Future Agricultures

Working Paper

The Political Economy of Agricultural Extension in Ethiopia: Economic Growth and Political Control

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1. Introduction

The central argument in this paper is that, for the past two decades, state-led agricultural extension in Ethiopia, implemented by excluding other players in general and non-state actors in particular, has facilitated uncontested control of the public space by the incumbent Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). In addition to its presumed economic ramifications, the ongoing agricultural extension scheme that is a major component of transforming smallholder agriculture is driven by political imperatives aimed at effectively controlling the bulk of the Ethiopian electorate whose votes in periodic elections are crucial to the regime's perpetuation in power.

In this vein, I argue that the urge for effective control of the majority among the electorate is necessitated by the existence of potential and actual threats to regime survival as indicated below:

- The Tigray People's Liberation Front that played the crucial role in ousting the previous military dictatorship and which is now at the heart of the EPRDF government has its origin and support in Tigray region with a population of less than 5 million in a country of 80 million. Even in Tigray itself, local constituencies are contested by other protagonists that are inimical to TPLF's policy directions. Hence the vitality of the Front cannot be maintained in the absence of control and patronage mediated by the advantage of incumbency.

- EPRDF is a coalition of four ethnic-based regional organizations whose legitimacy is highly contested and challenged by other protagonists in the regional states of the federal system. This necessitated tight control and patronage as instruments of survival.

- TPLF/EPRDF is accused by Pan-Ethiopian political and social forces of abandoning the unity and territorial integrity of the country and of endorsing Ethiopia's dismemberment by facilitating Eritrea's secession and elevating ethnicity as an overriding organizing principle of political life.

- Threats from armed separatist groups, like the Ogaden National Liberation Front in Somali and the Oromo Liberation Front in Oromia regions, are another factor that prompted EPRDF to entrench a system of control and patronage.

- The Eritrean threat expressed in hosting separatist and unionist movements of various persuasions striving to effect regime change in Ethiopia could also be taken as one of the reasons for EPRDF's recourse to control.

- EPRDF's close cooperation with the west in the fight against thriving political Islam in the sub-region has also brought it into conflict with some radical Islamist movements engaged in terrorist activities, for example in mainland Somalia. Tight political control throughout the country may be seen as a means of ensuring that such groups do not establish a foothold within Ethiopia.

- Last but not least, EPRDF's Marxist-Leninist past espousing the role of a vanguard party still inherently persists forcing it to emphasize control in its management of public affairs.

Despite the aforementioned, however, it could be assumed that control and patronage in a large and populous country like Ethiopia characterized by numerous diversities, competing claims, and multiplicity of incompatible interests could serve only short-term goals that cannot endure over a longer period. Cognizant of this, EPRDF is striving to bring about economic development and improvement in people's livelihood through which citizens would develop stakes in the continuity of the system. This is why official government declarations repeatedly state that implementation of existing economic policies, including those concerned with agrarian transformation, would elevate the country to the status of a middle-income economy under which citizens could be extricated from underdevelopment. In this vein, EPRDF believes that a robust middle class that subscribes to its socio-economic and political programmes as a reliable constituency of support by paying allegiance to its drives of transforming the Ethiopian political economy and state-society relations can be forged in due course. It thus hopes that the majority of Ethiopians would develop a sense of common belonging expressed in voluntary coexistence within the polity. Specifically, EPRDF sees the success of the agricultural extension programme as critical to the realization of these goals, believing that the resulting broad-based agricultural growth would weaken support for the forces that are opposed to its dominance and survival. Whether such broad-based agricultural growth is indeed to be achieved and whether this brings the anticipated political benefits are matters to be seen in the years to come. In the meantime, it is hard to see any other exit strategy for the EPRDF from desisting from its tight political control other than that of increasing popular support through broad-based growth and prosperity, thereby allowing political liberalization.

As this paper documents, however, this leaves the agricultural extension programme playing an important dual role as short and medium-term strategies. On the one hand, it is a central part of the government's strategy for promoting broad-based agricultural growth whereas it functions as a valuable tool for political control and mobilization across the country on the other hand. For both reasons, the government has made public investment in agricultural extension a high priority over the past two decades – in contrast to many other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, there may be

tensions between the two objectives, with the control imperative leading to a less flexible and responsive service for farmers, thereby reducing its productivity and growth impacts.

The paper contributes to the PEAPA project alongside studies of Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania. It also draws on research for the Africa Power and Politics Programme (www.institutions-africa.org) which has compared the historical and contemporary political economies of Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

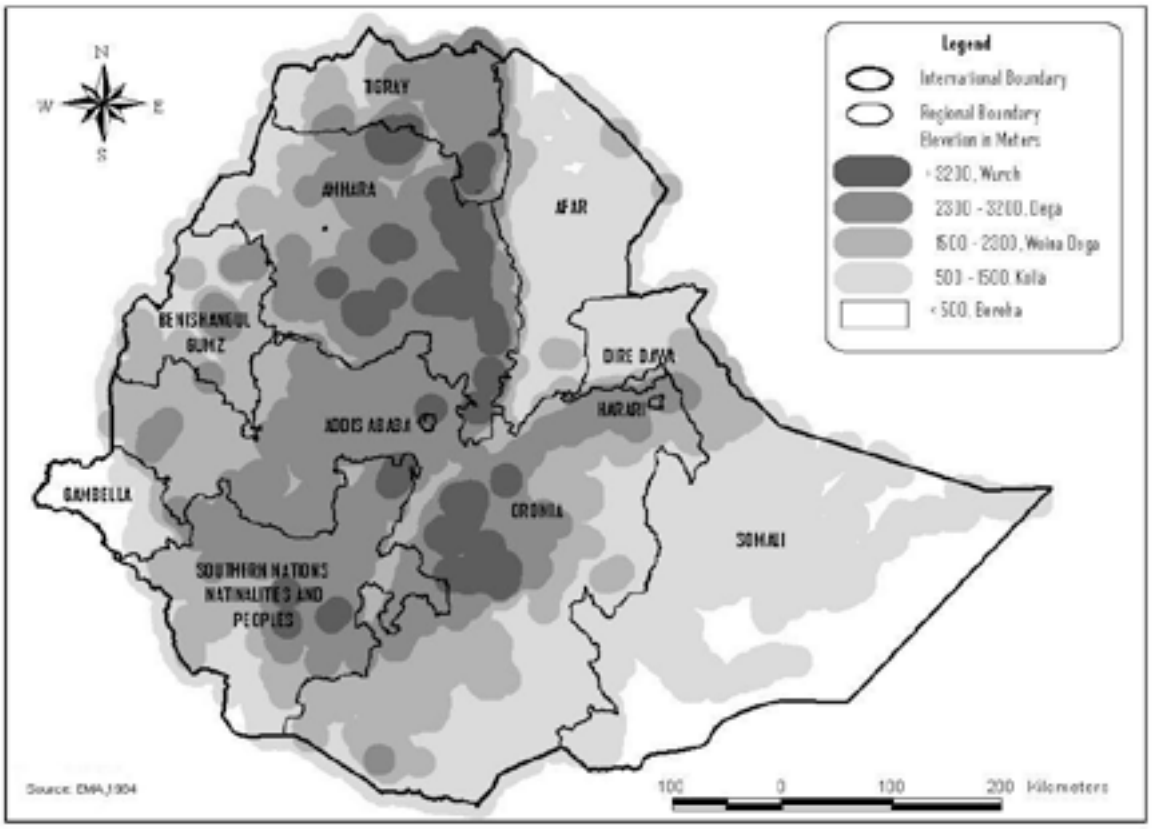
Data for this study is elicited from different complementary sources like key informants comprising knowledgeable individuals, former and current employees of agricultural offices, experts of vocational training institutes, and smallholders engaged in agricultural extension schemes. Moreover, relevant policy documents and published and grey literature in the form of consultancy reports, research papers, edited volumes, and journal articles were reviewed and analyzed.

1.1. Background

With a population of about 80 million, living in a total land area of 1.1 million sq km, Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa (CSA July 2010). It is bordered by Sudan in the west, Eritrea in the north, Djibouti and Somalia in the east, and Kenya in the south. The country is home to over 70 ethnic groups characterized by diverse cultural, linguistic and religious makeup. Notwithstanding its long history of independence, Ethiopia stands among the lowest in terms of socio-economic development indicators. The multi-ethnic character of Ethiopia's population is reflected in the incumbent constitution that provided for a form of government characterised by ethnic federalism on the part of formally self-governing regional states. Ethiopian history over the last four decades in particular is replete with episodes of recurrent drought and cyclic famine plus sporadic interstate conflicts. Diversities expressed in high and rugged mountains, plateaus, deep gorges, river valleys and plains, contrasting landscape with diverse soil types, and a range of agro-ecological zones (frost, highland, temperate, lowland and desert) form the physiographic setting of the polity. The central highlands that spread in and around the north-western and south-eastern massifs separated by the Ethiopian Rift Valley accommodate 88 per cent of the human population, 75% of the livestock and 95% of the total cultivated land (EEA 2004/05).

Ethiopia's agro-ecological configuration is broadly divided into five zones where each has its own rainfall pattern and agricultural production system. Most of the sedentary agricultural areas are located in the highlands while the semi-arid and arid lowlands are dominated by agro-pastoral and pastoral production systems.

