

**Reexamining the Politics of “Developmental State” in Ethiopia: Was/Is Ethiopia a Developmental State in EPRDF Regime? A Study From 1991-2018**

Getasew Endalew Admasu \*

**Abstract**

*The core theme of the article is focused on reexamining the "developmental state" politics in Ethiopia. Conceptually, a developmental state is a state which follows the development approach of a state-led economy. It is characterized by the existence of development oriented-political leadership, autonomous bureaucracy, production-oriented private sector, and performance-oriented governance. Based on this notion, the study aims to prove whether Ethiopia (from 1991-2018) is a developmental state or not in the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime by employing a qualitative research approach with secondary sources of data. Hence, EPRDF's economic-political realities are examined using theoretical frameworks and features of the developmental state. Accordingly, the study has found, first, that the rhetoric of creating efficient development-oriented political leadership in Ethiopia is aborted due to the prevalence of the economic-political culture of corruption, organized theft, and rent-seeking. Secondly, the EPRDF regime has failed to build autonomous and efficient bureaucracy. Thirdly, the private sector had forced so as not to be productive, competitive, and strong. Fourthly, through achieving high economic growth and reducing the level of poverty, the regime has relatively succeeded in performance-oriented governance even though debt crisis, high level of unemployment, and huge income disparity, the concentration of national resources prevailed amidst the poor level of industrialization. Thus, empirically, EPRDF's Ethiopia in the study's time frame has exceedingly remained as a predatory state and marginally continued as a developmental state. Accordingly, the study recommends succeeding regimes that strive to achieve sustainable economic development to take lessons from the failure of EPRDF in functioning development-oriented political leadership, production-oriented private sector, and meritocratic bureaucracy, plus realizing performance-oriented governance.*

**Keywords:** Politics, Development, Developmental State, Ethiopia, EPRDF

**Introduction**

The politics and the notion of 'developmental state' are originated from the experience of East and Southeast Asian states, which became successful in attaining economic development in the 1960s (Meyns and Musamba, 2010). Chalmers Johnson firstly used the term after he investigated the development miracle of Japan through following a state-led economy (Fesseha and Abteuold, 2012; Tewolde, 2017). A developmental state is one alternative path of development

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\* University of Gondar, Ethiopia. Email: [getshendale8@gmail.com](mailto:getshendale8@gmail.com)

by which a state plays a crucial role in planning and leading the development of a nation's economy in a comprehensive manner (UNDP, 2012). That is why the developmental state, conceptually, conveys the state-led economy's operation to bring economic development. It is true that lots of politicians in Ethiopia, for the last nearly three decades since the coming of EPRDF into power, correlated the political economy and ideological nomenclature of the country with the idea of a "democratic developmental state," and the country had pronounced itself as a "developmental state" (UNDP, 2012). This political truth remains constant, and researches indicate that a developmental state can be authoritarian or democratic (Muleta, 2015). It entails that a regime type does not matter a state is developmental.

The regime of post-1991 Ethiopia, EPRDF, has inclined to follow the developmental state approach of East and Southeast Asian states from other development alternative paths. This political decision is made following the exceptional success of East and Southeast Asian states and the failure of the neoliberal model in Africa and developing states (Meys and Musamba, 2010; Muleta, 2015). That is why EPRDF has found the developmental state approach of economic development as appropriate for the development of Ethiopia, which is characterized by underdevelopment. Consequently, the then politicians reiterated that it is impossible to eradicate poverty in Ethiopia through adopting neo-liberalism (Fesseha and Abtefold, 2017). Researchers also affirm that Ethiopia is a 'developmental state' (Muleta, 2015; Tewolde, 2017).

Nevertheless, previous studies describing whether Ethiopia is empirically a developmental state or not are shallow. Scholars' debate is restricted on justifying whether Ethiopia is a democratic developmental or authoritarian developmental state regardless of exhaustively investigating whether Ethiopia is a "developmental state or not though taking all features of the developmental state. For instance, politicians of the EPRDF regime and some scholars have argued that "Ethiopia is a democratic developmental state" (Muleta, 2015, p.108).

On the contrary, Tewolde (2017, p.101) has acknowledged that the post-1991 Ethiopia of EPRDF regime is an "authoritarian developmental state." It is developmental because of the record of unprecedented economic growth (*Ibid*). Like Tewolde, the researcher's position is that EPRDF's Ethiopia is an authoritarian state. Due to the absence of constitutionalism, failure of legitimacy, human rights violation, absence of freedom of speech and freedom of movement, and electoral fraud (Merera, 2007; Yonas, 2016; Tewolde, 2017). However, unlike the above

scholars, the researcher argued that unprecedented economic growth could not enable Ethiopia to be a developmental state. The reason is the existence of different parameters of the developmental state. Thus, proving whether Ethiopia is a developmental state requires further investigations by examining the political-economic realities by comprehensively considering all developmental state parameters that preceding researchers have failed to examine.

