

Unit 8

POST- 1991 DEVELOPMENTS IN ETHIOPIA

Post-1991 Developments in Ethiopia

This unit examines Ethiopia's political transformation following the fall of the Derg regime in 1991, the establishment of a new government, the 1995 constitution, and ongoing hydro-political issues regarding the Nile River.

1. Transitional Charter and Formation of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE)

In 1991, Ethiopia experienced a major political shift. The Marxist military junta known as the Derg was overthrown by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF), a coalition led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and including other ethnic-based groups.

The London Conference in May 1991, mediated by the U.S., aimed to discuss forming a transitional government. However, insurgents took control of Addis Ababa before the conference concluded. Consequently, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) was formed by a national conference in July 1991.

Key Points:

- **Transitional Charter:** This document acted as a provisional constitution, introducing a federal system based on ethnic regions.
- **Council of Representatives:** An 87-member body with significant EPRDF representation, chaired by Meles Zenawi.
- **Challenges:** Despite the diverse representation, ethnic conflicts and instability persisted. The OLF withdrew from the government, and the TGE faced significant internal strife.

2. The 1995 Constitution and Formation of the FDRE

The 1995 Ethiopian Constitution marked the official establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). This constitution introduced a federal system comprising nine regional states and two city administrations.

Key Features of the 1995 Constitution:

- **Federal Structure:** Established nine regional states (Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, SNNPRS, Gambella, Harari) and two city administrations (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa).
- **Ethnic Federalism:** Recognized the rights of ethnic groups to self-governance and cultural preservation. The constitution allows for significant autonomy within these states.
- **Government Structure:** Introduced a parliamentary system with the House of Peoples' Representatives (HPR) and the House of Federation (HoF). The HPR is the primary legislative body, while the HoF interprets the constitution.

Challenges:

- **Internal Fragmentation:** Managing diverse ethnic groups and ensuring equitable resource distribution remains a challenge.
- **Secessionist Threats:** Ethnic federalism poses risks of secession and regional instability.
- **Development Disparities:** Economic growth has been uneven, with significant poverty remaining in some areas.

3. Hydro-Political Issues of the Nile River

The Nile, the world's longest river, is vital for several African countries. Ethiopia contributes about 86% of the Nile's annual water through its tributaries, the Blue Nile (Abay) and the Tekeze (Atbara).

Historical Agreements:

- **1929 Agreement:** Egypt and Sudan reserved the majority of Nile water rights, excluding other riparian states.
- **1959 Agreement:** Further solidified Egypt and Sudan's control, disregarding the interests of upper riparian states like Ethiopia.

Recent Developments:

- **Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA):** A 1999 agreement aimed at equitable water use but did not fully address Ethiopia's concerns.
- **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD):** Constructed starting in 2011, this dam represents Ethiopia's significant step towards utilizing its Nile

waters for national development. The project has led to tensions with Egypt and Sudan, highlighting the need for new agreements on water use.

Summary

The transition from the Derg regime to the EPRDF-led government marked a significant shift in Ethiopian politics, culminating in the 1995 constitution and the formation of the FDRE. The country's federal structure emphasizes ethnic self-governance but faces challenges in balancing regional needs and managing hydro-political issues related to the Nile River. The evolving dynamics of Nile water use underscore the importance of equitable agreements among riparian states.