

Development and Democracy –

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“The symbols of modernity, in the form of steel mills, chemical plants, automobile factories or squadrons military aircraft can be purchased on the international market but development is a complex social process which rests in large part upon internal innovative capacities of a society. Imports of foreign ideas, values and technologies have a major part to play but few societies in history have developed exclusively on the basis of such imports. One of the major tasks of the developing nations is to create, nurture and more often than not to rehabilitate their internal capacity to invent and innovate” Nicolas Jequier

Overview

A country's development is the business of every citizen. True development is a bottom up process that starts from individuals at local level and spreads to reach everyone. Development is not something to be handed down from officials at the top. The role of a patriotic government is to facilitate the citizens' creative and innovative activities. Development requires free-will and empowered individuals, therefore, democracy has a significant role. Development requires a holistic and balanced approach, in which education, economy, health, technology and good governance that must complement each other and develop together. EPRDF wants us to believe, that development is erecting tall buildings or building an isolated “the millennium dam” in the middle of a society with subsistence economy where millions are dying of starvation. Development progresses in stages and the first step to win over abject poverty i.e. preventing starvation and diseases and having decent shelter. Unleashing the creative power of citizens through democracy should be the immediate task of “Ye Limat Mengist”.

In this write up, I start by describing what development is. I then attempt to discuss the holistic nature of development as well as the importance of democracy for development. I also try show that development is multi-faceted and balanced process. I also point that. development is science and fact based process but not ideological. Let me start by describing what development is.

What is Development?

A first impression of development is that it is a progression of something from a small to a big, from a simple to a complex, from weak to strong, from dependence to independence etc. I think it is safe to say that, the development of a nation also follows similar transition.

A widely-accepted description of society's development is given by Gene Shackman and et al, They said that: “Development is a function of society's capacity to organize human energies

and productive resources to respond to opportunities and challenges. It is emergence of higher, more complex, more productive levels of social organization through the stages of nomadic hunting, rural agrarian, urban, commercial, industrial and post-industrial societies. It examines the process by which new activities are introduced by pioneers, imitated, resisted, accepted, organized, institutionalized and assimilated into the culture.”¹

At the expense of being repetitive, I would echo that development is successive emergences of higher, more complex levels of productive forces and the respective social organizations starting from the hunter-gatherer communities and progressing to agricultural, industrial, and post-industrial way of life respectively. Development is building society’s capacity to coordinate the participation of most of its members and their know-how with available natural sources to responsibly improve their lives.

Another description of development that caught my attention is that of Nicolas Jequier (quoted above) who puts it as: “Development is a complex social process which rests in large part upon internal innovative capacities of a society.”

This description also makes the point that development rests on the innovative capacity of the citizens of a society. Development is the continuous activity of citizens to invent, create or build, and innovate with the resources they have, to address their immediate and long term needs. Societies undergoing through true development must keep on moving from lower level to the higher level social systems.

At the minimum, development requires:

to educate and empower citizens so that they become the creative, innovative and entrepreneurial powers to develop the tools and mechanism they need to harmonize the relations among themselves and to overcome the challenges of nature including the dangers of hunger, disease and ignorance and pave the way for higher living standards.

to be respectful to each other and to the environment through system of laws and regulation that they craft to balance freedom with responsibility and to resolve differences in nonviolent and non-repressive manner.
to create an atmosphere where people are free to be creative and to have practical mechanisms to exercise political power and to monitor and influence the behaviors of their officials.

It is important to note here that the stages of development go hand in hand with the way how the majority in a society produce to meet their needs and wants. How societies produce have everything to do with the tools or forces of production they use, which in turn has to do with the level of technological developments. As such, hunter-gatherer communities use sticks and stones that they collected from nature. The agricultural communities produce with oxen driven plough and which is more advanced than the sticks and the stones. Then, the industrial, and post-industrial societies produce with power driven machineries and advanced communication methods. Those societies whose dominant production force did not advance beyond oxen driven plough are known to be underdeveloped. Those societies who are transitioning to industrial mode production are known developing nation while those who have completed the transition to industrial mode of production are called advanced nations.

Development is Holistic

Development of a society is a holistic and integrated functioning of the main organs of a society, namely, economy, education, health, democracy (good governance) and technology. I consider these as the vitals of society. Of these vital organs, Technology and Democracy have the central role in development. Technology is the main engine of development while democracy is the fuel that drives the development.