In Africa, researchers like Meyns and Musamba (2010) have, in their article, "*the developmental state in Africa: problems and prospects*", explained that there are few research publications regarding the issue of examining a state from the perspective of the developmental state approach. In the Ethiopian context, Tewolde (2017), in his research titled "*The 'democratic developmental state' in Ethiopia*", has argued that Ethiopia is an authoritarian rather developmental state. However, Tewolde and other researchers have failed to conduct an all-inclusive investigation that conveys whether EPRDF's Ethiopia is a "developmental state" or not by all parameters. It is only the country's "unprecedented economic growth" that Tewolde has inclined with limitation to judge Ethiopia as "a developmental state" (Tewolde, 2017, p.101). UNDP also considered Ethiopia as a developmental state by taking its potential of subsequently recording an economic growth rate that extended from 8.4 – 11% (Ahmed, 2017, UNDP, 2012).

Nevertheless, it is impossible to argue that the high economic growth is sufficient for a state to be entirely judged as developmental (Muleta, 2015). Additionally, "not all countries with good growth rates are developmental states" (Taylor, 2005 in Fesseha and Abtewold, 2017, p.12).

Thus, economic growth is not adequate to consider a state as developmental. Within this conceptual framework, Fesseha and Abtewold's (2017) research, "*Ethiopia: A Democratic Developmental State?*" concluded that the status of Ethiopia to be a democratic developmental state is 'controversial.'

Scholars have identified general features of the developmental state, including development-oriented political leadership, autonomous and effective bureaucracy, production-oriented private sector, and performance-oriented governance (Meyns and Musamba, 2010, p.21). The reason for selecting these four pillars to examine the status of Ethiopia from the perspective of the developmental state approach is emanated from the fact that they are features of the

developmental state. The denotation of East Asian states to be a developmental state results from their status to fulfill these featuring requirements to be called developmental state. However, as it is justified earlier, the issue of proving whether Ethiopia is a developmental state or not is not comprehensively examined by taking such features into full consideration. Thus, it is vital to broadly investigate Ethiopia's categorization of the developmental state by taking the developmental state's general measuring features. Besides, among researchers, Muleta (2015, p.108), in his article, "*The Role of Developmental State in Development: The Case of Ethiopia*", argued that:

*Ethiopia is one of the emerging democratic developmental states in Africa that largely satisfy the perquisites of [the] democratic developmental state paradigm. A few among them are the presence of development-oriented and committed political elites, commitment to build vibrant and far-reaching institutions, state bureaucracy, and the adoption of [a] long-term development plan.*

Nevertheless, contrary to the conclusion of Muleta, the existing reality as argued by the researcher about Ethiopia's political economy and institutional status is not complementary with its connotation to be a developmental state. Abiy and Bedlu substantiated the argument that corruption was prevalent and organized theft in Ethiopia during the EPRDF regime (Abiy, 2019; Bedlu, 2019). It entails, indirectly, the existence of gaps in leadership when Ethiopia is examined via the feature of development-oriented political leadership. The justification is that developmental states are less corrupted (Meysn and Musamba, 2020). Linked with the autonomous and effective bureaucratic features of the developmental state, the issue of meritocracy and professionalism is questionable. The reason is that, in Ethiopia, merit-based bureaucracy is exposed for ethnicity and party loyalty (Bedlu, 2019; Fesseha and Abtewold, 2017; Getachew, 2018). In addition, post-1991, Ethiopia was primarily held by party-led economic companies (Getachew, 2018), which challenged the country not to build a reasonably competitive and production-oriented private sector. Furthermore, unlike the status of developmental states that they achieve according to the future of performance-oriented governance, problems of unemployment and absolute poverty prevailed in Ethiopia (Alemayehu and Befekadu, 2005 Alemayehu, 2017).

These premises prove the existence of research gaps and suggest the essentiality of reexamining the politics of Ethiopia from the perspective of the developmental state approach. To this end, the study's time frame is extended from 1991 to 2018. In 1991, EPRDF came into power and joined a momentum of 'political reform' in 2018 (UNDP, 2018). Thus, the political economy and institutional realities that researchers have failed to analyze in this time frame must be comprehensively reexamined through the features of the developmental state that scholars have identified. That is why reinvestigating Ethiopia's connotation to be a "developmental state" labeled in the EPRDF regime.

Accordingly, the study's main objective is to reexamine the scientific task of proving whether EPRDF's Ethiopia was/is a developmental state or not. It is done through reviewing the previous findings of researchers who failed to consider groundbreaking realities, which could be seen to study Ethiopia's linkage with the developmental state approach of development. The study is conducted by triangulating tangible realities observed in the governance of the EPRDF regime with the features of developmental state and experience of developmental states.

Hence, in order to validate whether Ethiopia is a "developmental state" or not, the study is encircled to justify four basic research questions. Had Ethiopia experienced a development-oriented political leadership in the regime of EPRDF? Had Ethiopia practiced an autonomous and effective bureaucracy in the EPRDF regime? Had EPRDF's Ethiopia undergone a production-oriented private sector? Had Ethiopia, in the EPRDF regime, implemented performance-oriented governance? The research is done to justify these questions of the study. Apart from filling a research gap, justifying these questions has two fundamental significances. First, the study is valuable to provide a conclusive scientific analysis for intellectual readers to have a deeper understanding, both from a theoretical and empirical perspective, of the politics of the 'developmental state' in Ethiopia. Secondly, the study is significant for the current and future practitioners at all government levels responsible for attaining economic development in Ethiopia to acquire empirical shreds of evidence and findings during EPRDF's regime.

