

A Critical Assessment of Decentralized Public Governance Features and Challenges in Ethiopia: Insights from Self-Governance in Guraghe Zone Districts

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Abstract

Ethiopia decentralized its centralized unitary government system in 1991. This decentralization reform accompanied continuous restructuring of regional ethnic-based States and sub-national governments with the objective of establishing self-governing and empowered States for effective decentralized public governance in the country. However, some empirical studies criticized the policy stating that the objectives have not yet been achieved. The critics point out that the system lacks proper design to ensure accountability and structure that recognizes the population size for services provided. This article assesses the decentralized public governance system focusing on the features and challenges in order to improve public service provision in Ethiopia, in the context of Guraghe Zone Districts. To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher employed concurrent mixed methods research design. The data were collected through survey questionnaires, focus group discussions and key informant interviews, simultaneously. The data were integrated for analyses and interpretation of the results. The researcher employs percentages, graphs, Chi-square and Kruskal Wallis Test to discuss and analyze the data, and identifies the institutional factors affecting the success of decentralized public governance for improved services. The results show that the majority of respondents agree that the decentralization system was well designed, while a significant number of respondents confirmed that decentralization reform has not been properly implemented. Furthermore, it was found that Zonal and Woreda administrators were not appropriately empowered, though this charge is enshrined in the Regional State Constitution. Through careful analyses of the data, the study identifies specific gaps in the system that leaders can then use to take corrective measures.

Keywords: decentralized public governance, proper local government size, empowerment

1. Introduction

In 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took power from the Communist-Military Government of Ethiopia – The Derg. The EPRDF transitional government charter proclaimed ambitious new governing principles 'equal rights and self-determination of peoples' and affirmed "the right of nations, nationalities, and peoples to self-determination." Nine ethnic-based Regional State Governments were established to administer their own affairs within their own defined territory and to participate effectively with the central government on the basis of free, fair and proper representation".

Ethiopia's government reform affected government structure, governance, capacity and interrelation between the Federal Government, Regional States and Local Governments during the last two decades. The government conceived decentralization as a strategy to empower grassroots governance, mobilize and utilize potential resources, address local issues for deepening democratic decentralization, and to transform institutions for economic development and poverty reduction (Tsegaye, 2006; World Bank, 2013). Though the government devolved power to local authorities, the system is deemed not responsive to local preferences or accountable to ordinary citizens. Instead, the system appears to have been used as a control mechanism for the central government (Merara, 2007; Zemelak, 2011).

The change in local government design and structure, democratic governance, capacity and the interrelation between these variables has affected the allocation of resources and formulation of strategies to achieve the decentralization objectives (Zemelak, 2011; Tsegaye, 2006). However, the effects of the change in those plans and strategies are not as effective as how they have been designed and implemented at each level. The job description for each governance actor at each tier and how they interact with each other to mobilize and utilize public resources to execute plans affect the effectiveness of decentralized public governance. If there is

mismatch in personal responsibility and resource management, it can be destructive to the entire government's ability to implement the strategy.

Since the 1990s, decentralization and governance reform in Ethiopia have centered on changing political, administrative and fiscal systems. The reform aims to empower local authorities and communities, institutionalize decision-making process at the grassroots level, with the view to enhance local participation, promote good governance, and improve decentralized service provision (Lissane and Mohammed 2005 and CIDA 2005 cited in Meheret 2007). The central theme of the reform was to change government structure through legal frameworks. First, it intends to share authority between Federal, Regional State and Local Governments for improved public decision-making. Second, it attempts to institutionalize and strengthen the degree of horizontal coordination at each tier of government- that is, how far government 'executives are able to work as a team' by ensuring that all government institutions integrate in the same direction (Chema and Rondilli, 2007; Manor, 2011; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). However, the traditional centralized system of control of local authorities by the higher government bodies remains unchanged (Zemelak, 2011). District Level Decentralization Program (DLDP), enacted in 2002, was considered dynamic change since it featured political, administrative and fiscal changes at a national level. Nevertheless, improvement at the basic grassroots level is still a topic of discussion.

Moreover, these efforts have been contested due to different horizontal and vertical political, administrative, and fiscal imbalances and differing institutional capacities (political, fiscal and administrative) between tiers of government (Zemelak, 2011; Merara, 2007). For example, decentralization design would lead to vertical fiscal imbalances in favor of the federal government because tax revenue sources have not decentralized as expenditure responsibilities have. Moreover, local government jurisdictions were not properly organized or structured for they do not consider the size of the local population in determining the size of government. The lack of nationally set standards to determine proper government size and structure has caused concern. This problem apparently opens the door for local privileged group patronages to manipulate the system in terms of ensuring private interests rather than public interests.

Government institutions in national, regional and intermediate levels face significant decentralization policy challenges with the implementation of the reform. One of these challenges is lack of clear guidance for local government population size in either the constitution or decentralization documents. These pressures influence the effectiveness of the decentralization process to improve public services. This is particularly significant when investigating effectiveness of decentralized public governance for improved basic public service provision. The change aims to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of traditional and hierarchical public service organizations. While some scholars, quoting the local government problem that decentralization has experienced, assert that it is indeed rhetoric than practiced (Merara, 2007). Other scholars proclaim that decentralization has produced mixed results (Meheret, 2007). Some have argued that the new governance mechanism has complemented the continual reform being made, but there have been some setbacks, especially in its application of empowering the local government. Moreover, given the challenges of collective action in public resource management (IGR, 2008), public offices need to be flexible enough to be effective. The study intends to identify the influencing factors affecting effectiveness of decentralized public governance reforms, particularly decentralization reform implementation for improved services.

More research on Ethiopian decentralized governance reform needs to be done. New directions for improved implementation are needed. Local social cohesion issues must be given considerable attention to make the changes introduced meaningful. This article investigates the decentralization reform design and its operation with reference to its effectiveness. It examines impact of the reform in effectiveness of decentralized public governance for improved public service provision in Guraghe Zone, Ethiopia - focusing on effects of the District level decentralization program since 2002.

2. Problem Statement

The problem this article attempts to address focuses on the lack of bringing effective decentralized public governance due to hindrances to improve services in Guraghe Zone Woredas (Districts). Although local governments in Ethiopia benefit from some level of constitutional privileges, the lack of clearly specified empowerment mechanism for local government units and ordinary citizens has caused them to concede their independence to Regional State Governments rendered useless the promise of forming autonomous local governance units. Decentralized public governance system can help address the call for improved local basic public services, production and provision. To realize this, however, it would take effective decentralized public governance that focuses on multiple stakeholders' involvement in decision-making and implementation (Osborne, 2010). However, the prevailing decentralization design and its practices have clearly influenced its effectiveness (World Bank, 2013). Here, we define effective decentralized governance as a coordinated mobilization and utilization of resources, ideas, and energies that contribute to the solution of policy problems or the provision of new opportunities (Torfing, et al., 2012).

