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Status, Challenges, and Prospects of the Ethiopian Developmental State (Emphasis on Democratic Governance)¹

Belayneh Bogale Zewdie

Box 1: Key points of the chapter
✓ The debate on democratic governance vs. development seems a “false choice” and a sequencing fallacy.
✓ There exists a considerable gap between form and reality when it comes to democratic governance in Ethiopia.
✓ The bottlenecks include the dispute between a shared vision and the quest for nations, nationalities, and people’s self-determination; the hostile relationship between the government and media, political opposition, and civil societies; the poor performance of some governance indicators.
✓ The achievements in HDI Ethiopia has made in the ten years since it shift toward the developmental state model are undisputed. The policy and strategic commitments and constitutional guardianship of democratic governance are positive factors.
✓ Dealing with such a state demands appropriate innovation and a pragmatic approach in order to deepen the democratic governance agenda in the context of the developmental state.

Box 2: Reading this chapter will give you insight in
✓ Conceptualization of the developmental state;
✓ Characteristics of the developmental state;
✓ Gray areas in the Ethiopian “democratic developmental state” model; and
✓ Challenges and prospects of democratic governance in the Ethiopian developmental state.
Introduction

Nowadays the terms “governance” and “democracy” are accepted as the nucleus of development politics. Bad governance is being increasingly regarded as one of the root causes of all evil within our societies. Major donors and international financial institutions are also basing their development assistance on the condition that reforms that ensure “democratic governance” are carried out (WB, 1992; UNESCAP, n.d; WB, 2013). On top of this, the concept of democratic governance has been widely recognized as prerequisite for successful nation-building and socioeconomic progress.

The concept of democratic governance has received increasing attention in Africa over the last three decades. The importance of the concept for African development is related to three major issues (WB, 2013). Firstly, it is related to the need to create the basic extra-economic conditions necessary for the growth of the African economy, such as effective public administration, an independent and functioning judiciary, a transparent financial system, and accountability. Secondly, the concept is related to the common developmental challenges of Africa, such as accountability, rule of law, freedom of expression and association, and legitimate and inclusive governments. Improving these factors may be considered as a significant move toward African renewal. Thirdly, the adoption and continuous improvement of the market-oriented system in Africa has been prescribed as a key to development.

In line with this, according to government reports, Ethiopia has achieved encouraging development results, maintaining an economic growth rate
of 10 percent over the last ten years. The international community has also recognized that there has been growth, though there is not much agreement on the rate (statistics). It has also been reported that the country has come to enjoy the fastest improvement in the Human Development Index among the Least Developed Countries (IIAG, 2015; Bekele & Regassa, 2012). Moreover, the government claims that it is determined to accelerate and maintain this development result while strengthening its democratic governance agenda. It has set for itself a challenging goal of creating a “democratic developmental state” and building a green economy (MoFED, 2010; Bekele & Regassa, 2012). Additionally, the county has also the ambition to become a middle-income state by 2025. In short, Ethiopia, a self-declared developmental state, seeks to construct a developmental state while also deepening its democratic governance.

The country has recently launched a set of coordinated comprehensive development plans, called the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) I and II. The first phase, which lasted for five years from 2010/11 to 2014/15 (MoFED, 2010), has come to a conclusion, leading to the kick-off of the second phase as of the 2015/16 budget year. The idea of the developmental state calls for such coordinated development plans, which identify the development priorities of the country and the respective roles of each sector, so as to facilitate the achievement of the national goals.

The concept of constructing a developmental state while also deepening democracy and good governance, as stimulating as it is to those who value a democratic developmental state, poses a set of challenges. It evokes the question as to whether pressing the democratic governance agenda impedes or facilitates development. The issue of whether there is a relationship of priority, or primacy, between development and democratic governance has not been resolved (Bekele & Regassa, 2012) and has evoked difficult questions and lengthy debate among development scholars. These questions are raised in different forms in different contexts and lead to smaller, local, and context-specific issues that need to be raised and discussed.

