

Ecological Imperialism and Ethiopian Green Economy Strategy

Could the roaring East African lion, the awakening giant – Ethiopian economy – decarbonize its way of development through clean energy and cutting-edge technology to become a “green economy front-runner”? Or would it follow the conventional path, business-as-usual development style, wherein depletion of natural resources, addiction and dependency on fossil fuel, degradation of ecosystem and uncontrolled green gas emission are an avoidable byproduct of growth? How to achieve the delicate balance between economic growth and keeping environment clean while minimizing the country’s green gas emission footprint globally? How to conserve indigenous features and cultural identity of local communities while modernizing the economy? As the economy gearing speed and expanding in volume in coming years and decades, raising such questions becomes imperative at all levels of economic activities.

Ethiopia’s ambitious plan to join middle income countries club by 2025 presupposes increasing gross domestic product (GDP) per capita from current USD \$410 at least up to lower threshold of middle income status USD 1000, keeping current rate of growth for next 12 years, decreasing agriculture sector share of GDP from today’s 40% to 30% and shifting mass employment from farming and herding to services and industries.¹

Yet economic growth always has a price tag in terms of ecological and environmental degradation since economy is a subsystem of the finite biosphere that supports it. When the economy’s expansion encroaches too much on its surrounding ecosystem, we will begin to sacrifice natural capital that is worth more than the man-made capital added by the growth. Sustainable economy isn’t merely equivalent to economic growth or sustain the rate of growth of GDP. Sustainability can be defined in terms of throughput by determining the environment’s capacity for supplying each raw resource and for absorbing the end waste products.²

Apart solar energy which has constant input, the biosphere is closed non- growing system that is limited and regulated by the laws of thermodynamics. This means, theoretically, economy as a subsystem must at some point cease growing and adapt itself to a dynamic equilibrium, something like a steady state. At this stage of equilibrium, economic growth replaced by economic development which is different from economic growth or expansion qualitatively.³ The dialectical relationship between economical activities of human society and the ecosystem is referred as ‘socio-ecological metabolism’ and ‘metabolic rift’ implies to a state of disharmony in this relation resulted by imbalanced economic activities of society. A growing global population coupled with a growing economy has steered the world into a socio metabolic transition which pushes the limit of global ecosystem.

What is Ecological Imperialism?

Besides its biological metabolism, human society as a cultural entity produces social metabolism. It’s biological metabolism regulated from the side of nature by natural laws governing the various physical processes involved and its social metabolism from the side of society by institutionalized norms governing the division of labor and distribution of wealth etc.

Metabolic rift is an ecological disruption which occurs as the consequence of interaction between social systems and non-human natural systems. The concept of metabolic rift derived from Marx’s interpretation of socio-ecological metabolism, which was rooted in his understanding of the

labor process. "Within the nineteenth-century foundations of social theory, it was Marx and Engels who applied the term 'metabolism' to society".⁴ Marx interpretation of labor is as a process between man and nature, and in this process man through his own actions, mediates, adjusts and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. Man by excreting his physical force on the materials of nature he changes it and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. The labor process according to Marx is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence.

Ecological imperialism is a modus operandi of capitalist economic mode of growth in which such fundamental ecological concepts as materials and energy sources exchanges, state of physical structures, and time-dependent processes of natural habitat are totally ignored and excluded from one side of the equation.

According to Hornborg's analysis, neoclassical economics cannot conceptualize this transfer due to the conflation. "It is this discrepancy between productive potential, not envisioned simply as money, and economic valuation enacted through and obscured within market exchange that fuels the disproportionate socio-economic metabolism supporting the technology, infrastructure, and standard of living of dominant industrialized countries"⁵ In recognition of this, ecological economist K. William Kapp called capitalism the "economy of unpaid costs."⁶

The structure of market economies, the political-economic institutions of modernity, and the relentless commitment to economic growth as an overarching systemic imperative and as the primary solution to the environmental crisis are the driving forces of Environmental exploitation.⁷ Economic super-powers of the North have been as successful today in their disproportionate occupation of the atmosphere with carbon emissions as they were in their military occupation of the terrestrial world in colonial times.

