

# **National development strategies and environment, a challenge ahead,**

## **Ethiopian case**

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### **I .Introduction**

Ethiopia is one of the populated countries in Africa, and its population growth is 2.3% per year (WHO, 2012, 2013). According to National Statistics Office of Ethiopia, 2012, the population density estimated 82.3/ square km. Life expectancy is estimated 62/65 years (WHO, 2012).

The country has diverse agro-ecological zones. Agriculture is accounting for over 45% of GDP, and 80% for export commodity. 85% of Ethiopians livelihood depends on Agriculture (Ethiopian Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, MFED, 2012).

With so many socio-economic and political challenges, the Ethiopian government aspires to reach middle income status over the next decade. The economy has experienced strong and broad based growth over the past decades, averaging the 10.6% per year growth in 2004/5-2011/12 compared to the regional average of 4.9% (MFED, 2010, 2012). While 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 as measured by the national poverty line, of less than \$0.6 per day. Using the government Growth and Transformations Plan the target is to reduce this further to 22.2% by the year 2014-2015 (MFED, 2011/12).

Ethiopia's total expenditure on health as % of GDP is 4.7% (WHO, 2012). Ethiopia is striving to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), using vertical public health approaches. Human development indicators show that, child mortality has been cut in half; the number of people with access to clean water has more than doubled, and primary school enrolments have quadrupled. There are improvements in HIV/AIDS, and malaria control, and reduction of extreme poverty, by inclusive shared and sustaining economic growth.

The government of Ethiopia formulated long-term economic development strategies, agriculture-led industrialization which is gearing towards the transformation of the backward-linkage between agriculture and industry. The construction of huge hydropower dams, such as Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and modernizing the agricultural to integrate with industries sectors are the corner stone for economic development plan. However, these national development strategic plans are not free from external criticism by the so called "environmental and Human Right" advocates. This paper will try to assess and discuss further on this and other related issues.

## II. Development and climate change, a challenge ahead

One of the primary objectives of Ethiopia's economic development strategies is to reduce poverty. But this does not achieve without improving the health care delivery systems. According to Getzen, 2000, and Schreiber, 1990, 1% long-run increase in GDP leads to a 1.2, and 1.4 % increase in health expenditure. However, the concept of development and environment are two contradictory issues human kind faces since the industrial revolution. According to David Archer et al, 2010, roughly three quarters of the greenhouse gases added to the atmosphere since industrialization have been emitted by the industrial nations.

The new concepts, “sustainable development” or “environmental friendly” developmental approaches failed to bring the desired results. As a result of this, Climate change remains an issue of concerns, but without solution. Recently, developing countries, including Ethiopia are criticizing by environmental advocates, for their “big” share to climate change. But, this accusation lack credibility. No one denied the danger of climate change, and its urgency to do something tangible to reduce the greenhouse gas emission. It should also be clear that environment is global public goods, and it needs equitable share from all sides to tackle the problem. Therefore, the developed nations should shoulder the bigger responsibilities to do more for the damage they has done to global environment.

Unfortunately, a big gap remains between developed and developing countries to reach a consensus which side was more responsible for the damage done, and how the problem should be addressed.

While the climate effects are real, countries choose to point fingers at each other’s.

The head of the UN Scientific Panel on April 21, 2014, warned that “if the world doesn’t cut pollution of heat –trapping gases, the already noticeable harms of global warming could spiral “out of control,”

(Huffingtonpost, May,11,2014). Similarly, according to the Global greenhouse warming, 2014,

industrialized countries are at present jointly responsible for 64% of the climate change problem.

Indeed, the top 7 industrialized countries alone account for 63% of the global warming up to the year of

2005, and the top 20 countries such as USA China, Russia, Brazil, India, German, UK, France, Indonesia,

Canada, Japan, Mexico, Thailand, Colombia, Argentina, Poland, Nigeria, Venezuela, Australia,

Netherlands accounts 82% of the observed global warming ( IOP science journal, 2014).

