



# Development under the Transformational Motto of 'Grow or Die', the Lake Tana Region of Ethiopia in Focus

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**Received:** 29-June-2020, Manuscript No. GMJ-20-14397; **Editor assigned:** 02-July-2020, PreQC No. GMJ-20-14397 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 16-July-2020, QC No. GMJ-20-14397; **Revised:** 30-January-2023, Manuscript No. GMJ-20-14397 (R); **Published:** 28-February-2023, DOI: 10.36648/1550-7521.21.60.350

**Citation:** Getahun BT (2023) Development under the Transformational Motto of 'Grow or Die', the Lake Tana Region of Ethiopia in Focus. Global Media Journal Vol. 21 No. 60: 350.

## Abstract

In post 2005 election Ethiopia, development has been taken as utmost priority issue to be achieved at any cost. For the Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Party (EPRDF) the leading party, achieving development was a matter of survival or death, which is related to the transformation principle of 'grow or die'. Normally there is no state that chooses to die by leaving development issues aside and for two decades the developmental state of Ethiopia achieved growth that proceeded at the rate of two digit growth. This paper addressed two basic questions. The first one, is the development broad based and participatory? Second, is development achieved at the cost of destroying the ecosystem of a given growth corridor accepted as healthy and sustainable? In addressing these issues information is collected from primary and secondary sources. Policy documents such as proclamations related to environmental protection and heritage protection including the constitution of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE constitution) are used as sources of first-hand information to understand the ideological position of the state and to identify if there is conformity between idea and practice. Second hand information is collected through intensive reading from the literature. A normative approach is used for analyzing the issues on the basis of Environmental Analysis and the Millennium ecosystem Assessment framework (M.A) is used to check if the ecosystem degraded and affected the wellness of the local community or not. The research, finally, concludes that development which is not broad based and environmental friendly cannot be sustainable.

**Keywords:** Local community; Ecosystem; Development; Sustainability; Participatory

## Introduction

Normally every state always strives to improve the lives of its citizens through meaningful development. Though, its development policies used to be donor influenced, since late 1950's Ethiopia too has designed and enforced national development policies. Following its ascendance to power after

the fall of the socialist military state in 1991, the Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPDRF) declared revolutionary democracy as its official ideology and liberal free market economy to attract the interest of Western financial institutions. Though making structural change in line with free market principle was essential for survival, disagreement between democratic and nondemocratic rent seeking forces, made its realization difficult. Moreover, giving emphasis to agriculture, EPRDF declared Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) as its main policy for rural and agricultural transformation. The Revolutionary Democratic State leaders then sought to achieve interrelated objectives of increasing peasant productivity, reducing poverty, and maintaining food security at national level. ADLI was also designed for transforming peasant agriculture and to support industrialization. Moreover, in line with the third generation development policy of the Western World, in its national Development strategy, the EPRDF led Transitional and Government, through its national development policy and Ethiopian environmental protection policy expressed its commitment to achieve sustainable development and to give emphasis to protection of environment for its sustainability [1].

In the early 2000's, the EPRDF-led government shifted its focus from revolutionary democracy to democratic developmental state. Politically, in one way or another, the EPRDF was screwing its grip and won the 1995 and 2000 elections. The party was also confident of knocking its opponents in the third election too but the result of the 2005 election was unexpected for the EPRDF. Following the 2005 election, EPRDF led Ethiopian government took development a priority issue of utmost importance in transformational principle of "grow or die". For the state leader, EPRDF, achieving growth was become a matter of choosing survival or death. To that end the developmental state tightened its intervention and control through a seemingly "stick and carrot"; stick to the uncooperative and carrot to the staunch supporter as model farmer and the like. With the intention of transforming and increasing the productivity of peasant farming, agriculture extension programs was introduced and investment in agriculture extension increased. Though the response to the issue of did the EPRDF led developmental state achieved

development is still controversial, official reports indicate that for decades two digit economic growth was achieved and hence there is development [2].

