



**Politics by Numbers:
Poverty Reduction Discourse, Contestations
and Regime Legitimacy in ETHIOPIA**

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|-------|---|
| ANDM | Amhara National Democratic Movement |
| CSA | Central Statistics Agency |
| DHS | Demographic Health Survey |
| EPRDF | Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front |
| GOE | Government of Ethiopia |
| HICE | Household Consumption Income Expenditure |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| MLLT | Marxist Leninist League of Tigray |
| MOFED | Ministry of Finance and Economic Development |
| MPI | Multidimensional poverty Index |
| OPDO | Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization |
| PPP | Purchasing power party |
| TPLF | Tigray People Liberation Front |
| UDJ | Unity for Democracy and Justice |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UN | United Nations |
| WB | World Bank |
| WMS | Welfare Monitoring Survey |

Abstract

Despite the global focus on poverty reduction and sophistications in poverty measurements, there is still lack of consensus on how to measure poverty. Different ways measuring poverty continued to suggest different rates of poverty prevalence, sometimes with contradictory trend or very wide discrepancies. How do such uncertainties on trends of poverty decline affect national politics in context where regime tries to build its legitimacy on poverty reduction and economic performance? This study examined two contradictory discourses on the trend of poverty decline in Ethiopia in the last two decades; one depicting rapid fall and the other a high level of poverty declining marginally. The study examined who is arguing what? Based on what evidence?

One group, which supports of the ruling regime, uses government's consumption poverty statistics to argue that poverty has dropped significantly as a result of recent economic growth in the country. As its legitimacy based on normative values such democratization and rule of law is declining and is accused being authoritarian, the government tries to legitimatize itself on economic performance and aggressively promotes its statistics. This compels the other group, which the study found it to be usually very critical of the government, rejects the government's data and instead uses the multi dimensional poverty index form OPHI to argue that poverty has remained widespread and declined only marginally. They also draw on IMF statistics and argue that the economy has not been growing as fast as the government claims, (and therefore could not have contributed to poverty reduction), and accuse the regime fabricating data. This way, the opposition group attempt to de-legitimatize the regime. The study thus established that these two discourses are being "done" by pre-established groups defined in relation to their view towards the regime. As such statistics is being used selectively to fit actor's political interests and poverty numbers are used as means of conducting politics- politics by numbers.

Relevance to Development Studies

Poverty reduction continued to be one of focuses development studies. Controversies on poverty measures numbers are not new to development studies. This paper contributes to our understanding of the controversies surrounding poverty measurement by linking statistics utilization with political legitimacy, to show how the use and production of statistics is influenced by overall political economy of a country.

Keywords

Poverty, Poverty Knowledge, Statistics, Ethiopia, Statistics in Africa

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Background and Research Questions

The frequent draughts and famines in 1970s and 1980 regrettably associated the image of Ethiopia with poverty and deprivation. Philip Gill, the journalist who played important role in exposing the 1984 famine in Ethiopia to the world, described how the image of the country turned into poverty and famine; “it is images of Ethiopian starvation that have held the imagination of the outside world... Instead of its glorious past and rich culture, we now associate Ethiopia with famine. It has become the iconic poor country “(Gill 2010:1-2).

What happened to poverty since then? The international community, (media, donor organizations, and civil society) believes the story has been changing for the last two decades. Especially in the last decade, the intentional media is portraying Ethiopia as power in rise with rapidly growing economy and poverty reduction. From “Ethiopia: Return of The African Lion” (Minney 2013, The) of *New African* to “Ethiopia hails poverty reduction” by VOA (Voice of Amercia 2012) and “over one Million Ethiopians ‘graduate’ from poverty” [in one year] by *African Review* (Sisay 2013), depicts poverty falling significantly. The IMF and the World Bank have also praised the country for its success in reducing poverty (World Bank 2012, IMF 2013). This may have not yet changed the image of Ethiopia as “the iconic poor country”; but it is a representation that will credit the efforts of the government in poverty reduction, and encourage investment and aid for the country.

However, the domestic view of the story of poverty decline is far from consensus. The trend and status of economic development and poverty reduction in Ethiopia continued to be a point of debate especially for the last ten years. There are two narratives computing on prevalence of poverty. One discourse draws on government poverty statistics and describes poverty as rapidly falling. According to government’s statistics poverty head count has fallen dramatically, from 45.5% in 1995 to 29.6 % in 2010 (MOFED 2012). The other narrative uses alternative evidences such as OPHI which estimates multidimensional poverty at 87.3% in 2010 and accuses the government data fabrications. Each of the two discourse coalitions involve a range of actors including politicians, journalist and scholars.

This study examined the details of each of these narratives. However, instead of trying to reconcile the narratives, however, this paper tries to understand the underlying source of these accounts; for two reasons. First, disagreements on poverty statistics may not necessarily be reduced to statistical procedures that can be settled with better availability of data or better engagement with it, although these exercises are extremely important by themselves. Instead, possible sources of disagreements in poverty knowledge can be ontological- what constitute poverty as a reality, epistemological- how to know and access poverty as a reality, or methodological - what methods should be used (Kura and Sulaiman 2012). Any move to better understand differences such accounts, should appreciate first what are the sources of differences: on what ground does the two groups accounts of poverty trends in Ethiopia differ?

The second reason is linked to recent developments in Ethiopia's political economy of in the last decade. After two decades of military dictatorship, when the ruling Party, Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRDF, hereafter) come to power, the country adopted democracy. Although not without problems, there were progresses in democratization with multi-party system established, national elections held and private press and civil societies flourished (Clark 2000, Vaughan 2003). However, after experiencing near defeat lose of Federal house seats in the 2005 national election, the ruling regime in Ethiopia has since then returned to more authoritarian practices (Abbink 2006). This was complemented with the government move towards building its legitimacy on performance based on economic growth with extensive promotion of itself as a developmental state citing recent economic growth of the economy (EPRDF 2008, 2010). Literature has indicated that in countries where economy performance is the main source of legitimating, statistics likely to be politicised and the issue at stake may not be purely technical differences (Holbig and Gilley 2010).

Combining these two recent developments (the regimes increasingly move to performance based legitimacy with the poverty debate), this study examines if, and how, the contestation of the poverty statistics is linked to politics, specifically, regime legitimacy. We do so by pursuing answer to the following specific questions:

1. Who are the main actors/participants of the debate? Who is arguing what? On what "evidence"?
2. What are the main arguments and "evidences" of each party?
3. How do groups judge authoritativeness of poverty knowledge?

1.2. Organization of the Paper

This paper argues that that the underlying differences in this debate are not how poverty is defined or how it should be best measured. In instead, these debates are parts of broader political discourses where the regime is increasingly trying to legitimatize itself based on economic performance, particularly, success in poverty reduction aggressively and those who are critical of the government try to undermine the same regime portraying it as unsuccessful in poverty reduction.

This is argued as follows. In chapter two I will review uncertainties about poverty reduction and on how these contradictory evidences can be used selectively for political discourses. The follow up section will explain the methodology and data sources for the paper. Chapter three takes of the analysis by showing how the regime's legitimacy based on democracy and constitutionalism is fragile and how it tries to legitimize itself on poverty reduction. Chapter four, we will present the main issues of contestation on poverty trends in Ethiopia, and arguments of each side. In chapter five, we analyze the manifestations of the political nature of the debate by looking in to the nature of actors alliance, the focus of the debate and strategies used by each actor to enhance their capacity to dominate the discourse. The last chapter summarizes the main finding, and discuss implications for poverty reduction planning and programming.

Chapter 2 : Analytical Framework and Methodology of the Study

2.1. Controversies and Uncertain Poverty knowledge

Poverty is a complex phenomenon and how to measure it has continued to be an issue of debate since early 20th century. The source controversy on poverty knowledge can come from four sources. The first, and perhaps the most fundamental, is ontological: people may hold different views of what is the nature of poverty as a social phenomenon- is it prior to people's thinking or is it a phenomenon created and influenced by our thinking? Usually differences in answering these questions translate to Epistemology. Epistemology is the branch of philosophy which studies the nature and claims of knowledge (Kura and Sulaiman 2012:5). Epistemological differences involve how we know about poverty and who is the legitimate “knower” or producer of poverty knowledge. The third source of diversity on poverty knowledge concerns methodological differences- what methods should be used to know poverty (quantitative or qualitative or combined). Finally, people may hold different views on procedures of implementing a selected methodology.

These differences in poverty conceptualizations and how to know it have resulted in different traditions of poverty knowledge. Generally “we identify broad differences between poverty knowledge as the lived experience of poor people, and poverty knowledge as the normative interpretations of poor people's priorities contained in poverty reduction policies that emerge from the centre” (Brock et al. 2003:ix). Each of these traditions have their own view of poverty, how to represent it, who is the ultimate knower, and usually different identifications of the “poor”. A comparison of four approaches poverty measurement in China (the Monetary approach, participatory poverty approach multidimensional poverty approach and China's official poor), for instance, found that each approach “generate different aggregate poverty incidences and identify households with different characteristics as poor” (Lu 2012: 1). As the result, despite the sophistication of methods of poverty measurement under each tradition, how to measure poverty and evaluate progress towards poverty reduction is still very controversial. Fischer (2013) emphasizes “national measurements of poverty are contentious, even in the best of cases such as China and India” (Fischer 2013:1).

2.2. Political Discourses and the Use Evidence

This indefinite evidences and the proliferation of different ways of measuring poverty poses a challenge from the user perspective. On what criteria users, including governments, will decide which one to use? One of the suggestions from literature is that although not always, evidence can be used as legitimizing tool for a predefined political commitment.(Boswell 2008). O'Connor (2002) in her book “Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History” documents historically how poverty knowledge and interventions to reduce poverty were highly in-

fluenced by the political ideologies of the ruling parties in USA and how the poverty knowledge was used to justify the policy preferences of ruling parties. As such poverty knowledge she argued, is a manifestation of “the influence of institutional arrangements in other ways as well, and in particular the uneasy, and changing, relations” among these different actors (O’Connor 2002:10). Recently, in what is known as the great Indian poverty debate (Deaton and Kozel 2005), two groups, one believe in role of liberalization and globalization for poverty reduction and the other do not, have been debating on whether poverty has declined in 1990s after liberalization. Both groups presented evidences what they support their view and argued extensively.

The underlying discussion suggest when it comes to evidences on poverty, the availability of alternative ways of measures may cause indefinite knowledge or knowledge gap on poverty and these may lead to debates. The question then is who is using which evidences and on what bases of authority? Thus, poverty debates may not necessarily be only technical differences and we need to try to understand them as a part of broader national and international political economy dynamics.