### III. Ethiopia Hydropower dam construction, and the large scale Agricultural lands development as a tool to reduce poverty

#### **Government policies and his critics**

Economic development is unthinkable without sound economic policy, aiming at exploiting the available natural resources in sustainable and environmental friendly manner. I am not sure the efforts the Ethiopian government agencies are doing to effectively addressing the environment and other related concerns, but I have no doubt in my mind why the government is determined to expand the energy sectors, and pursuing the large scale agricultural development programs. Ethiopian government is leasing large scale agricultural land to domestic as well as for foreign investors. Similarly, to support the agro-industrial sectors in power supply, construction of huge hydropower dams is a vital importance (this will help to satisfy the demands of electricity, which is 25%/year). Without agro-industrialization program, no country has achieved development, and manages to feed its people. According to the World Bank, 2011 the Agricultural irrigated land (% of total agricultural land) in Ethiopia was measured 0.51. This is out of 35.1% of the total land area suitable for agriculture (total land area suitable for agriculture in Ethiopia is estimated 350, 770 sq.km).

However, both development sectors are become a target of criticism by foreign based humanitarian and environmental advocate organizations, such as the Human Right Watch, International Rivers Networks, Oakland Institution, Survival International, the Egyptian government, and others, including some naive Ethiopian (in groups or individual) motivated by emotions and hate. These groups opened common fronts with various media outlets to promote their ill agendas, by calling the Ethiopian government development plan “Land Grab” or “it is unnecessary project” etc.. Tirelessly they are lobbying donor agencies, financial institutions, and their respective governments to condemned and stop aid to Ethiopia. Because of their influence, and double standard nature of the west, both the World Bank and IMF refrain from lending money to Ethiopia for these two development sectors.

What is strange and dangerous is that these “non political” or “Non government” organizations opened a common front against the Ethiopian government with some Diaspora based Ethiopian opposition

groups. Some of those infantile “Ethiopian” individuals and organizations who considered themselves as “political organization” not only opposing the construction of the hydro-power dam, and other developmental programs, but also accusing the government officials, especially the late prime minister, as if the main purpose of constructing such huge and expensive mega dam is to get fame out of it. Are the Chinese people accusing their Emperor Qin Shihuang for his role in finishing the construction of the great China Wall? I think this kind of unacceptable behavior become a norm for some infamous Diaspora “Ethiopians”. For some it is better to compromise the National interest of Ethiopia just to upgrade their CV/Resume as a “Human Right Advocates” as some idiots are portraying themselves. I do not think mentally stable human being have this kind of inhuman character, determined to harm the home country’s by joining foreign hostile entities. Some even cross the line and spreading hate to instigate internal conflicts. They are tirelessly posted, disseminated unfounded and one sided articles aiming at to convince the international community’s to put pressure on Ethiopia to stop these development activities. This kind of unprofessional approaches and a direct interference in the internal affairs of one country is a recipe for distraction. This situation becomes a danger, when western media outlets sided with one group and tirelessly pumping biased and one-sided information to the public. The primary victims due to social unrest will be the people of Ethiopia, especially children and women, and will be eroding socio-economic successes of the past decades. We have to take lessons from others.

No one denied the problems associated with any development programs, in this case environmental concerns. But is this an exception for Ethiopia? Is there any development program that does not have an effect on environment? The same way as the human activities are affecting the environment; there are also solutions to amend the damage done by human interference. The only thing what it need is healthy communication, free from interference, free from Neo-liberal and hegemonic imperialistic approaches.

## Relocation of indigenous people from their land, a conceptual as well as technical problem

According to the constitution of Ethiopia, land is a common property of the people (in reality it is better to say under the government control, which I am not discussing here about the pros and cons) Based on this constitution, if land is leasing and transferring to investor, people should be relocated to settle in another place through a process called villagization. I do not think this approach is an exception for Ethiopia. However, such moves are complex and not easy to execute without problems, and criticisms. Villagization is not only a controversial, but also it has political, environmental, Human Right, economic and social issues. It depends how the program is executed. However, I am sure it is not the same way as Egyptian has done to Nubian people during the construction of Nassir dam.

Because of the past history in Ethiopia, people have preconceived notion about government villagization program. Many critics are condemning the ongoing villagization programs as a “violation of human right”. To me violation of human right is to oppose the measures taken by the Ethiopian government to change the life of those neglected marginalized indigenous people. Instead of blindly condemning the whole process (some even do not know the actual place or about the people whom they are talking about) it would have been better to pin point where the problems are (I personally do not believe the ongoing villagization process is perfect and free from criticism). What I mean is we can argue with some issues, but not with all.

