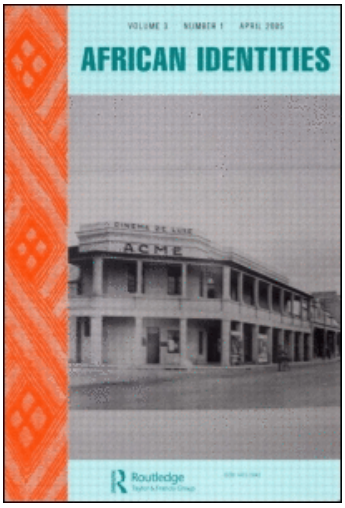

African Identities
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713611520

The EPRDF *vis-à-vis* Ethiopia's development challenges

Melakou Tegegn [a]
[a] Department of Sociology, University of South Africa, Pretoria

To cite this Article Tegegn, Melakou(2008) 'The EPRDF *vis-à-vis* Ethiopia's development challenges', African Identities, 6: 4, 445 — 475
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/14725840802417992
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14725840802417992

African Identities
Vol. 6, No. 4, November 2008, 445–475

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The EPRDF *vis-à-vis* Ethiopia's development challenges

Melakou Tegegn*

Department of Sociology, University of South Africa, Pretoria

(Received 15 July 2008; final version received 8 August 2008)

This article is about the major development challenges that Ethiopia faces. It also provides a critique of the policies that the government of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) follows to 'mitigate' them. It highlights the magnitude of these problems that have accumulated throughout the reigns of the three post-war governments and shows how bottlenecks have arisen in the transition process from unfreedom to democracy, and from poverty to prosperity. I have identified five major challenges, namely: lack of political democracy, gender inequality, environmental degradation, unchecked population growth, and the crisis of rural development. I argue that in as far as Ethiopia is unable to surmount these challenges, it will be impossible to do away with poverty and there can be no development. I see political democracy and freedom as key to surmount poverty and I therefore argue that as long as the EPRDF government suppresses freedom and rejects political democracy, it is unlikely that Ethiopia's ongoing situation of poverty and under-development will be resolved.

Keywords: freedom; development; gender; conservation of the environment; rural development; population growth

Introduction

> The economic record of seventeen years of military rule was to prove an unmitigated disaster. By almost every major index of economic growth, the country retreated rather than advancing forward. Wrong-headed policies, war, environmental degradation, a rapidly growing population, adverse external development, and a number of other factors combined to drive the economy to the edge of the precipice. Towards the end of its rule the government began to read the handwriting on the wall. (Chole 2004, p. 193)

Under-development is not absence of incremental change *in toto* in the economic sense but the incompatibility of that incremental change with the demographic, political and social changes required for the provision of a better life for the population at large. In that relative sense, the state of poverty and under-development that was rampant in Ethiopia under the military rule has not improved under the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). In fact, it appears that poverty and under-development have increased and that Ethiopia is now worse off than it was under the military Derg as some surveys suggest (UNDP's Human Development Reports since 1987; World Bank 2005). From Eshetu Chole's statement above, one has only to substitute 'the EPRDF' for 'the military' to describe the current state of poverty, under-development and political crisis in the country.

*Email: melakoutegegn@yahoo.com

ISSN 1472-5843 print/ISSN 1472-5851 online

DOI: 10.1080/14725840802417992
http://www.informaworld.com

Ethiopia's standing according to the UN's Human Development Index (HDI) has been consistent ever since the Human Development Report began in the early 1980s. In 1983 the Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) contended that Norway was the best place to live in and Ethiopia the worst. By 1987, Ethiopia ranked 111 out of 130, in 1995 it stood at 169 out of 174 and in 2005 it stood at 170 out of 177 (UNDP 1983, 1987, 1995 and 2005). Indeed, a country's HDI ranking can be taken as one indicator of its poverty and under-development. The measurements and criteria of under-development used in the HDI is a clear break from the erstwhile economic–reductionist view of development that had been dominant for too long. The reductionist school used economic criteria only as indicators of development such as GNP/GDP. The HDI changed this. The meaning of development is no longer merely economic growth: it also includes political and social issues and indicators such as the state of human rights, women's rights and environmental protection.

Although it does not represent a major shift from the criteria used by the UN, the HDI standards of well-being and quality of life are now real indicators of human development. Well-being and quality of life both deal with real issues involving the deprivation of communities and individuals in a comprehensive way. People become poor when their capabilities to overcome the problems that they face in order to live a decent life are deficient. Though what is visible in poverty is the material deprivation in terms of basic human needs such as food and shelter, in fact material deprivation is a symptom of the principal deprivation at the level of social and political capabilities. Ethiopia's poverty can only be described in this manner since two gigantic obstacles are the main factors for the deprivation of the capabilities of communities and individuals. These obstacles are the prevailing political and social structures. Apart from food and shelter, humans need security and peace to live without fear and threat, and political rights to regain all capabilities of which they may artificially be deprived. Ethiopians live in an uninterrupted state of fear and intimidation. The demand for human and democratic rights has always been met with ferocity. Their lives are totally controlled by a body completely alien to them – the 'state'. The obsession of the 'state' is to control, but it is inept when it comes to generating development. The people are neither let free to control the factors that determine their lives and generate development in their own way nor is the state capable of generating it.

One means of regaining deprived capabilities and therefore of empowerment is education. For individuals and communities there is a certain level of knowledge-ability that is required of them in order to live a life of conscious involvement (producing and reproducing, for instance) and most of all in order to make informed choices, both in their day-to-day lives and in making political choices that are of a strategic and long-term nature but that affect them as part of the collective as a whole. Education is knowledge and knowledge is power. It is through education that social capital can be built as a crucial base for an emerging civil society and social development as a whole. The fact that poverty in Ethiopia prevails indicates the low level of social capital whose basis is knowledgeability that in turn can only be acquired through formal or civic education. The state of education in Ethiopia is one of the poorest in the world.

The health profile is equally bad. Health care has simply never matched population growth and as a result public spending on health has not increased.

Ethiopian society is ridden with major diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and so on. People contract diseases that are easily controllable but due to lack of civic education on health and sufficient investment in the health care system they suffer and many die an early death.

> Of 1.9 million children born each year, 230,000 (12%) die before reaching their first birthday; another 160,000 (8%) die before their fifth birthday. Major causes of death in infancy and early childhood are acute respiratory infection, diarrhoea, nutritional deficiencies and measles. These account for 80 % of deaths of children under the age of 5 years. (EEA 2000, p. 107)

Table 1 and Figure 1 indicate the magnitude of the problem of public health and poverty in Ethiopia. Figure 1, as well as the World Bank's 2005 Report on Well-being and Poverty in Ethiopia, show that Ethiopia has not fared any better during the EPRDF period and that poverty has not been reduced at all.

Ethiopia's state of poverty is indissolubly connected to the general state of unfreedom in a number of ways. As recent development theories have it, poverty as a totality of capability-deprivation is also related, in the case of Ethiopia, to the low level of knowledgeability of society about the conditions that govern its existence. A high level of illiteracy, prevalence of tradition and traditional practices heavily impacting on depriving the capabilities of women and children in particular, insufficient levels of modern education and the low level in quality of the existing modern education system all add up to deprive society of its awareness of the conditions that govern its existence.

Freedom disentangles the social inertia of the hitherto marginalized. Freedom opens the road to free participation, free expression, and the development horizon in general. With freedom people can express their creativity as it is freedom that unleashes the ingenuity of humans. In Ethiopia, it is this particular aspect that has been stifled for too long by the authoritarian regimes. The EPRDF is no exception.

It is now necessary to investigate the areas of development that are crucial for Ethiopia's poverty and see how society is prevented from participating in alleviating it. That is the link between poverty and unfreedom as a hurdle for popular participation and as a fetter to the emergence of civil society. Both in the immediate and long-term sense, there are issues that require solutions on the one hand but which cannot be attained without the popular participation, i.e. participation by the civic sector. As we will see, the dominance of the government as the sole actor of development and poverty eradication has led the country astray. Let us now examine these challenges, namely: lack of freedom/political democracy; gender inequality; environmental degradation; unchecked population growth; and the crisis of rural development.

Table 1. Major indicators of health status in Ethiopia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Indicators	Sub-Saharan Africa	Ethiopia
Infant mortality rate	97/1000	111/1000
Child mortality rate	114/1000	161/1000
Maternal mortality rate	7/1000	10/1000
Life expectancy	50 years	48 years
Access to safe water	51%	25%

Source: UNDP, 1997, p. 131

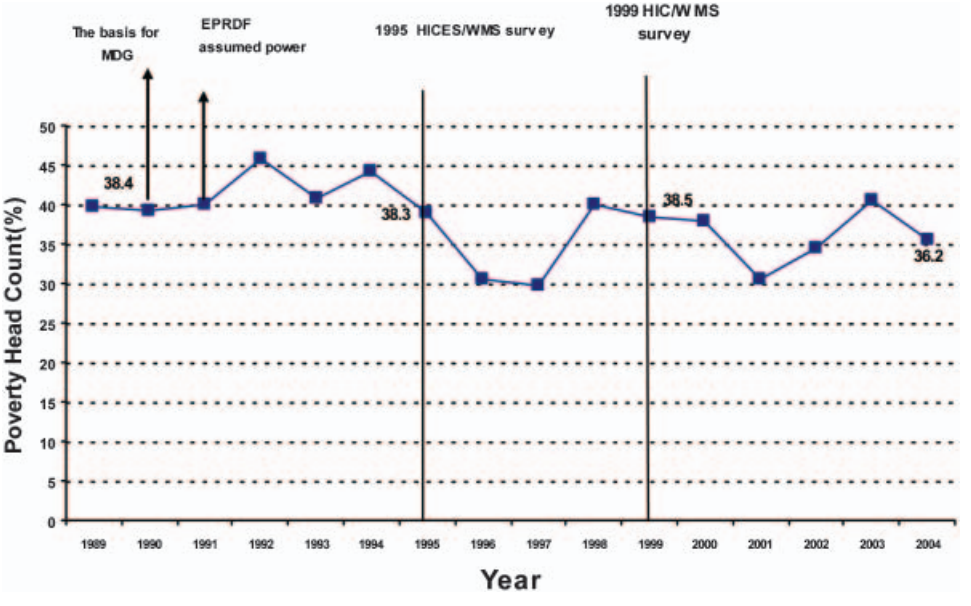

Figure 1. Evolution of poverty incidence between 1989 and 2004 (World Bank 2005, p. iii).

