

Ethiopia, Post-Feudal Development between 1976 - 2006

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1. Introduction

When I was asked in July 2005 to give a lecture on the occasion of the 2nd Littmann Conference in Aksum I was wondering why an economist and political scientist was invited to this conference. I never dug to find ancient goods, I always have walked on earth talking to people, finding out about them. But people have roots, deep in their history, hundred, thousands and even more years back. Monuments, books and art preserve the information of the history of human beings and speak from one generation to the next. I was told and finally convinced that a person with a background like me also can and should contribute to the 2nd Littmann Conference. And after all out of the 100 years of Ethiopian and German relationship I share already 30 years, that is almost one third.

It was in May/June 1976 that I came to Ethiopia for the first time. It was in the aftermath of the revolutionary upsurge in 1974 in Ethiopia. At the Freie Universität of Berlin (West) we had followed the process in Ethiopia closely. Now I wanted to see myself. Ethiopia became my first African country to get to know, 26 more African countries should follow during my upcoming work in and with countries in development. But I always returned to my first "African roots", that is Ethiopia. I came again in December 1979 to prepare a research collaboration between Addis Ababa University and the Technical University of Berlin, Federal Republic of Germany. In May to August 1980 I was heading a team of postgraduates from the Centre for Advanced Training in Agricultural Development of the Technical University of Berlin doing research in three rural areas in Ethiopia, Holetta, Alemaya and Awassa area. We were the first western group allowed to do research after the upsurge in 1974. We collaborated with the Addis Ababa University, with the Institute of Agricultural Research and the Horticultural Development Department. In the frame of the research topic "Production, Marketing and Consumption of potatoes in the

Ethiopian Highlands" (Börgel a.o., 1980)¹ we studied the organisational structure in rural Ethiopia in post-feudal times and tried to assess its impact, as far as it was already possible. I should mention that the post-graduate research team coming from Berlin (West) was formed by three postgraduates from the Federal Republic of Germany and three Tanzanians who had studied in Leipzig, in those days a city of the Democratic Republic of Germany. Before going back to their home country the Tanzanians had decided to do post-graduate studies in Berlin (West). With such a "united" international team I came to Ethiopia, then joined by Ethiopians. The Tanzanians found some of their teachers from Leipzig in Alemaya College, the West-Germans found Ethiopians who had studied in Giessen, in Berlin-West and in the USA, in Awassa and Alemaya College and in the Institute of Agricultural Research. Thanks to the Tanzanians in the team the West and the East Germans could say at least hello to each other. The East – West conflict is how. Germany is united, the Centre of Advanced Training in Agricultural Development, in those days part of the Technical University, situated in the western part of Berlin is now part of the Humboldt University Berlin. The East-West conflict however not only affected Germany, but it also had its impact on Ethiopia. The awful civil war following the overthrow of the Emperor Haile Selassie was also fuelled by the East-West conflict. But let me now return to the development in Ethiopia, in which the development of Tigray is imbedded.

2. Organisational Structure of Revolutionary Ethiopia and Post - Feudal Development 1974 –1991

Far reaching and radical changes started in the upsurge 1974. It affected all parts and the social-strata of Ethiopia (Pausewang, 2002). One of the pillars of revolutionary Ethiopia was the land reform (Börgel, 1981, p. 17-19). Decentralisation in all provinces was tried to be implemented. 60.000 young Ethiopian high school and university students, teachers and soldiers were sent in 1975 from the cities into the country side to teach the farmers the alphabet and explain their rights (Börgel, 1984, p. 6). This action was called "*Zemecha*" (development by co-operation). The alphabetisation in different local languages in mid seventies was awarded later by the UNESCO. I remember farmers in 1980 asking us, whether we brought something to read with us. They were so proud to be able to read and write at least simple things, especially their name. Ethiopian intellectuals, who had studied in Western and Eastern Europe and the USA came back right after the

1 Börgel, H. (Team Leader), Arend, B.; Jacobi, C., Kanyarukiga, S., Kullaya, A., Lemaga, B., Mogaeka, S., Prante, W.: Production, marketing and consumption of potatoes in the Ethiopian Highlands (Holeta, Awassa, Alemaya), Berlin 1980 (Centre for Advanced Training in Agricultural Development, Institute of Socio-Economics of Agricultural Development, Technical University of Berlin).

overthrow of the ancient regime. They thought that the upsurge in Ethiopia was a historical chance and that they could contribute to fill the ideological vacuum of the *Derg*, an interim military council, formed by 120 soldiers from different ranks. The *Derg* trained in military actions had hardly any ideas about the functioning of an economy and respective development, needed to overcome the backward Ethiopian economy. "Independent scientific socialism" was supposed to fill the ideological gap of the *Derg* and should contribute to hold together the centrifugal powers of the social classes and the provinces, until 1974 kept together by the authority of the Emperor.

