On Ginbot 20's Eve: Ethiopia's Future Looks Brighter than Ever

(Atnafe Zenebe 05-27-15)

24 years ago this week, a major event took place. An event that changed the fate of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

The gallant fighters of EPRDF hit the last nail on the coffin of the military dictatorship and entered Addis Ababa.

Since then, the face of Ethiopia was changed dramatically. The renowned media Foreign Affairs attested recently:

A quarter-century on, though, the mood in Addis Ababa could not be more changed.

Between 2001 and 2012–13, Ethiopia’s economy grew more than seven percent per year on average. It was the only African country to move at a pace comparable to the East Asian tigers—and to do so without a hydrocarbons boom or a huge mining sector.

The economic miracle resulted in real pro-poor growth, lifting millions of people out of the vicious cycle of poverty, hunger, and poor health. While the country’s population soared from roughly 40 million in the 1980s to nearly 100 million today, it achieved the 2000–15 Millennium Development Goals for child mortality and is likely to also meet them for combating HIV/AIDS and rolling back malaria.

Ethiopia is also making giant strides tackling income volatility and illiteracy. And, with sequential bumper harvests of Ethiopia’s staple
crop, teff (a cereal similar to millet), millions of smallholder farmers might well be able to escape the productivity traps that historically have kept them in abject poverty.

Indeed, EPRDF was not the first or the only force that waged battle against the brutal undemocratic regimes that made the life of the peoples miserable for a century.

Ethiopian farmers, workers, students, and other segments of the nation and nationalities mounted bitter and persistent struggles for economic and social development, justice, democracy and good governance.

Especially in the 1950s and 1960s, Ethiopian young students became major drivers of the struggle through various initiatives and groupings in diverse forms and objectives to bring about radical change by raising the land tenure question, stressing and other popular issues.

However, the lack of effective organization was a major problem that always setback the struggle. Though many sacrificed their lives for these noble causes and put an end to the decadent imperial era political system, it was hijacked by the military junta Derge.

Therefore, the struggle had to continue even more bitterly against the undemocratic regime in the period 1974-1991. However, most of those struggles were effectively crushed by the military dictatorship as their strategies and tactics made them vulnerable.

The matter was fundamentally changed under the scientific leadership and mobilization of the EPRDF. Though EPRDF was formally established in 1989, TPLF and ANDM have been fighting the Derg since 1975 1982, respectively, both separately and in coordination.

The people-centered mobilization strategies of the EPRDF not only
succeeded in flushing the Dergue army from its strong holds and bases around urban centers, but also withstood natural calamities that can frustrate any armed struggle.

For example, when drought hit northern Ethiopia. At the time, millions of farmers were threatened by famine, as the drought coupled with years of war, poor provision of agricultural input and market access as well as recurrent irresponsible bombing of civilian areas by the Dergue. Even more sadly, the Dergue refused TPLF's offer for a truce and for providing full access to humanitarian agencies.

However, EPRDF was able to avert the catastrophe by sharing its fighter's food to surrounding people, by transporting hundreds of thousands to refugee centers in Sudan and by lobbying & providing protections for aid organizations who were willing to enter through the border with Sudan.

The Ethiopian peoples' struggle led by EPRDF program and leadership became unstoppable after the mid-1980s. However, that didn't turn EPRDF into a military adventurist rather consistently perused negotiations and peace talks both with the Dergue and other armed groups regardless of TPLF's fast growing military strength.

EPRDF's leading motto was to mobilize everyone who can contribute even by throwing a stone. For example: EPRDF persistently perused talks with OLF to establish ties and a common front. Though OLF had been ideologically unfocused and militarily weak organization that it was believed better to include all forces of change rather than rely on sheer military power. Sadly, OLF was not of the same attitude. After several time-wasting discussions and talks, when TPLF sent as per their agreement two of its cadres to help train OLF fighters, OLF officials mistreated them labeling them spies and the whole effort failed.
The first Congress of the EPRDF took place in Kolla Tembien in January 1991, at the time when the gallant fighters of TPLF and ANDM as well as the later founders of OPDO and SEPDM were in control of half of the country. They were close to achieve victory against the Dergue and they knew it was inevitable.

Becoming close to power didn't turn TPLF & ANDM against each other, as we see with today's opposition parties who quarrel & brake their partnership when they achieve a sizable diaspora money or popularity or become close to power. Rather, TPLF & ANDM decided to take their decade-long cooperation ideological discussions to next stage by forming a Front.

The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front was born with equal representation of the two parties in the Front's leadership. The first EPRDF Congress deliberated on and approved the Revolutionary Democracy political program that saved the Ethiopia from the existential threat it was facing and put her in the right track of democracy and development following the downfall of the Derg regime.

The resolutions of the first Congress and the leaders it elected succeeded in the delivering the down-fall of the military regime on May 28, 1991 and also in making the Transitional period characterized by peace, multiparty democracy and development.

Therefore, Ethiopia escaped not only the immediate threats posed by the downfall of Derg & the empty treasury and tens thousands of small arms scattered all over the country; but also managed to tackle the more fundamental threats that arise from centuries old national oppression and denial of the farmers' fruits of labor.
Not only Ethiopia safely passed the looming threats of disintegration and communal conflict, it managed to set-up a multinational federalism that addresses the roots of the problem. Nation and nationalities started governing themselves and for the first time voluntarily renewed their commitment to live as one country by ratifying the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia constitution through their elected representatives in 1995.

