A Cornerstone of Democracy

Good Governance

(by Sofia Bekele)

To have a democratic government, we need to have good governance. To then have good governance, we need to understand the concept of governance, which is complex and subjective. One definition of governance is "the process through which....institutions, businesses and citizens' groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations, allocate human choices and opportunities, and mediate their differences". Less formally, governance is described as "the process by which a society or organization steers itself."

Since the inception of civilization, governance and government have been built on rigid hierarchies. But today the efficiency of the pyramid model of governance is being eroded by democratization of information. From the traditional position of power, the basis of authority and influence is shifting towards knowledge, expertise and interest. The resulting model encourages a sharing of power and influence between the different governance stakeholders: government, private sector and civil society. Ideally, the partnership among the three sectors should hinge upon the collective wisdom, mutual cooperation and responsible action of all key sectors in governance.

Ethiopia is still trying to address the issues of governance to a single nation. Imagine how complex it will be if we have to think of governance in the 'internetworked' world. Our societies are changing. We are more informed, more knowledgeable, more internetworked. As such, we will need governance that will reflect that. Clearly, there is a gap between our new generation of societies and our governments. Our governments should reflect the changing realities of our societies and the changing roles of governance stakeholders.

Yes, it is evident that economic progress has been achieved in the past ten years in Ethiopia in light of the market-oriented reforms and directives issued by our government. This was also demonstrated during the Inter-Africa meeting last year, which was a review of the countries' economic performance. We have also as a loner term peace that is condusive to the development. Now, our government should be commended for all the efforts. Despite this, the people of Ethiopia are expecting more and governments and parlimentarians should do more. The societies we are now are more informed, internet-worked, dynamic and with passion for progress. We also understand that development takes time and that the dimensions to resolve the issues of development should be a shared agenda and a shared responsibility and accountability of all stakeholders.

The recent riots, which included the 'hooligans', as they were referred to, were allegedly instigated by economic deprivation: poverty, unemployment, high inflation. It was brought to light also that the police were not trained for riot management. The excessive use of force was anti-democratic.

citizens must be respected. To know one's rights and stand for one's right should be the norm not the exception. Justice is about understanding and granting what is right. The nation's or individual's rightful cry for justice should be respected and be given due attention. It should be examined by its government and appropriate actions should follow. Our government and parliament should be free of inefficiency, lack of transparency, nepotism, and corruption. They should set examples for other public and private institutions.

To run quickly through the basics of governance, let's use the parallel between the way in which the governance systems and computers work.

They both need to have hardware and operating systems to function. And they both need to have software to make the various applications run.

The hardware of any governance system is its institutional structure. The operating system is the management—through this institutional structure—of processes needed to articulate interests, to exercises, to distribute opportunities, to meet obligations, to mediate differences.

Participation, transparency, equity, responsiveness and efficiency can be used to assess the quality of both the institutional structure and these basic governance processes.

Now, as always, the real fun starts with the applications. What is it that we want to achieve? From whom? What is the basis of legitimacy of those who will boss us around while we will be doing all this? What is the method that will be applied to make things happen?

These are important questions as they relate to the purpose, domain, legitimacy and mode of operation of a governance system. Each of these variables elements represents a menu of options. The options chosen as well as the mix of them crucially determine the quality of the governance system, as it determines its accountability, usefulness and effectiveness.

It is often forgotten in the process of governance who is working for whom. It is to be firmly understood by government that it exists for the people. It is evident to many observers now that whenever any sector challenge the governance of our government or parliament, the honorable thing to do appears to be to understand and accept the government position despite the grave mistakes being made – in light of national interest or what not. This is to be at the expense of individual interest, which collectively represents the interest of the people.

In good governance, the rights of

They should be the first to follow the ideals of democracy. This should be the minimum requirement in good governance.

It is to be recalled that the Prime Minister had set precedent during his appearance by attending the Millennium Conference of African Entrepreneurs. "His presence at the conference was not a matter of mere protocol but reflects the commitment of its government to continental economic initiatives that will prove beneficial to our country and the private sector in particular," wrote a local newspaper, "and sets a good example for all government

officials to follow."

For governance to be effective, there should be a functioning democratic institution and people who can make it work.

We live and operate in the world of institutions, and operate across borders. Our opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function. It is absolutely pointless to debate rights, roles, responsibilities and relationships that pertain to our governance system, if this debate is conducted outside the context of the institutions, formal or informal, as the case may be. Our people are starting to clamor for governance which will guarantee their quality of life. The old rhetoric does not apply any longer.

As such, our country then needs new governance structures to effectively manage the new societies - Societies based on information, knowledge, and access to global resources. Using these current opportunities for change, our political governance can implement a new integrated approach, a new framework that acknowledges the creation of societies based on knowledge, involving a connections between three dimensions: POLITICAL, SOCIAL and ECONOMIC issues surrounding governance. A new approach will be needed to bring all key stakeholders, especially those previously excluded from the process, around shared goals and objectives. How can the key stakeholders be or take part in the process of governance under the three dimensions mentioned above?

The POLITICAL dimension of our governance should apply concepts and instruments of new knowledge, ideas and technologies so that governance structures increasingly transcend the state through collaboration with subnational and transnational private sectors and with representatives of civil society. Under the old system, governance was predominantly guided by state, like our current governance system in Ethiopia.

The breakdown of the vertical structures in our societies leads to increased horizontal interaction where a multitude of individual decisions are taken. This 'horizontalization' of governance structure involves the transfer of power