The role of the agricultural sector and its impact on the different aspects of socio-economic life is signified



Source: Ethiopian Mapping Agency-EMA, 1984

by its contribution to GDP (46%), source of livelihood for the overwhelming majority of the population (80%), food supply, and export trade and foreign exchange earning (84%). Ethiopian agriculture is dominated by smallholder farms that produce the bulk (over 90 percent) of outputs for consumption and the market (Zenebe et al 2005). Agriculture has a considerable potential for boosting the country's socio-economic development endeavours given its varied endowments (Dessalegn et al. 2010: 29). It is in view of these that successive Ethiopian governments made substantial efforts in agricultural development as a priority area of intervention by enacting various policies to this end. Nevertheless, performance in agricultural production and productivity is frequently bedevilled by a host of adversities that have culminated in perpetual dependence on food aid for sustaining the wellbeing of millions of people. Smallholder rain-fed agriculture, which is the dominant form of engagement in the sector, faced formidable challenges over the years due to the entrenched mismatch between low productivity and high population growth rate. This is compounded by adverse climatic variability contributing to the unfolding of crisis in rural livelihood. The fact that the country is rated 174th out of 187 in terms of Human Development Index (UNDP 2011) indicates the poor performance of the sector despite its central role as the mainstay of the economy. Notwithstanding this, however, it is claimed that the country has registered a double-digit economic growth rate over the period 2005/06-2009/10, having grown at just over 6% per annum over the period 2000/01-2004/05 (EEA 2011: 7) allegedly due to, among others, sustained performance and increased diversification of export commodities.

The land under cultivation in 2007/08 was 15.7 million hectares operated by 13.2 million households (CSA 2008) with average per capita holding size per household of a little over one hectare. In terms of land use, the bulk of the agricultural land (78.9%) is devoted to crop production as compared to fallow land, grazing land and land for other uses each of which accounts for less than 10%. Crop and livestock production is practiced in the different agro-ecological zones under four distinct farming systems, namely the highland cereal production system of the north-central and south-eastern highlands, the enset-coffee-livestock complex of the southern and western highlands, the shifting cultivation production system of the south-western lowlands, and the pastoral production complex in the arid and semi-arid zones (Westphal, 1975). In the highlands, plough-culture dominates the cereal producing areas where different seasonal crops are grown interspersed with livestock production. According to Teller, Tesfai and Assefa (2007: 4), the country's population is highly concentrated in the highlands, whereas the lowlands are sparsely populated due to the prevalence of malaria and other vector-borne diseases (ibid.) as well as for other geographical, historical and socio-economic reasons (Pankhurst and Piguet 2004: 2). As a consequence, population density correspondingly varies with altitude. The highest population density is in the enset-growing belt covering five geographic zones of the Southern regional state. Population density in the enset belt ranges from about 340 persons to about 575 persons/square kilometer (Teller, Tesfai and Assefa 2007). In the lowlands bordering Sudan, Kenya and Somalia, the variation ranges from 2 to 40 persons per square km, which indicates that nearly 80% of the population lives in only 37% of the total landmass while the remaining 20% inhabits 63% of the total land area (ibid).

In the face of a plethora of vulnerabilities resulting from heavy dependence on rain-fed agriculture practiced through traditional farming techniques, the military regime embarked on irrigation development during its incumbency (1974-1991). In addition to creating a favorable environment for ensuring food security, this move was aimed at enhancing import substitution, promoting export trade, and expediting planned resettlement of food-deficit rural households. However, this initiative was not persevered with until the early 1990s when increased attention was lent to irrigation schemes targeting smallholders as beneficiaries. In the post-1991 years, small-scale irrigation schemes proliferated in the four major regional states (Amhara, Tigray, Oromia and SNNPR). It was reported that in 2003, traditional and modern small-scale irrigation schemes became operational covering 140,000 and 47,000 hectares of land respectively (Adugna 2003 cited in EEA 2004/05). In subsequent years, large-scale irrigation projects have been implemented on the basis of several multi-purpose master plans.

Agriculture's prominence persisted by co-existing with small and medium-scale manufacturing and an expanding service sector as the major features of the Ethiopian economy. Cognizant of the centrality of the agricultural sector, the EPRDF regime formulated the Agriculture-Led Development Industrialization (ADLI) Strategy in the mid-1990s when modernizing traditional smallholder agricultural production became the central focus. ADLI also formed the basis for the 'Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development Programme' (PASDEP) implemented between 2005 and 2010 as a result of which Ethiopia hoped to realize most of the targets enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To this end, a well-coordinated support system of agricultural extension and agricultural research was taken as a means of enhancing opportunities for improving the performance of the sector with a view to reducing poverty and food insecurity. Other associated goals enshrined in the strategy included commercialization of smallholder agriculture through product diversification and a gradual shift to high-value crops for domestic consumption and export. Interventions that are compatible with the country's varied agro-ecological zones were designed by taking into account the country's comparative advantage in terms of reliable availability of labour, land and agro-ecological diversity. The agricultural extension program, whose key features include deployment of extension workers in all rural grassroots localities (kebeles) and assigning them to undertake various activities like facilitating the imparting of knowledge and skills to smallholder farmers aimed at boosting agricultural production and productivity, was deemed necessary. Hence agricultural extension is taken as a case study for

unpacking the political economy of agricultural policy making in Ethiopia.

Under a situation where smallholder farmers mainly engage in production based on traditional knowledge and skills, deploying trained extension workers in the rural areas was viewed as invaluable. The agricultural extension programme emphasized the need for enhancing the numerical size and educational level of extension workers by providing them with extensive technical and vocational training and skills. Since 2004, Farmers Training Centres (FTCs) have been established to transfer improved agricultural technologies and provide adequate services at a closer reach to smallholder producers (Yonas 2006b: 53). In addition, 25 Agricultural Training and Vocational Education and Training (ATVET) colleges have been established from which tens of thousand extension workers have graduated and deployed in almost all the rural areas in all the regional states. Following the launching of FTCs, millions of farmers have participated in the various training packages dealing with crop production, water resource utilization and management, and building community-level institutions for coordinating activities. Thus, the agricultural extension program has witnessed a significant increase in the number of extension workers as well as introduction of the package[1] approach for inducing the participation of smallholders on both individual and group basis under the supervision and guidance of the former (Dessalegn 2008). The number of extension workers increased from 2500 in 1995 to 15,000 in 2002 (MOFED 2006), 25,000 in 2008 (Dessalegn 2008: 133) and 46,000 by 2010 (Davis et al, 2010). It is intended to increase this to 60,000 in the near future. Meanwhile, physical construction of around 6500 FTCs had occurred by 2009, with around 2400 of these already offering some form of training. Ultimately, it is intended to increase this to around 15,000, i.e. one for every kebele in the country (Davis et.al. 2010).

With the foregoing as backdrop, the political and economic dimensions of the agricultural extension program as a major focus of agricultural policy making in Ethiopia is examined. Inquiry on the subject is premised on the hypothesis that ADLI in general and the agricultural extension program in particular are aimed, among others, at ensuring regime legitimacy and acceptance that could lead to the perpetuation of the ruling party in power. The other assumption that underlies this hypothesis is that the program is designed to benefit smallholder agricultural households that have significant and multifaceted influence on several aspects of the economy.

Smallholder producers are believed to be important in politico-administrative terms as they constitute a sizeable electoral constituency, source of human power supply for regime security and survival, and bulwark against internal and external threats. In the light of this, EPRDF has sought to retain its support base from the heydays of its armed insurgency, which was rooted in smallholder farming communities. Moreover, it seems that EPRDF has drawn lessons from previous experience whereby the fall of both the imperial and military regimes was precipitated by the disaffection of smallholders. Hence a combination of political and economic imperatives served as drivers for embarking on agricultural policies and associated programs that cater for the livelihood needs of smallholders.

2 Agriculture Policy Context and Performance

2.1 Overview

Ethiopian Agricultural policy has undergone several changes during the past several decades in terms of focus and major goals. In all cases, its central objective remained to be improvement of agricultural performance by creating a favorable environment that could promote the drives of the successive regimes that pursued different objectives for furthering their legitimacy. In what follows, the different paths that agricultural policy making in Ethiopia has followed both in the past and at present are highlighted.

The imperial regime's first two Five-Year plans (1957-1962 and 1962-1967) heavily favored large-scale commercial farms for augmenting agricultural production for export in line with the modernization drive that gained currency at the time. Increase in production was expected to be achieved through accelerated investment in large-scale farms pursuant to the dominant line of thinking of the imperial government (EEA, 2004/05). However, the regime underwent a policy shift, emphasizing the modernization of smallholder agriculture during the Third Five Year-Plan Period (1968-1973). This introduced the package project approach (Dejene, 1990), which had two variants, namely the Comprehensive and the Minimum Package Programs focusing on improving agricultural production on farms of individual households and organized groups, respectively, were introduced in some parts of the country. The success of the Comprehensive Package Program, however, was limited because of its high requirements in terms of modern agricultural inputs and skilled human power, unfavorable land tenure regime, and poor infrastructural and market development (EEA, 2004/05). The Minimum Package Program too did not entail significant progress due to failure in introducing a more dynamic farming system drawing on the experiences of smallholders (Dessalegn, 2004).

