



# **Reconciling Self Reliance & External assistance in the Development Process:**

## **The Case of Eritrea**

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This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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## List of Acronyms

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific States
AfDB	African Development Bank
AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act
AU	African Union
CBO	Community Based Organization
CPA	Cotonou Partnership Agreement
CPIA	Country Policy and Institutional Assessment
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSP	Country Strategic Paper
DNAO	Deputy National Authorising Officer
EC	European Union
EDF	European Development Fund
EPAs	Economic Partnership Agreements
EEBC	Eritrea and Ethiopia Border Commission
ENAMCO	Eritrean National Mining Corporation
EPLF	Eritrea's Peoples Liberation Front
ERREC	Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission
EU	European Union
EU-ACP	European Union- African, Caribbean and Pacific states
GDP	Gross Domestic Production
GoSE	Government of Eritrea
HDI	Human Development Index
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MND	Ministry of National Development
MPP	Macro-Policy Paper
NAO	National Authorising Officer
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NCEW	National Confederation of Eritrean Workers

NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIP	National Indicative Programme
NSA	Non-State Actors
NUEW	National Union of Eritrean Women
NUEYS	National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PERA tions	Proclamation for the Establishment of Regional Administra-
PFDJ	Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategic Papers
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SPCF	Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework
UN	United Nations
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USAID	US Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WATSAN	Water and Sanitation
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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## **Abstract**

Self-reliance has been the development principle of Eritrean State since its independence in 1991, a principle inherited from its long years of liberation struggle. As a new and poor country, Eritrea requires external assistance. However, relations with partners are persistently strained due to ideological differences, discord in strategies and policy frameworks. Eritrea follows the 'developmental state' model where the state is the driving force of development, spearheaded by the only political organization in the country-the PFDJ. On the other hand, donors fall within the liberal or neo-liberal continuum; where the private sector plays a driving force and political pluralism is emphasized.

Countries that pursue self-reliant development policy pass through three discernible and temporal phases-(i) partial dissociation/disengagement, (ii) gradual restructuring and (iii) re-association (Biersteker 1980: 229-264). Although Eritrea's development path within these three typologies had faced persistent interruptions; the country has modelled its own development path mirroring its self-reliance and ownership principle amidst a global aid system which adheres to a set of explicit and implicit norms. The development and the sustenance of strong ownership involves negotiations relative to once negotiating capital. This indeed is different to idealistic donor-recipient marriage of interests; it manifests a power-control features as neither the 'recipient' nor the 'donor' is passive in the process of negotiation (Whitfield and Fraser 2010: 341-366). While the three-phase process was arduous; the evidence show that it has worked for Eritrea. Eritrea owns its development strategy, on its own terms and in the 'Eritrean way', with external assistance only coming in case of capacity gaps. However, the sustenance and translation of the national self-reliance policy at the community level requires shared understanding, wider mass participation and the presence of civil society. While Eritrea has modelled its own form of mass participation based on local social movements, the country's increasingly tight restriction of civil society, circumventing of aid management and lack of political pluralism raises questions over the feasibility of its self-reliant principle. Notwithstanding the persistent hiccups to the process of self-reliance, Eritrea's travel through the contours of the three phases was dynamic, continually evolving and merits its own features that can be learnt in the quest for alternative development for the developing world.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

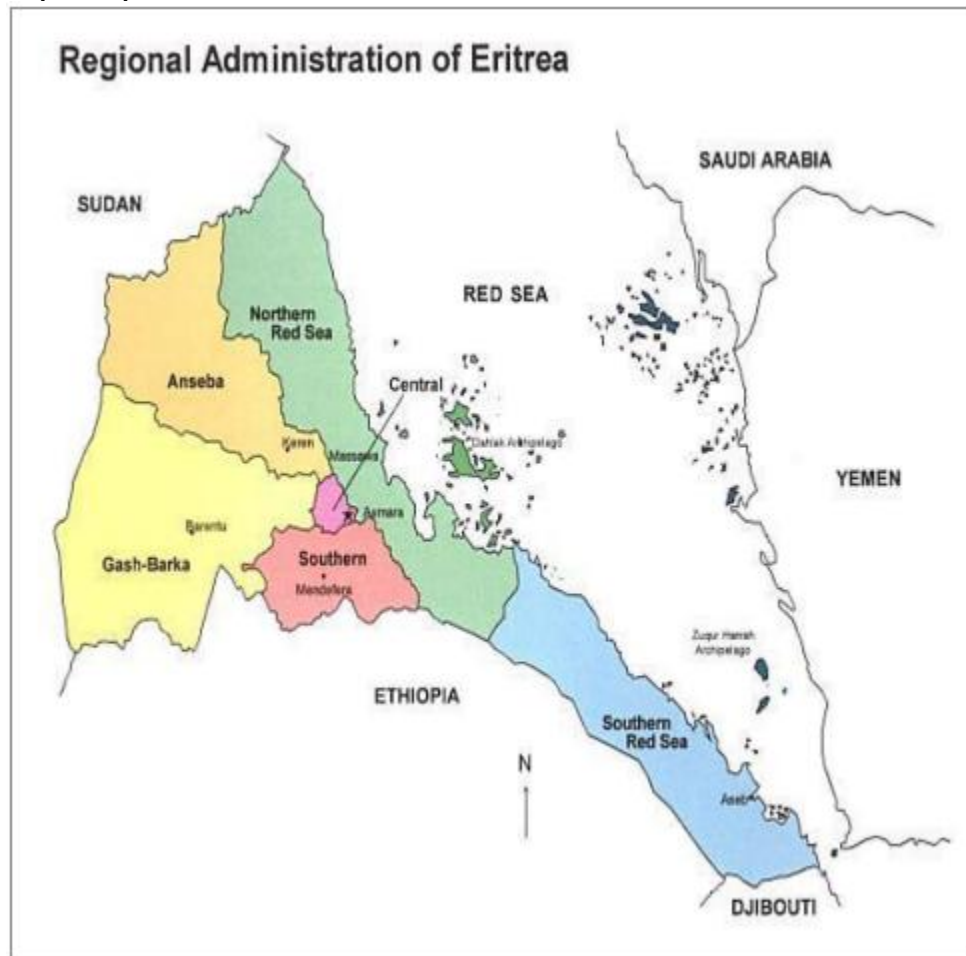
Consistent with the multidimensional nature of development studies, this study cuts across a range of concepts in development studies. It does this by blending concepts in international relations, social policy, and poverty studies. It explores fundamental social problems in development by critically examining the theories underlying it, policies followed and practices observed. As African countries strive to own their programmes themselves, this study brings much relevance to the understanding of alternative development models.

## **Keywords**

Self-Reliance, Partnership, Cooperation, Community Participation, Ownership, Development Assistance, Aid, Aid Negotiation, Civil Society, Social Movement

# Map of Eritrea

Map 1- Map of Eritrea



Source: AfDB (2014)- "This map is provided by the Government of State of Eritrea, 9th April 2014 during the I-CSP validation mission."

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This study presents a critical assessment of the cooperation partnership model that Eritrea is pursuing within the framework of self-reliance. Eritrea has embraced Self-reliance as its domestic guiding principle of development in its macro-policy (1994), and the PFDJ's national charter (1994). Eritrea's relationship with the donor community has traversed through periods of uncertainty, discontinuity and re-engagement. The government of Eritrea insists that it wants to forge its own development path independent of other models. The dilemma remains how it can fashion this independence, amidst competing power-relationships, without foregoing its political independence. As noted by Judice (1980; cited in Wu 1981: 445-482) national self-reliance/independence and the lofty goal of modernization are seldom compatible for countries emerging out of war, such as Eritrea. With poor economic base, large population living in poverty, the road to self-reliance without bowing to conditionality is tortuous. Yet, the possibility of falling into the dependency trap might be the worst. As noted by Wu (1981: 445-482), 'development-without-dependence' within the framework of self-reliance is difficult to attain for a poor country like Eritrea.

However, Eritrea also has its own leverage negotiating capital to ensure ownership in the development process (Whitfield and Fraser 2010: 341–366). The negotiating capital might include- the ideological position, the strategies chosen and the tactical considerations employed by both the donor and the recipient on reconciling their differing viewpoints. Eritrea's negotiating capital includes- its geo-strategic location, natural resources, history of its ideology, and a cohesive and stable government. According to Biersteker (1980:229-264), countries that pursue self-reliant development pass through three discernible phases to ensure ultimate strong national ownership. (i) partial dissociation from dominant relationships; (ii) deliberate restructuring of these relationships to alter the basis of international relations; (iii) finally a partial re-association or reestablishment of relations. Although Eritrea's development path within these three typologies was not smooth; it has modelled its own development path mirroring its self-reliance and ownership. Eritrea's experience of self-reliance and national ownership and its uniquely selective partnership models can lend a great lesson to SSA countries (Hayman 2003, Habtom 2016: 49-66).

However, the sustenance and translation of the national self-reliance policy at the community level requires shared understanding, wider mass participation and the presence of vibrant civil society. While Eritrea has modelled its own form of mass participation based on local social movements, the country's increasingly tight restriction of civil society, circumventing of aid management and lack of political pluralism raises questions over the feasibility of its self-reliant principle.

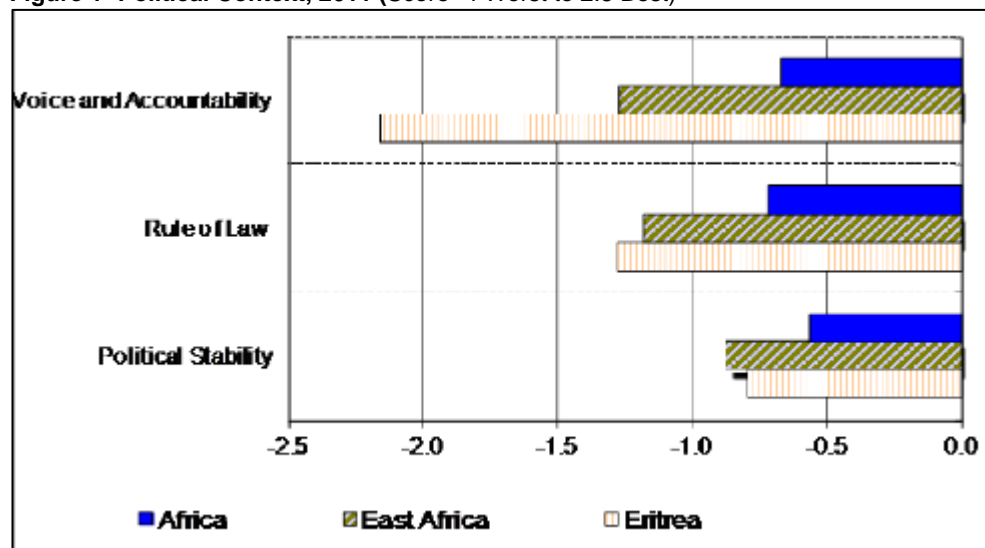
Against this backdrop, this study examines how cooperative partnerships for development assistance can be forged in a framework that emphasizes self-reliance.

## 1.2 Country context

### 1.2.1 Political and Institutional Situation

Eritrea got its de facto independence in 1991 after 30 years of armed struggle against Ethiopia and de jure independence was declared in 1993 after internationally recognized referendum. Official population is estimated at about 3.7 million. In recent years, the government of Eritrea has been the subject of much scrutiny in the areas of human rights and lack of democratic rights, mostly by western scholars and the mainstream media. For instance, in June 2016 a commission set up by the United Nations Human Rights Council reported that there was “widespread” human rights violations by the government; though not adopted due to methodological and substantive questions (Fikreyesus 2016). The national constitution ratified in 1997 hasn’t been implemented and hence there is no separation of powers between the judiciary, executive and legislative bodies. National election has not been conducted since 1993. In 2001 government arrested 15 higher government officials on grounds of ‘national security’, it closed the private press and arrested the chief editors of the private newspapers. On the other hand, Eritrea has met important milestones of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It has also ensured a fair distribution of these ‘rights’ across the country and the different social groups. However, issues of accountability and governance are still a concern. For instance, a 2014 AfDB report indicates that the country has low scores on ‘performance of bureaucracies and regulatory frameworks, which reflected institutional weaknesses’ (AfDB 2014:2).

**Figure 1- Political Context, 2011 (Score -4 Worst to 2.5 Best)**



Source: African Development Bank (2014)

Prior to the 1998-2000 border war with Ethiopia, Eritrea enjoyed relatively stable and promising political and economic progress (EC 2009:7, World Bank 2004, Muller 2008). There was a clear sign that the country was taking a transition to political pluralism with the drafting and subsequent ratification of the

Constitution in 1997 and planned Election for 1998. However, the 1998-2000 war proved to be a turning point in Eritrea's political development. It has derailed the promising start that once has earned the country as 'Africa's Hope' and plunged it into deeper crisis (Muller 2016:4, Bereketeab 2017: 68-82). Public and private production sectors were deprived of labour as the majority of the young people were mobilized to the defence forces, investment plunged and this has serious social and human consequences. As a result, more young people were forced to look for better conditions elsewhere (Bereketeab 2017: 68-82). The mandatory national service programme is legally supposed to be 18 months; but has been extended pending the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Eritrean land. It has also drawn strong condemnation from the international community.