But ideologies, intellectual fights among Ethiopian Marxists, which had started already among the Ethiopian student movement outside Ethiopia and had contributed to splits within the movement, continued in Ethiopia, followed by the white and red terror. The years 1977 and 1978 are from the retrospective the dark years of the revolution. There was hardly any family not affected by death or arrest of their mostly younger family members. Arbitrariness, fear, but also private revenge in those days have left their tracks deep in the Ethiopian society. The ideological warfare was accompanied by different inner Ethiopian freedom movements, some along ethnic lines. The civil war, which escalated in the eighties, stopped or deteriorated the first promising signs to overcome the feudal times. Forced recruitment especially in the countryside made the farmers, who just escaped the feudal times, which often meant bondage for them, again objects of the government, now military men. I still remember December 1988, I was sitting in Gimbi in the early morning at six o'clock in front of my small hotel, when I saw a group of young men, recruited the night before in nearby villages, all with their heads down, except one fresh farmer's boy face. It seemed that this young boy did not know what he would face. For me this boy was not older than 12 to 14 years. I never forgot his face (Börgel, 2002, p. 80 f).

The inner Ethiopian conflicts were overshadowed by foreign conflicts. In 1977 Somalia was keen on parts of the Ogaden and sent its troops. Ethiopia's demand for weapons from the USA were turned down by President Carter who saw human rights violated in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government then asked Cuban soldiers to help to defend them and bought their weapons in Moscow. There were times with estimated 6.000 Russian advisors, out of them 3.000 were supposed military advisors and 12.000 Cubans, out of them 9.000 soldiers in Ogaden. Civilian Cubans worked as medical doctors and teachers. Ethiopia in those days was definitely a ground, where the East-West conflict with its sometimes absurd appearances and deterioration could be observed. The tight friendship between the Federal Republic of Germany and Ethiopia was reduced in those days but never completely cut as the research cooperation between Addis Ababa University and Technical University Berlin showed. The well known German school in Addis Ababa, visited by Germans and Ethiopians, was closed, a small part of it could proceed on the ground of the embassy of the Federal Republic but only with German children. The Revolutionary Government established relationship with the German Democratic Republic to support the Ethiopian economy, the administration, to build up the security as well as to fill the vacant places of American and West-German researchers in Ethiopian colleges and the university (for details Haile Gabriel Dagne, 2004).

Despite the escalation of the war on different inner frontiers, especially during the eighties of last century and some definitely wrong and ill-devised development, organisational reform in the countryside went on. Let me outline for a moment the organisational structure in the country side we found in 1980.

For centuries the land belonged to the feudal government, the royal families, the feudal landlords, the churches and monasteries. Only a small part was under private and tribal ownership. And as such divided into small plots. More than 50% of the agricultural population were tenants, who had to pay 1/3 to 1/4 of the income from the rented land to the owner and were obliged to farm the plots of the feudal with his draught animals and to carry out all kinds of services for him. In addition, the peasants had to pay various taxes to the government.

The revolutionary upsurge in February 1974 set an end to these centuries of exploitation. One of the pillars of revolutionary Ethiopia was the land reform as proclaimed on 29th of April 1975. In those days it was the most effective and radical land reform in Africa. The proclamation (Proclamation No. 31, 1975) stated that all rural lands were the common property of the Ethiopian population and called for an immediate re-distribution of land. Without differentiation to sex, those persons who were willing and able to cultivate the land, including the ex-land-owners, were entitled to obtain land for their livelihood, not exceeding 10 hectares per family. On the assumption that an average peasant family could raise both crops and livestock sufficient to meet domestic needs, the proclamation prohibited the use of hired labour. This provision did not apply to women with no other means of livelihood or to cases where the holder died, was sick or old, to the wife or husband of the deceased or to his/her children who were not yet of age.

To implement the provisions (Proclamation No. 31, 1975; Alula Abate/Tesfaye Teklu, 1978) and to lay the basis for a self-sufficient unit, Peasants' associations were to be formed on a traditional village or administrative unit up to 800 ha. Membership was open to tenants, landless persons, hired agricultural workers and landowners with less than ten hectares. Former landlords who had more than ten hectares would be admitted after the completion of land distribution.

The Peasants' Associations were empowered to implement the distribution of land on the basis of equity, considering both the size of a family and the quality of the soil, to supervise land use regulations and administration of public property, to establish judicial committees, service cooperatives and an elementary form of Producers' Cooperative, and to promote the socio-economic infrastructure and villagization programmes.