In this article I argued that development that is not inclusive and environment friendly is not healthy development. To that end two leading question, did the development by the EPRDF led government give citizens' equal opportunity? Second, is development achieved at the cost of destroying the ecosystem of a given growth corridor can be sustainable? The article is organized into two parts. In the first part a brief discussion is given about how some people is excluded from participating with illustration case to the subjects of the discussion. After briefly elucidating what developmental state and development mean, in the second part an analysis is made to depict why development that took place at the cost of destroying nature cannot be sustainable [3].

## Literature Review

This research is qualitative in type that depend on information drawn from first hand policy related documents and intensive reading of relevant secondary sources. After the information organized and interpreted, the data is interpreted analyzed on the basis of structural violence theory. A normative analytical approach used for analysis [4].

## Conceptual framework

According to violence is understood as "avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or, to put it in more general terms, the impairment of human life, which lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible". There are three types of violence theory that explain how it harms both humanity and nature. Direct violence is when victims harmed physically and psychologically and as a consequence of which people and incapacitates him/her from realizing their life goals and from meeting their basic needs necessities for living [5]. Structural violence is when a group of people is harmed by violence embedded in political, economic and social institution and structures so that a difference created between the potential and actual ability of the victim in meeting life goals. In harming or hurting the receiver or victim, some aspect of culture is used to justify and or legitimize the unjust act and consequence of violence. In male dominated society where wives culturally required obeying their respective husband, for example, sexual harassment against women is not wrong act because the norm of the society accepts it as normal. In relation to violence against nature, both direct violence such burning some valuable raw materials and structural violence like polluting the environment harm the environment and degrades its capacity to support and satisfy the present and future generations relied on it. In this case, however, it is development, not culture, that is used to justify the crime against nature [6].

## Description of the study area

Since the focus of this study is the Lake Tana development corridor, it is pertinent to give a brief description about lake Tana

Region [7]. The source of blue Nile, lake Tana, is located adjacent to Bahir Dar, the capital city of Amhara regional state, which is 563 kms far from Addis Ababa. The lake is fed by several rivers and stream. Of these four rivers contribute 93% of the lake's water. The Lake and its wetland ecology support and provide ecological services to more than five hundred thousand/500,000/people [8].

The lake and its wetland is endowed with different resources like Papyrus plantation, which serves as a raw material for thankwa/reed boat/construction, basketry and other sovereigns and hose hold utensils by the Negede Woyto minority group; water for irrigation and boat transportation to the different islands and peninsulas and for fishing [9]. It is also known for its manmade and natural tourist attractions that include churches and monasteries and divers scenery and aquatic biodiversity that in 2015 the lake Tana Biodiversity reserve was established by UNESCO. Principally due to its importance in water resources, in the last two and half decades the Ethiopian government considers the lake Tana sub basin as having well an economic growth corridor. For this reason, on lake Tana and almost in all its main tributaries, mega hydropower and irrigation projects are under way and some others such as are in operation [10].

## Discussion

Before entering the discussion, it is pertinent to give briefing on two issues; what is developmental state? What does development really mean? As expounded by different scholars, developmental state is a state which is ideologically between liberalism and socialism [11]. In terms of economic policy, it advocates free market economy under state guidance. A developmental state is a state that intervenes and regulates the direction and pace of economic transformation in economic policies that are not rigid. Even though it is interventionist and has autonomy to decide on public matters, a developmental state is not authoritarian or a totalitarian, its legitimate power to decide emanates from its achievement and its capacity in managing the country in a responsible and wise manner [12].

