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# Development and Democracy, Complementary or Contradictory: A Critical Reflection on Ethiopian Democratic Developmental State

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**Abstract:** Achieving economic growth and sustainable development remain the prior policy all nation states across the world. To achieve their sustainable development and economic growth goals, international communities has been fermenting and diagnosing various development models and paradigms. However, there is no one size and fit all development paradigms which obliged to be followed by nation states around the globe. This paper examines developmental state growth model and its nexus with democratization with reference to Ethiopian democratic developmental state growth model. The paper employed qualitative research approach as a research methodology. This paper is based on desk review. This paper argued that, even though EPRDF government claim the country as democratic developmental state which is unique to Asian authoritarian developmental state, the country portrayed as one of poor human right records and leading journalist jailer in the Africa despite the country has been witnessing the fastest economic growth for the last ten consecutive years. This paper also argued that Ethiopian developmental state and democratization process is contradictory since Ethiopian governments have been garnering the political legitimacy through development achievement not directly from public elections and the government has been using the economic achievement as an excuse for its democratic back sliding and democratic deconsolidation in Ethiopia.

**Keywords:** Developmental State, Democratization, Ethiopia, Democratic Developmental State

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## 1. Introduction

The idea of developmental state gained credence as alternative development paradigm to define the miraculous economic growth of Asian tigers after 1960's and 1970's [22, 23]. Even though, the notion of developmental state is not new to literature of development and international political economy, conceptualizing it is said to have begun with the work of Chalmers Johnson in the 1980s [5]. However, the concept of developmental state is recent phenomena in the context of Ethiopia [24]. It was in the late of 1990's when EPRDF<sup>1</sup> government opposed the neoliberal development

paradigm and Structure Adjustment Programmes (SAP's) which led to dead end in other African countries and begun searching for alternative development paths that end era of poverty and underdevelopment in Ethiopia [9]. Taking the advantage of the failure of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP's) and neoliberalism development paradigm across the world in the late 1990's, Ethiopia subscribe to developmental state model growth which allows the state to play the leading role in the economy.

Due to the failure of neoliberal development paradigm and Structural Adjustment programmes (SAPs) in realizing the renaissance of Africa, Ethiopia rush to subscribe developmental state model of growth shown its disregards to neoliberal economic principles which proposed for Africa by International Financial institutions (IFIs) and faced its dead-

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<sup>1</sup> Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front. The coalition of four ethnic based movements which defeated the military regime in Ethiopia but disbanded by reformist Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), Amhara People Libration Movement (APLM), Oromo People Democratic Organization (OPDO) and Southern Ethiopian people Democratic

Movement (SEPDM).

end in bringing development at the continent [3].

Ethiopian developmental state growth model is based on two arguments. The first argument is the country's successive attempt to emulate the developmental paths of different countries at different times and the failure those development paradigms to bring the expected outcome especially in terms of economic development. The second argument is the realization of the failure of the neoliberal paradigm in bringing development both in Africa and in the world. It was to that end that the former late Prime Minister Meles challenged the neoliberal policy prescriptions and openly stated that Africa needs a paradigm shift away from the predatory state emerged under neoliberal policy to a home-grown and more progressive one that is the democratic developmental state which allows the state to regulate economy and the public to exercise their democratic and human rights [18].

However, unlike East Asian developmental state model which postponed democracy for the sake of development, Ethiopian developmental state model of growth is mixture two ideologies democratic developmental state (adopted democracy from global North and development from global South) [10]. Ethiopia assumes democracy as the founding block for the development, unity and survival of the state.

As a result, Ethiopian model of developmental referred as the Democratic Developmental state model of economic growth or developmental democracy which has been the defining feature of Ethiopian political landscape for the quarter of century [5]. Taking this in to account, the Ethiopia government has been playing the leading role in economic sectors of the country, praised and hailed by international community for its economic success externally and has been garnering legitimacy from large scale development success than election internally.

However, the nexus between Ethiopian developmental state and democratization is inadequately studied neither by government officials nor by political elites. Thus, this paper seeks to scrutinize the nexus between development and democracy with reference to Ethiopian democratic developmental state model of growth. This paper is based on desk review and intends to answer the following questions; Why Ethiopia adopts democratic developmental state model of growth? What are the typical characteristics of Ethiopian developmental state model of growth? What are the nexus between development and democracy in Ethiopia? To this end, this paper organized in to five sections. Following this brief introduction, the second section of the paper will present developmental state; concept and characteristics which followed by the third section which present developmental state as an alternative development paradigm; the fourth section of the paper present Ethiopian developmental state model; origin and distinctive features; the fifth section of the paper presents the nexus development and democracy in Ethiopia with especial focus on Ethiopian democratic developmental state and which will be followed by conclusion.

## 2. Developmental State: Concept and Characteristics

Developmental state model of growth is the development paradigm where the government of nation states put economic development and growth at the top priority of government policy and design effective policy to achieve economic development. Developmental state is also the state which strongly committed and has ability to mobilize resources for economic development. Developmental state begun exist when state possesses the vision, leadership and capacity to bring about a positive transformation of society within a condensed period of time and its associated with rapid process of industrialization and shift from subsistence agriculture to more commercial, export oriented farming [25].

