

Ginbot 20: A candle - lit and guarded by Ethiopian farmers

(Solome Adane -05/29/14)

For more than half a century, Ethiopian farmers have been struggling to realize the full enjoyments of their produces. The Bale peasants uprising, the Tigray peasants uprising and the Gojam peasants uprising are among the notable ones. However, despite the sacrifices made, it was hijacked by the group military officers, the Derg.

The suffering of Ethiopian farmers was double-fold both during the imperial era and during the Derg era. They were forced to give away their harvests for free or at a nominal price. At the same time, their standard of living and productivity was declining due to the neglect of the central government and as a result of misguided policies.

Therefore, Ethiopian farmers had no choice but to continue their struggle even more bitterly, under the leadership of Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPRDF), until May 28, 1991/Ginbot 20.

That bitter struggle has brought about the current astonishing pace of growth.

Last week, *The Africa Progress Panel (APP) 2014 report* stated that:

"Once synonymous with macroeconomic mismanagement and economic stagnation, Africa now hosts some of the world's fastest-growing economies.

When it comes to growth, Ethiopia rivals China, and Zambia outpaces India."

While this general growth is a matter that brings joy to all citizens and friends of Ethiopia, the farmers had also other specific expectations when they took part in the armed struggle.

They wanted not only to be the beneficiaries of the fruit of their produce, but also get access to basic services that will ease their daily lives and help them escape the centuries-long abject poverty.

EPRDF pledged to the farmers that it will make their demands a priority since the days of the armed struggle. And, it kept its promises.

Therefore, in 1992, immediately after the removal of the Dergue regime, the EPRDF-led transitional government started laboring to improve the lives of Ethiopian farmers.

The government undertook several program of economic reforms by designing various policies and strategies to put an end to the rent-seeking political-economy in rural urban areas and to embark on an accelerate growth trajectory.

The Agriculture Development led Industrialization (ADLI) that aimed at transforming the country's economy is one of those national policies and strategies.

It aimed at transforming the country into a well-developed and prospered one. Since the start of the implementation of this timely and effective economic policy and strategy, the agricultural sector is influencing the overall economic performance in Ethiopia.

It should be understood that from the very beginning, when the EPRDF-led government said that the economic direction is ADLI, it didn't mean that there is no need for development outside agriculture, or that no priority need be given to non-agricultural activities in rural and urban centers.

In the process of development activities, it is inevitable that non-agricultural development initiatives will in due course become important elements of rural development.

In fact, it has been stated that rural development objective is irreversibly attained only when agriculture ceases to be directly or indirectly the main economic sector, especially in terms of its percentage share in the GDP and employment.

Focus on agriculture should be understood to mean seeking accelerated and sustainable agricultural development to end the predominance of agriculture in the national economy. It is consistent that such a development strategy indeed gives a greater priority to the development of non-agricultural sectors than any other development strategy.

Even if the first ten years improved the livelihood of Ethiopia's farmers at a commendable scale, the peasant-based EPRDF was not satisfied.

The growth rates were not sustained; as a result their impact on the peasantry was limited. Following the reform of 2001, detailed Rural and Agricultural Development policy and strategies were formulated.

The next seven years saw a dramatic change in the lives of Ethiopian farmers. From 2003 to 2009, the agriculture sector registered an 8 per cent average growth consecutively. That was a direct result of the government's strong commitment to agriculture and rural development as demonstrated by allocating more than 10 per cent of the country's total budget.

Indeed, the scale of progress achieved in the seven years was impressive by any standard. For example: To implement the Rural and Agricultural Development policy, 25 agricultural vocational training colleges (ATVT's) have already been established all over the country and graduated more than 71,000 agricultural development agents are graduated in animal science, plant science and natural resource.

As a result, the number of farmers who used agricultural extension packages had reached more than 8 million. Moreover, 8,780 farmers training centers (FTCs) have been built and many farmers are getting trained in various agricultural practices, extension services and on how to adapt new agricultural technologies that enhances agricultural productivity.

The cumulative effect of all these endeavors is the growth in agricultural production and productivity that benefit the whole people.

Therefore, in 2009/2010, the total land covered by the main crops was rose several folds to 11.25 million hectare, while agricultural productivity reached to 200 million Quintals.

The average productivity of the main crops has increased from 12.1 to 17 Quintals per hectare. The foreign currency required from both agricultural and industrial products reached \$1.45 billion US dollar.

As the result of the development in agricultural productivity, in the last decade, Ethiopian farmers have started gradually shifting from subsistence agriculture to commercialized one and became more and more able to improve their living standards.

Many of them started sending their children to better and higher schools and some others have started their own private business in the nearby cities. These and other remarkable achievements are the results of our effective and timely policy and strategies of agricultural development.

Indeed, the agriculture sector registered tremendous results due to the government's responsible leadership - a developmental and democratic one.

Nonetheless, the EPRDF believed it should do more to improve the lots of the farmers who made incalculable sacrifices for the advent of this era of peace and development.

Therefore, in 2010, the government designed even larger plans. The Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) was designed by the Government of Ethiopia as a strategic framework for the agricultural sector from 2011 to 2015. The GTP aimed to: Enhance productivity and production of smallholder farmers and pastoralists; Strengthen marketing systems; Improve participation and engagement of the private sector; Expand the amount of land under irrigation; and Reduce the number of chronically food insecure households.

The GTP set an overall target of at least 8.1% annual agricultural growth for the five-year period. Sub-sectoral targets include tripling the number of farmers receiving relevant extension services, reducing the number of safety net beneficiaries from 7.8 to 1.8 million households, and more than doubling the production of key crops from 18.1 million metric tonnes to 39.5 million metric tonnes. Specific targets are aligned with and in support of the targets contained in the CAADP Compact and other Ministry of Agriculture-led initiatives.