Ethiopia's district level decentralization has promised better governance and deeper democracy. However, in practice, different factors have affected its results. Despite the recognized importance of DLDP for effective decentralized governance to improve public service provision, empirical studies are lacking on programs for properly structuring local government units, decentralization policy design and implementation, local government accountability mechanisms, empowerment and community participation, and local capacity in public decision making and implementation (Tegegne, 2007). Thus, this article examines issues related to decentralization policy design and implementation, local governance and the challenges of decentralized public governance in Guraghe Zone and its Districts.

3. Population Size and Distribution of Guraghe Zone

According to central statistical Agency (2007), the total population of Guraghe Zone is 1,280,484. It contains 8.5 percent of the Southern Regional population (i.e., 15,042,531). Guraghe Zone stands in fourth position in SNNPRS in terms of zonal population next to Sidama, Gamo Goffa and Wolayta Zones, respectively (Guraghe Zone Urban Development Department, 2010). From the total population of the study area, the number of males is 622,254 and female 658,229. The percentage share of female population in the zone is 51.5% whereas the males constitute 48.5 % of the total population. The lower male count is explained by the fact that most of the males from Guraghe zone live out of the zone, mainly for commercial purpose. As a result, male deficit population characterizes the zone. The disparities repeat again at the Woreda levels, due to same reason.

Districts in zones, in small selection of cases, are given large number of local government systems across Ethiopia. This arrangement limits discussions in linguistically or dialectically diverse ethnic groups in Ethiopia. The reason for this is that zones (Ethnic Groups) serve units of analysis. The country is clearly defined in the south semantic languages, and local governments are amalgamated and fragmented since 1991. Guraghe Zone districts/ethnic groups share a culture and artistic heritage; they have similar political ideals and have experienced the parallel development of forms of religion; and many have had similar patterns of economic development. The organization and structure of Guraghe Zone was an entity different prior to 1991. Before the downfall of the Military totalitarian socialist government, parts of Guraghe Zone administration had been structured in different territorial authorities such as the Haykochen Butajira, Chebona Guraghe, and Kembatana Hadiya Awerajas.

It shows that the zone had not been self-governed locality of Ethiopia. As the other ethnic groups of the country, the Guraghe ethnic group's clans and sub-clans were struggling for self-rule and consolidation. Nowhere is a unique Guraghe Zone with a common identity belonging to Guraghe. Alongside these ethnic and community legacies are shared cultural and indigenous knowledge that have defined the Guraghe space at various points in time and have collectively been protected from fragmentation and maintained their unity (Guraghelema, 2011). Note that privileged local elites should remember the diversity both across and within the Guraghe ethnic group and the constant socioeconomic development, particularly variations between western and Eastern Guraghe. However, there is sufficient common legacy to take the local government systems and their contexts together, especially when the 1995 Ethiopia's Constitution strengthens the self-governance (Tsegaye, 2006). As, formation of Districts is based on their clan and sub-clans, they vary in their population size. Figure 1 clearly shows the variation between Districts in Guraghe Zone.

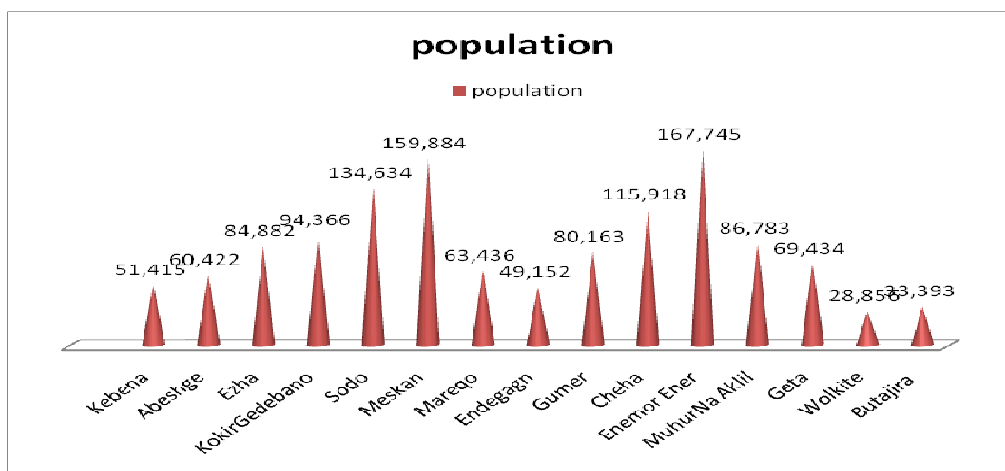


Figure 1: Population size and distribution of Guraghe Zone and its districts, 2007 G.C

Source: drawn from Central Statistical Agency data, 2008

Note: Butajira and Wolkite are urban town administrations

The rapid population growth in Guraghe Zone Woredas and inadequate growth of public service facilities create a huge demand for and produce pressure on public institutions (Guraghelima, 2011). The mismatch between demand and supply of services has become a debatable issue in local areas (ibid). The formal public service system provides only limited services, which are highly inaccessible to the poor. Based on the available evidence, decentralized service provision in Ethiopia in general and Guraghe Zone Woredas in particular has brought changes in basic public services such as education, health, water supply and transportation.

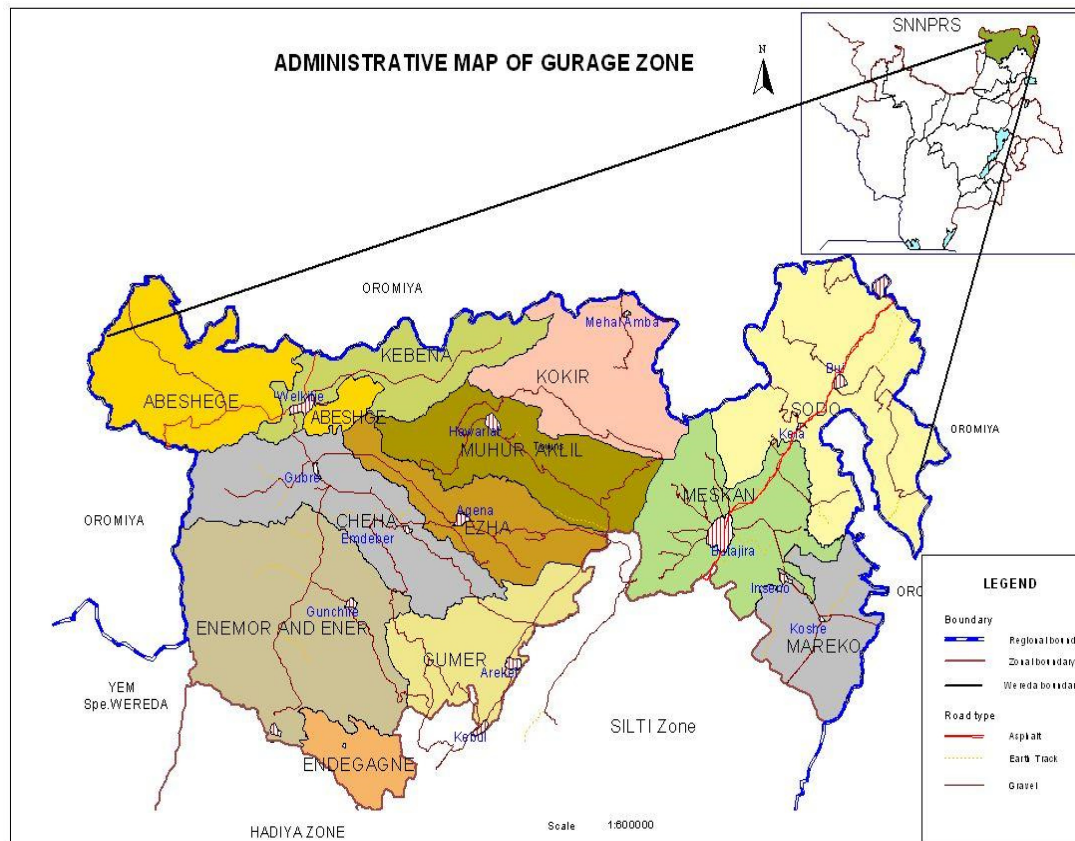


Figure 2: Administrative Map of Gurage Zone
 Source: Guraghe Zone Urban Development Department, 2010

