



## The state of multiparty democracy and multilevel governance under the Ethiopian developmental state model: A Retrospective analysis

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### Abstract

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*Ethiopia's experiment with the developmental state model (DSM) within its federal system has been widely contested on the grounds of its compatibility with the country's democratic and federal systems of governance. This paper argued that even though DSM tends to favor centralized state structure and authoritarian governance system, these features however are not necessarily inherent features of the model as the experiences of countries like India and South Africa demonstrate. They managed to build a democratic developmental state under a constitutionally decentralized state structure. Regarding the Ethiopian experience with the model, the article shows that Ethiopia's experiment with the DSM has been largely driven by revolutionary democracy which led to authoritarian developmentalism which significantly undermined both multiparty democracy and multilevel governance system in the country.*

**Keywords:** Developmental State Model, Ethiopia, federalism, Multiparty Democracy, Multilevel Governance

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Following the Ethiopian government's official adoption of the developmental state model (DSM) as a viable path to realizing rapid economic growth and industrialization, the model has served until recently (2018, a year of major political change) as the driving ideological framework for the country's political economy. However, the DSM's implementation under the leadership of the now-defunct Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF) has been a subject of debate in academic and policy circles (see for example Clapham, 2006, 2009 & 2017; Asnake, 2011; De Waal, 2012 & 2018; Lefort, 2012, and Fantini, 2013). The debates relate to, among other things, the question of whether the DSM harmoniously co-exists with the constitutionally decentralized and democratic federal system of Ethiopia.

On the one hand, proponents of the Ethiopian DSM (EDSM) argue that the model was essentially grounded in federal and democratic governance. They maintain that the democratic DSM implemented by the EPRDF delivered tangible results, as seen in the country's double-digit economic growth and the legitimation of its top leadership in successive national elections (Bereket, 2011 & 2017). On the other hand, others argue that the application of the DSM under the EPRDF's leadership was characterized by and large by "development authoritarianism" that significantly undermined democratic federalism, in particular regional autonomy, multiparty democracy, freedom of the press, and freedom for civil society organizations (CSOs) (Lefort, 2013).

The DSM has indeed been implemented in many countries across the globe, although the model's status as a distinct developmental path and its compatibility with democratic governance has been a widely contested issue among scholars and policy-makers (Mkandawire, 2001 & 2010; Leftwich, 2005). Two main arguments are espoused: the "incompatibility thesis" and the "compatibility thesis" of the model with democracy and pluralism. Indeed, many studies of the nature of the DSM have linked it to "authoritarianism". As a considerable number of scholars who studied the experiences of the East Asian developmental states (DSs) have argued (Leftwich, 2005), the model tends to promote a governance system that is "hegemonic, centrist and interventionist" and whose priority is to realize economic development above everything else, even democracy (Prado et al., 2016).

However, even though dominant scholarly views on the DSM associate it with authoritarianism, there is a counterargument, albeit less dominant. Some people oppose such an association and argue for the possibility of building a democratic developmental state model (DDSM) (Mkandawire, 2010). According to proponents of this view, who argue that there indeed are 21st-century DDSMs, authoritarianism is an exogenous, rather than an endogenous feature of the DSM and the model can thus be democratic.

But as several studies of successful East Asian developmental states such as South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan, the prototypes of the DSM, have found, the DSM is antithetical to a democratic and decentralized governance system, which weighs in favor of the "incompatibility thesis" (see for example Chang, 2002; Johnson, 1999; Kim, 1999; Evans, 1995, and Mkandawire, 2001 & 2010). The application of the DSM in a federal political system associated, at least in theory, with federal democracy raises serious questions about the compatibility of the former with the latter. In the federal political system (FPS), the essence of federal democracy lies in constitutionally entrenched multilevel governance anchored on the division of state power that confers autonomy to regional states along with political pluralism (Watts, 2002). A well-functioning federal democracy is indeed essential for the meaningful exercise of both self-rule and shared rule in a federal political system (Elazar, 1995). Hence, the experiment of DSM within the Ethiopian federation should be examined within a broader context of these ongoing debates, as well as of the country's constitutional federal political system, which provides for decentralized and democratic governance of development.

Some studies have explored the EPRDF's conception and execution of the DSM as well as the model's interplay with the country's federal system. These studies can generally be placed into two broad categories (See for example: Clapham, 2006 & 2017; Batch, 2011; Mesay, 2011; Fantini, 2013; Abbink, 2017; Berket, 2011; Addis Alem, 2013). The first comprises studies that support the "incompatibility thesis", and the second, those that support the "compatibility

thesis”. Indeed, even within these broad categories, the studies vary in terms of their focus of investigation and approach of inquiry as well as their outcomes.

In terms of their focus of the investigation, studies that support the “incompatibility thesis” typically address at least one of four major themes: 1) the challenges and desirability of building a DSM; 2) the relationship between the DSM and democracy; 3) the relationship between an ethnic-based federal arrangement and the DSM; and 4) the pitfalls of applying the DSM in certain policy areas. Generally, most of the studies that support the “incompatibility thesis” share the argument that the practice of the DSM in Ethiopia by the EPRDF has undermined the country’s federal system.

These studies, however, fall short of providing a comprehensive explanation of the EDSM’s interplay with, and impact, on Ethiopia’s federal system. They are also scanty and not sufficiently empirically rigorous in their analysis of specific policy areas and institutions. Specifically, the studies have two major limitations. First, they do not adequately explore how the DSM in and of itself (i.e. independently of other factors such as the EPRDF’s ideology of “revolutionary democracy”, the nature of political culture in the country, and the design of the Constitution concerning the vertical division power between tiers of government) is linked to the tendency towards centralization. Secondly, the studies appear to succumb to the myopic argument that because the DSM has worked well in East Asian countries within a context of unitary state structures and centralized systems of governance, it would not work in countries with a decentralized governance system, such as Ethiopia.