"The Peasants' Associations were to be organised in a five-level hierarchical structure, of which the lower unit was the local Peasant Association and the highest governing body was the All-Ethiopia Peasant Association. In between, in ascending order, the wereda-level (sub district), the *awraja*-level (district) and the *kifle-bager* level (administrative region / former province). Peasant Associations would each coordinate local Association functions and set up a judicial committee to hear, and if necessary, forward appeals".²

2 Alula Abate / Tesfaye Teklu, 1978, p. 16.

Realizing the shortcomings of this proclamation, the government added supplementary proclamations, which defined duties and responsibilities more clearly. By 1977-78 there were 28,583 Peasants' Associations with a membership of 7.3 million households.

Along with the organisations of Peasants' Associations the organisation of Women's Associations took place. Each Peasants' Association was asked to organise the women in their Associations. But due to traditional cultural habits, quite a number of women were reluctant to organise at the beginning. The forming of Women's Associations proceeded much more slowly than the establishment of Peasants' Associations.

The outline of this basic structure, found in Ethiopia in the second half of the seventies of the last century, was slightly restructured along the process. In addition two kinds of Cooperatives were formed: the service cooperative and the producers' cooperative. To speed up agricultural development state farms were created. The government in those days did not distribute big-sized farms, formerly run by individuals, to the peasants, but put them under state administration. The main goals of the state farms were: to reduce the nation's import expense by meeting local demands for industrial raw materials, to increase the production of cereals for export, and to develop animal and fishery resources.

Whereas the countryside was organised in Peasants' / Women's Associations and producers' Cooperatives, cities and towns were organised in urban dwellers' associations, who have to run their own affairs, solve their own problems, and directly participate in political, economic and social activities. The urban dwellers are organized in a three level hierarchical structure: the lowest level of organisation was the Kebele, the next level is the higher *Qebelé* and, finally the central urban dwellers' association.

What began so hopefully with the aim to improve the situation of the majority of the Ethiopian people faded away under military boots. Only the southern part and some parts in the north and East went on with development. But north of Dessie, north of Gonder often were "no-go areas" for civilians. Military troops moved back and forward. Ceasefire never hold for long in the eighties. Displaced persons were settled far away from their homes. Forced settlement from the mountains into the valleys with the aim to improve the lives of poor people on the deforested slopes often failed. Hunger catastrophes in 1984/85 and in 1987/88 in parts of the country aggravated the situation, although usually quickly responded to with the help of foreign donors. It was still well known by the Ethiopian government, that the beginning of the overthrow of the Emperor Haile Selassie was the hunger catastrophe in 1973/74.

The agony of the eighties ended in May 1991 when the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front together with the Tigray People's Liberation Front overthrew the Mengistu government. Several attempts by critical and concerned Ethiopians in the end of the eighties, beginning of the nineties to reform the old military regime failed, a Round Table in London with different Ethiopian parties at the table side, willing to discuss to overcome the deadlock and isolation of the country, was dissolved shortly before the military take-over in 1991. This military

overthrow was followed by seven years of peace, restructuring and reforming. Eritrea became an independent state, Tigray, neglected during war time, attracted development aid and foreign donors.

2.1. 1991 - 2006

Let us have a brief look now on the development in the nineties and the beginning of the new millennium with a special focus on development in Tigray. Despite revolutionary rhetoric the way was paved for democracy and market economy rather quick. A reform of the administration established 9 ethnically-based states in 1994, followed by a new constitution in 1995. The first multi-party election in 1995 gave legal power to the so far interim government (1991 –1995), although disputed and partly boycotted by opposition parties.

What began so hopefully showed however signs of the old Ethiopia, which were intended to overcome:

The organization along ethnic lines proved to be a difficult approach in a multi-ethnic society. There are hardly ethnic homogenous states among the 11 regions. There are always ethnical groups who do not feel well represented in their direct environment.

Decentralisation, a precondition for development after the feudal rule of the Emperor until 1974 and the following centralized years of Mengistu dictatorship, was carried out in the frame of Regional States, their respective development plans, but was lacking – at the end of the nineties – transmission of power to administration below the regional level (*woreda/ kebele*). The lower administration levels had no own budget. There were signs that decentralisation was sometimes carried out with the help of affiliated parties to the ruling party.

The outbreak of military clashes along the Ethiopian-Eritrean border (1998-99) led again to heavy recruitment of young men. Displaced persons from boarder areas had to be looked after. Financial resources for these actions were drawn from the export of coffee and could not be used for the development of the country.

The organizational structure in the country side (e.g. peasant associations) was introduced from above, right after the feudal system broke down. Elected and appointed people of the different decentralised bodies often have the saying while ordinary farmers/women lack the experiences to express themselves. The years of civil war have not contributed to a democratic development, but were rather influenced by the commanding structures of the regular army or the different liberation movements. Men and women who have rarely participated in democratic decision making processes, who are used to be commanded or manipulated by feudal or socialist hierarchies, need special attention and time in how to articulate themselves in public and how to defend their own interests and not be misused another time by leaders. This process is the key to sustainability and institution building on decentralised level.

