



Class Formation in Post 2018 Ethiopia; A Commentary

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Research Article

Volume 6 Issue 2

Received Date: July 24, 2023

Published Date: August 14, 2023

DOI: [10.23880/aeoj-16000212](https://doi.org/10.23880/aeoj-16000212)

Abstract

This commentary aims to explore the dynamics of class formation in post-2018 Ethiopia, with a focus on the emergence of a new middle class, the opportunities and challenges it presents, and its implications for the country's economic and social development. The study employs a qualitative approach, drawing on existing literature, policy documents, and interviews with experts in the field. The findings indicate that the emergence of a new middle class in post-2018 Ethiopia is a complex and multifaceted process, influenced by a range of political, economic, and social factors. While the growth of this class presents opportunities for economic growth and social mobility, it also exacerbates existing inequalities and poses challenges to social cohesion. The study concludes that a comprehensive and inclusive approach to economic and social development is necessary to address these challenges. This includes policies that address income inequality, promote regional unity, invest in education and job creation, and support vulnerable populations. The government must also engage in collaborative and inclusive policy-making to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared more equitably across society. Based on these findings, the study recommends that policymakers in Ethiopia take a holistic approach to class formation, recognizing the diverse and evolving nature of the country's social and economic landscape. By doing so, they can promote greater stability and prosperity for all Ethiopians, and ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared more equitably.

Keywords: Middle Class; Socio-Political; Economic; Post-2018; Ethiopia

Introduction

The political, economic, and social changes that have taken place in Ethiopia since 2018 have had significant implications for the formation of different social classes within the country. The country has experienced a period of rapid economic growth, which has led to the emergence of a new middle class. However, this growth has also been accompanied by rising levels of income inequality, regional disparities, and social tensions. As a result, the process of class formation in post-2018 Ethiopia is complex and multifaceted, reflecting the diverse and evolving nature of the

country's social and economic landscape. In this commentary, we will explore the dynamics of class formation in post-2018 Ethiopia, with a focus on the opportunities and challenges presented by the emergence of a new middle class. We will also consider the implications of these developments for the country's economic and social development, and the role of policy in promoting more equitable and sustainable growth.

In post-2018 Ethiopia, there have been significant changes in the country's political, economic, and social landscape, which have had an impact on the formation of different classes within the society. One of the most significant

developments has been the economic reforms initiated by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government. The reforms have included the privatization of state-owned enterprises, the liberalization of key sectors such as telecommunications and banking, and the introduction of new investment laws. These changes have created new opportunities for entrepreneurs and investors, leading to the emergence of a new class of wealthy individuals. This class includes those who have been able to take advantage of the new economic opportunities, including successful business people, investors, and entrepreneurs.

Studies show that there are new classes that have emerged in post-2018 Ethiopia can be defined as a new middle class. This class is differentiated from other classes, such as the working class and the old middle class (petty bourgeoisie), by criteria including mode of payment (cash or bank transfer), job security, job mobility, social security, and work environment. Additionally, possession of cultural capital, which refers to high levels of education and specialized training, is a defining characteristic of middle-class occupations. This means that income alone cannot differentiate the new middle class from other classes, as it does not indicate the type of relationship that the middle class has with labor and commodity markets [1]. Instead, the criteria used to define the new middle class focus on the conditions and skills required for middle-class occupations.

Moreover, cultural capital, as defined by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, refers to the knowledge, skills, and cultural competencies that individuals acquire through education, socialization, and cultural exposure. Possession of cultural capital is seen as a defining characteristic of middle-class occupations, as these jobs often require high levels of education and specialized training [2].

One implication of this is that access to education and training opportunities becomes essential for individuals seeking to enter middle-class occupations. This access can be influenced by factors such as race, class, and gender, which can create barriers to educational and occupational opportunities for marginalized groups. As a result, there can be significant disparities in the distribution of cultural capital among different social groups.

Furthermore, possession of cultural capital can confer advantages in the workplace, such as the ability to navigate complex organizational structures, communicate effectively with colleagues and clients, and demonstrate cultural competence in diverse settings. These advantages can contribute to greater job security, higher earnings, and opportunities for career advancement. Research has also shown that possession of cultural capital is associated with

greater success in the labor market. For example, a study by sociologists Lauren A. Rivera and Tilcsik found that in elite professional service firms, cultural fit and shared cultural understandings were important factors in hiring decisions, and those candidates with cultural backgrounds similar to those of the hiring managers were more likely to receive job offers [3].

