the world's leading climate-resilient opportunity crops
- Mobilize international investment to accelerate Ethiopia's Enset economy
- Submit the 501c.3 determination application to the IRS



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## **Our Guiding Principle**

**"Building a trusted global institution before building a funded organization."**

In just 28 months, the Enset Innovation Institute has evolved from a vision discussed around a meeting table in Addis Ababa into a formally governed international nonprofit organization with a growing network of partners spanning government, academia, science, international development, and philanthropy.

Before receiving its first institutional grant, EII was built through volunteer leadership, personal investment, strategic partnerships, and an unwavering commitment to Ethiopia's future. Together, the founders, advisors, and partners have laid the institutional foundation to transform Enset from an underrecognized indigenous crop into a globally recognized platform for food security, climate resilience, women's economic empowerment, biodiversity conservation, research, innovation, and sustainable development.

As we inaugurate our first Board of Directors, we celebrate not only the establishment of a new organization, but the beginning of a long-term movement. The Board now assumes stewardship of an institution built on vision, perseverance, integrity, and collaboration. Together, we look forward to transforming this strong foundation into lasting impact for Ethiopia and the global community.

***"Institutions are not built by funding alone. They are built by vision, sustained by trust, strengthened through partnerships, and measured by the lives they ultimately transform."***

**Enset Innovation Institute  
Inaugural Board Meeting  
July 11, 2026**