Developmental state is the state that promote capital accumulation, utilizes the reserves of surplus labor, relaxes the utilization of foreign exchange constraints through import substitution and the state with sufficient power and organization to achieve its development goals and with the ability to prove consistent economic guidance and rational and efficient organization, and the power to back up its long-range economic policies and strategies [25].

Developmental state is a persuasive state with the competence to mobilize people and resource around its development plan and seeks to be a strong player in the economy of a nation with a view to enhancing economic development. Developmental state depend on the premises which state that the state is the engine of economic growth and it argues for the efficiency of massive state intervention in fastening economic development the country [12].

In his work MITI and the Japanese Economic Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925– 1975 in 1982 Chalmers Johnson (1982) mentioned four major elements that define the developmental state model of growth. The first element is the advent of a small, inexpensive, but elite state bureaucracy, staffed by the best managerial talent available in the system, which made development a prior to any thing of the nation. The second is a political system in which the bureaucracy is given sufficient scope to take the initiative and operate effectively. The third element is the perfection of market-oriented methods of state intervention in the economy. The fourth is a pilot organization [17].

Alex de Wall (2018) further mentioned three major elements of developmental state, namely state directed economic growth, commitment to pro-poor welfare policy and the nature of state institution themselves [7].

## 3. Developmental State as Alternative Development Paradigm

Developmental state model of growth emerged as alternative development paradigm after miraculous economic development of East Asian countries in 1970's and 1980's commonly referred as four tigers and it appreciate the role of the state in guiding and regulating economic development

and growth of the nations across the globe.

Developmental state is back at the center of the international policy debate and the East Asian industrialization brought it into currency, the idea of the developmental state has enduring value as an anchor for discussions among researchers and policy-makers [8, 13].

Developmental state model has emerged as an alternative development model, which promotes the role of state and market integration in the economic growth of given nation as an alternative to global neoliberal order. The core idea of the developmental state model of growth is that the state should make development agenda its top priority all its policies and intervene in the economy to facilitate growth and economic transformation [19, 9]. This amounted to the shift from Washington Consensus which has been dead end in Africa for years due to its failure to bring development and African Renaissance to Southern Consensus which hails the strong role of government in the economic development of nation states and how states can become more capable and more supportive of development and human security [9, 11].

This idea of developmental state model gained credence as theorists sought to explain the impressive growth rate of East Asian states known as the 'Four Tigers' including Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea were developing during the 1960s and 1970s and the aim was to offer an alternative development path to neoliberal development paradigm that advanced and recommended by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) [22].

#### **4. Ethiopian Developmental State Model: Origin and Distinctive Features**

The end of cold war is a global cesura which brought shift in global economic and political order due to the collapse of Soviet Union and end of bi-polar global system. The same holds true in Ethiopia. The year 1991 has brought shifts and departure in social, economic and political aspects of Ethiopia after the military regime was toppled by EPRDF. After holding the throne the first assignment of EPRDF government was designing new policies and strategies which help the regime to lead the country from poverty to sustainable development due to the regimes deep disappointment in a paradigm of predatory state which was the root cause of rent seeking and underdevelopment in Africa [20, 6].

It was to this end that, the EPRDF begun to search for alternative development path which is unique to Western and Breton woods institutions recommended neoliberal paradigm which the former late prime minister Meles Zenawi called it dead end and incapable of bringing about African renaissance [18; 19]. Thus, after long process searching for alternative development paths, Ethiopia committed itself to exercise developmental state growth model which intended to bring structural change through modernizing agriculture and moving towards industrialization [19].

However, unlike to that of East Asian authoritarian

developmental state model, Ethiopia adopted democratic developmental state which is consistent with pluralistic form of democracy in which multitude of interest groups enjoy broadly equal and unrestricted access to the state in practice though its practice is subject to different interpretation among different scholars because EPRDF government have been anchoring power legitimacy by development achievement not directly from public elements [3].

Ethiopian developmental state is based on the premises which state that Ethiopia can be a developmental state and advance democratic values based on popular participation in governance and transformation process and democratic developmental state can accommodate diverse political interests and voices. Ethiopian developmental state model of growth is also based state ability to promote economic growth and social inclusion which underpinned by democratic governance.

To realize economic growth and rapid transformation as one wing of democratic developmental state, EPRDF government adopted different development strategies such as Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to end Poverty (PASDEP) and Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) with an intention to not merely achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but also to make Ethiopia one of lower middle income countries by 2020-2023. Ethiopia became one of the fastest growing economies in the world with average of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 10% per annum and became symbol of economic turnaround in Africa [1].

Ethiopia has recorded steady economic growth and has achieved a remarkable up trend in establishing health services, social development program and universal primary education. Development of Manufacturing sector is considered as sustained economic growth and structural transformation in Ethiopia especially after 2010 [2].