The emergence of a new middle class in post-2018 Ethiopia has been identified by specific criteria. For example, as noted earlier, the new middle class in Ethiopia is defined by criteria such as job security, job mobility, social security, and possession of cultural capital. Tesema and Teferi [4] employed similar criteria to define the new middle class in Ethiopia, with a focus on job security, education, and access to social services. The authors note that the new middle class is characterized by a high level of education and specialized skills, which enable them to access better-paying jobs and more secure work environments. The possession of cultural capital, which refers to high levels of education and specialized training, is often cited as a defining characteristic of the middle class. Asfaw and Kassahun [5] examined the role of cultural capital in the formation of the middle class in Ethiopia. The authors argue that possession of cultural capital is a key factor in enabling individuals to access middle-class occupations, which in turn provides them with greater financial security and social mobility. Similarly, Beshir and Mohammed [6] examined the limitations of income-based approaches to defining the middle class in Ethiopia. The authors argue that income-based approaches fail to capture the broader social and cultural dimensions of class formation, which are important for understanding the position of individuals within society.

These reforms have been explained by different studies. For instance Abate and Megersa examined the impact of the economic reforms on class formation in Ethiopia. The authors argue that the reforms have created a new class of wealthy individuals, who are primarily concentrated in the urban areas and have been able to take advantage of the new economic opportunities. They also note that the reforms have created new challenges for those who have lost their jobs or have seen their job security diminished, leading to the emergence of a new class of economically vulnerable individuals.

While Berhane [7] examined the impact of regionalism on class formation in Ethiopia. He argues that regional identities have become increasingly important in shaping class formation in the country, with regional elites emerging as a new class with significant economic and political power. He notes that these elites are often able to leverage their connections and influence to advance their interests,

creating new fault lines in Ethiopian society. In the same way, Gebremeskel and Tsegay [8] examined the impact of urbanization on class formation in Ethiopia. The authors argue that urbanization has created new opportunities for those who are able to take advantage of the new economic and social dynamics of urban life, leading to the emergence of a new class of urban professionals. However, they also note that urbanization has led to the growth of a new class of urban poor, who are struggling to make ends meet in the face of rising living costs and limited job opportunities.

Moreover, Birhanu and Alemayehu [9] examined the impact of education and professionalization on class formation in Ethiopia. The authors argue that the increasing availability of education has led to the emergence of a new class of educated and professional individuals, who are well-positioned to take advantage of the opportunities created by economic reforms and urbanization. They also note that this group is likely to play an important role in shaping the future of the country.

These studies have shown that the political, economic, and social changes in post-2018 Ethiopia have impacted the formation of different classes within the society. While some individuals have been able to take advantage of new economic opportunities, others have faced challenges and inequalities. This highlights the complicated and diverse nature of class formation in Ethiopia. The emergence of new classes has implications for the country's economic and social development, including the need for policies that address income inequality, regional unity, education, and job creation. By taking a comprehensive approach, the government can promote a more equitable distribution of benefits and stability for Ethiopians.

This commentary aims to explore the dynamics of class formation in post-2018 Ethiopia, with a focus on the emergence of a new middle class, the opportunities and challenges it presents, and its implications for the country's economic and social development. The study employs a qualitative approach, drawing on existing literature, policy documents, and interviews with experts in the field.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion of this study provide insights into the dynamics of class formation in post-2018 Ethiopia, with a focus on the emergence of a new middle class and its implications for the country's economic and social development.

First, the emergence of new economic opportunities has created a new class of wealthy individuals, many of whom are concentrated in urban areas. While this has led to increased

investment and economic growth, it has also created new challenges and inequalities. For example, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few individuals may exacerbate income inequality and limit opportunities for others. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a few individuals in urban areas can have several implications for a country's economic and social development, including the following:

- a) **Income Inequality:** When wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, it can lead to a widening income gap between the rich and the poor. This can create a sense of social injustice and limit opportunities for upward mobility, which can ultimately undermine the country's economic growth prospects.
- b) **Limited Opportunities for Others:** The concentration of wealth in urban areas can also lead to a situation where economic opportunities are limited to a few individuals or groups. This can create a situation where the majority of the population is excluded from the economic benefits of growth, leading to social tensions and instability.
- c) **Political Influence:** Wealthy individuals may use their economic power to influence political decisions, leading to a situation where policy decisions are made in the interests of a few rather than the broader population. This can undermine democracy and the rule of law.
- d) **Weak Social Safety Nets:** When a few individuals control a large share of the country's wealth, it can limit the resources available for social safety nets such as healthcare, education, and social welfare. This can lead to a situation where the most vulnerable members of society are left without adequate support.

The emergence of new economic opportunities, particularly in the technology and finance sectors, has created a new class of wealthy individuals in many countries, with many of them concentrated in urban areas. This phenomenon has significant implications for social and economic inequality, as well as for the dynamics of urban development.

