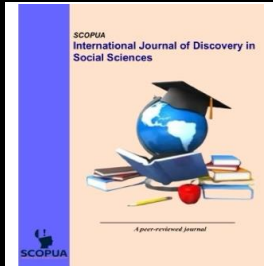




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Advancing Human Rights through Reciprocal Learning: A Comparative Analysis of the NHRAPs of China and Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

States across the world have adopted various mechanisms and institutional strategies to fulfil their obligations under domestic and international human rights law. Among these mechanisms, National Human Rights Action Plans (NHRAPs) have emerged as an important policy tool since the 1993 United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, which encouraged states to develop national plans aimed at improving the promotion and protection of human rights. Following this global initiative, several countries, including the People's Republic of China and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, have implemented successive rounds of national human rights action plans. In recent years, both China and Ethiopia have introduced new action plans designed to consolidate earlier achievements, address emerging human rights challenges, and guide future improvements in governance and policy. Against this background, the present study offers a detailed comparative examination of China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan (2021–2025) and Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan (2016–2020). The analysis focuses on several key aspects, including the sources and legal foundations of the plans, the level of participation during their preparation, the strategies adopted for implementation, and the mechanisms established for monitoring and evaluation. It also evaluates how these plans are aligned with broader national development objectives and identifies potential obstacles that may affect their implementation. Through this comparative approach, the study highlights both the strengths and limitations of the two action plans. While recognizing notable achievements in each framework, the paper also identifies areas that require further improvement. Ultimately, the study seeks to derive practical lessons that China and Ethiopia can learn from one another's experiences in human rights planning. By examining the complementarities between the two approaches, the paper argues that reciprocal learning can help both countries address existing gaps and improve the effectiveness of their future human rights initiatives.

Keywords: Human Rights Action Plans; Rights Monitoring; Evaluation; China; Ethiopia

1. Introduction

The concept of National Human Rights Action Plans developed from the United Nations World Conference that happened in 1993 on Human Rights in Vienna (Boerefijn, 2007). The conference recommended that every state should consider developing a national action plan that outlines concrete steps for improving the advancement and safety of human rights within its jurisdiction. Since then, many countries have adopted such plans as strategic tools for strengthening their human rights frameworks. The growing adoption of national action plans reflects an important understanding: the realization of human rights is an ongoing process. Neither of the country owns a flawless human rights record, and every state must continuously strive to improve its practices and institutions. Among the countries that have demonstrated a sustained commitment to this process are the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) (HUMAN & PEOPLES' RIGHTS, 2014). Over the past fifteen years, China has adopted four consecutive national human rights action plans, each designed to advance human rights protection through structured policy goals and institutional reforms. Ethiopia has also taken steps in this direction by introducing two national human rights action plans



since 2011 (Teame, 2019). These initiatives illustrate the willingness of both states to institutionalize human rights promotion within broader governance and development strategies.

Several important factors justify conducting a comparative analysis of the human rights action plans of China and Ethiopia. First, in both countries, the modern institutionalization of human rights is relatively recent. In China, the concept of human rights gained official recognition through the 1991 White Paper on Human Rights (Sun, 2013), which introduced a comprehensive discussion of the issue. Similarly, Ethiopia established its first constitution guaranteeing fundamental human rights in 1995 (Constitution, 1995). Consequently, both countries began developing formal human rights frameworks at roughly the same historical period and therefore share a relatively short institutional history in this domain. Second, despite differences in economic scale and development levels, both China and Ethiopia are developing countries that face several comparable human rights challenges, particularly in areas such as poverty reduction, access to basic services, and social welfare. Third, both states operate primarily within the civil law legal tradition, which shapes the way legal institutions and policy instruments are structured. Finally, the two countries maintain strong political and economic ties through South–South cooperation, including their cooperation within international platforms such as BRICS. These connections highlight a shared commitment to collaboration in areas including governance, development, and human rights advancement.