To envision the holistic nature of a nation's development, we can compare it with development of a child. In the development of a normal child, her or his physical as well as mental growth must go hand in hand. All the organs, the legs, arms, face, ears, eyes etc. grow proportionally. The intellectual maturity also should grow proportional with physical development as well as, the age. In the development of a normal child, it is uncommon to see enlarged legs while the arms or other organs are still small or the vice versa. They all grow proportionally. This is so because, the various organs in the human body function in such a way that the nutrients that the child's body needs are processed and distributed evenly by our blood to all the organs, all the way down to each cell that the organs are made of. The cells get proportional amount of nutrients. So, they grow proportionally.

In the same token, the development of a nation depends on what it produces and whether it distributes what is produced to all members proportionally. In other words, to develop to the next level, a nation, not only must produce more, it also must make sure that it has a mechanism by which what is produced can reach every citizen in a fair manner. It is important that every citizen has access to at least, the basic needs. True development of a society is not taking place if one group of the population has too much (excess) of anything, while the other group is unable to get the basic needs just as a normally developed child cannot have un-proportionally large legs and small arms.

Cells of a normal body must get what they need to grow on so that they enable organs to grow/develop which in turn will enable the whole body to develop. A country's development follows the same pattern. The development of each individual citizen is the foundation for the development of a family which in turn becomes the foundation for the development of the community which in turn is the foundation for the development of a nation.

There is another important point that needs mentioning at this point. It is about the interaction and interdependence between parts at various levels and the whole. In the case of a child, we are talking about the interaction and interdependence between each cell, the organs they form, and the whole body. In the case of a nation's development, it is about the interaction and interdependence between individual citizen, the communities they form and the whole nation.

The first obvious thing to note is that, the parts and the whole are inseparably connected. The second point is, the interactions between each cell or organ should complement each other and consequently the whole body. They are all interconnected, interacting and interdependent for the whole body of a child to grow. In the case of a nation's development the actions that individual citizens, and different communities take should complement each other to move the whole nation forward. That is, for development to take place, there must be positive (constructive) feedbacks at every level of the interlink. In other words, the technological, the good governance activities (democratic activities), the economic, educational and health

related activities of individuals, families, communities and the whole nation must complement each other at every level. If one destroys what the other does, then there is no development or progress. Again, development happens when the individual citizens, the communities that and the nation that emerges from them act together as interconnected, interacting and interdependent.

Democracy is Necessary for Development

To say development is bottom up process is to say that it is the people themselves who are the primary owners of their own development. This requires that they are empowered and are free to do what is right and good for them. In other words, there should be a democratic atmosphere that would allow citizens' participation in their own development. The following quote clearly shows why democracy is necessary to empower development. "Democracy raises human aspirations. It encourages individuals to take active initiative for their own advancement. It facilitates freer and wider social interactions. It releases greater social energy. It vastly increases the dissemination of information and the multiplication of new organizations. As the transition from monarchy to democracy was a catalyst for rapid economic advancement of Western countries over the past three centuries, the spread of democratic institutions today opens up greater possibilities for global development. "2

The process of development starts when individuals and communities willingly collaborate to address local development issues. In an attempt to illustrate that development is people's business, with an example, let's say, a local issue could be building water reservoir to be used for irrigation. In addition to coming together to collaborate, the process of constructing the reservoir involves, exchanging of ideas and the selection of the best way to do the job, gathering labor and material resources and then doing the actual work of constructing it. These are big tasks which need series of decisions. The decision making and doing the works can proceed in one of two ways. One way is, an individual or an authority of some sort, tells everybody, what and how to do the tasks at each step. Another way of doing it is to make collective decision by letting everyone involved have a say at each step. The first way, which is doing things under an authoritative leadership is, the way most things are done in undemocratic societies. This way of operating any work, let alone development, does not give the best result. The reasons are, it does not raise the aspirations of the participants. It does not encourage individuals to take active initiative. It does not facilitate freer and wider social interactions. It suppresses greater social energy. It does not increase the dissemination of information and the flourishing of new productive organizations.

The alternative way, a democratic way, which is to make collective decision on what and how to do the tasks by letting everyone involved have a say at each step is known to bring the best results. The reasons are, that the freedom to participate raises human aspirations. It releases greater social energy. It encourages individuals to take active initiative for their own advancement by doing their best for the collective good. It facilitates freer and wider social interactions. It vastly increases the dissemination of information and encourages doing things in a different and better way.

A democratic way to do work (development in our case) allows people to self-organize and establish stable patterns. In doing so, the patterns of creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, integrity, thrust, respect, equality and other relevant attributes emerge. People establish these stable patterns on their own by learning from each other, without the interference by outside

forces. That is, no one tells them to establish these patterns other than their own free will and experiences which were fueled by democracy. These patterns emerge spontaneously when the individuals in the community interact with each other for the common good based on the conditions that exist locally and with the simple rules of engagement that they formulate on their own.