Hence, there has to be continuous rhetoric and discourse within the academic community and practitioners in the field so as to attain conceptual clarity. To this end, the author of this chapter strongly believes that this chapter will serve to provoke thought and stimulate discussions. Especially in Ethiopian context, where the culture of boldly discussing politics is not yet very deep, the importance of this chapter is self-evident.
2. **Objectives of the Review**

The general objective of this chapter is to explore the status, challenges, and prospects of good governance in a developmental state, with particular emphasis on the Ethiopian context. Specifically;
- To come up with conceptual clarity regarding the developmental state;
- To portray the characteristics of the developmental state model;
- To point out the gray areas in the Ethiopian democratic developmental state model; and
- To discuss the challenges and prospects of democratic governance in the Ethiopian developmental state.

3. **Materials and Methods**

By way of desk review, the chapter attempts to point out the status, challenges, and prospects of democratic governance under the Ethiopian developmental state model, examining national legal, strategic, and policy documents (such as the Growth and Transformation Plan I and II and different related programs) and various publications and prior studies in this area. Hence, the reviewer looked into the literature on the developmental state in general and the Ethiopian state in particular. The overall goal of the review is to provoke thoughts and to stimulate discussions.

4. **Conceptualizing Developmental State**

The concept of a developmental state is not utterly new to the literature in politics, development studies, and economics. While the term has been used to refer to state-led economic planning as experienced in the countries of East Asia and some other countries that have worn the label since the 1970s, a serious attempt at conceptualizing it is said to have begun with the work of Chalmers Johnson in the 1980s (Johnson, 1982). In his analysis of Japanese development in the 1970s, Johnson created the foundations for the model of the developmental state. He first used the term to describe strong interventionist policies that led to sustained, rapid industrialization and long-term economic development. For example, in the period that began with the Second World War and continued up to the 1980s, the economy of Japan was shaped by a political ideology that privileged raising income levels and sustaining industrial growth.
But it was the small East Asian “tigers”—Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore—that became the archetypal instantiations of the model (Amsden, 1989; Wade, 1990). The East Asian “tigers” managed to change their position in the world economic hierarchy, moving from “underdeveloped” to “developed” in the course of two generations. This kind of shift is not only unprecedented among twentieth-century developing countries. It is exceptional even in the broader context that includes the historical experience of Europe and the Americas (Evans and Heller, 2018).

In the context of Africa, McKinsey (2010) labeled Botswana and Mauritius as the “African Lions” to demonstrate the two states as the African version of successful developmental states. In Ethiopia, the term is increasingly being used and dominating political discourse.

4.1. Meaning of Developmental State

There is no agreed definition of the developmental state; rather, the discussion and debate on it is a work in progress. However, just like many other social science concepts, it can be defined and conceptualized in diverse ways (Jaleta, 2015). A developmental state may be defined as a state wherein the government is closely involved in macro- and microeconomic planning in order to grow the economy. It has generally been observed that successful developmental states are able to advance their economies much faster than regulatory states that use regulations to manage the economy. As an example, according to Hollander (2011), it took the USA and United Kingdom approximately fifty years to double their economy while it took China, which is a developmental state, approximately ten years to achieve the same goal. However, this argument seems simplistic, since the contexts and periods of the Chinese and the aforementioned western countries economic doubling time were quite different.

A developmental state is often defined in terms of its ideological orientation (i.e., promoting the ideal and agenda of developmentalism) and its institutional arrangements (i.e., its institutional capacity to formulate and implement its policies and programs), whereby the state has to build efficient and effective institutions to achieve its developmental goals. Standard descriptions also maintain that a developmental state is a state with instincts to resist external demands (e.g., multinational corporations) and oppress internal resistance (from groups focused on transient political gains or short–term profits, i.e., local political and business elites) (Bekele & Regassa, 2012).

