

# The Extent of Public Opinion to Endorse or Halt Public Policies: A Review of Recent Change of Policy Goal Posts in Ethiopia

Dereje Terefe (PhD)  
Social & Public Policy, Assistant Professor,  
Center for Public Policy Studies, Ethiopian Civil Service University (ECSU)

## Abstract

It is believed that one of the functions of representative democracy is to provide a mechanism through which public opinion and public policy are reliably and regularly connected. The relationship between public opinion and public policy shows the functioning of representative democracy. Conventional wisdom shows that policy representation has become a prominent issue in everyday politics in recent years. The primary concept of public opinion refers to public preferences. This conviction presupposes that there has to be a policy representation, where public preferences can soundly be reflected. Meantime, public responsiveness implies public preferences to be considered in public policymaking process. However, true representation depends fundamentally on a responsive public, a public that monitors and reacts to what government does. There is less benefit when representation is inattentive and uninformed. In consequence, authorities of public opinion uphold the view that responsive public is like a thermostat which adjusts its preferences for more or less policy in response to what policymakers plan to do. This implies the embedded direct relationship between public policy and the response of the public. That is, when there is a policy increase, *ceteris paribus*, public policy preferences for more policy decrease. Conversely, when policy decreases, *ceteris paribus*, the public preference for more policy increases. Consequently, the magnitude of public support matters and government responsiveness is made proportional to the magnitude of public preferences for change. The objective of this paper is to examine the role of public opinion on policy endorsement or its demands for reconsideration or rejection for convincing reasons. Moreover, it tries to define how policy responsiveness and public responsiveness are played out and the optimum level of public opinion to influence public policies. Taking this theoretical background, the paper attempts to review and analyze the role of public opinion in policymaking process in Ethiopia and finally concludes with brief recommendations on the way forward.

**Keywords:** Public opinion, public preference, public policy, policy responsiveness, public responsiveness, citizen participation, open and inclusive policymaking, and tokenism/pseudo-participation

## 1. Public Opinion: Brief Bird's Eye View

### 1.1 Conceptual background

The term "public opinion" was not known and used until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. But phenomena that closely resemble public opinion seem to have occurred in many historical epochs. The ancient histories of Babylonia and Assyria contain references to popular attitudes, including the legend of a Caliph who would disguise himself and mingle with the people to hear what they said about his governance (Britannica Online Encyclopedia-<http://www.britannica.com/2016>). Similarly, the prophets of an ancient Israel sometimes justified the policies of the government to the people and sometimes appealed to the people to oppose the government. This used to influence the opinion of the people. In the classical democracy of Athens, it was commonly observed that everything depended on the word. Wealth, fame, and respect, could all be given or taken away by persuading the populace. In contrast, Plato found little of value in public opinion since he believed that society should be governed by philosopher-kings, whose wisdom far exceeded the knowledge and intellectual capabilities of the general population. Aristotle (Plato's student), however, stated that "he who loses the support of the people is a king no longer." The public he had in mind was a very select group in the Athens of his time, since the voting population was limited to about one-third of free adult male citizens.

Gradually, the general level of education of the lay population led to the rise of humanism and to the emergence of group of writers whose services were eagerly sought by princes striving to consolidate their domains. Some of these writers began to serve as advisers and diplomats; others were employed as publishers because of their rhetorical skills. The famous political philosopher, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1532), also believed that princes should not ignore popular opinion, when it particularly comes to matters as the distribution of offices. In particular, the invention of the printing press in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the Protestant Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century further increased the number of people able to hold and express informed opinions on the contemporary issues. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century and on the eve of the French Revolution, Jacques Necker, French finance minister, popularized the term "public opinion". He repeatedly noted in his writings that public credit developed upon the opinions of holder and buyers of government securities about the viability of the royal administration. Meantime, Necker argued that public opinion has both its pros and cons; it either strengthens or weakens human institutions. But Necker emphasized that public opinion should be taken into account in all

political undertakings. The scholar further distinguished public opinion from the view that it is people who collectively shape public opinion, those who could read and write; those who lived in cities, who kept up with the day's news, and who had money to buy government securities.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some scholars viewed public opinion as the domain of the upper classes. However, there is no doubt that public opinion was in the minds of great thinkers and writers of the century. For instance, the German philosopher, G. W. F. Hegel, described public opinion as containing both truth and falsehood. Consequently, he added that it was the task of the great man to distinguish between the two. Similarly, an English jurist and historian, James Bryce, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, maintained that a government based on popular consent would give a nation great stability and strength. However, Bryce did not believe that public opinion could or should determine detail policies, since most people do not have the leisure and inclination to arrive at conclusion on every popular demands or questions. The scholar believed that what the masses can do is setting the general tone for policy, which would help take stand in view of justice, honor, and peace. The term "honor" may hint the value and respect that government should attribute to the people who made the former. Consequently, many scholars are of the opinion that various theories of public opinion have been developed since early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which upheld the flow of public opinion from the bottom levels of the society to the top, to ensure a two-way flow of communication between representatives and the represented.

## **2. Public opinion and public policy: conceptual framework and controversies**

Public policymaking process is often times influenced by a host of interwoven and complex issues. One of such complex variables is public opinion. According to James E. Anderson (1997), it is difficult to speak and explain public opinion with precision. To Bryce (1981), public opinion is:

*all sorts of discrepant notions, beliefs, fancies, prejudices, and aspirations. It is confused, incoherent, amorphous, varying from day today and week-to-week. But in the midst of the diversity and confusion every question as it rises into importance is subjected to a process of consolidation and clarification until there emerge and take definite shape certain views, or set of disconnected views, each held and advocated in common by bodies of citizens... (p. 571)*

Public opinion may also be considered to mean any collection of opinions on specific political issues held or expressed by individuals and groups outside the government. In this sense, public opinion may be synonymous with mass opinion, with the collective opinion of the voting public, or with any collection of individual opinions (Idang 1973). It can also be referred to as the commonly held attitudes by individuals or groups regarding specific issues and policy outputs. Public opinion further connotes the totality of private or individual opinions on political phenomena or policy outputs of the government which usually reflects people's thinking or feeling on political subjects of local, state, national and international interest (Akindele, Obiyan, and Owoye 2000, 82). On the other hand, note must be made that opinions are also shaped by institutional, political, and government forces that make it more likely that citizens will hold some beliefs and less likely that they will hold others. But public opinion can generally regarded as the totality of the political orientations, beliefs, values, and attitudes expressed by members of a group about current issues, actors, and events in their political environment ( Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle 2004; Ayeni Akeke 2008).