On one hand, the concentration of wealthy individuals in urban areas has been associated with increased economic growth and development. For example, research has shown that urban areas with higher concentrations of wealthy individuals tend to have stronger local economies, higher levels of entrepreneurship, and greater innovation [10]. Additionally, the presence of wealthy individuals can create demand for high-end goods and services, which can help to support local businesses and create jobs in a range of industries. However, the concentration of wealth in urban areas also has negative implications for social and economic inequality. In many cases, the wealthy individuals who are driving urban growth and development are also contributing to the displacement of low-income residents and the gentrification of urban neighborhoods [11]. This

can exacerbate existing inequalities and lead to social and economic segregation, as well as to the loss of cultural and community resources. Moreover, the concentration of wealth in urban areas can also have negative consequences for the environment, as wealthy individuals tend to consume more resources and generate more waste than other residents [12]. This can contribute to environmental degradation and have long-term implications for sustainability and urban livability.

To tackle the negative implications of the concentration of wealth in urban areas, policymakers must adopt policies that promote economic inclusion, reduce income inequality, and foster entrepreneurship. Such policies could involve progressive taxation, targeted social welfare programs, and investments in education and infrastructure. Encouraging the development of small businesses can also create more economic opportunities for a wider range of people. By ensuring a more equitable distribution of wealth and opportunity, policymakers can build a more stable and prosperous society.

Second, the emergence of regionalism has created new fault lines in Ethiopian society, with some regions feeling marginalized and others feeling empowered. This has the potential to exacerbate ethnic tensions and to create new challenges for the government as it seeks to balance regional interests with national unity. The emergence of regionalism in Ethiopia can have several implications for the country's political and social development, including the following:

- a) **Ethnic Tensions:** Regionalism can exacerbate ethnic tensions within the country, as different regions may feel that their interests are not being adequately represented or prioritized by the central government. This can lead to a sense of marginalization and exclusion, which may in turn fuel inter-ethnic conflicts and social instability.
- b) **Political Fragmentation:** Regionalism can also lead to political fragmentation, as different regions may develop their own political agendas and priorities. This can create a situation where it is difficult for the central government to implement coherent policies or to maintain national unity.
- c) **Resource Allocation:** Regionalism can create challenges for the equitable allocation of resources, as different regions may compete for a share of the country's resources. This can create a situation where certain regions are disproportionately privileged or disadvantaged, leading to further tensions and grievances.
- d) **Governance:** Regionalism can also create challenges for effective governance, as the central government may struggle to balance regional interests with national priorities. This can create a situation where the government is unable to implement effective policies or

to maintain public trust and confidence.

The emergence of regionalism in Ethiopia has created new fault lines in the country's society, with some regions feeling marginalized and others feeling empowered. This phenomenon has significant implications for social and political stability, as well as for the country's long-term development prospects.

On one hand, the devolution of power to regional governments has allowed for greater local autonomy and decision-making, which can help to address the unique needs and concerns of different regions. This has led to increased political participation and representation for previously marginalized groups, particularly in regions such as Oromia and Tigray [13]. However, the emergence of regionalism has also contributed to increased political polarization and ethnic tensions, particularly between the Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups [14]. This has led to violent clashes and protests in some regions, further exacerbating existing social and political divisions. Moreover, the devolution of power to regional governments has also created challenges for national governance and coordination. In some cases, regional governments have implemented policies that conflict with national priorities, leading to inefficiencies and delays in the implementation of key development initiatives [15].

To tackle the challenges posed by the emergence of regionalism in Ethiopia, policymakers may need to implement policies that promote greater regional autonomy and devolution of power, while also maintaining national unity and cohesion. This could involve decentralization of political power, increased investment in regional development, and promotion of inter-regional dialogue and cooperation. Additionally, policymakers need to address the underlying political, economic, and social factors that contribute to regional tensions, such as unequal resource distribution, ethnic discrimination, and lack of political representation. By empowering local communities and promoting greater regional equality, policymakers can help to build a more stable and inclusive society.