### **Research Methods and Materials**

The study has employed a qualitative research approach. As scholars argue, the qualitative method is advised to be used for a study that is descriptive and non-experimental (Frankfurt-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996). Congruent with this research method, the study has adopted a non-experimental research design of content analysis that focuses on using existing collected and written data (Bordens and Abot, 1999, Johnson, 2014). To this end, the researcher has utilized secondary sources of data. Linked with the analysis of secondary data sources, researchers recommend that secondary analysis may benefit in situations where there is a difficulty to access participants by different factors (Sutehal *et al.*, 2010). Besides, “secondary data analysis is a viable method to utilize in the process of inquiry” (Johnston, 2014, p.619). That is why the study applied this method of analysis.

Moreover, the existence of great potentiality to achieve the objective and justify the research questions by utilizing secondary data sources can enable the study to be scientifically persuasive and rigorous. Accordingly, the data analysis is conducted through the content-based descriptive technique of qualitative secondary data analysis. Hence, the study exhaustively investigated available literature and research outputs.

### **Theoretical and Empirical Discussion**

#### **The Status of Ethiopia *vis-à-vis* Features of Developmental State**

The study's analysis is done by using the featuring concepts of a developmental state as parameters of triangulating the reality both thematically and methodologically. The defining features of the developmental state are identified by those scholars who have researched the experience of East and South-East Asian countries. These features include development-oriented political leadership, autonomous and effective bureaucracy, production-oriented private sector, and performance-oriented governance (Meysn and Musamba, 2010). Accordingly, to justify whether the status of Ethiopia is empirically developmental or not in the time frame of the study, the author has conducted the theoretical and empirical analysis as follows.

#### ***Development-Oriented Political Leadership***

The theoretical root of the developmental state concept is examined via the regime of EPRDF, by which its ideological orientation has been officially introduced. Similarly, through the leadership

of Ethiopia's ex-Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, the idea of development-oriented political leadership has been overemphasized and reiterated (Muleta, 2015). The reiteration about the developmental state emanates from the interest of mobilizing the people by the slogan of "our enemy is poverty, and we will make poverty history" (Muleta, 2015, p.97). It implies that it was during the EPRDF regime in which poverty was publically declared as the enemy of the country. Accordingly, it is possible to reason out that the regime's justification in introducing a developmental state approach is to reverse poverty which is acknowledged as an enemy of the country. Here, what could be remembered is a substantial role of government intervention to eradicate poverty and transform the economy. For further clarification, a developmental state is a state which is "determined to influence the direction and pace of economic development by directly intervening in the development process, rather than relying on the uncoordinated influence of market forces to allocate economic resource" (Meyns and Musamba, 2010, p.13). Based on this definition, it is vital to justify the purpose of state intervention.

As researchers reveal it, state intervention is to encourage the industrial policy of import substitution to reinforce investment and economic growth by addressing the problem of market distortion (Onis, 1991). That is why the government has a vital role in correcting market failure, which is taken as the feature of an underdeveloped economy (*Ibid*). To this end, the vital force of policy realization is leadership. Again, the leadership of policy realization through achieving politico-economic stability requires the existence of powerful economic and political ideology that drives development (Meyns and Musamba, 2010). Simultaneously, it also demands the presence of functional institutions which can facilitate economic development and political stability (*Ibid*). Within this scope, the primary concern of the developmental state is ensuring relative equity of income, eradicating poverty, and addressing unemployment through achieving sustained economic growth and rapid industrialization (Singh and Ovadia, 2018) ). It seems to this end that EPRDF designed development programs like Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), Plan of Action for Sustainable Development and Eradication of Poverty (PASDEP), and Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) ( MoFED, 2010). As it is defined by Leftwich (2000), it bears in mind that the developmental state is demanded to be governed by the highest servants of the public who are developmentally oriented, demonstrate

high levels of commitment, and will attain economic growth. Moreover, following the parameter of development-oriented leadership, leaders of a developmental state are relatively "uncorrupted, non-predatory or had limited personal gains, and thus did not impede investments but rather facilitated the expansion of national productivity" (Fritz, 2006 in Meyns and Musamba, 2010, p.22).

While the reality of EPRDF's regime is examined, corruption and rent-seeking have remained as cancers in transforming Ethiopia's socio-economic and political development (UNDP, 2018 and Bedlu, 2019). This is due to the failure of the EPRDF regime to establish a strong system of accountability which is vital to control public-serving responsibility (Abiy, 2019, Bedlu, 2019). Thus, following the practice of revolutionary democracy in Ethiopia, the public's interest was highly exposed to and exploited by rent-seekers (Abiy, 2019). This fact proves the prevalence of pervasive corruption that blocked the provision of public goods and the attainment of development needs in Ethiopia (Singh and Ovadia, 2018). Additionally, due to the practice of federal state structure in post-1991 Ethiopia, it is an ethnic representation of nation and nationalities that has acquired a prime concern regardless of leadership quality. This experience has paved the way for the growth of the leadership system of patrimonialism, which caused for scrambling the existing wealth of a state differently through collecting servants of the public based on ethnicity, largely, from one area (Abiy, 2019, Singh and Ovadia, 2018). The scenario in Ethiopia conveys the existence of "Patronage-oriented political rulers" (Meyns and Musamba, 2010, p.8). Because of this, resources of the country scrambled and concentrated in the hands of a few instead of being distributed equitably to the majority of the population. Through examining this tendency of the regime, Singh and Ovadia (2018) pointed out that the national wealth of the state is unfairly exploited by a small group.

