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The Impact of leadership change on socio-economy of Ethiopia: April 02/2018 to April 02/2019

Abstract

Ethiopian governance system can broadly be categorized in to three eras. The Imperial era where Ethiopia has been ruled by emperors, Socialist era where the ruling system was military socialism and the third one is the current federal system with parliament as the main authority holder. The establishment of federal system intended to maintain the unity and peace among the people, prevent the dominance of the ruling party and enhanced the public participation Compared to the previous administrations, in the las two decades the current administration under Ethiopian People's Revolutionary democratic front (EPRDF) has achieved considerable progresses in all aspects such as economic, political and social and human development. Though a positive progress has been registered there were several anti-government protests which last more than three years under the leadership of former Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn which resulted in resignation on February 15, 2018 opening a way to the current leader Abiy Ahmed (PhD) and his staff. This study is then aims to identify the main reason for resignation of former Prime Minister the overall socio-economic impact of the leadership change in the country within one year office service under the new premier. To do so, reports, Medias and personal observation was used as a main tool to collect the information and qualitative analysis was used to examine the overall status of the new governance. Accordingly, several reforms have been made to stabilize the internal instability and lead the country to better democracy. In doing so, he merged several ministerial offices so as to properly utilize the budget and ease monitoring procedure, assigned women in the 50% the ministerial seats (cabinet) including Ministry of military and defense, he brought peace between Ethiopian and Eritrea, freed thousands of political prisoners and reformed some of the laws. Although he made such changes and achieve good acceptance by majority, there were some challenges he has been facing. Some of them to mention are lack of coherence of the central government, no national consciences, scope legitimate state action which hardly

exist and absence of clear change road map. In order to improve the current status, structural forces which might affect the transition should be identified and coherence of central government is highly required. Ethnic differences should be wisely managed by respecting rule of law. In addition to this, horizontal discussions are mandatory. Economic performance must be improved in order to create jobs and reduce unemployment. At macroeconomic level, the government should expand the economic activities by financing the deficit, if any. Professionalizing bureaucracy and integration of newly appointed leaders and the bureaucracy and asserting of newly political ideology to all levels of administrative Units is required. On the other hand, tolerance between Ethiopian people is the key to successfully bring the democratic system in the country.

Key words: Good governance, rule of law, ethnic nationalism, Ethiopian nationalism, Leadership change

Introduction

Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the world with more than 76 ethnic groups speaking more than 90 different languages. Geographically Ethiopia is located in the eastern part of Africa bordered with Eritrea, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti covering an area of 1.14 million square kilometers. Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa where about 79 % are rural residents engaged in agriculture as a means of livelihood. Ethiopian economy is based on rain fed agriculture.

Ethiopian governance system can broadly be categorized in to three eras. The Imperial era where Ethiopia has been ruled by emperors, Socialist era where the ruling system was military socialism, and thirdly the current federal system with parliament as the main authority holder. Before 1991, the overall political culture of Ethiopia can be considered as non-democratic. Several improvements have been registered under the leadership of Ethiopia in all aspects in the last two decades. Though the current federal system brought the socio-economy of the country to the level that the global community can witness, there were grievances in the country especially after the death of late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. The source of these grievances was the government. These grievances finally brought a new prime minster Abiy Ahmed (PhD) on April 02/1018. This study is then conducted to examine his one year efficiency and challenges he has been facing and the overall socio-economic impact.

To do so, reports, Medias and personal observation was used as a main tool to collect the information and qualitative analysis was used to examine the overall status of the new governance.

Ethiopian Governance System before 1991

Ethiopia has been ruled by emperors for very long period with kings assuming themselves as a chosen person from God to be a head of state and the Orthodox Church was the key player though institutionalized later allowing the emperor to have all the power. In this political governance system power was centralized and inherited through blood/hierarchical (Hashim, 2010; Shimelis, 2015; Mehari, 2008; African Development Bank, 2009) or through internal war between different groups. Land, belonged to secular and church feudal heads, was main economic base for the country. In these long-lasting periods of Ethiopian political system (till 1974), the majority of Ethiopian was ignored and forced to work hard and feed the king and the church feudal letting them live under poverty with low standard of life. Such conditions enabled Ethiopian University students to raise questions as they had a chance to observe and compare development activities in other continents and similar challenges. Finally, the student's movement with internal political gap of the emperor forced to overthrow the final imperial system which was led by emperor Hailessilassie (Teferi Mekonnen). The main question of Ethiopian students was progress, development, equality and equity.