The underlying role of public opinion is that public officials consider or take into account in making decisions; and may be expressed in many ways- letters to the editor; and to public officials; meetings; public demonstrations; editorials; election results; legislators meetings with constituents; plebiscites (referendum), and radio talk shows (Anderson 1997). As seen from the foregoing conceptual definitions, public opinion, in its many forms, has one major objective: influence policy decisions. As is known, public policy involves critical decisions, which allocate public resources in a bid to solve public problems. This all takes place in an environment of contending groups where the legislature plays many roles: referees the group struggle; ratifies the victories of the successful coalitions; and records the terms surrenders, compromises, and conquests in the form of statutes (Dye 1987, Grindle and Thomas in Jega (2003, 23). One of the most uncontroversial tenets of modern democratic theory is the belief that citizens should be able to influence the policies that govern their lives. From a normative standpoint, it is believed that the public has an impact on the policy decision made by their elected representatives. This implies that we would assume the executives govern in accordance with the people's preferences, or at least a majority of the people ((Hobolt and Klemmensen (2005). Empirical studies have also shown that public opinion influences policy behavior in modern democratic polities and asserted that this influence is increasing due to the evolution of polling technology. Consequently, as of recent, most politicians have come to relentlessly listen to public opinion as it relates to public policy decisions (Geer 1996; Stimson, Mackuen and Erikson 1995).

One of the principal functions of representative democracy is to provide a mechanism through which public opinion and public policy are reliably and regularly connected. Public opinion implies public preferences. Hence, policy representation and public preferences can only be realized through tapping into public opinion. On the other hand, it is argued that public responsiveness and public (policy) preferences should be informed, and

should react to public policy. According to Soroka and Wlezien (2007), these two dynamics are central to the theoretical work on representative democracy, from the time of Rousseau's *The Social Contract* to Lippmann (2005), Schumpeter (1950), and Dahl (1971). There is no doubt that policy participation or representation has become a prominent theme in everyday politics in recent years. The underlying reason is that there has been a steady increase in dissatisfaction in what governments consider as policy achievements. According to Soroka and Wlezien, back-room policy negotiations have negatively affected transparency and public consultations. These have led to situations where elites are tending to unresponsive to popular demands and the latter's tolerance seems to have been dissipated.

On the other hand, public opinion only possesses an effect when the public wants more action on a policy under question. In consequence, a responsive public is a public that can monitor and reacts to what government is doing. Without public attention to what policymakers do, the electoral incentive to represent would be absent. It, therefore, follows that public responsiveness is as vital to representative democracy as representation itself. To Wlezien (1995), a responsive public behaves like a thermostat, which adjusts its preferences for "more" or "less" policy in response to what policymakers do. Following the thermostat metaphor, the public behaves much like it and when the "policy temperature" is too low, a responsive public calls for more policy, and then when the "policy temperature" is found too high, a responsive public calls for less. The analogy goes that policymakers are expected to adhere to public policy preferences, whereas when the public does not respond to policy, they (policymakers) will not represent public preferences (Wlezien 2004). In view of the foregoing scholars, it can be understood that government responsiveness varies in light of the magnitude of public preferences and demands. Another important aspect is the fact that political institutions or institutional setups to affect the level of policy responsiveness of governments. For instance, Hobolt and Klemmensen (2005), in their comparative research between Britain and Denmark, found out that policy responsiveness is higher in proportional democracies than that of majoritarian. That is, the higher the degree of party competition and government vulnerability in proportional democracies makes the executive more responsive to public preferences. Moreover, elected politicians are expected to respond to public preferences due to the threat of electoral sanction, a literature well accounted on democratic politics. That is why large body of research demonstrates a correspondence between public opinion and policy behavior (Page and Shapiro, 1983, 1992; Wlezien 1995, 1997; Stimson, Mackuen and Erikson 1995).

Similarly, Soroka and Wlezien (2007) in their study found that the US presidential system is more conducive to policy representation than that of the Canadian parliamentary system. They further argue that it has been long noted that the dominance of cabinets over parliaments, where cabinet governments exercise substantial discretion, where the cabinet is the proposer, the legislature ultimately has only a limited check on what government does. In situations where the legislature and executive are fused, the need for a government to hold the confidence of the legislature can result in relatively strong party cohesiveness, or "party discipline" (Diermeier and Feddersen 1998; Huber 1996). Consequently, parliamentary government deals with much better with 'adverse selection' than it does 'moral hazard'. Party discipline does not only create substantial policy discretion and difficult to control on a recurring basis, but the system is increasingly centralized (Dochery 1997; Carly et al. 2000; and Savoi 1999). Moreover, it has greater implications for public responsiveness. In consequence, the parliament cannot effectively impose its own contrary will nor can it consistently undertake corrective measures frequently found to be erroneous. The overall result is usually the independence of ministers and prime ministers in making the policies that they wish to be put in place (Laver and Shepsle 1996). Such issues are quite different in the presidential systems, where the executive cannot act without the legislature which is the proposer and which can override an executive veto that may arise against the latter. This, therefore, causes a necessary mutual agreement between both the executive and the legislature in most policy changes.

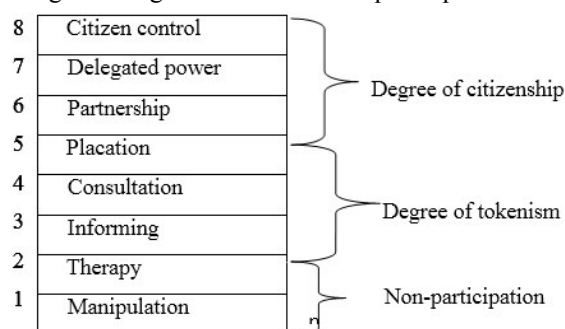
To the view of Powell (2000), the extent to which the electoral system produces disproportional results is crucial in determining which interests will gain representation. He argues that the more disproportional results an electoral system produce, the more likely it is to be majoritarian. Moreover, the decision-making rules in parliament have to be taken into account if one wants to assess whether a democracy is proportional or majoritarian, as power concentration in the hands of the government can impede an otherwise proportional results an electoral system (Powel 2000). It is also believed that the degree of opposition influences the policy. Consequently, Powel analyzed that Denmark is a purely proportional democracy whereas the UK is purely majoritarian. In the case of Denmark, Powel argues, proportional representation is used, whereas the UK uses a plurality system. In the British case, the government dominates the parliamentary committees, making it difficult for the opposition to get influence on policy outcomes (Powel 2000), while in the Danish legislature, the opposition is granted to influence over policy through the proportionally assigned committee membership and thus plays a considerable role in policymaking. In the majoritarian model, it is often found that one-party governments with a large parliamentary majority makes the government less vulnerable and less responsive to public pressure during its term in office. This makes parties in majoritarian governance more insulated from voter pressure than their counter parts in proportional democracies (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2005).