Apart from this, EPRDF's idea of "Revolutionary Democracy" has failed to ensure the prevalence of the rule of law and failed to limit those individuals who have strengthened their web of plundering the nation's resources and the population (Abiy, 2019). This implies the occurrence of a system that experts call the '*Kleptocratic regime*' system characterized by the existence of expanded corruption and collection of thefts (Fekade, 2018). Corruption is indeed a fundamental impediment to economic and other areas of development (Agbude and Etete, 2013; Plumer, 2012; Zouaoui *et al.*, 2017). Accordingly, the developmental state approach, among others, demands leadership quality and relatively uncorrupted governance to achieve the required



mission of development. However, unlike developmental states, Ethiopia is one of those states that scored unchanged high corruption perception index (CPI) (West, 2005; Zemelak, 2017; Zouaoui *et al.*, 2017). Researchers and institutions have categorized the corruption level of around 175 states as high, medium, and low. Their value of CPI is limited from 0.85 - 3.2, 3.34 - 6.55, and 6.96 - 8.57, respectively. Accordingly, the CPI of Ethiopia was 2.06, which implied the prevalence of high corruption levels (Zouaoui *et al.*, 2017).

Having this data in mind, Ethiopians have proved that EPRDF has arrived from the stage of producing Generals and Ministers who plunder the resources of the state in millions and billions (Bedlu, 2019). The imprisonment of officials of Metal and Engineering Technology Corporation of Ethiopia (METEC) and other federal government ministers in 2018 (Zemelak, 2017; Mahlet and Yared, 2018; Kiruga, 2019) was self-evident for the execution of massive level of corruption in EPRDF's Ethiopia. Due to this, as pointed out in Africa Report and Addis Standard, nearly 60 government officials have been accused of committing grand corruption following the coming of Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister of a state (Mahlet and Yared, 2018; Kiruga, 2019). However, it does not mean that these are the only corrupted officials of the country. Because of the systematic and structural nature of corruption (Agbude and Etete, 2013), all could not be fully and easily identified and accused.

In Ethiopia, the government of the EPRDF regime also became unable to address the inadequacy of leadership quality of attaining development-oriented political governance (Abiy, 2019). The reason is that leadership in EPRDF is linked with the politics of party loyalty and ethnic representation regardless of referring leadership qualification. In the EPRDF regime, it is justified that rent-seeking is the dominant manifestation of its system of governance. The political power linked with corruption and organized stealing has domiciliated as a culture (Abiy, 2019 and Muleta, 2015). The reality of this practice envisions Habtamu (2017) to argue that the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) dominated system of EPRDF is a collection of governmental robbers.

Moreover, the government has failed to ensure the prevalence of accountability (Zemelak, 2017; Bedlu, 2019). Therefore, there is no possibility to judge Ethiopia as a developmental state within the politico-economic culture of corruption, organized stealing, rent-seeking, violation of law,

and absence of accountability at the back of all efforts to attain economic development. For Ethiopia's status to be a developmental state based on the criteria of development-oriented political leadership, what EPRDF has is only an ideological orientation to promote a developmental state approach. In short, EPRDF's Ethiopia was/is not, empirically, a developmental state while it is examined through the parameter of development-oriented political leadership.

### ***Autonomous and Effective Bureaucracy***

Regarding this feature, as the experience of Japan demonstrates, the developmental state demands the existence of "inexpensive, professional and efficient state bureaucracy" (Johnson, 1982 cited in Meyns and Musamba, 2010, p.12). Apart from Japan, the development path of other East and Southeast Asian states like Taiwan, Thailand, and Hong Kong implies that their bureaucracy operates through prioritizing meritocratic recruitment, providing promotion incentives, applying rationality to bureaucratic officials and employees (Meyns and Musamba, 2010). The justification is that "the developmental state is managed by a powerful, professional, highly competent, and insulated and career-based bureaucracy" (Leftwich, 2000 in Meyns and Musamba, 2010, p.16). To this end, a developmental state requires "a political system in which the bureaucracy is given sufficient scope to take initiatives and operate effectively" (Onis, 1991, p.111). That is why the presence of strong and effective bureaucracy is one of the key features and basic source of strength for the developmental state (Abiy, 2019). Thus, a developmental state is needed to have an efficient and autonomous bureaucracy. The bureaucratic autonomy is required to attain the development desires and goals of the public in an inclusive manner instead of predatorily-oriented self-maximizing leadership behavior. To attain development through an autonomous and efficient bureaucracy, a developmental state necessitates and applies the system of accountability because it is accountability by which the effectiveness of bureaucracy of governance of a certain state can be measured (Onis, 1991).