Lack of freedom and political democracy

Has the present government 'delivered' on the challenges facing the country? Regrettably the record of the EPRDF on political democracy has thus far been dismal. Suppression of official opposition and imprisoning its leaders, literally banning civic organizations by law (see the new draft law on civic associations), closing down the independent media, controlling or abolishing trade unions, stealing elections and clamping down on the opposition, killing close to 400 persons and jailing close to 11,000 persons in labour camps, and so on, are the well-known record of the EPRDF on rights and political democracy. This practice is strictly in line with the EPRDF's hotchpotch formula called 'revolutionary democracy', which in content is neither revolutionary nor democratic. Although the prime minister pretends to be knowledgeable and theoretical, we have not witnessed anything that resembles a conceptual construct to elaborate or support this formula that is declared to be the creed of the EPRDF.

Democracy and freedom constitute the pivotal key link to Ethiopia's development. All the three post-war regimes have suppressed freedom and denied society the fruits of democracy. As a consequence, Ethiopian society wallows in a mire of abject poverty, under-development and sporadic famines. In face of this historical necessity, the EPRDF's principal agenda is setting up mechanisms to deprive society of freedom. The two-track policy that it had followed until 2005 constitutes an official and constitutional recognition of freedom but its suppression in practice using a number of techniques. The 2005 election was a landmark in the contemporary political history of the country, in which society displayed its utter disgust and opposition to the EPRDF regime. In the post-2005 situation, therefore, the EPRDF is displaying its true colours and makes no pretence of being democratic.

The new law on associations (i.e. civic associations) that makes forming a civic organization impossible is one example. This will undoubtedly have further implications, particularly in exacerbating poverty and under-development.

The prevailing unfreedom has also generated a great deal of conflict. Most of this is social in nature but takes the form of ethnic disputes. Despite the EPRDF's rhetoric on proclaiming the right of Ethiopia's ethnic groups to self-determination including the right to secession, problems that arose as a result of ethnic inequality still prevail. The impact of these ethnic-based conflicts is enormous on Ethiopia's beleaguered economy, clearly indicating that political problems created by unfreedom directly contribute to exacerbating poverty and under-development.

Gender inequality

Poverty as capability-deprivation is starkly clear in the case of Ethiopian women. The deprivation of women's capabilities occurs in crucial categories of life, domains of life that determine not only choices (by women) and their agency but also their very existence. These categories are economic, social, ideological and political. Women's capabilities are deprived at all these levels. These deprivations occur mostly because women constitute the female sex, while some happen to women simply as members of society. On the other hand, these categories are also inter-related and reinforce each other; the deprivation at one level reinforces the other at a different level. The prevailing construction of sexuality and gender relations/roles, which is traditional through and through, for instance, constitutes deprivation at the ideological level and reinforces deprivations at the economic, social and political levels. Let us now see the state of the deprivations at various levels.

In Ethiopia's two major traditional modes of production, peasant farming and pastoral livestock production, women are largely deprived of property ownership. In peasant livelihood systems, land rights are mainly for men. Where women are entitled to own land, it is always men who benefit as women have no access to the land and farm income. In almost all pastoral communities, women have no right to property ownership. Lack of property rights and ownership in traditional formations has made women completely dependent on their husbands for their income. Lack of property ownership has debilitated the capabilities of women.

One important factor concerning the deprivation of women's rights at home and within society is discrimination in employment. Women workers, particularly in the service sector (mainly hotels and restaurants), are underpaid, and the numerous women domestic workers employed by individuals are paid even less. Unemployment among women is very high compared to that of men. The presence of women among the employed is minimal. This constitutes one category of deprivation while the level of their employment constitutes another. Within the same civil service for instance, a very high percentage of women civil servants work in the lower echelons as cleaners and coffee-servers and very few work in the administration and managerial posts. Though the low-level absorptive capacity for employment in the civil service and private sector affects both sexes, the gender bias that sees women as child-bearing and child-rearing also plays an important role in making the presence of women in the workforce small. Another factor is the low incidence of girls/women in education and vocational training. An unfavourable traditional attitude toward working women also exacerbates the small presence of women in the workforce.

Education enhances the knowledgeability of the woman, impacting on her power to make her own choice, whether in employment, in marriage or in deciding on the number of children she can raise in a life that is meaningful for her and the family. This has a direct influence on issues of population that in turn impact heavily on the state of poverty. Ethiopian women suffer from the worst form of social exclusion: lack of education. Traditional perceptions always require the boys to be sent to school, as the girl child is needed for the drudgery of domestic work. Those who struggle to go to school drop out for one reason or another, the major factors being having no time to study because of housework, early marriage and so on. Girls are expected to undertake a number of household chores that interfere with their education. A great many of them do all manner of tasks including cooking, cleaning, laundry and running errands. School enrolment in Ethiopia is like a pyramidal structure in which the relative number of girls dwindles as they move to higher institutions. Women and girls in Ethiopia are excluded from education, but what does that mean and how does that impact on the perpetuation of poverty and under-development? The cumulative effect of all these factors clearly shows that Ethiopian women are systematically deprived of their rights and capabilities. This in turn has a great impact on the deterioration of the state of poverty and under-development.

It is the social position that women occupy in society and their culturally defined functions that contribute to the deterioration of their health. Cooking is the most important function specifically designated to women. The other activities associated with cooking such as fetching water, collecting firewood, and wood- and charcoal-burning cause ill-health in most women. As Abonesh H. Mariam noted of rural women in the discussion journal *Reflections*:

> Women in rural areas on the average spend 14–16 hours laboring under difficult conditions where the basic necessities such as clean water and fuel for cooking are not available. Fetching water and firewood means a long walk from home and back, often barefoot, carrying heavy loads on their backs or head for hours and negotiating difficult terrains. Moreover, they collect and wash/use contaminated water and cook in an air-polluted environment. Hence, women and their children spend most of their time in an unhealthy atmosphere that contributes greatly to ill-health. (Panos Ethiopia, 2000b, pp. 24–25)

In addition, when women fall ill, they delay seeking care for as long as possible as everything in the household depends on them. Abonesh continues: 'When women fall sick, they delay care-seeking, as they give less priority to their personal needs. It is very common for women to wait until they are unable to move and do their daily chores' (Mariam 2000, p. 25). In fact, this is also true of urban women.

The most universal form of violence against women (VAW) in Ethiopia is the prevalence of rape and marriage by abduction. Rape has now become the scourge of women from all walks of life and a national shame. The increasing rate of rape cases has exposed three fundamental facts: the pervasive nature of the pandemic; its dreadful implications (both physically and psychologically); and the alarming apathy of the EPRDF government and its law-enforcement agencies. Rape occurs throughout Ethiopia. According to the Ministry of Health document on gender mainstreaming in the health sector it is estimated that three women are raped each day in each of the 28 *woredas* (districts) in Addis Ababa, adding up to an alarming total of 30,660 rape cases every year (*The Reporter*, 19 March 2005). Another startling dimension of the pandemic is the widespread nature of the culprits. They come from all walks of life: peasants and pastoralists, rich and poor, elders and

youngsters, fathers, uncles, priests, sheikhs, soldiers, officers, police, politicians. In a care centre for victims of rape in Addis Ababa called the Integrated Family Services Organization (IFSO), ten of the first rape victims reported to the centre had been raped by their own fathers. One of the victims who shared a bed with her parents was raped by her father while the mother slept beside him in the same bed (*The Reporter*, 19 March 2005). In face of such a rampant threat, Ethiopian women live in a constant state of fear. What makes this fear so terrible is the fact that the attacker could be anyone.

In the era of AIDS, rape has reached extremely dangerous proportions as its victims, if infected with the HIV virus, will assuredly die an early and painful death. At the IFSO centre, among the first to report rape cases, out of 185 cases six were HIV-positive. It has been claimed that HIV-positive men deliberately infected girls and young women by raping them (Panos Ethiopia 2000a, p. 63). Despite the fact that women face a life of such terror, the EPRDF government and its law enforcement agencies have displayed an alarming apathy. Even more shocking is the fact that the Women's Affairs Bureau under the Prime Minister's Office and one of its parastatals, the Addis Ababa Women's Association, withdrew from the anti-rape campaign launched by NGOs in 2001. It was this disturbing indifference that compelled a woman activist to state that 'a government that doesn't enforce its own laws to protect women from rapists and attackers is an accomplice of the crime' (Panos Ethiopia 2000a, p. 6).

A survey by Kasaye Mulugeta, conducted among high school students in Addis Ababa and its environs reports:

> A total of 140 female students were involved in the study. The prevalence of completed rape and attempted rape against female students was 5% and 10% respectively. The age range of those against whom actual rape was committed was between 12 and 13 years, and 85% of the rape victims were less than 18 years of age. Of the total respondents 78% believed that rape was a major problem constraining their educational performance. Among the 72 girls who reported they had been raped, 24% had vaginal discharge … Social isolation, fear and phobia, hopelessness and suicide attempts were reported in 33%, 19%, 22% 6% of rape cases respectively. It was concluded that the prevalence of sexual violence among high school students is a serious problem. Considering that this data provides only a very small sample of the experiences of female students in Ethiopia, one can imagine the extent of the danger that the society is facing. (Panos Ethiopia 2001, p. 14)

There are also a number of factors categorized as harmful traditional practices affecting women's health. The most prevalent is the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM is socially condoned almost universally and there is no region in the country where the practice does not prevail. There are three major forms of FGM, the first of which is infibulation (or Pharaonic as it is known in Sudan), practised in pastoral and some other lowland communities. That is the most ferocious and brutal. The second variety is excision, which is common in most highland and temperate zones and involves the removal of the 'clitoral hood with or without excision of part or the entire clitoris'. The third type is the clitoridectomy, which involves the 'removal of the clitoris together with partial or total excision of the labia minora' (NCTP 2004, p. 3). In all cases, the most sexually sensitive organ of the woman, the clitoris, is removed, thereby depriving the woman of sexual satisfaction for the rest of her life. FGM is one of the most brutal human rights violations of women. FGM is a pandemic occurring throughout the country; that is, in 1998 72.7% of Ethiopian women had been circumcized.

> High prevalence is found mainly in six of the ten regions including: Afar with over 90%, Harari, Amhara, and Oromiya regions with about 80%, Addis Ababa and Somali regions about 70%. Beni Shangul Gumuz, Tigray and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) fall in the intermediate group with prevalence rates under 60%. (NCTP 2004, p. 4)

The same study also indicates that 62% of the FGM in Ethiopia is due to clitoridectomy, 19% due to excision and only 3% due to infibulation.

Other forms of VAW include early marriage where the girl child is married off at the age of seven, eight and up to fifteen years. The prevalence of early marriage in Ethiopia is 54.6% (NCTP 2004, p. 10). What is more surprising is that the difference in the prevalence of early marriage between rural and urban areas is not significant at all (56.5% rural and 48.9% urban) in a country whose two successive governments have embarked on a policy of the 'woman question' for 30 years between them. Early marriage literally debilitates the life of the girl child resulting in the discontinuity of the girl's education, thereby permanently depriving her of her capabilities. Early marriage also results in early pregnancy and motherhood, effectively ending her chances of personal endeavour. The direct negative consequence of early marriage on the girl child is what is known as fistula, which involves damage to the internal sexual organs upon child delivery. Child mothers with fistula cannot control the flow of their urine as a result of the damage undergone during delivery. There are more than 9,000 reported cases of fistula in the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital (*The Reporter*, 11 September 2005). Fistula can only be cured by an operation in a fistula hospital. There is only one fistula hospital in the entire country whereas early marriage prevalence is 54.6% nation-wide and a great many of the girl mothers fall victim to fistula.

