**ERITREA’S UNHURRIED DEVELOPMENT**

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The year 2012 was a good year because many friends were in Eritrea visiting family and touring the country. Those who went out to different parts of the country and saw the different development projects were very much impressed with Eritrea’s achievements and her future prospects. On the other hand, those who stayed put in Asmara were disappointed. Their complaints, rightly so, were that Asmara is neglected. However, what I want to remind these souls is that the Eritrean government economic policy is Social justice and equal distribution of development in all six regions based on the Golden Principle of self-reliant Economy and political process free from external pressures and dependency.

In 1991, Faced with a zero economy, no viable economic institutions, no sustainable infrastructure in education, health, socials services and transportation systems; Eritrean government started a holistic development program towards economic emancipation and prosperous nation. Based on the Cardinal principle of Social Justus; meaning that those who have been on the underside of history must see that there is a qualitative difference between repression and freedom.

And for an Eritrean, freedom translates into having supply of clean water, electricity; being able to live in a decent home and having a good job, to be able to send our children to school and have accessible health care for all covering the whole country regardless of how remote or inaccessible the area may be.

In the first ten years after independence, Eritrea had spent over a billion US dollars on infrastructure, power plant, roads, dams and social services (schools, hospitals, clean water electrification). The government shifted from centralized to rational development programs though privatization and, developed a liberal Macroeconomic program in 1994 to attract foreign investments.

Eritrea’s economic environment is different from most developing countries. Eritrea’s economic development policy is based on investment rather than foreign aid. Eritrea’s political, social values and norms are also much different. Political stability, location, low corruption, inexpensive skilled and industrious labor force gives Eritrea comparative advantages. Energy, mining, agro-industry, construction, tourism, marine resources offer good opportunity for investment. And understanding these opportunities, many foreign firms and capital had started to flow into the country.

The country was registering 7 to 10 % growth. In 1998, after the war of aggression Eritrea’s economic development took a different strategy. Most of the foreign currency reserve was used to defend the country. Foreign investments left the country. Eritrea in 2004 imported $514 million dollars of consumable goods and exported $95million with a trade deficit of $423million dollars. Basing their assumptions on these economic measures, Economic experts in Western countries forecasted that Eritrea will cease to exist as a nation due to the collapse of it economy.

As it is the norm however, the strong willed people and the leadership Eritrea today have overcome these challenges and are in a much better position than most of her counterparts. What has been attained to-date is a miracle. One can testify to these accomplishments by looking at the major economic sectors i.e. Agriculture, infrastructure, health, and education.

The Eritrean government set the strategic priorities regarding development programs that require large capital expenditure sectors by sector; infrastructure, Agro-industry, health, and education. In order to build these needed infrastructures and related development projects, the Government formed many national construction companies like Segane, Bidho and others.

To highlight few infrastructure construction projects and accomplishments undertaken by these companies;

The Keren to Tesenei road, Nefasit to Dekahmare , Mendefera Barantu, Asmara to Zalambesa, Asmara to Mereb, Mendefera to Adekyeh, Keren to Selea, Akordat to Sawa to Girmayka , Massawa to Assab. These infrastructural projects have made it possible for internal handling and transport of goods within a short time interval. In Africa on average it takes 1.5 months to transport goods to port, in Eritrea however, it takes much less. In-addition to the roads, these companies had built projects worth $1.2 billion estimated cost of construction of residential housing, $350 million dollars cost of hospitals and government office, $1.5 billion water supply dams.

To promote sustainable development and to achieve food sufficiency; development of Agro industries was necessitated. Agro-Macro policy was devised, Irrigation based agriculture was introduced to increase output and create surplus in cereal corps, vegetables, fruits, and livestock. Dams, micro-dams and water diversion schemes were constructed. Animal husbandry, poultry and honey farms are new industries popping everywhere in the country. Food sufficiency has been achieved and, export markets are being developed. In order to be competitive and export high value-added agricultural products, the Agro-industries have created a post-harvest system, sanitary standards and technical requirements in packing and labeling. Eritrean government has invested large sums of foreign currency to meet export requirements and standards. Proclamation No. 170/2012, Legal notice No. 121-123/ 2012 has fulfilled the incorporation of Agro- industry and requirements for traceability of export products and marketing.

Realizing the need for skilled labor, education being the fundamental right that all nationals are entitled to; Eritrean government built elementary, junior and secondary schools everywhere even in the most remote areas. This is done to assure access, equity, quality of education and to promote the relevance of education in order to attain balanced educational system across the board. Seven colleges and one university were constructed to provide higher education. The University Of Eritrea Institute Of Technology which has six thousand (6,000) students is being expanded with four modernly equipped laboratories and four five story high building for each discipline.

Eritrea is certified amongst the first African countries for its endeavors on health management system. Skillful management system with well-equipped health care services is one from which Eritrea is best renowned. Health for all is the motto in Eritrea. The health system provides sustainable and excellent health care that is effective, efficient, accessible, acceptable and affordable to all citizens. Access to health care is available in an area of 10 kilometers radius. 75% of the population lives in an area of 5 kilometers from a health center. HIV/AIDS is the lowest in Sub-Sahara Africa 96% of children receive the necessary vaccination. 95% of the urban and 78% of the rural area now have clean water. Eritrea in the last 15 years have eradicated communicable and non-communicable diseases i.e. Malaria, Polio, Small pox and many other. Has lowered infant mortality rate and is providing good health services in all corners of the country. Eritrea’s health expectancy stands at 65 years old the highest in Africa.

As stated above, Eritrea as a nation has completed the first phase of its economic development program and has now leaped forward to the second phase to attain Social housing; cheaper food prices and prosperous life for the population with bright future for the young.

If you think building a few high rise apartments and shopping malls for the very few rich people to enjoy life is what you call economic development while millions of your citizens are deprived of health care, education and clean water then yes Asmara has been neglected and nothing has been achieved. However, one needs to understand that Eritrea is not a country where foreign colonial powers using their local puppets run the country for their selfish gain.

Eritrea is a country that is built on shared sacrifices and as such all it citizens benefit equally. The Eritrean people and its leadership are humble, honest, and down to earth and not sick with self-gratification. Some of us minimize the achievements that the country has achieved with little resources or don’t really understand the workings of a nation building and economic emancipation. Hence, we come to our own wrong uneducated conclusion. In face of all things Eritrea is unhurriedly marching to economic prosperity.