4. Research Methodology

This article is based on data collected in a social survey study undertaken in Gurage Zone Districts, Ethiopia in 2013/14. The Gurage Zone's districts are purposively sampled to identify challenges and prospects of decentralized public governance for self-governance in the study area. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from both primary and secondary sources through surveys, FGDs, interviews, content analysis of relevant documents, including FDRE Constitution and 2001 revised South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) Constitution. The data are presented anonymously, in line with the ethical agreement between the researcher and participants. These data were integrated for the purpose of analysis and interpretation. Concurrent mixed methods approach is selected in order to strengthen salience of the conclusion and final recommendations (Creswell 2003).

5. Literature Review

5.1. Overview decentralization, Local government and governance in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the world. It had a decentralized governance system until 1885 (Merara, 2007, Zemelak, 2011). The features of the old system were distinguished by the existence of autonomous kings, provincial, and local nobilities with powers to exercise self-rule in their respective locality (Assefa, 2007). Ethiopia was known for authoritarian centralized governments throughout its long history (1855-1974). Emperor Haile Selassie I, proclaimed the first written Ethiopian Constitution as a formal mechanism to centralize power (ibid). This constitution gave absolute centralized power for the Emperor over provincial and local governments while it ended the autonomy of local governors throughout the country (Zemelak, 2011). The introduction of a 'uniform local administrative system' in Ethiopia was relegated to the Emperor. The central unitary government of the then Ethiopia was structured into a three-tiered sub-national government system dubbed provinces,

awrajas, and Woredas.

The theoretical literature on decentralization in developing countries show that it has led to significant improvements in local governance and public service provision(PSP) for many people in different parts of the world (Manor, 2011). These have been achieved through combination of different mechanisms such as strengthening governance principles(participation, responsiveness, transparency, accountability), reducing corruption, and improving cost recovery; improving power relations; promoting efficiency and effectiveness of PSPs; and empowering community and enhancing its participation in the development (World Bank, 2003; Kimenyi and Meagher, 2004,). However, the literature does not show decentralization in all its manifestations to be universally beneficial. Furthermore, there are little empirical literature to verify whether or not this is true (Conyers, 2007). The difficulties or failures of decentralization are related to benefits of local elites capture, exclusion of poor and marginalizing groups from participation, and fragmentation of the states (Oluwu and Wusch, 2004,World Bank, 2010). These arguments against decentralization fall into national and grassroots impact. Firstly, the local governments overuse power beyond their assigned functions.

This can lead to conflicts between tiers of government in exercising authority as well as resource use (Oluwu and Wusch, 2004). This may result in situations where in some cases local governments may engage in policymaking in the areas beyond their jurisdiction. This could lead to overlapping and duplication of government activities. The second argument against decentralization concerns the possibility that the elite and privileged may usurp local government power (Kimenyi and Meagher, 2004). Thus, there are cases where decentralization creates coordination problems for decision-making across different communities, exacerbate incentives for officials to predate, and generate barriers to any attempt to alter the status quo (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2006). The decentralization of power to territorially concentrated ethnic groups might provide a base for secession, or further fragmentation into clan-based States or local fiefdoms(Tsegaye, 2006).In fact, Zoescott(2009) also ascertained that decentralization endangered unity of some States and ethnic groups. The numbers of Woredas in Guraghe Zone in particular and Ethiopia in general have been steadily increasing over the years because of frequent splitting of existing Woredas to create the new ones. This invites more territorial fragmentation based on clan subdivisions. Such practices could weaken the contributions of social capital for local economic and social development in general, and PSP in particular which call for collective action. The proper size of local government can affect the economic efficiency of PSP, “especially where economics of scale and scope are significant factors in the cost of service delivery” (Dollery and Robotti, 2008, p.30).

From the above cases, it can be argued that the failures of decentralization must arise either due to poor design of the reform or else has to be related to weak implementation. The decentralization reform framers claim the problems spring from local government authorities pointing to misuse of public resources, corruption and inefficiency there. In fact, it is public secret that there is much waste, corruption and inefficiencies. Empirical research on the Ethiopian decentralization reform seems to offer contradictory conclusions. As Meheret(2007) ascertained, decentralization in Ethiopia was established to legally authorize Woreda administrations. The regional governments recognize the powers of local governments in their regional constitutions as well. The constitutions clearly define the powers and functions of each tier of government. However, its implementation and practice have been challenged. In practice, powers designated to low level officials is often transferred to higher level ones where lower level offices are given limited managerial and technical authority, and often it is observed that local governments must subordinate themselves and authority to higher officials regarding decisions on political, administrative and fiscal matters (Meherete, 2007). As a result, some of the intended targets for better basic public services provision are missed (*ibid*).

Tegegne (2007) confirms that perceived decentralization has helped in the mushrooming and strengthening of ethnic-based development associations in Ethiopia. On the other hand, decentralization has not led to a significant growth of formal and independent civic organizations at the grassroots level. Tsegaye(2006) indicated that the social cohesion and unity of Guraghe ethnic group in Ethiopia is weakened following the ethnic decentralization in Ethiopia. However, there is little empirical evidence focusing on challenges and features of decentralized public governance for improved public services provision. This study contributes some insights in filling such gaps.