Attributes like the patterns of creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, integrity, thrust, respect, and equality are very relevant, even crucial for development. Because, they help establish stability, thrust, confidence and continuity all of which are required for progress to take place. So, in a way, development is an activity from within, which, communities organize on their own around the development activities that they deem important.

This does not mean that those engaged in development should oppose external assistance. Be it financial, material or intellectual, external assistances are important. However, they are important only if the people who receive them are the decision makers on how to implement them towards their own development. People need to be trusted to do their own development. This should be the case even when they make mistakes, as they are the ones who can learn the quickest and who can fix them better. If there is no democracy and the assistance receivers are not empowered to decide on the assistance given to them, the alternative is the status quo which is a top-down development programs of the last fifty years which involved hundreds of billion dollars but failed to bring any development worthy of a name to the people of the developing nations.

Development as Multi-Faceted Endeavor

Development involves, at the minimum, education, economy, technology, democracy (good governance) and health care. These vital social activities should be dealt with in parallel as interconnected and interdependent development activities. Of these, technology and democracy play the central roll. Technology is the engine while democracy is the fuel with which the development engine runs on. Below is a statement or two why development needs all five mentioned above.

Education: Development requires educated citizens who are skilled, creative, innovators and entrepreneurs who can collectively overcome the challenges of poverty.

Economy: Development also needs economic activity such as production, exchange, distribution, trade etc. which is geared to grow, free of corruption, and accommodates the needs of both investors and workers and delivers fair distribution of wealth. But first and foremost, eradicating abject poverty the immediate goal of economy.

Technology: Technology is another requirement for development. Technology deals with improving materials production transportation, communication, energy generation, modern farming, advanced manufacturing. Technology is widely recognized for increasing productivity and enable better farming and manufacturing, travel and communicating faster.

Health: Modern education, growing economy and advanced technologies all need healthy citizens who work in them as well as healthy environment. Therefore affordable, health system for all is another requirement. A health system that focuses on clean environment and preventive measures in hygiene would enhance affordability.

Democracy: Education, health, economy and technology mentioned above can be greatly helped with good governance. Good governance that is the result of free and fair election that respects the rule of one person-one vote. Good governance ensures a social system that is fair, free, just and that discourages tyranny and corruption.

It is worth noting that all aspects of development, that is, education, economy technology; health and good governance are all interconnected and interrelated in that one affects the other. This is to say a nation needs educated and healthy citizens who have the skills and talent to develop economy and technology. who stand for their democratic rights and build a responsible government. They all must go hand-in hand and development needs to take a holistic approach.

Development is a Balanced Activity
As mentioned above, development consists of integrated interactions of all the vital development activities. Isolating one from the other would not bring a sustainable development. One example (among many) of such isolated, non-developmental project is the construction of the “millennium” or the “Renaissance dam” to generate electricity from the Nile River. At first, the project gives the impression of being developmental. But a scrutiny shows that it is not. It is an ambitious construction endeavor. At its full capacity, which, according to Wikipedia, may take up to 15 years to gain full capacity, is supposed to generate 6, 450 Megawatt of power. Depending on the electric consumption of an average household in the USA, one Megawatt can serve 650 to 1000 homes. If we exaggerate, and assume that a house hold in Ethiopia consumes the same amount of power as the house hold in USA, 6,450 Megawatt will serve 4.2 to 6.45 million homes. On its face value, making electricity available to these many homes sounds good. In fact it is what most of us dream for. But, is this project an integral part of development? Let’s give it a litmus test by asking some basic questions from a holistic perspective as it pertains to Technology, Democracy, Education, Economy and Health.

Let’s start from Technology. The dam is supposed to generate massive electrical energy. Does Ethiopia have the infrastructure for distributing the power to these many households? Have we developed the prior technologies that can effectively utilize all this energy? Are Ethiopians empowered to develop such technologies as, farming machinery, manufacturing factories, transportation and communication equipment, household technologies such as refrigeration, cloth washer and dryer, dish washer, grinder just to name a few, which, can use this massive power? In other words, given the low technological advances, it is unlikely that this massive energy (assuming it can be generated) can contribute to the development of Ethiopia. Democracy: Did the people living in the area (or the whole country) had (or have) a say in its construction? Were all Ethiopians who were forced to make economic contribution given alternative plans or projects to discuss and chose from? All indictors point that it was a top-down decision made by EPRDF and shoved on to the people in the name of development.

Economic: Who will gain economic benefit from this project? Did EPRDF clearly outline the distribution the revenue? Is there a track record of economic fairness by the ruling group? Is this the best investment decision economically? Is there a better or different way of doing the investment?

Health: Is the impact the project can have on people as well as on the environment (ecosystem) Studied?

Education: Does the project have enough trained people to make the project successful and sustainable?