## Is there inclusive development in the lake Tana region?

The EPRDF lead developmental state, though it advocates free market economy and strived to achieve development under state guidance, ideologically it was neither revolutionary nor democratic. Though expected to advance ideal and flexible policy just as other developmental states did, as indicated, its economic policies were rigid. EPRDF's rural land policy is a good case to illustrate the point [13]. Its development policies and strategies including ADLI's agriculture transformation extension programs, and the two GTP I and GTP II respectively, were designed and implemented country wide, but the party, at the same time used development programs to maintain its political hegemony; its 'all fit and rigid' policies do not take the livelihoods and interests of indigenous and minority groups. Hence no matter whether the government did it intentionally or not, the EPRDF led government used to exclude some of its peoples in enforcing its policies [14]. This selective

implementation of policies on the basis of class and ethnicity in Galtung's term is structural violence which lowers and or incapacitates the excluded group from applying its full potential towards development and other life changing opportunities [15].

During the period of EPDRF, even though sovereign power vested on ethnic groups Abbink (1997:166, FDRE constitution Art 8(1), excluding minorities on the bases of identity and class interest is not uncommon. Both at federal and regional state levels minorities, both political and ethnic minorities, structurally excluded. At federal level even members of the EPDRF were not equal in status and exercising political power [16]. Members of TPLF were greater in power and status than members of the other three partner parties that constitute EPDRF. As convincingly explained the TPLF used three of its partner parties to maintain Tigrian interest in their own respective regions. This means that though all top leaders had authority only the core members of TPLF had real power. In relation to this point confirm that political power is essential in distributing economic opportunities and public services. In the same logic at regional state level, the political leaders from the dominant group in whose name the region designated, though took power to rule over and threat all members of the regional state society equally, used to exclude minorities living in the regional state. In this regard, exclusion manifests in terms of access to power and resources [17].

From the different communities, whose livelihood directly or indirectly supported by Lake Tana and its ecology, the Negede Woyto minority group is subjected to exclusion. To show how the community excluded politically and economically by the developmental state, let me point up about the minority group's life. Traditionally, the Negede Woyto's life had been entirely depended on lake Tana and its wetlands. The papyrus the community used to construct thankwa and to make basket, among other uses; the hippopotamus they used to hunt for its meat and the fish they used to catch for supplementing their diet and their traditional god, they used to worship all was used to be available from the lake and its wetlands. In 1990's when the lake Tana region increasingly becomes a developmental corridor, the Negede Woyto's livelihood is not taken into account and almost totally displaced from their livelihood basis. In 1996, when the Chara Chara weir was constructed to regulate the lake water at its outlet, and after wards, the community elders expressed their concern that their livelihood basis would be threatened. But federal and local authorities did not respond.

With growth in population the local farmers had begun to engage in recessional farming in wetlands along the shore of lake Tana. The wetlands along the shore of the lake are a fertile ground both for papyrus plantation and for fish as spawning grounds. But when the farmers expanded their dry time recessional farm illegally, they uprooted and burned the papyrus. While recessional farm enabled farmers to reap good harvest for temporal advantage, it seriously affected not only the livelihoods of the Negede Woyto, but also it is violence against nature. The Negede Woyto expressed their worries about conversion of wetlands to farmlands and formally asked

local authority to intervene and stop the anti-environmental act. But their just call for state intervention ignored. Instead of finding ways of mechanism to protect the wetland and strengthening environment friendly activities, some local or wereda authorities recently has begun to allocate the wetlands to landless local farmers. This is a clear structural violence both against nature and the Negede Woyto minority.

To put what is discussed above in short, given the fact that economic growth was achieved at the expense of destroying nature such as forests in the border areas converting wetland ecosystems into farm lands and excluding a large number of its own people including minority ethnic group and indigenous people, the EPDRF led development cannot be accepted as healthy and inclusive.

### What type of development is sustainable development?

Before addressing the issues of what type of development is sustainable, let us begin with the definition of development. Depending the time and context it is undertaken, development is understood and defined variously. In the post-cold war period, as a concept development is increasingly defined in relation to human security which means making people "free from want" ensuring people at least the minimum necessities to their survival and well-being and to live in dignity as a human. To develop means giving citizens more vital options to improve the quality of life. Better quality of life that includes, among others, better health service, better education and better standard of life.