This article therefore aims to compare and contrast China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan (2021–2025) and Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan (2016–2020) in order to identify their similarities and differences. Using official policy documents, academic literature, government reports, and relevant socio-legal frameworks, the study examines the objectives, institutional mechanisms, monitoring systems, and implementation challenges associated with each plan. Beyond simply identifying similarities and differences, the study also seeks to promote mutual learning between the two countries. By examining the distinct approaches adopted by China and Ethiopia in designing and implementing their action plans, the article offers insights that may help policymakers, human rights practitioners, and researchers strengthen the practical effectiveness of national human rights planning. As one of the first systematic comparative studies focusing on the human rights action plans of these two countries, this study is focused to provide a beneficial reference for scholars and policymakers interested in improving the governance and implementation of human rights policies.

The article is based on four main sections. The first one is to evaluate the structural alignment and preparatory processes of the two action plans. The second section provides a thematic comparison of the rights and protections included in the plans. The third section examines the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms established for their implementation. Finally, the fourth section synthesizes the main findings of the study and presents key lessons and concluding observations.

2. Section I: Structural Alignment and the Preparatory Process

This section examines whether both action plans originate from the national and international legal frameworks, their inclusivity level during the drafting process and if they are mainstreamed into national economic development plans.

2.1 Alignment with National and International Frameworks

The introduction section of Chinese Fourth Action Plan of Human Rights indicates that it draws its foundation from four major sources (Chang & Zhu, 2024). The first source of the action plan is the Constitution of the Republic, which provides the foundation for protecting and respecting the human rights it enshrines. Second, the Framework of 14th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development and the long-term Objectives Through the Year 2035 serves as another key foundation for the action plan (Kwong, 2025). Third, the action plan reflects the principles that are being included in the UDHR. Fourth, it incorporates the experiences and lessons drawn from previous human rights action plans. Finally, international human rights conventions ratified by the country also serve as a foundational basis for the action plan.

Alternatively, Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan was drawn up from both national and international sources (Chalabi, 2025). The plan's national sources include the principles of the national constitution, government policies, laws, strategies, programs, the Second Growth and Transformation Plan, and development data on the application of the First Action Plan. Moreover, the United Nations Universal Periodic Review process, reports, and evaluations from various U.N. and African Union bodies are among the international human rights sources for the action plan.

The sources of the two action plans discussed above reveal fundamental similarities in their grounding within both national and international normative frameworks. First, both plans originate from their respective national constitutions. Second, each plan builds on the strengths and addresses the shortcomings of its predecessor as a crucial step, as a new action plan is unlikely to succeed without rectifying the deficiencies of the earlier one. Third, both plans are rooted in international treaties, whether explicitly or implicitly. The Chinese action plan expressly cites the Universal Declaration of Human Rights



(UDHR) and other human rights treaties among its sources. In contrast, the Ethiopian action plan primarily references constitutional principles. However, under Article 9(4) of the FDRE Constitution, all international treaties endorsed by Ethiopia are an essential part of the existing law. It follows that Ethiopia's human rights action plan is likewise derived from the country's ratified human rights treaties. Accordingly, the Ethiopian legal frameworks discussed earlier also serve as sources for the Second Human Rights Action Plan. In this respect, both plans meet the criterion of "human rightfulness," which requires that human rights action plans originate in international human rights law and remain constant with international human rights standards(Chalabi, 2025).

2.2 Participation Level during the Preparation Phase

Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan was framed by various federal public departments. Key actors involved in its development included the National Human Rights Action Plan Office, a navigation committee operating under the Office of the Federal Attorney General, the Federal Attorney General itself, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Pastoralist Development. Oversight of the plan's implementation is entrusted to the National Coordination Board, which comprises five ministries and four additional federal offices. Notably, civic associations and non-governmental organizations are not represented on board.