The 16 or more armed groups that existed at the time of the downfall of the Dergue were persuaded to lay down their arms and join the political process while their fighters either resumed their peaceful lives or joined the national army, militia and police in accordance with their qualification and skills. Some, like, OLF, who tried to impose their will on the people were effectively put under control with the cooperation of the public before they inflicted further damage.

For the first time in history, free and fair national and regional elections were held across the country. It was clearly seen Ethiopia started to rise from the brink of collapse to the regional prominence and influence.

The stability of the government and the unity of nation nationalities and peoples during the Eritrean aggression and the subsequent full-scale war (1998-2000) were further evidence of the success of the struggle under EPRDF leadership. Previously marginalized people, like Somalis, Gambellias, Afar, etc. made it clear that for the first time they feel owners of the country and they are willing to pay price to preserve and protect it.

The progress was across the board. More importantly, in the socio economic sectors.
The Government has been engaged in a major effort to transform Ethiopian society and place the country on a trajectory to become a middle-income economy by the year 2025.

Indeed, over the last decade, Ethiopia’s GDP grew by nearly 10 per cent per year, which is one of the fastest growth rates registered in the world. One of the primary movers of this stride is the achievements in the education sector, as significant attention has been given to upgrading economic and social infrastructure and promoting pro-poor spending on education, health, and other services that benefit the poor and marginalized.

The progress in the Education sector had been commended by the Human Development Report. The report noted:

While the recent expansion of education has taken place at all levels, the Government has made particular efforts towards universal primary education. Gross enrolment rates in primary school are 98.2 per cent for boys and 92.4 per cent for girls, while for secondary schools the gross rates are 40 per cent for boys and 37 per cent for girls.

Ethiopia has thus seen an enormous and rapid increase in enrolment in primary education that has contributed to reducing the gender imbalance within education. The Government aims to achieve universal primary education for those aged 7-14 as a GTP target by 2014/15.

As part of expanding educational opportunities over the past two decades, net enrolments in primary school have almost tripled since monitoring began in 1994. Currently, 85.7 percent of Ethiopian primary age children are attending primary school.
Moreover, as pointed out in the Human Development Report:

*Primary school (Grades 1-8) net enrolment rose from 68.5 per cent in 2004/5 to 85.7 percent in 2012/13, but it remained virtually unchanged over the last two years of that period. Lower primary net enrolment rate (Grades 1-4) reached 95.3 per cent, having improved by 3.1 percent -age points from the previous year. While net enrolment for both boys and girls are showing improvement, boys’ net enrolment is ahead of girls’ by 5.3 percentage points.*

In terms of fighting hunger, the progress made so far is so big that the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UNFAO) awarded Ethiopia last year.

The Director-General of UNFAO attested the efforts and achievements of Ethiopia in the following words:

*"You have overcome major challenges in difficult global economic conditions and policy environments. You have demonstrated the will and mobilized the means".*

Ethiopia was one of the thirteen countries that were awarded diplomas from FAO for "outstanding progress in fighting hunger". The others are Brazil, Cameroon, Gabon, the Gambia, Iran, Kiribati, Malaysia, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, the Philippines and Uruguay.

In its official statement, UNFAO noted that Ethiopia is one of the countries making great strides in combating undernourishment.

*"This includes the early achievement of the Millennium Development Goal 1 (MDG-1) hunger target - to halve the proportion of hungry people by 2015 - or the more stringent 1996 World Food Summit*
(WFS) target of halving the absolute number of hungry people by 2015."

The accomplishments' in terms of fighting poverty was also acknowledged by the prominent founder and former CEO of Microsoft Bill Gates, in the following strong words:

"Ethiopia has made enormous improvement.....With per-capita income comparable to many other African nations – and considerably smaller than some – Ethiopia is putting itself on a path to the global middle class.

If this proud country – which 30 years ago was seen by many as the world’s most extreme example of poverty and malnutrition – can put itself on this trajectory, there’s no good reason why other African countries can’t do the same.

Indeed, as Ethiopia celebrates the 24th anniversary of Ginbot 20, the future looks brighter than ever.

It is an occasion to renew their commitment to the National Vision that guided development plans for more than a decade.

Ethiopia's National Vision states:

" to become a country where democratic rule, good-governance and social justice reign, upon the involvement and free will of its peoples, and once extricating itself from poverty to reach the level of a middle-income economy as of 2020-2023."

In terms of the economic sector, the National Objective is that:

"building an economy which has a modern and productive agricultural sector with enhanced technology and an industrial sector that plays a leading role in the economy, sustaining economic
development and securing social justice and increasing per capita income of the citizens so as to reach the level or those in middle-income countries."

As Foreign Affairs media attested recently:

Ethiopia has come a long way since the dark days of a quarter-century ago. Its resurgence, domestically and internationally, is unmistakable. Never have so many Ethiopians had so much reason to be optimistic and confident about the future.

Eternal glory to the martyrs!!!