Similar is the case with studies that generally appear to support the “compatibility thesis” and the possibility of building a DDSM, and which argue that the EDSM has been executed harmoniously with the country’s federal system. These studies also fall far short of critically examining and adequately explaining how the model’s authoritarian tendency and the EPRDF’s hegemonic rule under the EDSM have played out in the country’s federal system, particularly when it comes to running a democratic and decentralized development governance system. That is, they do not specifically indicate how the implementation of the model – which is often associated with a largely authoritarian and centrist governance approach – could be reconciled with the core values and institutions of a genuine federal political system, such as democratic governance, subnational policy autonomy, policy innovation, and accountable and responsive governance.

Against this backdrop, this article aims to re-assess the impact of the practice of the DSM on multiparty democracy and multilevel governance in Ethiopia. In doing so, the specific objectives of this study are twofold. First, it points out the impact of the EDSM on multiparty electoral democracy in Ethiopia; and secondly, it pinpoints the impact of the EDSM on the country’s constitutional multilevel development governance system, which guarantees autonomy for regional states to make and execute their regional development policies, as outlined under the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The FDRE Constitution provides for a decentralised and democratic governance of development underpinned by the core values and principles of a federal democracy and a constitutionally delineated vertical division of power between tiers of government. See Articles 1; 8; 9; 10; 12; 13; 39(1), (2) and (3); 41; 43; 50(2), (3), (4) and (8); 88; 89; 90; and 92 of the FDRE Constitution.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This article assesses Ethiopia's experiment with the DSM vis-à-vis its impacts on democratic federalism from late 2002 until April 2018 (a critical juncture that saw key political changes, namely the demise of EPRDF). The study uses a retrospective research design that looks back at Ethiopia's experiment with the DSM to examine the latter's interaction with and impact on the norms and institutions of democratic federalism enshrined in the FDRE Constitution. This study employs mainly qualitative procedures for collecting and analyzing data from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include policy documents, strategic plans, and legislation. In addition, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with opposition party figures as well as senior government officials and technical experts who occupied various posts at the federal and regional state levels under the EPRDF-led government.

In selecting samples, the study relied on purposive sampling techniques, and due consideration was given to ensure that the selection of participants was fairly representative of the different socio-economic development levels of regional states across Ethiopia. Accordingly, a total of five regional states were identified and selected as participants in this study: the Gambella Peoples' National Regional State (GPNRS) and the Benishangul-Gumuz National Regional State (BGNRS), from the 'emerging regions'; and the Amhara National Regional State (ANRS), the Oromia National Regional State (ONRS), and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), from the 'developed regions'.

This article is arranged into 7 sections and main parts. The first section is this introduction. Section two provides the methods and material of the study. Section three discusses the theoretical and conceptual framework of, and normative discourses on, the DSM in general. Section four describes the relationship between DSM and authoritarianism. Section five provides the core normative and institutional underpinnings of EPRDF's DSM. Section six presents the empirical analysis and findings of the paper specifically on the implication of EPRDF's experiment with the DSM against multiparty democracy and multilevel development governance (MLDG). Section Seven, concludes the paper by recapping the core arguments and findings of the study.

## 3. THE DSM: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In contrast to the neoclassical narrative that downplays the role of a big state on the grounds of its inefficiency in resource allocation, in the DSM, as its proponents argue, the state "governs" or regulates the market rather than letting market forces set the price of wages and goods and services. In the DSM, state intervention to address market inefficiencies is believed to create economies of scale, particularly in transitional Third World economies dominated by the primary sectors of the economy (Kim, 1999). This is one of the main attributes of the DSM as an alternative means to create capabilities to pave the way for rapid industrialization. Furthermore, citing as an example the developmental state in post-war Japan (later emulated by South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong in the 1970s and early 1990s), Johnson argues that markets do not exist in isolation but arise as a result of deliberate action in the state and politics (Evans, 1995).

It is widely argued by many scholars that the DSM draws on aspects of all of the conventional paradigms or models of economic development; as a result, it is often seen as a mid-way point

between socialism and market-led liberalism (Leftwich, 1995; Woo-Cummings, 1999; Ghani et al., 2005). While experiences with the DSM differ from one country to another, one can point out certain core elements that are shared by all of the countries that have adopted it.

First and foremost, the DSM emphasizes the importance of active state intervention in managing, governing, and regulating the economy. The state plays an active role in regulating the market, building essential public infrastructure, redistributing resources as well as producing and providing goods and services which the private sector is unwilling or unable to provide (Leftwich, 1995, p. 400–402). The DSM specifically allows for state-led capitalism within liberal economic principles. This in turn requires the “developmental” state to have at least two essential attributes: the state must have the capacity to control a vast majority of its territory, and it must possess a set of core capacities that enable it to design and deliver various development policies (Ghani, 2005). This is one of the main reasons for considering the DSM as an alternative path to bringing about rapid economic growth and structural transformation towards industrialization in transitional economies with huge market inefficiencies, such as Ethiopia.

Secondly, nationalism and a national vision lie at the heart of the DSM. This is so because it is not sufficient for the DSM to only have development-oriented goals and policies; it also needs to be capable of effecting national mobilization towards these goals. National mobilization is crucial for gaining consensus on developmental projects and enabling the state to mobilize or rally broad sections of the populace for their execution (Woo-Cummings, 1999). This means people from the apex of power down to farmers in villages need to align themselves with, and sing to the tune of, the “development agenda” set by the leadership at the top (Woo-Cummings, 1999).