2.3. Methodology

2.3.1. *The Forum of Debate and Data Sources*

The central focus of this paper is to understand the on-going debate between two discourses on poverty trends in Ethiopia. One discourses presenting rapid decline widespread poverty that is declining marginally. As would be expected, much of the debate represented in this paper is happening in major urban areas. Besides, readers should note that much of this debate is happening thorough media. There are two explanations for this. First, as would be expected, there are limited number of scholarly journals and scholars to engage in the discussion. Secondly, and more importantly, is because media and newspapers are very accessible to the public, which any political discourses want to reach and influence. A significant part of it also happens through on-line newspapers and forums. The media here included media’s that are located both inside and outside Ethiopians but mainly targeting Ethiopians. As such, it rarely represents the position of rural residents as participant of these discourses although rural poor and poverty are one elements of the controversy.

Consequently, for this paper, I draw heavily on print and online materials and government and party publications of both the ruling and opposition parties. Field work was conducted from June 7 to September 3, 2013. The field work mainly includes collection of range of documents, speeches, online and print materials, magazine articles, and interviews. In addition to these documents, I have conducted four interviews with staffs of the Central statistics Agency. The purposes of the interviews were to understand the process of poverty knowledge production in the Ethiopian state apparatus and how it is disseminated.

Secondary data collection mainly included multidimensional poverty Index (MPI) reports of the Oxford poverty and Human development Initiative (OPHI), reports of International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the IMF and World Bank reports. In addition, published literature from journals

and organization reports are used, especially in chapter three, to understand political economy dynamics and change in present-day Ethiopia.

2.4.2. Data Analysis

The analysis used in this paper follows Van Dijk (1997) suggestion on how and what elements to examine in analyzing political discourses. Van Dijk identified three elements that have to be analysed to understand political discourses. These are context, actors and content. He defined contexts broadly in terms “political and communicative events and encounters, with their own settings (time, place, circumstances), occasions, intentions, functions, goals, and legal or political implications” (Van Dijk :1997 :14). Context is hard to delimit, however. In this paper, I analysed the political economy of poverty reduction in the last decade in Ethiopia with special emphasis on the way the ruling regime views its relationship with the society. A particular focus is given to how the regime tries to legitimize itself and what contestations it is facing. The analysis is presented in Chapter Three

The second component of political discourse is actors. Van Dijk, suggested that analysing who is the actor or participant in debate or controversy is the “easiest, and not altogether misguided” (Van Dick 1997: 12) way to understand political discourses. In understanding actors, I have analysed what is the interaction among them and what commonalities and differences they hold on the main controversial issues. Actors are here understood not as holders of fixed attributes. Indeed, as they engage in exchange of discourses, actors interest or self-awareness may evolve. To put it in other words, “ideas ‘transform’ perceptions of interest, shaping actors’ self-understanding of their own interest” (Sikkink 1991, p. 243 cited in Lavers 2013: 20). Besides, these ideas and arguments are embodied in historical socio-political context at national level but also influenced by international practices and norms. However, it has always been very difficult to empirically capture the influence of ideas on actors interests (Hall 2010). Therefore, rather than taking ideational approach, this paper takes actors- focused approach where the focus is on which actor is arguing what instead which idea is influencing which actor. I therefore, first identify ideas, (arguments) and characterise actor’s attributes. The analysis is presented in Chapter Four and first section of chapter five.

Van Dijk, however warned that the nature of actors will not automatically make one controversy a political discourse. He noted that “even politicians are not always involved in political discourse, and the same is obviously true for most other participants, such as the public or citizens in general, or even members of social movements or action groups”(Van Dijk 1997 :14). Therefore Van Dijk suggests, one has to also analyse the content of the controversy in a form of practices and activities. To understand the content, I used argumentation analysis. Argumentation often involves a number of ways of advancing ones believe. Therefore i didn’t limit to analyzing the evidences of the arguments buts instead went to examine how these evidences are justified as knowledge. Departing from a limited analysis of evidence of research, to “poverty knowledge, “allows an examination of the political and epistemological dynamics in the production and use of such knowledge, while still including (but also reframing) the insights gained into evidence and research “(Jones et al. 2009). I have analysed the underpinning justifications of claiming authoritative evidence and the strategies and practices used by each actor to undermine other evidence and

enhance their agency of influencing the debate. This analysis is presented in chapter five.

2.4.3. Reflexivity

This analysis of the two political discourses on poverty reduction is in itself a representation of a discourse. Two issues are worth reflecting on how they may affect my representation of the discourses. The first is my position in the two conflicting narratives. I approach my topic not as complete neutral objective researcher but as a male, rural grown up- urban middle class who was actively following politics in Ethiopia. My interest in these numbers seems more motivated by the wonder I still have about the role of statistics in politics. As much as I believe in role of statistics for development planning, I am concerned with the presentation of numbers as ultimate facts. I always wanted critical discussion on these numbers, and wanted people to engage in such discussion. After taking courses on different conceptualizations of poverty and epistemology I decided to research on this paper to better make sense of the debate that I have been following before I join this Masters program. As such, I had no pre-defined inclination to any of these positions, except my keen interest to make sense of the debate. I am not a member of any political organization.

I am still affiliated to a state owned university and at times have been warned by friends (both members of ruling and opposition parties) not write on this topic, both for its very messy nature to understand but also because it might have negative impact for my job. Although I don't believe such on the possibility of such threat, I have taken precarious measures to prevent any of such possible effects, some of which might have impacted the study. For instance, when I ask documents during my field work, following Hammersley's suggestion on situations where the data the researcher asks might be very sensitive, I did not deceive but was very careful in framing my study as less controversial as much as I can (Hammersley 2005). Furthermore, to ensure that I hold a balanced approach, I had many informal discussions on the issue with members of each discourse both during my stay in Addis Ababa and online and email discussion after I return from field work. Furthermore, the bold writing style each parties uses to argue their position, as will be seen in the quotes presented in the coming chapters, made the arguments and positions of each party vivid from the texts facilities the representation positions of each party.

Chapter 3 : Overview of Political Economy of Poverty Reduction in Ethiopia

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the context for the discussion following chapters. The context we will discuss is the change in how the ruling regime in Ethiopia justifies its rule. One common thing every government and other power holder do is to justify why they should be allowed to rule, from where they get the right to rule- legitimacy.

Teskey, et.al (2012) defines legitimacy as “whether citizens feel the government has the right to govern and whether they trust the government (Teskey, et.al:2012: 10). Citizens may accept their governments right to rule on “a variety of grounds, for example charismatic leadership, traditions, ideological orthodoxy, a sense of national unity, the way the state delivers its promise of welfare to the citizens, the extent to which an administration is accountable for its actions, and so on (Hwang and Schneider 2011). The World Development Report (2011) clusters these different reasons to two main source of legitimacy for a regime: procedural or political, and performance based legitimacy¹. While the bases of procedural legitimacy are normative features like democratic procedures, rule of law and constitutionalism, performance legitimacy is based on how well the government does in objectives like Economic development (Alagappa 1995). However, usually government tries to justify their right to rule combining the procedural/normative and performance based legitimacy. However, the relative importance they attach to each of these varies from country to country (Ibid).

In this chapter, I will show why and how the regime in Ethiopia is increasingly moving from procedural to performance based legitimacy. The regime still retains democracy and rule of law as a formal system. However there are indications that, especially aftermath of the 2005 national election, such normative bases of legitimacy are relegated to secondary role and it is increasingly tries to build its legitimacy mainly on economic performance.

A number of reasons² contribute to this shift. The first part will discuss the contribution of the party’s ideological and historical background focusing on the ethnic federalisms policy and its revolutionary democracy ideology. The second section will review the aspiration to be developmental state and the last section reviews the focus on poverty reduction.

¹ These dichotomies are used in the literature with different terminologies, for instance, input versus output legitimacy.

² In this discussion of political economy I will limit myself to internal factors for their importance to the topic of the research, although there are geopolitical sources of insecurities like the conflict in Somalia and Islamic militant threat of war on Ethiopia, the Egyptians support for rebels to undermine and weaken Ethiopia so that it will not exploit the Nile river, for which Egypt is highly dependent on and the no-war –no-peace relationship with Eritrea since 2000 border war, among others.

3.1 Basic Elements of Policy and Practice the incumbent Regime and Contestations

The ruling party, Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) , which has been on power since 1991, is a coalition of four parties: Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Amahara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO) and Southern Ethiopia People's Democratic Movement' (SEPOM). At the core of the EPRDF is Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) which played a leading role in establishing the ruling party in 1989. The initial aim of TPLF was establishing an independent socialist Tigray state, believing Tigray was being oppressed by the central state. However, in the due course of fighting for independence, intra-party debates in the 1980s made the party abandon the program of establishing an Independent Tigray Republic. Instead TPLF decided to fight for a democratic Ethiopia in collaboration with other movements and created EPRDF with the above mentioned parties (EPRDF 2013). EPRDF took power in 1991 defeating the military *Derg* regime in collaboration with Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF).

EPRDF has introduced a radical restructuring of the state in some ways and continuation of socialist practices of the previous regime in other ways. One of their radical measures was the introduction of Ethnic federalism. The continuity of socialist practice, (albeit in a very carefully framed way to fit the capitalist world dynamics) is found, in its, revolutionary democracy ideology. The next section will discuss these two issues, ethic federalism and revolutionary democracy.

3.1.1 Ethnic Federalism: A New Approach to an old Political challenge

Ethiopia is a very diverse society with more than 80 ethnic groups and more than 200 language dialects. Unfortunately, ethnic divisions and tensions have been part of Ethiopia's history. Although there are external threats, the main challenge of the Ethiopian state has been and continued to be, managing diversity. Regimes in the past had tried to address ethnic tensions by fostering one Ethiopianism identity. However, their attempt was viewed as an endeavor to impose a culture of the Amhara ethnic group (the ethnic group of the ruling elites of previous two regimes) with a disguise of Ethiopianism (hence the description of their attempt by some as "Amharization" see Jalata 1998) and failed to contain tensions, ultimately, combined with other factors leading to their collapse.

EPRDF took another approach to address these ethnic tensions. It introduced ethnic federalism and restructured the state into nine ethnic based regional states each with their own judicial, executive and legal power including the right to self-determination up to secession. EPRDF "advocated ethnic-federalism by stressing that it could empower and equalize the diverse ethnic communities and reduce conflict" (Balcha 2006:1). EPRDF argument was that the discriminatory practices based on ethnicity in the past regimes have already made ethnicity a principle of political classification. Therefore, preventing any future conflict needs addressing the root cause itself by overtly recognizing

ethnicity and providing a chance for ethnic groups to administer themselves (Vaughan 2003).