5.2. Public Management Reform

Over the last four decades, governments in developed and developing countries have been reformed their public sectors’ management and governance practices. This was also true for Ethiopia. International public management reforms have been implemented with deliberate design and process to transform the State (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). The process, causes and effects of such reforms have shown variation based on the contexts. The most cited causes for these reforms are associated with failures in the traditional and bureaucratic governance and the desire to establish ‘self-governance’ through a decentralized system of government (Jorensen and Torfin, 2009). In 1970s, many developed countries reformed their governance and public administration to address ‘governability crises’ of the time. The proponents of those reforms articulated the ills of governing by sheer

might and sole decision-making powers on public policy and implementation. However, the opponents highly criticized such change claiming that these moves encouraged fragmentation of the State. In the 1980s, in response to the aforementioned critics, the new governance network theorists proposed mechanisms for how to create relatively autonomous public institutions at central and local levels. They looked at a new model of public governance that needed to a decentralized plurality involving State, market and civil society (Jorensen and Torfin, 2009; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). The majority of public sector reforms including decentralization reform evolved with new organizational structures through redesigning their public services (Boyne, 2003). This has been changing modes of public governance through modification and/or transformation of bureaucratic hierarchy and market (Rhodes, 1997). This results in the establishment of horizontal reforms of intra-organizational coordination and/or institutionalization of different forms of inter-organizational cooperation. Sorensen and Torfing(2008)have properly summarized five of the potential impacts of governance networks that impact the effectiveness of public governance:

1. Strengthens knowledge sharing between actors for better political goals achievement;
2. Improving coordination through the creation of a shared perception of the reform objectives and why they are significant;
3. Raising the level of awareness of ownership of policy among the involved and affected areas, thus reducing resistance and paving the way for the smooth implementation of policy goals;
4. Bridging differences that enhance the production of the new results; and
Introducing good governance through workable institutions.

5.3. Overview of Theoretical Framework

The researcher employs public management reform models to develop the research framework. According to Pollitt and Bouckaert(2011), public management reform is deliberate change made to the structure and process of public sector organizations with the objective of getting them to run better for improving public services provision. This study on decentralization reform in Ethiopia falls under public management reform. Governments adopt institutional mechanisms for coordination of citizens to influence effectiveness of governance. Pollitt and Bouckaert discuss three general public management models that governments can adapt.

1. New Public Management Model(NPM): This model claims that governments need to be more efficient, and consumer- responsive by injecting businesslike methods. Some of Ethiopia's public sector reforms have been associated with NPM.
2. Neo-Weberian State Model(NWS): NWS proposes modernizing traditional hierarchy of governments. The implication is that modernizing government would improve the hierarchy by making managers professional, efficient and responsive to citizens. It reflects a more optimistic and trusting attitudes towards government apparatus than NPM. This model seems more applicable in developing countries like Ethiopia. That is because the private sector organizations do not currently provide efficient services nor do they use business-like methods.
3. Governance Network Theory(GNT): This theory focuses on making government better informed, more flexible and less exclusive by working through self-governance networks rather than hierarchies and/or market mechanisms. It utilizes network of independent stakeholders as a coordinating mechanism.
4. New Public Governance Model(NPG): This model claims to make the government more effective, efficient and legitimate by including a wider range of governance actors in both public policy making and implementation(Osborne, 2010). Its features include some notions of NPM, but government functions are given more weight in making rules, procedures, regulations, resources, methods and culture. The basic coordination mechanism assumed in this model is exercised through the authority and disciplined hierarchy of impartial officials.

By considering applicability of the different models for the analysis, the researcher employed a mixed approach of the aforementioned models. This approach is aligned with the Ethiopian government choice to adapt mixed approaches for the implementation of its governance reforms in the context.

6. Analytical Framework

After careful review of the related literature on decentralization and decentralized public governance, and theoretical frameworks, the following analytical framework has been constructed. The analytical framework depicts the local government challenges related to reform design, structure, processes and governance that are the likely to succeed. Many scholars argue that identifying and directly measuring effects in terms of outputs and outcomes of government reforms in general and decentralization reform in particular is problematic (Pollit and Bouckaer, 2011). The analytical framework focuses on the research questions that were drawn from the problem statement of the study.

7. Results and Discussion

The assessment of the effectiveness of decentralization policy in Ethiopia was undertaken based on how well the process was designed and implemented for effective decentralized public governance. The assessment and discussion of the findings were based on primary and secondary data collected from Guraghe Zone and its districts. The study attempts to identify the challenges and features that local public administrators and other governance actors have experienced in working effectively: the general recurrent institutional constraints of the local public administrations, the interference of upper level governments through appointed members, the control of local bodies by higher government tiers and their impact on local affairs, the inadequate organization and restructuring of local governments for improved services provision, issues related to local government and community empowerment, the level of community participation and other local governance related issues were assessed in depth.

7.1. Relevant Features and Challenges of Decentralized Public Governance in Ethiopia

Since 1974, under the Socialist Military Regime, the political and economic decision-making powers were concentrated at the center. Many scholars claim this over-centralized system as one of the reasons for public sector governance inefficiency and ineffectiveness in public services and citizens' living under poverty (Dickovick and Tegegne, 2010). Under EPRDF, in order to address the failures as well as the challenges of decentralized public governance, the government has put forward different development plans, policies, strategies and programs to achieve its vision of a 'middle income country' by 2020(UN, 2007).

Since 2001, the Ethiopian government's medium term national development frameworks (PRSP, PASDEP and GTP) emphasized the need for decentralized decision-making and implementation for better PSPs. To address the present day governance and socioeconomic development problems, the current government introduced District Level Decentralization Program (DLDP) in 2001/02.

Decentralization is the transfer of power and resources from the central government to its subnational government units for effective decentralized public governance. Its success requires institutional mechanisms for communication and collaboration between levels of government and other actors (Meekiso 2007). There is no best system that fits all; however, each can devise its own mechanisms and institutions for coordinating the activities and policies at different levels (ibid). These institutional mechanisms can facilitate governance actors' interactions in terms of the level of political influence on the allocation of resources, the level of mutual understanding between different tiers of government in decision-making, the degree of autonomy, existence of clearly defined powers and functions, and the extent of resource decentralization.

The Federal Government of Ethiopia empowers Regional State governments to organize local administrative units, and determine powers, functions and procedures of local governments at Zonal, District and Kebele levels (1995 FDRE Constitution article 50(4)). It devolves adequate powers to the lowest units of government thus enabling the people to participate directly in the administration of the aforementioned local units. This reveals the political will of the national government at least of its constitution. However, true decentralization of power, of course, depends on the process established and what is practiced on the ground.

The design of devolving government functions from central government to local governments requires political, administrative, and fiscal considerations (World Bank, 2010). The design of the government has been bringing good governance at all levels through transfer of power and resources from central government to local governments to improve decentralized public services (Dickovick, and Tegegne, 2010).

The process and structure of local governments is associated with changes in political, administrative, cultural, legal, fiscal and economic power/function. The success of public sector reforms in general and decentralization reform in particular, have determined how constructs match the aforementioned factors. Devolving political decision-making without empowering local communities, or decentralizing resources without adequate accountability through political decentralization, invites problems such as corruption (Tsegaye, 2006).

National and Regional State constitutions were reviewed with the aim to decipher the challenges and features of decentralization policy design. In addition, survey participants were asked related question and regarding their perception on the challenges and features of Guraghe Zone and its districts, as shown in Table 2.

7.2. Decentralization Policy Design and Its Implementation in Ethiopia

Survey respondents were asked whether decentralization in Ethiopia was designed well and implemented as designed. As depicted in the Table 2, (65.4%) confirmed decentralization in Ethiopia was well designed; while a significant number of the participants (53.4%) reported that it has not been implemented well as designed. This shows that one of the gaps for achieving effective decentralized public governance is related to implementation gap. The FGDs participants also support the existence of implementation gap as the most important challenge for decentralization success.

