Ethiopia currently pledges to pursue the policies of a democratic developmental state, and is implementing series of Growth and Transformation plans. However, there is the need for new imaginaries of development and social justice because statistical claims of double-digit economic growth are not accompanied by enhanced livelihoods and being of citizens commensurate with the growth reports. I argue that new imaginaries should critically examine the most effective and realistic means of enhancing the (physical, mental, spiritual and emotional) being of citizens and the (economic, social, political and environmental) livelihoods of people. Development is not ‘given’ by a ‘Big Brother’, and is rather the making of citizens themselves in the context of an appropriate institutional setting including policy environment and work culture. Nor should development be regarded as hasty campaign because it is an incremental steady attainment. The Ethiopian 1995 Constitution envisages the capacity enhancement of citizens so that they can bring about development and meet their needs. Newer conceptions should thus give prime attention to nurturing and developing the state of being and livelihoods of citizens in the context of environmental sustainability and the preservation of positive cultural legacies. Such imaginaries of development should transcend statistical figures and reports of ‘accelerated growth’ including number of schools and universities, and instead offer prime attention to enhancing livelihoods (including poverty alleviation) and the state of being (i.e., quality education, social ties, work ethic and moral character) of citizens.