In contrast, however, the aforementioned study shows that with regard to responsiveness to public, the plurality system used in the UK ('first-past-the-post') is superior to a proportional system, since the plurality system creates a direct link between the voter and the elected representative. Constituencies are directly represented and the government can be held accountable (Austen-Smith and Banks 1998). Nevertheless, the ability of voters to monitor the responsiveness of the parliamentarians and punish these in case of shirking depends on the choices open to the electorate. In this regard, proportional representation (PR) has advantage in terms of sanctions because there are more candidates in each constituency with a reasonable chance of gaining representation (Mitchell 2000; Lijphart 1999). Another paradoxical finding of this same study is that governments in proportional democracies are less efficient in terms of delivering the policies than their majoritarian counterpart. The researchers left it open to a further research that the underlying cause that governments in proportional systems are more responsive to public opinion, but less capable of delivering the demanded policies. One possible explanation may be the size of the governing coalition which may be fragmented in delivering policies between the two study democracies, despite that more studies in other democracies are called upon.

### 3. Public Policy Participation

Participation is the expectation that citizens have a voice in policy choices. More and better participation in policymaking is considered and has become a standard expectation in an area of democratic discontent (Bishop and Davis 2002). The idea of participation rests in a sharing of power between the governed and the government. This has become critically necessary due to what Hinde (1997) labels as a 'democratic deficient' system of governance. There is also similar concern that declining trust in public institutions, the rise of social movements, public sector change and new expectations of service quality have made elected officials sensitive about their legitimacy. To the views of Bishop and Davis, participation is not appealing for policy effectiveness, out for drawing disaffected citizens back to the political mainstream. Demand for a more transparent and permeable policy process, through challenging, is understood as a link to direct democracy, preferring citizen control of an issue to meditation through representative bodies as the legislature (Bishop and Davis 2002). In all cases, participation involves a measure of citizen's involvement in decisions that could have otherwise become the prerogatives of the government. The sharing of authority in which government acknowledges the right of the people to a voice in issues likely affects their interest.

Nevertheless, there are differing views as what public participation amounts to. Questions of level or magnitude, extent of power sharing, and the relationship between traditional representative institutions and the new consultative processes all require clarity and consistency. The contending views make participation more of a political domain than a settled notion. While the broad literature on democracy struggles to delineate the concept of participation, the world of public sector management has developed a narrower technical understanding of participatory mechanisms. For instance, the World Bank defines participation as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them. Munro-Clark (1992:13) argues that participation implies an interactive process between government and citizens but does not specify the nature or bounds of the exchange. Consequently, there are different approaches, one of which is continuum participation. Two influential scholars explained the continuum model of participation. For instance, Sherry Arnstein (1969, 1971) offers a categorization of interaction between community and government. Similar themes are also discussed by Carole Pateman (1970). Arnstein suggests the metaphor of a "ladder of participation", that begins at the lowest rung (level) with manipulation, and ascending toward citizen control. According to this scholar, "citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power" (1969, 216-17). In consequence, any process which does not transfer power is token, a manipulation of public opinion. Arnstein further acknowledges that her approaches is designed to be provocative and argues that a ladder metaphor helps to illustrate the point that so many have missed – that there are significant gradations of citizen participation. It is presented in the following ladder form.



Source: Arnstein (1969: 217)

On the other hand, Pateman pays greater attention to the relationship between participation and



representative democracy. She sees participation as essential for meaningful citizenship. The same scholar also observes that participation gains little affection in most accounts of democracy and gives ‘only the most minimal role’ and sitting in the shadow of representative democracy in which electors decide between contending elites (Pateman, 1970,1). Though a representative model, citizens have little input once votes are cast. After that they cannot directly influence policy choices, and develop the social capital that flows from discussing problems, weighing options and debating possible policy courses. As a result, Pateman is skeptical about token attempts by government in consulting with citizens. In particular, elite participation is generally unconcerned about public apathy, “which retains the notion of participation at its heart” (Pateman 1970, 111). The scholar then distinguishes between Pseudo, partial and full participation –from a process which offers the comfort of voice without real substance, through to those rare instances in which each participation can influence the outcome (Pateman 1970:68-71). In contrast, *participation is only meaningful when it involves a real transfer of power from government to citizens* (emphasis added) (P. 18).

According to Arnstein, an implicit continuum plots participation along a line from token consultation at one end to full citizen control of an issue at the other. As the process travels across the spectrum, the degree of participation increases from the perfunctory to the meaningful. Such an approach acknowledges ambiguities in defining participation. It makes particularly not a single act, but a scale of possibilities. Arnstein further holds that the continuum offers both a classification of participation mechanisms and a value judgment: the language of ‘pseudo –participation’ makes clear the preference for more meaningful engagement between citizen and government. Hence, it goes without saying that responsive government needs to go beyond policy problems to propose a continuum participation in service delivery with a spectrum from minimal involvement through to community control and through regular referenda (Shand and Morten Arnsberg1996, 21). To Shand and Arnsberg (1996), referendum settles contentious policy issues (e.g., most EU nations use it for difficult issues such as membership to the EU). In consequence, partnership is explained as further step toward handing control of a decision from officials to the public to provide some measure of joint decision-making. To this end, advisory boards are the most common vehicle for partnership-style consultation (OECD1994a). Overtime, advisory committees can also develop into policy communities’ regular meetings of the key interests in a policy field, with an opportunity to broker agreements. Governments have to also see the role of providing a forum for discussions, ensuring that participants are representative of the broader community’s interests, and proposing policy ideas that is debatable, modified and adopted with some measure of common support. Information technology (today) serves through using internet to conduct opinion polls. It can advise or warn, and allows representatives to hear from the electorate. Hence, it can support direct and ‘virtual democracy’; through which issues can be debated and then resolved (Bishop and David 2002).

The growth of the internet, rapid adoption of home computers with communications facilities and the web-site presence of many pressure groups and viewpoints definitely make it feasible to conduct political business across this new medium. It’s believed that policy participation is best understood as a discontinuous set of techniques, chosen according to the issue in hand and the political comparative of the times. Each form of participation has a public rationale, and a characteristic set of power instruments (Bishop and Davis 2002). Participation is metaphorically likened to a transport process, which helps ensure citizens are informed about policy processes and remains an irreducible feature of the political and policy world that almost always has to balance active participation with technical limitations and political interests (Ibid).