Thirdly, embedded autonomy is another key tenet of the DSM. “Embedded autonomy” refers to the nature of the relationship that should exist between a strong interventionist state and other social agents, such as influential private businesses, landlords, and the like (Evans, 2005). According to Evans, under the DSM, the state is believed to be autonomous as long as it has a rationalized bureaucracy characterized by meritocracy and long-term career prospects – traits that make civil servants more professional and detached from the influence of powerful rent-seeking groups. It is this “autonomy”, according to Evans, which gives a state the ability to define and pursue its strategic developmental goals; the “embeddedness” of this “autonomy” is created by forming alliances with key social groups that enable the state to achieve its developmental goals.

As the experience of successful East Asian developmental states shows, it is also essential that, under the DSM, there are pilot agencies responsible for policy planning, coordinating, and overseeing implementation (Chang & Evans, 2005). For instance, during its experience with the DSM between the 1960s and the 1980s, South Korea had a powerful pilot agency known as the Economic Planning Board (EPB), with the responsibility not only to undertake policy and strategy planning but also to control the allocation of budget. The primary role of the EPB was coordinating the activities of other key players in the economy, including the then Ministry of Commerce and Industry, which was in charge of formulating and implementing sectoral policies as well as all overseeing banks and state-owned enterprises. The same holds for Taiwan, Singapore, and Japan (Chang & Evans, 2005).

Meanwhile, another important institutional factor for the DSM relates to the party system. Under the DSM, the party system plays a crucial role in defining the appropriate ideological orientation, institutions, and policies to be adopted; the success of the DSM is often linked, among other things, to the party system in that the latter is the main driver of the ideology of developmentalism and its translation into institutions and practices (Bogaards, 2013). Based on the number of parties and the level of democratic competition, party systems can be categorized as one-party, two-party, and multiparty systems. A one-party system is an autocratic power where only a single party is constitutionally entitled to rule a state and all forms of political opposition are banned by law. Cuba, North Korea, and China are examples of one-party systems. In a two-party system, the political arena is, of course, dominated by just two parties – other parties might exist but they have little or no political significance. A multiparty system represents broader political constituencies and integrates society into the democratic process; it forms the basis for stable political coalitions and governments, particularly in situations of great uncertainty about electoral outcomes and political matters generally. See Bogaards (2013).

In developing states, party politics are usually associated with either a dominant party or a hegemonic-party system (Woo-Cummings, 1999, p. 9). According to Woo-Cummings (1999, p. 5), a dominant-party system, otherwise known as a hegemonic-party system is one in which the incumbent is dominant to such an extent that its victory at elections is a mere formality. In these systems, incumbents face a very limited degree of competitive electoral challenge. The DSM often tends to embrace party politics that expedite developmental policy-making and enforcement with little or no procedural hurdles (Woo-Cummings, 1999). Under the DSM, therefore, a dominant, if not hegemonic, party system is viewed as apposite for expedited collective action that facilitates centralized rent creation and distribution (Booth, 2012). The importance of a hegemonic party under the DSM is underlined by Leftwich (1998, p. 400):

In the DSM, without a dominant-party political rule, developmental elites would be divided or paralyzed and relative state autonomy would have been impossible and the bargaining demands of special interests would have come to predominate and the bureaucratic continuity and capacity may be compromised in a way that would be unlikely to serve national developmental goal/national development goals.

Last but not the least, the other feature of the developmental state is its tendency to change itself toward authoritarian regimes. Indeed, studies conducted on the nature of the DSM have often linked the model with authoritarianism. As a considerable number of scholars who have studied the experiences of the East Asian DSs have often argued, the model is largely viewed as tending to promote a governance system that is hegemonic, centrist, and interventionist whose priority is to realize economic development more than anything else, even democracy (For more on this, see: Chu, 2016; Prado et al., 2016). East Asian DSs often described to have had traditional marks of heavy temptations toward authoritarianism which is in the words of Samuel Huntington's legacies of oriental despotism as their shared behavior (Leftwich, 2005, p. 686). Some of the explanations given to the authoritarian governances embedded with the DSM are the state must ease itself from the procedural hurdles of democracy to deliver fast economic growth not to mention that governments need to stay in power for a longer period to ensure continuity of policy that would transform the country (Fantini, 2013).

Even though the dominant scholarly views on the DSM associate it with authoritarianism, there is a counter narration, albeit not dominant, that opposes such association and argues for the possibility of building a democratic developmental state model (DDSM) (see Mkandawire,

2010; Chibber, 2014). According to the proponents of DDSM, authoritarianism is an exogenous, rather than endogenous, feature of the DSM, and the model can be democratic arguing that there indeed are 21st century democratic developmental states (Chibber, 2014, Evans, 2010; Mkandawire, 2010). In Ethiopia too, the dominant view is that the EPRDF's DSM has had authoritarianism as its dominant characteristic feature of the Ethiopian DSM (see Abbink, 2017; Clapham, 2018; Ermias, 2021). There are however some who maintain that Ethiopia's experiment with the model has been one of a DDSM, and they further argued that the model has been implemented in a manner that complements the country's federal arrangement (see for example Berket, 2011; Meles, 2012; Addis Alem, 2013). Let's then see the relationship that DSM has with an authoritarian mode of governance.

