



How Do Multilateral and Bilateral Cooperation Shape Ethiopia's Development Path?

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ABSTRACT

A combination of multilateral and bilateral cooperation frameworks shapes Ethiopia's journey toward sustainable development. This paper explores Ethiopia's engagement with various international development partners, assessing their role in facilitating socio-economic advancements across key sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, health, and education. Drawing upon projects led by multilateral organizations like the United Nations (UN), and the African Union (AU), and bilateral relationships with countries such as the United States and China, the study evaluates the successes and challenges of these partnerships. By employing a thematic and content analysis approach, the paper identifies areas for enhancing the effectiveness of these collaborations, particularly in capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and the diversification of partnerships. Furthermore, the article situates Ethiopia's development strategies within the context of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting the alignment between international cooperation and Ethiopia's long-term goals.

KEYWORDS: Ethiopia, Development Cooperation, Multilateral Partnerships, Bilateral Agreements, SDGs, Global Partnerships, Agriculture, Infrastructure, Health, Education.

INTRODUCTION

International development cooperation has been a cornerstone in Ethiopia's path toward achieving sustainable development. As a country with limited domestic resources, Ethiopia has consistently relied on external support to address pressing developmental challenges such as poverty, food insecurity, and inadequate infrastructure (Wazza, 2022). Over the years, international development cooperation, whether through multilateral organizations or bilateral agreements, has played a significant role in transforming Ethiopia's socio-economic landscape.

The importance of development partnerships cannot be overstated for a country like Ethiopia, where more than 22% of the population faces food insecurity and approximately 30% lives in poverty (Vos, Rice, & Minot, 2022). These challenges have underscored the need for international collaboration to bridge the gap between Ethiopia's development aspirations and the reality of its limited domestic resources. From large-scale infrastructure projects like the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway to health sector reforms supported by the Global Fund, Ethiopia's partnerships with global institutions have been pivotal.

The paper's central aim is to analyze the role of both multilateral and bilateral cooperation in fostering Ethiopia's development. It also explores the alignment between

Ethiopia's national development goals and the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), identifying areas where international collaboration has had the greatest impact, as well as areas that require further attention. By drawing on a range of case studies and sectoral analyses, this paper contributes to the growing body of literature on development cooperation and its role in advancing sustainable development in low-income countries.

BACKGROUND OF ETHIOPIA'S DEVELOPMENT LANDSCAPE AND GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

Historical Development Challenges

Ethiopia's history of development is deeply rooted in its agrarian economy, which has long been the backbone of the nation. With agriculture accounting for 34% of GDP and employing around 80% of the workforce, the country remains highly vulnerable to climatic fluctuations, such as droughts, that significantly impact food production (Muluye, 2021). The Ethiopian government has launched a series of Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP I and II) aimed at addressing these vulnerabilities by modernizing the agricultural sector, enhancing infrastructure, and fostering industrialization (Muluneh, 2021). However, Ethiopia continues to face significant development hurdles.

One of the major challenges is food insecurity, which



affects more than one-fifth of the population. This issue is exacerbated by Ethiopia's reliance on rain-fed agriculture, which makes the country susceptible to droughts and climate change (Habte et al., 2022). The limited access to modern agricultural technologies and infrastructure further impedes efforts to boost productivity. Additionally, Ethiopia's high poverty rate, which was at nearly 30% in 2021, is a stark reminder of the socio-economic challenges that persist despite recent development gains (Vos, Rice, & Minot, 2022).

Beyond agriculture, Ethiopia's infrastructure remains underdeveloped. Large sections of the population, particularly in rural areas, lack access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and clean water. The country's road network, though improving, is insufficient to meet the demands of its growing population, hindering access to markets and social services. These challenges, coupled with a high rate of population growth, have strained Ethiopia's limited resources, necessitating strong international partnerships to support national development efforts.

Ethiopia's Involvement in International Development Initiatives

Ethiopia's participation in international development initiatives has been critical to its socio-economic progress. The country has long engaged with multilateral organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and the African Development Bank (AfDB), which have provided financial and technical support to numerous development projects. These partnerships have helped Ethiopia address key challenges in governance, infrastructure, and poverty alleviation.