Since its inception late fifteenth and early sixteenth century capitalism has been always a world system that divides the globe into center and periphery in which the people and ecosystem of the periphery have been treated as appendages to the growth requirements of the advanced capitalist center. The economic logic of capitalism has always been accumulation of wealth at one pole and the accumulation of relative misery and degradation at the other. Not surprisingly, the exponential rise of income inequality and less upward mobility in developed nations and increasing economic inequalities between Global South and Global North characterize present day capitalism and its underpinning ideology - neoliberalism.

The 'treadmill' logic of capital accumulation which underpins the transnational organization of production nurtures the contingencies and contradictions of global environmental degradation and the ecological unequal exchange dynamics that attain within a world economy structured by asymmetrical, hierarchical political-economic patterns reflected in the vastly divergent material throughput of industrialized and non-industrialized countries.⁸

Ecological unequal exchange defined as the environmentally damaging withdrawal of energy and other natural resource assets from the periphery and the addition or externalization of environmentally damaging production and disposal activities within the periphery of the world-system. Ecological imperialism constitutes both the obtainment of natural capital and the stocks of natural resources that yield important goods and services and the usurpation of sink-capacity or of ecological

systems in a manner enlarging the domestic carrying capacity of industrialized countries to the detriment of peripheral societies

At a higher level of theoretical abstraction, ecological imperialism references to ecological unequal exchange which is the asymmetrical importation of the 'productive potential' embodied in natural resource assets and the export of entropy or the dispersal of degraded energy and thermodynamic disorder within the world-system.⁹

According to one estimate, between 1850 and 1995, a total of 368 billion tons of carbon were released globally into the atmosphere through human activities. Some 208 billion tons were absorbed into the oceans and into vegetation and soils, leaving an extra 160 billion tons in the atmosphere. The current rate of accumulation in the atmosphere is over 1.6 extra billion tons of carbon every year.¹⁰

Global South suffer worst and first from climate change disasters than the North who most often caused the crises in the first place. People in developing nation are facing more frequent and more dangerous droughts, storms floods and have suffered immeasurable more loss of life and livelihood than affluent nations. Ninety seven per cent of natural disaster-related deaths and significant economic losses in terms of percentage of gross national product occurs each year in developing countries.

Since the Stockholm declaration in 1972, the saga of international agreements debacle on global climate change has been prompted because of unwillingness to address adequately the underline issue of the problem which is – Inequality. Inequality in the distribution of goods (wealth) and inequality in distribution of bads (emissions) has been the key issue to reach any viable and enduring international agreement. Unless Global south and Global north come together to build a workable global treaty which includes a comprehensive solution to the question of inequality there is little chance to advance in climate negotiations.

As Richard Benedick chief negotiator of US noted "The North's interests in maintaining a healthy planet can only achieved through aggressive efforts to support national economic advancement in the South." ⁹ This could require mandated funding from global North as ecological debt to global South. According to Acción Ecológica ecological debt is "The debt accumulated by Northern, industrial countries toward Third World countries on account of resource plundering, environmental damages, and the free occupation of environmental space to deposit wastes, such as greenhouse gases, from the industrial countries." It refers to the environmental liabilities of Northern countries for the excessive per capita production of greenhouse gases, historically and at present.¹¹

The leading role and contribution of late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in the international climate negotiations was not only that he vigorously voiced the issue of inequality in behalf of Africa and Global South. But also as co-chairman the High-Level Advisory Group on Climate Change Financing of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) he outlined and proposed a pragmatic and achievable financial initiatives to resolve the gridlock.¹²