Moreover, the plan indicates that the final document was developed through numerous dialogue sessions involving the public, civil society, regional states, donors, development partners, and registered political parties. However, it regrettably does not clarify whether consultations were specifically conducted with NGOs and civil society organizations, nor does it specify the number of forums held or the number of participants involved. The participation and insights of NGOs are critically important for the growth of progressive human rights action plans(Chalabi, 2018). Additionally, human rights scholars and think tanks were not involved in the development of the plan. Lastly, and significantly, influential religious institutions and leaders, who possess substantial influence among the people, were not included in the discussions.

In contrast to the Ethiopian action plan, China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan does not identify the specific departments involved in its preparation and coordination. However, insights from past action plans shed light on the preparation process, suggesting that the latest plan may follow a similar pattern. Wang Chen, director of the International Communication Office of the CPC Central Committee and head of the State Council Information Office, detailed the groundwork of the next human rights action plan. According to him, the Chinese plan involved efforts across the relevant CPC Central Committee, government departments, and a wide spectrum of societal facets. He further emphasized that the State Council Information Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as members of the "joint meeting mechanism," convened meetings involving 54 departments, governmental and non-governmental organizations(Zhang, 2022).

According to Wang Chen, specialists from various universities and research institutions were invited to participate in the design and construction of the plan, with participants from Nankai University, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, and the Party School of the CPC Central Committee(China, 2012). Chapter Seven of China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan indicates that the combined meeting process remains in place and operational. Notably, the mechanism is primarily dominated by ministries and other governmental institutions. Nevertheless, civil society organizations and NGOs, such as the All-China Women's Federation, the China Disabled Persons' Federation, and the China Society for Human Rights Studies, are also members of the mechanism.

The above passage indicates that China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan is more collaborative than Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan. As shown, the Chinese plan was developed with participation from people from all aspect and working class, as well as governmental and private organizations. In contrast, the Ethiopian action plan appears less participatory, as NGOs, religious leaders, and other groups either did not take part in its preparation or their involvement was omitted from the final document.

2.3 Integration with National Economic and Development Plans

The PRC adopted and implemented 13 national development plans from 1953 to 2021, achieving notable development in the economic, social, and human rights arenas during this period. In 2021, a follow-up to the previous plan, the 14th National Development Plan, covering the years 2021 to 2025, was released. Its objectives include, among others, improving living standards, combating climate change and pollution, bridging rural-urban developmental disparities, and ensuring high-quality development. These goals are ambitious and represent significant strides forward for the sole purpose of human rights.



Nevertheless, the level of connection between the respective human rights and economic plans is significant. While the goals of China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan have been integrated with the 14th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan is only loosely synchronized with the Second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II) (Bitew et al., 2022; GTP). Major tasks enumerated under the right to education, health, and the right to food, among others, in Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan received little or no attention in the Second Growth and Transformation Plan. While the Second Growth and Transformation Plan prioritizes the provision of social security for vulnerable individuals, such as people with disabilities and the elderly, the Second Human Rights Action Plan fails to address this concern entirely. As a result, the right to social security section of the human rights plan is inconsistent with the Growth and Transformation Plan.

Nearly all activities included in China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan are specified in the country's 14th National Economic and Social Development Plan, in contrast to the Ethiopian action plan. However, the minority rights enshrined in Chapter Four of the Chinese human rights action plan were not included in the 14th economic and social development plan. Consequently, the tasks outlined under the minority rights section of China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan are not integrated into the country's latest economic and social development framework.

3. Section II. Thematic Comparison of Rights

This section examines the scope and content of thematic rights within the respective action plans, shedding light on each country's priorities. Through a detailed analysis of the thematic rights included in both human rights action plans, the study identifies key areas of convergence and divergence, as outlined below.

3.1 Economic, social and Cultural Rights

Both human rights action plans devote a full section to economic, social and cultural rights, covering a wide array of entitlements. China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan includes the rights to a suitable standard of living, work, property, social security, health, education, and culture. Within the framework of a satisfactory class of living, the plan specifically addresses the rights to food, fresh water, housing, and transportation. For each of these areas, concrete tasks are outlined with specified timelines for implementation. Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan similarly guarantees the rights to food, health, education, work, adequate housing, clean water, social security, and culture. While both plans reflect a strong commitment to economic, social and cultural rights, China's version is distinctive in its inclusion of property and transportation rights, areas not addressed in Ethiopia's plan. Viewed from this perspective, the range of economic, social and cultural rights set out in China's action plan is broader in scope than that of its Ethiopian counterpart.