The UNDP has been a crucial partner in Ethiopia's development efforts, particularly in areas of democratic governance and environmental sustainability. Through its programs, the UNDP has supported Ethiopia in strengthening its institutional capacity, enhancing transparency, and promoting environmental resilience (Alemu, 2009). In addition, the World Bank has provided critical funding for infrastructure projects, including road construction, water supply systems, and healthcare facilities, which have had a transformative impact on the country's socio-economic landscape (Woldehanna & Araya, 2019).

Ethiopia's involvement in international development also aligns with its commitment to global goals, such as the SDGs. The country has made notable progress in areas such as education, where primary school enrollment has increased from 77% in 2012 to 85% in 2019 (Muellegger, 2021). Health sector reforms, supported by multilateral organizations like the Global Fund, have significantly improved healthcare outcomes, particularly in the fight against malaria, HIV, and tuberculosis (Steurs, 2018). These initiatives demonstrate the importance of international cooperation in achieving Ethiopia's national development goals.

Overview of Bilateral and Multilateral Partners

Ethiopia's development strategy has been shaped by strong bilateral relationships with key international partners, including the United States, China, and the European Union (EU). Each of these partners has played a pivotal role in addressing Ethiopia's development needs through targeted interventions in sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, and governance.

The United States, through USAID, has implemented significant initiatives aimed at improving Ethiopia's agricultural productivity and healthcare systems. The Feed of the Future program, for example, has introduced improved farming techniques and better seed varieties to Ethiopian farmers, enhancing food security and boosting rural incomes (Feyissa, 2011). Similarly, China's Belt and Road Initiative has had a transformative impact on Ethiopia's infrastructure, particularly through the construction of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, which has improved trade logistics and regional connectivity (Bharti, 2023). European countries, notably Germany and the UK, have contributed to Ethiopia's development by supporting renewable energy projects, vocational training programs, and governance reforms (Hackenesch, 2013).

In addition to these bilateral relationships, Ethiopia has also benefited from multilateral cooperation through organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the UN. As a founding member of the AU and host of its headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia has been at the forefront of continental development initiatives, particularly through the AU's Agenda 2063, which aims to foster inclusive growth and sustainable development across Africa (Rafiu, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Approach

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze Ethiopia's engagement in international development cooperation. The research follows a thematic analysis approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of key themes related to Ethiopia's development partnerships. This method was chosen to examine the complex dynamics of multilateral and bilateral cooperation, focusing on specific case studies to draw broader conclusions about their impact on Ethiopia's development trajectory.

The qualitative nature of this research allows for a more nuanced understanding of the role that international partnerships play in Ethiopia's development. By focusing on case studies, the paper highlights the outcomes of various development initiatives and assesses their alignment with Ethiopia's national development goals, as well as their contributions to the global SDGs.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from a variety of secondary sources, including academic articles, government reports,

and publications from international organizations. Key data sources included reports from the UNDP, World Bank, and African Development Bank (AfDB), which provided insights into Ethiopia's development progress in sectors such as infrastructure, health, and education. Peer-reviewed articles on foreign aid effectiveness, such as Alemu (2009) and Feyissa (2011), were also consulted to understand the broader implications of Ethiopia's international partnerships.

Government publications, particularly those outlining Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP I and II), were instrumental in providing context for the country's development strategies and priorities (Habte et al., 2022). These sources were supplemented by case studies on specific development projects, such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and the Global Fund's health initiatives, to assess the real-world impact of these partnerships.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using content analysis, with a focus on identifying recurring themes related to the effectiveness of Ethiopia's multilateral and bilateral engagements. Thematic analysis was employed to explore the different outcomes of these partnerships, particularly in key sectors such as agriculture, health, and infrastructure. By comparing the relative effectiveness of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, the study seeks to provide a balanced assessment of their respective contributions to Ethiopia's development goals.