## **5. Manipulation of public opinion by elites**

Some analysts (e.g. Ginsberg, 1986) contend that the rapid growth of polling explicitly reflects an attempt on the part of the state managers and political elites to channel citizen opinion and prevent the emergence of contentious politics. In this light, other scholars also shed light on the extensive efforts and frequent successes of political elites in shaping or even manipulating public opinion in posting elite influence in public opinion (Manza and Cook 2002). Although public opinion clearly sets important parameters on policymaking, the combination of contradictory public views on many key policy issues and the capacity of political elites to shape or direct citizen’s views significantly reduce the independent causal impact of public opinion. According to Obo, Eteng, and Coker (2014), it is important to consider the three main groups of “publics” when considering public policymaking process through public opinion: mass public; attentive or interested public; and opinion-elite or opinion-making public.

The first category includes the largest public but with least capacity of articulating coherent opinions on public policy or exercising (exerting) any influence on government’s decisions or policies. This emanates from the fact that members of this public lack the informational and evaluative resources necessary to adequately comprehend the complexities of public policy. The second category (attentive or interested public) is smaller in size than the mass public though it plays more decisive role in opinion formation and policy formulation. Members of this public are educated, informed, and highly motivated participants in public affairs. The last public is the opinion-elite or opinion-making public. This third group is made up of recognized opinion leaders

in the country. Because of their social position, communication resources, organizational ability and, political leverage, they are expected to exert a strong influence on the public preferences.

Moreover, the opinion elite have more direct access to the centers of decision-making in the society (Suberu 1991, 75-6). In light of the situation of developing countries, scholars are of the view that public opinion in the mass public is largely neglected due to lack of multidimensional resources. On the other hand, the attentive public can do more if it is not for its small size and lower leverage on public decisions. Unlike the other two publics, opinion elite can “use” public opinion as a weapon of political struggle instead of merely responding to it. Although public policy tends to follow public opinion more often than not, there is a sufficiently wide variation in the extent of responsiveness across different points in time to warrant, increased scholarly attention to examining the institutional and political source of variation. In short, rather than debating whether policy is responsive to public opinion, scholars suggest to work toward the development of theories of the source of contingency to better understand factors that explain variation in the opinion policy link (Manza & Cook 2002).

## 6. Open and Inclusive policymaking

Today’s world has it that governance has become more complex unless governments keep their belt tight to respond to the emerging popular demands with available resources at their disposal. Unfortunately, governments are put under pressure to do more with less since demands could not match with the resources available. One of the possible means to meet the demands is through open and inclusive policymaking, which offers avenues to improve performance and meet citizens’ rising expectations. In other words, public engagement in the design and delivery of public policy and services can help governments better understand their targets needs and enhance a wider pool of information and resources, improve compliance, contain costs and reduce the risk of conflict and delays downstream (OECD 2009). On the other hand, it is important to note that openness alone is not sufficient to ensure inclusive public participation. According to OECD (2009), inclusion has to serve the purpose of both efficacy and equity.

The true value of opening up policymaking lies in obtaining a wider range of views. In this vein, democratic governments have to make extra efforts to reach out those who are least equipped for public participation (e.g. the youth and people with some level of disabilities) to ensure equity. There are many plausible reasons for people not able to participate in policymaking and public service design and delivery. The reasons can be categorized into two groups: those who are willing but unable and those who are able but unwilling. It is believed that there are people who are “willing but unable” to participate for various reasons such as cultural or language barriers, geographic distance, disability or socioeconomic status. On the other hand, there are also people who are “able but unwilling” to participate because they are not interested in politics, do not have time, or do not trust government to make good use of their input. In response, the government has to do something in both cases. That is, to engage the “willing but unable”, government has to invest in lowering the barriers (e.g. providing multilingual information). Similarly, for the “able but unwilling”, governments must still try to make participation more attractive (e.g. picking relevant issues, providing multiple channels for participation, including face-to-face, online and mobile options). Above all, governments must expect to “go where people are” in seeking to engage with them, rather than expecting people to come to government (OECD 2009).

## 7. Guiding Principles for Open and Inclusive Policymaking

While there are a variety of options to ensure open and inclusive policymaking, the OECD (2009) provides some underlying principles that public leaders as well as politicians need to pursue to ensure open and inclusive policymaking. The guiding principles help governments to strengthen open and inclusive policymaking in a bid to improving policy performance and service delivery.

- a) **Commitment:** There has to be a strong commitment to realize open and inclusive policymaking at all levels by politicians, senior managers and public officials.
- b) **Rights:** Citizens’ rights to information, consultation and public participation in policymaking and service delivery must be firmly grounded in law or policy. Government obligations to respond to citizens must also be clearly stated, while independent oversight arrangements are essential to enforcing these rights.
- c) **Time:** public engagement should be undertaken as early in the policy process as possible to allow greater range of solutions and to raise the chances of successful implementation. Hence, adequate time must be available for consultation and participation to be effective.
- d) **Inclusion:** All citizens should have equal opportunities and multiple channels to access information, be consulted and made to participate. To this end, every reasonable effort should be made to engage with as wide a variety of people as possible.
- e) **Accountability:** governments have an obligation to inform participants how they use inputs

received through public consultation and participation. Measures to ensure that the policymaking process is open, transparent and amenable to external scrutiny can help increase accountability of, and trust in, government.

- f) **Active citizenship:** Societies benefit from dynamic civil society, and governments can facilitate access to information, encourage participation, raise awareness, strengthen citizens' civic education and skills, as well as to support capacity-building among civil society organizations. Governments also need to explore new roles to effectively support autonomous problem-solving by citizens, CSOs and businesses (OECD, 2009, 17).

In general, citizens have to be helped to judge their governments in terms of both their "democratic performance" and their "policy performance" (Klingemann and Fuchs 1995). Open and inclusive policymaking is most often promoted as a means of improving democratic performance, since it is believed to enhance transparency and accountability, public participation and build civic capacity. In turn, open and inclusive policymaking offers governments to improve their policy performance by working with citizens, civil society organization (CSOs), businesses and other stakeholders to the delivery of concrete improvements in policy outcomes and the quality of public services (OECD 2009). Finally, open and inclusive policymaking process can help governments to benefit from a wider public input when deliberating, deciding and doing. Consequently, investing in greater openness and inclusion in policymaking and service delivery can help governments achieve greater trust, better outcomes, higher level of compliance, ensure equity of access to public policymaking and services, leverages knowledge and resources, and use innovative solutions for public problems (OECD, pp. 23-24).