Note that we can ask many more questions. The answer to each of the above question is no, indicating that the renaissance dam is an isolated one with very minimal holistic purpose or outcome. As such, its impact on the all-rounded development of the country will be insignificant.

Think about it: Does a child with relatively large heart (the organ) compared to the other organs (lungs, kidney, liver blood vessels etc.) grow healthy and lead balanced life because of his very large heart?

The renaissance dam is totally unbalanced undertaking, particularly when Ethiopia ranks 157th out of 169 countries in the Human development index (HDI) of the United nations. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education and standards of living for countries worldwide. It is a standard means of measuring well-being, especially child welfare. It is used to distinguish whether the country is a developed, a developing or an under-developed country.

Development is fact based or Scientific

Development happens only when the laws of nature (discovered by science) are applied to build the appropriate technological and organizational tools to solve relevant social problems. Development is possible through facts gathered from scientific experiments and the learnings built around them are applied to address the problems of underdevelopment. Development is not a guesswork, it is rather guided by science. Development requires thousands of skilled free thinking workers with scientific outlook.

Development does not have ideology. There is no such a thing as neo-liberal, socialist or capitalist development. If development has any ideology, it can only be scientific and technological. Let me pick “food for everyone” slogan as an example to make my point. We can feed every citizen only, if there is enough food for all. We can get enough food for all only if we harvest enough. We can harvest enough only if we can farm adequately. We can farm adequately if we have the right machinery, fertile soil, good quality seeds, moisture, and skilled farmers. And we can get all these only from science, technology, training-education, the right investment and by doing the actual work but not from this ideology or that doctrine.

Development is a grass-root effort of millions who have decided to engage in it to live a better life. They engage in development guided by their local conditions and by entering harmonious engagement with fellow citizens around them. Experience teaches that with the right initial conditions, self-organized local groups, over time, develop habits and patterns of creativity and innovation, hard work etc. which replicate and increase in scale. The replication of patterns facilitates the learning process to reach millions of people. In this learning process, good experiences can be amplified and transferred fast while failures will be discarded before being repeated. But all these can happen, only if the responsibility of development is left to free and independent citizens with their free will intact. If such conditions exist, the process of eradicating poverty, ignorance and disease and advancing towards higher living standards should be accomplished in a decade or shorter. It should not take forever.

The first and foremost role of government in development is to recognize the decisive role of citizens for their own development. Then, based on that recognition, to facilitate their local and national interactions. Another role of a government is to recognize and protect citizens' rights and their wellbeing and empower them to solve their basic needs and beyond. To help the scaling up of their success to regional and national level is another role that the government should play. Development is not a top-down process done either by a genius leader or powerful president or revered spiritual person or outside power.

It is true development does not happen overnight. It is gradual and evolutionary and will take reasonable time, but not forever. Development builds on prior works, as such we need to pay attention to historical precedents and use them as learning grounds. We also must recognize that the development process is not orderly and predictable all the time. There is some uncertainty too. The uncertainty arises from the fact that nation-wide patterns are the product of numerous local interactions, where, different localities have different realities but can control it through interactions.

But as mentioned earlier, citizens and their local interactions are the basis for development. Interactions provide the necessary energy to overcome the obstacles to development. Facilitating the conditions for free local interactions and self-organization is a key. Such facilitation can occur if there is democracy, thus making democracy a necessity for development. Ultimately, it is not government, but it is the local actions that determine whether a nation develops or stagnates⁴.

If one wonders why Ethiopia's development has stagnated, it is because the local people are not empowered to organize to solve their own problems. Past Ethiopian governments as well as EPRDF sees development as a top-down dictated process but not as a democratic process. Unless that changes, we Ethiopians remain a starving people. Forget development!!

In summary

The goal of development is to improve the lives of everyone in a country. For this to happen, each and every citizen has to be in charge of his or her development. Of course, by using mutual development as a guide. It is only then, that true development occurs. For citizens to be in charge, they should be able exercise their free-will they should feel free and independent. From then on, people come together in small and large groups and start interacting and organizing based on the rules they chose to engage in. These processes enable them to form a stable pattern towards reaching their goals. This stable pattern is the one that helps to develop tried and true practices which will speed development.

Development can advance faster if taken holistically by engaging in all its aspects. Development is not education only, or economy only or technology only or health only or Democracy only. It is all of them advancing side by side. That said, Technology and Democracy have prominent roles in development, the former as an engine and the latter as a fuel for development. If development is attempted by isolating each component, it will remain unbalanced and incomplete. But if all aspects of development are taken together and pushed in parallel and citizens are made the primary drivers of their development, the patterns they develop replicate from one corner of the country to the other quickly and the desired development can be reached faster. Democracy is not luxury but necessity for development.

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