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the data were categorized into several themes: (1) agricultural productivity, (2) healthcare improvements, (3) infrastructure development, and (4) governance reforms. Each theme was examined in the context of specific development projects, and the findings were cross-referenced with Ethiopia's national development plans and the global SDGs to assess alignment and effectiveness.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to Ethiopia's engagement in international development cooperation between 2000 and 2023, with a focus on key multilateral and bilateral partnerships. While the paper provides a broad overview of Ethiopia's development progress, it does not capture all the complexities of the country's development landscape, particularly in terms of the internal dynamics of these partnerships. Additionally, the study relies primarily on secondary data, which may not fully reflect the nuances of the negotiation processes between Ethiopia and its international partners.

MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

Ethiopia's Engagement in Multilateral Initiatives

Ethiopia's active participation in multilateral cooperation has been critical in shaping its development path. As a founding member of the African Union (AU), Ethiopia has been a driving force behind continental initiatives aimed at fostering peace,

security, and development across Africa. The AU's Agenda 2063, for example, outlines a long-term vision for Africa's transformation, emphasizing inclusive growth, sustainable development, and good governance (Rafiu, 2014). Ethiopia's leadership in the AU has allowed it to play a central role in shaping the continent's development agenda, particularly in areas such as infrastructure and regional integration.

In addition to its role in the AU, Ethiopia has also been a key participant in global development initiatives led by the United Nations (UN). The country's involvement in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is particularly noteworthy, as Ethiopia has made significant progress in aligning its national development plans with these global objectives. The UNDP has been a crucial partner in Ethiopia's efforts to achieve the SDGs, providing financial and technical support for projects aimed at reducing poverty, improving education, and promoting environmental sustainability (Assefa et al., 2017).

Analysis of Specific Projects and Outcomes

One of the most successful multilateral initiatives in Ethiopia has been the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. This UN-backed initiative has provided critical funding for Ethiopia's healthcare sector, leading to a 50% reduction in malaria mortality between 2010 and 2015 (Banteyerga et al., 2011). The Global Fund's support has been instrumental in expanding access to healthcare services, particularly in rural areas, where healthcare infrastructure is often lacking.

Another successful multilateral initiative is Ethiopia's collaboration with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which has significantly improved access to primary education. The GPE's support has resulted in the construction of new schools and the training of thousands of teachers, contributing to a substantial increase in primary school enrollment from 77% in 2012 to 85% in 2019 (Muellegger, 2021).

However, despite these successes, multilateral projects are not without challenges. Bureaucratic inefficiencies and misalignment with national priorities have sometimes hindered the timely implementation of projects. For example, the complex governance structures of multilateral organizations often result in delays, which can reduce the overall effectiveness of development initiatives (Knill et al., 2019). Moreover, the need to coordinate multiple stakeholders can lead to administrative bottlenecks, further complicating project implementation.

Benefits and Challenges of Multilateral Cooperation

The primary advantage of multilateral cooperation is the pooling of resources and expertise from a diverse range of stakeholders. This allows Ethiopia to undertake large-scale development projects that would be impossible to achieve with domestic resources alone. For example, the African Development Bank (AfDB) has provided significant financial

support for Ethiopia's electrification program, which aims to connect millions of Ethiopians to the national power grid by 2025 (Beyene, 2018). This project is critical for Ethiopia's industrialization goals, as access to reliable electricity is essential for business growth and economic development.

Additionally, engagement in multilateral frameworks helps Ethiopia align its policies with international standards and best practices. This alignment ensures better governance, transparency, and accountability, fostering an environment conducive to sustainable development. By adhering to global standards, Ethiopia can attract further investment and partnerships, facilitating the achievement of its development goals (Teshome, 2019). Moreover, active participation in multilateral initiatives enhances Ethiopia's diplomatic standing, providing the country with a platform to influence international policies and promote its interests on the global stage.

Despite these benefits, multilateral cooperation also presents challenges. One of the key issues is the difficulty in aligning the priorities of international organizations with Ethiopia's national development goals (Taddese, 2015). While multilateral projects are often designed to address broad global objectives, they may not always fully reflect the specific needs of Ethiopia. Additionally, the bureaucratic complexity of multilateral organizations can lead to inefficiencies in project implementation, particularly in sectors such as healthcare and education (Knill et al., 2019). Addressing these challenges requires effective management and coordination between Ethiopia and its multilateral partners.