There are a few 'civil society' associations, mostly farmer producer associations. The workers, women, student and youth associations are affiliated to the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), which is the only political entity in the country. Moreover, Eritrea is a member of three regional bodies- IGAD, COMESA and CEN-SAD.

### ***1.2.2 Economic***

Data related to major macroeconomic indicators are lacking for Eritrea. The IMF estimates the per capita income for 2014 at 590 USD (IMF 2014). As per the AfDB Eritrea's economy grew from 1.3% in 2013 to 2.1% in 2015 (AfDB 2015, cited in Anderson 2016). The world bank estimates Eritrea's gross domestic product in 2014 to be \$3.9bn.

Inflation rate in 2008 was 20%, in 2009 it was 33%, and in 2013 it dropped to 12.3% (AfDB 2014). Since 2011, there has been a mining boom in the country. Nevsun Resources P.L.C a Canadian Company and ENAMCO an Eritrean company formed a mining share company called Bisha mining. Since 2011, the company has contributed more than \$755m to the Eritrean economy (Anderson 2016). The mining industry is just taking-off, and out of the 17 foreign companies that are granted license to operate in Eritrea only 1 has reached production stage. Eritrea gets closer to \$200m from the mining industry annually; yet the oil import bill alone amounts to about \$300m/annum (Anderson 2016). Moreover, according to the Permanent Mission of Eritrea to the UN (2015), the Government of Eritrea's budget for education, health and food security alone in 2014 was \$328,894,753.00. However, thanks to the revenue from the mining sector the country has for the first time managed to record a surplus in its balance of trade (MoF 2016). About 70 % of the people depend on agriculture for their livelihood, however, agriculture's contribution to GDP is less than 20% (ibid).

The role of the private sector is limited to trade and the services sector. The main constraint for the private sector is lack of hard currency. The general government gross debt reaches about 125% of GDP (IMF 2016). In 2006 the servicing of the debt was about 38.1% of export earning; this is expected to have improved with the revenue from the mining industry since 2011. In 2006 the IMF and the WB did a debt sustainability study in Eritrea. Eritrea fulfilled the criteria for the debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. However, the debt relief was not implemented as Eritrea

didn't met certain policy criteria required by the IMF, including not embarking on the Staff Monitoring Programme (EC 2009).

### ***1.2.3 Demographic and Social situation***

The estimated population of Eritrea is 3.5 million (NID 2014-2018). Closer to 70% of the people live in the rural areas and is dependent on rain-fed subsistence agriculture. There are no substantial data on indicators related to poverty and the last time the country has done poverty assessment was in 2003. An estimated 66% of the population lives below the national poverty line (AfDB 2014). However, income inequality is low with a GNI coefficient of below 0.40 (EC 2009). The malnutrition levels of under-five children remain persistently high. The most recent Demographic and Health Survey was undertaken in 2010 (EDHS 2010). The 2010 EDHS shows that 50% of under five-year-old children were stunted, 15% wasted while 39% underweight. Eritrea is also one of the countries in the low category of the HDI; ranked 186 out of 188 countries (HDI 2014).

Low rainfall, drought and under-developed agriculture production system lend to low levels of food production. Even during good rainfall periods, the country produces only about 60-70% of its food total food requirement, while during poor years it produces only 25% of the need (EC 2009).

Eritrea's best post-independence achievement is the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals related to social services. The country has met all targets related to health (UNDP 2014) and health (AfDB 2014). The following table provides the key

**Table 1- Key indicators related to social services**

Indicators	Year	
	1991/1995	2015
Net Primary School Enrolment	30%	85%
Population 15-24 year olds with some education	59%	94%
Under five mortality per 1000 live births	151	47
Infant Mortality Per 1000 live births	92	32
Maternal Mortality ratio per 100,000 live births	1700	352
proportion of population without access to safe water	87%	33%
Life expectancy	46	63

*Source: Kidane (2016)*

### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

The previous section provided a bird's eye view of the socio-political and economic context in Eritrea. It is clear that the country exhibits a developing country with massive social, economic and political challenges. Despite this, Eritrea has boldly adopted self-reliance as its national development strategy. The principle emphasizes strong ownership and independent decision making principles. This principle is stated in the Macro-Policy Paper (MPP) and the Charter of the People's Front for Justice and Democracy (PFDJ).

Eritrea's strong emphasis on self-reliance and ownership has led to the adoption of policies that are at times in discord with donor requirements. Bundegaard (2004:66) has labelled the governments tense relationship with the aid agencies and its strong insistence on the principle of Self-reliance as the "nationalist narrative based on stubbornness". He emphasises that the government's tight control on NGOs and donor agencies; despite the poor conditions of the population, can be at best counterproductive and at worst disastrous.

While donors have successfully been able to push for policy changes in many developing countries; their influence on Eritrea's development policy is limited. In this regard, some of the bold decisions the government has taken to ensure strong national ownership include- the abolition of food aid; rejection of any third-party funding (only bilateral and multilateral is allowed); its rejection of the norms of the Breton Woods institutions including PRSP and SAP; driving out of international NGOs as intermediaries. In this regard, Hayman (2003) accentuates that there is a kind of reversal of 'conditionality' in Eritrea; where it is a take it or leave it situation for the donors and not for the government.

Despite the above mentioned divergent views, some donor<sup>1</sup> agencies still have cooperative partnerships in Eritrea. The main donors at the moment are the EC and the UN systems; although bilateral partnerships with China and individual EU countries have started to pick-up off late. Relationship with these donors is characterized as delicate, fragile and rough. Donors question the country's too centralized and tightly controlled approach towards partnerships. As a result, relations have soured with donors with some withdrawing aid altogether. This highlights the delicate balance on which aid partnerships are based, which in turn masks issues of power and control. Questions of governance, democratization and human right are on the agenda of the donors.

What the ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding the partnerships seem to show is that there are contested ideological positions, strategies and priorities. Within these contested contours of power and control, neither of the players is passive, it has its own negotiating capital. Hence, the main problem this research intends to address is to examine and unpack the ambiguities in coopera-

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<sup>1</sup> In line with the analytical framework that I have adopted the term donor here refers to institutions in the traditional aid system: OECD bilateral aid agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions, and UN systems. The term 'donors' refers collectively to these official aid agencies in Eritrea.

tive partnerships with the donors within the domestic policy that emphasizes self-reliance.

Only by situating the priorities of each actor within the trajectories of their divergent ideologies, strategies and priorities can we justifiably understand the possibility for realizing workable cooperative partnerships/relationships within the framework of the policy of self-reliance. As well noted by Whitfield and Fraser (2010) the compromises and trade-off along the continuum of historical developments and ideological differences are rarely discussed. My research attempts to dig the basis for Eritrea's policy preferences and the underlying incentives for negotiating these policy preferences with donors.

## **1.4 Objectives of the study**

This research cuts across many current challenges facing development cooperation. It has both practical and academic implications, merging with questions around development assistance principles, and self-reliance. In the Eritrean case, there is a gap on public policy debates on how best to reconcile the domestic/national policy of self-reliance and the need for external assistance. This paper tries to unpack the ambiguities between Eritrea's development strategy (self-reliance) on the one hand and international development assistance agenda on the other.

As alluded by Hayman (2003:1-8), the Eritrean experience might trigger some interesting questions on the viability of a new developing nation negotiating its own development path of self-reliance within the global aid agenda which is guided by a set of implicit and explicit protocols.

## **1.5 The Research Questions**

### **The main research questions will therefore be?**

How can cooperative partnerships be realized in a national development framework that emphasizes self-reliance?

### **Sub-Questions**

In order to uncover the larger problematic, the following sub-questions are posed.

- How are planning and decision making processes on development cooperation done?
- How is Eritrea modelling its self-reliance principle and how has it affected its position to external assistance and relations with external agencies?
- How is the interaction of self-reliance and development cooperation mirrored on the ground and how has it affected people's participation?

## **1.6 Hypothesis**

In order to better illuminate the above-mentioned research questions, I have developed the following two hypotheses: 1) H1-Eritrea has modelled its own development path mirroring its self-reliance and ownership principle amidst a global aid system which adheres to a set of explicit and implicit norms. In the process, Eritrea is passing through the tortuous contours of the three discerni-



ble phases of self-reliance (Biersteker 1980:229-264). After early periods of serious discord with the donor community leading to the ultimate eviction of international NGOs from the country, the government has a firm control on its development path, the 'Eritrean way' (Bundegaard 2004:66). On the other hand, the government has used its ideological and strategic position to leverage its negotiating capital in the era of delicate partnerships. This leads us to the second hypothesis: 2) H0: Eritrea's development policy of self-reliance is a façade used as instrument of control and disciplining society and hinders the effectiveness of cooperative partnerships, masks the need for broader domestic economic and socio-political reform by curbing community and civil society participation.

## 1.7 Methodology

The methodology employed follows from the conceptual framework and the research questions discussed above. The research questions discussed above are concerned with development policy, planning and contextual understandings of certain concepts. Hence, the overall method applied was essentially qualitative.

The qualitative approach was done through the application of two principal methods- key informant interviews and field visits to shed ethnographic observations. Within the ethnographic approach I have taken three separate case studies at the community level. My approach was, to a great deal, influenced with the application of what Moses (2005) calls 'Development Aid Ethnography'. Largely, this wasn't used as a method of data collection, rather as a lens through which I tried to understand (analytical lens) the discourse and understandings of the contested issues raised above. The pioneers of 'aid negotiation', Whitfield and Fraser (2010: 341-366) argued that the application of ethnography provides a 'thick description' of the process of constructing the divergent perspectives on 'aid effectiveness' between donors and recipients. Hence, they suggest, the study of aid ownership and the process of negotiation can best be studied through "extensive experience working on or researching these issues in the country or through ethnographic field research".

I have largely tried to look at both the understanding on Development assistance as seeing by both the government and the donor agency as well as the implication of this when translated into practice at community level.

Finally, I would like to state that I consider myself as a 'development professional' who has worked in development for 15 years. I have witnessed the negotiations, the policies and the ideological principles first hand. I'm a member of what Moses (2005) calls "the circuitry of the local development policy process" and that of development partners that includes policy makers, practitioner, professionals; and as an Eritrean, a beneficiary of 'development'. The data collection method I employed included, interview, document review, focus group and appreciative inquiry of the process. I also undertook a sort of a participant observation by exploring three projects to examine the research boundary at the micro-level.

In this regard, there will always be the dilemma of positionality and bias. The biggest dilemma is to have a subjective association with the process. In order to separate subjectivity from sound judgement I have continuously interacted

with people of different opinions and reflected back and forth with the academic literature. In this respect, the open discussions with people was important in uncovering how the official rhetoric on aid resonates in the everyday life of ordinary people (Wedeen 1999 in Auyero et al 2007:1-14).

### **1.7.1 Data collection**

#### **1.7.1.1 Key Informant interviews**

Key informant interviews were used as the main means to understand the interacting scenarios from both the government and the donor agency. I have conducted a total of 17 interviews with key informants that included policy makers (4), former NGO workers (2), EU staff (2), NGO staff (3), government staff working on projects (4) and UN (2).

#### **1.7.1.2 Case-Studies**

I visited three project sites to look at the interaction of the policy discourse and the practice at the community level. One project was in a village called Adi Keih, in highland Eritrea (18 Km to the south of the capital, Asmara), managed by an Irish NGO. The second was a project funded by the European Union in western Eritrea in a village called Alebu (about 270km west of the capital, Asmara). The third was a climate adaptation change project financed by the UNDP in North West Eritrea, a village called Habero (about 120km from the capital). The aim of this visit was to look at the social constructions and the ethnographic underpinnings of the principle of self-reliance and external assistance at the community level. I spoke with 21 households; 5 in Adi Keih, 8 in Habero and 8 in Alebu. The discussion with the households was done through a semi-structured discussion guide. A checklist of the issues discussed is provided in the Appendix-1.

## **1.8 Organization of the study**

This study is Organized into six chapters. Chapter one includes general introduction, the country context, the nature of the problem, the objective and research questions as well as the methodology applied. Chapter two presents the conceptual and analytical framework used. Chapter three provides the evolution of the Self-reliance policy in Eritrea along with development policies and how decisions with regard with aid are done. In chapter four I discuss the interaction between self-reliance and external assistance and they are understood and managed in the context of Eritrea. Chapter five addresses how self-reliance and its interaction with development assistance are translated in the ground at the community level. And finally, a conclusion is provided.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework

#### *2.1.1. Defining Self-Reliance as a development strategy*

Self-reliance as a philosophy of life first was used by Radolf Emerson as a virtue where individual trustworthy is emphasized. “Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string” (Emerson 1900). However, the concept of self-reliance still is as elusive as development is. The accomplished scholar in self-reliance Johan Galtung (1980:19-45) asserts that one of the advantages of self-reliance is in its open-endedness.