## 8. Public Opinion and Its Limitations

Most scholars who study public opinion and public policy in democratic countries agree that:

1. Politicians and policy entrepreneurs often have substantial room to maneuver policy in detailed ways that are not visible to the public. As in any areas of social life, when it comes to making policy, "the devil is in the details".
2. Although public opinion clearly sets important parameters in policymaking, combination of contradictory views in many keep policy issues and the capacity of political elites shapes or directs citizen's views, thereby reducing the independent causal impact of public opinion.
3. Although policy will tend to follow public opinion more often than not, there is sufficiently wide variation in the extent of responsiveness across different issues at different points in time to warrant increased scholarly attention to examine the institutional and political sources of variation (Manza and Cook, p 657).
4. The relationship between public opinion and public policy is threatened by the power of interest organization, political parties, and economic elites (Aldrich 1995; Dahl 1989; Muller 1999; Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1995; Page and Shapiro 1983; Smith 2000).
5. No one believes that public opinion always determines public policy: few believe it never does. Even proponents of democratic theory acknowledge that democratic governments sometimes ignore the public (Page and Shapiro 1983).
6. The most common objection to the claim that public opinion influences public policy is that policy is really determined by interest organizations, political parties, and elites, especially economic elites (Burstein 2003).
7. The resources available to interest organizations and elites may enable them to set what they want, even in opposition to public opinion (Domhoff 1998; Wilson 1990; Wright 1996), and political parties may, when in office, enact policies favored by their most ardent supporters rather than the general public (Aldrich 1995). Even when opinion and policy are highly correlated, the public's power may be more apparent than real: citizens may have been persuaded that they are getting what they want, while effective power lies elsewhere. Moreover, political parties may prefer to serve the interests of their most ardent supporters rather than the public, despite that electoral competition often mandates responsiveness to the public. It is all of this that the relationship between public opinion and how much power the public has comes under question.
8. Many hold that the influence of public opinion on government policy is less than it has been in the past, largely because politicians have discovered how to avoid accountability to voters. For instance, it is argued that since 1970s, the policy decisions of Presidents and members of the Congress have become less responsive to the substantive policy preferences of the average American. However, Burstein's study (2003) shows that public opinion affects public policy three-quarters of the times. Moreover, issue salience affects the impact of public opinion on policy, while the impact of opinion on policy remains substantial when the activities of interest organizations, public parties, and elites are taken into account.

However, it must be admitted that the paucity of data on interest organizations and elites mandates need great caution when interpreting the results. Furthermore, the hypothesis that government responsiveness to the public has changed over time cannot be definitively rejected, because so little evidence is available; and evidence does not support the hypothesis. To Burstein, our ability to generalize about the impact of opinion on policy is severely compromised by the narrow focus of available work, both geographically and in terms of issues. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that the overall findings of the study show that responsiveness is quite robust, not strongly affected by the activities of political organizations or elites, type of issue, or time.

## 9. Status of public opinion and its influence in developing countries

Public policy making in many developing countries, including African countries, has long been dominated by a 'top-down' approach for years. For many scholars, this is explained as a hangover either from the long period of military dictatorship in many of the countries or from the authoritarian one-party system in some of them (Obasi and Lekorwe 2014). Consequently, many of the existing "participatory" mechanisms only provide symbolic forms of participation. This is more revealing in the African context. As per the assessment of Leber (2003), the political panorama in modern Africa is sadly one of destitutions and hopelessness, for democracy and political stability seem elusive as rain in a season of drought.

### 9.1 Citizens Engagement Culture in Some African Countries

Basically, citizen engagement is conceived as both "interacting and iterative process of deliberation among citizens and between citizens and government officials with the purpose of contributing meaningfully to specification public and accountable way" (Phillips and Orsini 2002). Consequently, citizen engagement can be considered as a mechanism or way in which a government uses to connect with citizens in the government and implementation of policies in the development and services (Queensland Government 2004). Hence, "citizen engagement is a two-way learning process between citizens and their democratically elected and public institutions in search for common ground" (Bourgon 1998). Values of citizens' engagement for "strengthening relations with citizens is a sound investment in better policymaking and a core element of good governance" which allows government to tap new sources of policy-relevant ideas, information and resources when making policy decisions. It also contributes to building public trust in government, raising the quality of democracy and strengthening civil capacity. This effort also helps strengthen representative democracy, in which parliaments play a central role (OECD 2001). Accordingly, a three- stage model of citizen engagement includes:

1. *Information provision stage* (one-way relation in which government produces and delivers information for use by citizens)
2. *Consultation stage* (two-way relation in which citizens provide feedback on issues defined by government)
3. *Active participation stage (higher stage)*, a partnership relation in which citizens actively propose policy options and shape the policy dialogue, but where government retains the responsibility for policy formulation and final decision (Curtain 2003). According to the OECD report (2001), many developed (especially OECD countries), have "long-standing traditions of extensive citizen involvement", and who are now still "looking for new, and complementary ways to include citizens in policy-making", information provision to their citizens is now an objective shared by all. Consequently, consultation is on the rise but at a slower rate and large differences remain among OECD countries, and active participation is still rare, undertaken on a pilot basis only and confined to a very few countries.

Having the aforementioned introductory points about citizen engagement, its practices will be highlighted as to how this is played out in some African countries where such practices are reasonably visible or inadvertently ignored in some. For instance, in Botswana, the use of community views and opinion in the policymaking process in that country has been growing from early traditional time to the present. How did that happen? Scholars have it that Botswana is an exceptional country in Africa that remained faithful to its choice at independence in 1966 of a representative democracy in a country located in the heart of the Southern Africa region. This success was possible through decentralization as a national political priority (Obasi & Lekorwe 2014). The country remained exceptional due to its decentralized planning as a priority in the governance process with its citizen engagement process rooted in the consultative framework of traditional 'Kgotla', a democratic system of governance in the country. To the views of these scholars, Botswana's existing citizen engagement mechanisms are no doubt a model for other African countries to emulate. Its success is attributable to its inherited traditional Kgotla system- the age-long popular participatory Village Public Gathering or Forum utilized for both political and administrative purposes.

Having a republican system of governance with a president heading the executive branch, the legislative in Botswana is vested with supreme authority made up of the president and the national assembly. The



constitution guarantees a multiparty system that has remained in operation through the Botswana Democratic Party, which has dominated the political landscape since independence. The Kgotla System of popular participation family groups are traditionally organized together and closely for administrative purposes or Kgotla, a place of assembly (Tlou 1998). This ward has a distinct social and political unit headed by hereditary headman or head of the village having defined administrative and judicial power and functions (Ibid). The ward (Kgotla) was the highest level of social organization and as such constituted the smallest territorial unit in the administration of the policy in that the king or chief (known as Kgosi) delegated some governmental powers to the heads of wards known as Kgosana (Tlou 1998). Hence, the king (Kgosi), center of traditional Botswana society during the pre- colonial period, was assisted by his councilors who consulted and received advice from the administration of his area. The kings use a degree of democracy by consulting their councilors and elders before implementing major decisions affecting their people (Mgadla 1998).