However, the ethnic federalism system is being criticized on two main grounds. The first is the current ethnic federalism is not egalitarian as alleged. “Most, including ethno-nationalist proponents of the federal principles, claim that the new arrangement … in practice institutionalizes a new and highly discriminatory constellation favouring a new EPRDF, primarily Tigrayan, elite (Vaughan 2003:37). Critics and opponents point the disproportional higher number of Tigrayan generals in the military (many of whom started as guerrilla fighters of TPLF) and the control of other key power positions (International Crisis Group 2009). Second, the federal system criticized for lacks effective decentralization of power to regional sates in practice as its implementation is highly controlled by the party than the constitution:

The prescription of detailed policies as well as the hegemonic influence of the ruling party over the regional parties appears to be contradictory to the hallmark of practice of federalism, namely the division of power between the center and sates... the Ethiopian Federal system is centralized in practice and the reasons for this centralization have to be sought at a political level rather than at the constitutional level. (Fiseha 2006:158)

Secondly, is being criticized for ethnicizing Ethiopian politics and thereby, is being a recipe for conflict instead of preventing it(Clapham 2009). This argument basically opposes the fundamental principle of using ethnicity as bases of political organization.

In an underdeveloped multi-ethnic society such as Ethiopia, where civil and political rights are traditionally not institutionalized, political-economic ‘resource competition’ is a regular feature, and collective claims are not recognized or adequately handled by the state administration, the tendency for ethnic resistance/conflicts to emerge is high (Berhe 2008:11).

Consequently, there are still divisions on how to compose the Ethiopian state with guerrilla fighting persistent at low scale. Mapping of violent conflict in Ethiopia by African Rally for Peace and Development (ARPD) identified ongoing internal armed conflict in seven out of nine regional states and concluded that “the major causes of conflicts in regional state are controversies over ethnic identity, disputes over border and administrative arrangements”(ARPD 2008 :2). Overall writers who examined the ethnic federalism in detail (Clapham 2009, Abbink 2011) expressed their concern that although the central state is still strong and is unlikely to collapse due to ethnic based war insurgents, there is still widespread ethnic tension and dissent.

3.1.2 Revolutionary Democracy and the Political Meltdown after 2005

In *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*, Zekaria (1997) complained that democracy in many developing countries outside the west is becoming illiberal, governments

who hold elections, even if they may not be free and fair, are referred as a democracy, while in practice these governments do not observe personal liberties and freedoms that are essential of liberal democracy. In his list of illiberal democracies was Ethiopia where, he commented “Ethiopia’s elected government turns its security forces on journalist and political opponents, doping a permanent damage to human rights (and human beings) (Zekaria 1997: 23)

However, What Zekaria, and perhaps many advocates of democracy in the west, didn’t know is that the Ethiopian government doesn’t claim it is building liberal democracy. In fact as recent as 2006, the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, criticized western liberal democracy saying:

The fundamental nature of the neo-liberal paradigm has thus led Africa into another economic dead end and into a fragile unstable democracy that is not only incapable of evolving into a stable and mature democracy but actually *binders the development of an alternative path of democracy that leads over time to such a mature and stable democracy*” (Zenawi 2006).

By alternative democracy, Zenawi is referring to his party’s version, *Abyotawi Democracy*, equivalent meaning of revolutionary democracy in Amharic.

Although revolutionary democracy has been subject of continuous improvements, it has its root and essence in socialism (EPRDF 1995). Indeed, the core of EPRDF, TPLF, had a Marxist- Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT) party which served as the ideological wing within the larger TPLF party. “Partly emerged from a Leninist interpretation of Marx’s Proletariat Dictatorship thesis” (Bach 2011 641), as the two terms in it suggests, revolutionary democracy (RD here after) aspires to achieve democracy through revolutionary means. Liberal democracy “aims at securing individual rights while as RD defends collective rights through the notion of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (Bach 2011: 644). EPRDF narrates revolutionary democracy as the opposite of “bourgeoisie parliamentary democracy” in western liberal democracy and instead RD is a coalition of the proletariat (EPRDF 1995). The party document published in Amharic in 1995 reads “from the point –view of revolutionary democracy, materializing the rights of the people means materializing the rights of the great [oppressed] majority of the population” (EPRDF 1995: 2). In the discussion of the economic goals of RD, it mentions peasantry as the pillar and backbone of RD, followed by urban petty bourgeois and the proletariat. On the other hand, the national bourgeoisie is identified as a possible group that might not support the RD ideology (ibid).

However, by the time the EPRDF comes to power, there were global changes that forced EPRDF to demote its socialist rhetoric. The same document (EPRDF 1995) discusses why EPRDF decided to pretend as if its version of democracy is compatible to liberal democracy stating:

[it is not] anymore necessary to continue indicating in our program that the rights of the oppressed would continue to be respected fully and that those of the oppressor will be suppressed. In the first place, such an approach will be unacceptable in the eyes of Western democracy and would invite fierce opposition from imperialism. Whether we like it or not, this is fact we can’t deny. The two imperialist camps have scrambled

and given way to the hegemony of the imperialist power led by the United states.... the second reason is that it is possible to ensure the human and democratic rights of the masses without suppressing all the rights of oppressors”(EPRDF 1995: 2).

As a result, EPRDF declared capitalism as its ideology and privatization agency established under a constitutional based federal republic with multiparty system and periodic election (FDRE Constitution, 1995). Consequently, “The goal of socialism went into abeyance, and the MLLT was neither “disbanded nor convened for years”(Vaughan 2011: 625). One member of MLLT said “we haven’t had time to think about it” and MLLT disappeared with no time even to demolish itself though formal council meeting” (EPRDF 2010).

However,

... interestingly, these “liberal” reforms as compared with Marxist-Leninist revolutionary democracy did not mean the abandonment of abyotawi democracy ideology by the new Ethiopian leaders. On the contrary, the TPLF-EPRDF have since stuck to the ideological line, whereas other African states have in the meantime tried to reshape it (Bach 2011: 642-643).

Instead, given the global pressure for liberal democratization, the party embarked on a liberal oriented democratization process and opposition parties and private media were allowed (Clapham 2009). Civil societies would also proliferate soon (Clark 2000). The international community was very hopeful of the democratic process in the country that to the extent they started to refer the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi as one of the new generation of African leaders (Clapham 2009).

The 2005 national election was however a track changer. Although two rounds of national elections “the hegemony of the ruling Ethiopian People’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has not been fundamentally challenged” (Allen and Tronvoll 2009:193). Encouraged by this win, the ruling party allowed the 2005 election to be more competitive than ever in the history of the country and showed tolerance to displaying political dissent; leading many to label the pre-election as a formative founding and genuine democracy (Abbink 2006). However, as election results came, it became clear that the opposition has managed to win many seats than the ruling party expected, including all the seats in Addis Ababa. In the same election night the prime minister banned demonstrations and public meetings in urban areas. Final results of the National election commission, which opposition parties rejected, declared EPRDF winner but the opposition went to won 173 seats (from 12 seats in the last election) in 547 seats house (NEBE 2006). The post-election crisis resulted in killing of 200 people and jailing of opposition parties leaders and private media journalists (Ranker et al 2007).

In “*the end of democracy? Curtailing political and civil rights in Ethiopia*” Allen and Tronvoll concluded that “with the excessive clampdown on the political opposition and civil society, coupled with the launch of new and repressive laws and the expansion of local structures of control and coercion, all demonstrated that the outcome of the 2005 elections was not more democracy, but more authoritarianism (Allen and Tronvoll 2009: 194). Calpham, blamed “[t]he intense and peculiar legacy of long guerrilla struggle, guided by a Maoist con-

ception of liberation war, has in practice proved virtually impossible to reconcile with liberal ideologies” (Calpham 2009: 183). Bach (2011) concluded that *Abeywotawi* Democracy is neither revolutionary nor democratic, “[but] remains an important discursive tool of legitimating as well as fighting tool for EPRDF against internal and external opponents or critics. This mainly explains the resilience of the ideology” (Bach 2011: 644). Clapham, argued that the pretence

could be sustained for so long, before the regime’s fundamental illiberalism became all too apparent in the aftermath of the 2005 elections, was due in very large measure to the leadership of Meles Zenawi—a man of extraordinary intellectual ability, great personal charm, tactical astuteness, and a capacity to appeal especially to international constituencies which were themselves looking for African ‘success stories’ to justify their own vision of liberal ‘good governance’ (Calpham 2009: 183).

Rakner and colleagues dubbed the situation as a “political melt-down” and concluded that “the shift towards authoritarianism during the course of the elections revealed that, when faced with the real threat of being ousted from power, the incumbent EPRDF was determined to stay in power by all means (Rakner et al. 2007).

Since then, it is largely believed that democratization process has regressed. The regime has been regularly blamed for repressing human right, the volition of freedom of speech, prosecution of journalist and soon (Human Right Watch 2010a, 2010b, 2013; Amnesty International 2012). In the 2010, national election, which the EPRDF won all but two seats, was the rated as “short of standards of a free and fair election” (European Union Election Observer mission 2010) and “re-establishing the one party state” (Tronvoll 2011). All these series of events after the 2005 election suggest that regime’s legitimacy based on normative values has been fragile, if not declining. This means that the regime has to consolidate on other sources of legitimacy.

3.2. Aspiration of Developmental State: A Move from Procedural to Performance Based Legitimacy?

Recently, the ruling party describes its government as developmental state. The discourse can be traced to the 2001 intra-party split within TPLF that ended up in dismissal of some of its founding and high profile members. The intra-party conflict winner coalition, led by Meles Zenawi, argued that rent-seeking and corruption within the state apparatus were the main source of the intra-party conflict, and labelled the losing faction of the party as rent-seekers who were using their power to collect undeserving wealth (Gebrezgheir 2011). Hence, since then rent-seeking is defined as the main challenge of the ruling party and the party launched a renewal campaign. One of the problems that the party claimed to diagnose was that the leadership was not committed to bringing development in the country. As the result, part of the strategy of the renewal was based on introducing and promoting the practice of developmental statism.

Since then and gradually more after 2005, almost all publications of EPRDF discuss the relevance of a developmental state in Ethiopian context and the experience of successful developmental states (EPRDF 2010, EPRDF 2011). Developmental state is presented as the antithesis of neo-liberalism, which the ruling party fiercely criticises and the government describes itself as a developmental state while branding opposition groups for being rent seekers, and advocates of neo-liberalism (see EPRDF 2008).