BILATERAL COOPERATION

Key Bilateral Agreements

Bilateral cooperation has been a critical component of Ethiopia's development strategy, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, and healthcare. Ethiopia has forged strong bilateral relationships with several key international partners, most notably the United States, China, and European nations.

The United States, through USAID, has implemented significant initiatives aimed at improving Ethiopia's agricultural productivity and healthcare systems. The Feed the Future program, for example, has introduced improved farming techniques and better seed varieties to Ethiopian farmers, enhancing food security and boosting rural incomes (NTA, 2000). This program has directly benefited over one million farmers, contributing to Ethiopia's broader efforts to reduce poverty and achieve food security.

China's Belt and Road Initiative has also had a transformative impact on Ethiopia's infrastructure development. The construction of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, a flagship project under this initiative, has significantly improved Ethiopia's trade logistics and regional connectivity, facilitating economic growth and job creation (Tovar, 2019). The railway

has not only reduced transportation costs for businesses but has also created numerous employment opportunities during the construction phase, contributing to poverty reduction in the regions along the railway corridor.

European nations, particularly Germany and the UK, have also played an important role in Ethiopia's development through bilateral agreements. Germany, for instance, has supported Ethiopia's renewable energy sector, while the UK has focused on vocational training programs aimed at addressing youth unemployment (Eshete & Gebre, 2012). These bilateral partnerships have been instrumental in addressing Ethiopia's specific development needs and contributing to its long-term development goals.

Impact of Bilateral Projects on Local Communities

Bilateral cooperation has had a significant impact on local communities in Ethiopia, particularly in rural areas where access to basic services is often limited. The Feed the Future initiative, for example, has not only improved food security but has also contributed to improved nutritional outcomes, particularly among children. By introducing more productive farming techniques and better seed varieties, the program has helped increase crop yields, leading to greater food availability and improved livelihoods for rural households (Abeselom, 2018).

Similarly, the construction of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway has had a positive impact on local businesses by improving access to markets and reducing transportation costs. The railway has also created numerous job opportunities during its construction, providing much-needed employment for local communities (Tovar, 2019). The project has also facilitated regional trade, which has contributed to Ethiopia's economic growth and integration with neighboring countries.

However, not all bilateral projects have been without challenges. Some projects have faced difficulties related to environmental sustainability and community engagement. For example, the Clean Water Initiative, funded by a European partner, encountered technical challenges due to the high sediment content of the water in rural areas, which was not adequately considered during the planning phase (Hörtl et al., 2021). Additionally, the lack of effective community involvement in the project led to distrust among residents, which further complicated its implementation.

Comparing Bilateral and Multilateral Approaches

Both bilateral and multilateral cooperation have their strengths and weaknesses, and the effectiveness of each approach depends on the specific context in which they are applied. Bilateral partnerships tend to offer more immediate and targeted interventions, particularly in areas such as agriculture and infrastructure. For instance, bilateral projects like the USAID-funded Feed the Future initiative have provided quick and direct benefits by improving food security and agricultural productivity (Feyissa, 2011).

Similarly, bilateral agreements with China have facilitated rapid infrastructure development, such as the construction of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway (Bharti, 2023).

On the other hand, multilateral cooperation tends to focus on long-term structural changes and sector-wide reforms. Multilateral projects, such as those supported by the Global Fund and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), have brought about significant improvements in healthcare and education, but they often require more time to implement due to the complexity of coordinating multiple stakeholders (Banteyerga et al., 2011). Despite these challenges, multilateral cooperation offers broader benefits by addressing structural issues that bilateral projects may not fully capture.

Overall, both bilateral and multilateral approaches are essential for addressing Ethiopia's diverse development challenges (Fantini, 2014). While bilateral cooperation provides more flexible and immediate solutions, multilateral initiatives help create the necessary conditions for sustainable, long-term development.