Self-reliance as understood within the context of development cooperation isn't the promotion of blinkered autarky or isolationism (Sayigh 2002: 69-88). Rather it is understood as a strategy of development that encourages own decision making and the regeneration of society to depend on itself to the extent possible (ibid). likewise, Preiswerk (1980:11) defines self-reliance as nothing more than to have a confidence in your ingenuity- “to be less dependent on international organizations, foreign governments or giant corporations when to trying to attain a better life”.

The origin of the concept of self-reliance is highly debatable. However, there is a claim that the concept of self-reliance dates back to Mao Zedong's 1945 era of *Tzu Li Keng Sheng*; meaning regeneration through once own capacity (Rist 2002: 124). However, as Galtung (Galtung 1980:19-45) accurately posited it is less than self-reliant to attribute any originality of ownership to any party be it the Chinese or other; because a social behaviour self-reliance has existed for as long as the human tribe has started to live into communities.

Self-reliance shouldn't be considered as merely an economic concept. Rather it portrays emphasis on people centred development. As Galtung (1993:77) puts it, to give priority to economics is country-centred but to give priority to basic needs is people centred. In this regard, Galtang argues self-reliance is located more in the field of psycho-politics than in the field of economics. The priority is to avoid inequality that perpetuates centre-periphery formation. The basic aim of self-reliance then becomes to get-out of unequal power relationships and be engaged in partnerships based on mutual respect.

According to Biersteker (1980:229-264) achieving self-reliance requires passing through three discernible phases: (i) first there is a need for partial disengagement from dominant relationships prevailing in the international system; (ii) the partial disengagement will lead to deliberate restructuring of these relationships to alter the basis of international relations; (iii) finally a partial re-association or reestablishment of relations with the developed countries takes place.

Countries passing through these phases essentially have to negotiate in each of the phases differently. The negotiation defines the extent to which effective

cooperative partnerships can be forged in a development policy framework of self-reliance.

Countries that have adopted self-reliance in specific periods include: North Vietnam, under the guidance of Ho Chi Minh, to fight the French and the Americans during WWII, Mohandas Gandhi also tried to promote it in India by preaching his countrymen to practice Jugaad (frugal innovation) but this was largely not very well organized (Sayigh 2002:69-88, Rist 2002:124-139). Although Cuba is also mentioned to have followed the strategy of self-reliance, it was more forced due to the US blockade and not auto centered or autonomous development as is also commonly called (Rist 2002:124-139).

## 2.2. Analytical Framework

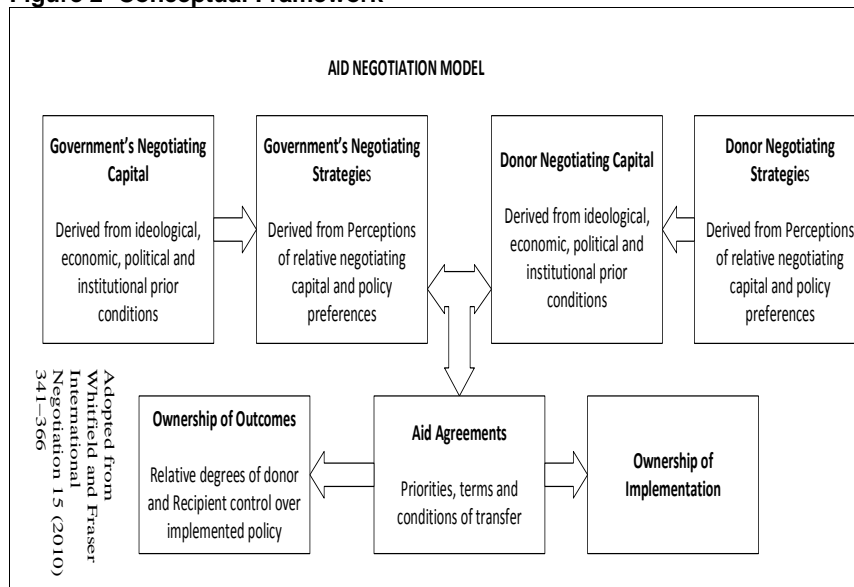
Aid negotiation has emerged as a new approach towards assessing ‘donor’ ‘recipient’ relations in the past few years, especially by two prominent scholars Whitfield and Fraser. Whitfield and Fraser (2010: 341–366) argue that negotiation postulates that relationships are shaped by circumstances under which each actor views the other and from the expectations that each actor have of each other. These expectations are framed by the perceived ability of each actor to achieve set goals. One of the steps in analysing ‘aid negotiation’ is to establish a clear understanding of the changing relationships of donor’s and ‘recipients along economic, political, ideological and institutional contexts. These contexts are called the structural conditions. This step along which ‘aid negotiation’ is analysed is congruent with the changing distinct phases of relationships that countries pursuing self-reliance adopt. In this regard Whitfield and Fraser (2009) highlight:

*“We prefer to conceptualise relations between “donors” and “recipients” of foreign aid as a negotiation for two reasons. First, aid-giving countries have more than simply altruistic motivations. Donors give aid for many purposes: diplomatic; commercial; humanitarian relief, and cultural (promoting language and values). Second, aid receiving countries are not passive recipients. Despite dependence, African governments almost always have a degree of choice over whether or not to accept aid from a particular source at a particular time.”*

An important question to raise is how countries negotiate along the structural conditions mentioned above. Although, the economic, political and institutional conditions are important; in this paper, they are subsumed to be as sub-sets of the ideological condition- in this case the self-reliance principle. The negotiating capital might be leveraged or weakened based on temporary manoeuvres within the contours of economic, political and institutional conditions but less likely with the ideological conditions. The manifestation of power and politics which is central to the framework more relevant in the ideological conditions. As noted by Whitfield and Fraser (2010: 341-366) a recipient country’s ideological proclivities are important in determining that country’s expression of clear vision and to be able to defend its policies within negotiations. It is difficult for donors to challenge “a recipient’s priorities that are constructed within a coherent framework, particularly one that draws strength from links to a wider international discourse that might contradict donor preferences” (ibid).

In this research the Whitfield and Fraser's approach of 'negotiating aid' will be used as an overarching framework (Whitfield and Fraser 2010: 341-366, Whitfield 2008). The analytical model employed in drawing this framework is presented in the following chart. The negotiating capital depicts the control that countries' have on negotiating relationships relative to their ideologies and strategies. The negotiating capital derives countries to shape their relationships through the promotion of their respective strategies and ideologies. Negotiating capital is built across time through a country's or its leaderships ideological, economic, social and institutional contexts. In turn, based on the negotiating capital countries develop their negotiating strategies which is derived from their policies and perceptions of relative negotiating capital. The extent that countries have ownership on this negotiating capital can be illustrated by the extent the country is able to influence the relationship towards its need.

**Figure 2- Conceptual Framework**



*Source- Adopted from Whitfield and Fraser (2010:341-366*

## **Chapter 3: Understanding Eritrea's Self-Reliant Development Strategy**

### **3.1. Self-reliance- Ideological and Historical Roots**

Self-reliance as an ideological and political position was nurtured during Eritrea's armed struggle from 1961-1991. During the armed struggle self-reliance was one of the watch-words, so prominent among the fighters and the population. But, why did the EPLF took self-reliance as its ideological maxim? And how did it carry this in the post-independence period? These are important questions as most of the divergent views and tensions that underpin present day relations with the international donors are rooted in this historical past.

The Eritrean revolution for liberation had very little if any external support. Firebrace and Holland (1985) indicate that unlike the Vietnamese and other revolutions of the 70s and 80s which received substantial support from the Soviet Union and China; the Eritrean cause was devoid of any major support. For much the struggle period the EPLF relied on the internal resources for military drills, battles and supplies. For instance, by the end of 1977 the EPLF had enough skilled workers who were able to sustain for about 80% of the needs of the liberation struggle. Much emphasis was given to nurturing the collective norms and resilience through adherence to principles of self-reliance; values that already existed in the Eritrean socio-cultural milieu. Increased production of agriculture through the establishment of people's cooperatives in the villages was also pursued. The EPLF's adoption of popular participation was transformative and pragmatic in bringing new social forms of organization at the community level (Connel:1993).

However, as an ideological and strategic principle self-reliance insinuated through different meanings across time to reflect the realities that the country and its leadership was going through. It started as a socialist ideology of revolution in the early-1970s with clear linkages to Maoist degree of mobilization and Albanian xenophobia Kaplan (2003: 46-53). Later on, it was adopted as a pragmatic approach of social transformation to deal with the international isolation that the revolution was going through in the late 1970s and up to the independence period. In the post-independence period, it was again constituted as an ideological standpoint to form a unified national identity that was so required to face a new development challenge. There are a lot of evidences that attest that self-reliance wasn't just a rhetoric or dogmatic ideological position. The principle was used to induce extensive social transformation in the society which had the potential to be divided along ethnic, religious and other factors. In this sense, the land reform, the establishment of village cooperatives in place of feudal structures, the establishment of social services, health services and agriculture plantations in areas that the EPLF controlled were some examples. An important point in the history of Eritrea, is the EPLF's success in instituting new administrative structures by dismantling the traditional feudal structures, which also ensured women's representation in village assemblies. This was especially glaring in areas which were predominantly Muslim communities. One of the top PFDJ leaderships has said "it was refined, redefined and honed

to reflect our reality over the period of our struggle and in the post-independence period. So, it reflects both a strategic choice and a mechanism of maintaining social justice' (Interview with Author). Hence, it wasn't just a matter of necessity, it was also an integral part of the process of building a movement impervious to internal divisions and as a means of ensuring internal control without being dependent on others (Hayman 2003:7).

A look into the 1977 national democratic programme (NDP-1977) of the EPLF suggests that it resonates with the alternative development models of the time, especially the dependency theories prominent among Latin American countries. Moreover, it has a lot of anti-imperialist contents; especially that of auto-centric development alternative coined by Marxists African scholars of the time (Amin 1979: 59-133).

Ideologically, the EPLF also underwent shifts and twists along the changes in the global political scene. In 1987, it stated in its national democratic programme that post-independence Eritrea would have a multi-party system and an economy where the private sector plays a leading role. While this was interpreted as a toning down of the front's Marxist-Leninist leanings (Hayman 2003:9) or lack of ideological coherence or ideological continuity (Pool 2001) by some scholars; for the leadership, it was a pragmatic approach to deal with circumstances and not related with ideological standpoints. One of PFDJ's leading authorities' remarks in an interview with the author 'we never saw ourselves copying any ideological positions from others. People can give it any name they want to give it, but we never have had any affiliation with any ideological position that we find in the literature. We have our own, and people can name it any'.

The above historical genesis of self-reliance and its ideological roots have important implication to the partnerships between the government and the donor community. The divergent ideological and strategic viewpoints discussed in detail in the later sections of this paper are the continuity of this historical trajectory. For instance, donors' insistence on individual civil rights as an important point of promoting governance don't resonate with the collective social organization that the EPLF has forged for years during the armed struggle period. Since the armed struggle the movement has insisted on non-alignment and autonomy of decision making independent of external forces. This development model has international relevance both in the past and now. Firebrace and Holland (1985) describe the model as a different dynamic and new development model which shows that a non-aligned stance regardless of geo-politics can also work.

### **3.2. Self-Reliance and the Role of the state in Eritrea**

Bagchi (2004: 1) says that there are two contested views on the role of the state: that which views the state as an authoritarian structure and the other which conceptualizes it as accountable for its actions to the vast majority of its citizens. Based on these two contestations, Bagchi situates the construction of the developmental state within the broader phenomenon of collectivity. Collectivity in the sense that modern nation states are the widest construction of the 'we circle'. In the process of constructing this 'we circle' Bagchi (2004:7) argues individual interests are ignored in the short term but in the long run it is the

willing cooperation of the individuals and their abjuring self-interests that strengthen the collectivity that is needed to harness the 'we' circle.

Post-independence Eritrea has embraced developmentalism as its core socio-economic ideology. The state's socio-political origin coupled with the liberation struggle's historically rural ontology makes it to be interventionist and penetrative; which is characteristic of any developmental state. In this sense, collective rights as opposed to individual rights are prioritized in Eritrea. Over the course of its history the present political leaders have nurtured the cultural values of the Eritrean people which cherish collectivism in its daily life. Rural Eritreans live in collective community where farm and other village life is collectively administered and individual rights come next. With a small population and sparse density collectivism is only natural and indispensable for Eritreans. Hence, at the centre of the developmental state's policy and the principle of self-reliance is the need to cherish collectivism.

In an attempt to promote collectivism and community mobilization, the PFDJ controls the social, political and administrative structures in the country. Decision making is highly centralized and at the grass-roots level, the various associations that exist are affiliated with the only leading political organization, the PFDJ. The state's tight control and centralist attitude is both structural and ideological. Structural in the sense that the state assumes full control to legitimate the promotion and sustenance of development (Castells 1992:55). Ideological because the ruling elite has consistently tried to establish an 'ideological hegemony', where all citizens contribute 'voluntarily' to the development of a 'hegemonic' state project (Mkandawire 2001:290).