Immediately upon seizing power, the military regime (1975-1991) embarked on the socialist path of development that geared Ethiopia's economic and political policies and attendant practices to fit to the principles of this doctrine. Socialist production relations thus prevailed in the workings of the agricultural and other sectors of the economy. The military regime is famed for introducing radical agrarian changes

signified by the Land Reform Act, which was expressed in nationalization and equitable distribution of land. Besides, peasant associations were established as the nuclei of grassroots administration that served as means for controlling grassroots and local communities. Other reforms introduced for effecting changes in the bid for transforming smallholder agriculture included the establishment of collective and state farms and producers' cooperatives, which were given privileged access to improved inputs and technical services, irrigation facilities, productive land, and higher farm-gate prices (EEA, 2004/05, Brune, 1990). Service Cooperatives were also created for facilitating favorable access of smallholders to basic goods and services (EEA, 2004/05). Despite the intensification of collectivization and cooperativization as major features of the agricultural sector and new agrarian relations, production declined during most of the years of military rule. Critics of the agrarian policies of the military regime argued that discrimination by favoring collectivization to the detriment of smallholder production was the major cause for the steady decline in the performance of the sector (Brune, 1990). In this connection, a SIDA report stated that 'the most efficient method of quickly stimulating agricultural production and increasing marketable grain surplus could have been achieved by encouraging smallholder production' (SIDA quoted in Brune, 1990: 25). The military regime also introduced two land use policies for expediting its resettlement and villagization programmes.

EPRDF's agricultural policy commenced with the introduction of the Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI) Strategy in the mid-1990s. The main arguments made to justify this as an overarching economic policy were that improving the performance of smallholder agriculture could lead to increase in farmers' income, reduction of poverty, and enhancement of production of industrial raw materials including marketable surplus (Dessalegn, 2008). The government strongly believes that ADLI is the fastest way to ensure economic development and recovery. However, critics doubt its efficacy by arguing that ADLI tends to disregard labor productivity by focusing on land productivity despite the fact that the main problem of Ethiopian agriculture is low labor productivity (Berhanu, 2003). Moreover, ADLI allegedly tends to emphasize the supply side with little concern for demand in the face of low purchasing power of the rural people on the one hand and the small size of the urban population on the other. Hence it is questionable that increased production alone could entail higher farmer income in the absence of adequate demand (ibid). Moreover, it is claimed that given its fragmented nature and the small size of per capita land holding, peasant agriculture cannot shoulder the onus of transforming the performance of agriculture in a manner that could enable it to play pivotal roles in boosting Ethiopia's development efforts as expected. In spite of the aforementioned constraining factors, however, EPRDF's Rural Development Policy and Strategy (FDRE 2002) reiterated that the country's overall development should be centered on the rural areas where smallholder agriculture is predominant. The justification for this is premised on the rationalization that the overwhelming majority of the country's population live in the rural areas that enjoy comparative advantages in abundant land and labor that can be judiciously utilized for ensuring economic growth and sustainable development by offsetting the consequences resulting from scarcity of capital (ibid: 4).

Dessalegn (2008) observed a change in direction in terms of agricultural development, with an increase in land allocations to local investors able to cultivate on a commercial scale. More recently still, Ethiopia has attracted attention as one of the major recipients of transnational investment in land (Anseeuw et.al. 2012). However, the government insists that this is complementary to efforts to increase the productivity of smallholder agriculture and not a substitute for them.

2.2 Agricultural Performance

In spite of the steady decline in the contribution of agriculture to GDP between 2006/2007 and 2009/2010, agriculture still remains significant in terms of its contribution to GDP particularly when compared to the manufacturing sector (Table 1).

Nevertheless, despite this impressive recent agricultural performance, Ethiopia remains heavily dependent on food aid. According to WFP/FAO (2010), the number of people in need of food assistance was 4.6 million in May 2008 and rose to 6.2 million in August 2009, as high global food prices were transmitted to Ethiopian markets. Notwithstanding the claim by official statistics

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of GDP by Sector at Constant Basic Prices (%)

Year	Agriculture	Industry	Services
2006/07	46.1	13.2	41.7
2007/08	44.6	13.0	43.5
2008/09	43.1	13.0	45.0
2009/10	42.0	13.0	46.1

Source: http:www.mofed.gov.et/upload/businesspropsal/nationaleconomic

Table 2: GDP Growth Rates by Major Industrial Classification at Constant Basic Price (%)

Year	Agriculture	Industry	Services	Total GDP
2003/04	16.9	11.6	6.3	11.8
2004/05	13.5	9.4	12.8	12.7
2005/06	10.9	10.2	13.3	11.8
2006/07	9.4	9.5	15.3	11.8
2007/08	7.5	10.1	16.0	11.4
2008/09	6.4	9.7	14.0	10.1
2009/2010	7.6	10.6	13.0	10.4

Source: *http: www.mofed.gov.et/upload/businesspropsal/nationaleconomic.*

that Ethiopia's overall economy has grown rapidly since the mid-2000s, in 2008 the country experienced the highest rate of inflation in its history that stood at the top in the world next to Zimbabwe (CIA, 2009) thereby entailing high food prices and growing food insecurity.

The high levels of food insecurity resulting thereof and the aforementioned progressive increase in the number of food-deficit people implying rising food aid figures illustrate the magnitude of the challenge faced by the Ethiopian government in its bid to effect agrarian transformation. Hence the unabated persistence of this state of affairs has a potential of inducing a growing number of disaffected citizens who may be sympathetic to critics of the EPRDF regime thereby leading to the forging of a sizeable constituency of discontent that forms the basis for the gradual undermining of regime legitimacy and survival. In the extreme case, the situation could lead to serious consequences resembling what transpired earlier culminating in the ouster of the imperial government and military rule.

2.2.1 Crop Production

Per capita crop production has grown during the years between 2005/06 and 2008/09, albeit at declining rates (Table 3), even as population has increased by an average of about 2 million per year. The government claimed that increase in the size of cultivated area is due to farmers' confidence in its agricultural policy that led to higher product prices, bumper harvest resulting from good rains, clearing forests and grazing land for cultivation, and increased engagement of the youth in farming (EEA, 2006/07).

Despite the increase in cultivated land, however, per capita land holding remained very small. Increased production during the harvest years in question can be largely explained by growth in the supply and use of improved inputs that ensured relatively enhanced land productivity rather than labour productivity. According to EEA (2011: 53), the role of such inputs and institutional support services is critical to attain higher agricultural production in Ethiopia. By the same token, the progressive decline in percentage changes in total production and per capita production can be attributed to the rise in the total cost of fertilizer since 2006 thereby entailing mismatch between supply and rising national demand (ibid: 46).

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Table 3: Volume of Agricultural Production and Cultivated Area (2003/04-2008/09)

Year	Production (tons)	Area (ha)	% change production	Population in 000	Per capita production (kg)	% change in per capita production
2005/06	13,382,127	10,170,911	12.13	75067	178.2	10.4
2006/07	14,943,201	10,582,054	11.66	77127	193.7	7.5
2007/08	16,116,657	10,954,722	7.85	79221	202.4	4.4
2008/09	17,116,740	11,210,501	6.20	82544	207.3	2.4

Source: *CSA, various publications.*

to the rise in the total cost of fertilizer since 2006 thereby entailing mismatch between supply and rising national demand (ibid: 46).

Note that the data in Table 3 refer to the period before the main influx of transnational land investments. However, data on production from these farms is not available and indeed many have yet to start production, let alone cultivate the entire area of their allocation. Prior to this, Girma (2005) indicated that production from medium and large-scale farms was less than 300,000 tons implying that the bulk of agricultural production still originates from smallholder farms.

Whilst agricultural production has been growing rapidly, many still argue that Ethiopian agriculture is hampered by the tiny size of most farms. In 2008, 31.3% of smallholder producers cultivated less than 0.5 hectares whereas 25% undertook production on land size ranging between 0.5 ha and 1 ha (Table 4). In spite of the fact that small size of land can be productive as evidenced by the Chinese experience, studies on Ethiopian agriculture show that small farm size remains one of the major handicaps militating against efforts towards improving productivity (Diao, Xinshen and Nin Pratt, A 2005 cited in EEA, 2006/07). The same source revealed that the major constraint in ensuring food security in food-deficit areas is the extremely small size of farm land (0.57 ha and 1.38 ha in the food-deficit localities and the surplus producing areas respectively). At this juncture, it is worthy to note that the military regime's Land Reform Act of 1975 has rendered all land (urban and rural) public property under the custody of the state. This policy that made landless rural producers eligible to access agricultural land has, in a way, contributed to fragmentation of farm plots due to equitable distribution measures that were influenced by the ideological orientation of the post-imperial political order under military rule.