Party cadres and civil servants study the experience of East Asian countries, especially Taiwan and South Korean. Nevertheless, it recognizes that the experience can't be directly replicable and should be scrutinized for the global and national factors (EPRDF 2010). However, the government also don't want to be associated with the authoritarian governments of Twain and South Korea and claims its ambition is to create democratic developmental state (EPRDF 2008). In his draft PhD dissertation, Zenawi argued that the necessary conditions for the emergence of developmental state like avoiding rent-seeking, establishing a ruling regime based on a system (not by a personal cult) and others are also necessary for the establishment of a democratic system. He recognized the challenge of ensuring continuity of policies in democratic system because there is a high probability that parties may lose power in elections. Therefore, he suggests, "the most likely scenario for a state that is both democratic and developmental to emerge is in the form of a dominant party or dominant coalition democracy" (Zenawi, 2006:34). For such collation to emerge, the party practices ensuring the hegemony of the developmental state paradigm thorough publications discussion and trainings (EPRDF 2012).

Needless to say, one of the strong arguments of the government is the state should play important role in economic development planning and implementation (Zenawi 2006). Zenawi explained to a journalist:

Our argument has been that the neoliberal model does not work in Africa. In developed countries it is a perfectly legitimate alternative (or it was – it needs serious modifications now). In the case of under-developed economies without the push of the state, an effective developmental state, it is very unlikely that the markets that do exist are going to function efficiently and push the country forward. (Zenawi, Interview, Gill 2012)

Accordingly, telecommunication, electricity and water services and Land are state owned. The financial sector is highly controlled with no international banks are allowed to operate, and government intervenes in the economy extensively.

It is very early to compare the trends of the economic development with the experience of classical developmental sate since the developmental state policy is practiced for less than a decade. However, the trend of the economic growth since 2003, when, according to the government statistics the year the economy started to grow rapidly and consecutively up to now, suggest that service sector has been the main driver of economic growth in the last decade. The share of agriculture in terms of output from GDP has been declining but still employs than 80 % of the labour force. The industrial policy promotes export and protection of infant industries however share of the industry has been stagnant and in some ways is even falling back with standing only 3.5% of the economy (MOFED 2013a). However, the national plan currently being im-

plemented targeted transforming the industrial sector to be the largest contributor to the economy and ensuring food security at national level by 2014 (MOFED 2011). Public investment is the main driver of economic growth and the share of private sector in the national economy has remained to be one of the lowest in the world (World Bank 2013).

One of the most important aspects of the developmental state narrative from the perspective of this research is in terms of how the regime/state understands its relationship with the society. In many of its documents, the ruling party expresses that to continue on power, it has to ensure rapid economic development. In its interpretations of the 2005 election result, the party argued that it lost many seats because the economic growth at that time, which started to grow rapidly only after 2003, was not strong enough to impact the life of people, especially the lower income class. Conversely, it argued the 2010 election result, 99.6% win of the seats in the federal house, indicates that the people have started to recognize economic growth (see EPRDF 2010).

3.3. The Significance of Poverty Reduction Objective

“The danger is that widening poverty may lead to our collapse”³

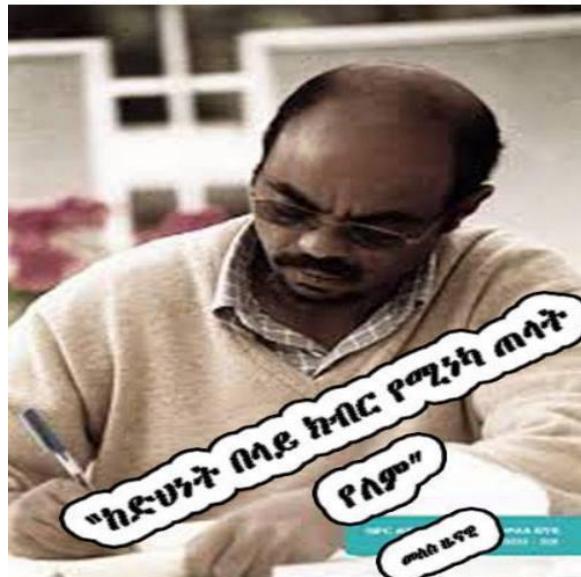
The government has high priority for poverty reduction particularly. Obviously economic growth is considered as a necessary condition for poverty reduction, but poverty reduction is seen as not only the goal of development but as a matter of security. For instance, a note on security issues in the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) urged that “it is not too much to say that ... the war on poverty [is] most important and central elements in national security. Ethiopia is now dedicating its capacities and resources to reversing the impact of poverty”.⁴ By using the phrase “the war on poverty”, the government portrays it as a national enemy to tackle and attempts to build consensus that the citizens and government should focus on poverty reduction.

This explicit focus on poverty reduction is understandable given the global focus on poverty reduction and the history of Ethiopia as an icon image of poor country. The first reason for explicit focus on poverty reduction is humiliation due to famine and poverty image of Ethiopia. Although Ethiopia is not the only country with a history of famine, following the catastrophic and much advertised, by Band Aid, Wollo Famine in 1974, for many foreigners Ethiopia is still a land of famine and poverty. The government recognizes this humiliation and build on it to forge cohesion. For instance the picture below illustrate an Amharic which reads “there is no derogatory enemy more than poverty is’ and with MEles Zenawi working.

³ National Foreign policy of Ethiopia p. 28

⁴ <http://www.mfa.gov.et/internationalMore.php?pg=27>

Figure 1: Picture of Meles Zenawi and his statement “There is no derogatory enemy more than poverty is”



Source: EPRDF (2012)

The national foreign policy states “yes, we Ethiopians are proud of our legacy and need to preserve it. However due to poverty, coupled with backwardness and the absence of good governance, we are in a shameful state”(p.18). And “the real source of our national humiliation in our time is poverty and backwardness” (MOFA 2002: 12). The same documents say “The danger is that widening poverty may lead to our collapse” (MOFA 2002:18). Recently, citing past glories civilizations, the ruling regime has called for a renaissance of Ethiopia in the new millennium, proclaimed “the main enemy of the county is poverty” and urged “our condition should give us no respite every day. We need to keep an eye on our objective, shoulder whatever burden and work ceaselessly to get ahead” (MOFA 2002: 8). And it concludes that “The primary interest of the people is to live free from poverty, disease and ignorance. Rapid development is not merely important in raising the standard of living of the people, but also a guarantee of national survival” (p.6). Confirming the above discussion on revolutionary democracy, democracy is viewed instrumentally, not in its normative value. The Foreign policy states “democracy is an important instrument to mobilize around common goals and to involve the people in nation building” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2002: 6). In conclusion, these quotes show that the regime describes poverty reduction as a the single most important goal that all efforts should be directed to.

3.4. Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to show why the incumbent regime felt insecure and have fragile legitimacy. The regime’s attempt to address ethnic tensions doesn’t ensure it legitimacy as it was expected and tensions. There have been ethnic conflicts in many parts of the country and insurgency movements, although the threat of these insurgencies to overthrowing the central state is very low (Clapham 2009). Another criticism is that power is not decentralized

enough and the central government is too powerful to the extent that it's very difficult to call it federalism. Thirdly, it has been criticised by pro-unity forces as a policy that weakens sense of identity of Ethiopianism and instigate ethnic tensions and divisions. In addition, following the 2005 election, regime has been criticised for reversing the democratization process and turning to authoritarianism (Abbink 2006, Aalen and Tronvoll 2009).

Overall, such contestation of other sources of legitimizing incentivized the government to focus more on legitimizing poverty reduction. With the global focus on poverty reduction and the local history of widespread poverty in Ethiopia, the importance of poverty reduction is less contested. To what extent, this goal of poverty reduction is achieved, however is being debated. The next chapter presents this debate.

Chapter 4 : Debating the Poverty Numbers: Actors, Arguments and “Evidences”

This chapter attempts to answer to three questions. The first is who are the main actors involved in the debate on poverty prevalence in Ethiopia? Secondly, what are the arguments made concerning poverty prevalence by each party? Thirdly what “evidence” each party present to support their argument?

I will begin with overall discussion of the members of the parties and their position in the first section. The second section will go in detail to demonstrate the evidences each party presents. The last part will summarize.

4.1. Overview of the Poverty Knowledge Landscape in Ethiopia

Holding a history of poverty for long time, it is not surprising that Ethiopia has been the destination of poverty experts. Relatively a large number of publications have covered poverty in Ethiopia. The first set of studies comes from the government of Ethiopia itself. The history of monitoring progress of poverty reduction in Ethiopia dates back to the establishment of Central Statistics Agency (CSA) in 1960s⁵. The CSA under MOFED is now tasked “to collect, process, analyse and disseminate the necessary socio-economic and demographic statistical data”⁶ and also to assist other organizations in their effort to record data and report. During 1980s CSA has conducted poverty analysis in selected cities. However, poverty prevalence survey a national level was conducted in 1996 for first time (CSA, 2013). The CSA has been conducted four rounds of Household Income Consumption Expenditure (HICE) and The Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS) in 1996, 2000/1, 2004/5 and in 2010/11⁷. In addition, the CSA has conducted three rounds of the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) in collaboration with Ministry of Health since 2000. The government’s poverty reports draw on the HICE and WMS mainly while the Ministry of Health uses the DHS for its publications.

The second and the most widely used dataset among foreign and local poverty researchers comes from projects of Universities. Three data sets, publicly available, are the main sources of much of the publication by both Ethiopian and foreign scholars on poverty trends in Ethiopia. The first and the mostly used data set is the Ethiopian Rural Household Survey dataset jointly collected by the Center for Study of African Economies, at Oxford

⁵ Since its establishment in 1962, the Central Statistics organization has been renamed and clustered under different ministers. It is renamed as Central Statistics Agency in 2004 and is now subordinate of Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MOFED).

⁶ "Central Statistics Agency Establishment Proclamation No. 442/2005." P. 3072

⁷ The Ethiopian calendar year is from September to August. The most recent poverty survey was conducted from September - June in 2003 in Ethiopian calendar, translated in to 2010/11 Gregorian calendar.

University, and Department of Economics in Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia with the support of IFPRI. This panel data set was collected in different rounds between 1989 and 2004. The data collection started with six places, but eventually included 15 villages. The merit of this panel data is that it has been following the same households for more than 15 years to trace the change in wellbeing and has succeeded to retain most of the original households (Deracon 2006). This data set also was later supplemented by the Ethiopian village studies which produced qualitative descriptions of trends of the trend in wellbeing for each village.