Following the overthrow of the imperial era, socialist military government emerged with several reforms though not easily implemented. The Dergue regime known for its unitary political system was characterized with nationalization of land and forced removal of landowners. The geographic classification was not based on language and culture alone. Several ethnic groups were administered in a certain geographic classification called kifle-hager (equivalent to region). This socialist regime was also characterized for its decentralized system and involuntary resettlement. According to Vaughan Kjetil (2003), under Dergue regime civil and political rights were completely banned by law and ruled without the consent of the people of the Ethiopian people for thirteen years. The main economic base was state owned agriculture. After several years of war, the integration of these movements defeated the military socialist regime in May 28, 1991 and formed a coalition party. Ethiopia Federal Revolutionary democratic Front came to power in 1995.

Ethiopia under Governance of Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRFD)

Ethiopia is named as Federal Democratic Republic country with a new constitution adopted in 1995 introducing the federal governance system and establishing the FDRE. The current constitution was adopted by the then transitional government in 1994 and came to practice in 1995. The constitution cherishes the separation of church and state and the basic human rights better than the previous constitutions under Haileselassie and Dergue. The federal system introduced by EPRDF brought a concept of good governance and democracy (Hashim, 2010; Shimelis, 2015; African Development Bank, 2009; Yonatan, 2012). The current federal system of Ethiopia is basically characterized as ethnic based. It is a system where composition of different organ come together to lead a country at central level where regions are given their administrative right to lead their community under their own constitution. According to Fessha (1996), the federalism that Ethiopia is implementing gives an opportunity the community to promote self-management of ethnic groups. Ethnic based politics in Ethiopia has worked up to a certain extent in enhancing self-respect and visibility of groups. The essentialization of identities that has resulted is difficult to remove and has a self-fulfilling prophecy effect, making national identity secondary.

Article 46 of current Ethiopian Constitution states that the geographical configuration of the federal states shall be based on "the basis of settlement patterns, language, identity and consent of the people concerned". This allowed the country to have nine member states and two City administrations. The member regional states, the State of Tigray, the State of Afar, the State of Amhara, the State of Oromia, the State of Somalia, the State of Benshangul-Gumuz, the State of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, the State of the Gambela people, the State of the Harari people, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa-city administrations. Both the federal and state organs have legislative, executive and judicial powers.

In this administration, regional classification is different from the classification of the previous regimes in a way that in the previous regimes classification were not ethnic based, rather it was based on geographic settlement. The settlement-based classification allowed the mixing of different ethnic groups to be administered under one region and a single ethnic group could be found in different regions irrespective of their ethnic base. This type of regional administration has its own benefits and challenges as well unless managed very well.

Compared to the current regional classification, the previous classification didn't allow every ethnic group to practice and promote its culture, identity and use its language as working language of their respective regions. It also didn't allow every child to learn in his/her mother tongue in schools. All these limitations can be considered as absence of democratic practices. On the other hand, the FDRE constitution grants every ethnic group the right to learn through mother tongue, promote their culture and identity, and allow every region to choose its own working language at regional level while the national working language is one which is Amharic. Though the ethnic based classification has contributed towards the implementation of democratic rights, the level of attention given to regionalism was higher than nationalism. The negative impact has been observed in the past few years as ethnic based conflicts start to arise. Ethnic groups started to show their dominancy on their territory by forcing others to leave and ending the mutual respect the Ethiopian people have had for their lifetime. The FDRE is, of course, trying to eliminate and bring the peace among the regional governments.