Abduction and forced marriage by abduction is another violent phenomenon that is widespread in Ethiopia and is often accompanied by extreme violence, including rape, continuous beatings and torture. As the NCTP study (2004, p. 17) states, abduction at the national level in 1998 stood at 69%: furthermore

> 52 of the 65 ethnic groups in whom the survey was conducted have an MBA [marriage by abduction] occurrence of 50% or above. In six of these ethnic groups (Basketo, Dasenech, Hamer, Koyra, Zeyse and Worji) the occurrence rate is 100%. Five of them are in SNNPR [Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region] while one, Worji, is in Oromiya Regional State. Likewise, the rate is between 90% and 99.5% in thirty ethnic groups. The rural/urban occurrence is reported to be 72% and 59.2% respectively.

Domestic violence in the form of wife-beating is also widely perpetrated against women. Although it is difficult to come up with figures, wife-beating is so common in the country that it has almost become 'norm'. The World Bank (2005, p. 45) report on Ethiopia states that wife-beating is a 'cultural problem'. Wives are beaten for numerous reasons, the most common of which is disobeying the husband. Unquestioned obedience to the husband is preached by the two major religions in the country, Islam and Coptic Orthodox Christianity, and is sanctified by the 'holy men'. The absolute obedience of a wife to the will of her husband has become as religious as any traditional belief.

This state of affairs has a great impact on the lack of assertiveness on the part of Ethiopian women. The process of moulding women to become obedient to their husbands begins with the upbringing of the girl child. From childhood, girls are even taught how to sit and walk, how to eat, drink and talk: 'You are a girl, talk like this and sit like that' is the norm in all Ethiopian communities. In addition, religious ethics are added to make the whole thing holy and sanctified by the dominant religions.

Sexual harassment is a major form of violence against women. This is a common offence perpetrated by young men, employers, bosses and teachers. It is hardly seen as an offence, let alone as violence. A great many women also interpret harassment as a compliment to their looks. However, the borderline between harassment and rape or abduction is so thin that the consequence is debilitating to young women and girls. At Addis Ababa University where the brains of the younger generation are supposedly assembled, the worst forms of sexual harassment take place followed by horrendous forms of violence. In the last six years, more than four girl students at Addis Ababa University have been stabbed to death for refusing to go out with boys who invited them. Liquid acid has been thrown in the faces of few girl students, resulting in permanent damage. Employers and bosses and a great many teachers ask for sex in return for favour in employment and grades.

Ethiopian women are beyond doubt politically disempowered. Although it is true that they are largely excluded from the altars of power in many parts of the world, including some supposedly advanced countries, in Ethiopia disempowerment is absolute. Women are not just politically unrepresented and excluded from decision-making bodies and processes, which is a typical phenomenon in Africa. They have also lost all their political capabilities to advance their cause. Every avenue enjoyed by women in other countries is closed to Ethiopian women. For instance, they have no means of influencing policy-makers so that law enforcement agencies implement the law to defend women from the worst forms of violence unleashed against them. Groups that advocate women's rights are seen as adversaries and with suspicion, and at times are openly threatened. The Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association was banned for a while because they exposed the plight of a young woman who was almost killed by an attacker, a case that embarrassed the Minister of Justice at the time. In 2002, the Oromiya Regional Council passed a bill tacitly recognizing polygamy. NGOs who signed a petition addressing the Oromiya Regional Council, demanding that the decision to be reversed, were openly threatened by the head of the Oromiya regional government. The EPRDF has its own front 'women's organizations' in each region attached to the ruling parties there, and these are the only organizations that are supposed to speak on behalf of women. But the purpose of the EPRDF's organizations is to advance the cause of the party and that prevents them from advocating women's rights. This is a fundamental problem for women in Ethiopia, and as this is a policy followed by the ruling party, it constitutes political exclusion. Precisely because of this structural problem, women are also excluded from the processes that devise the legislation and policies that concern them. From the days of the first enactment of the country's constitution in 1931, when the major laws such as the penal code were implemented, women have been completely excluded.

However, disempowerment will not just go away. Someone has to address the issue. But first a critical mass is needed and social leaders must emerge to take the lead to initiate the process of empowerment. At present, a critical mass has begun to emerge in Ethiopia, mainly through the efforts of the civic sector, NGOs and associations in particular. This process is extremely slow and at times frustrating due to a number of factors, the main one being the hurdles put in the way by the government. In fact, with the ratification of new law on civic associations drafted by the government, the efforts already made by women's leadership and the nascent civil sector will take a severe blow.

It is also necessary to produce social leaders and activists who can take the struggle for the emancipation of women forward. Leaders and activists who are devoted to the cause and who work hard are sorely needed. South Asia and India in particular are quite lucky in this respect. And that is no accident as the level of space and freedom in India is far better than many other places to the south. Ethiopia in this respect has not yet produced its gender activists and social leaders. The stifling political atmosphere is the main hurdle, although the civic sector also has its own weaknesses. Despite the rhetoric about the 'woman question' that has continued for thirty years, Ethiopia is still some way off from producing its own gender activists.

The treatise on 'freedom as the precondition for development' must go beyond rationalizing the indispensability of freedom and establish the linkages between the various components that make this freedom workable and practical in a given society at a given time. It must identify the principal social agent for development. Beyond the necessity of space for popular participation by civil society, that is freedom, there is also a structural problem at the cultural/ethical level that severely prevents society from having the disposition to accept, absorb and consolidate democratic ideas and alternatives. It is crucial in a discourse on democracy and democratization, with implicit impact on development, to identify these hurdles and get to the bottom of the nature and characteristic features of their construction. It is the identification of these hurdles that can lead to identifying areas of intervention that can make a breakthrough towards changing the perceptions to which Ethiopian society still clings.

Knowledgeability is one important precondition for the transformation of individuals from subject to citizen, thereby laying the foundation for the emergence of civil society. The process of social change/transformation towards civil society and the dismantling of poverty are the key to development. Women constitute the social agency for social development and change towards freedom. Here, we are dealing with another dimension of the problem: namely, how lack of knowlegeability, which is poverty of the mind, in turn perpetuates poverty and under-development. As the Ethiopian variant of the patriarchal mentality unveils itself, male dominance becomes a function of the degradation of women. In addition and, as we have seen in the section dealing with rape and violence against women, Ethiopian women, far from exercising social agency and enjoying recognition of their role in social change, in fact live in perpetual fear, hopelessness and apathy. Their male counterparts bask in the dominance that patriarchy has bestowed on them but at a huge cost – the cost of ignorance. A great many of the womenfolk also share this patriarchal mentality, thus forming another hurdle in the required transformation from subject to citizen.

At this stage, the patriarchal society in Ethiopia, even if it is granted unrestricted freedom for participation and political choice, suffers from serious maladies at the cognitive level, which is in turn one of the major stumbling-blocks to the transformation of subjects into citizens. The universality of ignorance, its pervasiveness and the impact of the low level of cognition on individual Ethiopians constitutes the principal hurdle for democratic and humane values to develop and expand, which in turn influences the development process. The prevailing attitude on sexuality in general, and masculinity and female sexuality in particular, lies at the heart of this cognitive malady. It accounts largely for the generally repressive and under-developed attitude towards the living (women) and the future (children). Unless Ethiopian society passes through some kind of 'cultural

revolution' at the level of cognition, democratization and freedom will remain an unrealistic dream, and so will poverty eradication and development. In this sense, women, being both the object and subject of the required change as well as in their responsibility for nurturing the future generation, constitute the principal social agent for development. Without women as principal subjects and gender as the perspective at the centre of a strategy of change and development, neither freedom/democracy nor development can be attained.

From the reality at grassroots level too, poverty is very much linked to women and in the contemporary world poverty has a woman's face. Successive UNDP Human Development Reports as well as numerous studies have consistently indicated that 70% of the world's poor are women. This holds true for Ethiopia too, where there are more factors that make women poorer. As part of a traditional society of the fiercest patriarchal values, Ethiopian women are primarily responsible for raising and rearing children; they also look after the aged. In male-headed households women have no say in property and the allocation of family income. In pastoral communities, women are not even allowed to own property. In such an impoverished country, the household and the country and the family have managed to co-exist mainly due to the sacrificial role of women. In short, women constitute the proletarians of our time. By the same token, development paradigms and strategies as well as democratization processes cannot do without the central role played by women or without gender as a perspective.

Furthermore, no section of Ethiopian society is as exposed to all forms of violence and discrimination as women are. Violence against women is believed to have been going on for centuries and has now reached alarming proportions. This violence is tantamount to unleashing violence against society itself. One enormous structural constraint on the part of civil society as far as the process of subject–citizen transformation goes is precisely the prevalence of the violent psyche against women. The violence against children also falls into the gender domain.

Moreover, if civil society is that sphere of society located outside the state sphere, the section of society which has always been disempowered and located outside the sphere of state power since time immemorial is women. This alone makes them potentially the most vibrant members of civil society as they 'have nothing to lose but their chains', to use Marx's famous phrase.

However, a significant feature of a civil society is its capacity to engage the state. In the case of women's civic organizations and those working on gender issues, the experience of the EPRDF's attitude towards women is that of restriction. Like all civic organizations, those working on gender are also subject to restrictions and sometimes intimidation. The EPRDF's policy is to dominate all spheres of organized, active social life and it leaves no stone unturned to dominate organizations working on gender issues. It has established phantom 'institutions' in the name of the Women's Affairs Office under the Prime Minister's Office and a number of 'women's associations' under regional governments in Addis Ababa, Amhara, Tigray, Oromiya, the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples State (SNNPS) and so on. These 'associations' are appendages of the EPRDF as mass organizations of the vanguard party. They are not independent at all, and cannot be so as they are all set-up and led by EPRDF cadres, follow the party line and implement its policies.

The EPRDF has adopted a strategy to ostracize civic associations by depriving them of donor funds. It does this in a number of ways. First, it makes registration of

civic associations a legal requirement and makes the process of acquiring a certificate of registration almost impossible. Second, it makes it obligatory that donors may only fund those civic associations that are legally registered. To make matters even worse it demands that civic organizations have funds available as an important precondition for registration! While systematically blocking the emergence and function of civic associations the state promotes its own 'associations', notably the relief organizations such as the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) and the many women's 'associations'.