It encompasses as ends in themselves better education, higher standards of health and nutrition, less poverty, a cleaner environment, more equality of opportunity, greater individual freedom and a richer cultural life. Development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy. For development to be accepted as real, it should fulfill three criteria; sustainability to make people meet basic needs enable them develop self-esteem and freedom from servitude. Growth is not playing in numbers, even if accepted as indicator of development for poor states, growth needs to be sustainable and the growth shall be achieved without degrading environment. Development is also defined as 'a process through which the potentialities of an object or organization are released until reaches its natural, complete and full-fledged form'. This definition implies use of resources and potentials to development purpose. Most scholars and organizations, however, agree that development to be sustainable broad based or inclusive, and environment friendly.

Conserving nature and development are inseparable. Any development has to satisfy the needs of the present without obstructing the resource capacity of nature to meet the needs of the coming generation. The UNDP also stress that the present generation has a moral responsibility to refrain harming nature to inherit a healthy ecosystem to the coming generation as did by its predecessors. However, in the most of the state owned development projects such as the Chara Chara weir, during the construction of which the natural wall of the lake bulldozed and

hydroelectric project, which diverted the natural flow of water, drastically harmed both the water resources, its ecology and disturbs aquatic and terrestrial life it supports. To mention one visible example, following the construction the Chara Chara dam, the marvelous tis isat fall, is located at about 35 kms far apart from the dam at out let of, is almost disappeared.

In principle governments shall not works against nature that serves as basis of its efforts to achieve better life for its people. It is also irrefutable that normally governments make their own effort to maintain sustainable development in their own way. However, as indicated in UNDP governments often forget to get the involvement of and support of the local people. On the other hand, though state development interventions aim at ensuring a good quality of life without obstructing the natural environment. In reality, however, a development intervention often goes against the intended purpose and ends up degrading the ecosystem and life that rely on it. In this regard Dam construction is one of the development projects that go against both on ecosystem and life that depend on it. Dam reduces the amount of water to be reached flood plains and wetlands. Consequently, it poses severe negative impact on biodiversity and in some cases it leads to disappearance of fauna and flora. In this case, dams bare or prevents aquatic organism such as migratory fish from reaching their feeding or spawning grounds. In other cases, dry or wetland habitats are lost due to inundation caused by dam and organisms that dwell on it perishes or may not survive.

Wetland conversion is one of the major threats for the livelihoods of people that rely on it. The wetland of lake Tana, which is the largest in Ethiopia, is under conversion. As indicated in less than three decades, 1986-2013, a total of 52% of the wetlands of the lake changed to other land use forms. Out of it (52%) the largest portion of the wetland is converted to cultivation land (23.4%) and about 3.27% is converted to water body due to Chara Chara weir regulation. The major causes for wetland conversion in Lake Tana include, among others, pollution, urbanization, agricultural intensification, major engineering projects such as dam construction and irrigation projects using lake water.

State sponsored development intervention and wetland conversion in Lake Tana, negatively affected both nature and life that depend on it in many ways. One, nutrient rich unchecked flooding that directly reached the lake and its shore created a favorable condition for invasive hyacinth weed, which in turn posed a serious threat on lives of fish and fisheries. On the one hand, the thick and floating invasive weed denies the fish spawning and breeding ground, on the other hand , the same weed make the shallow part and the wetlands adjacent to the lake to dry up, which ultimately leads to decline fishing. As noticed by as a result of decline of fish breeding ecosystem, in 2010 fish Catch Per Unit of Effort (CPUE ) had dropped with an alarming rate of 63 kg/trip in 1991-1993 to a 63 kg/trip in 2010.

Scholars of environment found that development and environmental protection are in divisible. In this regard as indicated in if 'development to be sustainable a balance between development and conservation need to be maintained. Accordingly, development is acceptable as sustainable

development when it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability nature to satisfy/meet the needs of future generations. Sustainable development requires 'an economically sustainable system that can generate goods and services on a continuous basis; an environmentally sustainable system to maintain stable resources base, and a socially sustainable system to achieve fairness in opportunity and social services. In other words, if development to take place continuously, it needs healthy ecosystem, institution to regulate and protect the base of the economy and good government system that can maintain equity.

