Unity in Diversity is our Strength!

Part –two

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The FDRE constitution has also guaranteed the right of all ethnic communities to live with regards to land ownership. The fact that nation, nationalities and people are made owner of their land implies that their existence is directly related to the land.

According to the constitution every ethnic community have their own territorial settlement (and region). Every nation, nationalities and people can (only) guarantee and maintain its cultural (ethnic) identity, if it has a clear settlement and territory.

Although it can’t be said that the chance of any (community) guaranteeing its identity outside of its territory is closed, but it’s obvious that it will be difficult to maintain the features of its identity. This is why the constitution is stating that land is the common property of the nation, nationalities and people of Ethiopia and it shall not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange.

The FDRE constitution has also enshrined nation, nationalities and people of Ethiopia the right to self-determination upto secession. This right will make the country, a nation where diverse ethnic communities gave their consent to live together. Because of the guarantee of the right to secede (at any time), it has encouraged the diverse ethnic communities to strive for unity seeing its benefit.
This stipulation has also other meanings. Guarantee the right to secede means giving a fully disclosed liberty which is free from any psychological pressure or suspicion. Part of the reason why it’s said that the FDRE constitution is unique and that it should be an example for others is because it guarantees full right (free of psychological suspicion) by including these basic issues.

After the new federal system was set up 22 years ago, the country has recorded many successes. The first of the federal system’s success is the long-lasting peace that has ensued all over Ethiopia. The federal system stopped the civil war that was raging all over the country, because it answered the basic democratic demands.

So, the system has confirmed that it’s a guarantee for peace. Seeing as how the system has been successful in accommodating the Ethiopian public, it shows that shared identity and values are strengthening. Since the new system has been established, there were some conflicts that aroused between ethnic groups and neighboring ethnic communities.

These conflicts were not created by the federal system. Some of them were long standing conflicts, while the rest were created as a result of inexperience, lack of good governance and very few people’s personal agenda. Through time these conflicts have decreased. The conflicts that were instigated since after the federal system came into function are inherited problems from previous regimes.

The fact that it has been able to consolidate lasting peace and security we are seeing today all over the country, have paved the way for the
people and government to direct their full power into fighting poverty and backwardness. And this has been one of the attributes (success) of the federal system.

Since the nation, nationalities and people of Ethiopia demand with relation to ethnic identity, they are now working on development agenda as one society to change their country. In brief, it has been confirmed that the federal system has consolidated of peace.

In addition, the peace that’s ensuing in Ethiopia is having a spillover effect outside the borders of Ethiopia in to Africa. So much that, Ethiopia is now called ‘the peace beacon of horn of Africa.

The country has played a leading role in improving the Somalia’s security and in stopping the Sudan and South Sudan civil war by bringing the warring sides together and mediating them, and also by sending in peace keepers to the area. Also it has affirmed its commitment to peace to the rest of the world by sending peacekeepers in Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia and Darfur.

Today the lasting peace that’s created in Ethiopia is attracting foreign investment. For past years huge flow of foreign investment has entered the country. At present Ethiopia’s nation, nationalities and peoples’ right is respected. So, their demands which they used to raise prior to the (new) federal Ethiopia have been answered.

Various ethnics (identities) are able to be educated and stand trial using their own language. They have been able to protect their history, conserve their heritages, and strengthen their identifying and customs
(tradition). The other success story revolves around the fact that they’re been afforded balanced representation and participation on every level of administration.

Every nation, nationalities and people have a constitutional right to establish a self administration. More than 80 ethnics with their own will and agreement have chosen to be classified under nine regions; and have been exercising their rights since.

Ethnics (identities) living under most of the regions administer themselves by organizing in special zones and woredas and establishing governmental institutions. In addition to this, since various ethnic communities got balanced representation in kebeles, woreda, zone, regional and federal legislative and executive branch, they are giving a huge contribution on nationwide agendas and unity issues on top of guaranteeing their representing societies’ wish (interest). As a result, their benefit from education, health, justice and other social services is increasing.

Today in Ethiopia religion equality is guaranteed. One of the successes of these past years is the fact that the stipulated rights about religion are implemented. Every citizen’s freedom to follow the religion of its own choosing is guaranteed. It has protected citizens’ right to hold or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice without any influence and interference from any party.

Every religious institution and their follower have been able to manifest his/her religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching without any fear. Every religion using their equality rights have built many religious institutions in order to be more accessible to their
followers. They have all been able write, distribute and propagate their religious procedures.