This latter description suggests that a developmental state ought to have the capacity to control internal strife and build consensus among citizens on the
national developmental agenda by drawing attention to the long-term benefits for all (Zenawi, 2006; Bekele & Regassa, 2012). An economic report on Africa holds that a developmental state is “one that has the capacity to deploy its authority, credibility and legitimacy in a binding manner to design and implement development policies and programs for promoting transformation and growth, as well as for expanding human capabilities” (ECS & AU, 2011, p. 7). Ideally, therefore, a developmental state needs to be a persuasive state with the competence to mobilize people and resources around its development plan (Zenawi, 2006). In other words, a democratic developmental state requires a shared vision and national consensus as preconditions for success. Peter Evans refers to it as a state with institutional design meant to advance the transformative role of the state “rather than constraining the state,” a state with the capacity to formulate and implement its development goals in an authoritative and binding fashion resulting in improved economic performance (Evans, 1995).

The developmental state is also referred to as an autonomous/independent state, with a decidedly interventionist bent, as it seeks to monitor and control the economy. In this sense, it can even be viewed as a model of capitalism that nonetheless differs from a minimalist state or other species of interventionist states such as the regulatory state and the welfare state (Wade, 1990; Edigheji, 2005; Bekele & Regassa, 2012). The late prime minister of FDRE, Melese Zenawi, contrasted the developmental state with weak states (which easily bow to the pressure mounted on them by the business or political elite) or predatory states (which tend to be extractive and exploitative of public resources for private purposes) (Zenawi, 2006).

A developmental state is, therefore, a state that is and seeks to be a strong player in the economy of a nation with a view to enhancing economic development. It is a state that promotes macroeconomic stability and establishes an institutional framework that provides law and order, effective administration of justice and peaceful resolution of conflicts (Mkandawire, 2001). The aspiration of developmental states is chiefly catching up with the advanced world by breaking out of a path dependency that has not led to the economic transformation needed to overcome poverty. In words of Bekele and regassa (2012) “the goals are articulated as achieving development (mainly to mean economic growth) without necessarily treading upon the neoliberal tradition” (p. 10). Their aspiration is to facilitate, if not dictate, economic transformation and capacity building while cautiously controlling internal and external market forces.
4.2. Characteristics of a Developmental State (in the Ethiopian Context)

In order to understand the concept of a developmental state, it is helpful to highlight some of the characteristics of the model. Developmental states generally put strong emphasis on technical education and the development of numeracy and computer skills within the population. This technically oriented education is strategically used to improve the capacity of government structures, particularly the bureaucracy (Amsden, 1989). What emerges out of this strategy is that the political and bureaucratic layers are populated by extremely educated people who have sufficient analytical tools to be able to take leadership initiatives, based on sound scientific basis.

In Ethiopia, a review of policy and strategic documents demonstrates the critical role of education in the overall development endeavors. As such, the country’s Education and Training Policy provides a definition of education that is strongly rooted in the purpose and role it plays in human life in general. Similarly, the HEP sets objectives for higher education that include the promotion and enhancement of research focusing on knowledge and technology transfer consistent with the country’s priority needs (FDRE, 2009). This objective not only emphasizes the importance of technology transfer, it also implies the identification of priority areas for the country. A similarly adequate policy focus has been given for TVET providers and related institutions, which are meant to be strengthened to become “centers for technology capabilities’ accumulation and transfer” (Ibid, 2009: 55) However, the ever-increasing rate of graduate unemployment and the deteriorating quality of higher education is becoming a cause of concern in the country.