This was further compounded by the exponential increase in the country's total population in general and that of the rural areas in particular, which culminated in the further diminishing of family holdings to the extent of adversely affecting both land and labour productivity. According to Hussein (2006: 147-149), the Land Reform Act that prohibited sale and exchange of land in every imaginable form was vital in shaping the pattern of relations between the state and smallholder farmers. Notwithstanding the introduction of a number of reforms in some aspects of the military regime's land tenure policy like the right to lease holdings and make use of hired labour including issuance of certificates affirming use rights of holders since 2003, the EPRDF regime persevered with the initiative of its predecessor affirming the previous status of land as public property including limiting the entitlement of agricultural producers to use right without claiming ownership. In this manner, the land tenure system became an enduring element that entrenched the hegemonic power of the state over the peasant producer (Dessalegn 2009: 285). Merera (2006: 230) argues that EPRDF's resistance to the pressures exerted by western governments and international financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF to resolve the anomaly between economic liberalization and state control with regard to land (once publicly stated as "over EPRDF's read body") is prompted by its quest to control the peasantry and ensure the continued dependence of rural producers on the state for accessing this vital resource.

Increase in yield is essential for sustained agricultural production. The yield figures for the major crops that progressively increased between 2003/04 and 2008/09 are indicated in Table 5 and Figure 1. Rainfall adequacy, timely harvesting, better supply of inputs, and low incidence of pest and other crop hazards during harvest seasons are reported to entail positive outcomes in agricultural production (FAO/WFP cited in EEA 2006/07). The amount of yield produced in Ethiopia during good harvest seasons, however, is found to be less than a quarter of the yield obtained in Asia during the Green Revolution including harvests in agricultural research and demonstration sites (EEA, 2006/07). This is in line with the assertion that variations in agricultural productivity across households and countries depend on a variety of factors like quantity and quality of conventional inputs such as land, labor, fertilizer and machinery (Carig, Pardey and Roseboom 1997, Abebayehu and Wiebe 2001).

Table 4: Farm Size in ha, percentage of holders, and average holding (2008).

Farm size (hectare)	Per cent of all holders (%)	Average area/ holder (ha)
Under 0.10	4.95	0.04
0.10-0.50	26.36	0.24
0.51-1.0	25.34	0.6
1.01-2.0	26.58	1.16
2.01-5.00	15.48	2.24
5.01-10.00	1.22	4.36
Over 10.0	0.07	8.22
Total	13,254,840	0.93

Source: CSA, 2008, statistical bulletin no 417, p.13

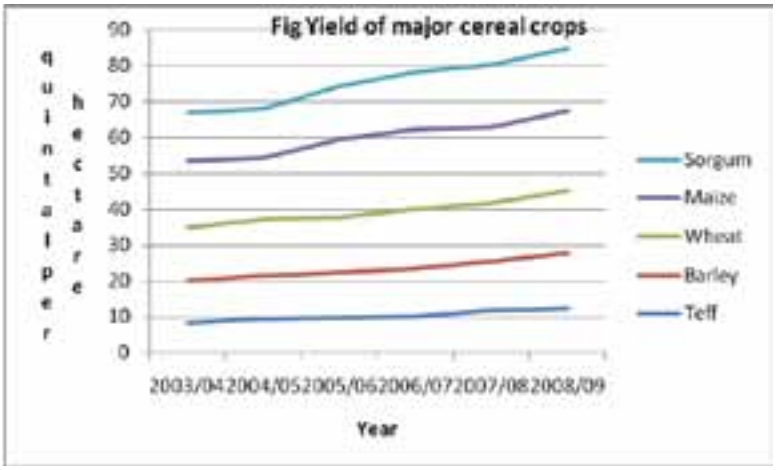
2.2.2. Livestock Production

There is paucity of accurate and up-to-date data on livestock production and productivity. CSA provides estimates of annual production of milk, eggs and honey but no data on meat production is made available. In 2008/09, cow and camel milk production was estimated to be 2.7 billion liters and 162.1 million liters respectively. According to the same source, honey production was 39.6 million kg whereas the figure for egg production stood at 79.1 million during the same year.

Despite the sizeable animal population for which the country is famed, the livestock sub-sector is marked by low productivity and low production (Azage cited in

Table 5: Yield in Major Crops in tons per hectare (2003/04-2008/09)					
Year	Teff	Barley	Wheat	Maize	Sorghum
2003/04	0.843	1.173	1.469	1.86	1.357
2004/05	0.948	1.212	1.557	1.719	1.369
2005/06	0.969	1.273	1.520	2.187	1.481
2006/07	1.014	1.327	1.671	2.229	1.582
2007/08	1.167	1.376	1.625	2.122	1.734
2008/09	1.220	1.554	1.746	2.224	1.736

Source: *CSA 2008/09*.



Source: Ibid

EEA, 2006/07), which is evidenced by shortfalls in supply that failed to match increasing demands for livestock products.

3. Distinctive Features of the Political System and Implications for Agricultural Policy

3.1 Introduction

The EPRDF, whose formation in 1989 was spearheaded by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), came to power in 1991 following its successful prosecution of over a decade and a-half of armed struggle against the military regime of President Mengistu. EPRDF is a coalition of four ethnically-based resistance groups whose leading members like the incumbent head of government (the Prime Minister) play influential roles in the workings of the present Ethiopian political system since the demise of the military dictatorship. EPRDF managed to build a robust constituency of support in the rural areas of north and central Ethiopia by rallying behind it broad sections of farming communities that were antagonized by the oppressive policies and attendant practices of the military regime. It also entered into a "deal" with the Eritrean Liberation Front (EPLF) that spearheaded the processes that culminated in the de facto and de jure secession of Eritrea in 1991 and 1993 respectively. Moreover, the elevation of ethnic rights to self-determination as a sacrosanct organizing principle in state-society relations and a major feature of the political landscape in post-1991 Ethiopia under EPRDF rule heightened ethnic awareness due to the nature of resistance against military rule. The secession of Eritrea also served as a source of inspiration for other armed groups some of which like the OLF and ONLF still seek independence for the regions and ethnic groups they

Table 6: Livestock Products (2005/06-2008/09)				
Year	Cow milk (billion lit)	Camel milk (million lit)	Honey (million kg)	Eggs (mil.)
2005/06	2.32	95.7	41.5	67.4
2006/07	2.63	114.18	51	81.7
2008/09	2.7	162.1	39.6	79.1

Source: *Ibid.*

claim to represent. Besides, the deal between the ruling liberation movements in Ethiopia and Eritrea, namely EPRDF and EPLF respectively, led to acrimony among many Ethiopians who lamented the dismemberment and land-lockedness of the country resulting thereof. Subsequently, the honeymoon between the two came to an end in 1998 and resulted in a fully-blown hostile relationship over a range of issues rooted in the unsettled terms of Eritrea's secession associated with issues like the undemarcated common border and divergence of economic policies (Plaut 2004, Gebru 2007).

Once in power, the EPRDF introduced several policy changes in the organization of the Ethiopian State and state-society relations. During the incumbency of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) that lasted between 1991 and 1995, several reforms were introduced based on principles of federalism, liberal political and socio-economic policy directions, and primacy of ethnic rights to self-determination. One of the important moves in this regard was the establishment of ethno-linguistically constituted regional state governments and sub-regional administrations. Signaling the end of the transitional period, a new constitution that ushered in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE 1995) was promulgated reaffirming the institutions of governance and major policy directions of the transitional period. The constitution emphasized that popular sovereignty and representation in the leading governance organs at various levels shall be exercised through direct popular participation in socio-economic and political processes including through periodic multiparty competitive elections.

3.2 Major Governance Structures

The three major branches of government and the associated structures are instituted at the national and sub-national levels based on the principles of decentralized governance. The constitution provided for devolved powers and functions to nine regional states and two autonomous city administrations, the totality of which constitutes the Ethiopian federal system. As a first step towards entrenching decentralized governance by way of devolution, the establishment of two levels of parliamentary government at federal and regional levels, which was later extended to the local (district) administrations in 2001/02, was legally sanctioned. Accordingly, governance structures ranging from the federal to the grassroots levels were laid in descending order of hierarchy. Moreover, each regional state is empowered to enact a constitution of its own in a manner that strictly conforms to the intents and spirit of the federal constitution that stipulated the sharing of powers and functions between national and sub-national levels of governments.

Accordingly, a federal bicameral legislature comprising the House of Peoples' Representatives and the House of Federation was formed. Members of both houses are elected for a five-year term without limitation on their tenure in so long as they are reelected. The constitution stipulated that the House of People's Representatives is the highest organ of state power with wide-ranging prerogatives: confirming the nomination of the top federal officials, approving proposed bills as laws, endorsing the national budget, ratifying bilateral and international treaties, discharging oversight functions, and declaring a state of emergency and/or war. On the other hand, the House of the Federation is empowered to serve as a constitutional court dealing with disputes between the federal and regional governments and between the regional states, determine the bases and sources of revenue of the federal and regional governments, and decide on issues of the right to self-determination whenever the need arises. Sub-national legislatures formed at regional, local and grassroots levels are organized as unicameral legislative assemblies to undertake functions that are more or less similar to the ones carried out by the federal House of Representatives particularly with regard to approving appointment of officials in the respective leading bodies, exercise oversight functions, approve plans and budgets, etc. With the exception of the regional state councils that are empowered to formulate their constitutions in conformity with the federal constitution, sub-regional legislative councils do not engage in law making. In the overwhelming majority of the regional states, intermediate tiers of administration known as zones are created to undertake functions of liaising between regional and local governments by carrying out routine coordinating and administrative activities and providing technical support to local governments.