The divergence between the two human rights action plans is most evident in their respective structures of prioritization. The Fourth Human Rights Action Plan of China adopts a framework in which economic, social, and cultural rights are collectively foregrounded, with particular emphasis placed on the right to an adequate standard of living. This emphasis is articulated through a series of well-defined and quantifiable objectives. By situating these rights at the beginning of the document, the Plan reaffirms a longstanding principle first articulated in the 1991 White Paper—namely, that the rights to survival and development constitute the foundational prerequisites for the realization of all other human rights. Moreover, this orientation is in alignment with Article 33 of the Chinese Constitution, which mandates that the state respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights guaranteed therein.

Notwithstanding a socio-economic context that would strongly suggest the need for a pronounced emphasis on economic, social, and cultural rights, Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan does not accord such rights priority status, either broadly or with specific regard to basic living standards. Moreover, the activities enumerated under this category within the Ethiopian framework lack the precision, strategic prioritization, and measurable benchmarks evident in the corresponding Chinese action plan. Specifically, the document fails to delineate projected annual budgetary increases for individual initiatives, nor does it articulate concrete and quantifiable strategies for advancing food security, expanding modern irrigation systems, or improving livestock productivity. In contrast to China's detailed framework, Ethiopia's plan offers no specification regarding which food crops are to be prioritized for increased production, establishes no measurable targets for expanding access to safe drinking water, and provides no clear framework for managing the relocation of populations from environmentally vulnerable areas to more sustainable regions. Given the severity of the challenges confronting the nation, the absence of a clearly articulated food self-sufficiency strategy is particularly conspicuous. This concern is underscored by the humanitarian condition report published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on March 1, 2024, which estimates that 15.5 million individuals in Ethiopia requires urgent



food assistance, necessitating an estimated US\$3.24 billion to address the crisis (Geremedhn & Gebrihet, 2024; Lind et al., 2024). Ethiopia possesses a protracted historical legacy of vulnerability to famine, endemic disease, internal conflict, and pervasive socio-economic hardship. Presently, tens of millions of its citizens continue to subsist below the absolute poverty line, while in reach of clean drinkable water and suitable cleanliness has reached critically diminished levels. Notwithstanding these pressing socio-economic realities, the country's Second Human Rights Action Plan effectively treats violations of these fundamental necessities as equivalent in stature to infringements of civil and political rights. This conceptual framework reveals a discernible absence of prioritization in the enforcement of human rights obligations, insofar as it fails to distinguish between rights whose realization is urgently required to redress widespread material deprivation and those whose violation may implicate qualitatively distinct forms of State accountability (Chalabi, 2018). This evidence proves that the most pressing challenge of Ethiopia has not been given priority in the action plan and treated equally to the violation of civil and political rights.

3.2 Civil, Political and Economic Rights

The civil and political rights section of China's 4th Human Rights Action Plan encompasses the rights to life, person, information, freedom of religious belief, voting and standing for election, participation, public scrutiny, and a fair trial. Notably, the 'personal rights' are further categorized into protection of dignity and the right to protection against unlawful detention. On the other hand, a similar section of Ethiopia's 2nd Ethiopian Human Rights Action Plan focuses on the right to security of person, the prohibition of inhuman treatment, the rights of arrested and detained persons, access to justice and equality, freedom of expression and association, and voting and electoral rights. Therefore, both plans aim to improve the protection of civil and political rights to a near-comprehensive extent. However, the right to freedom of association is an important omission from China's Fourth National Human Rights Action Plan. Thus, Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan is more comprehensive in terms of enshrining the protection of civil and political rights than China's action plan.