In this perspective, if the reality of Ethiopia is examined, the bureaucracy is linked with the political arrangement of ethnic federalism. In the EPRDF regime, political space is opened for ethnic nationalism to prevail in Ethiopia rather than civic nationalism. However, the "economy of developmental state requires civic nationalism" (Getachew, 2018, p.51) to prevail over ethnic nationalism. In addition, the developmental state approach needs a standard that can generate a

bureaucratic elite with a sense of unity and common or shared identity, which is imperative to attain national goals (Onis, 2011). According to this perspective, Ethiopia's ethnic federalism is faced with the problem of bureaucratic inefficiency in particular and operational problems in general. It is due to the practice of recruiting experts "based on ethnicity who largely do not have a potential to achieve the desirable outcome of development" (Bedlu, 2019, p.38). This practical evidence implies that the inefficiency of state bureaucracy results from the system's failure to recruit those who have the potential of execution based on meritocracy. As justified earlier, Scholars like Onis (1991) have argued that autonomous bureaucracy's effectiveness is determined by the existence and absence of accountability and meritocracy. For instance, the success of Japan (typical developmental state) in building political and economic development has resulted from its commitment to building an efficient and autonomous bureaucracy reliant on knowledge and skill (Abiy, 2019).

On the contrary, Ethiopia has experienced a limitation in building strong bureaucratic institutions even though EPRDF has initiated a developmental state approach in the past nearly three decades (*Ibid*). It is due to the prevalence of party loyalty in the country at the expense of professionalism and meritocracy (Fesseha and Abtewold, 2017; Bedlu, 2019). That is why the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, has stated that "everybody could be appointed as a minister if he accepts the intent of EPRDF" (Bedlu, 2019, p.164).

In this leadership path under the guiding principle of ethnic chauvinism, state institutions of Ethiopia were filled and managed to run the administration. Knowledge and working experience have not been prioritized as a standard of serving the public (*Ibid*). Any civic and governmental institutions were required to be led by individuals directly and indirectly affiliated with the power holders of TPLF (Habtamu, 2017). Thus, filling institutional positions was not professional capacity but political loyalty and predominantly ethnic identity of being Tigre (Bedlu, 2017, Habtamu, 2017). That is why the system is criticized by its bureaucratic leadership experience of focusing on recruiting experts on their party loyalty of being a member of EPRDF and ethnic group, which becomes a social base of TPLF with the cost of meritocracy. It entails that institutional practices are connected with the everyday political decision-making process. However, the experience of developmental states demonstrates the establishment of a

"professional bureaucracy that kept its distance from everyday politics" (Hauge, 2019:2073). Based on this fact, it is possible to argue that the necessity of autonomous and effective bureaucracy, which is demanded to realize developmental state approach of development in Ethiopia, failed to be built in the lifetime of the regime. It is because of the deficiency of autonomous and efficient bureaucracy and the existence of a collection of governmental robbers, the governance situation of Ethiopia in the EPRDF regime has arrived from the stage of holding a picture of desperation (Habtamu, 2017). Simultaneously, the prevalence of corruption in Ethiopia has resulted from the ineffectiveness of state institutions (Zemelak, 2017). Thus, there is no ground to argue that EPRDF's Ethiopia is a developmental state in the nonexistence of an autonomous and efficient bureaucracy.

### ***Production-Oriented Private Sector***

Developmental states exhibit high capacity levels for effective economic management of domestic and foreign private economic interests (Meyns and Musamba, 2010). For this purpose, developmental states are demanded to apply selective and strategic use of protectionism. This includes providing industrial subsidies, applying sustained rewards to persuade domestic investors, creating business coalitions amongst industrial capital and financial capital with the state (Wong, 2004, Singh and Ovadia, 2018). As we can learn from the experience of East and Southeast Asian developmental states, they have a strong private sector supported by market incentives (Onis, 1991 and Yusuf, 2017). In order to pave a way and realize the existence of a production-oriented private sector, the government is responsible for exercising its autonomy of subsidizing the growth and success of private sectors, especially in the manufacturing sector like what has been seen in Taiwan, Japan, and Singapore (Onis, 1991).

In post-1991 Ethiopia, following the policy of regime change, it was relatively small enterprises that were privatized (Ethiopian Economic Association (EEA), 2007). The economic path was closed, especially for domestic investors who want to produce in a fair and competitive environment. The reason is that the economy was controlled by a few economic forces (Abiy, 2019). Though unprecedented economic growth was recorded (Tewolde, 2017, UNDP, 2012) and EPRDF has "opened the door for the private sector to play a considerable role in the economy" (Muleta, 2015, p.9), a state has failed to build independent and competitive private sector (Getachew, 2018).

Researches indicate that private investment increased in the first three years and decreased in the second half of the 1990s (Shiferaw, 2017). In addition, "although private investment bounced back to 18% of GDP during 2002-2004, it steadily declined to about 14% of GDP in 2011. It was only in 2012, halfway into the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP-1), that private investment rose above 20% of GDP" (Shiferaw, 2017, p.3). Unlike the experience of globally known developmental states in creating business alliances (Singh and Ovadia, 2018), in EPRDF's Ethiopia, the economic alliance of the private and public sector also remained weak (Getachew, 2018). Like in the past, the private sector is highly limited in producing consumer and light manufacturing goods (EEA, 2007, Hague, 2019). These realities prove the existence of pathetic institutional capacity in creating a production-oriented private sector and attaining rapid industrialization development in Ethiopia.

