

African Inspiration

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"We will cease to exist as a nation unless we grow fast and share our growth" – MELES ZENAWI

Past experiences in most parts of the world proved that one of the root causes of poverty, hunger, and other forms of human misery is conflict. And conflicts are mainly results from unstable and weak political system as well as lack of committed leaderships to the desires and needs of their people.

Conflicts are rampant in countries that fail to address the basic needs of their people. Inequalities among people, nations and groups also drag nations in to conflict and violence. Political and economic discrimination could also be considered as a cause for conflict.

Many studies unanimously agree on the fact that where there is conflict there is no economic development.

According to a study conducted by the World Bank in 2011 conflict is a principal source of human misery, including poverty and hunger. Poverty rates are 20 percentage points higher in countries affected by repeated cycles of violence over the last three decades.

As mentioned by the report every year of violence in a country is associated with lagging poverty reduction of nearly one percentage point. People living in countries currently affected by violence are twice as likely to be undernourished and 50 percent more likely to be impoverished. Their children are three times as likely to be out of school.

The report also pointed out that countries with weak government effectiveness, rule of law, and control of corruption have a 30 - 45 percent higher risk of civil war, and significantly higher risk of extreme criminal violence than other developing countries.

Thus If any country to be peaceful and politically stable, it should take at least some steps in terms of economic and social developments. It is also important to ensure the equality of people in all aspects.

Where there is economic development that guarantees equality and addresses the benefits and interests of the vast majority, it is unlikely to see grievances which drag people in to undesirable chaos that leads to human agony.

Researchers argue that the failure to avoiding inequality and marginalization of citizens in terms of economic benefits and political participation is one of the basic reasons as to why some countries even with enormous natural resources like oil are still unable to attain political stability.

It is also been said that countries, whose political economic system are not geared most importantly towards addressing the socio-economic realities of their own nature, are still lagging in preventing conflicts and improving the livelihood of their citizens.

Many of African countries could be cited as an example in this regard. The war for independence brought a golden opportunity to the people of the continent to exercises their full freedom and self determination, however, after independence, many African countries found themselves in Civil Wars and Chaos.

These conflicts and civil strife took their toll on the population of the continent. Many people died of hunger. Others became refugees and displaced. The continent that is endowed with various resources being in the scenario of different disasters and catastrophes is really been awkward to many of the people in the continent and beyond.

Despite the fact that there are many factors behind these conflicts including greediness of power and poverty, according to many international researches, the key is lack visionary political leadership that really are firm to addressing the basic problems of their people.

The nonexistence of leaders that are wise enough to understanding the best interests of their people and take at least the minimum efforts to address the root causes of hindrance to development and prosperity is one of the reasons as to why most of African countries are still poor.

Some African countries have been showing the fact that poverty could be tackled if efforts are made to create a peaceful political environment based on their own objective realities.

Currently some governments in Africa have started to understand this fact. African now started to realizing that instilling political and economic policies that don't reflect the objective socio-economic realities of their people and country as one of the key reasons to their backwardness and are trying to implement development strategies based on their domestic realities.

Following conscious decisions made by these few political leaders to preventing conflict, creating political dialogue, and choosing an appropriate path of development policies, the countries are now able to achieve positive progress that attracted the recognition of the international community.

Since recently the continent Africa was represented by the rest of the world as a land of only civil strife, economic and social crisis. However according to recent reports economic output across sub-Saharan Africa was just \$322billion in 2000, but currently it is four times higher at \$1.22trillion.

Ethiopia is one of the countries often mentioned by the international community and media channels in this regard. The country is being pioneered in changing the bad image of the continent.

And behind all these admiration is the ruling party.

It has been 22 years now since the Ethiopian People's revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), took political power following the demise of the military dictatorship that oppressed citizens and exposed the entire nation to unimaginable agony for 17 years.

Though the struggle against the military regime was so challenging, it was only the first step to creating a new Ethiopia. For EPRDF the battle to addressing a century long public grievance that dragged the country in to unstoppable conflicts was a much more challenging.

The new leaders were well aware of the fact that civil war, political instability and poverty are mainly the results of inequalities among nations and nationalities of the country.

It was also very clear to these Ethiopian politicians that the political system and approach, with which the former leaders of this country uphold was entirely against the will of Ethiopians.

The previous political and economic systems were purely aimed at creating a favorable environment to only the rulers stay in power. And they were well aware of the fact that this was the key cause to the deep rooted human misery in Ethiopia.

And first of all the ruling party took a very huge responsibility and established a constitutional federal system through consultation with the people and concerned political groups.

According to scholars the constitution provides basic democratic rights and the peoples' right to development. It ensures the rights of sharing the country's resources as well as exercising the rights of self administration in their respective constitutional boundaries.

It also gave the lasting solutions to the decisive needs of the nations and nationalities as well as created conducive environment to strengthen the unity and harmony of the nation.

Ethiopia's political and Economic system, which is the center of its constitution, was not entirely taken from the outside world; instead it is based on the objective realities of the country's political and socioeconomic situations.

The system is also carefully designed to addressing the root causes of the country's long time human misery and to forecasting its future fate.

The leadership in Ethiopia was in my view the first in Africa to boldly discard the obvious political economy ideology of neoliberal and endorse its own approach which is somehow similar to those of south East Asian countries.

Although, this approach was encountered resistance and had been considered as unrealistic by some western partners and International Financial Institutions, many believe that the political economic system pursued in the last two decades created conducive environment to engaging the general public to the fight against poverty.

Ethiopia today is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The country is clearly booming in terms of economic and social development. The World Bank, IMF and other international financial and research institutions have started to accept this as reality.