The central tenet of Ethiopia's developmental state is economic growth. Economic development continues in a very fast pace. In 2012, the year of Mele's death, Ethiopia's GDP was \$43 billion; in 2018 it will be close to \$90 billion. At this rate of growth, Ethiopia will become a middle-income country by 2022. In spite of this, the country has poor human rights records, locking democratic space especially after 2005 competitive parliamentary election by jailing opposition political parties, and banning the operation of civil society organization. However, Ethiopia has recorded its fastest-ever period of growth in the last six years can be interpreted many ways [7, 26].

#### **5. Development and Democracy in Ethiopia: Contradictory or Complimentary**

Despite rapid economic growth and transformation recorded in the country, Ethiopia has poor progress in the democratization process, which illustrated by prevailed political space, human rights and good governance. EPRDF

government underscored revolutionary democracy and developmental state growth model as the modes operandi of political and economic goals respectively. Though progress are recorded in terms economic growth, democratization process remain at infant stage and fragile as the regime almost locked up political space and banned the operation of civil society organization. This has received anger from the public which manifested by anti-government protest which erupted in the country since 2015 and lasted to April 2018. Repression of opposition position political parties and *de facto* one political party was the political culture of Ethiopia especially since controversial 2005 national election to April of 2018 when Abiy Ahmed elected as chair persons of EPRDF. Ethiopia was one of the ten biggest journalist jailors in the world. Ethiopia's rapid development has been marred by serious human rights violations and closure of political spaces [5]. The EPRDF's ideological commitment to revolutionary democracy a doctrine of top-down governance has undermined the country's democratic institutions and subordinated human rights to economic development.

During (2015-2018) the country has experienced blatant human rights violations due to erupted anti-government protest starting in the Oromia region in November 2015 as a protest against the Addis Ababa Master plan which planned to displace thousands of Oromo farmers from their home lands and creation of frontiers. The protests spread across the country throughout 2016, turning into unprecedented demonstrations seeking regime change and democratic reform which lead to declaration of state of emergency which in turn amounted to derogation of fundamental human rights and violations of fundamental freedoms of people [12].

Adoption of developmental state also threaten the federal arrangements of the country as it violates regional states autonomy to meet its economic objectives and top-down flow of rules and orders from the center to be executed by each respective bodies at the lower level. Ethiopian government was also criticized for its bad human right record due to the nature of developmental state which mainly focuses on economic goal prior to all goals and democracy coupled with development in Ethiopia by EPRDF government to assume political power for long period of time by buying legitimacy through economic development and oppressing the oppositions and dissidents and strengthening their power [10].

Despite the establishment of a multiparty system, the EPRDF has remained the dominant party throughout the past three decades winning 100% parliamentary seats [21, 8] and political liberties, respect for human rights and economic equality were also neglected and the country's political record thus shows an increasingly authoritarian governance model recalling the features of the country's traditional hierarchical and autocratic political culture [15].

Hailing the ethno-federal system and revolutionary democracy as the ideology of the party, EPRDF have counted nearly quarter of century as exclusivist, authoritarian and democratic centralism which has been defining features Ethiopian political land scape, the party is not inclined to share or give up power and adoption of developmental state

made representative democratic structures and popular civic rights secondary to economic growth and regime anchors its legitimacy through national economic development and service delivery [16].

Though, Ethiopia is praised by its double digit economic growth, progress on development, and the apparent political stability, the government run the country with almost complete grip of power and Ethiopia's remains among Africa's leading poor human rights records till July 2, 2018 when initiation to reform the political and economic system briefed by reformist Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed Ali. Many opposition politicians, journalists, and activists have been convicted under the repressive 2009 anti- terrorism law, press law and civil society law [14; 4]. Though Ethiopian developmental state has played an important role in bringing remarkable economic growth in the country, yet it has failed to contain the rampage of rent seeking behavior and practice which is infesting the structure of governmental apparatus at alarming pace.

Thus, impressive economic growth have been observed in the country after adoption of development state growth model, which claimed by the government as democratic developmental state in contrary to East Asian authoritarian developmental state. However, the country is known for its democratic back sliding, locking up political spaces and abating democratization process in general especially before Abiy Ahmed came to power in 2018. Hence, the development and democracy is contradictory in Ethiopia as the former stalled the later and the later was postponed in reality if not rhetorically for the sake former. Democratic Developmental state growth model of Ethiopia failed to balance the economic growth and democratization process, as it economic progress outweighs and holds down the process of democratic consolidation of the country.

## 6. Conclusion

Achieving economic development remains the prior agenda of nation states across the planet especially since the aftermath of WWI. But, there is no one size and all fit development paradigm that nation states should have to uphold to realize their destiny in terms of achieving economic development. This paper examines the nexus between development and democracy in the context of Ethiopian developmental state growth model. The paper argued that, the nexus between development and democracy in Ethiopia is contradictory since the EPRDF governments have been buying political legitimacy by development achievement not from public election and use the economic as success as an excuse for stalled democratization process in the country for almost quarter of century.

Additionally, EPRDF government ( the coalition four parties that has been leading Ethiopian political market place for the last three decades, (1991-2019)) have been shielding its poor human rights records, closing political space, election fraud and intimidating dissidents by its economic sector success. This paper argued that, Ethiopian

democratization process remain handicapped while there is progress in terms of economic growth.

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