The third source consumption /income based poverty studies in Ethiopia is the Ethiopian Urban Household survey which has been collected by the Department of Economics of Addis Ababa University in collaboration with the Department of Economics of the University of Goteborg, Sweden. “It started with 1500 households selected from 7 major towns, including the capital, Addis Ababa, using stratified sampling technique” and followed them for four rounds of surveys (Bigsten and Shimeles 2011: 836). Some of the studies based on this data set that will be discussed in this study include Alem, Köhlin and Stage, 2012, Bigsten and Shimeles, 2008, 2011). A small set of publications come from the wellbeing in developing countries project (2004-2009) at University of Bath, which Ethiopia is one of the countries.

The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiatives (OPHI) has been producing multi- dimensional poverty index (MPI) for more than 100 countries, Ethiopia included since 2007. The dataset (MPI) used the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) collected by the CSA.

Lastly, many international organizations have produced reports on their areas of interests. One of the organizations that worked in Ethiopia is IFPRI. IFPRI produced researches on food security in Ethiopia and also publish the Global Hunger Index (GHI), based on the FAO database in collaboration with organizations.

4.2. Parties of the Debate

Based on the documents reviewed, two groups are identified; one group believes poverty has declined, and the other argues poverty has not declined or reduced only marginally. For the purpose of this research, I have dubbed these two groups as *poverty reduction believers* and *poverty reduction doubters*. Each group consisting of scholars, politicians and journalists, among others.

4.2. 1. Poverty Reduction Believers

Members of this group believe that poverty has declined in Ethiopia and has rapidly declined especially in the last decade. They also believe that the economic growth country experienced in the last decade has contributed to poverty reduction enormously.

This group consists of the Central Statistics Agency (CSA, here after) and other government institutions that use the poverty data from CSA. Obviously, the ruling party also supports this position. The state media, including the Ethiopian radio and television, Addis *Zemen* and *Ethiopian Herald* are also in this group. Among foreign based on line blogs Aiga forum and Tigrai online

are included in this group. International organizations including the World Bank and the IMF also believe poverty has declined significantly and can be categorized under this group. However, they have also some reservations on the exact figures.

4.2.2. Poverty Reduction Doubters

This group believes the government's economic growth statistics is overestimated. Furthermore, they argue that even by government's growth statistics, the growth is not pro-poor and cannot result in rapid poverty decline. Therefore, they argue, poverty has not declined. They also reject government's data and instead use alternative poverty measures such as MPI.

The group consists of a coalition of political parties, media and scholars. Among political parties, Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) and Blue party support this position. Other opposition group members have written pieces arguing this position for private owned newspapers. However since they don't have party publications it wasn't clear the views or personal or shared among other members. From foreign based media outlets, The Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT) and the *Zehabesha* can be categorized are in this group. Many of the print newspapers in Ethiopia including *Addis Neger* (now only online), and *Addis Guday* have reflected positions of this group. In addition scholars such as Getachew Bashaw, Almayehu G.Mariam, have also written and/or gave interview arguing poverty has not declined.

4.3. Arguments and Evidences of Poverty Reduction Believers

4.3.1 National Poverty Surveys

National poverty surveys are the main evidence cited by this group. Four national Household Consumption Expenditure surveys (HCES) were conducted by CSA since 1996. The methodology used in the poverty line is estimation of the cost of adult equivalent of 2200 kilocalorie. Accordingly, food poverty line is set by calculating the price equivalent of the bundle of food individuals need pay for a food with adult equivalent scale of 2200 kilocalorie content. Non-food poverty line is calculated via dividing the food poverty line "by the food share of the poorest quartile" (MOFED 2012:4). The total food poverty line is sum of poverty line and non-food poverty line. The following table presents results of the four surveys.

Table 4 1: Consumption Poverty Prevalence Trends in Ethiopia

| Poverty Trends | | | | | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Reporting Level | Indicator | 1995/6 | 1999/00 | 2004/5 | 2010/11 | Change (from 1996 to 2011 in %) |
| National | Head Count index | 0.455 | 0.442 | 0.387 | 0.296 | 34.9 |
| | Poverty gap index | 0.129 | 0.119 | 0.083 | 0.078 | 39.5 |
| | Poverty severity Index | 0.051 | 0.045 | 0.027 | 0.031 | 39.2 |
| Rural | Head Count index | 0.475 | 0.454 | 0.393 | 0.304 | 36 |
| | Poverty gap index | 0.134 | 0.122 | 0.085 | 0.080 | 40.3 |

| | | | | | | |
|-------|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| | Poverty severity Index | 0.053 | 0.046 | 0.027 | 0.032 | 39.6 |
| Urban | Head Count index | 0.332 | 0.369 | 0.351 | 0.257 | 22.5 |
| | Poverty gap index | 0.099 | 0.101 | 0.077 | 0.069 | 30.3 |
| | Poverty severity Index | 0.041 | 0.039 | 0.026 | 0.027 | 34.1 |

Source: MOFED 2012(p.9)

Poverty decline believers group present this poverty reduction as very high level achievement to be celebrated. Between 1995 and 2011, poverty head count has declined by 34.9%. In a budget speech, the Minister of MOFED reported that in 2012/3 the poverty head count has further declined to 27.6 per cent¹ (Ahemd 2013). Looking at the rural –urban difference, similar pattern of higher poverty incidence, gap and severity has been reported for rural areas. In the last survey, 2010/11, the proportion of head count poverty stand at 30.45%, compared to urban areas (25.7%). The poverty gap and severity is also higher in rural areas compared to urban areas. Nevertheless the overall reduction in poverty is substantial. This story is an inevitable quote in many political speeches, and government reports (See MOFED: 2012, 2013b and Ahmed, 2013).

4.3.2. Pro-Poor Economic Growth

According to the government statistics, Ethiopia has experienced fast economic growth especially for the last decade. The poverty reduction believers draw on this statistics to argue that the economic growth has contributed to poverty reduction.

Table 4.3.2 : Nominal GDP Growth in Ethiopia

| year | GDP growth rate (Gov't report) |
|---------|--------------------------------|
| 2003/4 | 13.6 |
| 2004/5 | 11.8 |
| 2005/6 | 10.8 |
| 2006/7 | 8.5 |
| 2007/8 | 10.8 |
| 2008/9 | 8.8 |
| 2009/10 | 12.6 |
| 2010/11 | 11.3 |

Source: National Bank of Ethiopia (October 2013).

The poverty reduction believers argue that the economic growth was not only rapid but also has resulted in millions move out of poverty. This can be seen from the quote below in an article featured in the website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).

This economic growth brought positive trends in reducing poverty, in both urban and rural areas, reducing the number of Ethiopians living under extreme poverty by 9 percent within five years. Overall

it also made considerable progress in most of the human development indicators. (Yifter 2013⁸)

MOFED argue pro-poor programs are the reason for rapid poverty decline:

Such achievement in the reduction of poverty can be attributed to the wide-ranging and multi-faceted pro-poor programs that have been implemented in rural and urban areas such as intensification of agriculture, infrastructural development, food security programs, the pro-poor urban development activities (such as development of micro and small scale enterprise development and use of cobblestone in urban road construction, housing construction...)(MOFED 2012: 13, emphasis mine)

Conceptual distinction can be made between pro-poor economic growth and pro-poor programs. While pro-poor economic growth means a growth pattern that benefit the poor disproportionately, pro-poor programs doesn't mean the poor wee benefit from the economic growth directly. Nevertheless, in general poverty decline believers share the belief that economic growth has contributed to poverty reduction in the country either by providing finance for pro-poor programs or thorough a growth pattern that disproportionately benefit the poor (i.e. pro-poor growth).

4.3.3. International Organizations Endorsement

Poverty reduction believers also emphasize that the rapid poverty reduction statistics has been admired by international organizations such as the IMF and World Bank. Guang Zhe Chen, the World Bank Country Director for Ethiopia praised the government saying “two and a half million people in Ethiopia have been lifted out of poverty over the past five years [2005-2010] as a result of strong economic growth”.. The Government target to reduce poverty to 22.2 percent by 2014/15 is ambitious but attainable⁹.” IMF also agreed that there was “dramatic decline in the incidence of poverty over the last decade” and praised Ethiopia, for “has been successful in translating economic growth into higher living standards for its citizens and has outperformed many Sub-Saharan African countries” (IMF 2013: 4).

Poverty reduction believers use such endorsements of government poverty statistics by IMF, and World Bank and as a way of dismissing question over the statistics. Answering to question over the reliability of the poverty statistics, the late Prime Minter Meles Zenawi once said “It is not only us, intentional organizations have endorsed our data and have praised us for our excellent job[in reducing poverty]” (cited in G.Mariam 2010).

⁸ In this and the follow up chapter I used many texts not paged and presented as html online. For clarity and space, I haven't included paragraph number when I cite directly. However I have provided the link to the websites in the references

⁹ Cited in <http://www.meleszenawi.com/world-bank-group-2-5-million-ethiopians-lifted-out-of-poverty-over-the-past-5-years-as-a-result-of-strong-economic-growth-video/>

4.4. Arguments and Evidences of Poverty Reduction Doubters

However, the poverty decline discourse is opposed by others who believe that poverty has remained widespread and is falling very marginally. This group presents four arguments-cum-evidences to justify their position. The first and the main one is the multidimensional poverty index (MPI) poverty estimate for Ethiopia. They also argue that methodological gaps in the official poverty surveys, lack of independence and weak capability of statistics system make the poverty estimates from the government unreliable and unconvincing.

4.4.1. The MPI Index

The main evidence this group presents is the multidimensional poverty index estimates of poverty in Ethiopia. The MPI estimates the poverty prevalence rate in Ethiopia at 87.3% in 2010, marginal fall from, 90% in 2005. Before going to present the detailed figures of MPI for Ethiopia, I will first introduce the MPI.

The Multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI) is a global estimate of multidimensional poverty in developing countries by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). MPI measures aspect of deprivation people experience at the same time. MPI uses three dimensions and ten indicators: two for health (nutrition and child mortality), two for education (years of schooling and child attendance to school), and six for living standards (access to electricity, safe drinking water, quality of house, cooking fuel type, and asset ownership). The data for these indicators come from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) of each country.