#### 4. DSM AND AUTHORITARIANISM: ARE THEY INHERENTLY LINKED?

Leftwich (2008) maintains that democratic consolidation has three fundamental features, namely, legitimacy, the institutionalization of rules and procedures, and the exercise of policy restraint by the winning parties. As Leftwich (2008, p. 127) argued, the DSM tends towards an authoritarian governance system as a necessary evil to address the underdevelopment problem by curtailing the consolidation of democracy. In this regard, the dominant conception of the DSM, as argued by considerable scholars (Huntington, 1987; Robinson & White, 1998; Prado et al., 2016; Ohno, 2008; Chu, 2016) pays little heed to democratic governance but for development authoritarianism. Indeed, one of the contending issues that often arise in the case of DSM is the interaction of the model with democracy (Woo-Cumings, 1999; Chibber, 2014). This is, noted by Fritz & Menocal (2007, p. 536) as 'historically, many developmental states have been based on various forms of non-democratic political regimes: monarchies in nineteenth-century Europe, capitalist dictatorships in South Korea and Taiwan, and communist authoritarian regimes in contemporary China and Vietnam. Furthermore, in describing the importance of an expedient governance system under the DSM over democracy which is viewed as a hindrance for it provides procedural cumbersome in decision-making and enforcement, it is pointed out by Fritz & Menocal (2007, p. 36) as follows:

In the case of authoritarian developmental states, power tends to be centralized in the hands of a few key actors and/or institutions, enabling political leaders to make and implement decisions (especially 'difficult' ones that may be opposed by certain segments of the population) more quickly. One of the characteristics of a democratic system, in contrast, is the diffusion of power among various sets of actors and institutions both inside and outside the government, which inevitably slows down the decision-making process, and makes it more difficult to take decisions that hurt important constituencies.

Some scholars even considered authoritarianism as an essential element for the success of DSM and as one of the factors that enhanced the developmental capacity of the Asian developmental states in the 1970s and 80s (Huntington, 1987). For instance, Huntington (1987, pp. 14-15) in his analysis of the incompatibility of democracy and development in transitional poor societies pointing that democratic governments would simply be too "soft" and hence unable to mobilize resources, curtail consumption, and promote investment to achieve a high growth rate. Therefore, he stresses that, during the process of political development in developing countries, political leaders must focus on strengthening political authority, maintaining social order, and promoting political institutionalization to create a favorable political environment for economic development (Woo-Cumings, 1999).

Similarly, [Leftwich \(2008\)](#) argues that the discourse that dominates the course of development governance under the DSM is overcoming the 'structural contradiction' between democracy and development represents the most significant challenge in realizing democratic developmentalism. This is due to the lengthy process and sometimes stalemate that may arise in democracies where consultation, deliberation, and consent an ingredient of the process of democratic decision-making. Whereas, in DSM expediting radical decision-making is more desirable than the lengthy and costly democratic process ([Leftwich, 2007](#), p. 127). In a similar vein, [Bolesta \(2007, p. 111\)](#) asserts that the DSM would be difficult to sustain in a fully democratic system in which people enjoy extensive political rights. According to this view, if the management of the state is developmental, then a form of authoritarianism can probably replace a democratic system, where the power legitimacy is drawn from developmental achievements and not directly from public elements ([Fujiwara, 1992](#)). In this regard, an effective DSM inevitably requires developmental dictatorship where according to [Fujiwara \(1992, p. 329\)](#) "economic development requires the centralization of power and stability, while democratization needs the separation of powers and institutionalization of political changes." Such an 'economic development first' argument is embedded in the DSM that emphasizes that in developing countries if democratization is sought before economic development, it would be disadvantageous and not conducive for conditions of development to arise ([Fujiwara \(1992, p. 329\)](#)).

Indeed, successful East Asian developmental states were authoritarian in their approaches to enforcing developmental policies to realize fast growth within a short period ([Mkandawire, 2001](#)). In these countries, fearing that adherence to democracy would lead to unruliness and disorderly conduct that would be disadvantageous to development, they considered democracy in the short-term as a luxury they could hardly afford, and thus they focused more on developing discipline than democracy ([Mackie, 1998](#)). Their impressive success is some claims that should not implicate that states need to be authoritarian to be developmental ([Mkandawire, 2001](#)). The proponents of this view, point out several authoritarian but anti-developmental or non-developmental states in Africa and Latin America. In this regard, Brazil, Botswana, Mauritius, and South Africa are very good examples ([Mackie, 1998](#)).

However, the fact that it is possible to name a good number of authoritarian developmental states does not settle the issue as there are however few democratic experiments ([Chibber, 2014](#)). Contrary to the description of the DSM as authoritarian in its tendency, there are, however, they are few, who argue that development authoritarianism is rather exogenous than endogenous factors in the DSM and it can be democratic and even there is essentially 21centuray democratic developmental state ([Chibber, 2014](#), [Evans, 2010](#); [Mkandawire, 2010](#)). According to this view, unlike the 20th century's DSM, in the 21st century, the DSM is conceived as being primarily concerned with human well-being, and development strategies and policies cannot be formulated by technocrats but must be derived from organized public deliberations ([Evans, 2010](#)). In this regard, deliberative and participatory democratic institutions are seen as central to a 21st-century conception of the DSM ([Evans, 2010](#)).

The general assertion that the DSM is inherently authoritarian is therefore challenged as it is hardly possible to make a simple generalization about the inherent relationship between the DSM and authoritarianism given some democratic experiences such as Japan ([Chibber, 2014](#)). [Randall \(2007, p. 635\)](#), for instance, contends that the DSM must be democratic as authoritarian systems are a major hindrance not only to political development but also to economic progress. Democracy has a detrimental role in enhancing the effectiveness of the



state in bringing about development (Lange & Rueschmyer, 2005). As Mkandawire (2005, p. 47) argues, a democratic DSM that embraces a system of checks and balances and one that is based on broad-based state-society alliances ensures popular participation in governance and the transformative processes. Thus, the conclusion is drawn that the DSM is autocratic by nature and thus not fitting with a democratic context. Such a conclusion is erroneous because first, not all the east Asian tigers were authoritarian. For instance, Japan was democratic while South Korea was authoritarian. Second, that the Asian type of the DSM was autocratic does not mean that others too have to be also autocratic (Randall, 2007).