The other characteristic of a developmental state is the centrality of a development-oriented political leadership bound together by a powerful economic and political ideology focused on development (Fritz and Menocal, 2006; Pempel, 1999, Waldner, 1999). The circumstances that give rise to a development-oriented political leadership can be quite diverse. According to Waldner (1999), this leadership grows out of a political context characterized by the absence of pressure, which gives these leaders scope to construct institutions conducive to economic development. Other analysts suggest that a development-oriented leadership evolves from of a clear consensus within the governing elites, both administrative and political, over the scope and direction of development (Leftwich, 2010). The final factor is the interests of political survival and legitimacy, which push political elites toward a developmental orientation.
However, given the relatively polarized politics and the heterogenous nature (multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural) of Ethiopia, where the quest for the rights of nations, nationalities, and people is the center of political discourse, engendering a development-oriented political leadership with lesser pressures is quite difficult. The experience of East Asian countries also suggests the importance of clear consensus and shared vision between different elites as an instrument to build a development-oriented leadership. However, at least as far as the reviewer is concerned, the Ethiopian state lacks this virtue. Worse, part of the political leadership has been accused of rent-seeking and predatory bandit behavior, which is a clear obstacle for the creation of development-oriented elite.

Compared to other developing regions, the autonomy, capability, and effectiveness of the permanent executive in the East Asian developmental states are quite impressive. This may be traced back to the presence of a bureaucracy in the Weberian tradition, which prioritizes meritocratic recruitment, provides promotion incentives, shows rationality, and guarantees high levels of prestige and legitimacy to bureaucratic officials (Meyns and Musamba, 2010; Wong, 2004). Onis supports this observation: “Rigorous standards of entry not only ensured a high degree of bureaucratic capability, but also generated a sense of unity and common identity on the part of the bureaucratic elite. Hence the bureaucrats were imbued with a sense of mission and identified themselves with national goals which derived from a position of leadership in society” (Onis, 1991: 114). Such a bureaucracy exhibits uncommon levels of autonomy and effectiveness when it is obviously free from unproductive interference from the political leadership. As a result, decision-makers and technocrats were able to effectively formulate economic policy and employ innovation in public service delivery (ECA and AUC, 2011; Pempel, 1999).

Nonetheless, the Ethiopian public sector lacks these key manifestations of a developmental bureaucracy. There is also evidence of recruitment and promotion based on political patronage in some key public agencies. In the words of Mebratu (2015):

“…… the civil service in Ethiopia today is actually being re-politicized. Thus, understanding of Ethiopian efforts to adopt reforms—in the context of developmental paradigm—provides key perspectives and experiences to end hiding behind development if there is actual need to transform civil service institutions and save them from being simple cogwheels that conclusively carry out the wishes of politicians.”

A production-oriented private sector working closely with an interventionist government has been at the center of the rapid building of a successful
developmental state. Based on long-term institutionalized alliances among political power, the financial sector, and industrial capital, these state-private sector partnerships were crafted on the principle of reciprocity, such as connecting subsidies to performance, and acted as an incentive for productivity (Caldentey, 2008; Wade, 2010). Nonetheless, the reality on the ground demonstrates that the majority of Ethiopian business is characterized by short-term investments that are seeking for short-term returns and “hot money”. This makes profit, particularly short-term profit, a significant factor in the investment decision-making process.

The other characteristic of the developmental state is the existence of performance-oriented governance. Developmental states are found to enjoy support because they are associated with promoting rapid economic growth and providing economic benefits to both the ruling elites and the general public. Hence due attention is given to performance orientation and the delivery of services (performance legitimacy) to citizens rather than to the ballot (electoral legitimacy) (Johnson as cited by Musamba, 2010). In Ethiopia, state legitimacy is achieved through the ballot; however, the main shortcoming is that society has, arguably, not reached an equilibrium stage where the feedback mechanism between voting patterns and the delivery of services reinforce each other. Moreover, there is emerging criticism of the Ethiopian government related to election frauds and suppressive laws that “has narrowed the political arena”. Critics often also accuse the regime of having room only for weak, fragile, and puppet political oppositions.

To conclude, developmental states tend to manifest the following traits: economic nationalism (skepticism about neo-liberalism), strong government bureaucracy, and production oriented private sector, prioritization of economic growth over political reform, performance legitimacy, and focus on technical education. Successful developmental states have used the aforementioned traits to transform their economies and be globally competitive, to reduce poverty and inequality in their societies and by and large to enhance quality of life. In this regard, Ethiopia, a self declared democratic developmental state, lucks most of the manifestations of successful developmental states.