The state's ideological hegemony entails that it has absolute authority for 'development projects' and it becomes itself the society's chief representative and defines societal goals by itself (Castells 1992: 57). This ideological hegemony of the state is often criticized. For instance, James Scott referring to Tanzanian leaderships attempt to enforce self-reliance through villagization calls it as an attempt to 'reorganize human communities in order to make them better objects of political control' (Scott 1998: 224). Likewise, Bundegaard (2004) notes that the Eritrean government's 'securitization of development' shows the state's interest to stifle and put the local population under its control. Bender (2008:843) also questions the state's interventionist political motives and asserts that the state's central tenet under these conditions is to monitor and discipline citizens under the pretext of development (Lal 2012: 212-234).

In the case of Eritrea, the application of biopolitical control and the aspiration of developmental state are relevant in defining the role of the state. Biopolitical control in the sense of national service programme where every citizen is required to serve 18 months' mandatory military and civilian service. This service can be extended whenever the state sees it fit. The large majority of the productive workforce is engaged in projects the state deems important. While in the military members of the national service are obliged to work in state managed projects and in collective community activities including communal farming, soil-water conservation activities and construction of roads. Biopolitical control isn't only disciplinary and oppressive; it also has the unequivocal benefit of promoting social welfare and expanding choices in a society which has



long been deprived of development and has to start from scratch (Muller 2008: 111-131).

Of course, one clear reality is that Eritrea's aspirations of self-reliance is curtailed by the lack of effective bureaucracy that is essential for achieving the goals of any developmental state. Yet, be it in the North or South, development is realized through a system which ensures the state's control over the majority of the population by a few political elites (Muller 2008: 111-131). Eritrean leadership is keen to replicate the economic success of East Asian countries, which largely adopted the 'authoritarian' type of developmental states where 'state emancipation' and 'societal pacification or submission' are prioritized over political reform (Bereketeab 2009:47). During the course of this research, high ranks of the leadership has consistently maintained that the liberal school of thought is out of context and rarely looks into the historical, cultural and political peculiarity that states go through. In the Eritrean case, the bigger picture is the dilemma that the country has been going through since 1998 where a comprehensive border war with Ethiopia has curtailed all progress of political reform the country has initiated in the mid-1990s. 'We need time. As much as economic development needs time and resource, so does political development' notes PFDJ's head of political affairs. Indeed, as Lo notes (2006:108) "Democratic institutions have to be groomed in the experience, tradition, and popular culture, which is primarily a matter of time and process" (cited in Bereketeab 2009:50).

### **3.3. Policy and Decision Making on Development Cooperation**

#### ***3.3.1. Development Policies***

Eritrea's Development policy is articulated in its Macro Policy Paper (2004) and the PFDJ's Charter (2004). The focus of the Macro-policy is on economic development (both rehabilitation and long-term) while the PFDJ's charter defines the front's role in post-independence Eritrea and political processes.

The macro-policy states that "the establishment of an efficient, export led private (market led) economy, with the Government playing a proactive role to stimulate the private economic activities." Given, Eritrea's position as a developmental state, it is rather ironic that the macro-policy appears to embrace a neo-liberal content. Presidential Advisor says "with the massive challenge that we have had, no one gave attention to the details. It was a period where there was a lot of change on the global order, with the end of the cold war. The time was such that neoliberal ideologies were resonating all over the world. When the macro-policy was developed, there were elements within our system who were influenced by capitalist and neoliberal attitudes". The macro-policy was a top-down strategy but encouraged a bottom-up approach in the execution of projects by encouraging local-participation, ownership and adopting decentralized implementation mechanism at the local level.

The 1994 PFDJ's 'National Charter', presents stark contrast to the macro policy. It profoundly echo's elements of a 'developmental state' with social justice as the main pillar of development. The national charter explicitly puts the

PFDJ (ruling political organization) as a driving force, around which community will be organized.

Participation of the population in planning is organized through Mass Social Movements. Although, donors are critical of the masses involvement at the macro-level on decisions of design, prioritization and civic involvement.

### ***3.3.2. Planning and Decision making***

The Ministry of National Development is the highest Planning Organ in the country. The management of aid is centralized. The Ministry of National Development holds centralized functions for development planning, and international cooperation coordination. The Ministry of Finance (MOF) is charged with the allocation of recurrent budget and the negotiations with legal agreements with donors; but its role is largely confined to the treasury. Aid is primarily required for capital expenditure (handled by MND) rather than recurrent expenditure (handled by MOF). In addition, MND is a focal point of high-level international cooperation issues along with the Ministry of foreign Affairs.

National Development Planning is rather weak at the moment. The department of planning within the Ministry lacks the capacity to spearhead national planning tasks. As a result, the National Strategic Plan (NSP) and the National Indicative Programmes are an amalgam of an outline of sector plans. However, because sector plans are developed through a bottom-up approach as per the decentralization policy of the government, public needs are progressively reflected in national plans.

An overarching aid-policy isn't available. Nor does a detailed expose of the government's quest for self-reliance. There are no defined national targets and the department of statistics hardly produces data that complement international indicators (e.g. GDP, and other indicators). As a result, data and information on Eritrea is based on projections and estimates. The 11<sup>th</sup> EDF states that it intends to cooperate with the government in the improvement of planning and statistics. The guideline that defines international cooperation provides the following laundry list of do's and don'ts with regard to international cooperation. This guide is provided to any organization engaged in development cooperation in Eritrea:

- ❑ Development Assistance shall originate from and be aligned with National Strategic Development Plan.
- ❑ MND reviews alignment of capital budget of sector Ministries and NSA with national priority/policy.
- ❑ MND and MoF jointly prioritize and determine project's that may be fully or partially funded by Gov't.
- ❑ Upon approval of the projects, MND will approach development partners for funding in case of shortfall
- ❑ Each Ministry develops a sector development with involvement of MND staff.

- ❑ Funds secured from Development partners shall be deposited in the accounts of the Implementing Ministries or NSAs.
- ❑ Implementation shall be done by local institutions.
- ❑ MND shall provide donors with regular reports to ensure that money is spent in the right programme-
- ❑ Where required, involvement of foreign/international NGOs shall be decided by the MND but shall be limited to capacity building and in areas of critical shortage of local capacity.

## **Chapter Four: The Interaction of Self-Reliance and External Assistance**

### **4.1. The making of ‘Partnerships’ within the Framework of Self-reliance**

In this section I will look at the interaction between self-reliance’s theoretical and policy underpinnings, expressed through the three discrete phases and its practice as manifested through the tight control and strong national ownership of aid. these phases are: a) partial dissociation, b) restructuring of relationships and c) Partial re-association. Eritrea’s development strategy has passed through similar stages, though the pattern isn’t exactly the same as a result of interruptions resulting from war with Ethiopia.

Eritrea’s self-reliance policy has been labelled by some as autarky and by others as ‘isolationist’. However, the country has managed to establish selective partnerships that it deems are congruent with its national programmes. Excessive emphasis on national ownership and resistance to donor demands of accountability and call for expat technical assistance in the areas of governance has led to straps of mistrust. This is reminiscent of Tanzania’s experience of self-reliance where foreign aid was perceived as an antithesis of independence. Hence, assistance that complement national programme were accepted, and the once that interfere with internal efforts were rejected (Hansson 2001:5). Dornbass and Tesfai note (1999:10) highlight “the Eritreans' determination not to let the war-born sense of self-sufficiency and independence get lost in the maze of international aid agreements, policy packages or their attached conditionality”.

#### ***4.1.1. Branding the New Nation- Conformity Vs Partial Dissociation***

The 1990s was the period when Eritrea was receiving accolades of appreciation for its self-reliance policy and its strong emphasis on ownership. Geraldine of the New Street journal (May 31, 1994) wrote “Africa’s Newest Nation: Little Eritrea Emerges as an Oasis of Civility”; Peter Washington of the Toronto Sun (December 28, 1998) wrote “What makes Eritrea-that coastal country on the Red Sea next to Ethiopia-the most unusual in Africa, if not the world, is that it doesn't like foreign aid”. However, there were also concerns over the country’s strict regulation and restriction of aid, NGOs and civil society. Some have already started to suggest that the government was using its self-reliance principle as a means of control and disciplining the public. Connel (2000) notes that the decisions and policies of the government has created the impression that it was hostile to international NGOs and hence to pluralism.

The above paragraph shows that the government was trying to forge its own way of doing things, which is corollary with what Galtung (1980) calls phase one or partial dissociation. This period under discussion covers the period between 1993-1997. The period between 1991-1993 is considered as a period of transition because, despite gaining independence in 1991, the country wasn’t a

recognized member of the UN until the referendum in 1993, hence not eligible for direct official assistance. Yohannes (1993:20-21) argues that the two-year transition period served as a period to think policy formulations and defining partnerships while at the same time being cautious from establishing dependency inducing relationships.

The 'new consensus' and 'new partnerships' echoed by international donor community in the early 1990s resonated well with the ethos the Eritrean leadership of self-reliance. The alternative for Eritrea was therefore spouting principles of self-reliance and independence from donor impositions. In this sense, the new aid paradigm created was favourable for Eritrea and its somehow maverick attitude towards aid. One of the UN staff says "I had an appreciation for the idea of Self Reliance. When Eritrea advertised the Self-reliance policy it really struck the chord with many people in the development agencies. It was contrasted with situations in other countries which has always asked 'give us as much as you can, this isn't enough, give us more...etc'. It was unique because after 30 years of fighting for liberation, to have a country that is totally devastated; and a new government coming and saying 'we will rely on our capacity' instead of asking for help was absolutely unique."

With closer to 70% of the people dependent on food aid the government in 1991 has very little resources to address the rife poverty and socio-economic difficulty of the people. Hence, it needed the support of the international community. The transitional macro-economic policies therefore resonated well with the neoliberal discourse which favours a self-regulating market led economy. Moreover, on the political area, the provisional government vowed that it would induce a multi-party system, elections and other features of western democracy. According to Makki (1996: 475-497) this signals "a break with the Popular Front's earlier strategy which had insisted that self-reliance would be the secret to economic success". However, the government still was very cautious on the way aid was managed. It wanted to have complete control of resources and dictate priorities.

As argued by Gatlung (1980) the dissociation process involves the rejection of foreign expertise and emphasis is placed on local methods of production and technology. In this regard, the biggest asset Eritrea had been the diaspora Eritreans. In 1992 the government invited all diaspora intellectuals to formulate the country's development strategy of which 'self-reliance' was put in the prime agenda (Tsfagiorgis 1993).

Some argue that, Eritrea's policy measures of the 1990s were only meant to placate the international community's call for greater pluralism. Eritrea's political advisor to the president counters this and states that the policy measures that were taken reflect the internal social cohesion of the government and the people. He says 'we were not only looking at ourselves. We have had huge aspirations for the region as a whole. We were looking to create strong regional alliances that is free of interventions, and which cooperates with each other.' It does seem that Eritrea has another leverage. Eritrea has strong leverage in terms of negotiating its policy as its independence was gained through struggle and there was strong sympathy from the international community for the 'mistakes' committed federating it with Ethiopia. A decision to only lead to the armed struggle.

Until 1995 relationship with the donor community went relatively smooth. Smith (2003: 335-348.) notes that the country was taken as a model to many other African countries in its approach; free of corruption and dependence syndrome. Hopes of self-sustained development could be achieved, even in a neo-colonial African context.

In 1995 the government introduced new regulations restricting religious institutions from engaging in relief work. A year later, Eritrea announced that it would cease to receive food aid, even if it meant still hasn't achieved food self-sufficiency. In 1996, international NGOs advised to streamline their programmes to health and education only. The following year (1997) new tax arrangements for expatriate staff were released; where they would be taxed 38% of their salaries (Connel 2000). Consequently, a number of NGOs left Eritrea as their activities don't correspond with neither of the two sectors.

By early 1998, international NGOs were requested to phase out their operations in Eritrea within the next six months. Although, the government thanked them for their contribution, the international NGOs were not happy. A former World Vision staff remarks "we had a project in the southern region. It was too early to terminate the project within six months. We still needed to do some community works to sustain the water-supply project. We requested a revision of the decision. It was not granted". During the study an employee in the Ministry of National Development (MND) asserted that the 1998 decision wasn't for all NGOs and there were a few who were allowed because their programmes were consistent with the national programme. One of these NGOs was Norwegian Church Aid (NCA). Smith (2003: 335-348) notes that NCA even "received special invitation to stay, although on a limited activity level. This special invitation was apparently due to the longstanding relationship between NCA and the Eritrean authorities".