Generally, the required and expected role of the private sector on the economic development of Ethiopia from the perspective of the developmental state approach is unsatisfactory. The private sector has been pushed and forced to continue as weak by government intervention, which ultimately paved the way for rent-seekers to plunder people's wealth (Abiy, 2019). This practice entails that the private sector has been made to be weakened by the government itself. Moreover, it was major party companies of EPRDF like *Effort*, *Tiret*, *Dinsho*, and *Wondo*, extensively engaged under the leadership of the then politicians through dominating the economic share of governmental institutions and private institutions investors. Their economic participation and domination are found both in the business of trade and service provision (Getachew, 2018). Yonas (2016, p.135) has pointed out that "suspicious party-led businesses pervade the private sector whose growth remains anemic, and the government still controls a large share of the national economy." Similarly, Habtamu (2017) justified that the political intervention of the government weakens the private economy.

According to these premises, as mentioned above, we can understand that the domination of party companies of EPRDF has forced the private sector so as not to be competitive and productive. Thus, it is convincing to conclude that the role of the private sector in enforcing the investment sector of the state economy was equated and replaced by the domination of party companies of the regime. Because, apart from controlling political power, the evidence proves

that party-led economic companies of EPRDF have dominance over economic networks by which the private sector deserves to engage for higher production through competition. In economics, the private sector cannot be efficient by its journey of economic participation and production without an enabling economic and political environment and the absence of government incentives. If the private sector has failed to be productive in the end, we cannot find a logical or theoretical foundation to consider a state as 'developmental'.

Based on the production-oriented-private sector feature of developmental states, South East Asian states became capable of "replacing an imported product of factory and exporting their factory product" (Getachew, 2018, p.11). It proves that the import substitution policy of the Asian Tigers became efficient. This success enabled them to block the global market's pressure and become a developmental state. The contrary is true in Ethiopia. That is why researchers on macro-economy and underdevelopment of Ethiopia advise the necessity of applying the policy of import substitution for the development of the country (Eshetu, 2004). To realize the success of import substitution, Ethiopia has hardly experienced strengthening the alliance of foreign investors and private domestic firms though coequally applying the reward and punishment ('carrot and stick') policy (Hague, 2019). Though FDI is increased, the EPRDF regime has focused on applying the carrot policy. The political-economic journey of attracting FDI also lacks a practical linkage to make the private sector productive and competitive (*Ibid*).

Precisely, the success of import substitution demands the existence of a production-oriented private sector. Hence, the production-oriented private sector feature of the developmental state is characterized by its competency of enabling a state to export heavily manufactured products with global competitiveness. Since recently, in the leadership of EPRDF, an improvement has begun to be seen in the manufacturing sector of textile through the support of foreign direct investment even though it does not bring meaningful contributions of export earnings for the country (Shiferaw, 2017). However, except for some consumer goods, Ethiopia is still an importer of heavily manufactured goods like in the past (Eshetu, 2004 and Shiferaw, 2017). It implies, partly, the low solidarity level of the production-oriented private sector. That is one of the reasons that from states of Sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopia is known for its lowest shares of industry and manufacturing (Eshetu, 2004; Muleta, 2015). Other researchers also supported the findings that Ethiopia's private production and investment rate is low (Shiferaw, 2017).

Accordingly, by the parameter of having a production-oriented private sector, empirically, Ethiopia cannot be judged as a 'developmental state'.

### ***Performance-Oriented Governance***

The last defining feature of a developmental state is the existence of performance-oriented governance. This type of governance is characterized by promoting economic growth and attainment of rapid industrialization (Meyns and Musamba, 2010, Singh and Ovadia, 2018). From the developmental state approach, benefiting citizens in economic growth is linked with eradicating poverty and addressing unemployment with equity (Musamba, 2010). Through examining the regime of EPRDF, Tewolde (2017, p.101) has concluded that Ethiopia became a developmental state due to its "unprecedented economic growth." However, becoming a developmental state and attaining economic growth that would be measured by Growth National Product (GNP) is different. The justification is that "growth data do not indicate the direction of change in income distribution and its impact on the wellbeing of the people" (Jeong, 2000, p.243). Simultaneously, a developmental state is manifested by the attainment of rapid and sustained growth of industrialization (Singh and Ovadia, 2018). Based on this premise, the researcher argues that economic growth cannot enable Ethiopia to be a developmental state even if that growth is part of such an approach because "growth and development are not the same things" (UNDP, 2012, p.4). However, the remarkable progress of Ethiopia's growth measured in GDP is recognizable.

Moreover, the performance-oriented governance of a developmental state is measured by the state's achievement of rapid and sustained growth of industrialization (Singh and Ovadia, 2018). By this theoretical parameter, Ethiopia is known for its poor level of industrialization and infant stage of the manufacturing sector (Ahmed, 2017). According to Shiferaw (2017), the total contribution of the private and public sectors manufacturing accounts for only 5% of GDP. Accordingly, unlike developmental states, Hauge (2019:2072) revealed that "Ethiopia is at a very early stage of industrialization."