Because of traditional and cultural constraints, projects designed in the past to improve the lives of those marginalized indigenous ethnic groups do not achieved its desired objectives. Pastoralist way of life is not their choice or not a culture that does not need a change. If there is availability of pasture, water together with pasture land management and marketing infrastructure, I do not think pastoralist

will choose to pursue the same old life style as they are practicing for a centuries. Unfortunately, those lands which are available for agricultural developments are located in the low land areas where the livelihood of the indigenous people are entirely depends on livestock rearing, and where their way of life style is in a dire situation. Crop production is very primitive and limited, due to erratic and shortages of rain fall in the area.

I was worked in some of these areas in the past for 19 years and I had observed how the local ecosystem has been gradually changed and the land no more growing quality pasture available for the livestock. The main reason is overgrazing, lack of pasture management practice and lack of livestock marketing infrastructures (In the 80's in South Omo, one can buy a bull with 4 bags of coffee pulp, a byproduct of coffee, and this can give an idea how the people were unfairly marginalized and exploited). As a result of this the pastoralists are forced to move beyond their traditional areas in search of grazing land and water for their livestock. This movement is not without price. Conflict erupted due to grazing land and water competition between clans, and peoples are killing each other and a headache for local as well as for the international communities. During their movement along with their livestock there is a great risk for disease transmission both for human and livestock. This by itself is an economic- cost for the farmers, both in terms of morbidity, mortality, and loss of livestock productivity. This indicates that the impact of environmental change is already there before the lands are using either for hydropower-dam construction or agricultural development activities. I do not think the major problem for those marginalized ethnic groups is the ongoing development program; it is lack of necessary and meaningful assistance to solve their many faceted, but deep rooted problems.

I sometimes follow Ethiopian news media outlets and watching some interviews from settlers, mainly women. One woman, a mother of two from Benshangul Gumuz Regional State, Ethiopia said that “Due to lack of health center, children used to die of disease. Now we have health center nearby, and our

children get medical care and vaccinations, and no more to go far to fetch water". Generally, women's are more open than men to tell the truth without afraid of political repercussion. Therefore I believe the testimony I heard from a women as a credible. What is more important for the women other than getting nearby clean water, school, health center and flour milling station? Generally in pastoralist societies, women shouldered the highest responsibilities in taking care of the whole family, including farming the land. Women in pastoral societies have more freedom than women living in sedentary societies. Therefore, they could be reliable partners for a change in pastoral communities.

#### IV. Conclusion

It is clear that any economic activates has an effect on environment. However, if there is a global cooperation and efforts there are options to correct the damages. This is what our world is demanding today. Accusations and counter accusations is a counterproductive for today's globalization era. No one will stop the ongoing dam construction and the agricultural development programs. What should be clear here is that the action taken by one country to disrupt environment will affects others. Therefore any concerns raised by interested groups need to be addressed properly, with no political or ideological affiliations. To this end the Human Wright Watch, the Oakland Institute, Survival international and the International Rivers Networks should considered the Ethiopian government as their partner rather than looking as their adversaries.

It should be clear that there were lots of mistakes in the kind of conditionality imposed in Africa, in particular Ethiopia, but with no avail. Ethiopia badly needs external financial and technological assistance to address the socio-economic as well as environmental concerns, but not mere opinion that impaired its development endeavors.



Without doubt, the hydro-power dam construction and large scale agricultural development strategies will bring positive socio-economic results to Ethiopia. Hydropower is a clean and environmental friendly energy source. Similarly, the large scale agricultural development program will improve the life of many previously marginalized indigenous societies. However, taking into consideration the implication of agricultural inputs to environment, and agricultural practices, strong, but workable legislation and regulation should be in place. Coordination efforts from various ministries, agencies, private organizations and NGO's are needed. Last but not least, the Ethiopian government should be more transparent, improve governance, and more government accountability by improving political crisis management to its citizens is a key for sustainable socio-economic development. More emphasis should be given to entertain the demands of the indigenous population in preserving their cultural value, traditional institutions, and encourage them to freely participate in issues affecting their life. Our world is heading to a new phase of western power hegemonic dominance. They have the capacity and the power to cause havoc and uncertainty in any country that does not accept their Neo-liberal ideology, and Geo-political interest. This must take into consideration and a political will is expected from all parties to avert this disaster. This country and its people have been through so much. We need to think for our long term collective values.

Map of Ethiopia, Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam construction site.



#### Literature reviews

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