3.3 Environmental Rights

While both human rights action plans address environmental protection, a clear institutional asymmetry distinguishes them. China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan emphasizes the implementation of existing environmental laws, whereas Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan centers on the formulation of new legislation. China's plan establishes a comprehensive framework for environmental rights, encompassing pollution prevention and control, public engagement in environmental decision-making, disclosure of ecological information, public interest environmental lawsuit, reimbursement for ecological harm, territorial rebuilding and protection, and climate change response. These measures are closely aligned with Chapters 37 and 38 of the Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development and the Long-term Objectives Through the Year 2035, thereby embedding human rights within the broader context of national economic strategy. The effectiveness of this integrated approach was evidenced in the 2023 World Air Quality Report, which indicated that China had succeeded in removing its major cities from the list of the world's most polluted urban areas (Ditta et al., 2025; Mandal et al., 2024). The report indicates that China no longer ranks amongst the 10 top polluted nations in the world, and that Beijing is not among the top 10 most polluted cities. The report also underscores that China has successfully reversed trends in air pollution through environmentally friendly policies implemented in recent years. This progress demonstrates China's pledge to the effective implementation of environmental rights.

In contrast, the Ethiopian action plan aims to create environmental protection legal frameworks rather than enforce the existing ones. Ethiopia has an Environmental Protection Proclamation that provides for environmental community betterment litigation and compensation. The second human rights plan of Ethiopia focuses on enacting new laws rather than de facto enforcement. This reality suggests the gap in administratively enforcing statutory rights. Moreover, the failure to integrate environmental protection into the Second Growth and Transformation plan was reflected in the 2023 World Air Quality Report. According to this report, Ethiopia ranks 29th among the 134 most polluted countries in the world, with its capital, Addis Ababa, ranked 26th most polluted. These findings underscore Ethiopia's urgent need to enforce the existing laws to address environmental pollution. Given the country's vulnerability to desertification and its current 15.1% total land-area forest coverage, Ethiopia should strongly consider integrating eco-environmental restoration and protection mechanisms into its human rights action plans (Nesha et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2025). This approach could lead to significant improvements in environmental sustainability and the protection of citizens' environmental rights.

3.4 Protecting the Rights of vulnerable Groups



China's Fourth and Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plans have provided great attention to the rights of prone groups. Both action plans outline an extensive activity devised to guarantee the rights of women, children, elderly people and persons with disabilities. A comparison of the two reveals that there are institutional and resource-based differences. While China's 4th Human Rights Action Plan leverages the country's vast economic potential and technological advancement to provide procedural protection and technology intervention for people in need of special support, Ethiopia focuses on foundational advocacy and general protection.

The Fourth China Human Rights Action Plan is progressive as it provides judicial compensation for violations of women's rights. Notably, China's action plan introduced public interest lawsuits against infringement upon women's rights, interests and dignity, such as violation of property rights, employment discrimination, failure to prevent domestic violence, etc. In contrast, although the Ethiopian action plan targets the prevention and trial of gender-based violence and harmful traditions against women, it does not dare to initiate public interest litigation in case of infringement of women's legitimate rights and interests. Furthermore, the Chinese action plan envisages supporting low-income women, women left behind by migrant workers, single mothers, seriously ill women, and women with disability. However, Ethiopia's human rights action plan does not mention government support for women in need and those who are disadvantaged.