Generally, even though it may not be appropriate to describe the DSM as inherently undemocratic, as shown above, a considerable number of scholars characterize it as being often associated with ‘development authoritarianism’. For example, Woo Cumings (1999, p. 19-20) notes that the DS can be “good in terms of its effectiveness but it can also be ugly for its undemocratic and authoritarian tendencies, explicitly or implicitly” Given such a normative depiction of the DSM as an authoritarian mode of governance, what would be the issues of incompatibility - at least in principle - that the application of the DSM in an FPS may raise given that the latter is often attributed to democratic governance that promotes political pluralism and multilevel governance system? Let’s see the Ethiopian experience concerning multiparty and multilevel governance perspectives.

## 5. AN OVERVIEW OF THE EPRDF’S DSM

As recorded in various party and official government documents, the EPRDF’s DSM largely draws on the emulation of the development path of the NICs, such as South Korea and Taiwan that had proclaimed the essence and aspects of its hegemonic developmentalism under its DSM (EPRDF, 2010; Altenburg, 2010; Abbink, 2011a). In this regard, for example, the Ethiopian government invited Japanese and Korean experts to advise the country on industrial policy (Altenburg, 2010). The various development policies prepared by the federal government exhibit policy parallels with that of the east Asian DSs where they state, as their pillars, early focus on boosting agricultural productivity to accumulate capital; increasing supply for agro-industries; providing incentives for export orientation; and implementing carrot and stick policies for enterprises (Abbink, 2011a). In this connection, as stated by Abbink (2011a, p. 598) ADLI, IDS, and GTPs, along with other party documents, are the best indication that the adoption of the DSM in Ethiopia marks the fourth phase in reforming and shaping the post-1991 Ethiopian state.

Generally, as often argued by the EPRDF (2010), the DSM that the party sought to build in Ethiopia has at least three core features (EPRDF, 2010; Meles Zenawi Foundation, 2017). These are a firm conviction that development must be considered and treated as an existential question; political and economic independence of the state or government from the influence of the economic elite; and ensuring the hegemony of developmental thinking. According to EPRDF, by embracing these principles and features, the EDSM will eventually help to extricate the country from poverty, to attain a middle-income economy as of 2020-2023 (EPRDF, 2010, p. 45). Consequently, undertaking development and bringing about structural transformation is considered to be not only an economic objective but also perhaps primarily a political one as well (Altenburg, 2010; Abbink, 2011). This, as some argue, is an indication of the EPRDF’s motive and intent that it had sought legitimacy to stay in power that is derived not from the ballot box but principally from its developmental success (Bach, 2011, pp. 641-663). This has been implemented by the EPRDF by blending its old political program known as revolutionary

democracy propelled by democratic centralism with DSM which it had sought to make a hegemonic ideology to govern the political economy of the country. This is underlined in one of the front political documents as 'The Developmental State Model needs a developmentally-oriented dominant party that would stay in power until and up to its developmental mission is achieved when the core tents of developmental objectives are realized' (EPRDF, 2010, p. 45).

Indeed, as can be gleaned from major party and government policy documents, such as democracy and development (2006), rural development and transformation (2002), capacity building (reforms on civil service, education, and justice sector), etc., the influence of revolutionary democracy tuned developmentalism is apparent. As some argued, by blending the ethos and institutions of the DSM and revolutionary democracy, it seems the EPRDF sought to project itself as a vanguard party and sought to obtain legitimacy from its developmental success through the proper implementation of the DSM (Abbink, 2011b, pp. 596-618). Hence, as Lefort (2013) noted that the EPRDF in its effort to institutionalize the DSM in Ethiopia includes undertakings to build a vanguard capitalist state where the party (EPRDF) is the omniscient and omnipresent propeller of the political economy of the state, along with the principles, paths, and goals of developmentalism.

The EPRDF however has often claimed that the developmental success recorded over the past two decades was the result of its efforts and effective leadership in applying a democratic DSM in Ethiopia (Bereket, 2011). In this view, the EPRDF's efforts in building a democratic DS helped the party to get the legitimacy to stay in power through the free consent of the public, who expressed their approval of the party at the various national elections, as recognition of its success in entrenching democracy while achieving a commendable double-digit economic growth since late 2002. On the contrary, critics have often castigated the mode of execution of the DSM by the EPRDF, claiming that it was characterized by development authoritarianism, specifically by undermining regional autonomy and multiparty democracy, press freedom, and freedom for civil societies (Hagmann & Abbink, 2011; Lefort, 2017). Let us now turn to see the impact that the experiment with the DSM made on democracy and multilevel development governance as enshrined in the FDRE Constitution.<sup>2</sup>

## 6. IMPACTS OF THE EPRF'S DSM ON MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY AND MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM IN ETHIOPIA

### 6.1. Impact on multiparty democracy

Various scholars argue that the adverse consequences of the practice of the EDSM by the EPRDF began to make themselves felt in the country's political space and democratization process following the much-contested 2005 general elections. According to these scholars, this period was a watershed moment that saw a marked intensification in the developmentalist discourse as the DSM started to take root at a practical level.<sup>2</sup> The post-2005-election period is thus often depicted as the climax of the EPRDF's hegemonic rule, but unfortunately, it also

<sup>2</sup> Since the federalisation of the Ethiopian state in 1995, one national election has been held every five years. Except for the 2005 elections, which saw relatively stronger results by opposition parties, the EPRDF has been the winner in all four elections. Indeed, after the demise of the EPRDF, a national election was held in 2021 in which the "successor" of the EPRDF (after the merger of three of its parties except TPLF) Prosperity Party won a slide victory but some opposition parties and individual contenders secured few seats.