The state, by definition, cannot cover all areas of development. The independent participation of civil society has to become involved if a country is to prosper. This is true even if the state concerned is well informed on gender issues and has a credible policy to emancipate its women. As has been shown, the EPRDF has serious limitations on this score. It has insufficient knowledge of gender and refuses to abandon the old Leninist formula of the 'woman question'. It follows that it does not have an emancipatory policy either. The consequence is enormous. like other development disciplines that constitute the domains of sustainable development, the EPRDF has created a vacuum by systematically excluding and stifling civic associations without delivering the solutions to the problems of Ethiopian women.

This restrictive policy has serious implications. It has stifled the emergence of independent civic associations (including women's associations) and NGOs that work on gender issues. This is a severe blow to the cause of women's emancipation as it robs them of their most important capability to emancipate themselves: *independent participation*. Having followed this stifling policy, the EPRDF has failed to develop its own institutions of governance to the level of a fully-fledged state. A government in power can only attain such institutional development through interaction with and response to independent civic intervention. It is the massive intervention of civic groups that prompts a government to move to its rightful role of regulating rather than controlling and dominating. And it is only such a role that in turn can galvanize the process of deconstructing poverty and under-development.

The TPLF's orientation on gender – dubbed the 'woman question' – is the same as that of all Leninist and Stalinist parties. It is precisely because the 'woman question' was not formulated in a thoroughly revolutionary way, but in a way that it would 'emancipate' women in the abstract, that the old gender social relationships were not abolished in the first place. How has the EPRDF performed on the 'woman question' since it came to power in 1991? Its policy and practice on the 'woman question' is a reflection of its two-track policy and its 'revolutionary democracy'. Track one is a recognition (on paper) of the rights of women, such as in the Ethiopian Constitution and other laws; this includes an engagement in a great deal of showy rhetoric on the rights of Ethiopian women. This rhetoric is designed to catch the attention of Western donors who want to see the inclusion of gender in development activities as well as in macro-policies in general. Using this tactic the EPRDF has successfully deceived Western donors who are apparently impressed by the 'involvement' of Ethiopian women in development.

Track two of the 'woman question' is the policy that the EPRDF in fact believes in and pursues. The disparity between the rhetoric and practice explains why the condition of Ethiopian women is still one of the most deplorable in the world as shown in the 2004 UNICEF report on Ethiopia. The current state of impoverishment of women and the denial of their rights is as a result of the EPRDF's macro-economic

policy in general, and its specific policy on 'women'. As we have seen above, Ethiopian women are disempowered mainly because they are denied the freedom and space to regain their capabilities. This is exacerbated because of the government's overall policy on freedom dictated by its rhetoric of 'revolutionary democracy'. The lack of freedom and space for society as a whole affects women more than any other sector as gender is related to a number of domains of sustainable development. To discourage the independent association of women it has set up its own women's associations in each region led by the Women's Affairs Bureau under the Prime Minister's Office. As to empowering women, the EPRDF has no vision whatsoever. Instead, its everyday practice infringes on women's freedom and denies them independent association. The few women's organizations outside the EPRDF, like all other NGOs or independent associations, are subjected to close government scrutiny and a multitude of bureaucratic hurdles. One of the reasons why there are so few active women's organizations is precisely this stifling EPRDF policy. Little wonder that there is only one rights-based women's organization in the entire country: the Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association. The others are all service-delivery NGOs – the EPRDF naturally has little problem with them. Once freedom has been stifled, the agency of women is also stifled because 'the ability to define one's goals and act upon them' (Kabeer 2000, p. 29) cannot take place without the resource – in this case freedom. The EPRDF does not take the issue of gender seriously.

As has been shown, the record of the EPRDF on women's rights and its role in ending VAW is abysmal. The historical role of a state, since the days of Hammurabi, is to provide justice; and one of the principal missions of the modern state is to protect the security of its people and the rights of the citizen, to ensure that they have equality before the law and that no individual infringes the rights of any other. The EPRDF has, however, been completely apathetic in protecting the rights of women and ending violence against them. It has relatively powerful law enforcement agencies, police and courts, but in protecting the rights of women and dispensing justice in cases of violence against them, the law enforcement agencies have been feeble. As a consequence, there is a huge disparity between the violence perpetrated and the number of reported cases. VAW in Ethiopia effectively deprives women of their agency, their capacity/right to make their own choices both at home and in society. This is the basis of their poverty and the poverty of Ethiopian society. Half the Ethiopian population is denied freedom, and upon them hangs the life of every household. Society can thus neither be free nor prosperous. At the household level, 'VAW can constrain women's choices, limit their productivity, and prevent them from bargaining effectively with their husbands or partners, all of which can undermine the health of these women and their children (Terry 2004, p. 471).

As Amartya Sen says: 'There is nothing more important in the political economy of development than the adequate recognition of women's participation in political, economic, and social leadership' (quoted in Terry 2004, p. 475). And Terry continues: 'By curbing women's agency, in other words limiting the choices women can make, VAW puts a brake on positive social change for whole societies, as well as the women concerned and their families' (2004, p. 475). Undoubtedly, this is the fundamental problem that Ethiopian women face and needless to say, this is the country's fundamental problem. It is to this fundamental problem that the EPRDF policy has remained apathetic.

Environment and sustainable development

> In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation. (Rio Declaration, 1992)

Why is the environment in general and conservation of natural resources in particular so important for impoverished and traditional countries such as Ethiopia? First, the overwhelming majority of the Ethiopian population, nearly 85%, lives in the rural areas and is engaged in agriculture. Second, the rural population depends on the availability of natural resources to produce crops in the case of peasants, to raise livestock in the case of pastoralists, and to hunt and gather in the case of hunters and gatherers (although the number of the latter group has now dwindled). As Tedla (2003, p. 25) puts it: 'the majority of our people rely completely for their livelihood on what nature provides'. Third, the rural population depends entirely on nature for firewood, energy, construction of shelters and medicines. This dependence on natural resources exposes the livelihood of the country's rural population to the vagaries of nature. The state of nature, such as the climate, determines the availability of natural resources upon which rural people depend. The climate determines the availability of rain, and thus the availability of water. Peasants start panicking when rains are delayed or do not fall, which in turn affects cultivation. Pastoralists also worry when rains are delayed because these farmers have to decide on the pattern of movement of their cattle. Conflict with other pastoral communities may also arise over competition for water and grazing land.

In short, the rural population is dependent on the availability of natural resources and the dynamics involved in the process of accumulation, which in turn determine diversification of livelihoods and so on. Most important, in rural areas the degradation of the environment is detrimental to food security. As Gedion Asfaw writes: 'the availability and sustainable use of environmental resources, to a large extent determine the food security situation of a country' (Asfaw 2003, p. 43). Two things are crucial here: the availability of natural resources, and the sustainable use of these resources. The first is provided by nature while the latter falls within the domain of human action – the ability of people to know about and to put into practice, certain policies in order to use these resources while simultaneously ensuring the continuity of their availability.

A major problem in Ethiopia is the fact that once degradation or destruction of natural resources occurs, recovery is either impossible or extremely difficult. Plants or animals may even become extinct. And in a given ecosystem, of which natural resources are part, the functions of the fauna and flora make them *de facto* interdependent. Some life cycles involve both the flora and fauna, and once these cycles are broken and discontinued, the ecosystem will be affected and become depleted. Preserving the flora and fauna requires a large, expensive undertaking. From this point of view alone, preserving the environment and conserving natural resources saves humanity from the troubles that lie ahead. Because of this crucial role that the environment plays in the lives of humans, we say the environment constitutes the physical domain of sustainable development.

Despite the acute environmental crisis that Ethiopia faces, the country is still endowed with conservable natural resources and is enriched with biodiversity. As Asfaw (2003, p. 46) attests:

> The Ethiopian biodiversity is made up of an estimated total of 6,500–7,000 plant species of which 12 are endemic. There are also 277 terrestrial mammals, some 861 bird species, 201 species of reptiles, 63 species of amphibians, 150 species of fish and 324 butterfly species of which 31 mammals, 28 birds, 24 amphibians, 4 fish, 9 reptiles, 7 butterfly species are endemic.

In the face of such biodiversity, however, there has been severe environmental degradation and destruction for several decades that has now threatened the very livelihood of the rural population, which comprises 85% of the population. The rural population has reached a stage where it cannot feed itself, making Ethiopia one of the most food-insecure countries. The state of food insecurity has become so perennial that, for instance, in the face of what is officially labelled as 'a year of bumper harvest', the government still requests food aid from donors. For a long time now, and despite the most serious warnings by experts, to which I will return later, Ethiopia has indeed entered a serious environmental crisis, a crisis of no return that has led to a situation of perennial food insecurity. It is in view of the seriousness of this situation that Shibiru Tedla (2003, p. 24) wrote:

> If 85% of Ethiopia's population, which lives in the rural areas and is engaged in farming and cattle breeding, cannot feed itself, we can simply decide that the magnitude of nature of the problem has no indicator and forget the whole thing.

What are Ethiopia's major environmental problems that have a direct bearing on perpetuating poverty and under-development? And how could the civic sector make a difference if it were allowed to do so? It is important to situate the problem in relation to poverty on the one hand and what civil society organizations could do (given the government's apathy) on the other hand. This will give definition to the role that freedom is able to play in poverty alleviation.

The single most important environmental problem that aggravates the precarious life of rural Ethiopia is deforestation, which has taken place massively – and continues unchecked. Although the rate of deforestation did indeed increase with the introduction of the Australian eucalyptus tree at the turn of the century from Australia, the problem is not a new one. Crop cultivation disappeared centuries ago from the highlands and mid-highlands because of deforestation and a disregard for conservation of the environment. In Buddhist culture, in contrast, respect for nature plays an important role and has a great impact on food security. In the peasant world of Ethiopia conservation has never been encouraged despite the fact that environmental conservation is a cornerstone of their livelihood. What gives an additional dimension to environmental degradation is the nature of the country's topography – the highlands and mid-highlands in particular.

The direct impact of deforestation is soil erosion. The roots of trees stabilize the soil and give it a strong base. Deforestation deprives the soil of that particular function and the soil is then exposed to wind and water erosion. Because of the topography of the highlands and mid-highlands,

> the water that drains in this manner from every plot of land turns into streams and rivers flowing away with a full load of fertile and rich soil. When the soil is thus washed away by flooding rivers, it is not only the soil that the country loses, but also the microbes that sustain the fertility of the soil. (Tedla 2003, p. 25)

As the population increases in the rural areas, so does the demand for cultivable land, housing and firewood and the scale of deforestation (and soil erosion) increases. What is the extent of deforestation in Ethiopia?