In my view the political stability has not only helped the country to progress but also made the international community believe in it and started to participate in the political and economic activities of the country.

Many of these organizations and the international community at large have been astonished by the annual double-digit economic growth rate for 8 consecutive years.

Anyone who tries to examine the development process of this country in the last two decades could easily understand the fact that reducing poverty and ensuring human development have been the objectives of the Ethiopian government.

Improving the livelihood of the overwhelming majority of the population by attacking poverty and expanding economic opportunities was the focus of all development strategies of the government.

The strategic investment pursued by the government, with carefully planned intervention, both in physical and human capital development, is considered by many as one of the key reasons to the positive achievements registered in this country which enabled it to address the challenges of the basic needs of its people.

Ethiopia has achieved an astounding expansion in basic infrastructure, including road constructions, nationwide telecom coverage and rural electrification.

An equally remarkable expansion has been achieved in social infrastructure development. The government has been spending more than 60 percent of its total annual expenditure on poverty oriented sectors, which include education, health, and agricultural development and water supply projects.

As a result Ethiopia has been recognized in the UN's Human Development Report. The report which is prepared by the United Nations Development Programme and measures progress in health, education, income, gender equality, and other areas, ranked Ethiopia as number 11 in the world for improving human development since 1970, the highest ranking in Africa.

Also the share of Ethiopians living in extreme poverty—those on less than 60 cents a day—has fallen from 38 percent to 29 percent.

The country is also believed to have met many of the development goals set by United Nations by 2015.

Almost all independent international organizations and media channels put Ethiopia one of the causes to inspiring African economies for its higher and consecutive annual GDP growth that consequently brought about a substantial amount of changes in the life of its people.

Many observers and international research institutions are being amazed by Ethiopia's progress for it is not driven by natural resources extraction, as the other few countries in Africa that are currently registering an encouraging economic growth.

According to World Bank's recent report the driving force of Ethiopia's encouraging Economy growth is mainly the agricultural sector.

The active role played by the government in directing economic development and using the resources of the country efficiently to meet the needs of the people helped the nation move in to a new chapter of history.

I believe in the fact that the leadership in Ethiopian has achieved these results because of its own adopted model of development designed based on the country's realities.

And this is accepted by many now. In addition to the international recognition, the international community is been suggesting Ethiopian development model for the other African countries.

In my belief, Ethiopia's political economy system and its development model, pursued in the last years, won this international recognition for its remarkable achievements. And this shows the political ability and leadership skills of the ruling party.

The ability of the leadership to control the country's key resources and directly apply them to the strategic tasks which focuses on pro-poor developments enabled the nation to meet its goals.

As a result of this millions particularly the most under privileged part of the society have become beneficial and being lifted out of poverty.

However, I accept the fact that the fruits of this progress should be sustained and expanded to each and every citizens of the country.

In this regard the Growth and Transformation Plan, which is being under implementation since two years is expected to bring a fundamental base to transforming the nation in to industrialization.

Lars Moller, lead economist at the World Bank in Ethiopia, believes that the GTP is showing strong progress, according to the recent Time Magazine.

He says the government's latest annual report indicates that "they are on target in maybe 90 per cent of the cases. And when they are not on target, the response is often that 'then we have to work harder'. That is admirable because it shows a lot of ambition."

Moller says there are a number of indicators that the government is on track. Spending priorities are geared towards the poor and there is substantial investment in public infrastructure. He also points to high economic growth, poverty reduction and the success in lowering inflation.

Nowadays the international notion regarding the political economic ideology promoted by the western world is been facing strong challenges.

The philosophy that strongly opposes the involvement of states in economic activities in any country is being disproved in a number of ways.

We can't find a very good example to substantiate this reality other than China. With a population of 1.3 billion, China recently became the second largest economy and is increasingly playing an important and influential role in the global economy.

According to the World Bank Since initiating market reforms in 1978, China has experienced rapid economic and social development.

GDP growth averaging about 10 percent a year has lifted more than 600 million people out of poverty. All Millennium Development Goals have been reached or are within reach.

Chinese success results from the strategic intervention of its government in directing and supporting the economic development through building a strong public service, creating an investor friendly environment and supporting small business development.

As far as I am concerned Ethiopia's recent history also tells us the same truth. In my opinion the country is becoming a manifestation to understanding the fact that there could be other alternatives to tackle poverty.

Once known for its deep rooted poverty and famine, Ethiopia now is being mentioned as one of emerging economies of African countries.

This is the consequence of the country's political leadership opted a course of actions which are different from the customary political economic path that had been considered as universal for the effective economic development and political change.

When Meles and his colleagues obligated to take the responsibility of leading this nation in the very beginning of 1990s, the country was on the verge of collapse due to the political and economic instability. The entire people were extremely hopeless.

Thus not only the existence of peace but also an economic development that would make beneficial the vast majority of the people were critical and a question of survival to this ancient nation.

And Meles used to say: "We will cease to exist as a nation unless we grow fast and share our growth."

In my opinion Meles's concern was correct. Thanks to the policies of our leadership now Ethiopia is transforming. And this helped to creating a tangible hope among all citizens.

Ethiopians are currently very enthusiastic to become one of the middle income nations of the world. And they are much more optimist than ever towards the realization of this goal.

This inspiration is not limited to the people of Ethiopia but also stretched to the vast majority of African countries.

African leaders in a number of occasions acknowledged the former Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's dedication to the development of the continent and expressed that his

economic development and political thoughts have become the focal points of the continent's socio-economic transformation agenda.