It was an essential part of the Kgotla system for all the people to participate in the deliberations, and “the king took account of the opinions expressed at the meeting” and “rarely did the kings go against the opposite interests of the people” (Tlou 1998). One of the limitations of the Kgotla system was that “women did not sit at the traditional assembly except when asked to testify or give evidence in a case” (Mgadla 1998). After independence, it “was the advancement of the traditional Kgotla system into a higher level of parliamentary democracy” (Marfhe 2003). This also led to the nation’s stability and social harmony that the country enjoys from Kgotla culture of peace and tolerance. This culture, since time immemorial, has revered the say that it is better ‘to jaw-jaw’ (talking) than to war -war.

Consequently, the Kgotla system can be regarded as the modern day democratic imperative of citizen engagement in the public policy making process in Botswana. In addition, presently, Kgotla has come to signify the embodiment of good governance measured by popular participation, consultation, transparency, accountability and rule of law. This background of Kgotla system has brought about two modern day public policy processes. The first is the creation of “freedom squares”, ‘open spaces set aside for public meetings of a political nature’. They exist in every residential area and village and are open to whatever political party applies for a permit to use them (van Binsbergen 1994).The second is the use of these open spaces to disseminate information to the people as well as to consult them. Hence, both decentralization and bottom-up planning approach is accepted by both the government at the center and local levels as well as by the people (UNND 2002; Karlsson, et al. 1993). In particular, of the four levels of local administration (district, council, land boards and traditional administrations), the latter is headed by Chiefs who play significant roles. It administers justice through traditional or customary courts, and maintains customs and traditions of the people, settle local disputes, and serves as spokesman of the local people. As a result, Kgotla and the Village Development Committees (VDCs) serve as the village public forum which exercises important functions such as election of members of the land boards (Karlsson et al. 1993).

The VDCs are forums for initiating, planning, and implementing the village’s development projects; grassroots level consultation of development; and raising of funds for the general development and benefit of the people. In Botswana, holding client-oriented consultative forums is a regular part of the policy process, which the government uses Kgotla to ask communities to select which project (s) is/are of the utmost priority to them in the face of budget constraints in a particular fiscal year. Moreover, citizen political awareness and consciousness deriving from access to information is no doubt on the increase. In conclusion, the inherited Botswana’s traditional Kgotla system of democracy provided the framework within which citizen engagement in the policymaking process was actively promoted in the country. With its (Botswana) vision 2016, it states “democracy must be extended down to the level of community in a way that allows ordinary people to see that their views have been freely sought and seriously received”, and that “there must be ownership and empowerment among the population’ (Vision 2016, 1997).

It may be important to add here the views aired by the famous American scholar and philosopher, John Dewey, on the need to nurture a democratic participation of the society as follows:

... A full-flowering democracy is rooted in the soil of community. Only when individual citizens see themselves as part of the greater community are they likely to share cooperatively their various interests, abilities, and attainments for the good society as a whole. The more deeply they participate in society’s on-going dialogue among its many different members about beliefs, values, and actions, the more likely they are to experience a growing sense of community, and democracy itself grows. Democracy both depends on and fosters the fullest and most intelligent participation of all members of the community (Dewey 1916).

Unlike Botswana’s Kgotla good community participation in public policy matters, policy inappropriateness is quite abundant in Africa, which emanates from situations in which policy fails to address public problems (Ndah 2010). Ndah traces policy practices of post-colonial Africa which had been dominated by a single party or military authoritarianism and significantly affected the policy environment. According to the World Bank and Bates (1981) and Lensink (1996) and Olukoshi (2000), a neo-patrimonial clientelist policy

relations absorbed scarce resources of the public, which also reduced public policies to the pursuit of personal interests of officials.

To Ndah (2010), there are also new challenges for contemporary policy environment in Africa. They include the effect of accelerated globalization process and the wave of political reforms from authoritarian to liberal governance (e.g. Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritius, Senegal and some others). However, it is argued that little progress has been made as many of these countries have not come close to their goal of developing and transforming their societies to the desired promise. In consequence, Ndah concluded that *polycymaking is still almost the sole responsibility of a small group of politicians who are more concerned with maintaining themselves in power rather than implementing policies to improve the socioeconomic wellbeing of their people* (emphasis added).

Ndah, therefore, finds three current African policy characteristics: lack of evaluation and improper/non-policy implementation; inconsistency of policies (both horizontal and vertical); and lack of policy review in some of the important policy fields (p. 11). The scholar further believes that wrong problem definition has both led to the setting of inappropriate policy goals and use of inappropriate strategies (instruments) to achieve the goals. In his "Public policy and the challenges of policy evaluation in the Third World", Nwagboso (2012), most conceived public policies abysmally fail in the developing world due largely to inadequate data, poor definition of goals, over-ambitious and unrealizable policy goals, inaccurate definition of social problems, adoption of top-down rather than bottom-up approach of decision-making, among others (Bhagwan and Bushan (2007).

In Nigeria, the question of public opinion is not much different from the rest of other African countries' practice. There is the real issue of the complex relationship between public opinion and polycymaking results in two types of opinion groups. While most people are not usually informed about an issue and cannot participate effectively in shaping public policy, the few others informed are interested in issue that is divergent and may not be able to convince the government to adopt their preferred position (Suberu 1991). Hence, in light of the truth that citizens have the power of electing, supporting or rejecting the main governmental actors and the policies they stand for, Ikelegbe (1996, 100) holds that the reality in Nigeria and other underdeveloped countries is different. That is, while resources used to fund government's policies belong to the citizens, the opinions of these vital components seldom can influence the polycymaking process. As Egonmwan (1991) observed:

*The situation is worse in the developing countries where polycymaking is not made explicit but dictated, in most cases by men at the top due to level of literacy of the masses, the weakness of ineffectiveness of the mass media (where they exist), centralization of authority, and the ineffectiveness of interest-aggregating structures (where they exist) because of the thin line of distinction between them and the ruling class (p. 164).*

However, in light of the fact that sovereignty lies with citizens and it is in the interest of the government to be guided by the opinions and preferences of the majority of the citizenry, public opinion remains to be a significant tool in polycymaking. Suberu (1991) thus reiterates: "no government interested in its own survival can consistently and completely ignore the opinion of the public's" (p. 83). Anderson further illuminates this same idea as follows: "elected public officials, who totally ignore public opinion and do not include it among their criteria for decisions, should be so foolish, and are likely to find themselves out of luck at election time" (1997, 147-8).