It is estimated that the forest coverage of Ethiopia's landmass at the turn of the century was more than 40%. By 1987 it had dwindled to 5.65% according to the Food and Agricultural Organisation's (FAO) estimate (Wood 1990, p. 187). And by 2003 it had shrunk further to a mere 0.2% (Asfaw 2003, p. 44). In addition, 87% of the highlands, where most of the population lives, were previously covered with broad-leafed deciduous and coniferous forests (Wood 1990, p. 187). The destruction of forests must also be examined against the background of population increase. As the demand for additional farm plots, huts, and fuel-wood increased, more trees were felled. In addition to the lifestyle of the peasantry, unchanged for centuries, the government has no programme of awareness-raising for the peasantry on environmental issues that are relevant to their day-to-day lives. All this has meant that deforestation has continued on a massive scale. To this must be added the fact that constant conflicts also result in great destruction of the biodiversity. Warfare, refugees and resettlement programmes all mean that trees are cut down for fuel, huts and cultivation.

The rate of Ethiopia's deforestation is alarming. In 1994, the Ethiopian Forestry Action Plan concluded that the deforestation rate was 150,000 to 200,000 hectares per year. In 1967 high forest coverage was 8.8 million hectares. In 1988 that figure had dwindled to 5.4 million, a loss of 3.4 million hectares in just 21 years, that is, 162,000 hectares per year (Asfaw 2003, p. 44). The situation has become alarming and yet the EPRDF policy is apathetic. One of the last remaining forest regions is Gambela, but even there the picture is not promising. According to Asfaw: 'Future trends for Gambela Region indicate that the region will lose 32% of its high forest in the coming three decades while the estimate for Oromiya is 27% for the same period' (Asfaw 2003, p. 45).

Trees have specific functions in conserving soil. Forests and vegetation also regulate the availability of water in rivers, springs and other water bodies. If the soil loses that capacity, it starts to degrade and fails to retain and regulate the amount of water to be retained in the soil. That results in direct run-offs and the soil begins to erode, as is happening on Ethiopia's highlands and mid-highlands. As Wood (1990, p. 187) puts it:

> Erosion is specially severe where slopes have been cleared and when the removal of permanent vegetation from arable land creates runoff and reduced infiltration causes streams to become more intermittent and lower water-tables, both of which increase the time required to collect water in the dry season.

This has been a typical pattern of soil erosion in Ethiopia for several decades now.

Soil erosion also contributes to shrinkage of lakes. Lakes play a crucial role in providing water supplies to towns in Ethiopia and in generating hydroelectric power. A typical feature of the Rift Valley lakes in Ethiopia now is that they are getting drier. Three important lakes in Eastern Ethiopia, which used to supply water to neighbouring towns and farms, have dried up, impacting heavily on people's livelihoods. Lakes Alemaya, Adele and Lange in Harrarghe, eastern Oromiya region, have dried up completely during the last five years. Lake Alemaya used to be the source of water for the historic town of Harrar and other small towns nearby. But for more than two years now Harrar has experienced a severe water crisis. Lakes Koka, Abyata and Awassa are also threatened unless drastic measures are taken immediately. Why are these lakes drying up? Deforestation causes soil erosion, run-offs which carry a huge amount of soil with them then deposit it at the bottom of the lakes. This begins to push the water level upwards causing a false 'flood' of sorts.

The lakes increase in area because of the rising level of the floor. This is a typical symptom of a drying lake. I shall return to this issue when I discuss Lake Awassa in relation to the EPRDF's policy.

Shortage of fuel-wood is another consequence of deforestation and brings a heavy burden to bear on mothers and women in general as they are responsible for fetching water and firewood, both of which are more difficult and time-consuming to come by. The shortage of fuel-wood compels peasants to use dung and crop residues, which now together 'provide up to 55% of domestic energy and are the dominant fuel source for one third of the population' (Wood 1990, pp. 187–188). Then too, burning dung has its own negative consequences for the soil. As Wood says: 'The burning of this source of soil humus has led to a progressive deterioration in soil structure, infiltration capacity, moisture storage, and fertility' (1990, p. 188). It also has an impact on the volume of crop production. All these environmental issues undermine the capacity of crops to withstand drought and so exacerbate variations in crop yields. Burning dung reduces the nation's crop production by an estimated 10 to 20%. The decline in the humus content of the soil causes a further cumulative fall in crop production estimated at 1% per annum and at the rate the deforestation occurs 'by 2020 the last highland forests will have disappeared' (Wood 1990, p. 188). Once the destruction has occurred, rehabilitation becomes impossible in view of the economic conditions of the country. As Wood warned in 1990, 'To meet rural fuel-wood needs in 2010, and replace the use of dung as fuel, some 16 million hectares of rural fuel-wood plantations will be required, with another 1.2 million ha of forests to provide timber needs' (1990, p. 188).

Undoubtedly, soil erosion and land degradation are serious threats to Ethiopia's agriculture, rural livelihood and food security. Several studies on land degradation have been undertaken during the last two decades. In the early 1980s, it was estimated that 3.7% of the highlands (2 million hectares) had been so seriously eroded that it could not support cultivation, while a further 52% had suffered moderate or serious degradation (Wood 1990, p. 188). Wood also indicated that close to 75% of the highlands are estimated to need soil conservation measures if they are to support sustained cultivation. In 1985, the Ethiopian Highland Reclamation Study came to some equally alarming conclusions: 'It concluded that over 14 million ha in the highlands were seriously eroded' and that '1900 million tons of soil were annually eroded from the highlands' (quoted in Asfaw 2003, p. 45). The increase in population in rural Ethiopia (while the way of life and culture of cultivation and agriculture in general endured unchanging) also placed more land under cultivation, implying less land for forests and grazing. In 2000, the Woody Biomass Inventory and Strategic Planning Project produced further disturbing figures on land degradation, with some regions losing upwards of 10 tons of soil per hectare per year (Asfaw 2003, p. 45). Such a massive scale of soil erosion and land degradation is taking place in a country with 85% of its population depending on these increasingly depleted resources for their livelihoods. M. Constable has good reason to conclude that 'the highlands of Ethiopia contain one of the largest ecological degradations in Africa, if not in the world' (quoted in Degefu 1991, p. 21).

In addition to blatant apathy on the part of successive governments in Ethiopia towards environmental degradation – which has contributed in no small way to poverty and under-development – maladministration has also led to political conflicts and armed insurrections. Indeed, warfare and insurrections have continued

unabated in the country for the last 500 years. These conflicts have led to resettlement by refugees who fled their original settlements. To mitigate political and 'famine problems', the Derg and EPRDF governments have both ventured into ill-prepared resettlement schemes that have involved the movement of people from areas that are already highly degraded to new, previously uncultivated areas. The refugees arrive at these new areas with their farming culture and attitude towards the environment firmly entrenched and with no security of tenure on the land. Hence the vicious cycle of environmental crisis is precipitated.

Although the major environmental problem that is directly associated with the processes of poverty and under-development is deforestation that results in soil erosion and land degradation, there are also other problems that contribute to environmental degradation. Notable here are the national policies on rural development adopted by successive governments. Such policies have often failed to generate growth in the sector and have led to degeneration of agriculture. Problems of land tenure are crucial and are at the heart of this problem. During the imperial period, land tenure was extremely exploitative and turned the peasant into a pauper who perished when famine hit Wollo and Tigray in 1973. The Derg made land state-owned, but the problem of food insecurity was by no means solved and the country suffered a second major famine, far more serious, in 1984–1985. Subsequently, under the EPRDF, more than 14 million people were in need of food aid in 2002, with a much higher percentage of the population affected by famine, a situation that was even more serious than that of 1984–1985. And yet environmental degradation continues: governments have simply not learnt from the neglect shown by their predecessors!

Another major environmental problem is also policy-related, namely the measures introduced by the various governments on land tenure that constrained the diversification of livelihood systems for the rural poor. This issue will be discussed below in an assessment of the EPRDF's policies.

In 1967, G.C. Last, who was an advisor to the government at the time, issued a warning to Ethiopia's leaders:

> As you are probably aware, this is a most serious issue [conservation of natural resources] in Ethiopia. In some ways the problem has already reached crisis proportions with regard to: a) the loss of soil through erosion, b) the destruction of forests, c) the destruction of wildlife, d) the rapid diminution of utilizable water supplies. … There is sufficient evidence to show that, unless serious steps are taken, not only will desert conditions develop rapidly in various parts of Ethiopia but, important national resources will disappear. … The question of conservation is usually the subject of a great deal of talk but very little action. It is clear also that really effective measures must be based on a widespread understanding of a spirit of co-operation among the population. (quoted in Asfaw 2003, p. 43)

G.C. Last made this statement not now, not even at the time of the Derg, but 40 years ago! In his capacity as advisor and as a geographer, he wrote this in a memorandum to the vice minister of education on the subject of launching a campaign on the conservation of natural resources. Last was probably the first person to issue a serious warning to the government in office. As we will see, such warnings have emanated from several natural resource management experts as well as environmentalists and are still forthcoming. This is the third government to reside in the imperial palace in Addis Ababa since Last made his statement but the official response has been negligible. As Asfaw (2003, p. 43) says: 'What is striking is [that]

almost four decades later we are talking about the same issues and probably the solutions currently being recommended may not be much different from what was recommended then.' Similar to issues of freedom/democracy, gender and rural development, the scope and content of the discourse on environment has been repeated for the last three to four decades. This provides another dimension to the development discourse in Ethiopia: namely, the issues that determine Ethiopia's development have not changed over time, largely because of lack of concern. A research project on the failure by government to address these issues is long overdue and must be undertaken as a matter of urgency.

Investigating the performance of the EPRDF on the environment should begin with an examination of the outlook of the ruling party. Starting as a Maoist grouping with a strong Stalinist orientation, the notion of environmental protection and conservation of nature did not exist in the minds of the TPLF leaders. The founder of the TPLF, Aregawi Berehe, confirms this. He blandly admitted during an interview conducted with him that the TPLF had no idea about protecting the environment either at the time of its formation or indeed much later when it overthrew the military government (personal communication, Dec. 2004). Negasso Gidada, the first president of the country under the EPRDF and currently a member of the federal parliament, confirms Aregawi's assertion. According to Negasso, the EPRDF's perception did not even change after the Rio Summit that was held in 1992 (personal communication, Jan. 2006). As on gender and democracy, the EPRDF's rhetoric on the environment seems to emanate from donor funding requirements. As the NGO activist I interviewed explained: 'the EPRDF's ''concern'' for the environment originates from donors' requirements for development funding. It is only to display that environment is on its agenda' (personal communication, 2006).

Much to the benefit of the EPRDF in terms of awareness on the environment, one year after it came to power the Rio Summit was held. The EPRDF sent a high-level delegation, led by the then prime minister, Tamrat Layne. Upon their return, a Ministry of Natural Resources Development and Environmental Protection was established. Apart from the necessity of a viable institution on the environment, laws and policies are also crucial. But very little has been done since. The State of Environment Report for Ethiopia issued by the Environmental Protection Authority in 2003 states that three laws have been enacted on the environment: the proclamation on the Establishment of Environmental Protection (2002), the Environmental Pollution Control Proclamation (2002) and the Environmental Impact Assessment Proclamation (2002). It is interesting to note that all three measures were issued in the same year.