The establishment of federal system intended to maintain the unity and peace among the people prevent the dominance of the ruling party and enhanced the public participation (FDRE, 2018). Compared to the previous administrations, in the las two decades the current administration under EPRDF has achieved considerable progresses in all aspects such as economic, political and social (Hashim, 2010). As presence of dominant party is understood as inappropriate for a developing, multi-ethnic country like Ethiopia with majority of rural poverty, and a small urban middle class (Abbink, 2014), EPRDF appreciates the multi-party system on a written document. In 2015, more than 86% of the 79 registered and actively participated political parties were ethnic based parties. Though there were several opposition parties they were powerless until the new prime minster came into power in April 02/2018 inviting opposition leaders and their parties to contribute to the democratization process in the country. Before his arrival, Opposition leaders have been subjected to abuse and their parties prevented from operating as such through an array of restricting laws and regulations.

Reasons for leadership change

Change of leadership might happen due to many reasons such as end of term, death, coup, and/or the leading party may decide to change his leader following series of public anti-government demonstrations. In order to happen a change of leadership after several public anti-governments, the protests (social movements) should grow into organizational maturity.

It is then the protests and movements might have an impact on the government. In Ethiopia before the prime minster Abiy came to power, there were several anti-government protests which lasts more than three years. These protests were mainly several grievances which were created by the government. Some of the key issues that created the public grievances were the Addis Ababa master plan (Addis Ababa city Expansion project), boarder issues, the request for constitutional revision, the boarder-line issue between regions and mainly lack of good governance in many parts of the country. The source of all these grievances were the government and the political vacuum following the death of late Prime minster Meles Zenawi enabled the movement to grow.

The population of the capital city of Ethiopia and a place for more than 120 international organizations, Addis Ababa, has been growing over the last two decades. For this and other reason the federal government of Ethiopia has decided to expand the territory of the city in order to accommodate the interest of the national and international community. As Addis Ababa is in the center of Oromia regional state and the region (Oromia) has a constitutional special right regarding the benefits from the capital. The new design of the city expansion master plan then initiated a question of ownership by Oromo youngsters and activists. High unemployment status in Ethiopia added a fuel to the quest of the youngsters called Qerro in the local language (Oromia).

The current regional classification was made before the approval of the current EPRDF constitution and the way the regions established now initiated land ownership between some regions. These resulted with the raise of identity crises in some of the communities living in the cities located in the border. The issue of Wolkait and Raya between Amhara regional state and Tigray regional state, some part of Benishangul Gumuz regional state with Amhara regional state,

There is a request for constitutional revision in some part of Ethiopian especially in Amhara regional state. The reasons behind this question are being not represented in the constitutional preparation and request for amendment of some articles in the constitutions.

The main reason for the grievances mentioned above is lack of good governance. At all levels of administration units in the country, the people of Ethiopia have been complaining about lack of good governance. In general, the government has been source of grievances in

the country. The grievances were started to grow and expand across almost all the country following the death of late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. The main challenge was not a presence of grievances rather the way these grievances advocated. It was advocated through ethnic channels. This way of advocation enabled several ethnic groups to come out for protest chaining as if everything that had happened was because of their ethnicity. It was very difficult to tackle such kinds of protests in a very democratic way. In addition to the protests, the internal political vacuum which was created after the death of late Prime Minister Meles was another reason for the growth and fast expansion of the protests. Internally, the sister parties who formed the leading party EPRDF were not ideologically on the same line and hard and soft liners came out through time. This situation enabled protesters to get power and the government to weaken and reach to the leadership change we have now.

Major Achievements of the New Governance

Following the resignation of former Prime Minister Mr. Hailemariam Desalegn on February 15/2018, the leading party nominated Dr. Abiy Ahmed, chairperson of Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) as Ethiopia's next prime minster until 2020's Ethiopian election period on April 02/2018. Dr. Abiy in his inauguration speech clearly stated his primary goal as making the next election democratic and fair election which will be accepted by all competing parties. He has identified the main causes of ethnic violence and political instability. These were economic and social injustices, violation of human and democratic rights, lack of good governance and youth unemployment rate (Siraw, 2015; Amnesty International, 2017; Freedom House, 2017). Following this, with several challenges he achieved the following.