A person will be considered poor if he/she is deprived in one of the three or more of these ten indicators. MPI calculates national poverty values for each country by multiplying headcount ratio of poor (the number of poor people out of the total population) and intensity of poverty, measured by proportion of indicators in which the poor are deprived simultaneously (for a detailed discussion of the methodology of MPI (see (Alkire et al. 2012) and (Alkire and Santos 2011). So far MPI estimates are produced for 104 countries, Ethiopia included and are updated when countries publish new rounds of DHSs.

Ethiopia's MPI was calculated form DHSs conducted in 2000, 2005 and 2010. The following table presents the MPI estimate¹⁰.

Table 0:1: Trends Multidimensional Poverty in Ethiopia

| Year | MPI indicators | | | | | | Comparison with national poverty head count | |
|------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| | MPI score | %of poor people | Average intensity across the poor | % of pop. vulnerable to poverty | % of pop. in severe poverty | %Difference (MPI- national estimate) | Ratio d/nice (MPI: national) | |
| 2000 | 0.678 | 93.6 | 72.4% | N/A | N/A | 49.4 | 2.1 | |

¹⁰Description of Ethiopian DHS with reports of each round, and full dataset can be found at <http://www.measuredhs.com/what-we-do/survey/survey-display-359.cfm>

| | | | | | | | |
|------|-------|------|-------|-----|-------|------|-----|
| 2005 | 0.582 | 90.0 | 64.7% | N/A | N/A | 51.3 | 2.3 |
| 2010 | 0.564 | 87.3 | 64.6 | 6.8 | 71.1% | 57.7 | 2.9 |

Source : Compiled from Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) various years

*N.A = Not Available

The table shows that there is a high difference between the national consumption based poverty measure (HICEs) and the MPI head count. MPI estimate of percentage of poor people is more than double of the HICEs in all three points of estimates (93.6 vs 44.5% in 2000, 90% vs 38.7% in 2005 and 87.3 vs 29.6 in 2010). With such high MPI estimates the report has consistently ranked Ethiopia as the second poorest country only after Niger in all of the three rounds of estimates.

Since it was released in June 2010, The MPI has been much cited by the poverty reduction doubters group. Poverty reduction doubters argue that the MPI is a better poverty measurement than the consumption and income based poverty measures used by the official survey in Ethiopia. Tesfaye (2010a) argues the “\$1.25 per day” thresholds have been highly criticized for focusing solely on income. Economists have argued that family income cannot be the only determinant, whether that particular family is extremely poor or not” (paragraph 5). In comparison, the MPI “shows the nature of poverty better than income alone. Knowing not just who is poor but how they are poor is essential for effective human development programs and policies” (The African Economist 2013).

As the result, the release of MPI is presented as a tool which exposed a new truth about poverty prevalence in Ethiopia:

Until last week, 39 percent of people were classified as living in extreme poverty, on a \$1.25 per day threshold. That is the old story. A “new” day has arrived to polish the old threshold; at least theoretically....The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which measures multidimensional aspects of poverty, shows that 90 percent of the Ethiopian people are today living in extreme poverty... According to the study, Ethiopia has the lowest performance indices in all three aspects and said to be the poorest of the poor... the MPI value of Ethiopia is 0.58. This value is even greater than that of neighbouring countries such as Somalia” (Tesfaye 2010a, Emphasis mine).

The writer stresses how Ethiopia’s MPI was very bad, with the phrase “even greater than” Somalia which don’t have central government. In addition, the title of the article was “*Multidimensional poverty: A fruit of 19 years*”. It is noteworthy how he connects the 19 years, number of years EPRDF stayed in power; with the multidimensional poverty using the term “fruit” to underline the EPRDF government resulted in multidimensional poverty rather than poverty declining.

4.4.2. Methodological Gaps of the Official Poverty Surveys

Poverty reduction doubters argue that the four rounds of national surveys have a number of methodological gaps that would affect the validity and reliability of the estimates. Four main criticisms are presented by this group.

The first is exclusion of some areas from the surveys. So far the poverty survey covers only sedentary areas and excludes nine zones inhabited by non-sedentary populations in Afar and Somali region. Second in some rounds regions were excluded such as Somali region in the second survey and Gambella region in the third survey (See MOFED 2012, MOFED 2013b). These exclusions are cited as reason for not taking the national poverty reports of the government at their face value. For instance, Devereux and Sharp argues “the original sampling frame [for the 1999/2000 HICES] was too small and unrepresentative to provide a basis for extrapolating national poverty levels or trends” (Devereux & Sharp 2003:1).

Second methodological concern is on the poverty line. “The poverty line is the most important and also the most controversial element of any poverty research” (Szulc 2006: 426). Depending on where to set the poverty line, “[i]t is possible for people to cross the poverty threshold without a qualitative difference in their standard of living” (Bigsten & Shemiles 2011:835 see also Fischer 2013). Therefore, the assessment on the trends of poverty in the country is highly dependent on the accuracy and appropriateness of the poverty line. The poverty line used in the four poverty surveys was set at 1075 birr in the first round (0.60 USD, in 1996) and was used for subsequent surveys indexed for Consumption Price Index (CPI). It has not been revised. For critics this line is set too low. Poverty reduction doubters, cite that qualitative studies and local level quantitative studies indicate that people can’t buy any adequate food with this amount especially in urban areas (see for instance Abroad 2011).

The third criticism is the use of only one national poverty line. This group argues the cost of living in regions differ widely that using the national CPI to index poverty is misleading. For instance, Gebremedhin and Whelan examined price and living cost in Ethiopian major cities to found out that cost of living and price vary enormously. They argued “the use of a country level CPI, which does not account for spatial cost of living differences, gives incorrect poverty estimates” (Gebremedhin and Whelan 2005 : 11).

Fourth, poverty reduction doubters argue that indicators used for monitoring poverty may not be the appropriate ones because the findings are inconstant with findings of qualitative studies of poverty. Qualitative poverty studies were depicting an increasing poverty while quantitative consumption based measures indicate decline. For instance, Rahamato and Kidanu in their country case study for the World Bank *Voices of the Poor* report emphasized that in the last ten years (i) a lot of households have moved from the middle to the lowest category and (ii) a new category of the weak and disabled has been added [*to the poor category*] (Rahamato and Kidanu : 1999: 103). Another study of subjective poverty among urban five major cities of Ethiopia concluded “subjective poverty remains high; the share of households that perceive themselves as poor has barely changed at all between 1994 and 2009 (Alem et al. 2012:2). Citing these studies, poverty reduction doubters therefore, argue that the government’s poverty surveys may not be valid.

4.4.3. “The Statistics is In Mess”: Questioning the Institutional Capacity of Poverty Monitoring

Poverty decline doubters group argue that statistical system in Ethiopia lacks capacity to administer accurate and reliable national surveys. For instance, G.Mariam argues:

The Central Statistics Agency (CSA) and the National Accounts Department of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development are the two institutions in Ethiopia that are responsible for keeping track of the statistical data and providing analysis on economic performance. But neither organization has the institutional capability to collect reliable and accurate economic data, let alone assemble complete and comprehensive data sets which could serve as empirical bases for economic prognostications. This fact was emphatically stated on March 24, 2010 in the official statement of Paul Mathieu, the IMF team leader who, after conducting an evaluation of the current half fiscal year economic performance of Ethiopia, said: "Statistics collection of the country requires transformations, and we advised the government to do that." (G.Mariam 2012).

By quoting the IMF team Leader, G. Mariam tries to show that not only is the problem of statistical incapacity is indisputable, but has been recognized by others too and the government has been suggested to do something. Because this group draws on IMF to justify its position that the statistical system is incapable, it might be interesting to examine IMF's Reports on the Observance of Standards and Codes (ROSCs). However no report is available for Ethiopia¹¹.

For poverty reduction doubters group, as the result of this institutional weakness, the statistical system in Ethiopia is in mess at the moment. In a piece titled “In today’s Ethiopia, numbers have lost, their Meaning” Chat (2010) wrote:

Given the flagrant tampering with almost all national data, in today’s Ethiopia numbers have no meaning. In politics or economics! After noticing the level to which the integrity of the country’s budget system was compromised, Paddy Ashdown, the man who worked as the international High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, concluded that what Bosnia needed were not doctors without borders, but accountants without borders. A post-Meles government should hope that the first help it gets is from statisticians without borders to clean the statistical mess we are in. (Chat, 2010, emphasis mine)

Chat emphasize that the problem is deep rooted using terms like “mess”, and “numbers lost meaning”. Chat’s phrase of “a post-Meles government” is interesting because it signals two tendencies of this group. First, it shows the group’s belief that responsibility for the statistic mess is Meles’ or his government’s (instead of for instance lack of trained human capacity or the large and

¹¹ According to World Bank statistical capacity assessment, Ethiopia ranks one of the countries with better statistical capacity ranking with scores “higher in each year than the African average by between 3 and 18 points” (Jervan 2013: 1).

diverse geography and population of the country that can make statistical system very difficult etcetera). Second it suggests the group's belief that solving the mess requires deposing Meles and his government from power. The message is what should come first is not cleaning the "statistical mess", but toppling the government. Then only "the statistical without borders" can clean the mess.

4.4.4. The Government Economic Growth Rate Estimate is exaggerated

It is, therefore, no surprise that this group believe that the economic growth estimates are also over estimated. The IMF has been estimating economic growth less than the government. IMF mission to Ethiopia 2010/11 press statement reads "Strong growth has continued in 2010/11 that the mission estimates at 7.5 percent (compared to an official estimate of 11.4 percent)" (IMF 2011:1) Similar discrepancy is reported for the Economic Update of 2012. "Government growth estimates and projections differ for 2010/11 and beyond and are above 11% per year (e.g.: 2010/11 estimate 11.4%, and 2012/13)" (IMF 2012: 1).

However this group also criticizes the IMF for not doing detail analysis beyond stating discrepancies of estimates:

In its official reports, the IMF simply accepts and incorporates at face value the data for GDP growth given to it by the Central Statistics Office (with its own staff estimates) and incorporates those figures... slavishly (with a wink, nod and a smile) parrots back to the world the same figures with some of its own "staff estimates and projections"without so much as qualifying it for completeness, accuracy or reliability" of the data that comes from a system that IMF said "needs massive transformation" (G.Mariam 2010).

Besides, this group members argue that even by the government's own statistics, the growth pattern shows that growth is mostly service sector that do not provide the impetus for a real economic progress in the country nor can result in such sharp decline in poverty reduction given it hardly improve the life of 80% of the people depending on agricultural sector. (Begashaw Interview with ESAT: 2012).

Citing these quotes, The poverty reduction doubters group criticises the IMF continuing using the poverty numbers, because "IMF and UN have no choice but to just use the exaggerated data provided to them [by the Government]"(Begashaw Interview with ESAT part 2 November 28 2012).