Interview with an opposition party member and former member of the HoPR during the 3rd Parliamentary Season, 5 November 2018, Addis Ababa.

marks an apparent regression in political pluralism in general and multiparty democracy in particular (Abbink, 2011b).

Such a practice of dominant-party politics by the EPRDF under the guise of pursuing a DSM in Ethiopia has been widely criticized for undermining political pluralism, as the party's hegemonic developmental discourse and practice adamantly adhered to exclusionary politics and policies. As one informant put it:

The intention and the practice on the ground had been to keep an iron grip on political power where the EPRDF has long been controlling the political space and all of the state apparatus. The EPRDF, especially following the historic 2005 elections, had been unleashing widespread smear campaigns against the political opposition, independent media, civil society, and the like, using such humiliating labels as “enemies of [the] developmental path”, “agents of neoliberalism”, “anti-peace elements”, and, in the worst cases, branding them as terrorists, which makes them a legitimate target of the party's clampdown measures taken in the name of development.<sup>3</sup>

The adoption of the DSM in Ethiopia has led to a regression in the country's electoral democracy, with a reversal taking place in the trend of progressive increase in representation of opposition parties in Parliament witnessed during the first three national elections before 2010 and culminating in literally no opposition representation at all in the 2015 elections. Such a situation is consistent with the prevailing view in the literature on the DSM that the state under the DSM has to be undemocratic to stay in power for long enough to be able to achieve its developmental agenda.

Despite this regression in electoral democracy and political pluralism in a supposedly multiparty system, some see the matter otherwise. Various scholars maintain that the mere fact that all of these national elections were held periodically is in itself a sign of a well-functioning democratic process and a testament to the EPRDF's commitment to democracy and development. In this regard, one key informant stated the following:

[The party] had been able to win the hearts and minds of the rural majority [which] led to its victory in the last four general elections held in the country. And its long-standing political dominance and stay in power in the country is a result of changes in the political culture in the country where it is getting into a new era where we have one dominant party – the EPRDF – which played the game according to [the game's] rules, [rules that] paved the way for its [victoriousness] within the context of a multiparty setting as outlined under the [FDRE] Constitution.<sup>4</sup>

For those who are of the view that the DSM is compatible with a democratic system, the EPRDF's practice under the DSM is seen as similar to the experience of countries like Japan and South Africa, where a dominant-party system exists within a democratic milieu. Such commentators thus try to justify their claims by equating the EPRDF with the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and the National Democratic Party (NDP) in Japan, which would imply that the EPRDF had been obtaining the popular mandate to rule the country through democratic elections in a competitive multiparty context where state power follows rules of the game that accord with principles and institutions set forth under the 1995 FDRE

3 Interview with an opposition party member and former member of the HoPR during the 3rd Parliamentary Season, 5 November 2018, Addis Ababa.

4 Interview with the head of the Institute of Policy Studies, March 2018, Addis Ababa.

Constitution. Such a view, however, is fiercely opposed by the EPRDF's critics, who see the party's conception and implementation of the DSM in general and its conduct of dominant-party politics in particular as a cover-up for iron-fisted, authoritarian rule (Mesay, 2011; Lefort, 2012). According to these critics, the EPRDF's politics falls within the ambit not of a dominant-party system but of an authoritarian, hegemonic-party system – one where the outcomes of elections are a foregone conclusion and there is a lack of strong opposition parties.

Overall, the EPRDF's attempt to establish itself as a dominant party championing the ideals and institutions of the DSM brought about major changes in the country's political landscape. Under the EDSM, the EPRDF sought to project itself as a hegemonic developmental party, and in so doing acted against the values and principles of the FDRE Constitution.<sup>5</sup>

## 6.2. Impact on democratic multilevel development governance

Democratic multilevel development governance is embedded within the FDRE Constitution, which prescribes that development governance has to carry out in transparent, accountable, participatory, and responsive ways. <sup>6</sup> Specifically, Chapter 10 of the FDRE Constitution provides for the respective tiers of government in the federation and sets out, in Article 85, the objectives and governing principles for the formulation and execution of policies on social, economic, and environmental matters. The question is how the authoritarianism that characterized the EPRDF's developmentalism affected democratic multilevel development governance in Ethiopia.

Some criticisms of the EDSM were directed at how various development policies and projects were formulated and executed, while others raised concerns about economic efficiency and sustainability, environmental feasibility, fair distribution, and equitable benefit-sharing at national, regional, and local levels. Leaving aside the criticisms about economic efficiency and feasibility (as important as these questions are), the criticisms raised against such projects based on other grounds are related to the guiding rules, principles, and values of the federal political system of Ethiopia, which guarantees a democratic and decentralized development governance system at all levels in the country. This is specifically reflected in terms of such important considerations and virtues of a federal arrangement as the regional states' policy autonomy, as well as the core values and principles of a federal democracy that promote, among other things, responsive, participatory and accountable governance.