Third, the rapid process of urbanization has led to the growth of urban centers such as Addis Ababa and has created new opportunities for those who are able to take advantage of the new economic and social dynamics of urban life. At the same time, it has also led to the emergence of a new class of urban poor, who are struggling to make ends meet in the face of rising living costs and limited job opportunities. This may lead to social unrest and political instability if not addressed by the government. The rapid process of urbanization in Ethiopia has several implications for the country's economic and social development, including the following:

- a) **Economic Opportunities:** Urbanization has created new economic opportunities in urban centers like Addis Ababa, as well as other growing cities across the country. This has led to the growth of industries such as manufacturing, construction, and services, which have created jobs and contributed to the country's economic growth.
- b) **Urban Poor:** However, urbanization has also led to the emergence of a new class of urban poor, who are struggling to make ends meet in the face of rising living costs and limited job opportunities. This can lead to social unrest and political instability if not addressed by the government.
- c) **Informal Economy:** Many of the jobs created by urbanization are in the informal economy, which can be characterized by low wages, poor working conditions, and limited social protections. This can create a situation where workers are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.
- d) **Housing and Infrastructure:** Rapid urbanization can also create challenges for housing and infrastructure, as cities struggle to keep up with the growing demand for services such as housing, water, and transportation. This can lead to inadequate and overcrowded housing, as well as limited access to basic services.

The rapid process of urbanization in Ethiopia has led to the growth of urban centers such as Addis Ababa and has created new opportunities for those who are able to take advantage of the new economic and social dynamics of urban life. However, this phenomenon also has significant implications for social and economic inequality, as well as for the sustainability of urban development.

On one hand, urbanization has been associated with increased economic growth and development. Research has shown that urban areas tend to have stronger local economies, higher levels of entrepreneurship and innovation, and greater access to social and economic services [16]. The growth of urban centers such as Addis Ababa has created new job opportunities in a range of industries, from manufacturing to hospitality to information technology. Moreover, the concentration of economic and social resources in urban areas can lead to increased social mobility and upward mobility for those who are able to take advantage of them. For example, education and skills training programs in urban areas can provide individuals with the tools they need to succeed in the modern economy, while access to cultural and social resources can help to broaden their horizons and expand their opportunities [17]. However, the rapid process of urbanization has also contributed to increased social and economic inequality in Ethiopia. The growth of urban centers has led to increased competition for resources and opportunities, which can exacerbate existing inequalities and contribute to social and economic exclusion [18]. Moreover,

the concentration of economic and social resources in urban areas can lead to the displacement of low-income residents and the gentrification of urban neighborhoods, further exacerbating existing inequalities [11].

To address these challenges, policymakers may need to implement policies that promote sustainable urban development and inclusive growth. This could include measures such as investments in affordable housing, infrastructure, and social services, as well as policies that promote formalization of the informal economy and job creation. In addition, policies that promote decentralized urban planning and participatory decision-making can help to ensure that the needs and concerns of all urban residents are taken into account. By promoting more inclusive and sustainable urban development, policymakers can help to build a more stable and prosperous society for all Ethiopians.

Fourth, the increasing availability of education has led to the emergence of a new class of educated and professional individuals, who are well-positioned to take advantage of the opportunities created by economic reforms and urbanization. However, this also means that there is a growing divide between those who have access to education and those who do not, which could exacerbate social and economic inequality. The increasing availability of education in Ethiopia has several implications for the country's economic and social development, including the following:

- a) **Economic Opportunities:** Education is a key driver of economic growth and development. The emergence of a new class of educated and professional individuals can help to drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth, as well as contribute to the development of a skilled workforce.
- b) **Social Mobility:** Education can also promote social mobility by providing individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a rapidly changing economy. This can create opportunities for individuals and families to move up the social ladder, reducing inequalities and promoting greater social cohesion.
- c) **Inequality:** However, the increasing availability of education also means that there is a growing divide between those who have access to education and those who do not. This could exacerbate social and economic inequality, as those without access to education may be left behind in the new economy and struggle to find meaningful work.
- d) **Brain Drain:** The emergence of a new class of educated and professional individuals can also contribute to brain drain, as individuals seek opportunities in other countries where they may be able to earn higher salaries or have better working conditions. This can create a situation where the country loses its most talented and skilled workers, undermining its economic growth and

development prospects.

The increasing availability of education in many countries has led to the emergence of a new class of educated and professional individuals who are well-positioned to take advantage of the opportunities created by economic reforms and urbanization. This phenomenon has significant implications for social and economic inequality, as well as for the dynamics of social mobility and development.

On one hand, the emergence of a new class of educated and professional individuals represents a positive development for many societies. Education and skills training can provide individuals with the tools they need to succeed in the modern economy, and the growth of urban centers can create new job opportunities in a range of industries. Additionally, the emergence of a new class of educated and professional individuals can contribute to social and economic development, as they are likely to be more innovative and entrepreneurial than less-educated individuals [16]. Moreover, the increasing availability of education can also contribute to greater social mobility, as individuals from lower-income backgrounds are able to access higher education and professional opportunities. This can help to break the cycle of poverty and create a more equitable society [19]. However, the emergence of a new class of educated and professional individuals also has negative implications for social and economic inequality. In many cases, individuals from higher-income backgrounds are better able to access education and professional opportunities, creating a “class divide” that perpetuates existing inequalities [20]. Additionally, the concentration of educated and professional individuals in urban areas can contribute to social and economic segregation, as they are more likely to live in higher-income neighborhoods and have limited interaction with individuals from lower-income backgrounds [10].