4.3. The Genesis of the Developmental State in Ethiopia

The first attempt to adopt a developmental state in Ethiopia dates back to the early twentieth century. Reformist intellectuals of 1920s like Negadras Gebre Hiwot Bykedagne, Blatten Geta Hiruy W/Silassie, Dr. Martin Workneh, and Ato Kebede Michael were passionate about the Japanese development model. In October 1931, the imperial government of Ethiopia sent a group of
government officials and intellectuals to Japan to study different aspects of that country’s development for use as a development model (Zewde, 2002). The first Ethiopian Constitution of 1931 directly modeled Japan’s Meiji constitution of 1890 (Zewde, 1990).

However, Ethiopia’s attempt to adopt the Japanese development state model was not successful for various reasons. The most notable one is the fact that the Ethiopian intellectuals did not conduct an in-depth study of the Japanese model (Jaleta, 2015). The imperial government’s commitment was also not up to the required level. The model was not supported by the objective reality of the then Ethiopia due to the great deal of difference between the two countries (Zewde, 1990). Some other external factors that contributed to the unsuccessful attempt to adopt the Japanese model included the Italian invasion and occupation of Ethiopia from 1936 to 1941 and the eruption of the Second World War in 1939 (Jaleta, 2015). Additionally, this attempt to join the first generation of developmental state was aborted by the feudo-capitalist orientation of the empire after the Second World War and its successor – the socialist military dictatorship.

In the contemporary Ethiopia, there is no agreement on the exact time when Ethiopia officially embraced the developmental state model. There are authors, for example Gebremichael (2013), who argue that certain elements of the developmental state were observed in the 1995 constitution. For others, the revival of the developmental state in Ethiopia has been affected by multiple interconnected factors. According to Clapamn (2013), the 2001 crisis within the TPLF and the resultant split of the party was one of the factors. The divisions within the party, among others, emanated from differences in ideology, on development strategies and the war with Eritrea. The victorious group then came up with its revisionist idea, declaring its commitment to building a developmental state (Clapham, 2013). Another factor was the surprising emergence of strong contestants for office in the 2005 national elections. EPRDF had admitted that its programs were not well-received by the people and that the party was forced to come up with new national development-oriented programs to win the hearts of the electorate. To this effect, the late Meles Zenawi’s government instituted the idea of a democratic developmental state, as a rebrand to their earlier ideology of a revolutionary democracy (Negash, 2012). Moreover, the ideological pitfalls of the neoliberal paradigm, which had led Africa into another economic dead-end and into a state of fragile, unstable democracy, were another source of pressure (Zenawi, 2011). Hence, the reemergence of the developmental state in Ethiopia is a result of contentious twists and turns in search of an alternative path of development that fits the reality of the country.
Jaleta (2015) claims that the Ethiopian model is drawn from South Korea, Taiwan, and China, that is, on the belief that the path to accelerated economic growth is through a strong developmental state that creates policy space, encourages and directs investments, and promotes a strong work culture and ethics among the population. The Ethiopian developmental state model reveals an emulation of the Chinese model, in that there is a de facto one-party state that prioritizes economic development over the democratization process (Jaleta, 2015). Although Ethiopia is a self-declared “democratic” developmental state, the country is facing sharp criticisms on its commitment to real democratic governance.

4.4. Grey Areas in the Ethiopian “Democratic Developmental State”

It is helpful to think of the developmental state as a state-led capital development process and a conscious effort at finding a short-cut to the advanced capitalist mode of development. In this sense, one notes that the developmental state model stands in stark contrast to the “Revolutionary Democratic State,” which can be seen as a Marxism-Leninism inspired doctrine in which the stopover in capitalism is temporary as the state is meant to steadily but inexorably head into a planned socialist economic system (Bekle & Regassa, 2012).