The approach to development governance under the EPRDF's "developmental hegemonism" was characterized largely by the federal government's extremely centralized and authoritarian policy-making and execution practices. This was reaffirmed by participants in the FGDs, specifically, those who were members of the House of People Representatives (HoPR and regional councils, who said it was a grave disciplinary offense to challenge policies already endorsed by the party's executive committee. This, as most of the FGD participants noted, was due to the unwritten rule that members may raise questions only on issues of implementation rather than on the policies themselves. According to one participant from the HoPR, "challenging the party's policies would be tantamount to challenging the party itself ... it could result in one being subjected to criticism [ ] and self-criticism [ - ], and even sometimes

<sup>5</sup> Interview with the head of the Press Secretariat at the Office of the Prime Minister, 10 March 2018, Addis Ababa.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see Articles 12, 52(1)(a) and 52(2)(c), 43(2), and 89(6) of the FDRE Constitution.

disciplinary measures for those who persisted in their stand”.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, an informant from the ONRS observed as follows:

The EPRDF created conditions in which, far from being able to exercise their policy-making and implementation autonomy as clearly provided in the FDRE Constitution, regional states were not permitted to have a say about policies developed at the center. Instead, once a policy was endorsed by the party, it simply rolled down to regions, where regional officials had to enforce it, with little to no opportunity available to them to challenge it.<sup>8</sup>

The informant mentioned, as an example, the case of the Integrated Addis Ababa-Oromia Master Plan, which affected surrounding areas of the ONRS. Some of the participants said that the EPRDF’s tight party control intensified, especially following the much-disputed 2005 national elections, with top-down intervention justified based on an urgent need to serve the national interest. This deprived the platform of entertaining diverse views and critical voices that could have helped to ensure better ownership of the government’s development projects by the public.<sup>9</sup> The EPRDF’s exclusionary approach to development policy planning and execution, as one informant described it, “hindered the building of a common national development agenda”.<sup>10</sup>

The EPRDF seems to have been attempting to apply the DSM based on its age-old Leninist belief in a vanguard party guided by the “I know for you” logic – all of which contributed to the apparent lack of ownership among the public of the policies made by the central government, not to mention the disfranchisement of the grassroots and the erosion of the accountability of regional and local administrations to the general public. For example, the Large Scale Commercial Farming (LSCF) projects, which are based on geographical differentiation, are often mentioned as an illustration of the EPRDF-led government’s elitist and exclusionary approach to developmental policy planning and execution. These projects were oftentimes designed and executed with little or no prior consultation with the concerned bodies, be they regional and local administrators or the general public that would be affected by the projects.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, some research participants criticized the government’s choice of lowland areas for LSCF projects, saying it evinced an intrusive and exclusionary approach. <sup>12</sup> In turn, the government sought to justify its actions by pointing out the need to exploit the comparative advantages of these lowlands, given their combination of sparse population density and vast expanses of land with flat topography that makes it particularly suitable for irrigated mechanized farming.<sup>13</sup> The government’s preferred policy approach here has been to promote the leasing of land to foreign and domestic investors. This approach, as one informant from the GPNRS, commented, constitutes:

[a] double-standard approach between the highland areas and the lowland areas. People in the lowland areas, such as the GPNRS, have been at the periphery of the power relations with rulers at the center of Ethiopia since the 19th century. And the EPRDF has simply maintained

7 Interview with a member of the HoPR and Chairperson of the Trade and Industry Affairs Standing Committee on Addis Ababa, 14 July 2019, Addis Ababa.

8 Interview with members of ONRS State Council, 18 February 2019, Addis Ababa.

9 Interview with an official at ONRS Plan and Development Commission, 5 December 2019, Addis Ababa.

10 Interview with a member of the HoPR, 14 July 2019, Addis Ababa.

11 Interview with a member of BGNRS State Council and a former official at the GPNRS Agriculture and Natural Resource Bureau, 5 December 2019, Addis Ababa.

12 Interview with the former President of the GPNRS and an official at the GPNRS Agriculture and Natural Resource Bureau, 14 October 2019, Addis Ababa.

13 Interview with a former official at the Ministry of Agriculture, 9 July 2019, Addis Ababa.

this historically lopsided center-periphery political relationship, where the center dominates the peripheries and dictates to them to execute development plans formulated by the center with little or no consultation.<sup>14</sup>

In a similar vein, a key informant from the BGNRS noted that there has been a hierarchical relationship between the center, led by the EPRDF, and the peripheries, led by affiliated parties.<sup>15</sup> There is no doubt that, as far as developmental policy-making and execution are concerned, the EPRDF dominated the entire process in an apparent violation of what is enshrined in the FDRE Constitution, be it the sovereignty of nations, nationalities, and peoples or the regional states' autonomy to make and execute their policies without undue influence by the federal government. The practice, moreover, has been that the central government's development plans result in the dispossession of resources from the peripheries for mega-development projects such as industrial parks, hydroelectric dams, and LSCFs. In most of these projects, deals were made with domestic and foreign companies without the involvement or consent of the respective regional state governments and the local residents, particularly so in lowland areas such as the GPNRS and BGNRS.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, in the case of Industrial Park Development Projects (IPD), informants from the respective IPD agencies of the ANRS and the ONRS underscored that the federal government often obligated the regional states to provide land for the development of industrial parks in their respective regions by the federal government, parks which were designed with little or no consultation.<sup>17</sup> The absence of regional-state participation in the planning and execution of development projects such as LSCFs and IPDs, as an informant from the ONRS Planning Commission, explained,

closes up avenues that could create democratic and non-authoritarian social, political, and economic relations between and among the federal government and regional states, eventually ensuring that peoples' right to development and their freedoms and democratic rights are not undermined in the name of developmentalism as pursued by the EPRDF under the helm of the DSM.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, as informants from the SNNPR noted, the absence of participation by regional states in policy and project design at the federal level denied them important platforms, inter alia, for expressing regional interests and priorities in the exercise of the rights to self-determination, self-rule and shared governance enshrined in the FDRE Constitution.<sup>19</sup>

The lack of participation and engagement of stakeholders and citizens often resulted in severe criticism and grievances which, according to some observers, led the EPRDF to dig its own grave, as seen in the case of the Integrated Addis Ababa-Oromia Master Plan (IAOMP).<sup>20</sup> This has been mentioned as a typical case that shows the ramifications of the EDSM's authoritarian developmentalism.<sup>21</sup> The IAOMP was widely castigated by observers for being

<sup>14</sup> Interview with a former official at the GPNRS Agriculture and Natural Resources Bureau, 19 October 2019, Addis Ababa.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with an official at the GPNRS Office of the Chief-Administrator, 19 October 2019, Addis Ababa.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with a former official at the GPNRS Agriculture and Natural Resource Bureau and member of the central Committee of the then ruling party of the BGNRS, 19 October 2019, Addis Ababa.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with an official at the ANRS Industrial Parks Development Corporation and an official at the ONRS Industrial Park Development Cooperation, 19 July 2019, Addis Ababa.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with an official at the ONRS Plan and Development Commission, 7 November 2018, Addis Ababa.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with an official at the SNNPR Council, 18 April 2019, Hawassa.

