Problems of Institutional Instability and Green Revolution
Bureaucracy in Ethiopia

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Allow me to take the liberty to respond to the concerns of two authors, Berhanu Tesfaye and Wonemhunegn Ezezew, who underlined the importance of institutional stability/change when considering green revolution and industrial decentralization in Ethiopia. In my previous postings I mentioned the need for institutional reforms passing. To bring the on-going discussion to another level I find it necessary to suggest ways of accommodating their concerns.

For the sake of avoiding unnecessary misunderstanding, I would like to summarize Berhanu Tesfaye discussion in terms of the concept of policy implementation style. This concept combines several characteristic of a policy making: policy goals, policy content, policy tools, justification for choosing and combination of tools and techniques, and modes of operation during the implementation phase.

Through illustrative examples Berehanu tried to point out that the Derg regime and EPDRF have similar policy implementation style, even if they differ in choice and combination of their policy instruments (the Derg being socialist while EPDRF being neo-liberal). Berehanu sees policy implementation styles as core problems of the governments in Ethiopia. According to him this problem should first be addressed in order to avail green revolution and industrial decentralization.

From a rather political approach, Wondemhunegn Ezezew in his article titled “Green Revolution: A Multipronged Approach”, pointed out the institutional impediments in realizing green revolution. “Without both internal and external peace Ethiopia will never be able to solve its chronic food insecurity problem, let alone join the club of middle income countries in the coming two decades. Either we democratize, improve our governance institutions, make peace with our people and our neighbors, or keep this country in eternal poverty and political instability.”

Brehanu from the economic aspect and Wondemhunegn from the political raised such issues which I understand as features of institutional instability in Ethiopia. To understand the types of institutional instability that relate to the design and implementation of green revolution and industrial decentralization programs, it is important I briefly discuss what I think as sources of institutional instability in Ethiopia.

**Essential Features and Sources of institutional instability in Ethiopia**
Indeed we have seen various forms of institutional instability in Ethiopia ever since the first attempt for structural transformation of the economy as planned in the first ten-year industrial development program of 1945. Since then an elaborated sectoral programs were worked out to bring about a structural transform of the economy and the country has since then experienced institutional changes at different levels and degree (For an overall discussion see Tsegaye 2007).
In Ethiopia one observes an obsession with radical and battle speed development since the 1974 revolution. To bring about a speedy end of poverty the Derg nationalized all lands and industries; formed co-operatives, carried out villagization, etc. During EPRDF there was a sweeping decentralization reforms and liberalization of the economy, among other things. Revolution and decentralization, though they constitute a sweeping, fundamental change in the political organization and economic property control, they have not yet precipitated a synchronous transformation of the socioeconomic system. It may be so that not all radical situations end in structural transformation.

Whatever that might be, since 1945, however, we observe growth of public bureaucracy. As I see it the Ethiopian bureaucracy did not grow as the society become richer and more complex needing for formalization and rationalization of all institutions. The public bureaucracy grew due to some formalization and by transforming the household, community and market functions to public utilities. In Ethiopia mostly the public bureaucracy grew as a result of controlling the civil society and the market. Regulation of the economy has become one of the major functions of the Ethiopian state.

As a result of non-participatory and top-down development that we have seen since 1945 we see parallels in boiling up of internal opposition. Most often development strategies and programs are designed by the Ethiopian state without the participation of the beneficiaries. Planning procedures are not based on the understanding of the critical ingredients of participation; namely participation in decision making, participation in implementation, participation in benefit sharing and participation in evaluation. During the time of Derg, the power elite suffer from top-down ism characterized by vertical political structure, centralized and monopolized policymaking, the absence of institutionalised checks and balances, and a uni-directional flow of power and influence that discourages bottom-up policy feedback.

The development programs of the various regimes in Ethiopia differ in their objectives, choices of strategies and mode of state intervention some being market friendly and some not. At risk of generalization, I may say that obsession with radical and battle speed development, growth of public bureaucracy and top-down development are essential characteristics common to all regimes in Ethiopia since 1945. Indeed the organizational set up of EPRDF is radically different from the previous governments by its principles and practice of decentralization. Yet the federal government has the fiscal string and due to lack of own regional analysis, local governments adopt the five year development program of the EPDRF party.