However, the Ethiopian approach toward development has been characterized by the doctrinal confusion of the democratic developmental state and revolutionary democracy. Though the country is a self-declared democratic developmental state, the ruling coalition uses the two doctrines interchangeably as if they are one and the same. Hence, there has to be a clear position on what the democratic developmental state is and what it is not, so as to shed light on the gray area.

The other gray area in the Ethiopian developmental state model is the quest for ideological hegemony and strategic policy-making, which contrasts with constitutionally recognized multiparty electoral democracy. Developmental states generally believe that they will attain state legitimacy through delivery of services to citizens (Edigheji, [2005]; Musamba [2010]), rather than through the ballot. As it has been mentioned above, most successful developmental states are found to enjoy support because they are associated with promoting rapid economic growth and providing economic benefits to both the ruling elites and the general public. Article 56 of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia constitution stated that legitimacy is achieved through the ballot (FDRE, 1995). However, the main shortcoming is that Ethiopian society, arguably, has not reached an equilibrium stage where the feedback mechanism
between voting patterns and service delivery reinforce each other. Additionally the scheme on how to reconciling the constitutionally granted multi party democracy and that of hegemonic performance legitimacy sentiment in developmental state model is not clear. That’s why critiques often accuse the regime for having room only to weak, fragile and puppet political oppositions.

5. Governance in a Developmental State

By governance we mean the manner in which power is exercised by governments in the management of a country’s social and economic resources. “Good” governance is the exercise of power by various levels of government in an effective, honest, equitable, transparent, and accountable manner (Smith, 2007; WB, 2003).

Good governance has eight major characteristics (UN, 2007; UNESCAP, n.d.). It is participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account, and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society.

Diagram 1: Characteristics of Good governance (UN, 2007; UNESCAP, n.d)

5.1. The Ethiopian Governance Status

The government claims that Ethiopia is an emerging democracy departing from its authoritarian past. There are appreciable formal attempts at capacity-building as the basis of installing the culture of democratic governance. There
is also evidence that there are considerable improvements in some indicators of democratic governance. Nevertheless, the reality on the ground, on some key indicators of democratic governance, remains utterly opposed to the formal rhetoric in official documents. The reality of Ethiopia’s democratic status, based on some key indicators of democratic governance, is highlighted in the subsequent paragraphs.

Based on the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), which measures the quality of governance in African countries on an annual basis by compiling data from diverse global sources, Ethiopia demonstrates notable progress at the overall governance level. Since 2011, as one of the top ten improvers on the continent, Ethiopia has shown steady improvement in overall governance. In 2015, Ethiopia ranked thirty-first in Africa and sixth out of the thirteen countries in its geographical region (IIAG, 2015). The same index indicated that the country has registered a considerable improvement of performance in safety and rule of law and in human development in particular.

Despite the surge in the overall governance status of Ethiopia, the index score of 48.6 (out of 100) is lower than the African average (50.1). Moreover, the progress is not comprehensive, with the country showing weakening performance in some subcategories and indicators (IIAG, 2015). The performance in some specific governance indicators was also reported as deteriorating. For example, the lowest indicator under the safety and rule of law subcategory was seen in accountability, with a score of 43.8. Similarly the county has performed poorly and slipped in score in human rights and participation. Particularly, the indicator “Free & Fair Elections” has fallen by 11.1 points since 2011 (IIAG, 2015). Transparency International in its 2016 corruption perception index also ranked Ethiopia 108th out of 176 countries, indicating a high degree of corruption. As per the report, the country is overwhelmed with corruption, which permeates all sectors, with land as a particularly important sector of corruption (Transparency International, 2016).