4.4.5. "Torture the Data Until it Confess": Questioning Objectivity

Poverty reduction doubters argue that the statistical system lacks autonomy from the ruling party. As the result, the regime is using the statistical institutions to fabricate data, they argue. This can be clearly seen in the quote below from *Fenot Nesenet*, the opposition UDJ party newspaper:

It has always never been clear why the economic performance reports are expected to be approved by the council of

ministers. Like other countries, institutions that monitor unemployment, job creation, economic growth/de-growth etcetera should be autonomous. If we have to believe statistical reports, government should refrain from interfering in works of institutions that produce such reports and should ensure the autonomy of these institutions both in law and practice. However, what is being done now is very clear-torture the data until it confesses. (*Fenote Nesant* 2012: 4)

Furthermore, this group believes that the fabrication of data is the manifestations of authoritarian nature of the regime. “Cooking data is the character of many autocratic regimes. They deny autonomy for institutions that collect and gather data”(*Fenote Nesant* 2012:2). Therefore, for poverty reduction doubters, the regime is playing a statistical game as the following quote shows:

The bottom line on the regime's statistical claims... is that the figures are cooked up in the Central Statistics Office ... This is the extent of the economic statistical game that continues to be played before our eyes”.(G/Mariam 2010)

Figure 2 : Pictorial depiction of manipulation of the statistics by Meles Zenawi



Source: *Fenote Nesant* (April 24, 2012)

Poverty reduction doubter group also claim that the government has blocked independent researchers from conducting independent poverty surveys. This is presented as indication that the data was “cooked up”. For instance, an Ethiopian origin American Economics professor affiliated to Michigan state university explained in ESAT that his research team was expelled from the country within 48 hours from the moment the government knew they were doing poverty assessment (Getachew Begashaw Interview With ESAT, minutes 18:00-25:00).

In conclusion, this group argues that “accepting this talk of poverty reduction shows not only foolishness but also irresponsibility (Teklu: 2012:1 my translation from Amharic).

4.5. Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to show the main arguments and evidences presented by each group. This can be summarized briefly in the following table.

Table 4.5. Summary of Arguments

| Issue | <i>Arguments of Each party</i> | | Remarks |
|-----------------------|--|--|---------|
| Preferred Statistics | Poverty Reduction believers | <i>Poverty reduction doubters</i> | |
| | National consumption based poverty Surveys has shown dramatic reduction | MPI has showed poverty is widespread and falling only marginally | |
| Authority of Evidence | Confirmed by Intentional organizations | Authoritative, because poverty is measured multi-dimensional Produced by non-government intentional organization | |
| | | | |
| Methodology | MPI is based on outdated data | National surveys has methodological weakness | |
| | | | |
| Explanation | The economy has been growing and it has contributed to poverty reduction | IMF and World Bank has lower estimates for economic growth. The trend of economic growth by govt statistics shows it is not pro-poor and therefore has little effect on poverty. | |
| | | | |
| Objectivity | The data is conducted by experts in the field | The CSA lacks institutional independence, and capacity. The data is unreliable, invalid and or/cooked. | |

Source: Field work (2013)

Chapter 5 : Politics by Numbers: Manifestations, Structures and Agency

In this chapter I will answer two questions: first is what are the manifestations of the political nature of the debate? This should have been partly evident from the discussion in the last two chapters. However, in this chapter I try to make it more explicit by analysing the actors' relationship with the regime as well as the content of the debate. In addition, the second section of the chapter discusses the strategies of each party to use to enhance their capacity of maintaining the hegemony of their representation of poverty trends in Ethiopia.

5.1. Manifestations of the Political Nature of the Debate

5.1.1 *Actors Alliance: Who is Grouping with whom?*

Following van Dijk' suggestion that “ the easiest, and not altogether misguided, answer is that political discourse is identified by its actors or authors, viz., politicians”(Van Dijk 1997 : 12), the study tried to analyze the way members position themselves against the other party of the debate. Indeed, looking in to the arrangement of forces debating the poverty numbers, it clearly emerges that the members of each party are the same actors we found in many other political issues. A complete description of the background of each actor will be neither feasible here nor is essential. However, below I have tried to fairly detail the relationship among the main ones.

Essentially, those who believe that poverty has reduced include the ruling party, its government apparatus including state media. Other private owned news outlets as Aiga forum, where most of the articles quoted come from such are known to be supporters of the party. A clear indication of this is such websites are listed as “related” links in the ruling party website¹² and link is provided to them. On the other hand none of the websites that featured poverty decline doubters view are mentioned.

On the hand, most of the arguments of the argument poverty decline doubters group is presented either in opposition parties' newspapers, which are very rare, such as *Fenote Nesenet*, or the private presses that are considered very critical of the government. One of such private press that has strongly promoted the MPI index was the Amharic weekly *Addis Neger* (now only online) where Tesfya (2010) is the “Economy” columnist. The paper had managed to draw the highest readership in the history Ethiopia's private press so far (Berhane 2012). However, it has been complaining of receiving threat of arrest of staffs and the state owned daily *Addis Zemen* accused it being the voice of opposition groups (Berhane 2012). In 2009 the staff went to exile allegedly receiving eminent threat of prosecution by the government but continued to manage an online site, *Addis Neger* Online (*Addis Neger* Publishing 2010). Although

¹² The ruling party website is www.eprdf.org.et

the government denies it did not had any plan to arrest them, later it charged the two editors of *Addis Neger* Online for “abetting, aiding, and supporting a terrorist group” (AFP :2011) through their website and sentenced each 8 years of prison in absence (Oromdia 2012). In addition to these media outlets, we found scholars who are critical of the government, such G. Mariam (2010, 2011), who describes himself as a person who “defend human rights and speak truth to power” in his blog¹³, is viewed as hardliner opposition to the government.

The state owned daily, *Addis Zemen* had wrote a couple of times blaming the media outlets airing poverty reduction doubters analysis such as *Addis Neger*. Articles in Aiga forum, which agrees with the government that poverty has declined, had denounced *Addis Neger* editors when they went exile labelling their move as “self-exile” motivated by other interests than fear of eminent prosecution (see Assefa 2009).

Generally, as previous researches on media in Ethiopia has indicated that the “media has been deeply polarized reflecting some of the divisions” (Price et. Al 2009: 1) on the nature and composition of the state. Therefore, such arrangements of actors and antagonisms between them suggest that these two coalitions of poverty discourses did not emerge out of the poverty debate but were pre-existing groups.

5.1.3. Content of the Debate

Although the identity of the actors in debate and their organization is important, however, mere the identity of the participants in the debate can’t make the debate spontaneously political. As Van Dijk noted “even politicians are not always involved in political discourse, and the same is obviously true for most other participants”(Van Dijk 1997). Van Dijk suggested that the content of the debate should also be analysed, an endeavour this section attempts.

As the quotes in the previous chapter shows, as it stands, the content of the debate focuses how much the government is successful in reducing poverty. As we have discussed in chapter two, the source of controversy in poverty knowledge can be either different ontological views of what is poverty or epistemological differences on who is the legitimate knower of poverty (Kura and Sulaiman 2012). However, the central debate of the prevalence of poverty in Ethiopia at the moment seems on the “correct” number of poor people mainly and to a lesser extent on the method that has to be used to measure poverty. No discussion of epistemology is presented except criticising the government reports for their incompatibility with qualitative studies. Even then, the concern is the indicators may not be the appropriate one or the poverty line has not been revised. Instead, it focuses on prevalence of poverty as measured in two different quantitative surveys. Primarily, this selection of numbers is because “numbers provide a unique means with which to simplify and communicate complex social phenomena” (Clegg 2009: 474) such as poverty. Through numbers, each party try to make their story accessible to the ordinary public who lacks both the time and expertise to understand the complex process involved in knowing the trends of poverty in the country.

¹³ G. Mariam’s block link is <http://open.salon.com/blog/almariam>

In terms of urban-rural differences, the debate's doesn't have any discussion of these possible differences in trends of poverty. However, in a recent document of MOFED, the ministry indicated that although there is decline in headcount, severity of poverty in urban areas has increased. The poverty decline doubters group also has focused on interviewing people living in urban areas and arguing poverty not declining. Here, there seems consensus that poverty in urban areas was sever as the opposition groups have been also arguing the same (see Teklu 2012). However, the overall discussion is more of national level and there is no explicit disaggregation of discourse at region or geographical level.

Another and perhaps the most clearest indications of the political driven nature of the debate is the way each party relate the developmental state ideology in this controversy. The poverty reduction believers argue the developmental statism was the reason for poverty reduction.

[Meles Zenawi's] vision allowed Ethiopia to establish a strong developmental state, a success story for other African countries to emulate. It was designed to lift the country out of poverty ...[resulted in] reducing the number of Ethiopians living under extreme poverty by 9 percent within five years.(Yifter 2013)

Another quote from the *poverty reduction believers* group also attributes the success to the polices of developmental sate:

The country's image abroad is changing for the better. One can confidently say that, although a lot more remains to be done, the age-old backwardness, poverty and famine that the country was suffering from are now history. This, no doubt, is the result of the relevance and correctness of the policies of the Ethiopian government led by EPRDF(Gebresellasie 2012).

However, the same developmental state ideology is blamed for being the underlying cause by the *poverty reduction doubters* for fabrications of numbers. As the quote below, the opposition UDJ party, for instance clearly accuse the developmental state ideology:

Especially not achieving the targets stated in the growth and transformation plan (for example, economic growth plan, poverty reduction plan etcetera) means, shacking the developmental state propaganda that EPRDF is standing on. Therefore proclaiming the reduction of poverty and continuity of economic growth (whether it is true or false) has become a matter of *existence* for EPRDF “(Fenote Nesanet 2012: 12, Emphasis mine).

5.2 Structures and Strategies to Heighten Agency

What is constraining each parties attempt to ensure hegemony of their representation is the focus of this section. According to (Leipold and Winkel 2013) discourse is “both representation (of societal structures) and interaction (of actors) – the former referring to the representation of meaning structures of social practice in (written and spoken) text, the latter referring to the processes and conditions of intersubjective communication which create these textual representations” (p.8). In this continuous and reactive communication

among actors, structural factors play an important role in constraining and enhancing the relative position of actors in dominating the discourse. A set of enhancing and constraining factors are discussed for each party below.