My purpose here is not to do historical and comparative analysis among the various regimes in Ethiopia. Rather, by way of refreshing your memory, I wanted to give you the institutional context and background to green revolution and industrial decentralization in Ethiopia. Given the swift practice and unstable institutional change traditions in Ethiopia how can we design successful institutional models of green revolution and industrial decentralization? I want to approach this problem by looking at sources of institutional instability in Ethiopia. Without going into details, I can mention three major sources of institutional instability that may contribute to bad performance of green revolution and industrial decentralization.
The first factor is related to instabilities that can come as a result of a policy or limit of
the reform. I call this policy factor instability and from the management point of view such
instabilities are under direct government control, i.e., they can be managed. A policy factor
becomes an inherent part of the causal mechanism when top management of development
helped set the stage for failure by ignoring the lessons from past performance assessments
and evaluations. Policy-factor instabilities results mainly from the formal distribution and co-
ordination of functions and resources. How to use the available resources in a legitimate
way is the main source of conflict and this is manageable if there is a complete
understanding of the needs and objectives of green revolution and industrial
decentralization in Ethiopia.

The second one is non-policy factors related to the collective behavior of the majority of
Ethiopian political elite (obsession with ideology, local identity, suspicion on claims and zero-
sum cognition). The third source of instability is external enemies of the country (natural
catastrophe, international commodity prices) and wars caused by geo-political factors such
as the Red Sea coast, the Nile water and religion. The geo-political situation of the country
has caused external aggression and threat since the second half of the nineteenth century.
So long us the given geo-political situation exists, it is unavoidable to be preoccupied in
building the fiscal and military base of the state and this will reinforce state functionality.
From the management point of view, external enemies are beyond central government
control.

To embark on the program of green revolution and industrial decentralization, it is
sufficient to find solution to the policy factor alone. There is no need to wait until such time
that one finds solution to the second and third sources of institutional instability in Ethiopia.
The non-policy factors are beyond the control of the government.

Changing the collective behaviour of the majority of the political elite in Ethiopia takes
time. It is related to the growth of critical thinking in our society. Education has to expand at
the expense of ideology. Ideology is a belief that one’s viewpoint on an issue is always right
while others seems simply to be wrong. It rejects innovation, is intolerant to other views and
promulgated in an affective way. In the Ethiopian society there is too much use of ideology
because of lack of expansion of education and knowledge development. I am hoping that the
current expansion of education in the country serve as a basis for the growth of critical
thinking in the country.

The use of too much ideology (partly mentioned by Brehanu) instead of scientific
management is mainly related to the expansion of education and it is something whose
effects will be minimized as critical thinking grows in Ethiopia. Local identity and zero-sum
culture, which are rooted in the land tenure system of Ethiopia (see Hoben 1973) will
disappear if urbanization expands rapidly at its current rate (4,7%).

My point is that green revolution and industrial decentralization should be conducted
within the limits of the collective behaviour of the Ethiopian political elites and geo-political
situation of the country. To ensure its’ implementation and performance we must focus
mainly on what I called policy related factors of institutional instability. To all intents and
purposes, the policy factor should not be generalized. When we discuss the model we should also be specific in identifying the appropriate organizational structure and management functions (see my example below). We should also consider the second and third factors of institutional instability since they constitute the context in which green revolution and industrial decentralization are expected to perform.

**Example of Green Revolution Bureaucracy**

In our discussion there seem to be consensus that green revolution in Ethiopia should be location specific and selective. If we agree on this the next step is to identify the type of organization structural necessary to carry out green revolution. Considering the factor of human capability in the country (management skills are scarce in Ethiopia), I am in favour of a bureaucratic structure which co-opt farmers’ representatives. The term bureaucracy should not be understood in its negative connotation. I am using it in the sense of providing the needed expertise, skills and organizational capacities and clear-cut lines of authorities to manage green revolution technologies.

At the national level, green revolution can fall within the responsibility of three ministries: Ministry of Irrigation responsible for the provision of and maintenance of dams and major canals, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. At the project level, namely, at the identified location of green revolution, there should be a single body of management (corporation) responsible for the co-ordination of various department activities. The corporation consists an irrigation department responsible for arranging the delivery of water and making it available up to the minor canals used by farmers. A mechanical and electrical department responsible for ensuring the mechanical and electrical equipment, plants and vehicles. An earthmoving department responsible for undertaking the clearance of sediments from canals. An agricultural research department and farmers’ organization which participates in the decision making process. In other words, there should be an organizational structure to provide and facilitate specialization in work tasks. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the specific functions and relationships within such system of organization. What I want to show is that it is possible to initiate green revolution if we agree on its objectives and system of organizational structure and requirements. I know that the collective behaviour of the Ethiopian political elite crops up in the management functions and organizational structure affecting performance. But if one has the appropriate green revolution and industrial decentralization system in place it may not be difficult to water down its role. The collective behaviour of the majority of the political elite cannot withstand for long challenges of a systematic development speed.

**References**