The most notable difference between the two plans is observed in the protection provided to the elderly. China's action plan aims to build a grant system for weakened elders in financial suffering and to provide home visits for lonely elderly residents. In contrast, the Ethiopian plan lacks such an ambitious goal. Second, the plan also mandates the inclusion of elderly facilities in new housing communities and newly established town areas, whereas the Ethiopian plan makes no similar provision. Third, China's document focuses on the development of older adults' literacy and skills so that they can pursue their own self-fulfilment, whereas the Ethiopian plan lacks similar tasks. Fourth, China's framework is promising, as the government plans the placement and operationalization of smart technologies, such as 5G, artificial intelligence, and the upgrading of websites and mobile applications, for food provision, telemedicine, fire safety, and health management for elderly people. China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan emphasizes disability prevention, subsidizing the expenses of persons with disabilities, paying insurance premiums for severely disabled persons, promoting employment for persons with disabilities, and supporting the R&D and manufacturing of smart assistive devices, all of which are absent from the relevant section of the Ethiopian action plan. According to the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, 17.6% of Ethiopians or more than 21 million Ethiopians, live with disability (Wakene et al., 2021). Given this figure, the attention given to the rights of persons with disabilities in Ethiopia's Human Rights Action is disproportionate to the actual need. By reversing the current gaps, Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan necessitates transitioning from general recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities to specific safeguarding and allocation of adequate budgets.

4. Section III. The Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms of the Plans

4.1 Monitoring

An assessment of human rights action plans should be led during the continuation of the implementation cycle. The ongoing oversight of the application of human rights tasks included in the plan, while the plan is still ongoing, is called monitoring (Cardenas, 2003; De Felice & Graf, 2015). In this sense, both action plans have implemented monitoring mechanisms.

Although China's Fourth and Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Plans include monitoring bodies, the structure of these bodies is not clearly specified in the documents. The Second Ethiopian Human Rights Action Plan is led by the National Coordination Board, which consists of 10 ministries and institutions. In addition, city administrations, the committee of the plan-leading institutions, and regional states have established monitoring bodies with clearly defined roles and review periods. In contrast, section seven of China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan stipulates that monitoring will be carried out by a joint meeting mechanism at various levels of government and party, but it is silent about the organisation of these institutions, their roles, and a review period for the implementation of the plan. Therefore, the implementation monitoring process of Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan is more transparent than that of China's Fourth Plan.

4.2 Evaluation

The result and overall impact of human rights action plans should be assessed upon completion of the implementation cycle. Thus, valuation is the assessment of the plan's overall results after the program has concluded. Although their review bodies differ, China's Fourth and Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plans set out the evaluation mechanism under which the plans' impacts and results would be studied.



In evaluating the action plans, China's Fourth Human Rights Action is in a stronger position. A third part evaluated China's third Human Rights Action Plan. Notably, the China Society for Human Rights, the largest human rights non-governmental organization in China, and the Southwest University of Political Science and Law, a pioneer in human rights research in the country, have jointly evaluated the plan (Chang & Zhu, 2024; Liu & Xie, 2023). Chapter seven of the fourth human rights action plan affirms that the third-party assessment and research mechanism will be sustained and strengthened during its implementation. In contrast to its Chinese counterpart, Ethiopia's plan requires federal government departments to evaluate Ethiopia's first human rights action plan. Furthermore, the second human rights action plan reiterates that the *national coordination board* will conduct the evaluation, ruling out the participation of non-governmental actors in the process. Hence, the valuation of the Chinese human rights action plan conducted by a nonpartisan organization is more reliable and impartial than the government-conducted evaluation in Ethiopia. As states under International Law are duty-bound to admire, protect and justify human rights, government-prepared evaluation reports may not fully reflect the actual performance of human rights plans. Limitations in the implementation of human rights action plans might remain hidden due to state bias, and governments may not learn appropriate lessons from implementation shortfalls. Therefore, an inclusive evaluation report may highlight authentic findings, enhance transparency, and generate recommendations and inputs for the succeeding plans. On the other hand, government-led evaluation reports may sometimes prioritize political and national image-building interests over human rights realities on the ground.

5. Section V: Synthesis of Findings, Lessons and Concluding Remarks

This section synthesizes the study's key findings and identifies reciprocal lessons for both countries. Finally, and importantly, the study concludes with succinct conclusions.