It must, however, be noted that policy challenges are not unique to few countries in Africa. It can be perceived that the challenges are pervasive whose causes could be attributable to lack of public responsiveness on the part of governments. The challenges exert substantial pressures on policy implementation. Many African and foreign scholars have widely dealt with, for instance, the policy implementation challenges in Ghana's National Health Insurance Cost-sharing Policy in Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda (Corkery and Bossuyt (1995). Among the causes, *politicization of policies to ensure political survival and perpetuation of party interest and lack of participation of the target groups* (emphasis added) are few ones to cite (Imurana, Haruna, and Kofi (2014, 20-1).

## **9. The status of public opinion and polycymaking in Ethiopia**

Scholars relate the emergence of formal development policies in Ethiopia to the period of late Imperial era. During the period of Emperor Haile Sellassie, the civil service made structural changes through what was known as Public Services Order No. 23/1961 that established the Central Personnel Agency (CPA), popularly known among Ethiopian civil servants until very recently. The CPA functioned under strict centralized system of governance to nurture a homogenous public serves throughout the nation. This in a way tacitly heralded the centralized and top-down polycymaking tradition until the emergence of the federal system of governance, in the aftermath of the fall of the military government and the beginning of the formation of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) in 1995. The country entered into a new era of policy environment since early 1990s. Beginning from the Transitional Charter, which had a three-year life span, lots of fundamental changes have taken place. In particular, the FDRE Constitution that came to force in 1995 brought about significant

policy departures in the following areas:

- i. The country adopted a federal system of governance;
- ii. This system of governance, by and large, was based on the nations, nationalities and peoples' common culture and similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, common or related identities, common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory (FDRE constitution Art. 39, sub Art. 5).
- iii. Pursuant to the federal system of governance, multiple policy venues had to become evident. This was made clear by the same constitution under articles 50, 51, 52, in particular where the federal and states have equal policy mandates. These policy mandates, unlike past-centralized imperial and military era practices, have brought about a policy departure in which many of the policy communities at each level of governance could play their part.
- iv. The FDRE constitution also made clear under article 52 (1) that "All powers not given expressly to the Federal Government alone, or concurrently to the federal government and the States are reserved to the States". In principle, this provision implies that the states have more policy mandates than the federal government. It further notes that there is a shift in policymaking style from the hitherto centralized system to a decentralized modus operandi.
- v. The constitution also guarantees citizens that they are entitled to be informed and participate in the formulation of national policies and programs as follows:

*Government shall at all times promote the participation of the people in the formulation of national development policies and programs; it shall also have the duty to support the initiatives of the people in their development endeavors (FDRE Const. Art.89, sub art.6).*

All of the above constitutional promises can inform that as public policies affect citizens' life and career, citizens have also every reason to take active part in the development policies of their own nation. Despite the foregoing constitutional provisions and change of governance modus operandi now almost close to three decades, a thorough and conclusive study is still awaited, on the level and spectrum of policy participation in Ethiopia. As a result, one may categorically characterize it as either high or low. Nevertheless, there are some studies which indicate the magnitude of stakeholders' participation both at local and national level policies. The implication shows that it (the level of participation) is not to the level required when seen in light of the broader constitutional provisions. Some scholars (e.g. Fekadu 2016; Habiba 2015; Omer 2014; Biruk (2014); Dereje (2012); Taye (2008); Amdissa (2008); Mulugeta 2005; Alemayehu (2004); and Getahun (2004) have found out that popular policy participation in Ethiopia is not commensurate with the changes that took place in the country and the constitutional land mark which assigns roles to all policy actors at all governance levels. The underlying cause for it is that most public policies are not only characterized as 'top-down' but the culture of policy dialogue and scope of citizen participation is limited (Dereje 2012, 2015).

Mulugeta (2005) argues that in Ethiopia there are policy imbalances between two levels: first, between the executive and the legislature, and second, between policy elites on one hand, and ordinary citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) on the other. It is further highlighted that at both levels the party and the executive exert enormous power leverages. The underlying reasons, not limited to, could be ascribed to two main dimensions: the age-old centralization practices and lack of sufficient policy capacity by policy actors at all levels. Indeed, one of the seasoned FDRE parliamentarians (Atsbeha Aregawi 2012) has made such limitations clear. He further underscored that the critical limitations for the quality policymaking in the country are the inadequate popular participation in the policymaking processes and the party discipline that stifles both the quality and transparency of public policy passed by the legislature. This has led the ruling party to assume parliamentary agenda (policy agenda) where the executive enjoys a virtual monopolistic leverage (Assefa Fiseha 2009). Assefa further added: "the ruling party to stay in power needs to ensure that its party members in and out of parliament should support and approve its own policies." On the other hand, when public policies are centralized, competitiveness among policy actors remains low and there is a greater transactional cost when policies are made to flow in a uni-directional fashion from the center.

Though efforts exerted so far to build policy capacity may not be undermined, it may sound presumptuous to think that such efforts are commensurate both with the constitutional provisions and with the diversity that the nation commits itself to celebrate. There is also room to doubt that some level of inadvertent policy tensions may exist between the constitutional provision of policy decentralization and desire for policy centralization. All the same, the magnitude of public opinion to influence policy decisions could be said minimal. Such participation deficits and lack of use of public opinion for effective policymaking process are commented by scholars at various times. For example, the Ethiopian Economic Association in its 2013 findings came up with similar ideas which most scholars have hinted before, a "top-down" approach which uses only a one-spot "conference style consultations". Harrison's finding (2012) is not different from this. While she noted that the rhetoric "participation" and "stakeholders" pervade almost all the mainstream media in Ethiopia, they are *narrowly skewed to a segmented public* (emphasis added), mainly those closely related to party affiliation and

sympathy.

Some of the above hints inform that the extent of public opinion to adopt or reject public policies is minimal, if not totally non-existent. In the extreme cases, policies designed at top-level and en route to implementation have two options: they will be made to operate in a coercive manner rather than consultative; or, will be made delayed since they may not pass the test of public consent for meaningful implementation. The recent three or four public policies that were made to ‘freeze’ temporarily or for good could be cases in point. Perhaps, one can argue that these deferred policies could be labeled as the first wave of policies, at least in recent years that acquired the status of responsiveness from both the public and the government to have been reconsidered.

### 10. Data gathered on the status of public opinion and policy participation in Ethiopia

The writer of this paper has approached experts and middle-level researchers at one of the training seminars conducted in Addis Ababa City. They were from Addis Ababa, Oromia, Tigray, Amhara and SNNPR leadership academies. Participants were consulted after they have undergone a week-long public policy seminar. The objective of the investigation was to gain some insights from the participants on their experience and views towards policy development, implementation, the level of popular participation, and challenges that surround these processes. Respondents’ educational background ranges from first degree (5 per cent), Masters (90 per cent) and PhD (5 per cent) respectively.