In 2011, the first year of the GTP, the overall growth rate of agricultural value added was 9 %. The total volume of production of major food crops (cereals, pulses and oilseeds) registered in 2010/11 was 221.8 million quintals.

This exceeds the production level of 202.46 million quintals in 2009/10 by 19.36 million quintals. The average productivity of major food crops during the same period was 16.5 quintal per hectare, which is 1.12 quintal/ha higher than the productivity in 2009/10 and 1.0 quintal/ha less than the target for the same year. The land covered by these major food crops was 13.45 million ha.

A total of 818,050 tons of chemical fertilizer and 1028.4 thousands improved seed have been distributed in 2010/11. In addition, 3034 thousands of hectares of land were covered with

organic manure in the same period. Efforts were also made to improve the genetic potential of livestock through crossbreeding.

The recent report of the GTP made known that the progress is on track. In the last fiscal year, Ethiopia registered a 10 percent increase in crop. The Central Statistical Agency (CSA) report also stated that 254 million quintal yield is expected this fiscal year from 12 million hectares of land. This will be a 23 million quintal increase on last year's produce on almost the same amount of land.

This remarkable progress is a result of sustained works. One of them is the level of irrigated land. In 1992, out of the 5.3 million hectares of land suitable for irrigation, only 61,000 hectares were cultivated. That number has since risen all-too-slowly up to 127,242 hectares in 2010. When all the current projects under the GTP are completed, the total area of land under irrigation is expected to reach more than 785,500 hectares.

This will boost the productivity of small-scale farm-holders, which is already registering sustained increases. Irrigation development projects like the Qoga Irrigation and Water Shed Management Project in Megech Woreda of the Amhara Regional State aim at further strengthening the rural development gains achieved so far. The Qoga Project, for example, is expected to advance real accomplishments in poverty reduction and food security for more than 14,000 farming households.

Another initiative under the Growth and Transformation Plan is the Meki-Zway Pressurized Irrigation Development Project. This project, which is under construction in the East Shoa Zone of the Oromia Regional State, will play a key role in increasing food productivity in the zone and in attaining an improved water conservation rate for the watershed.

Other irrigation projects expected to significantly advance the overall productivity are the Rib Irrigation and Drainage Project, which will benefit 40,000 farmers, the Raya Valley Pressurized Irrigation Development Project, for another 10,000 farmers, and the Gidabo and Billate Irrigation Project, which will benefit 16,000 farmers.

The production of major crops, which stood at 193 million quintals, is projected to reach 225 million quintals this year and on track to 260 million quintal by 2015. This doesn't include root crops, fruits and vegetables, spices and the like.

The increase in production and productivity of the agriculture sector is expected to continue at even faster rate, given the surge in the coverage of agricultural extension services, which benefitted 14.3 million farmers, agro-pastoralists and pastoralists in the last year.

Indeed, this has broader meaning to the overall development of the nation. Agriculture is the mainstay of most African economies, as the vast majority of the region's poor lives and works in rural areas, most of them as smallholder farmers. Unlocking the productive potential of agriculture would enable farmers to strengthen their contribution to growth and to share more equitably in the benefits.

As the 2014 report of The Africa Progress Panel (APP), released last week noted:

"Many Asian countries with a strong track record in reducing poverty have started out by raising agricultural productivity – Bangladesh, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia are examples.

As the experiences of Ethiopia and Rwanda demonstrate, Africa has the potential to follow these examples, but the potential has yet to be realized."

The Africa Progress Panel (APP) which consists of ten distinguished individuals who advocate for equitable and sustainable development for Africa, under the chairmanship of Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations and Nobel laureate, made its independent assessment of Ethiopia's agricultural development and gave exultant testimonies.

The Africa Progress Panel (APP) panel's report clearly demonstrates that Ethiopia is not only growing but also making it in an equitable manner that REALLY changes the lives of the farmers.

In its 180 pages report, the Panel wrote, regarding the fairness of the wealth distribution:

"...examples of countries where growth has succeeded in reducing poverty are revealing. Ethiopia halved the national poverty rate between 1995 and 2011, from 60 per cent to 30 per cent.

That reduction was achieved through broad-based economic growth, with agriculture making a major contribution, increased and more equitable public spending, and the development of labor-intensive manufacturing.

The success of Ethiopia can be traced in no small measure to the role of agriculture."

Similarly, the Panel observed:

"While Ghana's average income is considerably higher than that of Mali, the average poor person in Ghana has a level of consumption similar to that of the average poor person in Mali. The average poor Angolan consumes less than the average poor person in Ethiopia, even though Angola is a middle-income country."

Indeed, Ethiopia has a long way to do to realize the promises of Ginbot 20. However, it is very certain that we are on the right track.

As the report of the independent panel of African prominent personalities attested:

"Were countries such as Mozambique, Rwanda and Sierra Leone to sustain the growth record of the past decade, they would see average incomes double in less than 17 years.

But, it would take Ethiopia just 12 to 13 years to achieve the same result."

The gallant Ethiopian farmers may not know who or what the African Progress Panel is. They may not read its reports. But they don't need to.

They have accumulated wisdom of centuries. They know how their fathers and fore-fathers lived and died for. They also know what they achieved in the last 23 years.

Ethiopian farmers observed so many times before that their hopes of change and progress have been hijacked by opportunists. They will not let that happen again, no matter what the neo-liberals and their foot soldiers keep dreaming.

----///----

Long live Ginbot 20!