

“Transformation” is a recent buzz word in Ethiopia. The politicians of the ruling party and the state television constantly introduce this English word into almost any conversation. It gives the impression that either the targeted audience is those outside of Ethiopia or the Amharic equivalent (i.e. *lew’T*) is too dynamic for the context it's been used.

⋮

Whatever the reason, it is now part of the package- *ye amistu amet edget’na transformation*  
*eqid* - The Five Year Growth and

Transformation Plan. Some of the promises of the  
*eqid*

are, in the next five years, to double the agriculture products in the country and to develop industries that will generate foreign currency.

According to the finance minister (MoFED), one of the major strategies that the government will use is to attract foreign investors. Intentionality and plan to develop the country is a noble idea.

The Ethiopian Diaspora must give a two-thumbs up for this  
*eqid*

, as long as there are carefully crafted, transparent policies and regulations, to protect the national interest, in place.

Eighty-five percent of the Ethiopian society is agrarian- dependent on rain-fed subsistence farming. Therefore, it is appropriate to develop the agriculture sector. The old method of farming must be replaced with modern approach. That should be a priority for the government of Ethiopia as well as for the donors. That is where the help is needed most. Supplying the farmer with chemical fertilizers alone is not the answer. What is needed is educating the farmer on tested and proven methods of farming. The life of the Ethiopian farmer is threatened with the slightest negative climate change. One can only imagine what a single season draught can do to the entire country’s food security and economy. Therefore, in ideal world, the introduction of foreign investment in the agriculture sector means knowledge sharing with domestic farmers and effective and efficient way of farming to guarantee food security in the country. In other words, the production will satisfy the nation’s need first and whatever is extra will be exported for international market to generate foreign currency that the government desperately needs for infrastructure and other businesses. That is one way to avoid food shortage and bring sustainable development.

As long as the government has the political will, the tool and the capacity to make poverty history and to transform Ethiopia’s image is under its disposal. Ethiopia does not need to be dependent on foreign aid! The Ethiopian society is always at the forefront when it comes to

national issues. Patriotism, national pride and dignity, are still its hallmarks. The governments of Ethiopia, past and present, were able to exploit this national sentiment at different times. All it takes was to portray the motive as a national interest, to bring dignity, and the people will march. Ethiopians always come together when there is a threat against their national interest. The present government had played this card effectively, to its convenience, during the Ethio-Eritrea conflict (1998-2000). Also, the recent Millennium Hydropower Dam project, the construction on River Nile, is another case in point. Therefore, the Ethiopian government is capable to mobilize the nation and the Ethiopian Diaspora to rally behind it to make poverty history, to transform the image of Ethiopia, through agricultural development. There must be a very good reason, or explanation, why the government does not take courage to try this approach.

I do believe it is the duty of Ethiopian academics, agronomists, economists, and technologists (inside and outside of the country) to work together in order to find a home-grown solution to this enormous threat of global food crisis. The basic and common needs of the Ethiopian society must have primacy over political ideologies and political differences. The government of Ethiopia needs to create the atmosphere for the Ethiopian Diaspora to desire to return. It must have the political will to allow Ethiopians in Diaspora to participate in discussions, public and political forums, on the interest of Ethiopia, and contribute in all their capacities. The government's interest in the life of the Diaspora should not be limited to the annual remittance- the over 1 billion dollar annual financial inflow into the country. There is an extraordinary potential within the Ethiopian Diaspora, experience and expertise, to transform the image of Ethiopia. I also believe that the transformation has to start from each individual. Both sides need to compromise to become the change they seek to see in their country. While the Ethiopian Diaspora needs to resist arrogance and elitism- lecturing from a distance, the government needs to deal with its own insecurity and authoritarianism- it needs to open all institutions for transparent democratic governance and to respect democratic values. Thus far no one has ever disproved nor disputed the claim of the renown economist Nobel laureate Amartya Sen that famine does not occur in a functioning democracy. We all need to think of the future generation.