The government's main reason for inducing such policies was to avoid dependency and increase local ownership. Although, the decision to curtail the activities of international NGOs was criticized; the world bank considered Eritrea's development policy as prudent and pragmatic (World Bank 2004). Remarkable progress was made during these periods as shown in the following table:

**Table 2- Performance in Key economic indicators until 1997**

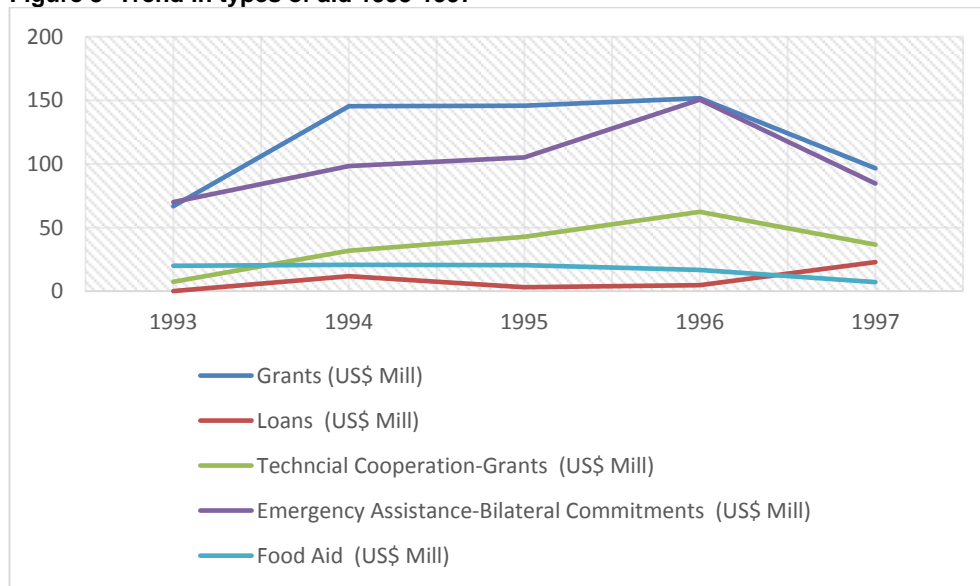
Indicator	Baseline	Change
Inflation	11% (1995)	1% (1997)
Fiscal deficit	22% of GDP (1995)	6% (1997)
Foreign exchange reserve	Less than one month of imports (1992)	Over five months of imports (1997)
Tax revenue	12. 4% of GDP (1992)	16% (1997)
Public expenditure for Education	1.4% of GDP (1992)	4% of GDP (1997)
Public expenditure for Health	0.5% (1992)	3% (1997)
GDP growth	Annual contraction of over 1% (1991-1993)	Grew 7% average

*Source- World Bank 2004*

The government's policies might have been inconsistently articulated, hence give the impression that it was backtracking its promises of democratic pluralism. However, decisions like this are needed at the early period of operationalizing self-reliance. The road to national self-reliance starts with intentional, partial and selective dissociation from unequal relationships (Biersteker 1980: 229-264). The government's request to streamline external assistance to health and education resonates with the assumed aim of selective engagement, where self-sufficiency would have achieved on a sectoral basis.

Along with this, there was a clear trend that the government was gradually abandoning grants and aid, in favour of loan. See table chart below:

**Figure 3- Trend in types of aid 1993-1997**



*Source: OECD statistical Compendium (cited in Hayman 2003:23)*

Hayman (2003:23) notes that the leadership has a huge leverage to avoid donor driven policy prescriptions because it neither had political difficulties nor financial debt to make any concessions. However, it was clear that a cautious policy concession and acceptance of some specific donor norms was inevitable. Eritrea was still in transition and it required the support and confidence of multilateral agencies not only to get financial injection but to garner political support to join the UN as a sovereign state. Hence, early promises of democratic governance, multiparty, elections and freedom resonated well with the neoliberal agenda. While, strong standpoint on matters of ownership and centralization demonstrate that the leadership's "volition on the basis of assessing the weaknesses of other development models and its conviction that this presented the best way forward" (Hayman 2013: 50). Understandably, countries the run the risk of 'isolation' in an attempt to own their development. China is believed to be the only country which has employed all three phases since 1949 (Biersteker 1980: 229-264). However, the country has faced severe economic hurdles due to international isolation between 1949-1978 (Tisdell 2013; Cheng 2004).

#### ***4.1.2. The post war humanitarian crisis- Policy Quandary***

This period covers the years 1998-2005. This period epitomizes how fragile partnerships become in the face of changing humanitarian needs and how negotiating capital isn't a static feature. At the same time, it shows, partnerships aren't only idealistic expressions of interest. They stretch beyond that and reflect hegemonic relationships between donors and recipients. Moreover, this period illustrates how donors can use conditionality to get in the way of partnerships to enhance 'democratic pluralism'. Hence, self-reliance is discussed in the margins of these competing power relationships of the donor and recipient. This period doesn't fall within neither of the phases of self-reliance outlined by Gatlung (1980). The process of Dissociation was supposed to lead to restructuring of international and domestic relationships; the second phase of self-reliance (Biersteker 1980: 229-264). In the domestic arena, the government had already started restructuring the domestic governance in 1996. In 1996 the government released a proclamation to establish regional administrations (PERA, 86/1996). Since the traditional governance structure was 'anarchistic' and 'deficient', this decentralized system would induce social transformation by devolving power to the regional administrations (Bereketeab 2012:1-29). It would play in the restructuring of the 'small autarkic village communities' which were propagating inequality on such matters as the rights of women and settlers (ibid). Strong state institutions were required to curb the erosion of social morals by a few privileged elite and power-abusers. Internationally, the phasing out of projects under international NGOs and the rejection of food aid epitomize the restructuring phase.

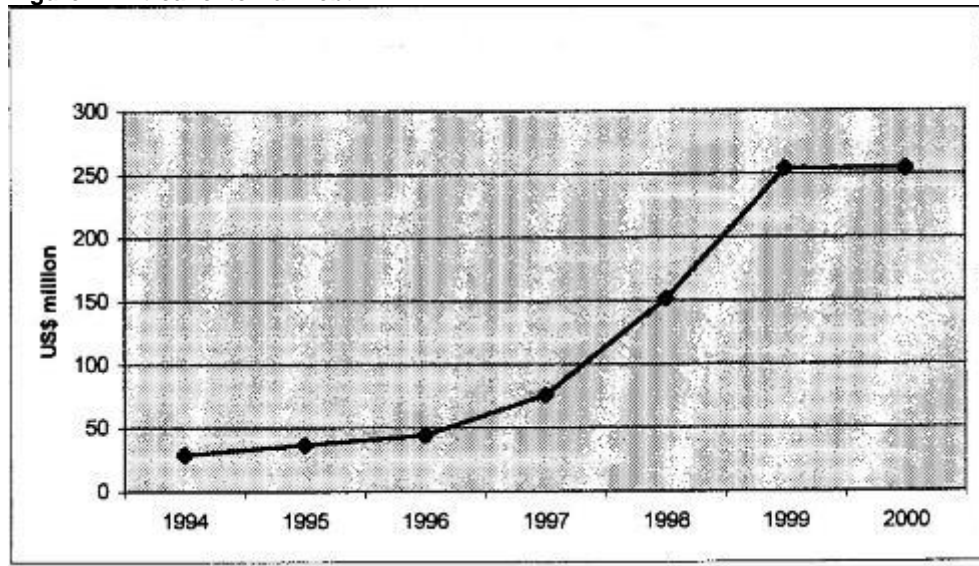
Yet, this was not going to be. In 1998 a border dispute erupted with Ethiopia and continued until 2000. It manifested in the reversal of the progress made; even worse. By 2000 closer to a third of the Eritrea population was displaced due to the war and the estimated economic damage according to the World Bank (2004) amounted to \$582 million, about 90 percent of Eritrea's GDP in 1999. Moreover, exports plummeted by over 60% and GDP growth slammed to negative 9%, external debt now reached to about 48% of GDP, inflation rose to 18% and foreign reserve fall to less than a month of import coverage. Nature wasn't helpful as well as by 2000 grain output fall by 75% compared to 1999 and livestock production by 30 percent in 2000.

Worst, Eritrea lost its main trade partner in Ethiopia. The world bank report summarizes:

*In 1997, port revenues amounted to 8 percent of GDP and 20 percent of the Government budget; with the disappearance of the Ethiopian transshipment trade, these revenues had fallen to the equivalent of 1 percent and 4 percent respectively. Ethiopia also accounted in 1997 for 60 percent of Eritrea's exports (mainly manufactures) and 20–30 percent of imports (mainly foodstuffs).*



**Figure 4-Eritrea- external Debt**

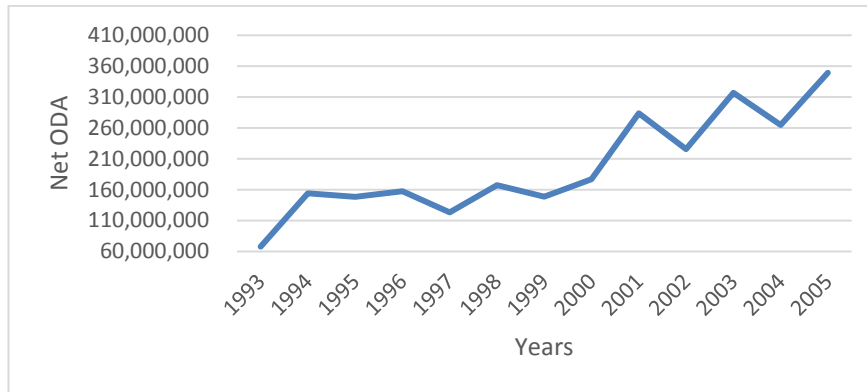


*Source: World Bank (cited in Hayman 2004:24)*

Eritrea needed a major support at this juncture. It has to revert back to the international donors which it had thankfully fare welled in 1998. In 1999 ERREC again invited international NGOs to comeback and assist. The response was rather subdued as some were disappointed when they were told to leave the previous year. Hence, they were reluctant to return unless they were guaranteed with a binding agreement to operate in a stable manner. Some, looked beyond the myriad of previous relations and into the immediate need of assistance for those affected.

The lack of confidence reflected in the immediate post-war period was finally eased and a number of NGOs started working in Eritrea. by 2015 there were 37 NGOs working in Eritrea, mostly in humanitarian intervention (Moehler and Leonard 2008:11). Moreover, the world bank mobilized reconstruction funds amounting to US \$233.of which US\$90 million was from IDA and US\$143.7 million from other donors. Eritrea also accessed the to the PRSP of the world Bank in 2003, having previously been a strong critic of the approach. The I-PRSP was never used as a guiding document though. Net ODA flows also exponentially grow after 1997 as shown in the following chart.

**Figure 5- Net ODA flows to Eritrea**



Source: OECD report (2016): 'development aid at a glance statistics by region

If anything, what this period has shown is that the partnerships were fragile and not essentially based on shared understanding. A former employee of NCA explains that at this time, it became clear that the government's self-reliance policy was a façade. All talks of national ownership, became irrelevant and 'partnership' became the catch word as if the NGOs weren't disgracefully kicked out. However, it was not largely a change in the government's policy or ideology. It was a humanitarian situation which required external assistance like anywhere else, remarks a key informant from the NAO. The principle was still the same; that once the humanitarian crisis is over, NGOs would be required to adhere to government regulations or leave the country. This portrays a changing leverage in negotiating capital, and in this particular situation- ideology and strategy didn't change but tactically concessions were made from the government. After the cessation of hostilities in 2000, it softened its approach towards NGOs, including an appeal to help the close to 1.2 million people displaced. Moreover, the government laxed its restrictions on food aid by allowing the distribution of basic necessities, though under close supervision. However, it still favoured cash for work programmes over food aid. For the transitional period, a number of people were engaged in soil and water conservation activities and in return get much needed cash as safety net. The idea was to move out of the relief-oriented dependence to dual purpose development oriented approach. Dual purpose, in the sense of rehabilitating the environment through soil-water conservation activities and return get some cash.

As set in the analytical framework, the development and the sustenance of local ownership involves negotiations relative to once negotiating capital. In this regard, conditionality was now used to negotiate relationships, an audacious attempt of using partnerships to promote what one sees as democratic development. Smith (2003: 335-348) notes "this is nothing but colonialism disguised in a moral form than territorial". This indeed is different to idealistic marriage of interests; it entails a power-struggle as no one remains passive in the process of negotiation. While the process of dissociation for better restructuring of relationships was arduous in Eritrea; the signs were that it was working.

#### ***4.1.3. Back to the process of dissociation and Restructuring Vs Isolation?***

The three typologies towards national self-reliance strategy do not necessarily follow in a strict pattern with each other, although they are discernible and

have temporal relationships. Either of the three phases can precede, succeed the other or take-place at the same time. The phases are constructed to show the essential road toward national self-reliance (Biersteker 1980: 229-264). For the sake of this paper, I prefer to present the two phases together. Restructuring, although temporal, caters throughout the process of dissociation and re-association. A glaring evidence from this period is that, the Eritrean government didn't go through effective restructuring process throughout the process. Incoherence in decisions, and the often-uncertain relationships drives donors to question the feasibility of the government's policies. As per Biersteker (1980: 229-264) the project of self-reliance must also involve conscious restructuring in relation to a) countries in the international system and b) domestically within the country itself. Eritrea didn't fare well in making conscious restructuring in relation to the international system. Domestically, the absence of comprehensive understanding of the principle of self-reliance and overarching development strategy make the dissociation process appear to be an attempt to avoid political pluralism.