As in its performance on gender, there are still great gaps in the EPRDF's perceptions, policies and laws on the environment. These are simply too far off the extremely critical needs of the country in terms of conservation. The gaps relate to institutional arrangements corresponding to the official rhetoric on conservation and environment; the capacity of the existing institutions; the EPRDF's attitude towards NGOs that are engaged in environmental issues and natural conservation projects; and official neglect.

In 1995, the EPRDF passed Proclamation No. 9/1995 on the basis of which the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) was established as the principal institution to deal with the environment and nature conservation. Although the proclamation is commendable, the relegation of the institution from a ministry to a

mere authority (as explained by the NGO activist I interviewed) is a major departure from the initial attitude that prevailed after Rio. The law that led to the establishment of the EPA has, however, flaws – including a lack of clarity on a number of provisions. Its major weakness is the fact that it does not 'provide the Authority with strong powers required for effective co-ordination and regulation' (Lemma 2004, 8). Also, unlike ministries, the EPA has no nationwide structure down to the level of wereda to enforce the 1995 law and implement the environmental policy proclaimed in 1997.

Although the 1995 law and the Environmental Policy of Ethiopia (EPE) introduced in 1997 are certainly major breakthroughs, there is still a need for legislation on the debilitation of the environment and poverty eradication. A measure to combat deforestation, for example, is an urgent need because Ethiopia's most serious environmental crisis emanates from the massive deforestation that has been going on for decades. From an estimated 40% coverage of the landmass at the turn of the century, Ethiopia's forest coverage has now been reduced to 0.2%. It is therefore no surprise that environmental degradation as a result of deforestation continues on a frightening scale and lakes continue to dry up under the very noses of regional administrations. This contributes directly to widespread drought, famine and poverty.

Ethiopia's worst record in the area of environmental protection has also been confirmed by well-known environmental institutions such as the UNDP, the Yale Centre for Environmental Law and Policy at Yale University, the Centre for International Earth Science Information Network at Columbia University and Conservation International. In a 2005 report (known as the Environmental Sustainability Index) issued jointly by the Yale Centre for Environmental Stewardship and the Centre for Environmental Law and Policy of Columbia University, Ethiopia ranks at 135, ahead of only nine other countries (Environmental Sustainability Index 2005, p. 22). This record must be seen against the background of Ethiopia as an ecosystem rich with unique flora and fauna found only in this country. Conservation International also confirms that Ethiopia is fast losing its unique biodiversity.

The state of the environment requires 'a preventive policy and strategy' as an NGO activist put it (personal communication, Jan. 2006). According to this person, the environmental problem in Ethiopia has reached such a critical point that it is absolutely essential for the authorities to move from therapeutic measures to prophylactic (preventive) ones. Drastic measures have to be taken immediately to conserve the natural resources of the country and protect the environment. Macro-economic policies and rural development policies must take natural conservation as the cornerstone of their strategy. More than 85% of Ethiopia's population depends on what nature provides.

Obviously, the EPRDF does not want to give space to NGOs in the area of natural conservation, although NGOs are doing a great deal of work in this regard, even in providing short-term training programmes on natural conservation for government staff at the wereda level – as Care Ethiopia does in the Awash valley.

One of the major civic interventions is that of the community in the conservation of nature. In many societies, there are traditional knowledge systems that promote the protection of the environment and have done so for centuries. Various farming communities in Ethiopia also have rich knowledge systems in preserving the

environment. Referring to Dessalegn Rahmato's publications that record the best conservation practices of the Konso and Gamo peoples, Getachew and Demele (2000, p. 20) also conclude that:

> all these arguments stand in support of the need for the promotion of indigenous environmental management practices and institutionalization of local authority systems (empowerment of local communities accompanied by a scheme to enable them to benefit from surrounding natural resources which used to have been considered as threats in the form of eviction).

Making the public aware of conservation of nature is one crucial intervention. However, the EPRDF's record in this respect is abysmal. In Ethiopia where the rate of illiteracy is high, radio and television can play a decisive role in transmitting information-based knowledge that can be used by rural and urban communities. Basic and elementary information on environmental protection could carry a strong message on conservation. However, as the environment does not really constitute its agenda, the EPRDF has not been engaged in providing such information and awareness.

To support our argument on the prevalence of official neglect of the preservation of the environment, suffice it to mention the alarming situation of lakes along the Rift Valley that are drying up. Lakes Abyata and Shalla are dangerously depleted mainly due to the siphoning-off of water to a soda factory. The case of Lake Alemaya is a classic case of official neglect and the ineptness of the government. Lake Alemaya was one of the largest lakes along the Rift Valley, supplying water to nearby communities including big towns such as Harrar. However, after decades of unchecked build-up of silt, the lake finally dried up completely in 2005. A smaller lake nearby called Adele has long been dry. A third lake along the Addis Ababa–Dire Dawa route, called Lake Lange, not very far from Alemaya, also dried up recently. These are not isolated cases but a clear case of a pattern of environmental change that is proving disastrous to human life and biodiversity.

The impact of the demographic transformation of these lakes is immense. For instance, during the 2002 drought, electricity rationing was introduced in the capital, Addis Ababa. The official explanation attributes the problem to the capacity of the Koka Dam to generate electricity because the water level in Lake Koka has fallen because of the drought. In fact, the problem was not really the low level of water as there had been drought periods previously that had been withstood. The problem was that the silt that was developing beneath the lake had not been dredged for more than 30 years.

Lake Awassa, the second-largest lake in the country, appears to be the next in line to dry up. A 2005 study commissioned by SOS Sahel, a local NGO, and conducted by Delta Consultancy, has produced alarming findings on the current state of the lake and its future. The elevation level of the lake has increased to the extent that enlargement of its surface area is already taking place and on the western portion of the elevation, the difference in the catchment is 5.40 metres. Further, the study finds that:

> the surface of Lake Awassa has increased by 1,237 hectares in three and half decades … The lake's surface area, according to computations from the 2001 satellite photograph, is 9,596 hectares, occupying about 6.5% of the catchment. In three-and-a-half decades, Lake Awassa recorded a horizontal surface increment of 1,237 hectares with per annum expansion of 34.4 hectares. (SOS Sahel 2005, pp. 40, 56)

The Lake Awassa catchment is one of the most populous regions in Southern Ethiopia. Cultivation has intensified here for the last three decades and has resulted in the clearing of forests. According to the report, in terms of area:

> the proportion of cultivated land accounted for 33.0% of the total area in 1965 and increased to 47% in 2001. During the period, the size of land newly converted to cultivation each year amounted close to 680 hectares. However, the tradition of food crop production for the growing population in the area caused damage to 42.0% of the vegetation that existed in 1965. Moreover, the semi-pastoral nature of occupation involving higher per capita livestock holding, put incremental pressure on available vegetation. Meanwhile, in areas west of Lake Awassa, both dense woodlands and open bushy woodlands completely disappeared as a result of simultaneous expansion of cultivation activities and increased encroachment of settlements into the vegetation-rich flatlands. (SOS Sahel 2005, p. 58)

The local people attribute the disappearance of the vegetation in the area to 'the effect of land fragmentation, particularly in individual farm plots ... average size of farmland per household has been as low as 0.58 hectares' (SOS Sahel 2005, p. 59). These findings are indeed pointers of the direction in which the current state of environmental degradation is going. Lake Awassa is destined to meet the same fate as Lake Alemaya and others before it – unless something drastic is done to prevent the disaster.

According to Tewolde G. Egziabher, director general of the Environmental Protection Authority, who was interviewed on national television in 2005, the fundamental obstacle to Ethiopia's environmental problems lies with the ignorance of the successive governments of Ethiopia. He claims that successive governments have meddled in matters about which they have no expertise. Because of their high-handed attitude, he says, they have destroyed the capabilities of the rural population to preserve the environment. This has in turn created a huge gulf between government and the people. Asked what the solution is, Tewolde maintains that the government should 'listen to what the people have to say' on the preservation of the environment. He feels that it should merely 'affirm the role of the people' and only complement their endeavours with the kind of assistance that the people need. One has only to extend this observation to the government's approach towards the other domains of sustainable development.

Rural development

The question of rural development is indissolubly linked to the environment. It is a crucial one for Ethiopia because the overwhelming majority of its population lives and works in the rural areas and depends on the natural resources available for their survival. In short, Ethiopian society is predominantly agricultural and is engaged in crop cultivation as in the case of peasants, and livestock production in the case of pastoralists. Both peasants and pastoralists have to work extremely hard to make ends meet. However, both communities have long become captives of government policies on the one hand and of recurrent drought on the other, thereby becoming perpetually food-insecure.

Ethiopia is well-known for its famines and for its many ethnic-based conflicts. Drought does not necessarily lead to famine, but in Ethiopia this is invariably the case. Why is this so? Are the state of rural poverty, food insecurity and the occurrence of famine related to other factors such as freedom, democracy and the process of the emergence of a civil society?

There are, broadly speaking, three traditional societies in Ethiopia, each with its distinct mode of production. The peasantry make up the majority, while the pastoralists comprise roughly 15% of the population. The hunters and gatherers, the third economically-defined group, are now very few in number. The peasantry is engaged in small-scale farming, while pastoralists are engaged in livestock production; both (economically speaking) lead a very precarious life. The peasant sector is plagued by sporadic famine and lives in a perpetual situation of food insecurity. On the other hand, until recently (when Sudan took over) Ethiopia had the largest number of cattle per head in Africa. Because of the cultural bias towards pastoralism reflected in macro-economic policies, Ethiopia's livestock wealth has never been seen as a national asset.

Poverty in rural Ethiopia has made the lives of communities precarious. Several factors contribute to this state of affairs, including: macro-economic policies; lack of freedom and democracy; environmental degradation; climate change and so on. Rural development in Ethiopia should be aimed at reversing this trend. It should mean a radical change in the lifestyle of rural communities; it should mean empowering them so that they can disengage themselves from total dependence on nature. Empowerment in this sense connotes a multitude of factors, including putting political structures in place and their being accountable to rural communities; broadening the scope of freedom and democracy; setting up institutions of governance to assume the role of a regulator rather than a ruler; releasing rural communities from the social inertia that inhibits them from participation; empowering women socially and politically; expanding education both formal and civic; and expanding health services. Rural development cannot simply be surplus grain production by the smallholder peasant.