The executive branch at all levels is organized in a manner that is characteristic of most parliamentary systems where a party or coalition of parties controlling the majority of seats in the legislative councils are entitled to form regional, local and grassroots administrations. The federal executive is organized under the leadership of a prime minister nominated by the party or coalition of parties controlling the majority of seats in the federal House of Representatives. The constitution also provides for election of a non-executive president who serves as a titular head of state following his/her nomination by the House of Representatives and elected by a two-thirds majority of both chambers in joint session. The term of office of the prime minister is unlimited whereas that of the president is for six years per term limited to two terms. While the prime minister is allowed to retain his parliamentary seat, a member of parliament elected as president is required to vacate his/her parliamentary seat following his/her appointment. The process follows a similar trajectory, albeit with some modifications, as regards the formation of sub-national executive branches. In a similar vein, the judicial system is organized at federal, regional, zonal, and local levels. Both federal and regional courts have different hierarchies of court systems vested with varying degrees of jurisdiction and competence. There are also Sharia courts whose jurisdiction is limited to family and related matters arising between litigants professing Islam provided that they are willing to be adjudicated by them.

3.3 Democracy and Elections in Theory and Practice

Following the 1991 regime change, several local, regional and national parliamentary elections have taken place. The May 1991 regime change ushered in significant changes in the body politic of Ethiopia as enshrined in the Transitional Charter (TGE 1991) and the subsequent constitution (FDRE 1995) both of which recognized the inviolability of human rights, the rights of Ethiopia's ethnic groups to self-determination, and citizens' unabridged freedom of speech, association and assembly. The Transitional Charter, the constitution and other laws (TGE 1992, FDRE 2002) ensured decentralization of power from the political center to the ethnically-constituted regions and below.

Official policies and rhetoric aside, EPRDF controls not only all branches of government at the federal level but also all the constituent regions and local and grassroots administrative units of government. This is expedited through the strong presence of the constituent members of EPRDF in the four major regions plus ethnic-based regional parties affiliated to EPRDF in the remaining five regions. Besides, the two autonomous chartered cities of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa are placed under the Federal Government, which in effect puts them under the ruling political Front thereby making its total control of the public realm complete. EPRDF's pervasive control is thus effected through closely-knit party structures that facilitate its quest for prevailing in the periodic elections. Thus, in all regional and local elections conducted in the country to date, EPRDF's member organizations have prevailed thus elevating it to omnipotence[2]. In instances where opposition parties claimed electoral victory, as was the case during the May 2005 Elections, second-rounds were held on the orders of the National Election Board resulting in the victory of EPRDF and its affiliates. Attempts made to challenge electoral processes and outcomes in the courts of law proved futile due to the alleged partisanship, lack of independence and integrity, and subservience of the electoral body and the judicial system to EPRDF. The results of the May 2010 Elections are indicative of the absolute preponderance of the ruling party as signified by its winning of 99.6% of the seats (NEB 2010) in the federal and regional legislatures. Given that policy and other major decisions with far-reaching socio-economic and political implications are approved by the House of Representatives following initial scrutiny in the EPRDF-dominated Council of Ministers, the formidable leverage that EPRDF commands to the detriment of other political groups is too clear to beg for further elaboration.

3.4 Non-State Actors

The role and influence of chiefdoms and other traditional centers of power on policy were abolished following the revolutionary upsurge of the mid-1970s spearheaded by the military government, which enacted a proclamation that provided for public ownership of land (PMAC 1975). These moves were retained by EPRDF after its ousting of military rule in 1991. Similarly and in spite of the several changes experienced over time since their genesis, the roles and modus operandi of Ethiopian traditional voluntary associations (such as traditional burial associations –idir- and saving and credit groups -iqub-) essentially remained unchanged in terms of scope of engagement and mandate whereby their preoccupation remained limited to catering for the needs of their members without transforming their fields of activities and organizational profile (Kassahun 2007). Hence the influence of non-state actors and institutions on policy including agricultural policy is virtually absent.

The advent of modern civil society organizations dates back only to Ethiopia's liberation from the brief Italian occupation in 1941 during which they were at a nascent stage in terms of capacity, scope and areas of engagement, and geographic distribution (Kassahun 2002). Hence during the years that preceded the 1974 revolution, formally organized modern CSOs were very few in number mainly characterized by ecumenical in orientation, foreign-based in terms of origin, and engagement in addressing pressing needs of vulnerable groups by providing relief aid, educational and health services, and vocational training (ibid). Between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, modern NGOs proliferated due to major famine episodes that prompted a massive influx of foreign-based organizations that induced the formation of some local counterparts. In view of the fact that coping with the unfolding humanitarian crisis was beyond the capacity and preparedness of the state, the military regime allowed the intervention of foreign NGOs to deal with threats of drought and food insecurity (Dessalegn 2002: 106).

In the aftermath of EPRDF's coming to power, formal civil society organisations mushroomed in a manner unprecedented hitherto due to the increasingly widening trend of the public space, which was expressed in the formation of several professional associations, NGOs, and private sector operators. In this manner the landscape of citizens' associations was transformed in several respects like spatial distribution, fields of engagement, and diversification of activities. Nevertheless, Ethiopian CSOs continued to heavily depend on external support in various ways due to their inability to survive on their own. Efforts to ameliorate this shortcoming by reducing the magnitude of dependence of Ethiopian CSOs were nonetheless constrained by a plethora of economic and socio-cultural and political factors that prevailed in the Ethiopian context. Once the euphoria of liberalization subsided, the legal-administrative environment within which CSOs are required to operate has been marked by increased state control culminating in the promulgation of new legislation in 2009 (FDRE 2009), which stipulated that local CSOs that draw 10 % or less of their funding from external sources shall be classified as 'Ethiopian Charities and Societies' and made eligible to engage in political advocacy and rights-based issues and concerns. On the other hand, both local and foreign/international CSOs constituting the bulk of CSOs in Ethiopia – defined as those that receive more than 10% of their funds from non-domestic resources - are required to register as 'Ethiopian Resident Charities and Societies" whose

involvement is legally limited to only service delivery and socio-economic development entailing their exclusion from engagement in advocacy aimed at influencing policy issues including agricultural policy.

3.5. Implications for Agricultural Policy making

The point of entry in the effort of unraveling the political economy of agricultural policy in Ethiopia is the organizational principles and operational practices of EPRDF. Once EPRDF's monopoly of the public space was entrenched in the aforementioned manner, the ruling Front got added leverage by incorporating the major elements of its socio-economic and political programs as the major provisions of the 1995 constitution in whose drafting it played decisive roles.

It should also be recalled that EPRDF's cardinal principles anchored in its Marxist-Leninist past espousing the vanguard role of the party remained intact, albeit with some modifications that are in line with developments associated with the end of the Cold War. This is evidenced by its adherence to democratic centralism as enshrined in its organizational document (EPRDF 2006) emphasizing the ruling party's centrality in spearheading socio-economic and political processes on the one hand and blending the structures of party and state on the other. Aalen (2002) argued that EPRDF's centralized party structure runs counter to the intents and spirits of the federal and regional constitutions due to the entrenchment of upward accountability to the higher party organs to the detriment of downward accountability. As a result, the constitutional rights of the self-governing ethnic regions in formulating and implementing policies under the rubric of arrangements aimed at entrenching formal decentralization are subordinated to the decisions and programmatic positions of EPRDF, i.e. centralization of power in practice.

Public policy making in today's Ethiopia is characterized by top-down approaches in the major areas of political governance, socio-economic development, and sub-national levels of administration despite EPRDF's official pledges favoring popular initiatives and participation in decision making. Dessalegn (2008: 147) opined that there is still a lot to be desired regarding the policy formulation process given that existing state of affairs tends to forfeit the advantages accruing from broad-based consultation. Besides, EPRDF's omnipotence in policy making is boosted through the façade of its uninterrupted victories in all the electoral exercises conducted since 1991. Its unbridled powers in decision-making are cemented by the different provisions of the incumbent constitution that empower the federal government to formulate and implement overall economic, social and development policies (Article 51). This is buttressed by empowering the EPRDF-dominated House of Peoples' Representatives to legislate in all matters falling under the jurisdiction of the federal government (Article 55, 2a) implying that constitutional principles that provide for institutional checks and balances and legislative oversight over the EPRDF-dominated executive have limited practical impact. Hence the preoccupation of parliament is confined to rubberstamping the decisions and proposals of the executive branch due to the legislature's predetermination of steadfastly supporting proposed bills without adequate scrutiny and debate (Kassahun 2005).

National policy including agricultural policy that falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government is initiated in the EPRDF Council in which each member organization of the four major constituent regional parties[3] is represented by 15 elected persons. Following consultations in the EPRDF Council and its Executive Committee at regular and extraordinary meetings, decision is often reached through consensus. In the absence of consensus, adherence to the principles of democratic centralism that underlines the binding nature of party discipline whereby the position supported by the majority and the higher echelons is strictly observed. Following this, draft policies that are agreed on at this level are channeled to the Council of Ministers chaired by the Prime Minister who is also the chairperson of EPRDF. The Council of Ministers, almost all of whose members are leading members of EPRDF and those of the affiliated ruling parties of the five "emerging" regions[4] , approves the same which then is submitted as a draft bill to the House of People's Representatives for approval. The process of approving draft bills by the regional and local legislatures (councils) also follows a similar trajectory. Noteworthy also is that it is incumbent on the regional states to comply with national policies that are within the purview of the powers of the federal government. The absence of a strong and viable loyal opposition as a countervailing force has thus provided EPRDF with a free hand and unconstrained space for legally enforcing its wills and preferences, which facilitates conditions for embarking on the task of transforming the performance of agriculture in a manner that it deems necessary and appropriate. In the light of the foregoing, therefore, it is hardly possible to envisage possibilities for debating on and promoting alternative policy choices given the neutralization of non-state actors, the dismal situation of opposition parties, and the absence of traditional and other forms of viable power centers outside the EPRDF mainstream.