Ethiopian Green Economy Strategy

According to the study, If Ethiopian economy follows the conventional path of development to achieve the goals set for 2025 that is to become middle income country, greenhouse gas emissions would more than double from 150 Mt CO₂e in 2010 to 400 Mt CO₂e in 2030, development faces

resource constraints due to diminishing carrying capacity, financial constraint due to forced spending an ever-larger share of GDP on fossil fuel imports, and locked it into outdated technologies.¹³

To avoid such foreseeable problems, and to face the challenge of climate change problems, that are often turn up as unpredictable rains and sometimes the complete failure of seasonal rains which leads to severe food shortages for millions of Ethiopians, the government of Ethiopia has launched Climate Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) Initiative. The main goal of CRGE is to attain by 2025 a middle-income economy as reflected in Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), and to create economy which is resilient to climatic shocks and adds no more emissions than Ethiopia's economy today.

Climate resilience green economy (CRGE) initiative is coordinated and overseen by the CRGE Ministerial Steering Committee which is formed in 2009 under the office of the prime minister and comprises more than 50 experts from 20 leading governmental institutions engaged in seven committees.¹⁴

Climate resilience green economy (CRGE) initiative has two building blocks (Green Economy Strategy and Climate Resilient components of the CRGE Sector Reduction Mechanism (SRM)) - which both become integral part of Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) to create a green national economic growth plan

Four pillars of green economy strategy outlined by CRGE initiative are:

- Improving crop and livestock production practices for higher food security and farmer income while reducing emissions
- Protecting and re-establishing forests for their economic and ecosystem services, including as carbon stocks
- Expanding electricity generation from renewable sources of energy for domestic and regional markets
- Leapfrogging to modern and energy-efficient technologies in transport, industrial sectors, and buildings.

Based on these strategies, offshoot initiatives that have the best chances of promoting growth immediately, capturing large abatement potentials, and attracting climate finance for their implementation are identified for fast track implementation.

- Exploiting the vast hydropower potential;
- Large-scale promotion of advanced rural cooking technologies;
- Efficiency improvements to the livestock value chain;
- Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation

In long term having formally merged national development objectives and the aims of developing climate resilient green economy under single policy framework enhances the opportunity to transform the country's development model by leapfrogging to modern energy-efficient development trajectories. The successful implementation of Climate resilience green economy projects protects

millions from hunger in face of drought and other calamities by increasing the country's immunity from climate shocks.

In addition CRGE Initiative attracts more investment from international, governmental and private partners. Recently signed a historic \$4 billion private sector investment agreement aimed to develop one of renewable sources of energy is the direct result of this strategy. Of course, the crown jewel of CRGE initiatives remains to be the grand Renaissance dam that hopefully in the near future will attract huge investment.

Ethiopian environmental grass root movements and organizations have to play their part in advancing environmental and climate issues and yet be vigilant not to be manipulated by lobbyists of neoliberal ideology which nurtures the gruesome status quo of the present and hell bent to keep it intact.

As the country contemplates leapfrogging to middle income country our society has to be informed and cautioned about the excesses and evils come with consumer society in capitalist system. Corporate offence on environment, individualism and greed that undermines common goods, ever widening income inequality which erodes social bonds and exacerbates instability are few of them.

Not approved then by IMF, Developmental State Paradigm tailored to the country's unique socio economic features has propelled the economy into historic trajectory of development wooing investors from all over the world. Ethiopia's \$43-billion economy is now sub-Saharan Africa's fifth-biggest economy, leapfrogging next door Kenya to become East African lion. (Paraphrasing South East Asian tigers)

According to IMF, "The economy has experienced strong and broad based growth over the past decade, averaging 10.6% per year in 2004/05 - 2011/12 compared to the regional average of 5.4%. 38.7% of Ethiopians lived in extreme poverty in 2004-2005, five years later this was 29.6%, which is a decrease of 9.1 percentage points".

Halleluiah!

God Bless Ethiopia

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