The district level decentralization program promises autonomy (self-rule) at the district and Kebele

levels. However, in the Ethiopian prevailing situation shows that there is inequitable distribution of power and resources under the control of the central government (Zemelak, 2011; Merara, 2007). The gap exists between decentralization program design and its implementation. The root cause for this failure is the contradictory action of the ethnic-based Ethiopian federal and decentralized system on paper and centralization in practice (Merara, 2007, Zemelak, 2011). In the review of the 1995 FDRE and the revised 2001 South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) Constitution, data gathered from survey participants confirmed that the regional self-government and local self-governments were established through a series of government proclamations. For example, the 1991 Ethiopian transitional government charter in article 15(b) of proclamation 7/1992 empowered the Regional States to establish additional administrative units to enable the people to directly participate in the administration of such units at the district levels, taking into account the area and population of the respective regions. Later on, the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) article 50(4) devolves adequate powers to the lowest unit of government to enable the people to participate directly in the administration of local units of government. Moreover, district level decentralization program devolved power to Woreda administration and Kebel administration levels since 2001/02. It aims to take away local public decision-making power from Federal and Regional State governments to Zonal, Woreda and Kebel levels. However, about 65% of the survey respondents in this study said they were dissatisfied with their participation in local public decision-making processes.

The Regional States are empowered constitutionally on determining lower level administrative structures. However, the SNNPRS Constitution does not provide parallel empowerments for Zonal government to determine administrative units' structure below it (Woreda and Kebel units). Over 51% of respondents in this survey confirm that decision making authority is centralized (see table 2). This arrangement denies local governments to enjoy their constitutional autonomy. Local public officials interviewed in this study also confirmed that they do not have the autonomy the constitution guaranteed them. The interviewed official claimed that this SNNPRS recentralization of decision-making power hinders local government empowerments.

Table 2: Perception on Relevant Local Government Features and Recurrent Problems

Challenges and Features for Effective Decentralized Governance	Responses in %		
	Yes	NO	IDK
Decentralization reform was designed well	65.4	27.5	7.3
Decentralization reform was implemented well	39.3	53.4	7.3
Defined roles and responsibilities at each level	74.4	18.7	6.5
Government procedures and institutions have been implemented as designed	30.2	62.2	7.6
Executives have not been committed for reform implementation	60.3	33.2	6.5
Higher level governments interference exists	63.3	19.8	14.9
Existence of higher level political patronage & interference on local affairs	48.1	22.2	29.8
Centralization of decision-making authority	51.1	40.9	8.8
Mismatch between resources and mandates	54.9	26	19.1
Low level of local government capacity	54.9	18.7	26.1
Lack of proper local government organization and structure policy	66.8	29.8	3.4
Inappropriate local government population size	43.9	53.1	2.3

IDK= I Don't Know

Source: Researcher's Ph.D. Field Survey, 2013/14

7.3. Institutional Arrangements of Local Government Accountability

Inappropriate institutional arrangement for local government accountability in a decentralized system of governance is an emerging challenge for local governments in developing countries including Ethiopia (World Bank, 2010). Guraghe Zone is one of the administrative hierarchies within SNNPR State. The zonal council is the highest authority elected every five years and appoints the chief administrator from the Regional State and the Zonal elected council members from the Zone. In this regard, study participants interviewed disclosed that the logic of organizing zonal council membership to include Regional State council members amounts to power grab by Regional State authorities. Furthermore, the zonal chief administrator is accountable to the zonal council, and the Regional State Chief executive (2001 Revised SNNPR State constitution article 87(2)). This reveals that the institutional design for accountability of zonal chief administrators refer to a design that effectively forced the chief administrator to act as agent of the Regional State government, while he or she is elected representative of the people in the zone level. This hampers free deliberations at the zonal council. As argued by some FGDs participants, if a zonal chief administrator were to challenge a Regional State government order, he or she would be dismissed. The implication is that democratic governance at sub-national levels is highly influenced

by a controlling apparatus of the SNNPRS's order (Zemelak, 2011, Merara, 2007). Majority of the survey participants (63.3%) confirmed that high level government interference is a major challenge for local governance. Furthermore, as some key interview informants of local chief administrators argued, that local actors lack autonomous decision-making power. They stated that centralized EPRDF party line command and control mechanisms significantly reduce the freedom of local chief administrators and public officials from self-governance (Meheret, 2007; Zemelak, 2011). Survey participants criticized the double role and influence of Regional State council members. Similarly, they claimed that zonal council members indirectly influence the district council decision-making process. Participants argue that this approach imposes significant challenges to decentralized public governance. In all sampled districts, State government has used its discretion to determine local government and their public sector organizational structures.

The local council can call and investigate the chief administrator and other officials to conduct and discharge of its responsibilities (2001 revised SNNPRS Constitution article 81(3h)). The Constitution does not explain how each member of the local council represents the people of the locality as a whole. Moreover, it does not state how they are accountable to the constitution, the will of the people and their conscience. The accountability of the local government is also forcefully connected to the Regional State government. These measures show how SNNPRS strongly controls local governments even more than the central government when it comes to local independence, self-governance, and accountability.

7.4. Assignment of Functions and Resources for Tiers of Government

The participants' perception on clear definition of roles and functions of each tier of governments vary. Such lack of clarity on roles and functions may lead to unnecessary interferences on decisions impacting sub-national governments. The majority of survey participants (65.3%) reported that they have observed interferences on tiers of governments. The data revealed that sub-national governments would take measures that are outside of their assigned authority. The existence of interference shows that there are conflicts of interests among different levels of actors (citizens, sub-national government bodies, service providers etc). FGD participants pointed out that conflict of interest exists due to lack of clear definition of roles and responsibilities significantly affecting decentralized public services provision. Ironically, as shown in Table 2, a significant number of survey respondents (74.4%), reported that roles and responsibilities of governments at each level are clearly defined.

The local council is formed in order to challenge the power of the local administrative executive and judiciary branch, and provide a strong popular power base. In addition, DLDP aimed to increase the decision-making power of the local citizen particularly the disadvantaged by devolving implementation of government programs to the zonal, district and Kebel administrations (PSCAP Report, 2008). FGDs participants point to a critical concern regarding the personal capacity of elected officials to act in their role as representatives. They are observed to be quite passive in their role with little participation in discussions and approvals. They fail to review, formulate, implement and monitor critical and impactful plans. As a result, the checks and balances presumably built into the constitution to avoid redundancies and corruption become moot. In other words, the accountability of local administrative executives to local elected representatives is not promising.

As of the data presented in Table 2 above indicates, the majority of the survey respondents (54.9%) asserted that the level of local government capacity is low. Comparatively, as zonal council member of FGD participants argued, the capacity of council members is far lower than that of executives. As most FGDs participants revealed, the local governance actors are unable to take advantage of the constitutional provision in their context. As mentioned by the civil servants at FGD, the upper level political elites and their local patrons benefited more than the poor and excluded groups are at the grassroots of the study area. Majority of survey respondents (63.3%) observed that officials at different tiers of government exercise authority outside of what the constitution allows.

