

The Power Struggle in Tigray: Balancing Reform Opportunities Amidst Complex Challenges

Batseba Seifu

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The political landscape in Tigray is marked by a deeply rooted power struggle, unveiling both significant challenges and potential opportunities for reform. Understanding the core reasons behind this dispute is crucial to determining whether it stems from a genuine drive for reform or if it is largely a contest for power. With little ideological distinction between the factions, the conflict appears to be primarily about control and dominance.

Challenges for Both Factions

The Tigray Interim Regional Administration (TIRA) has struggled to establish a strong local power base, a feat that Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael's faction has managed to achieve. This raises critical concerns about the future effectiveness of TIRA in addressing Tigray's urgent issues. The centralized authority held by those from the 14th congress has considerably weakened TIRA's leadership. This decline in effectiveness highlights the broader challenge of dismantling entrenched power structures. To play a meaningful role in Tigray's governance, particularly after the Pretoria Agreement, TIRA must rebuild support and restore credibility. However, the entrenched networks controlled by those from the 14th congress extend to lower levels of

governance, complicating efforts to achieve meaningful change without facing significant resistance.

As TIRA grapples with contested control over both the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and its own administrative functions, it increasingly seeks legitimacy from the African Union (AU) and other external forces. By appealing to these bodies, TIRA hopes to strengthen its credibility and gain recognition amid the ongoing power struggle. This strategy reflects a tactical move to bolster its standing and legitimacy, with external validation potentially offering support against the internal and regional challenges it faces. The TIRA's reliance on the AU and other external actors underscores its struggle to assert control and legitimacy within a complex political environment that extends beyond Tigray's borders.

Strategic Opportunities for Reform

Before the 14th congress, TIRA introduced a strategy during an all-inclusive meeting that could potentially reshape Tigray's political landscape. This strategy, which calls for the establishment of a multiparty system and the dismantling of the TPLF's centralized control over various sectors, presents a significant opportunity for political transformation in the region. While it is unclear whether this strategy was deliberately devised by TIRA or if it serves as a means to gain support, it nonetheless offers a pivotal moment for change.

Path Forward

A comprehensive approach to reform in Tigray will require strong pressure from a diverse range of stakeholders. Internal pressure can be significantly bolstered through the formation of a coalition of nationalist parties, which can serve as a unified force advocating for a multiparty system and the dismantling of entrenched control. The collective effort of this coalition will be essential in driving the reform process and ensuring a successful transition towards a more democratic governance system.

Media outlets have a critical role to play in this process by promoting the benefits of TIRA's proposed strategy and advocating for its adoption. Influential elites, including business leaders, intellectuals, and community figures, must actively leverage their influence to push for democratic reforms. Additionally, social groups and civil society organizations must mobilize grassroots movements and public demand for change, contributing to the creation of a more inclusive and equitable political environment.

While the path to reform in Tigray is filled with challenges, TIRA's proposed strategy represents a significant opportunity for transformative change. A unified and collaborative effort from all stakeholders, focusing on pressure and cooperation, is essential for addressing the region's deep-seated issues and moving towards a more democratic future.

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