

The experience of renaissance in the EPRDF promotes success in deep renewal

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The ruling party EPRDF has a long tradition of evaluation in which members put forth critic on each other and themselves. This system has allowed the party to identify changes and come up with a strategy to cope with them. The party has continuously identified its weaknesses and replaced them with stronger ones through this system of evaluation. These sessions have also enabled the party cope with big changes in and outside of the party setting.

There were also moments when the changes needed were so broad that they incorporated the whole party. The party calls these broad schemes of change renaissance. The party had a period of renaissance during the days of armed struggle. Since its ascendance to the helm of state power, however, EPRDF has had two of them. The first was called the period of renaissance and it kicked off in 2001.

The period of renaissance provided the opportunity to deliberate on policy clarification and civil service reform. Accordingly, various policy documents were produced and distributed for the people. These include foreign policy, agricultural policy and industrial policy. These policies were put forth for deliberation among the public. They subsequently garnered considerable social acceptance and geared the country towards a period of rapid economic growth and development.

These strong policy documents were followed by ambitious five year plans that aimed at realizing the goals set in these policies. PASDEP, GTP I and GTP II are all the brain children of the policy documents prepared during the start of the renaissance period. Accordingly, the role of the renaissance was to equip the country with sound and ambitious policies and strategies that pushed the country forward on the way to development.

The tangible results that followed have become very tangible especially now that we have the opportunity to look back on them. Accordingly, the tangible results in the economic standing of the country have to do with its current standing as one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

With a double digit growth throughout the past fifteen years, the period of renaissance in Ethiopia has matched its name. In this period of rapid transformation, the level of poverty in the country has been halved. It has also been identified that at an equivalent rate of national food supply per person (290 kg/yr), the Chinese economic growth gained the stability to increase sustainably for decades to come. Accordingly, the status of economic growth in Ethiopia is analyzed to be equivalent to that of the Chinese economic growth in the 1980s.

The agricultural sector has enjoyed a tremendous growth in the past fifteen years. To corroborate that, the total agricultural harvest in the country stood at 73 million quintals annually in the mid 1990s. However, the autumn harvest alone this year has reached 280 million quintals. During the fifteen years of EPRDF's renaissance, the harvest by subsistence farmers increased fourfold. The national food supply has grown to reach three quintals per person annually.

Health, education and infrastructure development all enjoyed glittering spells during the fifteen years of renaissance as health and educational facilities have reached almost each locality. Access to all weather roads also increased substantially slashing the hours it took rural residents to access one. Electricity,

clean water and telecommunication have also gone mainstream within the specified time. The social realities in the countries have, therefore, changed for the better within the specified time.

The political and diplomatic realities of the country have also largely benefitted from the rapidly improving economic and social conditions. The level of political participation has increased in the country as demonstrated by the increasing number of people casting their votes in national and local elections. Diplomatically, the country has also leveraged a considerable negotiating power and influence through its cooperative and mutually beneficial foreign policy. By designating democracy as a matter of existence, the renaissance period worked a lot towards realizing the equality of nations, nationalities and peoples besides promoting their economic and political representation in leadership.

After this long march to economic development and international recognition as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, the prosperity and wealth generated in the country has seduced some into embezzlement. The sense of social service that has been the hallmark of EPRDF's long journey has gradually faded as leaders at all levels indulged themselves in the new gained riches.

This brought about a chronic lack of good governance that created a lot of anger among the public. After the deteriorating conditions led to the popular unrest a few months ago, the party has designed another period of renaissance called deep renewal. Unlike the past periods of renaissance, this one has been designed to have social ownership through which society would have an active participation in effecting the changes. Considering the experience from the last two renaissance periods, the EPRDF led government seems to be in a better position to see through the proposed changes.

Considering the problem of good governance has gotten to a point where it threatens the sustainability of the economic development achieved over the last fifteen years, deep renewal has averting this danger as one of its utmost goals. The strategy it pursued to realize that was ensuring unity and peace. Accordingly, the threatening situation has, since, then been controlled.

Deep renewal is a move designed by the party to reinstate the sense of public service that characterized EPRDF for the large period of time prior to the recent surge in rent seeking behavior. The period of deep renewal has been kicked off with a wide and deep evaluation that spans all regional governments and kicked off by the federal government. The solution packages put forward in deep renaissance include: staffing political office through merit and not mere party membership, raising ethical standard, implementing transparency, accountability and participatory measures.

Although evaluation is, as stated earlier, part of deep renewal, the change of personnel who are deemed unfit for their positions does not constitute the big picture. Along with the merit based system proposed in deep renewal, the evaluation has already helped procure capable personnel from either the party system or elsewhere that can re-galvanize public service to cater for the needs of the disgruntled public. It would, at the same time, be used to identify and get rid of those involved in rent seeking behavior. The understanding of this measure as a firing campaign is, thus, far from accurate.

Deep renewal would also embed in itself moves to raise ethical standard. In addition to ensuring the promotion of ethical principles (accountability, transparency, leading by example, integrity, honesty, etc) in public service, deep renewal sets out to craft a system that rewards ethical behavior and punishes transgressions against it. It would also ensure more participation by stakeholders giving them the chance to act as watchdogs collectively monitoring the actions of office holders.