In order to deepen their religious education, they have built religious education institutions, and sent their followers abroad for education. The government has been able to service all religions equally (neutrally) as its matter is separated from religion, as per the constitution. And followers of all religion have been able to create wealth by working peacefully.

Every citizen is able to elect or be elected and involve in governmental responsibility and duty without any religious interference (hamper). As the result of democratic participation and empowerment the constitution gives, any opening of a government law, policy or plan (strategy) ratified that harms a religion from passing is non-existant. Today the federal system has guaranteed women’s’ equality (with men) and participation.

The system by improving (correcting) the legacy of unfair gender relation that had ensued in the country, it has achieved an incredible achievement in guaranteeing women’s equality and participation. Women are now enjoying the rights that have been guaranteed by the FDRE constitution. The involvement of the legislation, executive and judiciary branch from kebele to the federal government is growing.

For instance the number of women participation; on the first year of function of the house of peoples’ representatives from 1987-1992, was 15. Then from 1998-2002 it has piked to 116 and now from 2003-2002 it has reached to 152. Similarly, in regional councils the participation of women is growing.
Today minority ethnics’ participation and representation is growing. It has made every ethnic represented in House of federation (without considering numbers). Ethiopia’s federal system has gone many distance compared to other federation with regards to giving (equal) opportunity to every ethnics through, the house of federation.

In addition, in order give an opportunity to minority ethnics that may end up being unrepresented in the house of peoples’ representative, 20 chairs are reserved for them. And member of the federation have made minority ethnics represented at every administrative level. Today diversity (pluralism) in Ethiopia is an opportunity to development and togetherness. Nation, nationalities and people of Ethiopia are strengthening in a way in which they live together by respecting their differences.

Those who used to think that the existence of many languages is a recipe to disagreement (quarrel) now are seeing from Ethiopia that you can agree talking in many different languages. Not only this, they have shown that it’s possible to live together with mutual respect, while adhering to different religion. These fast few years has shown that the conviction of building one economic community that has been stated in the preamble of the FDRE constitution is being achieved.

Diversity is being the basis for maintaining unity. And past unflattering and distorted views about diversity is now changing. As tolerance and mutual respect have got constitutional backing, they are now part of the uniting values. Believing that respecting others cultural identity is the way to maintain own identity, nowadays all cultural communities of the
country ared celebrating and reflecting their self and shared traditions and history. Today although the right to secede has a constitutional guarantee, the days of it being the major demand of the society is fast ending.

At the time of the downfall of the ‘Derg’ regime, some of the political forces only objective was to secede. However, as the benefit of unity is widening at every passing day and opportunity, demands to secede is now losing its foothold it had on the society formerly. Although their were many analysts that predicted Ethiopia would be disintegrated at the turn of Derg’s downfall and many people that claimed ethno-linguistic based federalism is not a guarantee of unity, they have all been debunked by the countr’s successful journey of the past years.

In 1991 when the former USSR and Yugozlavia were being disintegrated before our own eyes, Ethiopia was building its unity on the bases of ethnic identities beleiving that the decision to determine the country’s future rests upon all cultural communities.

Today diversity is the strength of the country. Various ethnic communities have seen that to pursue the best possible benefit is better together rather than separateley. Since they have together defeated a force that threatened their peace and security. Ethiopian people through their action have confirmed that they are diverse but they stand-up as one for its peace and development.

Today its diversity has changed the country’s image for the better. Some have said that an ethno-linguistic based federal system will not work, but the fact of the matter of the country is quite the opposite. Past
experiences have shown that the only way to make diversity an opportunity is by making various ethnic communities the owner of the country’s system building process. With this Ethiopia is now a peaceful and stable country, as attested by many who follow the country. Similarly, the democratic federalism has played a vital role in Ethiopia’s rapid and sustainable development, as attested by many international institutions. So, Ethiopia’s handling of diversity can be a benchmark to other countries. These successes of the country’s federal system are gained because the FDRE constitution answered previous regime’s unreturned demands of identity and ethnicity.

The important issue to strengthen the federal system of Ethiopia, is creating an awareness about the system’s basic thoughts, principles and on how their executed. The country’s federal system is still open to draw valuable lessons, as it can further improve upon its culture of respect and care, while strengthening the new Ethiopian identity that its building.

As creating a ‘constitutional thinking’ public is a neverending task, the duty must not be left to few institutions. So, the government and other stakeholders should work hard to enable ‘constitutional way of thinking’reign supreme. And through this effort a community that have deep rooted belief in the constitution and one that don’t stand for unconstitutional acts has been built. One which believes a constitution is a guarantee to ensure the continuation of a constitutionally limited Republic for the next generation.