Table 3: Kruskal Wallis Test for the Existence of Interference between Tiers of Government

			Local Administration	n	Mean Rank	Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
Have you ever observed any tier of government take measures outside of their assigned function?	Guraghe Zone			22	99.27	Chi-Square	10.396
	Wolkite			22	109.82	df	7
	Abesheghe			27	98.46	Asymp.Sig.	0.167
	Enmor-Ener			47	107.18	a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
	Endegagn			20	115.15	b. Grouping Variable: Local Administration	
	Geta			22	115.95		
	Ezza			30	121.90		
	Sodo			36	134.56		
Total				226			

Source: Researcher's Ph.D. Field Survey, 2013/14

The study data analyzed and the Kruskal Wallis H Test presented in Table 3 show that the significance level is 0.167 and is greater than 0.05. Therefore, the finding reveals that there is no statistically significant difference in perceptions of survey participants across the local government institutions' for the existence of interference. Table 3 also shows that the survey confirmed that there is interference between tiers of government and that officials exercise authority outside of their jurisdiction

Findings of the study show that SNNPR regional State has not empowered its lower administrative structure (Zonal authority) to take similar action in its lower administration structure (Woreda). Local governments need empower themselves as guaranteed by the constitution such that they will not be controlled and commanded by unnecessary Regional State government discretionary power. As argued by local government officials, many Regional State officials and politicians have been distrustful of local government empowerment as a potential danger to their own authority and have perceived such a move as potential threat to their own power base. Though they fail to practice it, Regional State politicians are not constitutionally permitted to organize government structures at will, dolling out powers to themselves and others under them.

7.5. Local Government Formation in Ethiopia

The factors following the ethnic-based local government restructuring are complex. The basis for the new initiatives in DLDP has been associated with the need for efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, and accountability of institutional actors (PSCAP Report, 2008). As shown in Table 4, majority of survey participants (62.2% for Kebel administration and 66.4% for Woreda administration) remarked that the government structure policy is unclear and inadequate to determine the size of local government administration units.

Table 4: Is the existing government structure policy clear and suitable to determine the size of local administration for efficient, fair and effective services provision to the residents/citizens?

The existing government structure policy is clear and suitable to	Y		N		IDK	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Size of Kebel administration	84	32.1	163	62.2	15	5.7
Size of Woreda administration	79	30.2	174	66.4	9	3.4

Note: Y= Yes, N= No, IDK= I Do not Know, n= Frequency

Source: Researcher's Ph.D. Field Survey, 2013/14

Key informants pointed out that inadequate government structural policy on size of local governments hinders their ability to be effective and improve services. The FGDs participants claimed that the clan and sub-clan driven districts have created a zonal unity without central core and brings its varied citizens to social cohesion. More recently, the effects of fragmentation in districts have made the structure wildly diverse, unwelding and difficult to amalgamate. Such unintended consequences cause huge administrative challenges to reunify the fragmenting units. It creates structural instability on the existing system. In this manner, more and more the local government population and geographic areas have been reshaped in the last two decades. The implication is that such fragmentation alters both formal and informal institutions for citizen participation in local development of Guraghe group. Scholars have found that there is association between the 'efficiency and effectiveness of public service provision and the size of local government units due to economies of scale' (Sharpe cited in Peter, 2001). Policies should recognize that local government size impacts efficiency and effectiveness of workers. It is important that we find a balance between what scholars suggest and the need of politicians in determining the size of local governments.

Ethiopia's government reform is geared towards creating more new sub-national governments. This is so critical that the success of the reform might be measured by the multiplicity of sub-governmental units. Regional States are empowered constitutionally to determine lower level administrative structures. However, the Regional State Constitution does not provide parallel empowerment mechanism for Zonal government to determine administrative structures for units below it (Woreda and Kebel). Unfortunately, due to such restrictions, local government units cannot enjoy administrative autonomy. So confirm the interviewed local public officials.

In Ethiopia, new forms of Ethnic-based Regional States and local governments have been established since 1991. The government structure changed from unitary to Federal form. Nevertheless, in practice, the traditional bureaucratic hierarchical structures established for controlling and commanding of local governments have not been realized (Merara, 2007; Zemelake, 2011). In this regard, Guraghe Zone provides an attractive center for study of decentralized public governance change in structure. The FGDs results revealed that the Guraghe Zone and its districts have long been politically and socially instable because of emerging reunification and fragmentation of its groups since 1991. They have been governed by a new zonal and district government structures in which local public governance was politicized through local ethnic-based elite patrons networks and lack of separation of policy formulation and the administration of zone public service provision (Tsegaye, 2006).

A different unintended consequence has to do with the accountability of council members. There is no clear perception on whether they represent the people of their jurisdiction (clan or sub-clan) or the entire population in the Zone. According to the survey results, the fragmenting aspect claimed to weaken zonal social cohesion and reduce equality, unity and fraternity among Guraghe clans, sub-clans, and expansively all citizens. As depicted in Table 5, a significant number of survey respondents (51.9%) observed that participation at different levels of the Zone is not complementary but more of a substitution. This is one commonly witnessed consequence brought about by the decentralization reform.

Table 5: Have you observed that acts of participation at different levels of the zone are not complements but substitutes?

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Yes	136	51.9
no	113	43.1
I do not Know	13	5.0
Total	262	100.0

Source: Researcher's Ph.D. Field Survey, 2013/14

The FGDs participants criticized the central government for not coordinating and monitoring how local elites and Regional State are implementing the structuring policies in general and decentralization reform in particular at the grass-roots level. In addition, one of the FGDs participants' asserted that district level decentralization program implementation is 'a trick for power and resources at sub-national government levels in the name of ordinary citizens'. This shows how participants are dissatisfied with how the reform is being practiced despite the central government proclamations. The determining factor that contributes to the failure of the decentralization reform is poor central government monitoring, coordination, and inadequate Regional State institutional arrangement for accountability. This has encouraged locals to establish patronage networks for misuse of power and public resources for personal use than for public interest. Therefore, proper scrutiny and commitment at both the Federal and Regional State government levels are essential for improved self-governance.