Nonetheless, Ethiopia has invested "heavily to reduce poverty and promote social development" (UNDP, 2018, p.5). Accordingly, the researcher recognized that the regime of EPRDF did

remarkable expansion on the access of social services. Besides this, the quality of education and health services has not been improved (*Ibid*). Furthermore, to appraise the performance-oriented governance of the developmental state, the government is expected to resolve problems of income inequality, unemployment, and rampant poverty (Deyo, 1987 in Meyns and Musamba, 2010, UNDP, 2012). Within such a conceptual and practical level of understanding, as seen from East Asian developmental states, equity is the central point of the success of developmental states. That is why the attainment of economic growth and equitable income distribution is the manifestation of these East Asian states. Accordingly, developmental states have attained a high level of economic growth and relatively equitable income distribution among their respective people (Onis, 1991).

However, in the Ethiopian context, there is a significant disparity in income distribution at the national level. In post-1991, what was created in Ethiopia was the society of few rich and many poor (Getachew, 2018). It is a substantial verification for the existence of a vast disparity of income distribution in the country. In EPRDF's Ethiopia, there was also a disparity of budget allocation at the regional level that challenged the developmental state approach so as not to be realized. Regarding this fact, Merera (2007, p.99) stated that:

*The Tigray region's per capita share of the federal subsidy was consistently higher than the Oromia, Amhara, and SNNP regions which, together, constitute more than 80% of the country's population. The same is true for capital expenditure per capita as well as foreign loans and aid per capita. Furthermore, the Somali region, whose population is greater than Tigray, was getting proportionally far less than Tigray.*

The above literature assures the prevalence of inequitable and unfair distribution of the country's national resources for its regions. This truth manifests the EPRDF regime as examined from 1991 to 2018. That is why the World Bank has reported that the economic growth recorded in Ethiopia does not create an equal opportunity for all regions and people to be equally benefited (World Bank, 2010 cited by Getachew, 2018). Researchers also urged that, in the EPRDF regime, there is "the growing concentration of power and wealth within a small group" (Singh and Ovadia, 2018, p.1042). Consequently, unfair distribution of national resources and unequal benefit from the state's economic growth entails the weakness of the performance-oriented governance of Ethiopia to be judged as a developmental state.



Moreover, unlike East Asian developmental states, the economic growth of Ethiopia is not accompanied by a sharp increase in the manufacturing sector (Shiferaw, 2017). Other researches also verify that the ties of foreign investors and the domestic economy of typical developmental states in their foreign direct investment (FDI) oriented policy are strong and contributed to the sustained growth of industrialization (Hague, 2019). Nonetheless, the linkage of business between foreign investors and domestic firms in EPRDF's Ethiopia has endured as poor, with the exception of ties between foreign footwear producers and local tanneries (Hague, 2019). It implies that Ethiopia's potential to become a developmental state in building sustained growth of industrialization is not strengthened.

Besides, apart from economic growth, the most imperative success that a developmental state should have is executive political elites who have a high level of commitment to reduce poverty and sustain political legitimacy (Leftwich, 2000 in Meyns and Musamba, 2010). It implies that the legitimacy of the political elite to govern a state is tightly linked to the state's ability to operate efficiently to reduce poverty and legitimate governance of the population. This urges that performance-oriented governance is demanded to address existing problems related to persistent unemployment, rampant poverty, and a high level of income inequality (Meyns and Musamba, 2010). As pointed out by Shiferaw that "the investment rate in Ethiopia doubled from about 20% of GDP in the second half of the 1990s to about 40% of GDP in 2014" (Shiferaw, 2017, p.34) which has contributed significantly to Ethiopia's promising economic growth. Therefore, Ethiopia's economy in the EPRDF regime has achieved a growth rate averaging 9.9 a year from 2007 to 2018 (Oshora *et al.*, 2021). However, economic growth exclusively cannot enable a state to be developmental (Hsu, 2012). Hence, considering EPRDF's Ethiopia as a developmental state by considering economic growth as one element of performance-oriented governance is "expected to resolve levels of income inequality, unemployment, and rampant poverty" (Meyns and Musamba, 2010, p.25).

While EPRDF's Ethiopia is examined, up until 2005, 44.2 percent of the total population was living below the poverty line (Alemayehu and Befekadu, 2005). Since then, around 8 million chronically food-insecure people have been targeted to be supported by a productive safety net program (PSNP) (UNDP, 2018). Still, 80% of the Ethiopian population is found in the living

condition, which can be termed "from hand to mouth" (Getachew, 2018, p. 21). Statistical data indicated that poverty was declined by 9% between the years 2005 and 2011 (Jolliffe *et al.*, 2016). The population who live in extreme poverty (\$1.9 and less) is reduced from 55.3 % in 2000 to 33.5 % in 2015 (World Bank, 2016 cited by Ahmed, 2018). However, how much the promising economic growth of Ethiopia was changed into an inclusive and better quality of job creation is questionable (Oshora *et al.*, 2021). Concerning this fact, the regime's inability to attain equity concerning the distribution of national budget and wealth is also justified earlier. Based on the evidence under investigation, EPRDF's Ethiopia cannot be righteously regarded as a developmental state. For a government that prefers to follow a developmental state, Getachew (2018, p.25) has stated that:

*A certain economic policy's effectiveness is measured by balancing the growth through equitable accessibility of resources, not by making or not making the growth fast. It is only while economic development is balanced and inclusively benefits the whole sections of the society by which a government can argue that it has brought economic growth. The reason is that growth must be citizen-driven rather than a policy-driven.*