To achieve his goals at office, he merged several ministerial offices and reduced in to 20 and assigned women in the 50% the ministerial seats (cabinet) including Ministry of military and defense, the president of the country and other key positions. This decision was one of the indicators that gender disparity in the higher official positions must decrease and women's contribution in the country is highly required.

One of the other important moves he made was the peace deal with Eritrea. He ended the silent war between the Ethiopia and Eritrean which lasted more than 20 years. Following this decision Ethiopian airline started to give service between the two countries a delegation

of Ethiopian official including the premier landed at Asmara to meet Eritrean officials to start the peace-making process. It was one of the key achievements registered under the premier in his one-year office. This decision between the two countries enabled families (father, mother and their children, sisters, brothers, friends) to reunite after twenty years.

The other important political decision made by his party after he came to power was to freeing thousands of political prisoners in the country and uplifting the search for some politicians whom the court have passed decision on. He also invited all opposition parties living abroad to come home with the aim to increase the political involvements of opposition (competing) political parties to enhance the democratization process in the country and achieve the free election goal. Publicly known and unknown special interrogation prisons were closed after he came to power in order to minimize the human rights violence. In relation to this, thousands of Ethiopian civilians imprisoned in different countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, Kenya etc were released following the negotiation with the countries mentioned above.

He also reformed some of the laws that was restricting access to information, realised bloggers and activists who were detained due to their free expression, lifted bans from social medias and websites opposing the government, Freedom of speech (press and media) highly increased and people started to express their views without any fear. People started to freely write and speak about the gaps of the government.

The other very important decision he passed was on assigning one of former opposition leaders, Birtikuan Mideksa, as a head of electoral board. She was one of the leaders of opposition parties imprisoned by the EPRDF years back under the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi.

All the above decisions brought hope to the people of Ethiopia. Ethiopian people are now expecting to answer the questions that have been raised in the last two decades. The already existing economic base is expected to grow fast with economic reforms and create jobs to decrease the unemployment rate. There has been high rate of corruption in the country and the Ethiopian people are hoping the leadership under Dr. Abiy Ahmed to reduce/avoid it from the country.

Main challenges Observed under the New Governance

It is expected to face challenges in the process of bringing a change. Any decision to be made in the process of change has both positive and negative impacts on some part of the society. The main thing to consider in such situation is the overall impacts of the decisions made on the socio-economic improvement of the greater community and the developmental process of the country. Although the premier has got a huge public acceptance in the beginning challenges also occurred in the meantime. The arrival and some decisions of the new prime minster didn't satisfy the whole community. Though it is expected such things to happen after a leadership change, its impact is becoming very huge. In the process of the continuous public protest that brought Dr Abiy Ahmed to power, the countries socio-economic status went bad. Protesters have destroyed public service sector, many died. Bringing the country's stability to where it was have had several challenges happening across the country due to several reasons.

Lack of coherence of the central government is the main challenge the country facing. The decision being made by the central government is not well implemented across the regions. This implies that the unity of these EPRDF member parties hardly exists. Based on their implementation level of the central decisions they passed together, it can be said that currently they differ in philosophy, vision, and strategy.

The ideological difference between the members is forcing the country not to reach into national consciences. Without national consciences and agreement between these sister parties leading the Federal government, the future of Ethiopia will be very hard to manage as the country is composed of many ethnic groups with different languages and needs.

The other challenge is scope legitimate state action which hardly exists. There have been several illegal movements across the country even after the leadership change. It can be said that the public safety was in danger due to the weak decision-making procedure by the federal government and the regions where the actions has been happened. Rule of law hardly existed in the one year. Banks were attacked several times, and nothing has been said about it. Due to this and other similar weaknesses that has been observed, it can be said the government was a bit confused in the first year of the premier.