CASE STUDIES

Success Stories

One of the most successful bilateral cooperation projects in Ethiopia is the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, funded by China under the Belt and Road Initiative. This project has significantly improved Ethiopia's connectivity to regional and global markets, enhancing trade logistics and fostering economic growth (Bharti, 2023). The railway has not only provided a critical transportation link between Ethiopia and its neighboring countries but has also had a positive impact on job creation and poverty reduction in the regions along the railway corridor. The success of this project can be attributed to strong governmental support from both Ethiopia and China, as well as substantial financial backing and technology transfer, which facilitated the efficient construction of the railway.

Another notable success story is the Global Fund's health initiatives, which have played a critical role in improving healthcare outcomes in Ethiopia. The Global Fund's support has led to a 50% reduction in malaria mortality, as well as significant progress in the fight against HIV and tuberculosis (Banteyerga et al., 2011). The Global Fund's focus on strengthening healthcare systems and expanding access to essential services has had a transformative impact on Ethiopia's public health infrastructure, particularly in rural areas where healthcare access has historically been limited.

Challenging Projects

Despite these successes, some bilateral and multilateral projects have encountered challenges that have limited their effectiveness. For example, the Clean Water Initiative, funded by a European government partner, faced technical difficulties due to inadequate environmental assessments and a lack of community engagement. The high sediment content of water sources in rural areas was not adequately

considered during the project's planning phase, failing water filtration systems (Hörtl et al., 2021). Additionally, the lack of meaningful involvement of local communities in the project's design and implementation led to mistrust and resistance, further complicating the project's success.

These challenges highlight the importance of conducting thorough environmental assessments and ensuring effective community engagement in the planning and implementation phases of development projects. The success of development initiatives often hinges on the extent to which local communities are involved and their concerns are addressed.

CONCLUSION

Key Findings

This study demonstrates that both bilateral and multilateral cooperation has been essential in advancing Ethiopia's development goals. Bilateral partnerships, particularly with the United States, China, and European nations, have played a critical role in addressing Ethiopia's immediate needs in sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, and healthcare. These partnerships have provided Ethiopia with the financial resources, technical expertise, and policy support necessary to overcome its development challenges.

On the other hand, multilateral cooperation, particularly through organizations such as the United Nations, the Global Fund, and the African Union, has contributed to long-term structural changes and sector-wide reforms. These initiatives have helped Ethiopia address systemic issues in healthcare, education, and governance, which are critical for achieving sustainable development.

Despite the successes of both bilateral and multilateral cooperation, some challenges need to be addressed to maximize the impact of development partnerships. These include the need for better alignment between international projects and Ethiopia's national priorities, as well as the importance of improving stakeholder engagement and ensuring that local communities are actively involved in development initiatives.

Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of future development cooperation, Ethiopia should focus on the following recommendations;

- **Improving Stakeholder Engagement:** Ensuring that local communities are actively involved in the planning and implementation phases of development projects is essential for building trust and ensuring the long-term success of these initiatives.
- **Capacity Building:** Investing in capacity building is crucial for ensuring that Ethiopia has the necessary skills and resources to manage development projects effectively. This includes training local officials and professionals to manage and sustain development projects.

- **Diversifying Partnerships:** Ethiopia should seek to diversify its development partnerships by engaging with emerging economies and private sector entities. This will provide access to new technologies, financial resources, and expertise that can complement existing bilateral and multilateral partnerships.
- **Robust Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establishing strong monitoring and evaluation frameworks is crucial for assessing the progress, impact, and effectiveness of development projects. Regular assessments of project performance and impact allow for the timely identification of challenges and the necessary adjustments to maximize positive outcomes. By collecting and analyzing data, Ethiopia can make informed decisions, enhance project efficiency, and improve accountability and transparency in the development cooperation process.
- **Strengthening Alignment with National Priorities:** It is important to ensure that international development projects are aligned with Ethiopia's national development goals contribute to Ethiopia's long-term development objectives.

By addressing these recommendations, Ethiopia can enhance the effectiveness of its development partnerships and continue to make progress toward achieving its national development goals and the global SDGs.

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