

Resilience and Progress: Eritrea's Path To Development Amid Adversity



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Eritrea's journey over the past three decades offers a remarkable story of resilience, progress, and determination in the face of persistent, at times extraordinary, challenges. As a nation emerging from a prolonged, arduous – and largely lonely – liberation struggle, it has faced formidable obstacles, including regional instability, external aggression, and various sanctions and coercive measures. Nevertheless, Eritrea has managed to chart a unique developmental path and register progress, characterized by its commitment to social justice, self-reliance, and unity.

Meaningful developmental strides

Since its independence in 1991, Eritrea has made notable strides in several key areas. In healthcare, the country has made remarkable progress in reducing maternal and child mortality rates, combating a range of diseases, and significantly improving life expectancy. Education, too, has seen substantial progress, with improvements in enrolments and literacy. Notably, free schooling is provided at all levels, and innovative policies, such as the mother language teaching program, help to enhance inclusivity and cultural preservation. Infrastructure development has been another area of focus. Much work has gone into developing roads, dams, and telecommunications, which have helped connect communities and lay the groundwork for trade and economic

activities. Led by the Ministry of Agriculture, various agricultural initiatives, including water and soil conservation measures, reforestation programs, and innovative irrigation or farming techniques, have contributed to promoting food and nutrition security and supporting national efforts for environmental sustainability. Meanwhile, Eritrea's growing focus on renewable energy projects, particularly solar and wind power, underlines its commitment to sustainable development.

These advancements are noteworthy in their own right. However, the broader context in which they have been achieved makes them all the more remarkable.

Confronting adversity and challenges



Eritrea has faced myriad challenges. Despite contributing among the smallest shares to global greenhouse gas emissions, it is on the frontlines of the global climate crisis. As well, with Eritrea situated within the Horn of Africa, it has been forced to confront the spillover effects of regional conflict and turmoil. In various ways, these have disrupted national development efforts and posed significant threats to peace and stability across the region.

Of course, among the main challenges faced by Eritrea has been the protracted war of aggression and occupation, which sought to annex large parts of Eritrean territory and effect “regime change”. This conflict, supported by billions of dollars in Western aid to Ethiopia, represented a flagrant violation of international law and Eritrea's sovereignty. Furthermore, Eritrea has endured years of crippling sanctions and economic coercion. These measures, orchestrated by Western powers, have blocked Eritrea's access to critical resources, technologies, and

financial systems. Restrictions on importing essential medical and agricultural equipment, disruptions in remittance flows, and a relentless media campaign have compounded the nation's challenges.

In the face of this extraordinary adversity, the fact that Eritrea has been able to move forward, without getting completely derailed from its pursuit of national development and nation-building endeavors, is somewhat audacious. It represents a powerful, resounding testament to the indomitable spirit and indefatigable resilience of Eritrea's people and serves as a deep reservoir of strength and profound inspiration for what is possible in the future.

The pillars of development and nation-building

Several core principles underpin Eritrea's development and nation building strategy. One is social justice and equality. Eritrea has prioritized policies and programs to reduce inequality and uplift marginalized groups. For example, the mother language teaching policy ensures inclusive education and cultural preservation, particularly for children in remote or disadvantaged areas. The Minimum Integrated Household Agricultural Package also provides rural households – often led by women – with livestock, seeds, and modern farming inputs, helping to promote food and nutrition security and support poverty reduction.

Other initiatives demonstrating Eritrea's commitment to social justice and equality include free healthcare and education, adult literacy programs, micro-credit and loan schemes, and the abolishment of harmful traditional practices. Together, these efforts not only address historical disparities but also help foster national unity and cohesion in Eritrea's diverse, multiethnic society.

Another pillar of Eritrea's development and nation-building strategy is self-reliance. While the country welcomes external cooperation, it does so selectively, ensuring that support aligns with domestic priorities and strengthens local capacity rather than fostering dependency. This philosophy is informed by the nation's independence struggle, during which Eritreans largely relied on their own resources and ingenuity.

Moreover, the country's stance on aid reflects a broader commitment to independence and sovereignty. It rejects paternalistic conditions and external prescriptions, emphasizing the importance of locally grounded solutions, which helps ensure sustainability and long-term success. Notably, this approach has helped Eritrea avoid the crippling dependency that has hampered progress in many other parts of Africa.



Valuable insights

Eritrea's story offers important lessons for Africa and the Global South. It underscores the value of indigenous agency, resilience, and context-specific solutions in overcoming challenges. The nation's focus on equality, unity, and self-reliance stands as a powerful counterpoint to externally driven models of development.

Another important point is how Eritrea's experiences highlight the hypocrisy and injustices of the global order, where might makes right, the large impose themselves on the small, and the wealthy who bear much of the responsibility for economic inequities fail to honor their obligations to support those most affected. Eritrea's resilience and perseverance in the face of persistent and intense adversity serves as both a critique of these inequities and a testament to the strength of collective will and determination.

The road ahead is long, and demands continued hard work

Looking ahead, Eritrea's journey is far from over. The road ahead is long, fraught with largely external challenges, and demands continued hard work, commitment,

and solidarity. Yet, the nation's achievements thus far offer great hope and inspiration for Eritrea and all striving to build a fairer, more equitable world. By prioritizing social justice, self-reliance, and unity, Eritrea demonstrates that progress is possible even in the face of extraordinary adversity

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January 25, 2025