This period could be characterized as the continuation of the process of Dissociation discussed in phase-one (Section xxx). It covers the period between 2005-2012. The measures taken after 2005 were consistent with the policy principles of the government, and in continuation of what it was already started in 1997. Theoretically, the government should go about the dissociation process rather slowly and through partial and selective partnership building. In the case of Eritrea, the dissociation process came as a 'sporadic measure' rather than through a well-planned process, which triggered much suspicion by the international community on the government's need to facilitate political pluralism. Especially this was done in the absence of strong national institutions and technologically equipped skill-force (Biersteker 1980: 229-264) to fill in the void left by the NGO sector, and when the decentralization process initiated in 1996 hadn't taken full effect on the ground.

The Dissociation started with terminating USAID's operations in Eritrea in 2004. Relations between the USA and Eritrea, are historically tense. In the 1950s the USA's geo-strategic interest favoured Ethiopia, hence, it [USA] played a pivotal role in stifling Eritrea's right for decolonization. Relations after independence improved with reciprocal bilateral relations through the USAID. After 1998 the relations took U-turn with the USA cancelling Eritrea's membership to African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in 2003.

In 2004 when the government cut USAID's programmes in Eritrea, it was a statement that it can travel any length to promote its understanding of self-reliance. Eritrea's Minister of National Development at that time remarks that the government was 'uncomfortable' with the operations of USAID and has decided to terminate cooperation with the organization (Weekly Mail 2005).

In 2005 the government released a new proclamation 'to determine the administration of NGOs' (Proclamation No.145/2005). This proclamation imposed strict control on the operations of NGOs. The proclamation outlined that all activities would be coordinated through the Ministry of Labour and Human welfare and stated "No international NGO may engage in Eritrea in relief and/or rehabilitation work except through the Ministry or other concerned government entity". The proclamation required all international NGOs to

prove that they have 2 million USD or equivalent technical capacity to continue working in Eritrea. The amount for local NGOs would be 1 million USD. Moreover, the proclamation indicated that all imports by international NGOs would be taxed. Operations cost for NGOs would be kept less than 10% with strict reporting and audit requirements, while local NGOs should demonstrate that a large part of their source of fund is mobilized from local source. The rationale was that local NGOs don't lose their identity and not become intermediaries of foreign donors. The contents of the proclamation illustrate that the issue was one of power and leverage and not one where NGOs are looked at as 'bridging gaps' in areas where the government has weaknesses. For instance, Article 7(3) of the proclamation warns that the permit of any NGO engaged in "political or economic sabotage or subversive activities against the state of Eritrea or Eritrean national interest" shall be revoked (Proclamation No.145/2005).

Speaking of the proclamation and the restrictions imposed government key informants allude that it was a matter of principle that NGOs that promote the self-reliance principle are welcome while those that obstruct it shall have little space to work. But, there was generally a suspicious look at NGOs and donor agencies. In the case of Eritrea, NGOs are viewed in the neo-Gramscian sense as "co-opted by hegemonic capitalist and political elites" that promote hegemonic interests and neoliberal values and provide a façade of opposition (Katz 2006: 332-347). This extends beyond the 'dissociation' principle advocated by Galtung (1980), where selective and partial dissociation is a dynamic process that involves pragmatic negotiation.

Consequently, by 2006 only 13 NGOs remained out of the 37 in 2005 (Moehler and Leonard 2008). At the same time, the government reversed its position on food aid and went for monetization of aid again. Government took unilateral decision and has sought to monetize all food aid at its disposal. The rationale for the government's decision to shift to cash for work programme was to 'prevent the distortion of local markets and to uproot the dependency syndrome through re-cultivation of work-ethic. However, the decision wasn't discussed with the 'partners', and it resulted in utter misunderstanding. Particularly, though, the United States, through its Embassy in Eritrea demanded that the government pay \$4.5 million for the food aid imported by Mercy Corps and Catholic Relief Services (both US NGOs) as part of its monetization policy.

However, at times the process of dissociation as a process of attaining self-reliance might have been used as a euphemism of isolation. International solidarity and external assistance if well negotiated can be essential to development within the framework of self-reliance (Welde-Giorgis 2014: 202). In 2011 the government decided to terminate all EU funded programmes in Eritrea, although it was resurrected after negotiations later in 2013. The decision saw the cancellation of closer €119 million under the 10<sup>th</sup> EDF, mainly for the development of the agriculture sector (Tefanews 2011). The rationale for cancellation was because the government intended to review its national development plan. Yet this wasn't the first time such cancellations were effected. Previously, the government has cancelled the 9<sup>th</sup> EDF which was geared towards the maintenance of Eritrea's road network. Key informant from the EC believes that policy and political dialogue with the government are bogged down for three reasons: (i) because the government fails to uphold its obligation under

the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA), which puts ‘governance’ and active civil society (NGO) participation at its centre, (ii) lack of pragmatism in separating ideology from political objectives and (iii) extreme suspicion amounting to paranoia of external actors that the sovereignty might be compromised. Eritrea’s former Ambassador to the European Union, Ambassador Welde-Giorgis<sup>2</sup> also notes that the rough tensions with the donor community is down to its ‘reluctance’ to address critical issues of governance and pluralism (Welde-Giorgis 2014: 227). A key informant from the NAO contradicts this and asserts, the CPA is an extension of the PRSP and Structural Adjustment Programme which Eritrea don’t accept, consistent with its self-reliance framework. Hence, although, the decision shows lack of thorough planning capacity, it can be taken as a bold move towards dissociation from a policy framework that isn’t based on equal partnerships.

The disassociation process and the road to self-reliance isn’t only about practicalities though. It is about power and control. There is a broader divergence in terms of understanding that these phased processes might not be able to capture. Aid is considered as a donor driven agenda, only relevant as a stop-gap and to complement national response programmes. Doornbos and Tesfai (1999) note that relationships between the Eritrean government and donors is complicated beyond the theoretical understandings. Donor’s normally propose a direct relief or conflict related interventions in the short-term, while Eritrean government look for the same issues through a long-term perspective. This cuts across sectors- from food security to issues of governance. The different views on role of NGOs as well revolve around the issue of invigorating local community organizations in the long-term. The leadership’s apathy for aid emanates from its position on looking aid in tandem with broader socio-political and economic development, regionally and globally. Hence, the presidential advisor’s remark ‘we don’t want to have a separate policy on aid or NGOs’ entails that relations are not shaped along the provision of aid rather on broader socio-political and economic context regionally and globally (Doornbos, 1999: 14). However, the ultimate effect of the self-reliant strategy and the much talked about ‘ownership’ must translate at the level of the community. Institutional capacity is weak with the latest CPIA on Eritrea reporting poor performance on governance and participation (AfDB 2014). The partial dissociation and restructuring undertaken as part of the self-reliant strategy need to fill this void if donor-assistance is to be embedded into the development scheme that the government outlines.

#### ***4.1.4. Partial re-association***

The phase under-consideration covers the post 2012 period. We have seen earlier that the development policies adopted by Eritrea benefited from the changes in the global aid scene and were in their own way deviant from the dominant donor-recipient relationships. Subsequent restructuring of relationships included the abolishing of food aid, the NGO proclamation, the letter to

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<sup>2</sup> Doctor Ambassador Andebrhan Welde-Giorgis has abandoned his post and joined the anti-government camp. He now is an activist and University professor in Brussels.

the UN systems that Eritrea intends to terminate all UNDAF assistance in favour of bilateral and multilateral assistance, the gradual moving away from grants to loan facilities, and the cancellation of a huge amount of financing from the European Union.

Along these policy options, Eritrea's position in the global scene were also affected by the political developments that the country has gone through over the years. This internal development can't be seen at the margins of the external world. Eritrea's relationship with the external world started to become soar after 2001 when an internal political cleavage among the leadership led to the suspicion that the country might be backtracking the democratic pluralism that it promised in its early 1990s period. Since 2001, 'human rights' and 'democratization' started to get in the way of development. Domestically, the government was criticized for 'securitizing' the need for 'domestic reform' (Bundegaard 2004). Hence, the road to self-reliance and the aid negotiations were equally affected by this changes in the global scene. Now that the 'obligation to care' has become an important characteristics of policy debates in the post-cold war period, the new nation of Eritrea has to negotiate its independent path to development.

Eritrea's emergence on the spotlight of human rights scrutiny in its recent history is partly shaped by the process of partial dissociation that it has taken between 2005-2012. The country was put under sanction since 2009 (UN Resolution 1907) and went through serious human rights scrutiny by the human rights council since 2013. Despite having solid arguments to stop both these resolutions<sup>3</sup>, Eritrea wouldn't get reliable international 'friends' to back its arguments. A key informant from the EC notes "every time, there is political negotiation in the international arena, Eritrea blames the international community for not forcing Ethiopia to evacuate from Eritrean territory. They know the world doesn't work like that. There isn't such thing as independent political path that Eritrea boasts about in international relations".

It became increasingly obvious that Eritrea needed a new kind of pragmatic and less ideological approach. Hence, since 2013 the processes of re-association started. This involves exploiting Eritrea's negotiating capital of natural resources (gold reserve) and using its geo-strategic advantage along the red sea. Eritrea's ownership of a long coastline along the red-sea means its geo-strategic importance is important, a leverage in its negotiating capital. The Red Sea has long been an arena for the world's superpowers to impose their ideological, economic, political and military interests. It shapes struggles, confrontations and manoeuvres in the international arena (Al-Yadoomi 1991). The Bab el-Mandeb Maritime Chokepoint, located adjacent to Eritrea's tip point, is the shortest maritime transport route between the east and the west. In 2013 alone closer to \$3.8 million bb/d crude and refined oil was transported to Europe,

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<sup>3</sup> In the first instance, the Somalia Eritrea Monitoring Group stated that it found no link of Eritrea helping Alshabab after the country was put under sanctions for three years. The sanction still isn't lifted. In the second instance, country specific mandate was preferred to the UN sponsored Universal Periodic Review, despite the country not agreeing to the objective merits of the panel of experts of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights.

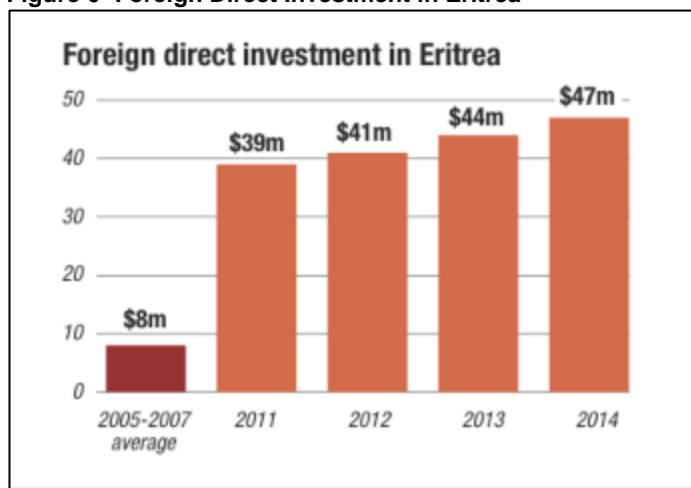
the USA and Asia through this check point (SUSRIS 2015). This makes Eritrea an important actor to negotiate with!

#### 4.1.4.1. The new Era- Re-association

The assumption for re-association is that through dissociation and restructuring countries pursuing self-reliance have better negotiating capital “to such an extent that they can afford to re-establish previous economic and political relationships” with the developed world without fearing the dependency syndrome (Biersteker 1980: 229-264). The re-association stage is only a process, and no country has reached this stage although Biersteker said China’s ‘opening-up’ since the 1980s can be considered a form of re-association process.

The re-association process is backed by improved foreign direct investment since 2011 (see figure below), largely driven by the Mining sector. As part of the re-association process the government has established its own mining company (ENAMCO) which spearheads investments in the mining industry. The re-association as alluded by Galtung (1980) caters across the board to trade deals and marketing. ENAMCO adopted Western Australian mining code as its law which allows it to get an automatic 10% share in every mining agreements (Anderson 2016), plus the option of buying additional shares (up to 40%). The idea is to own the mining sector without depending on foreign expertise and capital. ENAMCO rules also aim to ensure gradual ownership of management decisions by local expertise. To ensure this, diaspora Eritreans are encouraged to return and fill-in the present skill gaps. To set-up initial investment capital for ENAMCO the government resorted to borrowing. As alluded in the conceptual frame of this research, in the Eritrean context self-reliance means rejecting any exploitative misuse of resources by foreign actors and reducing dependence on the developed nations. That’s what practically was done through the early periods of re-association.