5.2. Challenges of Democratic Governance in the Ethiopian Developmental State

The challenges of good governance in a developmental state are many and varied. Creating an inclusive responsive state with efficient and effective institutions and accountable and transparent government that is based on rule of law while making the government the leader of the economy is not something one can do easily. Accordingly, the summary of the most critical
challenges of building good governance in the Ethiopian developmental state are as follows:

a) Harmonizing the ethno-linguistic based federal system and the quest of nations, nationalities, and peoples with the need to install a shared vision and national consensus;

b) Overcoming the historical legacy of feudalism, authoritarianism, and inequality;

c) Forming a capable state with an efficient bureaucracy, meritocratic public service system, and overcoming turnover and poor skill levels (Mebratu, 2015);

d) Dismantling and fighting corruption and rent-seeking behavior, which is deep-rooted in the current system;

e) The prevailing hostile relationship between the government and media, political opposition, and civil societies is an area of concern that impedes democratic governance in Ethiopia. Several reports (for example, APRM Ethiopian Report, 2011; Kelsall, 2013), have noted that journalists and publishers are being harassed and prosecuted for alleged violations of press and counterterrorism legislations (the Mass Media and Freedom of Information Proclamation of 2008, and the Anti-Terrorist Proclamation of 2009). There is also an apparent challenge with regard to civil society organizations. Civil society organizations have been pressed firmly in line with the government’s policy through the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamations, which restrain the scope of their activities and funding. The same holds true for the opposition parties. As of today (UNECA, 2012 cited in Jaleta, 2015), the ruling coalition does not seem to have a genuine belief that opposition parties can play positive roles in building democratic governance and national consensus. Hence, living under a constitutional democracy with the duty of protecting and enforcing human rights by harmonizing the relationship between collective and individual, and civil/political and economic/socio-cultural rights is a trillion-dollar assignment given the aforementioned track records.

f) Confronting the external elements that constrain the freedom of the developmental state to achieve its objectives (Zenawi, 2006). These challenges need to be met as we seek to build a democratic developmental state in Ethiopia. They remain as challenges in spite of the fact that, owing to the collapse of the “Washington Consensus” and the emergence of new global players, their toll might not be as large as it once was (Bekele & Regassa, 2012).

g) The challenges of democratically mobilizing people and resources for the developmentalist project and winning popular trust. As this sort of
mobilization towards the realization of vision set has to be carried out voluntarily in democratic state, it puts heavy burden on the government to strike the delicate balance.

Moreover, institutional capacity building of the public sector should be stressed here. Currently public institutions are strongly influenced by the ruling elite. From the point of view of equal representation, the higher positions in many governmental departments are assigned according to an ethnic-based quota system. Willingly or unwillingly, the bureaucrats are expected to operate in conformance with their ethnic affiliation rather than in pursuit of the goals of their organization. Because of this, instead of transparency, the desire to fulfill the wishes of the political agenda introduces the temptation for corruption that has become endemic in the functioning of the Ethiopian bureaucracy (Asayehegn, 2012). Therefore, if the Ethiopian government desires to use the state as a very important medium to tackle the chronic developmental problems (beyond empty promises and short-term political advantages to sustain power), it needs to improve the capability of its public administration sector and keep the permanent executive/the bureaucracy politically neutral.

5.3. Prospects of Democratic Governance in Ethiopia

The sharp focus of the Ethiopian government on economic development and the clarity of goals (eradication of poverty and becoming a middle-income country by 2025) manifest the ideological orientation of the government toward developmentalism. In this regard, the government has been working on important plans that have brought significant economic growth and poverty reduction in the country. These plans are the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), followed by the Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) (from 2005–2010), the Growth and Transformation Plan One (from 2011 to 2015) (MoFDD, 2010), and the current Growth and Transformation Plan Two. Despite the weak capacity of institutions (the capacity of the executive, availability and strength of the central planning, the quality of public enterprises to control the commanding heights, availability of national consensus and shared vision, etc. are all elements to be further explored), there has been an encouraging success story. For instance, poverty in Ethiopia is reducing at one of the fastest rates in the world. The percentage of the population living below the poverty line declined from 44 percent in 2000 to 29 percent in 2010 and to 23.5 percent in 2016 (UNDP, 2017).
The government has also set its vision on building a democratic state, a system of good governance and social justice based on the blessing and full participation of citizens. This commitment is clearly expressed in the country’s higher-level policies and national strategic plans. For instance, the vision of the GTP is “to become a country where democratic rule, good governance and social justice reign, upon the involvement and free will of its peoples….” (MoFED, 2010). Likewise in the same document, the economic vision is expressed as building an economy exhibiting sustainable economic development and securing social justice and increasing per capita income of the citizens.