Whilst EPRDF's apparent hegemony in all areas of politics undoubtedly does have negative impacts on the quality of policy making, in the realm of agricultural policy making its negative impacts are at least in part counter-acted by the continuing insecurity of the EPRDF regime (resounding election victories notwithstanding) and by its acknowledged need to generate broad-based growth in order to control the consolidation of opposition forces. The final section of the paper examines the agricultural extension program in Ethiopia, which neatly illustrates that both political and economic drivers result in shaping agricultural policy in the country.

4. Agricultural Extension Program in Ethiopia: Political and Economic Drivers

Though agricultural extension programs formed a major component of agricultural policy during the reigns of both the imperial government and military rule, the priority attached to investment in extension grew by leaps and bounds in the post-1991 years following the formulation of the Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization Strategy (ADLI). Whilst the government's claim of endeavoring to bring about economic recovery through implementing ADLI and the agricultural extension program focusing on smallholder agriculture is not questioned, this section also sets out to shed light on the political dimension of the program and its contribution to the EPRDF's quest for control and legitimacy. Furthermore, there may be tensions between the two objectives, with the control imperative leading to a less flexible and responsive service for farmers, thereby reducing its productivity and growth impacts.

4.1 Agricultural Extension during the Reigns of the Imperial and Military Regimes

Agricultural extension has always been at the center of policies pertaining to the sector during the reigns of successive Ethiopian governments. A historical survey of the agricultural extension system in the country (Belay 2003, Berhanu et al 2006) reveals that it has been at the forefront of agricultural development drives for the last several decades since government-led agricultural extension services commenced in the 1950s. The Alemaya [later renamed Haromaya] College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts, that had links with Oklahoma University in the US, was the first to be entrusted with the task of reaching out to farming communities by providing extension services and disseminating research-based knowledge and adult education (Davis et al. 2010: 8). When the Ministry of Agriculture of the imperial government was established in 1963, it was given the mandate for providing extension services as a result of which it established departments responsible for agricultural extension both at the Ministry and its branch offices (Habtemariam 2007). Between the late-1950s and 1960s, the imperial government developed three successive Five-Year National Development Plans (1957-1962, 1962-1967, and 1968-1973, respectively).

The first two Five-Year Plans heavily favored large-scale farms specializing in the production of export crops whereas the Third (1968-1973) exhibited a major departure from the previous ones by recognizing the need for transforming smallholder production by focusing on localities that were endowed with high production factors (Dejene 1990: 50). This move culminated in the establishment of the Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit (CADU) and the Wolaita Agricultural Development Unit (WADU), among others, in today's Oromia and Southern Regional States respectively. (Yonas 2006a: 174). These were formed to facilitate the provision of technological packages in the form of improved seeds, fertilizer and credit, and to assist in building human and physical infrastructure development and soil conservation (Yonas 2006b: 29). Agricultural extension was classified into what came to be known as the Comprehensive Package Approach (CPA) and the Minimum Package Approach (MPA) both of which were mainly donor-driven targeting wealthy smallholders and those engaged in commercial agriculture (Berhanu et al 2006). Whereas both CPA and MPA focused on increasing production as a means of improving the standard of living of smallholders, the Comprehensive Package Approach was implemented by organizing groups of farmers who were targeted to benefit from research-based knowledge and application of improved inputs. On the other hand, the Minimum Package Approach was designed to address similar goals by taking individual farming households as beneficiaries from similar interventions (Davis et al 2010: 8). The progress in realizing increased production through implementation of these package approaches under imperial rule was bedeviled by structural constraints like the land tenure system, which was characterized by high incidence of tenancy, that inhibited efforts aimed at lending durability and progressive and incremental expansion of the initiative. However, through their representatives that wielded immense powers in the mainstream political organs of the imperial establishment, the landlords in the different parts of the country blocked each and every attempt aimed at reforming the tenure system[5] .

Under military rule, implementation of the Minimum Package Approach temporarily became the focus of agricultural extension with support from the World Bank, IFAD and SIDA[6] . This approach later assumed a new nomenclature, the Peasant Agricultural Development Extension Program (PADEP), which was also supported by foreign donors. Nevertheless, agricultural policy in the immediate aftermath of the demise of imperial rule focused more on implementing the Land Reform Proclamation than on promoting agricultural extension (Davis et al 2010: 8). Moreover, given the limited number of extension workers and lack of financial and other forms of incentives, PADEP failed in terms of achieving stated objectives (Befekadu and Berhanu 2000: 185). Instead, agricultural development priorities anchored in the ideological orientation of the military government that accorded primacy to cooperatives and state farms led to a situation whereby individual peasant producers were largely deprived of access to credit services and improved inputs[7] . Hence efforts made during the reigns of both the imperial and military regimes in expediting agricultural development proved futile (Tesfaye 1999: 134).

4.2 Agricultural Extension under EPRDF

Under EPRDF, smallholders became the focus of interventions in agriculture in general and in regard to agricultural extension in particular. In doing so, the regime initially received support for the agricultural extension scheme from smallholders who hoped to get preferential access to agricultural inputs and other related services presumed to lead to improvement of their lots. The first four years of EPRDF rule (1991-1995) were marked by the resumption of PADEP. At the same time a pilot extension system supported by Sasakawa Global 2000 (SG-2000) was introduced in 1993, involving 160 farmers in demonstration exercises focusing on maize and wheat production. The number of participating farmers grew tenfold by 1994 with the establishment of additional demonstration sites engaged in sorghum and teff production (Berhanu et al 2006). The success of the SG-2000 scheme, resulting in a boom harvest in 1995, prompted the government to adopt agricultural extension as a national intervention strategy and a major component of ADLI. Based on this, a new extension programme, the Participatory Demonstration and Training Extension System (PADETES), was introduced.

During the launching of PADETES, the government declared that the objective of this approach was to enhance the productivity, production capacity and empowerment of smallholders with a view to ensuring prospects for national food self-sufficiency, increase the volume and variety of industrial raw materials (primary products), and producing for the export market (EEA, 2004/05).

Under the PADETES scheme, one extension team was deployed for each of the three agricultural production zones, namely those with abundant moisture, moisture-deficit areas, and pastoral rangelands. The number of smallholder farmers who participated in the PADETES scheme increased from 32,000 in 1995 to about 4.2 million in 2002 whereas the number of deployed extension workers increased from 2500 in 1995 to about 15,000 in 2002 implying that about one third of all farmers participated in PADETES, whilst the development agent to farmer ratio had risen from 1: 5000 to 1:800 (ibid).

In 2004 the government embarked on a further ambitious expansion of the extension system in the country. Central to this were the establishment of Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges (ATVETs) to train a new cadre of extension workers and the establishment of farmer training centres (FTCs) to become the focal point of extension support in every kebele in the country. Between 2004 and 2009, these farmer training programs received a significant annual public investment amounting to over US $ 50 million or almost 2% of agricultural GDP (Spielman et al 2010). According to Roseboom (cited in ibid), the investment earmarked for the program is in excess of those made in other developing countries.

As of recently, agricultural extension is geared towards developing various packages that are suited to the different agro-ecological zones where both smallholder and large-scale agricultural activities are undertaken. According to Dessalegn (2008: 159), whereas the initial focus was on food crops, the extension system at a later stage developed packages that are redefined to fit to the conditions of the different agro-ecological zones including the dry land areas. The packages developed in line with this include those dealing with high-value crops (spices, oilseeds, vegetables), livestock (dairy, poultry, beekeeping, fattening), and natural resources (forestry and soil and water conservation).

Thus, investment in agricultural extension has been a key component of the government's strategy to promote smallholder agricultural growth for almost two decades. There is indeed some evidence of its beneficial impact. For example, drawing on a 15-year longitudinal data set on households in 15 Ethiopian villages compiled since 1994, Dercon et al (2008) found that public investment in improved road quality and increased extension services indeed contributed to the lowering of poverty and to increasing rural consumption. The same source stated that access to all-weather roads reduces poverty by 6.9 percentage points and raises consumption by 16.3 percent. This notwithstanding, however, many smallholder farmers are hesitant to embrace the use of modern inputs particularly when access to these is based on credit due to the tendency of farmers to avoid risk in instances of crop failure (Carleson et al 2005).