Rural development cannot take place in a vacuum. As pastoral indigenous knowledge system has it, but put in the language of development discourse, there has to be a balance between the use of natural resources and the ecosystem. Imbalance in this relationship causes degradation, which in most cases is irretrievable. Rural population cannot sustain life under continuous degradation and against the background of population increase. Widespread social, political and economic problems and the alarming rate of environmental degradation are daunting issues. Mitigation of the structural problems is an enormous and multidimensional undertaking. What can and should be done?

There are some important components that should feature in a rural development strategy for Ethiopia. A strategy that the country's rural social formation and the historical state of the economy can afford is disengagement of the rural population from the land. What Ethiopia needs is a strategy that enables the rural population to disengage from the land – peasants from the farm plots and pastoralists from perpetual dependence on grazing land and water points. The rural population must be transformed from the situation it has been floundering in for thousands of years to a state of economy characterized by small-scale commodity production, exchange and accumulation. The strategy must enable as many of the rural population as possible to become other types of producers such as petty traders, artisans, carpenters, producers in co-operatives, and so forth. It should not be imagined that this strategy will succeed in isolation from other sectors such as the development of the modern sector. Rural development cannot take place without the simultaneous development of the modern sector.

What are the structural problems of the Ethiopian peasantry? What makes the life of the peasantry so precarious? The major issues are: 'diminishing farm size and subsistence farming, soil degradation, inadequate and variable rainfall, tenure insecurity, weak agricultural research base and extension system, lack of financial services, imperfect agricultural markets and poor infrastructure' (EEA 2000, p. 178). Some of these factors are within the bounds of control by policy-makers, but others are not; they are nevertheless interwoven because the EPRDF's agricultural policy falls far short of what is required.

One problem is population increase against the background of a situation in which the possibility of expanding the total land area for farming is extremely limited. Ethiopia's population in general and that of the rural population (the overwhelming majority of the poor live in rural areas) has grown tremendously since land reform was introduced by the Derg in 1975. The Ethiopian peasant, in the first place, is unable to invest in a non-farm activity on a long-term basis in order to transform into a petty trader. Second, and worse still, the peasant consumes everything produced, which means the peasant economy is a subsistence economy – there is no surplus grain to store.

Although some degree of non-farm activity exists, a social division of labour has not yet emerged. This has an impact at two levels. First, it has stifled the emergence and development of the market, even in a limited, rural setting. Second, employment for those who want to sell their labour in order to earn a little extra has become impossible as almost no one can afford to hire labour. Another structural problem is soil degradation. Farms and grazing lands in Ethiopia have suffered from massive land degradation. Then too, there is tenure insecurity, which has a great impact on productivity as well as environmental degradation. The issue of land ownership has been controversial since 2000 because the 1975 land reform (which did not give ownership rights to peasants) only gave them user rights to work on the land. Land belongs to the state. The EPRDF has not only affirmed this policy initiated by the Derg, but has also inserted this stipulation into the 1995 constitution, thereby effectively shielding it from public debate. Land ownership is also related to security of tenure which in turn is linked to a number of social, political and environmental relationships.

Tenure security must go hand in hand with the traditional knowledge system, culture and tradition of communities. Ethiopia is a mosaic of diverse ethnic groups, cultures and knowledge systems. In a project involving transformation of rural life that is based primarily on traditional knowledge systems, endorsement of measures taken to transform it must be done by the communities in question. This is essential. The best way to achieve tenure security, whether through land privatization or not, should be defined according to these diverse traditional knowledge systems.

> As these categories are strongly based on local indigenous knowledge systems, the recognition of multiple strategies and diversification of the means of livelihood is inevitable. This is essential, as a strategy of rural development must be supported by the rural communities. (Tegegn 2004, p. 48)

Thus, when choosing between security of tenure through land ownership or a land ownership policy, it is required to recognize this diversity. This means, in principle, recognition of the possibility of multiple forms of land tenure. One certainty is that if pastoralism is to flourish in Ethiopia, there can be no private ownership of land. Land is owned by the community at large and its natural resources are also protected by the entire community.

Pastoral life has become precarious particularly since the series of droughts from 1992 onwards. In Afar and Borana (see Alemayehu 1998, pp. 15–16), drought has decimated cattle and livestock. As one pastoral elder recently told me in an interview: 'Previously people who had up to 2 000 cattle and animals now have no more than eight or ten' (Tegegn 2005). People chose pastoral livelihood systems because they inhabit a harsh environment unsuitable for cultivation in the first place. In Afar, cultivable land is located along the River Awash and areas adjacent to Wollo. Besides, commercial farmers have already taken the fertile land along the Awash and the government also has a scheme underway to expand sugar plantations over an area of about 7,000 hectares along the Awash. If the Afars move to cultivation *en masse*, there will definitely be a land shortage. In the case of both peasants and pastoralists, rural life has become so precarious that changing to a different livelihood is not only urgent but an absolute necessity.

The knowledge gap on pastoralism in the intellectual world as well as among policy-makers has also left a gap in information on how primitive accumulation can take place from within the pastoral system. As in the farming context, pastoral accumulation can begin with livelihood diversification processes. However, this will require great external support both in terms of legal and policy frameworks in the government as well as other developmental support from stakeholders in pastoral development. This is mainly because the pastoral way of life is under grave threat unless a viable alternative can be found.

Primitive accumulation in the pastoral context and as an economic category needs to be complemented by social and political interventions to make it successful. It must be contextualized within the larger category of pastoral development. Pastoral development must start with affirming the need for social change in this sector and social transformation within the community. The hitherto macro-intervention aimed at settling pastoralists was met with hostility by the community, and this is largely why the endeavour failed. Indeed the record of the EPRDF on agriculture can only be characterized as dismal. A large number of food-insecure communities still exist in the country although the number fluctuates between drought and 'bumper harvest' periods. Whether or not there is drought, millions of Ethiopians still depend on food aid. Even when the government claims bumper harvests, a minimum of 2.5 to 3 million people need food aid. Such is the precarious state of Ethiopia's agriculture. Needless to say, at the centre of this failure is bad governance and ill-advised policy.

It has been almost 17 years since the EPRDF adopted its Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI) in order to use rural development as a vehicle for industrialization. The bitter truth is that the country is still stretching out its begging bowl for food aid. Yet the EPRDF still claims that it is on the right track.

Population and development

Population constitutes the demographic dimension of sustainable development. The fact that the issue of population is directly related to social development has not been contested since the UN's International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994. The Cairo conference produced a Plan of Action as a reference for governments and development actors to mitigate problems of poverty and under-development that are directly related to population growth.

The rate of population growth and the fertility rate in Ethiopia is simply frightening given the prevalence of an extreme state of poverty. For an impoverished country like Ethiopia (with a current population of 80 million), to have a population growth rate of 3% per annum and a 5.9 fertility rate, and yet be ranked among the countries with the lowest level of social and economic development, is an extremely serious problem. Between 1900 and 2007, the population rocketed from 11.8 million to 80 million, and the rate of population growth grew from 1% at the turn of this century to its current 3%. Population growth accelerated steadily in the 1960s and leapt ahead from the 1980s and particularly the 1990s, that is, after the EPRDF came to power.

The population trend is characterized not only by high population growth and a high fertility rate but is also accompanied by a high level of infant and child mortality. Although a decline in fertility and infant/child mortality rates has been observed in recent years, the current level is still one of the highest in the world. The third component of the population trend in Ethiopia is the fact that a large part of the population is young. In its 2003/04 Annual Economic Report on Ethiopia, the Economic Association of Ethiopia (EEA), states: 'Of Ethiopia's current population of about 70 million, 4% is estimated to be less than 15 years of age, which implies a high dependency ratio.' And what is the impact of this?

> Taking into account the high level of unemployment and underemployment and those economically inactive, an economically active person is forced to carry more than one dependent person. When the national population policy was issued in 1993, there were 116 inactive persons per 100 active ones. (EEA 2004, p. 128)

To add to this, the youth will, within a few years, enter a reproductive life and, even at a much lower fertility rate, will still contribute significantly to population growth. A further characteristic feature of the population trend in Ethiopia is the spatial distribution with a high concentration in rural areas and the highlands.

Indeed, population is indissolubly connected with development. The high rate of population growth in Ethiopia is taking place against a background of a stagnant agriculture that has failed to secure food for its own people. As Sahlu Hailu says:

> the performance of the agricultural sector, which employs the vast majority of the population, is lower today than it was 20 years ago. The non-agricultural economy employs a very small proportion of the labour force. Agricultural land is over-crowded, over-cultivated and under-maintained and has lost most of its organic matters, and has been severely eroded. The population pressure exacerbates the situation. As a result, the country is condemned to perpetual food dependency and foreign aid. (Hailu 2004, p. 30)

Poverty and limited services such as education and healthcare constitute a vicious circle along with population growth. The greater the population numbers, the less adequate these services are; and the more the well-being of the people will suffer. A high rate of infant, child and maternal mortality rates prevail and other social indicators such as primary and high school education are correspondingly poor. The Ethiopian Economic Association (EEA) report claims that: 'according to the 1994 census, only 23.4% of the country's population was literate. To date, about 40% and 87% of primary and secondary school age children respectively, are still out of school' (EEA 2004, p. 133). These figures are confirmed by Sahlu Hailu, who contends that a 'little more than a third of school-age children have access to primary education. The rate for girls is only 17%. High school attendance is limited

to less than 12% of the age specific group while higher education is limited to less than 2% of the youth' (Hailu 2004, p. 31). Population growth in Ethiopia has also impacted upon other social services such as health care; economic performance in crop agriculture; conflict over the use of resources; and employment opportunities. Other social indicators such as access to proper housing, electricity and potable water, are also abysmal.

Problems generated by population growth or population issues in general cannot be analysed without referring to gender and the social and political milieu surrounding human reproduction. This is starkly clear in Ethiopia, where the very notion of reproductive rights is largely unknown. This ignorance is coupled with government apathy on the matter as well as the predominance of traditional religions such as Orthodox Christianity and Islam. In the rural areas, there has never been any discussion of reproductive rights and women's right to take decisions that concern their own bodies. Childbirth can be an agonizing experience for women, resulting in pain, physical changes to their bodies (even morbidity), and can result in bad health, physical and psychological trauma, often as the result of a lack of maternal care services. Nor do the problems of childbirth end by giving birth. In Ethiopia, the burden of child-rearing is entirely the responsibility of the mother, even in urban areas such as Addis Ababa where most of the country's educated people live.

Respect for the reproductive rights of women is not even recognized by law. The revised edition of the Penal Code, ratified by the parliament in 2003, declined to grant women their reproductive rights. The EPRDF, who claim to be revolutionary and democratic ('revolutionary democracy') and to champion the cause of women, have flatly refused to grant women reproductive rights. Moreover, the EPRDF have not implemented any systematic education on the matter. Unless the reproductive rights of women are respected and acted upon, the problems associated with population growth cannot be solved. That is the only way to restore the capabilities of women so that they can make decisions about their bodies, the very capacity they are deprived of by tradition and religion. After all, it is the woman who is going to carry the baby for nine months and who must be able to decide whether or not she wants it.