**Figure 6- Foreign Direct Investment in Eritrea**



*Source- Anderson (2016)*

My field visits to three project sites also complement the changes brought at the community level with regard to improvement in food availability at household level. While the absence of young labour force in the villages is glaringly visible, bumper harvest coupled with government driven cash for work programmes induced visible changes. Massive water harvest structures (dams, con-

struction) provided communities with opportunity to transform their production modes from rain-fed to irrigation driven. The government still says it is work in progress-but an indication that the country is returning back to the pre-1998 stage of engagement and re-association. An employee of the only international NGO in the country states that they observed significant in the rural areas compared to the past 3-4 years where communities were very vulnerable. An international NGO representative I interviewed said “despite the challenges of drought and El Nino in the Horn of Africa, I see from my several visits to the rural areas that the intervention in natural resources management through soil-water conservation activities provided communities stability and confidence compared to 3-4 years ago.

The re-association process involves engagement with global institutions and the focus on bilateral and multilateral partnerships. Now that Eritrea has advanced leverage of negotiating capital (mining industry, geo-strategic importance with changes in the gulf and middle east- conflict in Yemen being one) the reluctance on its self-reliance principle is low. Since 2013, relations with donors started to improve through a process of selective partnerships. The main development partners presently are the UNDP and the European Union. Looking at the partnerships with these organizations reveals that, the government is clearly getting less-ideological and dealing with practicalities after the difficult periods. Each of these partners operate through different frameworks. The EU through Cotonou Partnership Agreement and the UNDP through Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework (SPCF). In the 2017-2021 SPCF, it has been clearly indicated that the programme will be entirely managed by government institutions, and states “All procurements under this SPCF 2017 – 2021 will rest on the Government and its sole procurement agency, the Red Sea Cooperation”. A concession that the UNDP has made compared to its 2016-2020 SPCF where procurement was complicated by the UNDP’s own procedures. A key informant from the NAO notes that in the 2013-2016 SPCF the government was quite lenient on its ownership as it wanted to reinstate the partnerships after it was strained in 2011. On the other hand, the EU funding is governed by the CPA where Eritrea has little leverage. Key informant from the EU also reiterate that the EU also a compromised by agreeing to the government’s priorities as highlighted in its ‘poorly prepared’ National Indicative Plan, which isn’t sufficiently aligned with the CPA. Normally, under the CPA there is a need to accept instruments for accountability, human rights, governance and space for NGOs, civil society and international organizations.

Eritrea takes its foreign policy as an extension of its self-reliance principle. Political independence and rejection of meddling with internal affairs are emphasized. As a result, it sees universal instruments as an extension of neoliberal hegemony. Self-Reliance principle is criticized for lacking universality. Preiswerk (1980) notes “a basic obstacle to self-reliance is the belief that a specific type of social structure, value system, or political institution should be universal. This belief is based on arrogance, since it postulates the superiority of those who originally introduced a particular institution on a paternalistic view.” However, self-reliance and partnerships can’t evolve in a vacuum. Eritrea also need to be a player in the international scene and open-up to international systems. Hence, as part of the re-association process Eritrea has accepted several



universal instruments as part of the above-mentioned partnerships with the UN and the EC. Notable one is the country's acceptance of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), an instrument to check the human rights and governance performance of countries.

From the re-association process, it is clear that Eritrea's self-reliance principle is evolving on its own course. Since 2015, western governments seem to revise their position in the country with many missions from AfDB, Japan, Norway, Germany, Swiss, Finland, UK, Denmark, Sweden etc. These missions were facilitated within the SPCF of the UNDP where partnership priorities for both donors and the government of Eritrea are well negotiated and articulated (British Home Office Report, June 2016). Donor confidence on the government's effective utilization of finances also facilitates the re-association. One of the challenges of Tanzania when it adopted the Ujamaa Self-reliance as its inability to go through these processes which finally succumbed the country to a complete dependence on the industrial world (Schneider 2003). Moreover, in the case of Tanzania, there was lack of commitment from the leadership in espousing self-reliance and foreign aid. Dondarenko et al (2014:91-104) notes "neither foreign donors nor national bureaucracy is interested in the Tanzanian nation's progress toward the goal of achieving self-reliance, and the alliance of the former and the latter promotes satisfaction of their own interests more than of the Tanzanian people's". Eritrea's experience is to the contrary, where the leadership is committed to political and economic independence and can forgo any assistance that gets along the way of this principle.

## **Chapter-5: Self-Reliance In practice- Convergences and Divergences**

The components or phases of self-reliance shall finally lead to self-reliance at the community level. The essential question raised here is: how did the phases of self-reliance discussed above translate into the everyday life Eritreans? Are there any instruments or a system to sustain the re-association made at the ground?

Operationally, self-reliance focuses on four elements (Hope 1983:455-462): a) directly address basic human needs rather than through the trickle-down process, b) maximum utilization of local resources through education, c) participation of the masses in the development process and d) cooperation among developing countries for collective development. The focus of this section is on the third element. Participation of the masses on the ground and how they sustain the re-association processes followed at the national government level?

### **5.1. Self-Reliance and Development Assistance in the views of the People**

The ultimate aim of the self-reliance principle is to help people have confidence in their own capacity. Individually, it asserts the individuals follow their own instinct and not become artificial conformists (Emerson 1900). In the context of external assistance or aid the intent of self-reliance is to make communities self-sustaining and self-governing.

The people's understanding reflected the contours of experiences they have been through. For those who have seen the marauding drought of the 1980s self-reliance was equated to having contingency during times of adversity. For others, it was equated with self-sufficiency. However, most of my interviewees associate self-reliance with sustainability. One man from Alebu said "I think it means not to wait from others to solve your problem. For example, we were expected to run this project [drip irrigation scheme] ourselves. But, how can we possibly do that?" the majority of the respondents (14 out of 21 respondents) believe that, it is possible for Eritrea to be self-reliant, but not in the immediate time- only in the future. Except for three respondents, all think that the government should allow aid to flow to Eritrea, but through the cash-for-work programme. One respondent said "spoon-feeding spoils people. We should work for any assistance that comes to our community".

Self-reliance is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural background of the people. Many of the interviewees said that it's in their tradition embedded in their daily lives, proverbs, riddles and stories. On the other hand, this suggests that the concept of self-reliance as a component of the society's tradition rather than a state policy. No wonder many of them were not able to relate the concept beyond their households/villages/communities to the national level.

Evidently, there was a proclivity to restate the official ideology as people's exposure to the media also differs. There are people who argue that there is a false sense of 'self-reliance' at an individual level and that the official ideology

hasn't trickled down at the individual practically. However, given the country's colonial history, the biggest achievement the government has scored on aid is the complete disappearance of 'aid mentality' and 'dependence' from the people. At independence, more than 70% of the people was dependent on food aid. and in 25 years' time, this has changed and people want to earn it rather than be given.

However, to say that projects can be self-sustaining, replicating and governing is far from reality. Two of the projects that I have visited, provide an inciting example in this case. The first is a community drip irrigation project in Alebu. The project was financed by the European Union and supposedly to benefit 50 community members selected by the village development committee and the local administration (Vita 2010). Selection criteria involved poverty levels as assessed by the community's own definition of poverty, family size and social status (Widows get priority). This is a community where their livelihoods is dependent on livestock and a little of rain-fed agriculture. MoA staff I spoke to in the field estimate that more than 70% of the people to be poor, consistent with the World Bank's estimate of 67% poverty level in Eritrea. Vita, an Irish NGO was responsible for the management of the project, although funding was entirely from the European Commission. In 2012 when the government curtailed the operations of NGO's, the sustainability of the project was jeopardized. A pump was broken and the group of beneficiaries were not able to mobilize enough to repair it. Moreover, with no incentive to keep on organizing the beneficiaries the management body was helpless. The infrastructure was neglected, and left to ruin. The assumption in the beginning was that the irrigation association would take ownership and transform itself from dependency to self-reliance. The project would only assist in the initial periods with provision of the infrastructure and a 'start-up' capital in the form of inputs (pesticides, fertilizers and seed). However, the author has observed that the community's participation at all levels was very minimal to say that ownership would be achieved just because investment was made on the ground. Machine politics was at play where community was organized at the will of the government outside its own structures and within the municipal and NGO structures. These structures have promoted patronage and elite capture, for sustainability to work, the masses were rarely at the heart of the project's planning and designing. De Wit and Berner (2009:927-947) observe that bottom-up CBOs might have less outreach than they are thought of, especially when they are driven by 'donor, municipal and NGO interventions'. In this case, the community's appreciation of the project and their 'participation' was merely to ensure the implementation of a project that was conceived and designed by the actors that seek the 'efficient' and 'effective' utilization of the funds they mobilized. My discussion with former members of the farmers' association shows that, unless supported continually (financially, technically and governance wise) to think that they can become self-reliant is far-fetched.

The second project involves the sustainability of water supply hand-pumps. Eritrea, has registered commendable progress with regard to access to safe drinking water where the proportion of population without access to safe water has decreased from 87% in 1991 to 33% in 2015 (Kidane 2016). Currently, an estimated 50% of hand pumps installed since 1993 across Eritrea are not reported not functioning due to wear and tear (Vita 2015). In Adi-Keih a small

village 18km south of Asmara, water supply is critical. The hand-pump installed in the mid 2000 has been broken for three years. Community was unable to service it. The water supply scheme was installed by an international NGO neither the community nor local authorities were able to remember. The assumption like with the drip irrigation project was that the Water and Sanitation Committee (WATSAN) would ensure proper management, mobilize enough from user-fees. the root problem was the assumption the WATSAN as a capable cost recovery approach. The intersectional composition of the community was never considered. System was built around pay-per-use approach. Those who couldn't pay had other alternative- that of travelling long distance and fetching using their donkeys from the natural spring. Hence, the multi-dimensionality of their livelihoods and poverty wasn't taken into account.

The two examples illustrate that for self-reliance to work and lead to self-sustenance and self-replication there must be a balance between bottom-up and top down approaches. To attempt to push self-reliance in a society as diverse as most of Eritrean 'communities' (cultural, historical, economic and social) only perpetuates inequality by promoting elite capture, clientelism and brokerage (De Wit and Berner 2009:927-947). To ensure self-sustenance and self-governance a balance must be found between bottom-up and top-down approaches and open room for local innovations and alternatives (Hayman 2003:48). This is missing in Eritrea currently.

## **5.2. Alternative approach at the Household level**

The progress towards self-reliance has took a new turn since 2015. This is called the Minimum Household Package (MHP), which was also encompassed within UNDP's people centred approach to development. The idea for the Minimum Household Package is to directly target the household instead of looking at the community. This approach takes into account that 'community' isn't a unitary entity with 'identifiable location and administrative as well as socio-economic boundary' (Cleaver 1999: 597-612). The MHP is a modular approach towards food security. The aim is to ensure wider coverage and special equality by targeting households in rural villages. This starts with the construction of water harvesting structures where the community also contributes labour through cash-for-work programme, ensuring transitional safety net. Once water is secured, selected households are provided with a small start-up package that includes 1 cow, 25 chicks, 2 bee-hives, 20 trees (10 fruit trees, 5 for animal feed and 5 as a source of energy through regular pruning), one fuel efficient stove and a small plot of land (1,000-2,500 m<sup>2</sup> for vegetables, animal forage and if possible high-performing cereal or legume crops). The estimated cost of the MHP reaches about €4,000 per household against an income forecast for year one of €3000 (MoA 2014). Hence the payback period for such an integrated modular household intervention is below one year. Hence, the approach is that the community at large benefits from the construction of the dam, and households at the lower end of economic ladder are provided with a small package to empower them get out of poverty.

Within the above approach important concerns are still not addressed. My interview reveals that the people have very little if any in the design of the approach, the planning and even limited knowledge on how one becomes the

beneficiary of the MHP. However, it does seem to strike the chord when it comes to agreeing on modalities between the government and the donors. The UNDP has already embraced the approach in its SPCF 2017-2021 and intends to mold it into a model household intervention approach to reduce poverty.

### **5.3. Participation and Civil Society within the Notion of Self-Reliance**

There is an implied relationship between self-reliance and participation. Self-reliance as a development strategy represents the mobilization and participation of the masses in the development process. The notion of people-centred approach discussed above implies that the participation of the people is pivotal in shaping the development process.

In Eritrea, the development of policies and programmes at the national level ensures participation through the different hierarchies going up to the village level. The participation of the masses is organized around huge social movements that were created during the country's armed struggle. These Mass organizations include: Youth, Women, Workers, Constructors and Trade Unions. While party-politics hasn't developed yet, the PFDJ, remains the only political organization in the country. PFDJ has about 600,000 registered members, meaning closer to a fifth of Eritrea's total population. The Youth and Students Association and the Women's Association each have closer to 300,000. In theory, these mass organizations fill in the space between the state and the society. However, some key informants stated that because of their affiliation with the PFDJ they are not autonomous and can't effectively fill-in the space. However, these associations and the PFDJ still command extensive respect from a large majority of the Eritrean people that Styan (1994) described it "Eritrea's essential paradox, that of a cohesive political machine in charge of the continent's most impoverished economy" (cited in Hayman 2003:16).