The discourse on the positive ramifications of agricultural extension in Ethiopia was primarily spearheaded by the bureaucratic elite and the agricultural research institutes that are engaged in facilitating increased production and productivity under the aegis of the federal and regional governments. Sections of the technocratic elite in particular advocated the use of green-revolution technologies to solve problems of low productivity and food insecurity in Ethiopia (Keeley and Scoones, 2000). This move was also supported by economists who invoked relevant experiences and data from elsewhere. The Ethiopian government in general and the Prime Minister who is the Chairman of EPRDF in particular invested substantial political capital on the scheme by promising to 'cross the divide' to food self-sufficiency (ibid) as expressed in applauding the success of the SG-2000 initiative marked by the 1995 bumper harvest. The government's resolve was thus strengthened to aggressively expedite the agricultural extension program whose efficacy was appreciated by multilateral and bilateral donors like the World Bank, European Union, UK, Canada, AfDB, Ireland, Germany and Sweden (Getachew 2007: 103). In this connection, Driscoll et al (2005) stated that Ethiopia received about 44% of its annual government budget from Overseas Development assistance (ODA) between 2002/03 and 2004/05. Of this, 31% was disbursed in the form of direct budget support, much of it channeled for boosting agricultural development.

4.3 Agricultural Extension as a Means of Control over Smallholder Producers

Until 1992 when liberalization reforms were introduced, state monopoly over the fertilizer market was controlled by the state-owned Agricultural Input Supply Enterprise (Yonas 2006b: 49-50). Liberalization, however, amounted to a mere pretension given that four out of the six companies involved in the sale and distribution of fertilizers were owned by EPRDF's member organizations (Befekadu and Berhanu 2000: 190; Abera 2001: 102). At a later stage, the two non-EPRDF private companies were pushed out under duress thereby enabling the ruling party's firms to monopolize the fertilizer market (Abegaz 2011: 52). According to Jayne et al, (2003), new agricultural technologies and liberalization reforms in fertilizer marketing actually resulted in government control of pricing and distribution of agricultural inputs, which entailed the exit of private operators from similar engagements. In view of the fact that the majority of smallholder farmers cannot pay cash for improved inputs they receive, extending credit to producers was deemed necessary as one of the components of the extension program. According to one informant[8], the precondition for Farmers' eligibility in accessing agricultural credit was to be organized in formally recognized cooperatives or to form credit and saving groups under the guidance of extension workers.

This mechanism of organizing producers was designed to form the basis of collateral for ensuring repayment of credits and the interest and administrative costs accruing thereof as per the terms enshrined in the contracts. After receiving inputs on credit, each beneficiary of the service is required to repay his/her share of the debt during each harvest season through the respective cooperative/ group leaders assisted by extension workers and grassroots (kebele) administrations (Yonas 2006b: 51). In several instances, defaulting smallholders in general and those suspected of sympathizing with the opposition in particular are forced to sell their oxen and other assets to settle their debts[9]. Even though data on average default figures and whether the politically loyal smallholders being preferentially treated are not available, Ayelegn and Shirega (2000: 26) cited several instances when several farmers were forced to sell oxen in order to settle their debts while the properties of others were auctioned. Moreover, official government and ruling-party sources (EPRDF 1999 and 2000 and FDRE 2001 cited in Demessie 2006: 217-218) mentioned the growing unwillingness and inability of peasant producers to repay loans incurred as a result of credit-based acquisition of modern inputs as a serious concern thereby indicating problems that underlie the situation of smallholder production.

Government monopoly was also experienced as regards the production, sale and distribution of improved seeds that are one of the major elements of the agricultural extension program. According to Befekadu and Berhanu (2000: 192), a government-owned firm known as the Ethiopian Improved Seeds Enterprise is in charge of distributing 93 % of the improved seeds despite the regime's alleged introduction of liberalization measures. Some studies indicated that several inadequacies underlie the adaptation of the seed-fertilizer and technological diffusion arrangement resulting in high cost of inputs, insufficient credit services and rationing, and lack of varieties that are appropriate to farmers' needs (EEA/EEPRI cited in Spielman et al 2010). Habtemariam (2008: 166-171) enumerated the challenges that bedevil the Ethiopian agricultural extension system from the point of view of technical inadequacies and absence of participation of non-state actors like NGOs and other citizens' groups. Based on his study on the supply of credit-based agricultural inputs in the Amhara regional state, Yonas (2006b: 66) stated that the agricultural extension programme compels farmers to excessively depend on providers that are either state enterprises or those affiliated to the regional ruling party. According to one informant[10], the situation is similar in the other regional states as well. In view of the foregoing, therefore, it can be argued that the taking effect of the aforementioned monopolistic structure results in double-pronged consequences. Economically, the aforementioned firms benefit from a high profit margin on the one hand and elevate access to agricultural inputs to the status of instrument of political control and patronage on the other (Yonas 2006a: 166). In view of this, I argue that access to agricultural inputs like improved seeds and chemical fertilizers including agricultural credit being among the major components of the agricultural extension scheme in Ethiopia, government monopoly over these lends added leverage to the EPRDF-led political establishment to command unbridled control over the smallholder producer in the absence of alternative providers.

4.4 Political and Economic Underpinnings of the Agricultural Extension Scheme

The central argument advanced in this study is that despite the legitimate and sound economic rationales advanced justifying agricultural extension, there are credible grounds for asserting that the venture is also driven by the urge for advancing political imperatives. As mentioned earlier, there is no doubt that the government is committed to bringing about economic recovery through agricultural transformation by working towards improved performance of smallholder production whose positive ramifications are beyond contention. On the other hand, EPRDF is also equally interested in perpetuating itself by securing votes and broader acceptance. It also worthy to note that under the circumstances in which it finds itself at present, its chosen means of doing this is by entrenching political control and patronage.

Hence the agricultural extension program is driven by these twin economic and political objectives. The central role in expediting the agricultural extension scheme in a

manner that meets the objectives for which it is designed is played by agricultural extension agents deployed in all the rural areas of the country. Moreover, selected smallholder farmers who participate in agriculture-related trainings on thousands of demonstration sites and Farmer Training Centers also play supportive roles to the endeavors of extension workers in this regard. The extension agents whose estimated number is 45,812 (Davis et al, 2010: 15) work in tandem with farmers trained in FTCs that they run in collusion with grassroots administrations with funding from local governments. Spielman et al (2006) stated that each FTC is designed to be staffed by three extension agents each of whom undertake tasks related to crop production, livestock, and natural resource management.

Trained agricultural extension workers are spread in all the regional states of the Ethiopian Federation. According to informants who served as ex-directors and instructors[11] of ATVETs, some training institutes currently under the federal Ministry will provisionally stay where they are until the concerned regions develop the necessary capacity to take them over. Following this, the regions will be in charge exercising devolved powers and functions by way of facilitating administrative expedience and easing concentration of tasks at the centre. It is envisaged that the role of the Federal Ministry will be limited to facilitating and coordinating activities when this is ultimately realized (Yonas 2006a: 175). As aforementioned, the fact that all sub-national level government structures fall under the jurisdiction of member organizations of the ruling Front ensures that decentralizing the management of the training institutes does not entail a situation that undermines the imperatives of control.

Admission to the training institutes is formally based on pass grades obtained in the national entrance exams prepared by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture. Eligible applicants who sit for the exams are required to complete 10th grade in the regular high schools. Short-listing and selecting qualified candidates is undertaken by regional government officials on the basis of quotas allocated to each. It was learnt that all applicants who meet all the requirements for admission cannot join the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutes due to shortage of space and limited quota. Formally, preferential treatment is given on the basis of gender and residence in the peripheral regions through affirmative action. However, interviewees explained that in practice additional criteria like political allegiance and loyalty, including subjective evaluation that takes into account commitment to the program, is also applied to discriminate among those that are short-listed. Based on their personal experiences, informants added that subjective considerations like commitment to the programme that cannot be easily measured are often attributed to selecting from among short- listed candidates that is often tilted in favour of those who are enlisted as members of EPRDF. Consequently, the additional points ranging between 15% and 25% of the total weighted average that members and sympathizers of the EPRDF receive on this basis makes them enjoy comparative advantages over other competitors to join the agricultural training institutes.

It was also reported that those who undertake the screening at various levels are largely believed to be members of the ruling party operating on the basis of standing instructions to this effect and are made aware of who among the candidates are members of the ruling party or not through various means. Following their admission, the successful candidates pursue their trainings for a period of three years after which they obtain diplomas in various agricultural disciplines. Following their graduation, extension workers are employed by the regional governments and deployed to the rural areas and charged with the responsibility of undertaking the aforementioned activities pertaining to their specialization and beyond. To date, tens of thousands of male and female extension workers have graduated while tens of thousands are currently in the pipeline. According to the various informants, about 10% of the graduates have left their jobs as extension workers in search of greener pastures elsewhere and secured employment in other organizations after serving as extension agents for a number of years. It is also reported that not all graduates continue to serve as extension workers indefinitely. Hundreds have changed their careers to serve in the local, zonal, regional, and federal government organs as administrators, sector office heads, legislators, and experts.