5.1 Synthesis of Findings

China's Fourth Human Rights and Ethiopia's Fourth Human Rights Action Plans share foundational similarities. Both documents are deeply embedded in their respective domestic legal frameworks and international human rights treaty obligations. In addition, although their levels differ, both plans integrate human rights protection into national development plans, recognizing that human rights protection is intimately linked to economic development. Furthermore, both frameworks have encompassed ambitious and multi-sectoral tasks intended to be implemented during their time frame. Despite these similarities, China's Fourth and Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plans exhibit greater divergence than convergence.

First, the two plans differ in the level of participation during the preparation phase. China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan reveals a higher degree of inclusivity during its preparation phase than the second Ethiopian action plan. This is evident as the preparation and administration of China's fourth action plan involves various ministries, offices, leadership from the ruling party, intellectuals, and non-governmental institutions, among others. In contrast, the Ethiopian action plan exhibits less inclusivity than the Chinese human rights action plan, as scholars, human rights think tanks and religious leaders were excluded from the development procedures. This limited public participation in the preparation of Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan is inconsistent with international and domestic laws mandating citizens' participation in policy and strategy development.

Second, both plans differ in terms of tailoring the human rights tasks to the prevailing social and economic context. China's Fourth Human Rights Action plan exhibits clear prioritization of social, Economic and Cultural rights, particularly consolidating the basic standard of living, which is heavily anchored in its the 1991 First White Paper and the national constitution. In contrast, although Ethiopia's socio-economic context warrants an urgent prioritization and focus on food security, safe drinking water, and sanitation, its Second Human Rights Action plan fails to prioritize these pressing human right challenges within its specific socio-economic context.

Third, other significant differences of the plan lie in the degree of integration between their respective countries' economic and development plans. China's Human Rights targets are largely integrated with its national developmental and economic plans, thereby indicating the country's commitment to turn the statutory rights into realizable enjoyments. In contrast, although Ethiopia's Second Growth and Transformation plan prioritizes social security for vulnerable groups, its Second Human Rights Action doesn't reflect a similar priority. Moreover, the fact that basic rights, like the right to health and food, have received no or little attention in the country's economic plan reveals loose integration between the country's economic planning and its human rights agenda.



Fourth, the two plans exhibit stark divergence in terms of institutional responsibility assignment. Ethiopia's action plan clearly assigns responsibilities to each outlined task, sets performance indicators, and thus, ministries, agencies, and local authorities are aware of their area of assignment beforehand. This clear distribution of responsibility is essential for the effective implementation of the plan. However, the Chinese plan fails to define the roles and responsibilities of administrative authorities. Although the plan urges departments of local and central governments to prioritize and implement the action plan, the specific role and responsibility of each entity are left unaddressed. Therefore, China's action plan risks facing implementation hurdles because of a lack of clear administrative authorities assigned for the implementation of the outlined goals and tasks.

Fifth, another difference between the two plans concerns the organisation of monitoring and evaluation bodies. Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Plan provides a clearly defined list of monitoring bodies, tasks and annual and biannual tasks, whereas China's relies on a vaguely defined joint meeting mechanism. Therefore, the obscure monitoring mechanism incorporated in China's document could impede the plan's implementation. In the evaluation phase, however, China's document is more progressive. China evaluates the results of its plan through independent and non-governmental organisations and higher educational institutions, thereby ensuring transparency and impartiality. However, performance evaluation of Ethiopia's plan is led wholly by governmental authorities and therefore risks state bias and potential omission shortfalls.

5.2 Reciprocal Lessons for FDRE

Ethiopia has much to learn from China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan to advance human rights protection.

First, Ethiopia has to learn from China's decade-long commitment to the successful development, implementation and evaluation of human rights action plans. This has resulted in notable progress in improving the human rights situation of its people, demonstrating the practicality and effectiveness of its action plans. Therefore, by developing and implementing uninterrupted human rights action like that of China, Ethiopia may achieve long-term human rights progress and improve its human rights record.

Second, like that of China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan, the future human rights action plans of Ethiopia should be people-centred, tailored to local realities and set human rights priorities, outlining a concise set of activities for the basic standard of living, health, education, and culture and addressing how to achieve them. This would allow the country to address critical human rights challenges rather than drafting bulky plans.