As elaborated by different scholars both the dam construction and activities that led to wetland conversion are not normally and legally acceptable. In this regard, in their joint work declare that the decision to construct the Chara Chara dam on a lake catchment was motivated solely as a response to growing development needs. They also indicate that the decision was in sharp contrast with principles and guidelines developed by World Commission on Dams (WDC). Two justifications are presented to support the argument. Firstly, water resource developers were not aware of the impact of the dam on fishing and fishers. Secondly, there was no agreement and cooperation on the issue of dam construction among different stake holders including irrigation professional such as irrigation engineers and biologists/ecologists.

According to violence against nature not only degrade the environment but also it incapacitate its potential to meet the needs of the present and the generations to come. The quality and potential of the Lake's ecosystem is already degraded that even today it reached to level of giving traditional/ normal services such as papyrus, hunted animals, fish are already drastically diminished as a result of which some of the people such as the Negede Woyto, who are the poorest and marginalized and the fishing community is unable to survive and the wellness of life that rely on the lake also degraded. In order to illustrate, an attempt is made to show how human wellbeing and ecosystem service are interlinked. As a concept ecosystem services are understood as the benefits people obtain from a given ecosystems. As categorized in ecosystem services are grouped in to four as provisioning services, regulating services, cultural services and supporting service. Each of the four ecosystem support humanity in different ways (Figure 1).

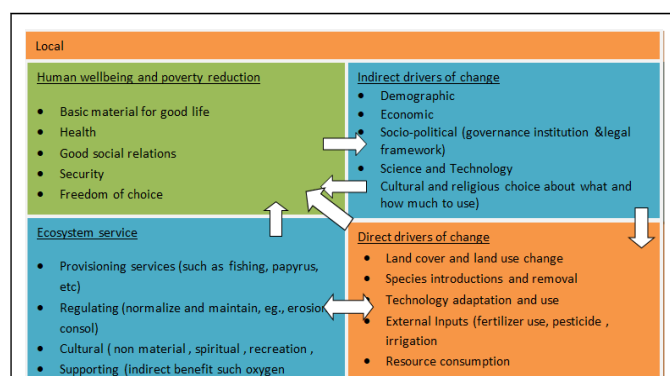


Figure 1: Depicting process of interaction and change.



## Conclusion

Since taking power in the post-cold War period, the EPRDF led government introduced and implemented nicely worded policies and strategies in all sectors. As a leader of multi ethnic nation, its decision to introduce and enforce an ethnic friendly constitution and establishing ethnic based federal state that gives all ethnic groups the opportunity to self-administration and to manage their own affairs was also a right decision. However, the implementation of the developmental state policies various greatly. The variation emanates from different factors, including lack of well-trained manpower, absence of institution and system based rule, and most importantly it relates to decision making political power. Ethnic based federalism or simply ethnicity as ideology is about difference. It is about difference between 'us and theirs'. In this logic the 'we' group in control of power is often give priority to the we ethnic group and any of the 'they' groups who have no neither vital political power nor special attachment with the core, could not have to decide and distribute public resources and services, may face difficulty. Logically, in ethnics all citizens may not be equal. By implication, there was in Galtung's terms, structural violence embedded in political and economic institutions. In structural violence, who harms the 'they groups' is invisible but it incapacitates the victimized group from using its full potential to meets its basis needs including survival, wellbeing and other life chance. Structural violence is manifested and manifests in the form of marginalization, inequality, poverty and the like. So it is possible to safely argue that, the Ethiopia's development was not broad based and it was not healthy, among others, it increased the disparity between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' on the one hand, and it was mostly 'growth in number', though growing' by itself may be appreciated for an age old poor nation, it was not development, because development can bring a significant structural change. It was not a healthy growth/development, in the present day understanding development should be broad based and sustainable that integrates sustainably in natural resource.

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