The engagement of extension workers in non-extension activities like administration, tax collection, and popularization of policies including those that are not directly related to agriculture (Berhanu et al, 2006) provide clues that they could also be involved in mobilizing votes in favor of the ruling party during elections. Belay (2002 cited in Fisseha 2009: 30) stated that the involvement of extension workers in non-extension activities led to the undermining of their credibility and reputation whereby many people tended to view them as government prolocutors rather than facilitators of agricultural development endeavours. According to Fisseha (ibid), this posed difficulties for extension workers to win the confidence and cooperation of farming communities who tend to view them as bureaucrats and politicians with little concern for the needs and preferences of local people. A study by Fasil and Habtemariam (2006) on the state of agricultural extension service in Ethiopia brought to light that about 87% and 46% of the interviewed extension workers stated that they were involved in credit repayment processes and tax collection respectively and admitted that "in some cases they play advocacy role in the interest of the ruling party". The involvement of extension workers in some non-extension activities is thus indicative of the fact that they engage in tasks that enhance the interests of the ruling party since they are regular government employees working under a situation where the blending of party and state structures is the norm at present. This assertion is plausible in view of the fact that the recruitment, employment and deployment of extension workers are undertaken by regional governments whose leading institutions and officials are integral parts of the

EPRDF political establishment. The instrumentality of the extension system to preserve the overriding interests of EPRDF can also be ascertained by the fact that the policy formulation process pertaining to the program is underpinned by top-down approaches under the aegis of the ruling Front. It is, therefore, highly likely that the agricultural extension program is designed in line with the quest to further the interests of the government and the ruling party along lines that are in accord with predetermined preferences of officialdom. In this vein, Belay (2002) argues that policies associated with the agricultural extension program are often developed and take effect without due regard to the preference and opinion of farmers.

In the light of the aforementioned, understanding the increasingly unprecedented intrusive power of the EPRDF regime is noteworthy. Dessalegn (2009) compares the situation of state control under the three successive regimes, namely imperial rule, the military government and EPRDF stating that the military government extended the intrusive powers of the state far more than its predecessor partly due to establishing Peasant Associations and mass organizations operating in the rural areas. These proved more effective in penetrating society more than the disparate semi-public agents under imperial rule. Moreover, the military dictatorship used the centralized Leninist party structure that replaced the administrative apparatus of the imperial regime at all levels by extending party membership to Peasant Association leaders and grassroots communities. This was further reinforced by deploying rural extension workers where one agent was assigned to undertake multiple tasks in at least 5 Peasant Associations. The same source asserts that the degree and extent of the intrusive power of the EPRDF surpassed even that of the military dictatorship in several respects, which is expedited through considerable increase in the number of extension workers deployed, replacement of grassroots administrations and associated organs and structures by cabinets, councils, and administrative managers including committees and teams dealing with development, mobilization, service provisioning, security, and more importantly party functionaries and cells deployed in villages and neighborhoods. The overarching presence of extension workers at the level of each and every rural community working in tandem with farmers graduating from FTCs and grassroots administrative and party structures spread over villages and neighborhoods of rural Ethiopia, therefore, makes scrutiny and control of state of affairs down to the household level increasingly complete.

4.5 State-Donor Relations with regard to Agricultural Extension

If the state is to use extension policy for objectives of domestic political control, then it must also be able to exert its control over extension policy in its dealings with international development partners. Above I noted that there has been support for investment in extension from multilateral, bilateral and other donors throughout the EPRDF period. Prominent amongst these have been World Bank, SG-2000 and IFAD. However, I argue that donor support has never allowed them to dictate the terms of extension policy to the EPRDF government.

The best example of this concerns the role of the private sector in provision of extension and other complementary services, e.g. seed and fertilizer supply. Starting in the late 1990s, a number of donors encouraged the government to allow a greater role for the private sector in agricultural input markets. Keeley and Scoones (2000) report the inaugural meeting, in 1997, of a so-called Agribusiness Forum that brought together donors (including World Bank, SG-2000 and USAID), government ministers, multinational companies and domestic private operators to deliberate on the issue of involving the private sector in agriculture in partnership with the government. The meeting was co-hosted by the Prime Minister and SG-2000 and was chaired by Jimmy Carter. However, in the five years following this meeting, the position of the Ethiopian government hardened against private sector participation, as illustrated above in relation to the reversal of fertilizer market liberalization. This position has not changed over the past decade.

More generally, Keeley and Scoones (2000, p100) cite an official in a bilateral donor agency as saying that, following the decision to upscale the SG-2000 pilot scheme in the late 1990s, extension policy is `the one policy we can't do anything about'.

In early 2009, in an apparent opening up to greater policy dialogue with donors, the Ethiopian Government requested the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to undertake a review of the country's agricultural extension programme. This aimed at identifying the strengths and constraints of the agricultural extension system and provide "best fit" solutions and indicate scaling-up opportunities for improvement (Davis et al 2009:1). Following this, the Foundation deployed a team of professionals specializing in agricultural extension and international management that undertook the review between May and July 2009. At the conclusion of the formal review process, a three-day stakeholder workshop was held for eliciting feedback and inputs from a group of over 80 parliamentarians, Ministry of Agriculture staff, and frontline extension workers. One of the outcomes of this process was the establishment in 2011 of the Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA), which aims to give renewed impetus to policies supporting smallholder agriculture in the country, in particular reforms to the extension system that respond to the weaknesses identified in the diagnostic study. The establishment of the ATA is a recognition of the limitations of the Ministry of Agriculture to undertake these tasks. However, whilst donors are providing technical and financial support to ATA, ultimate control remains in the government's hands, with the Prime Minister himself chairing the ATA board. I understand that, despite high-level discussion regarding the role of the private sector in providing agricultural support services in the country, there has been no movement in government policy on this issue since the establishment of ATA.

In the light of the foregoing, I argue that both the outcomes of the Foundation's review process and the initiatives attempted by other donors like USAID has left the uncontested control of the government on the Ethiopian agricultural extension system largely intact.

Conclusion

The ramifications of agricultural extension in Ethiopia are viewed from several angles. First, it has played an important role in augmenting smallholder production due to improved access to inputs, credits, and training. Second, the government persisted in implementing the extension program despite the hesitation of many smallholders to embrace credit-based services for fear of being indebted in cases of harvest failure. Third, the implementation of the program gained the support of donors of various persuasions that provided assistance prior to and following the commencement of the programme. Fourth, the government has invested a lot in the venture to advance closely intertwined socio-economic and political goals. Fifth, extension workers who received relatively advanced technical and administrative training of various sorts are deployed en masse in all the rural areas to guide and oversee implementation of the programme in a manner that could lead to the attainment of the desired economic and political objectives. Sixth, the overarching presence and outreach of EPRDF that is embedded in closely-knit party and government structures enabled it to effectively penetrate the rural areas thereby facilitating political control that is vital to securing votes of grassroots communities constituting the overwhelming majority of the electorate. In conclusion, in as much as the attainment of economic recovery and food self-sufficiency is the genuine desire of the EPRDF regime, the implicit goal also includes obtaining legitimacy from smallholders whose support is crucial for winning elections and ensuring survival against internal and external threats. By and large, donor influence on agricultural policy is rather limited except in cases that donor interventions are commensurate with the preferences of the EPRDF regime as indicated with regard to the SG-2000 pilot scheme. The discussion on the political economy of agricultural policy making in Ethiopia has, therefore, both economic and political dimensions as presented in this paper.

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END NOTES

1 According to Dessalegn (2008; 134), the package approach was designed for application at group and household levels. In the case of households, the approach is based on family resources like land, labour, and other household assets including the capacity to produce where farmers are provided menu-based technologies to choose from and receive the necessary training and information for making informed decisions and choices. On the other hand, 20-30 households that are provided with either a menu-based technological package or a minimum package linking research-extension and input-credit distribution are organized under the group-approach.

2 EPRDF has continuously controlled the four major regions (Tigray, Oromia, Amhara and the Southern Region) and the two autonomous city governments (Addis Ababa abd Dire Dawa) since 1991. The same applies to the remaining five regions (Afar, Beni-Shangul Gumuz, Gambella, Harari and Somali) that are controlled by ethnic parties that are closely associated with EPRDF without being formally enlisted as members of the coalition.

3 These include the Tigray People's Libertaion Front (TPLF), the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), and the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (SEPDM) that are the ruling political organizations in Tigray, Oromia, Amhara and Southern National/Regional States respectively.

4 Reference is made to the ruling parties in Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Harari and Somali regional states that are not formally members of the EPRDF-coalition. To date, the programmes and policy directions of these organizations on different issues and concerns have always remained identical with those of the ruling Front. Hence they are officially designated as "friendly" political organizations. These receive preferential treatment and support from the former resulting in their enjoying a dominant position over their adversaries in their respective areas as expressed in their repeated electoral victory as a result of which they managed to form the concerned regional/state governments under their jurisdiction. Regarding their role and participation in the policy making process, it is widely believed that they are consulted through their respective leaderships following which they follow suit by subscribing to what has been already decided by EPRDF's leadership. There is no instance where divergences on policy issues between these organizations and EPRDF have taken place to date.

5 Interview with a former member of the Management of the Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit (CADU), 28 April 2011, Washington DC.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Interview with an agricultural extension team leader in Oromia Region, 10 March 2011, Zway, East Shoa Zone.

9 Interview with anonymous smallholder farmer in East Shoa Zone of the Oromia Regional State, Mojo, 8 March 2011.

10 Interview with ex-Deputy Manager of an Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education Training Institute, 12 March 2011, Southern Regional State.

11 Interviews with the author at varying times in December 2010, Addis Ababa.

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