For the poverty decline believers group, led by the government, the first and main enhancing factors is legal –rational power of the government as a representative of the state. Whatever its legitimacy is contested, as long as the ruling party is in power, it has the power and mandate to act as representative of the country. It also has the authority to collect information on the economy of the nation, to prove data for inter-state organizations such IMF, the World Bank and United Nations. These organizations not always buy the evidences and arguments of the government, but still primarily use the government's statistics combining it with their own projections and estimates, thereby contributing to the hegemony of the government's discourse through their numerous publications. This makes such institutions to be part of the legitimatizing forces of the discourse of the government. However, when they do provide different estimates, like the IMF growth Statistics and MPI estimates, they hugely undermine the credibility of the regime and enhance the capacity of the opposition groups.

Besides, the government draws on other strategies to ensure the hegemony of its discourse. One of the strategies is limiting production of alternative statistics/ figures on poverty using its database. The full datasets of HICE and WMS, on which the government's poverty reduction reports are based on, are not available for public use. Individual researchers can receive micro data per region or selected number of indicators. However, the full dataset is not available for public use or individual researchers. CSA doesn't allow access to the full data set for researchers "so that they will not come up with their own reports on national poverty" (CSA Staff C Interview, August 21, 2013). Besides, the micro dataset available on World Bank database also have a disclaimer that "household expenditure dataset can't be used to calculate poverty". As a result, there is no alternative report to the government's report based on the full dataset. In addition, during my field work, I requested one of the consultants of MOFED, who is a university teacher, for interview, but he declined telling me he is too busy. Of course the reason might not genuine one, but also can equally be a pretext for not engaging in any such discussions.

The lack of access to dataset is the main constraint of the poverty reduction doubters' group agency. Although they accuse the government for data manipulations, they can't show that by coming up with alternative reports based on the same data set. However the continued restriction of access to the dataset can be considered as advantageous for this group because it enables the group to sustain its accusations of data manipulation.

Second strategy of the poverty reduction believers group is to silence alternative knowledge based on other datasets. As we have already seen the main poverty estimate the poverty reduction doubters' group draw is the MPI index. However, the government didn't react when the report is released, despite both local and international media coverage, since this would be detrimental to the government itself by unintentionally bringing The MPI to the public attention.

However, scholars within the poverty reduction believers group did try to undermine the credibility of the report. For instance Aduga argues "the

OPHI report gives the wrong impression" (Adugna 2010:2) for three reasons. His first criticism is that the MPI report of 2010 used the 2004 data and hence doesn't reflect the situation in 2010 because "many changes have been observed in the country since 2004/05" (Adugna 2010 :8). However, the MPI estimates by OPHI clearly indicated that the estimate is for 2005 and this criticism is against the poverty reduction doubters group who portrayed it as reflecting the poverty status in 2010, the year the report was first realised. Adugna then turned in to the weight of indicators in MPI and comments "like other people I believe that it is not fair to give equal weight for child mortality and nutrition level in the same family" (Adugna 2010 :8). Lastly, he criticizes the inclusion of only 10 indicators in the MPI saying "at least when we compare it with the MDGs, it is less by thirty eight indicators "(Ibid: 9).

Nevertheless, despite his intention to undermine the MPI, Adunga missed some other fundamental criticisms of the MPI discussed in the literature. First, the cut point for poverty status in MPI (set at one –third of the ten indicators) is not only a normative judgement that one can contest, but also "does not resolve the more fundamental issue of how the dimensions and cut-offs should be chosen" in measuring poverty (Fischer 2013:12). To what extent the cut-off point or the composition of the indicators in Ethiopian context is realistic can be contested. Secondly, the composite index of MPI, which put Ethiopia the poorest in the world next to Niger (which the poverty decline doubters group highly emphasises) was criticised on two grounds. First, since the basic rational of the multidimensional poverty is to show poverty in different dimensions, "It is not the aggregate index that we need for this purpose [of knowing the trend in all of the three dimensions of MPI] but its component" (Ravallion 2011: 7-8). Furthermore, "the complexity of the exercise [involved in calculating the composite MPI score] renders the resulting index even more opaque and less intuitive than money-metric measures" (Fischer 2013 12). The implication of the missing these weaknesses of the MPI in the debate is that the poverty reduction doubters' narrative to portray the MPI as superior measure of poverty than the government's consumption based report was relatively unchallenged.

Another strategy used by both groups to enhance the hegemony of their representation of the poverty trend in Ethiopia is building discourse collaboration with the media. The ruling party controls the state own media and propagates its own discourse with no space for the other party's view. Previous research has showed that the state media in Ethiopia lacks autonomy to reflect views that may undermine the regimes credibility (Skjerdal :2012). However, not there are also private media outlets that present the arguments of poverty reduction believers.

The poverty reduction doubters created coalition with most of private media try to counter the government's rapid poverty discourse by creating story line that show how life has worsened in the last decade by interviewing ordinary people sometimes with their desperate picture and interviewing experts on the subject, usually economics professors(for instance Addis Guday 2013) As such the independence of the media and the objective view of the experts are supposedly the reason why people should believe the position that poverty has not declined or has declined marginally. However, the government accuses the print media as being a propaganda machine of the oppositions. This tense relationship of the local private media, especially print newspapers and magazines, many believe is the reason behind the closure of 70 newspapers

and magazines in the last 20 years and jailing of many journalists (VOA, Nov 8, 2013).

Chapter 6 : Conclusion

Two discourses of trends of poverty reduction in Ethiopia are competing at the moment. One discourse argues poverty has declined rapidly in the last two decades. The other discourse depicts poverty hasn't declined and remained widespread. This study examined these discourses in detail to understand who are the main actors/participants of the debate are and what evidences they use to argue their position. To understand these discourses, the research analysed main documents representing each discourse, secondary data and literatures along with data from four interviews of staffs of central statistics agency.

The study found that the two discourses draw on different estimates of poverty. The rapid poverty decline discourse draws on the government's statistics that shows head count poverty dropped from 44.5 percent in 1995 to 29.6 percent in 2010. This group also explains that the economy has been growing fast especially in the last two decades and has contributed to poverty reduction. It also argues that doubts about poverty decline are unfounded as the decline has been attested by international organizations such as UN, IMF and World Bank.

On the other hand, those who doubt poverty decline draw on the multi-dimensional poverty estimates of OPHI that estimates poverty at 87.3% in 2010, with a marginal decline from 93% in 2000 and 90% in 2005. They also argue that the MPI score is better indicator of measure of poverty than the consumption based measures. Furthermore, drawing on the discrepancy between IMF's growth of Ethiopian economy with the government's estimate (which is higher than IMF's), this group ; (1) argues that the economic growth is not as high as the government claims, (2) blames the statistical system of the country as weak and incompetent and (3) accuses the government fabricating and manipulating data.

The study also analysed the relationship among actors and their view towards the regime. In essence, the poverty decline believers are also supporters of the regime while the poverty decline doubters are those who are critical of the regime. Most of the articles that propagate the government's view of poverty decline come from sites listed as "related links" in the ruling party website. On the other hand views of poverty decline doubters are featured in the opposition newspapers, and private websites that the government has accused of being in partial and sympathetic to opposition groups.

In terms of content, much of the debate is focused on the prevalence of poverty, as measured by headcount percentage of the poor. Although there are concerns on validity of methods, there are no significant differences in conceptualization of poverty.

But why is poverty numbers so important for political actors? And how do we make sense of the actors' arrangement in the discourse (i.e regimes supporters' vs opponent)? The answer is in the way the regime tries to legitimatize itself. Despite the hope that the government strength democratization when it comes to power in 1991, taking over power from a militraty junta, in recent years, es-

pecially after the 2005 national election, the government has showed increasing tendency of being authoritarianism. This means the legitimacy of the regime based on normative values such as democracy is very fragile, if not declining. Instead, the government is increasingly trying to build its legitimacy on poverty reduction and economic development citing economic growth and poverty decline, yet retaining the democratic system formally. Since poverty reduction has been the focus of the regime and explicit goal of development in Ethiopia, for both global and country specific reasons, portraying a declining poverty is supposed to earn support for the regime. Consequently, the government engages in discourse that poverty has reduced rapidly drawing on its statistics. This compelled the opposition group to fight the regime in two sides: one in legal rational grounds of like accusing it being undemocratic and so on and another undermining its discourse of success in economic development. The presence of alternative evidences such as MPI of OPHI, which depict widespread poverty than the government's estimate, is then used by the opposition to undermine the government's legitimacy.

Therefore, this study showed that in contexts where regimes legitimacy is contested and is perceived to be on success in poverty reduction, measuring progress towards poverty becomes highly politicised. When alternative and, at least on their face, contradictory statistics are available, statistics that serves the political purposes is picked to justify political motives. As a result, poverty knowledge, which is always contested and uncertain, becomes a deep contestation area among actors using poverty number as a means of doing politics-politics by numbers.

Within the debate of two discourses, the implications of poverty assessments for poverty reduction have received little attention. This is not to say that the government and other development planers are not using official statistics. Instead, the note is the pre-occupation with numbers and the attribution of falling or increasing poverty rate to the government legitimacy has resulted in polarized debate which is blocking relevant discussion on what policies and programs should be employed for better effect on poverty reduction. Besides, there is little discussion on what does each evidences, that each of the parties claims are authoritative, suggest on how best poverty can be addressed and what polices and strategies should be used for poverty reduction.

However, through the debate important gaps of both approaches, especially the consumption based measures are highlighted. For instance, criticism of the exclusion of some areas in each round and the exclusion of non-sedentary areas are legitimate concerns that the government need to work on rather than trying to silence them. Furthermore, the fact that the poverty line has not been consulted with the people when it was set initially and it hasn't been revised. These are important gaps that the government surveys should address. Similarly the poverty reduction believers' criticisms of MPI are helpful. The few number of indicators, and the equal weight of given to the three dimensions can be scrutinized the validity in Ethiopian context.

Overall, the two measure of poverty; consumption and MPI, are two different measures with their own policy implications and aims. It shouldn't be ever assumed that that one or the other is correct. However, the difference is too massive to avoid (29.6% 87.5% headcount). Indeed, the discrepancies indicate there is knowledge gap on what is the trend of poverty in Ethiopia.

Furthermore, the perception we have to government's statistics is too important to avoid or not care. Confidence in government's statistics is very essential for users to rely on government's statistics. In this regard, poverty reduction doubter's accusations of data fabrications and cooking by the government, and the autonomy of CSA should be engaged with rather than to silenced. Therefore, this paper suggests instead of going to extremists to treat data as dogma, both discourses should engage in details to come up with plausible explanations for the large discrepancy between measures through a more open and transparent discussion, including public access of the official datasets.

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