Contrarily, the people of Ethiopia are known for the wide disparity of wealth challenged by the increasing trend of inflation, poverty, unemployment, and shortage of foreign currency (Getachew, 2018). Furthermore, inflation which reduces the purchasing power of its people, basically the poor and middle class of the society, became an expanding factor of absolute poverty (75%) in Ethiopia than ever before (Alemayehu, 2017).<sup>24</sup> All of the above qualitative and quantitative data prove that rampant and absolute poverty prevails in Ethiopians' lives, with the exception of its severity from time to time. Moreover, in the Human Development Index (HDI) of 2015, Ethiopia was ranked at 174<sup>th</sup> of 188 states (Ahmed, 2018). This is the lowest record that is not expected from a state presumed as a developmental state. Thus, the achievement of promising economic growth in EPRDF contributed to the reduction of severity of poverty and unemployment but was not supported by the rapid growth of industrialization, the realization of equity in wealth distribution, and the lowest HDI and failed to guarantee Ethiopia to be righteously developmental state.

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<sup>24</sup> Alemyahu Geda is a Professor of Economics at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. The researcher recorded this affirmation while presenting his research paper at the University of Gondar in 2017.

### **Results and Discussions**

This research affirmed that Ethiopia, in the EPRDF regime, had developed a comprehensive development strategy that conveyed the essentiality of following the developmental state approach. It also revealed that EPRDF had endured as a proponent of the developmental state approach to achieve economic development. However, in reality, EPRDF's Ethiopia was not profoundly qualified as a developmental state. The research has revealed that the political economy and culture of corruption, organized theft, rent-seeking, and absence of accountability obligated the development-oriented political leadership feature of developmental state to fail in Ethiopia. Due to the dominance of ethnicity and party loyalty, the EPRDF regime had not succeeded in establishing an autonomous and efficient bureaucracy based on meritocracy.

Moreover, the production-oriented private sector was not created in Ethiopia. Instead, the private sector was forced not to be competitive and productive. Besides, the alliance of the domestic private firms with foreign investors for structural and sustained growth of production was weak. From the perspective of performance-oriented governance, the EPRDF regime has failed to attain rapid growth of industrialization. The recorded promising economic growth has indeed reduced the level of poverty and unemployment. However, problems of the debt crisis, unemployment, income disparity, and generally rampant poverty were not resolved in the country. Hence, the study has empirically found that EPRDF's Ethiopia has remained a marginally developmental and exceedingly predatory state.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

From the above discussion and analysis, it can be concluded that the status of Ethiopia was not fairly a developmental state. Instead, it has dominantly stayed as a predatory state. It happens due to the failure of TPLF dominated regime of EPRDF to create an enabling environment for comprehensive operation of features of developmental state approach in the country. Thus, essential features of developmental state like development-oriented leadership, autonomous and efficient bureaucracy, production-oriented private sector, and performance-oriented governance have not been efficiently attained. To provide justifications, unlike developmental states, what has been deep-rooted in EPRDF's Ethiopia was grand corruption and structurally organized theft

(Abiy, 2019). Therefore, the practice of structurally organized grand corruption has caused the development-oriented political leadership parameter of developmental state to be aborted.

Furthermore, all of this reality is the manifestation of a predatory state. Conceptually, a predatory state is a state where its business people and political elites tend to extract and exploit public resources for their private purpose instead of benefiting society and ordinary people (Diamond, 2008 and UNDP, 2012). It entails that a predatory state is a state which consists of rulers who primarily focus on maximizing their interests.

Besides proving the existence of a weak private economic sector and inefficient bureaucracy, the study also revealed that EPRDF became unable to realize the performance-oriented governance feature of a developmental state. That is why the performances of the state in attaining equity, eradicating poverty, and addressing unemployment are continued as the most challenging socio-economic issue of the regime. Though promising economic growth is recorded, at the same time, unemployment of youths and economic disparity between the poor and rich has highly prevailed. Moreover, unlike east and Southeast Asian developmental states, EPRDF's Ethiopia does not achieve rapid industrialization growth. The study has concluded that EPRDF's Ethiopia is not a relatively developmental rather a predatory state. Scholars in the field argue that predatory states are known for their lowest performance of attaining popular welfare and character of organized banditry (Moselle and Polak, 2001). The same is true in Ethiopia's political and economic reality, where organized theft of the system has severely affected public welfare, and the trajectory of development projects' success is expanded in the leadership of EPRDF.

Therefore, like other features, the performance-oriented governance parameter of the developmental state approach is not efficiently achieved in Ethiopia. Accordingly, the study concluded that the state-led economy of EPRDF's Ethiopia, characterized by organized theft, inefficient bureaucracy, weak private economic sector, weak industrialization, and rampant poverty, could not enable Ethiopia to be empirically developmental. Generally and empirically, in the EPRDF regime extended from 1991 to 2018, Ethiopia is a slightly developmental and exceedingly predatory state. It entails that the regime has failed to make Ethiopia a developmental state. Thus, the researcher recommends the successive regimes of Ethiopia and other states to take lessons from the failure of EPRDF in attaining development through

efficiently functioning development-oriented political governance, production-oriented private sector, performance-oriented governance, and efficient and autonomous bureaucracy.

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