There is one of a fundamental divergence between donor's and the government on the role of civil society and NGOs in participation. The donor perspective sees civil society as an interlocutor or a 'third space' that has a leading role in development. For instance, Mansuri, and Rao (2012:54) argue.

*The fundamental goal of local participatory development is to build an effective local civic sphere. The philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1991) argues that civil society is activated by a "public sphere" in which citizens, collectively and publicly, create a "third space" that engages with states and markets. Thus, civil society is symbiotically linked to the effective functioning of markets and governments. An effective civil society is the social arena in which citizens participate, voluntarily organizing to work toward their collective benefit. It is the space in which individuals turn into citizens.*

On the other hand, from the perspective of Eritrea, civil society isn't considered as a 'third space', rather a part of the community that must not be seen devoid of the development project of the state. The social movement organizations mentioned above have a strong rural mass base, with more than 50% of the members being in the rural areas. Projects are managed and the people organized through these social movements into campaign groups or producers' associations. The assumption is that; these campaign groups or producer asso-

ciations represent the collective interest of the mass. It is clear here, the focus on individual rights from the donor perspective isn't compatible with the collective right pursued by the state. The advisor to the president notes "donors think NGOs or the western society like civil society ensure participation and hence self-reliance. But these organizations are foreign funded and with foreign mind set, often not in touch with the context. They diminish societal and social structures and often try to work as substitutes for the government".

However, this position of the government isn't rigid. NGOs (civil society) which contribute to our self-reliance principle and which fulfil the requirements laid-down in the 2005 proclamation can still be considered, says a key informant from the NAO. However, perspectives on space for NGO and civil society seem arbitrary. For instance, after the 2012 curtailing of NGO activities in Eritrea, the Irish NGO, Vita was allowed to continue, albeit as a research partner to the Ministry of Agriculture. The programmes of this NGO were accepted as contributing to self-reliance and community empowerment. Vita's 'Social Impact Fund', is considered consistent with the government policy of self-reliance. Through the Social Impact Fund, Vita facilitates the sale of CO2 to voluntary carbon markets in Europe; through the development of emissions reducing projects as per the Kyoto and other climate change protocols. In this regard, Vita facilitates the dissemination of the fuel-wood efficient stove in rural Eritrea where closer to 30,000 households will benefit, and the repair of handpumps across the country on a scalable basis (Vita 2015). The fuel-efficient cook stoves reduce up to 70% of wood consumption. The idea is mitigating climate change while at the same time addressing social problems including poverty in rural areas. The funds collected through CO2 emissions reduction sales are re-invested in social-economic projects in Eritrea. This is considered as a horizontal trade partnership by the government and not as aid or assistance. Since this is consistent with the 2016-2030 SDGs and the COP21 Paris Declaration on climate change, it can receive good traction for a new innovative form of partnerships between Eritrea and the donor community. The model is being piloted in Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Generally, the discourse on civil society and NGOs is affected more by practices than coherent policies. Cooperation with a few bilateral NGOs has been opened recently, though not yet allowed to maintain separate offices in Eritrea. These bilateral NGOs are seen as a lynchpin for further bilateral country-to-country cooperation. These include- the FinAid and Norwegian Refugee Council. Partnership with these NGOs is part of self-reliant foreign policy, where partnerships are guided within the priorities of the nation. In this respect, these organizations are obliged to work through the popular associations discussed above, and not act as initiators or originators of any project.

Participation at the project level is where the notion of self-reliance appears as one EC official notes. Theoretically, projects should have relied on decentralized forms of local ownership and control with tremendous input from the people.

The strategy of self-reliance is in complete and façade without meaningful participation at the project level. The evidence from this research shows that projects are imposed from above without sufficient consultation with the local people. This takes away motivation and the essential effort that requires pro-

jects to self-sustenance- an important element of self-reliance. While this doesn't signal, that projects weren't consistent with the people's needs, it does show that the people don't assume full ownership. The case in Alebu project where a modern irrigation scheme was implemented for a community dependent on livestock rearing and agriculture is an illustration. The beneficiaries of this particular project didn't see the project as theirs, and still call it 'the EU project'. The water supply (hand pump) projects are also notable examples where communities were unable to sustain them despite their high motivation and the need to keep them functioning. As noted by Cleaver (1999: 597-612), community isn't always resourceful even-if committed to self-reliance. Development practitioners and development actors assume that communities have latent capacity to sustain projects as long as they are sufficiently mobilized. Cleaver suggests that there is little evidence to support this claim as there are several structural and resource constraints that impact community's capability.

## Chapter-7: Conclusion

This study has examined the interaction of cooperative partnerships within the framework of self-reliance in the context of Eritrea. Eritrea as a poor nation requires robust and stable partnerships with the donor community. Nonetheless, as a 'developmental state', its strategy of self-reliance mirrors policy measures that are often in discord with the norms of international aid system. Countries that pursue self-reliance principle theoretically pass through discernible and temporal phases (Biersteker 1980:229-264, Galtung 1980). Eritrea's has passed through similar though not exactly congruent phases in its endeavour to have an independent development path, a principle at the centre of self-reliance. These include the early stage of policy formulation that reflect the country's historical legacy (1991-1993), which isn't considered within the typology suggested by Biersteker and Galtung as Eritrea wasn't a sovereign member state of the UN and hence not eligible for ODA funding.

The first phase of Eritrea's march towards self-reliance was the period between 1993-1997, which I called a 'conformity Vs Partial dissociation'. This was a period where there a balance between pleasing the international donor community by conforming to some of its global norms and strongly arguing for absolute national ownership. On the one hand, the government subscribe to the donor's "negotiating card"- that of embracing the neoliberal packages in its policies including promises for multiparty politics, market-led economy, vibrant civil society and elections. As a result, Eritrea enjoyed a sober relationship with donors at this time. Additional 'negotiating cards' at play were (i) the humanitarian card, where over 70% of the population was dependent on food aid after half a century of war, drought and neglect, (iii) the historical card where there was a lot of sympathy for the neglect of the international community when the people was subjected to all kinds of humiliation for half a century, and iv) the 'new model' card, where a liberation front coming out of half a century of armed struggle came-up with confident policies stressing 'national ownership', which also resonated with the changes in the international aid system in the early 1990s with the fall of the Soviet Union. Notwithstanding conformity, the government was still resistant to interventions on internal affairs. While donor norms (through PRSP, SAP, CPA) have influenced the domestic development policies of many SSA countries, they have very little influence on Eritrea's policies. stressed for strong ownership expressed through its refusal of food aid in 1996 and ultimately thanking NGOs that it was time to transfer from humanitarian assistance to development assistance. As restructuring involves the re-shaping of relationships domestically and internationally; on the domestic arena, the government proclaimed decentralization at the Zoba (provincial) level while internationally it announced that development assistance would focus only in areas that the government wants, majority education and health. Along with this some regulations were put-forth that restricted the continued presence of international organizations. Hence, when NGOs were thanked for good in 1997, they left the country unhappy.

However, the outbreak of the 1998 war with Ethiopia saw a complete shift to the pre-1997 situation. Government appealed for international assistance to address the humanitarian crisis. The war's effect was devastating including the displacement of a third of the country's population (2002) and the loss of mul-



ti-million worth on property, agriculture and livestock. That international NGOs left the country un-happy in 1997 means, they return back with pre-conditions. They demanded guarantee from the government on span of their programmes, spaces of functions and softening of restrictions. In return, the government softened some of its policies including acceptance of food-aid and negative rhetoric on neoliberal agenda of NGOs. This stage confirms that the relationships were delicate and subject to shifts in the negotiating capital of either the donor or the recipient. This period of policy quandary by the government stayed until 2005, when the government again went back to its path of partial dissociation and restructuring.

The second phase refers to the continuation of dissociation and restructuring (2005-2012). Having evicted USAID in 2004, the government issued the 2005 NGO proclamation which seriously curtailed the presence of international NGOs in Eritrea. it reversed its policy on food aid and declared return to monetization policy. In 2011 it wrote a letter to both the UN resident humanitarian representative (UNDP) that Eritrea has decided to stop all UNDAFF agreements in an attempt to avoid dependency. The same year it sent a letter to the EC stating that Eritrea decided to terminate the 10<sup>th</sup> EDF because it was in the process of developing its national development strategy. The decline in the popularity of the PFDJ both internationally and to a certain extent domestically promoted questions of democratic pluralism. Donor's take the impression that the government was now back-tracking the promised political reform and pluralism of the 1990s. In 2001 the government had already jailed former officers (including Ministers) for 'endangering the national security of the country' during the war with Ethiopia. The few donors that remained questioned the institutional capacity of government organs to deliver and associated accountability issues. Government policies were quested as merely 'hegemonic' and an attempt to clamp down opinions, suppress rights and increasingly authoritarian. The seriousness of 'security' concerns of the government was put to the sidelines. A UN key informant states "we didn't see any concrete plan on political development, hence naturally, the government was subjected to human rights scrutiny. Ideology as a negotiating card was pulled at this stage. Eritrea's 'develemental state' approach means space for civil society and individual liberties were sacrificed in favour of collectivism. Hence, the process of dissociation wasn't smooth and accompanied with conscious restructuring of its cooperative partnerships with the international community and the absence of an overarching policy agenda on the policy of self-reliance itself.

The third phase saw the 'strategic' and 'economic' cards pulled as forms of negotiating capital spearheading the 're-association' process. It was increasingly becoming clear that Eritrea needed to open up and soften some of its policies. The donors pulled human rights as their negotiating capital. Hence, partnerships were shaped by donor's demand for improved human rights performance by subscribing to international instruments and the government showing the country's resilience in the chaotic horn of Africa.

This period covers the post 2012 period where Eritrea opened up with the discovery of natural resources foreign direct investment improved. Partnership agreements with the EC and the UNDP in 2016 crystalized the road to re-association, though a long way to go. Not only did the government negotiate it in its own terms, but ensured that it was directed according to its programmes

and priorities. The assumption for re-association is that through dissociation and restructuring countries pursuing self-reliance now have better negotiating capital “to such an extent that they can afford to re-establish previous economic and political relationships” with the developed world without fearing the dependency syndrome (Biersteker 1980: 229-264). However, since, the re-association stage is only a process, and no country has reached this stage although Biersteker said China’s ‘opening-up’ since the 1980s can be considered a form of re-association process. Re-association is more of a long-term and futuristic process that builds on the effective process of dissociation and restructuring.

The main thrust of self-reliant development strategy is to make communities self-sustaining and self-governing. Findings from the field to three projects revealed that self-sustenance and self-governance seem far from been achieved in the absence of external assistance. Projects which were initially financed by donors have failed once donor funding was withdrawing. Issues of community participation and unrealistic assessment of community capacity are the leading reasons for the failures. The two examples illustrate that for self-reliance to work and lead to self-sustenance and self-replication there must be a balance between bottom-up and top down approaches. To attempt to push self-reliance in a society as diverse as most of Eritrean ‘communities’ (cultural, historical, economic and social) only perpetuates inequality by promoting elite capture, clientelism and brokerage (De Wit and Berner 2009:927-947). To ensure self-sustenance and self-governance a balance must be found between bottom-up and top-down approaches and open room for local innovations and alternatives (Hayman 2003:48). The evidence from this research shows that projects are imposed from above without sufficient consultation with the local people. This takes away motivation and the essential effort that requires projects to self-sustenance- an important element of self-reliance. While this doesn’t signal, that projects weren’t consistent with the people’s needs, it does show that the people don’t assume full ownership.

Finally, the sustenance and translation of the national self-reliance policy at the community level requires shared understanding, wider mass participation and the presence of civil society. While Eritrea has modelled its own form of mass participation based on local social movements, the country’s increasingly tight restriction of civil society, circumventing of aid management and lack of political pluralism raises questions over the feasibility of its self-reliant principle.

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# List of Appendices

## Appendix 1- Discussion Checklist with Households

### (Translated from Tigrigna-local language)

My Name is Mehretab Medhanie. I am studying Social Policy for Development in the Netherlands. As part of my studies I am doing research on the self-reliance principle of Eritrea and its consistency with external assistance. Part of my research involves discussions with the people and beneficiaries of development projects in Eritrea. The information that you give me will be confidential and will not be used for any other purpose outside this research. I thank you for your Cooperation!

1. Name (optional):

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2. Village:

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3. Main occupation:

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4. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

6. What is your understanding of self-reliance?
7. Is self-reliance possible for Eritrea?
8. Do you believe the Eritrean government has to accept aid? Why?
9. What does foreign aid mean to you? And your community?
10. Can foreign aid facilitate self-reliance in Eritrea?
11. Do you think your community can stand by itself without aid? How?
12. Who decided on development programmes in your community?
13. How was your participation in the project?
14. When was, the project initiated? Who decided? How was the community represented?
15. Do you think that the community can sustain the project? How?