Reproductive rights must also be reinforced by education, both formal and civic. Studies indicate that if women are aware of their rights and the social and economic consequences of having many children, they will be empowered because they well decide not to have more children than they feel they can bring up successfully. That is why educated women have comparatively far fewer children. In Ethiopia many people do not seem to be aware of all the consequences of bringing children into the world. In both Christian and Muslim cultures, having children is a matter left to God. It is common to hear such statements like 'God will take care of it' when it comes to having another child. They fail to see the economic and social consequences of having large families which they cannot afford to raise. In the impoverished world of Ethiopia, children have less opportunity to become productive citizens because the infrastructure of social services is too limited to absorb them. Nor is any family planning education conducted in the media (which is dominated by the government), where such information, particularly on television, would be readily accessible to most of the population. It is true to say that the government's neglect of gender has had a significant impact on population growth, and that the core of the problem appears to be the lack of recognition of the reproductive rights of women.

Sustainable development has a generational dimension which concerns children and youth. It does not only concern the current generation, it is also about preparing the political, social and environmental base upon which the livelihood of the future generation depends. Degrading the environment and destroying the ecosystem is fundamental to the future generation. It is also crucial for future generations to nurture a humane and democratically-constructed generation: a generation that considers women to be the equal of men, respects the rights of individuals, recognizes that all people are born equal and should be treated as such; a generation free of ethnic and religious bigotry, and so on. Education, including both formal and civic education, plays a crucial role in this respect. Such education must be free of ideological brainwashing such as that perpetrated by the Stalinist regimes and the EPRDF.

It is also necessary to nurture such a humane and democratic generation from the political perspective. Since the EPRDF has been in power, politics has been ethnicized to the extreme. It is no longer taboo to think in terms of ethnicity and when this is coupled with protest against a regime that operates on the basis of ethnicity, ethnic prejudice may follow. The government has implemented extremely repressive measures and (as was seen in the 2005 post-election period) is not averse to ruthless suppression of dissenting voices. Such actions may exacerbate prejudice and lead to bigotry.

Nurturing a humane generation is not only the duty of a government. Society as a whole and parents and elders in particular, must also share the heavy responsibility. As a traditional society replete with a violent culture that emanated from its peculiar history, child upbringing in Ethiopia does not nurture children to be humane and democratic citizens. Boys and girls are brought up in an entirely different manner. The protection of the interests of the family is dictated entirely by the head of the family, the man. Boys are nurtured as the future guardians of the family and there is a great deal of violent psyche in the process. A great many fathers teach their sons to fight back and win instead of talking through differences and settling them by dialogue. This has an impact on a number of relationships including their relationship with the children of 'others'.

This is reflected in a horrifying practice that has become relatively common in recent years. Men abduct little children from rural towns and bring them to big cities like Addis where they send them out to beg in the streets. Worse still, they sometimes first blind the children with a poisonous thorn. This has been reported in the media, including the government-owned television, which provided graphic descriptions of this dreadful crime. This is surely a reflection of the prevalence of a violent culture in general and a warped attitude towards the children of 'others'.

Another expression of complete disregard for children is rape against the girl child. As we saw earlier, the rate of rape is not only high but also directed specifically against girls. Children of all ages, including infants, are frequently the victims of rape in Ethiopia. This is another indication of prevalence of a violent psyche, specifically against children. As long as she is the daughter of someone else, she may be targeted. The same can be said about child prostitution. It is society that keeps the prostitution business going. To make the business profitable, the most preferred 'product' is sold in the market. The man who goes out to buy this commodity is perhaps a father or brother who has a daughter or sister of the same age. But she is 'somebody else's daughter'.

Like gender, the environment, children's rights and sustainable development in general, population is a terrain that the EPRDF had not traversed prior to its accession to power. It only became aware of its importance (while it was still acting in its capacity as the Transitional Government), in preparing a population policy prior to the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo. That was its first acquaintance with the issue, a full three years after it came to power.

Now, after ten years of rule, the EPRDF government has assessed its accomplishments. Because (in all truth) nothing of importance has been achieved, the government (a rare admission by its standards) recognized its faults and admitted to them. What are these areas of neglect? The head of the national Office of Population, Hiruy Mitiku, outlines them:

1. According to the 1993 population policy, a National Population Council would be set up to co-ordinate the overall work of the government on population issues. The National Population Council has not been put into place yet.
2. The National Office of Population, the ad hoc body set up, was not given a legal framework with which to operate in terms of the duties and responsibilities entrusted to it by the policy framework. Consequently, it was enfeebled from the start in performing its co-ordinating and executing roles. It was not empowered to mobilize resources and inputs at the desired level.
3. At regional level the coordinating role of Regional Offices of Population was either non-existent or inefficient. Inefficiencies were witnessed during the implementation process in those Regional Offices of Population that were handicapped due to a shortage of qualified staff, material, and counterpart budget. The low status accorded to the Offices of Population in some regions through restructuring or otherwise is a distressing situation we live with. Some Regional Offices of Population were relegated to departments or units within other regional sector bureaus, with diminishing roles, unlike those envisaged in the population policy document.
4. The technical capacities of implementing agencies in programme and project formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation are so low that they have to be resuscitated at all levels. A four-year project, for example, has taken a full two years to formulate.
5. There is a tendency to consider 'population' as an independent sector, not as an integral part of broader society. This perception reigned in the minds of some professional cadres who failed to see the nexus between population and development. This led to difficult and uncertain sequencing of activities.
6. It has been observed that 'although gender dimensions of population issues are widely recognized and gender disparities constitute a source of concern, there is not much evidence of gender mainstreaming' in programmes and projects.
7. There is limited involvement of civil society in the implementation of the national population programmes and projects.
8. Co-ordination between agencies responsible for the implementation of the national population policy is weak. The National Office of Population, which was responsible for overall co-ordination as indicated in the policy document, was not given full legal backing to undertake a co-ordinating role. The same can be said of Regional Offices of Population.

9. There was insufficient interaction between federal and regional offices both laterally and vertically. (Mitiku 2004, pp. 22–23)

In a nutshell, the EPRDF has no agenda on population growth. Suffice it to allude to the testimony of a Western diplomat who said that she thought the EPRDF did not even want to control population growth, and that 'a population growth rate of 3% and economic growth rate of 2.5% means no growth' (personal communication, diplomat from the Donor's Assistance Group, February 2006).

Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to bring out the major development challenges Ethiopia faces that I argue are detrimental to the state of poverty and under-development. Policies at the macro-economic level, i.e. government measures on these issues are so crucial that they can determine the direction of the struggle against poverty and under-development. Good policies that emanate from good governance can galvanize the effort to beat poverty while bad policies that normally emanate from bad governance can lead a country to stray. The EPRDF's government is doing just that.

Notes on contributor

Melakou Tegegn was born and grew up in Ethiopia, and has lived, worked and studied in The Netherlands. He was involved in the student and Left movements in Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s. He has an MA in Development Studies from the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, and a PhD in Sociology from the University of South Africa.

References

Alemayehu, M., 1998. *The Borana and the 1991–92 drought*. Addis Ababa: n.p.

Asfaw, G., 2003. *Economic focus: assessment of the environment policy of Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa: Lessan Press.

Chole, E., 2004. *Underdevelopment in Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa: African Book Collective.

Degefu, T., 1991. Environmental crisis: options for rehabilitation and sustainable development in the Ethiopian Highlands, a research proposal. Thesis (PhD). Institute of Social Studies, The Hague.

Environmental Sustainability Index, 2005. Yale Centre for Environmental Stewardship and Centre for Environmental Law and Policy, Columbia University [online]. Available from: http/:www.yale.edu/esi/ESI2005_Main_Report.pdf.

Ethiopian Economic Association (EEA), 2000. *Annual report on the Ethiopian economy 1999/2000*. Addis Ababa: n.p.

Ethiopian Economic Association (EEA), 2004. *Annual report on the Ethiopian economy 2003/2004: Ethiopia, a generation after*. Addis Ababa: Rehobot.

Getachew, A. and Demele, Y., 2000. Sustainable development and environmental indicators. Mimeograph. Addis Ababa.

Hailu, S., 2004. *Population, development and environment in Ethiopia*. Official report. Addis Ababa: Population and Development Centre.

Kabeer, N., 2000. Resources, agency, achievements: reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *In*: S. Razavi, ed. *Gendered poverty*. Oxford and London: Blackwell and Zed Books, 27–56.

Lemma, K., 2004. A brief note on the implementation of the environmental policy of Ethiopia and related institutional issues. Brochure. Addis Ababa: n.p.

Mitiku, H., 2004. *Canvassing the ten years of the national population policy of Ethiopia*. Official Report. Addis Ababa: Population and Development Centre.
National Committee on Traditional Practices (NCTP), 2004. Enabling communities to abandon harmful traditional practices. Mimeograph. Addis Ababa.
Panos Ethiopia, 2000a. *Reflections*, 3. Addis Ababa.
Panos Ethiopia, 2000b. *Reflections*, 4. Addis Ababa.
Panos Ethiopia, 2001. *Reflections*, 5. Addis Ababa.
Rio Declaration, 1992. *Agenda 21. United Nations programme of action from Rio de Janeiro*. New York: United Nations.
Sen, A., 2000. *Development as freedom*. New York: Anchor.
SOS Sahel, 2005. Unpublished survey report: land use/land cover change and erosion: hazard study in Lake Awassa catchment. Addis Ababa.
Tedla, S., 2003. Ethiopia's environmental condition: today and twenty-five years from now. *In*: Ethiopian Economic Association, ed. *Ethiopia after a generation*. Addis Ababa: EEA, 71–101.
Tegegn, M., 2004. Ethiopia: from social revolution to social regression. *Africa insight*, 34 (1), 43–49.
Tegegn, M., 2005. FARM Africa survey report. Mimeograph. Addis Ababa.
Terry, G., 2004. Poverty reduction and violence against women. *Development in practice*, 14 (4), 469–480.
UNICEF, 2004. *Ethiopia report*. New York: United Nations.
UNDP, 1983. *Human development report*. New York: United Nations.
UNDP, 1987. *Human development report*. New York: United Nations.
UNDP, 1995. *Human development report*. New York: United Nations.
UNDP, 1997. *Human development report*. Annual Report on the Ethiopian Economy 1999–2000. New York: United Nations.
UNDP, 2005. *Human development report*. New York: United Nations.
Wood, A.P., 1990. Natural resource management and rural development. *In*: S. Pausewang *et al.*, eds. *Ethiopia: rural development options*. London: Zed Books, 187–198.
World Bank, 2005. Ethiopia: well being and poverty. World Bank report no. 29468-ET. Washington, DC: World Bank.