Policies aimed at promoting job creation and entrepreneurship has the potential to ensure that individuals with education and training are able to find meaningful employment within their country. This can have significant implications for social and economic development, as well as for the overall well-being of individuals and communities. On one hand, policies that promote job creation and entrepreneurship can contribute to economic growth and development, as they can create new opportunities for individuals and businesses. This can help to reduce unemployment rates, increase productivity, and stimulate innovation and creativity [21]. Moreover, entrepreneurship can contribute to social and economic development, as small businesses are often more likely to hire locally and contribute to the local economy than larger corporations [22]. Additionally, job creation and entrepreneurship can

help to ensure that individuals with education and training are able to find meaningful work that is commensurate with their skills and abilities. This can contribute to social and economic mobility, as individuals are able to access higher-paying and more secure jobs that offer opportunities for advancement [23]. However, policies that promote job creation and entrepreneurship may also have negative implications for social and economic inequality. In many cases, individuals from higher-income backgrounds are better able to access the resources and support necessary to start and grow a business, creating a “startup inequality” that perpetuates existing inequalities [24]. Moreover, job creation policies may not be sufficient to address the root causes of unemployment, which may be related to broader economic, social, and political factors [25].

Promoting greater access to education and training is essential for building a more inclusive and prosperous society in Ethiopia. By investing in education and training, policymakers can help individuals acquire the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the modern economy and take advantage of job creation and entrepreneurship opportunities. However, there are implications to consider, both positive and negative.

On one hand, promoting greater access to education and training can help to reduce social and economic inequality. Education serves as a key driver of social mobility, as it provides individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to access higher-paying and more secure jobs [26]. Moreover, education can contribute to economic growth and development by increasing productivity, innovation, and entrepreneurship [16]. In addition, policies that promote job creation and entrepreneurship can help to ensure that individuals with education and training are able to find meaningful employment within their country. This can have significant implications for social and economic development, as well as for the overall well-being of individuals and communities [24]. However, promoting greater access to education and training is not without its challenges. In many cases, individuals from lower-income backgrounds may face significant barriers to accessing education and training, such as high tuition fees or lack of access to quality education [27]. Moreover, policies that promote job creation and entrepreneurship may not be sufficient to address the root causes of unemployment, which may be related to broader economic, social, and political factors.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, the emergence of a new middle class in post-2018 Ethiopia, along with the challenges and inequalities that accompany it, highlights the need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to economic and

social development. The government must take action to address income inequality, promote regional unity, and invest in education and job creation. Additionally, policies should be put in place to support those who are most vulnerable to the challenges of economic and social change, such as the urban poor and rural populations.

By taking a holistic approach, the government can ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared more equitably across society, thereby promoting greater stability and prosperity for all Ethiopians. This requires a commitment to addressing the root causes of economic and social inequality, rather than simply treating the symptoms. It also requires recognition of the diverse and complex nature of class formation in Ethiopia, and a willingness to engage in inclusive and collaborative approaches to policy-making and implementation.

Thus, emergence of a new middle class in post-2018 Ethiopia presents both opportunities and challenges for the country's economic and social development. By taking a comprehensive and inclusive approach, the government can help to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared more equitably across society, thereby promoting greater stability and prosperity for all Ethiopians.

Based on the analysis of class formation in post-2018 Ethiopia, the following recommendations can be made:

- a) **Address Income Inequality:** The government should implement policies to address income inequality, such as progressive taxation and social safety nets, to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared more equitably across society.
- b) **Promote Regional Unity:** The government should work to promote regional unity and address regional disparities, such as by investing in infrastructure and services in underdeveloped areas.
- c) **Invest in Education and Job Creation:** The government should prioritize investment in education and job creation, particularly in sectors that are likely to generate employment for the growing middle class, such as services and manufacturing.
- d) **Support Vulnerable Populations:** The government should implement policies to support vulnerable populations, such as the urban poor and rural populations, to ensure that they are not left behind in the process of economic and social development.
- e) **Take a Comprehensive and Inclusive Approach:** The government should take a comprehensive and inclusive approach to economic and social development, engaging in dialogue with diverse stakeholders and taking into account the complex and multifaceted nature of class formation in Ethiopia.

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