7.5.1. Local Government Population Size in Guraghe Zone Districts

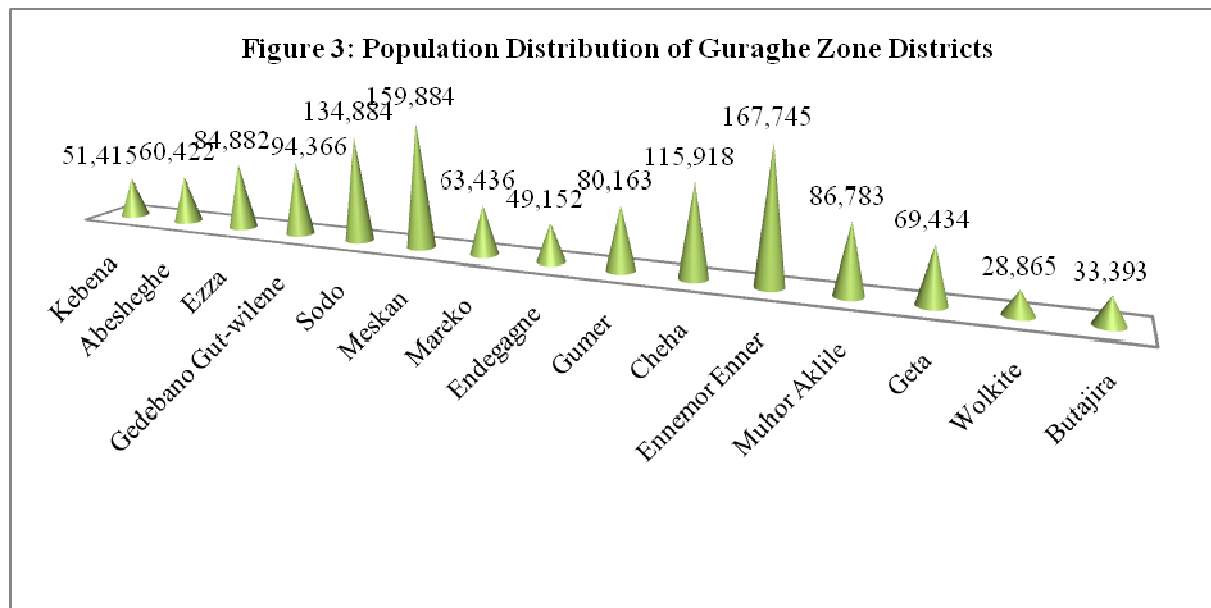
Prominent scholars state that proper population size and geographic area is mandatory for effective, efficient and responsive public services provision (Sharpe cited in Peter, 2001). The prevailing Woredas and Kebeles administrations' population size do not reflect such perspective nor are they aligned with nationally established frameworks. As can be seen in Table 6, significant number of survey participants (43.9% for Woreda units) also revealed that the existing population density and geographic area of Woredas is not compatible with the national service delivery standards. However, majority of the survey participants (72.1% for size of Kebeles and 53.1% for size of Woreda units) confirmed that their local government units' population size and geographic areas are compatible with the national services delivery standards and are proper for the services provision (see Table 6).

Table 6: Are the existing local government units in your locality consisting of appropriate population density and geographical area compatible with the national service delivery standards in practice?

Responses	Kebeles		Woreda	
	n	%	n	%
0	2	.8	2	.8
Yes	189	72.1	139	53.1
No	62	23.7	115	43.9
I do not know	9	3.4	6	2.3
Total	262	100.0	262	100.0

Source: Researcher's Ph.D. Field Survey, 2013/14

Figure 3 provides detailed information on variation in population size of district governments in Guraghe Zone. Though, Ethiopia's district level decentralization program intended for district administration with an average population between 100,000 and 120,000 inhabitants for efficient and effective public services provision (Meheret, 2002 and World Bank, 2013), the population sizes of Guraghe Zone Districts vary from 167,145 people in Ennemor and Enner District to 49,152 people in Endegagn District (as of fiscal year 2008).



Note: Wolkite and Butajira are towns

Source: Drawn from Central Statistical Agency, 2008 data

Even though, with natural population growth the prevailing demographic increase is fairly expected, as shown in Figure 3, Guraghe Zone districts population sizes do not meet the national standard for the status of a district. The data show that two of the districts (Ennemor and Enner, and Sodo) have inhabitants more than 120,000. While the remaining eleven districts in the zone have less than 100,000 inhabitants. Thus, the population size of districts and Kebeles in Guraghe Zone do not satisfy the nationally accepted standards of DLDP and other proper legal frameworks. Moreover, the overall criteria for the formation of district and Kebel structures are complicated and not clear. In this regard, FGDs and key participants were asked, ‘what are the criteria for the new formation of local governments?’ The answer was that the likely criterion is clan and sub-clan settlement based and/or is a political decision. From the aforementioned discussions, it is possible to see that the importance of proper local government population size and geographic area for effective, efficient and responsive public services provision were missing in Guraghe Zone Districts and Kebeles.

7.5.2. The Implication of Local Population Size Variation on Effective Decentralized Public Governance

Despite the variations in population size and geographic area, the organizational structure of local public sectors: education, health, agriculture, road and transport etc, has been the same for both large and small sized districts and Kebeles to provide services (Tsegaye, 2006). The frequent structural changes introduced have created instability in assignment of functions. Local governments with different population sizes are allocated the same number of organizations to serve them, as well as relatively the same number of local officials and service provider. This creates a situation where officials assigned at larger localities suffer bigger workload, while at the same time; customers also must endure longer waits due to insufficient number of case workers. For instance, during the research fieldwork, it was observed that each Kebel administration was assigned two health extension agents, without regard to variation in population size and geographic area of the unit. This arrangement creates unequal work-load for front line public service providers based on district of assignment. As if the workload issue is not enough, all service providers are paid equal salary. The local government bodies are unable to solve such structural problems because they are not empowered to do so. The authorities lack such discretionary powers in their locality. Furthermore, this creates equity problems in public resource allocation between districts. The changes introduced have created instability. The aforementioned structural related factors cause consultation, supervision and coordination problems or limitations. In practical terms, Districts such as Ennemor and Enner are experiencing severe human resources shortages and have challenges to implement the programs. Study participants in small sized districts, such as Endegagn, reported that inadequate finances and vehicles shortage are factors adversely affecting the effectiveness of local public governance.

7.6. Level of Community Participation and Empowerment

To examine the level and determinants of community participation in local public decision-making, planning and management in the study area, data from a survey of elected and appointed government officials, council members, and civil servants were gathered. The extent of local government bodies’ consultation to the community and other governance actors is reported to be a possible weakness to participation. This is partly due

to low capacity of local government bodies to listen and heed to ideas and suggestions from ordinary citizens. For the community members and local governance actors, inability to express or influence public affairs means powerlessness to prevent misuses of public resources. In order to examine the extent of involvement in public services process, six indicators were used. Survey participants were asked the extent of their involvement in planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and decision making using five Likert Scale measurement (very high, high, moderate, low and very low).

The data show that there is variation in the extent of their involvement in the processes.

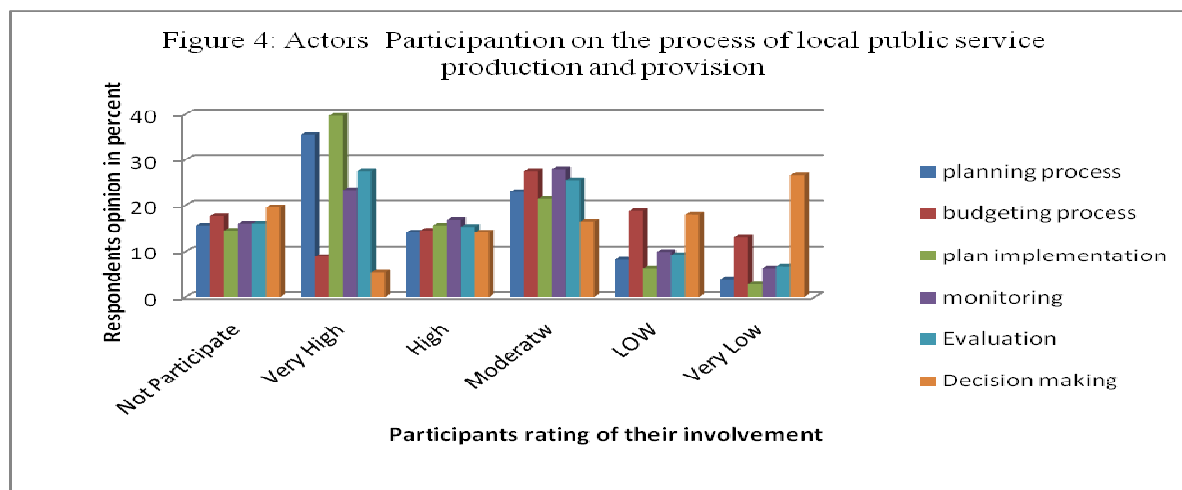


Figure 4: Actors Participation on the Process of Local Public Service Production and Provision