Third, China's fourth human rights action plan demonstrates a strong level of popular participation, with both governmental and non-governmental bodies involved in its development, administration and monitoring. To ensure participatory governance, Ethiopia should broaden the scope of inclusivity in its human rights action plans beyond administrative authorities and incorporate stakeholders excluded from the Second Human Rights Action Plan. This would ensure its citizens' right to participation in policy development.

Fourth, the study found that China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan is well integrated with the 14th national economic and development plan. Therefore, Ethiopia should learn from this practice and integrate its future human rights action plans with its economic development plans. If this integration is enforced, Ethiopia can ensure food security and control environmental pollution, as China has done.

Fifth, the study revealed that China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan has a transparent and independent evaluation mechanism. Ethiopia should discontinue the current system of evaluating the performance of human rights action plans by government departments and adopt a third-party evaluation system. To this end, following China's example, it should use independent universities and non-governmental organisations to evaluate the plan's performance, verify the integrity of the results, and inform future action based on the study's findings.

5.3 Reciprocal Lessons for China

Although China's Fourth Human Rights Action Plan excels in integration, evaluation, participation, and prioritisation, it has room for improvement in its administrative specificity. To rectify the gaps in administration, China should draw the following lessons from its Ethiopian counterpart.

First, the first lesson that China's Fourth Human Rights Action plan should learn from the Ethiopian document is to clearly define the responsibilities and functions of the plan's implementing bodies. The Ethiopian plan's clear designation of each plan's implementing ministry, bureau, and institution is a crucial tool for ensuring accountability. By adopting the Ethiopian

model, China should designate a responsible agency and define its corresponding mandates rather than setting general directions. This measure would curtail the ambiguity of responsible bodies and implementation gaps

Second, the other lesson China's framework should learn from Ethiopia by establishing a granular monitoring mechanism and defining review periods. The Ethiopian Plan sets out clear monitoring bodies and timeframes. However, China's document neither specifies its monitoring bodies nor states the monitoring period, although it assigns a joint meeting mechanism and various organs to supervise, assess and implement the plan. By adopting a specific monitoring body and a definite review time frame, the government of China may enhance the local implementation of its plan.

Third, Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plan stipulates specific performance indicators for every goal included therein, so as to measure the successes and failures of the plan. Therefore, it would be crucial for transparency if China included the performance evaluation indicators within the plan, rather than separating them. Inclusion of explicit performance indicators in the plan would allow interested evaluators to utilise the openly known benchmarks.

6. Concluding Remarks

A comparison of China's Fourth and Ethiopia's Second Human Rights Action Plans shows that the conventional human rights operationalisation is undergoing a fundamental transformation. This study also shows that the strengths of one country's plan can compensate for the shortcomings of another. The strengths of the Ethiopian Human Rights Action Plan, such as the clarity of the structure and responsibilities of the plan's implementing bodies, and the specificity of organisation and defined time frame of monitoring bodies, fill the gaps of administrative clarity identified in the Chinese plan. Likewise, the strong stakeholder participation in the preparation of the plan, the country's existing socio-economic tailored priority, strong integration between the plan and economic development, and the independent review of the plan's implementation identified in China's Fourth Human Rights Action are solutions to the gaps identified in the Ethiopian plan. This study concludes that the progress of human rights in the Global South countries lies in mutual learning from the administrative structures of one another. When the strengths of one plan fill the gaps in the other, both plans together can create a very strong and resilient implementation of human rights. This paradigm is specifically relevant for South-South cooperation and the BRICS, where building robust internal institutions has become a main tool for the realization of human rights. Finally, Human rights implementation plans do not stand still but are constantly evolving. The human rights action plans of China and Ethiopia are also constantly refining themselves through dynamic governance and thus heightening their chance of success from time to time. Therefore, both plans are destined to turn de jure rights into tangible protection by making the state machinery capable of delivering rights through independent monitoring and evaluation.

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