Despite the difficult political development until today the Ethiopian government tried to go on with the economic development of the country. It achieved - with the support of donors - promising results:

- Improvement of the infrastructure in backward areas
- Avoiding starvation in deficit areas
- Mobilizing people to improve their living
- Trying to reduce the dependency syndrome in deficit areas

Since mid-nineties Ethiopia is following a long-term strategy of Agricultural-Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI). ADLI envisages a growth process focussing on poverty reduction. ADLI paved the way for the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) is Ethiopia's guiding strategic framework for the period of 2005 – 2010. It is already the second phase of the PRSP process which begun under the sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), which covered 2000/01 – 2003/04. Development is directed to the main strategic points as there are:

- Human development
- rural development
- food security
- capacity building

With special emphasis on growth. Greater commercialisation of agriculture and the private sector are supposed to be on line the motor for growth³ the next years to come. The full potential of agricultural growth has yet not been realized. There is an enormous agricultural potential, but it is still under-utilised or not even used at all.

Under ADLI agriculture and industry were brought together already into a single framework of development, where the development of agriculture is viewed as an important vehicle for industrialization by providing a market base and not simply as a source of raw material and capital accumulation. Agriculture as motor for growth of the economy is however confronted with the small ratio of urbanization of Ethiopia, which could become a critical bottleneck for the domestic demand. Agricultural goods for the export market have to be internationally competitive.

In the meantime Ethiopia has proved that it can respond quickly to drought. The serious drought of 2001 directed a large-scale food security programme into poor and vulnerable areas. As a result of various programmes, public spending on agriculture, natural resources and food security has risen from 9 percent of the total government budget in 1999/2000 to 16 percent in 2003/04, the highest in sub-Saharan Africa.

But despite significant expenditure on the agricultural sector, agriculture remains low-input, low-value and subsistence oriented. Land degradation, population pressure put tremendous stress on the natural resource endowment. Production

3 Part of this chapter is based on the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 2000/01-2002/03; PASDEP Final Draft, December 2005.

increase is explained mainly by area expansion, while land and labour productivity decline or stagnate.

In Tigray ADLI was stated right from the beginning more precisely as “the conservation based agricultural development-led industrialisation strategy” (Tigray National Regional State, 2000, p. 3). It so emphasized the need for preserving the national resource base on which agriculture activities are built on. To promote development and change the Tigray government identified the most important policy areas for the region.

Food Security Coordination Offices, established by the Ethiopian Government in Tigray, Oromiya, Amhara and SNNP are geared towards capacity building and further development of food security strategies on different administrative levels.

An integrated food security programme, originally designed as pilot project in South Gondar with the support of the German Technical Cooperation expanded to Tigray with the financial support of the European Union. The rehabilitation of the “Watershed Areas” in South-Gondar and Tigray are taken already as examples by other donors and organisations. It is strictly implemented through state structures, to assure long-term sustainability and is emphasizing training of local partners and farmers. Especially innovative measures, carried out in the beginning in South-Gondar with German support have contributed to the success of the programme.

The transformation from an agriculture to an industry-based economy is the long term goal of the conservation based agricultural development-led industrialization strategy. Therefore Tigray identified as a crucial prerequisite for regional transformation the technical and vocational education and training. A dynamic private sector in the major cities helped Tigray to be among the first national regional states in 2000 to implement a tripartite partnership on regional level in order to deliver labour market relevant training.

To finalize: Development during the last 30 years has definitely taken place, although often hampered by political and economic deficiencies, civil wars and violating human rights. Germans, East or West and now together again, were all along the way to support. Sometimes they followed Ethiopians on the wrong track, but there were always on hand for changes to improve the live of the majority of the Ethiopian people.

Backlashes on the way to development have to be taken into consideration. A deeply rooted feudal society like the Ethiopian, which has been part of the East-West conflict, and with military rulers along the way, cannot be transformed within a decade into a prosperous democratic state. Democracy starts in the villages. It is a process of respecting each other, using arguments when different opinions stand against each other, but it also includes set-backs along the way. War with neighbours is no answer to the problems. Germany has learned its lessons from the two world wars. It is better to talk to the neighbours than marching over them. The countries on the Horn of Africa need critical companions on their long way of development and democracy. I hope, I am convinced, that Ethiopia has the strength and the courage to overcome the recent set-backs. The long history, also demonstrated in the monuments here in Tigray and in other parts of Ethiopia and also our gathering here hundred years after Littmann came to Aksum in 1906 as

well as the long term relationship between the two countries are signs of hope for me. We should share the next hundred years as we have shared the first hundred, hopefully with less ups and downs.

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