Besides ideological orientation and national polices and strategies, the constitution (the supreme law of the land) itself can be seen as prospectively important for building good governance. To directly quote the preamble of FDRE constitution:

“We, the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia: Strongly committed, in full and free exercise of our right to self-determination, to building a political community founded on the rule of law and capable of ensuring a lasting peace, guaranteeing a democratic order, and advancing our economic and social development; Firmly convinced that the fulfillment of this objective requires full respect of individual and people’s fundamental freedoms and rights, to live together on the basis of equality and without any sexual, religious or cultural discrimination;....” (FDRE constitution, Preamble)

The explicit recognition of the whole range of human rights set in international human rights conventions in what constitutes one-third of the corpus of the constitution shows the country’s commitment, at least in principle, to democratic values and the principles of good governance.

The investment and remarkable development in economic infrastructure is promising. Thousands of kilometers of roads have been built to connect all states and districts (Woredas) of the country. The Ethio-Djibouti rail is also operational while other networks are in the pipeline. There is an astonishing boost in mobile phone subscribers. Despite the restrictive government, there is also growing private media. As the economy is booming, the expansion of higher education and production of a university-trained workforce in the country holds great promise and returns. All this will significantly increase the flow information (Jaleta, 2015), commodities, human capital, and the like, thus helping create a more enlightened citizenry. Having enlightened citizens is, in turn, an important tool to build democratic governance.
6. Conclusion

In this desk review, an attempt has been made to explore the status, the challenges, and the prospects of democratic governance in a developmental state by reflecting on the case of Ethiopia. It is far beyond the scope of this chapter to pretend to solve the puzzle that has preoccupied the subject of the relationship between the developmental state and democratic governance. The review also may lack comprehensiveness due to an inadequate literature review in the area. These are the limitations of the chapter. However, contributes to shedding light on the debate and hopes to stimulate further inquiries concerning the quest for democratic governance in the context of the developmental state.

Nowadays, it is common to witness a never-ending debate on democratic governance vs. development, which lucks a practical relevance. It seems a “false choice” and a sequencing fallacy form logical point view too. Hence, the author claims that future scholarship in the area should focus on practical harmony of the two than impossibility and incompatibility theorem. The chapter has also noted that Ethiopia has declared itself to be a developmental state. However, when we compare the characteristics of successful developmental states with the reality in Ethiopia, much remains to be done, especially in the areas of the autonomy and implementation capacity of the bureaucracy, and the incongruity between a shared vision (national consensus) and the quest for nations, nationalities, and people’s self-determination. The hostile relationship between the government and media, political opposition, and civil societies is also a bottleneck. Furthermore, despite the overall improvement of governance indicators in Ethiopia, the index score is still lower than the African average. Therefore, one is tempted to conclude that there exists a considerable gap between form and reality concerning the key governance indicators in the Ethiopian “democratic developmental state.”

The achievements Ethiopia has made in the ten years since shift toward the developmental state model are undisputed. Particularly, the improvement in human development index, infrastructural development, and expansion of higher education are promising. In addition, the explicit ideological orientation, policy, and strategic commitments and constitutional guardianship of good governance suggest it may be possible to install democratic governance without compromising development. Dealing with such a state demands appropriate innovation and a pragmatic approach in order to deepen the democratic governance agenda in the context of the developmental state.
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Notes

1. This paper was prepared for discussion at the national public administration conference “Administrative Resilience for Sustainable Development in Ethiopia,” held from September 21 to 22, 2018 in Addis Ababa. It doesn’t reference recent political developments and changes made by the current reformist government.

References