<sup>20</sup> The IAOMP, the tenth subnational integrated plan, was designed to be implemented from 2014 to 2037. The aim of the Master Plan, as stated in the original document, is "to developmentally link Oromia special zones and the City of Addis Ababa to improve the quality of life of citizens as well as contribute to the economic growth and development of the nation" (AACPO, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Interview with an official at the ONRS Urban Development Bureau, 5 December 2019, Addis Ababa.

carried out in an authoritarian manner, as manifested, among other things, in the top-down, exclusionary, and coercive formulation and implementation of development policies with no, or little, consultation with and consent from concerned stakeholders such as the ONRS, local administrators and farmers. 22 Degefa (2019, pp. 1–2) describes the practice as follows:

The plan is imposed “from above” as has always been, while a real development plan needs the free and informed consent of the affected people and includes measures to avoid or minimize any possible destruction to local communities. The designers of the Master Plan refuse to recognize examples from other parts of the world concerning legitimate development and ignore Oromo protests of unprecedented scale that have already led to hundreds of innocent victims. Such patterns are clear indicators of the designers’ intent to destroy the Oromo identity in the area under the guise of the “Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan”.

These sentiments were confirmed by an informant from the ONRS, who explained the process of planning and (attempted) execution of the IOAMP as follows:

*The problem with this Master Plan is both in its content and manner of enforcement. When I say “content”, I mean the federal government does not have the power to make detailed plans such as the IAOMP and oblige regional states and local governments to enforce [them]. The fact on the ground was that in the case of the Master Plan, the administration in the ONRS was pressured by the EPRDF’s officials at the party’s higher echelon to enforce the IAOMP, which [was] prepared from the very beginning with little consultation and consent from the region, which, as seen later, erupted in fierce disagreements between the EPRDF leadership and the OPDO [Oromo People’s Democratic Organisation].<sup>23</sup>*

What the IAOMP illustrates is that plans are often prepared with little or no consultation with the stakeholders concerned, be they regional or local officials or people at the grassroots.<sup>24</sup> Most of the informants from the ONRS stated that the IAOMP was prepared by a few elites, with little consultation, coordination, and cooperation between officials of the ONRS and Addis Ababa from the inception of the plan up to the stage where it was to be implemented.<sup>25</sup> The IAOMP was formulated within small circles, mainly by EPRDF “big men” on its executive committee and a few confidante-technocrats. One informant from the ONRS planning and development commission said that “if you want a textbook example of centralized governance by the EPRDF that disregarded the federal system in general, and regional state autonomy in particular, it’s the Addis Ababa-Oromia Special Zone Integrated Master Plan”.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, the IAOMP is mentioned by a considerable number of scholars as a watershed moment that marks the pinnacle and decline of the centrist, top-down and exclusionary approach to development governance of the EPRDF. The announcement of the Master Plan triggered massive public protests across the ONRS, which eventually led to the disintegration of the EPRDF’s democratic centralism and the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegne in April 2018.

22 Interview with a member of the ONRS Council, 7 November 2018, Addis Ababa.

23 Interview with a former official at the ONRS Finance and Economic Development Bureau, 18 February 2019, Addis Ababa.

24 Interview with an official at the ONRS Urban Development Bureau, 5 December 2019, Addis Ababa.

25 Interview with a member of the ONRS Council, 7 November 2019, Addis Ababa.

26 *Ibid.*

## 7. CONCLUSION

This article examined the impact of the DSM on Ethiopia's federal system in light of the Constitution's framework, on the vertical division of policy-making, execution, and administration powers between the federal government and regional state governments. It showed how the core ideological and institutional drivers of the EDSM – a dominant-party system and a hegemonic, centralized, top-down approach to policy formulation and execution – significantly undermined the democratic multilevel system of development governance provided under the FDRE Constitution.

Generally, the practice of the DSM in Ethiopia under the leadership of the EPRDF undermined the essence of a democratic system of multilevel development governance anchored on the values and principles of a federal democracy and a vertical division of power between tiers of government, as outlined in the 1995 FDRE Constitution. The result has been a regression in multiparty democracy and an infringement of regional states' autonomy to formulate and implement their local development policies and plans.

Consequently, the EPRDF's mode of execution of the DSM in Ethiopia contributed to the frequent civil unrest and public protests that the country witnessed from 2015 onwards and which culminated in a reshuffle of the top political leadership within the EPRDF as well as the government. Moreover, there has since been a series of political developments that have triggered profound changes in the political arena, in particular a shift towards a liberal political-economic model and a waning of the DSM and the EPDRF's long-held "revolutionary democracy" ideology. In the process, the EPRDF has even been dismantled and rebranded as a new party, the Prosperity Party, led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

On taking office in March 2018, the Prime Minister announced major reforms across the political, economic and social frontiers of the country that were previously considered off-limits by the EPRDF. Importantly, he began his premiership by criticizing the DSM as an outdated political-economic ideology (Ahmed, 2018). It is thus hoped that this article will serve as a background source for researchers interested in considering what the fate of the DSM in Ethiopia will be going forward.

## 8. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No conflict of interest was reported.

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