Source: Researcher's Ph.D. Field Survey, 2013/14

Decentralization in Ethiopia seems to have changed participation in local governance for production and provision of public services. However, survey participants point out that the extent of involvement in planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and decision-making varies (see Table 7 and Figure 4). The data presented in the Table 8 show that the association governance actors' participation and their involvement in the aforementioned processes is statistically significant.

Table7: Indicators of Actors' Participation in Production and Provision of Decentralized Public Services

Indicators=	NP		VH		H		M		L		VL	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
The Extent of Actors involvement in												
planning process	41	15.6	93	35.5	37	14.1	60	22.9	21	8.0	10	3.8
budgeting process	46	17.6	23	8.8	38	14.5	72	27.5	49	18.7	34	13.0
plan implementation	38	14.5	104	39.7	41	15.6	56	21.4	16	6.1	7	2.7
monitoring	42	16.0	61	23.3	44	16.8	73	27.9	26	9.9	16	6.1
Evaluation	42	16.0	72	27.5	40	15.3	67	25.6	24	9.2	17	6.5
Decision making	51	19.5	14	5.3	37	14.1	43	16.4	47	17.9	70	26.7

NP=Not Participate, Very High, H= High, M= Moderate, L= Low, VL= Very Low, n= Frequency. Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2013/14

Table 8: Chi-Square Test results actors' participation and the extent of their involvement in the process

	Chi-square	df	Asymp.sig
The extent of actors' involvement in planning	100.748 ^a	5	0.000
The extent of actors' involvement in budgeting process	31.817 ^a	5	0.000
The extent of actors' involvement in plan implementation	136.061 ^a	5	0.000
The extent of actors' involvement monitoring	51.328 ^a	5	0.000
The extent of actors' involvement in evaluation	56.366 ^a	5	0.000
The extent of actors' involvement in decision making	38.550 ^a	5	0.000

0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 43.7.

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2013/14

7.6.1. Involvement in Decision-making

The study attempts to identify the participants' perception on involvement in decision-making. The result shows that their perception differed from district to district. However, majority of the participants (19.5%) reported that they are not involved in decision-making. In addition, detailed analysis of data from the participants rating of the extent of their involvement in decision-making declined from very high (5.3%), high (14.1%), moderate (16.4%), low (17.9%) to very low (26.9%).

Increase community participation through the creation of a system of self-governing network with consultative powers was the objective of district level decentralization program in Ethiopia. As measurement of a contract to local government social accountability mechanism, the government expected to promote a local development plan implementation effort that has resulted in a government open system of governance networks with the stated goals of increasing participation and improving the local governments' responsiveness to its constituent communities. However, as depicted in the Table 6, the institutional actors' participation in decision-making is not promising.

7.6.2. Decentralization and Empowerment Strategies

Critics of decentralization reform in Africa have argued that one of the limitations of the reform is that it empowers local government elites than empowering ordinary citizens (the poor)(Olowu and Wunsch, 2004). Such phenomenon misdirects the benefits of the government services provision from vulnerable groups such as poor and women to local government official elites.

The survey participants were asked, "Is it true that decentralization in Ethiopia puts more power in the hands of local governments than local communities/citizens?" The results show that significantly large proportion of participants (64.3%) perceived that decentralization reform in Ethiopia devolves more power to local governments than local communities. While (28.6%) of participants reported that the community empowerment is greater compared to local governments. Local community empowerments are required to effect further change. However, the perception toward community empowerment is slight different from locality to locality (See Table 10).

Table10: Participants' Perception on Empowerments

SNG* local community more empowered		LG more empowered than citizens			Total in %
SNG		Y	N	IDK	
Guraghe zone	Count	15	4	3	22
	% within SNG	68.2%	18.2%	13.6%	100
wolkite	Count	10	4	2	16
	% within SNG	62.5%	25.0%	12.5%	100
Abesheghe	Count	9	5	3	17
	% within SNG	52.9%	29.4%	17.6%	100
Enmor and Ener	Count	24	17	6	47
	% within SNG	51.1%	36.2%	12.8%	100
Endegagn	Count	14	6	0	20
	% within SNG	70.0%	30.0%	0.0%	100
Geta	Count	12	8		20
	% within SNG	60.0%	40.0%	0.0%	100
Ezza	Count	19	10	1	30
	% within SNG	63.3%	33.3%	3.3%	100
Sodo	Count	32	2	2	36
	% within SNG	88.9%	5.6%	5.6%	100
Meskan	Count	20	14	2	36
	% within SNG	55.6%	38.9%	5.6%	100
Total	Count	155	70	19	244
	% within SNG	63.5%	28.7%	7.8%	100

Note: Y=Yes, N=No, IDK= I Do Not Know, SNG= Name of Subnational Government

Source: Researcher's Ph.D. Field Survey, 2013/14

7.7. Conclusion

Ethiopia decentralized and devolved central government power to local authorities. However, in the process local government official elites are more empowered than ordinary citizens at the grassroots level. The results of the study revealed that local governments in the study area are controlled and run in the form of regulated self-governance with Regional State bodies' decision-making. Political interference was observed and affects self-

governance.

Local government population size matters in Guraghe Zone Districts, Ethiopia. In addition, there are large discrepancies in local government population size and geographic area. However, the number of appointed local government officials, and the structure in public organizations do not account for such variation. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that there is no pay difference between officials serving vastly different population sizes. This affects the effectiveness of decentralized public governance.

Even if the Ethiopian DLDP suggests the population size of a district should be between 100,000 and 120,000 for district government formation, this suggestion is not heeded in practice. The program mandates a proper local rural government population size for efficient, effective and responsive public services provision, but local elites and their networks with upper level political patrons ignore the standard and follow their own comfortable standards. Thus, a clear institutional arrangement for coordination and management of Zonal, Woreda, and Kebel administrations must be designed and implemented by both Federal and Regional State governments. This would discourage local elite patrons' influence and interventions in favor of effective decentralized public governance, empowerment, democracy and development. Absent this, the vulnerability of the local poor and minority ethnic group will become worse. SNNPRS that have empowered and established Zonal, Woreda and Kebel administrations should grant powers to the Zonal and Woreda governments so they can establish their self-governance units.

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