Absence of clear change road map is another challenge which has been observed in his first year. Though majority of the members of councils of minsters have had common understanding of the ideology and way the premier want to lead the country, it didn't reach the lower administrative part of the country where majority are affected. This indicates that the lower administrative unit leaders were doing their job as they used to, and this forced the public protest and continue. This situation also opened a room for those who lost their benefits following the leadership change to ethnically advocate as if the current leaders are against the nation and nationalities interest.

The other which is observed in the first year of Dr. Abiy Ahmed was the ideological division between two groups, Ethnic nationalism and Ethiopian nationalism. There are groups who advocate EPRDFs ethnic nationalism which has been implemented and promoted well till the coming the new PM. These groups usually say that the nations and nationalities of Ethiopia have got their rights to self-administered, use their languages in both education and workplaces, promoted their culture etc. The other group who promote Ethiopian nationalism argue that the national thinking has been forgotten allowing everyone to limit themselves in their regions. Of course, the implementation of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia created a wrong understanding of the system. The limitation of this ethnic promotion can be observed that a graduate is not able to work in a region where he is not from due to the working language barrier in every region. For example, a person from Tigray or Amhara is not allowed to work in Oromia region unless he can speak and write the local language. This has increased the unemployment rate in the country and these ethnic division (ethnic and Ethiopian nationalism) created internal public displacement in the country ranking Ethiopia number one the world. Bringing the displaced people to their home needs huge investments which became a challenge to the country. Though these displacements were created by a few groups, the perception of the displaced community is linked to their race.

The other thing to mention here is the case of tragedy of commons. These can be explained by the practice of regional leadership in the country. They all say that they are a real Ethiopian who wishes to see prosperous Ethiopia. Yet, they disagree to work together and achieve the goals they set in their federal meetings. They only try to protect their own community ignoring the remaining. They complain to one another; they don't take responsibilities for the actions committed in their own region and take correction measures.

In the economic sector, the reforms that have been made are not basic ones. The export has been decreased due the internal instability which didn't allow the producers to produce and hence the foreign currency earning was decreased. Besides this, the internal instability in the country opened a way to illegal trade. To improve the development status of the country and increase employment rate, majority of Ethiopians were expecting the government to launch a new development projects which didn't happen. The federal government explained in their report to the parliament that the financial capacity of the country couldn't allow them to do so. On the other hand, launching a new development project could have helped reduce unemployment rate and the internal instability. Generally, there is no basic economic policy reform under the new leadership.

The other challenge that the premier faced was institutional legacies. It is very difficult to assert the new way of thinking under PM Abiy Ahmed (PhD) EPRDF in this short period which needs the institutional culture to be changed. Some of the key federal and regional institutions are still working in the same way the used to work. Institutional working environment must be improved specially in security and prison areas.

Conclusions

Ethiopia is a country with more than 76 ethnic groups administered under 9 ethnic and settlement based regional states and two city administrations. Though ethnic-based regional classification allow every ethnic groups to promote and share their culture and identities to others, use their language as a medium of instruction in elementary schools and work with it within the region, the rooted misconception of ethnic based federalism in Ethiopia is currently affecting the democratization process of the country.

The Ethiopia people are religious people with indigenous traditional conflict resolution systems. The growth rate of the country was very impressive registering 10% annual growth rate. Keeping this growth and achieving the goal to bring Ethiopia into middle income country is a very important task of the government and the public. In order to achieve this, internal stability, good governance, democratic practices such as freedom/liberty, justice and equity should be given a priority. To do so, the government must do the following.

Structural forces which might affect the transition should be identified and coherence of central government is highly required. Ethnic differences should be wisely managed by respecting rule of law. In addition to this, horizontal discussions are mandatory. Economic performance must be improved in order to create jobs and reduce unemployment. At macroeconomic level, the government should expand the economic activities by financing the deficit, if any. Professionalizing bureaucracy and Integration of newly appointed leaders and the bureaucracy and asserting of newly political ideology to all levels of administrative Units is required. On the other hand, tolerance between Ethiopian people is the key to successfully bring the democratic system in the country.

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