In terms of gender, of the total respondents, only two (10 per cent) were female while the rest 90 per cent were male. All of the respondents filled in the questionnaires with full consent and free will to which the researcher pays tribute to their professional understanding and value of the data. Almost all of the questionnaire items were constructed on a five-point Likert Scale, while respondents also made to choose from among given alternative responses. Furthermore, open-ended questions were supplied where respondents had to freely express their views on the subject under questions. The twelve (12) question items were organized in the form of description to which respondents had to indicate the level of their agreement or disagreement. As shown in the table that follows, responses were analyzed item by item, discussed and interpretation (implication) drawn.

5=don’t know 4=strongly disagree 3= disagree 2=strongly agree 1= agree

Table I: Respondents’ responses on public policy -related issues

No.	Descriptions	Level of agreement or disagreement										Total in %
		5		4		3		2		1		
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
1.	My overall understanding of public policy goal and importance is low.	-	-	4	20	12	60	-	-	4	20	100
2.	There is no any policy that I take part to implement in my institution	3	16.5	12	67	1	5.5	-	-	2	11	100
3.	My participation in the national development policies has been high	1	6	2	11	9	50	1	6	5	27	100
4.	Upon formulating main national policies, employees of their institution will be made to gain enough knowledge and understanding	2	10	5	25	3	15	3	15	7	35	100
5.	I have the belief that in the policy formulation process the public will largely participate	-	-	7	39	4	22	2	11	5	28	100
6.	The main reason why policies are not implemented as per their set goals is because the public does not want them	-	-	10	43.5	9	39.1	-	-	4	17.4	100
7.	Lack of effective policy implementation emanates from low stakeholders participation who are in the policy network	1	5	1	5	3	15	6	30	9	45	100
8.	To what extent to do you agree to the commonly expressed press conferences on the media that, “the policy has no any pitfall; the problem lies in its implementation”?	-	-	5	25	3	15	6	30	6	30	100
9.	Sometimes after policies are designed and close to implementation, the will be made to wait or held back. Such decisions will create trust between implementers and the society and the government	1	5	6	30	7	35	2	10	4	20	100
10.	When policies fail to transform into implementation result in problems, those are have to be held accountable	-	-	1	5	-	-	9	45	10	50	100
11.	When policies not supported and properly deliberated upon are barred from implementation, it shows the ailment of the political system	-	-	4	20	3	15	6	30	7	35	100
12.	A public policy endorsed by lawmakers but unable to be properly implemented may become hindrance to people’s representatives’ re-election	1	5	2	10	-	-	6	30	11	55	100



As shown in the table (under item one), respondents were requested to indicate if their overall understanding of public policy goal and importance is low. To this end, 20 per cent of the respondents strongly disagreed; 60 per cent disagreed, while only 20 per cent of them accepted (agreed) that they have minimal policy understanding as regards its goal and importance. In contrast, 80 per cent of the respondents have assumed to have good knowledge and understanding about policy goals and importance. If the 'knowledge' responses are taken for granted, the corollary is that there is a wider platform of policy participation that meaningfully contributes to its effective implementation.

Similarly, item two of the table inquires to find out if respondents have not participated in policy implementation of their institution. In response, 16.5 per cent of the respondents confirmed the "don't know" response, while 72.5 per cent of them strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively to the "no" participation statement. Only 11 per cent of the respondents have agreed, while 16.5 per cent of them do not have any clue about it. The overall implication is that majority of the respondents, in one way or another, have participated in policy implementation of their institution. This finding is encouraging in the sense that most the staff members know that they are implementing different public policies their respective institutions have designed.

Similarly, respondents were requested to determine their agreement or disagreement if their participation in the national development policies has been high. In response, 61 per cent of them disagreed, while 33 per cent of them agreed. Similarly, 6 per cent of the respondents could not be certain of such type of policy role. On the other hand, questions related to employee's participation in main national policies shows that 40% per cent of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively, while 50 per cent confirmed to have gained enough knowledge and understanding about national policies. Nevertheless, 10 percent have not made up of their mind. Overall, the difference of responses between the two extremes is not reliable and casts doubt of the solidity of the knowledge about the subject under discussion. It therefore needs to exert more effort to enhance the level of policy awareness and participation at all levels.

Furthermore, in response to item five of the table that describes greater public participation in the policy formulation process, 61 per cent of the participants (respondents) strongly disagreed, while 39 per cent agreed. While the difference is significant, the term "formulation" may have also played a detracting role, with the traditional view that policy formulation it is the domain of few designated experts rather than tapping on additional treasure of ideas or opinions from the rest of stakeholders. Item 6 in the table is as to why policies could not be implemented as per their set goals and if this is attributable to the fact that the public does not want them at all. In response, a clear majority of respondents (82.6 per cent) starkly disagreed to the statement, while only 17.4 per cent of them are in the agreement side of the scale. The writer has tried to draw a link with the recent government decisions where some public policy implementation has been suspended for further public scrutiny and consensus (e.g. the controversial Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan (2015), the Health Care Insurance (2015), and Traffic Accident Mitigation policies (2015). Reasons for withholding the policies from official implementation as planned have emanated from blatant popular disapproval of their implementation because sufficient discussions were not carried out with potential stakeholders. Such a u-turn policy reversal, either temporarily or for good, has nevertheless left its grim impacts both for current and future policy formulation and implementation practices informs policymakers to think twice. The overall matter to be drawn from respondents' reaction vividly shows that policy relevance and public responsiveness matters considerably if it is to qualify as 'public'. The policy reversal can also be related to the fact that good intentions may sometimes result in bad consequences. Such consequences are "very, very difficult to remedy" (Banks 2009).

Item 7 in the table was meant to find out if there is a link between lack of effective policy implementation and low stakeholders' participation. To this end, 75 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed, while 20 per cent of them strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. The rest (5 per cent) could not make up their minds to approve or disapprove the statement. The overall finding clearly indicates that the more we have effective policy participation from the beginning, the greater is its enhanced implementation. Little or no stakeholders' participation results in weak policy implementation. Indeed, this is consistent with many scholars in the area (e.g. Mulugeta 2005, Dereje 2012, 2015; Habiba 2015; and Fekaddu 2016). The issue has also been high on agenda and there was a continuous call by policy scholars though attention cherished to it has been little or sometimes non-existent. While policy implementation gap obviously occurs due to a variety of causes, the impact is much greater when a top-down approach is used and beneficiaries are not allowed to contribute to the formulation of policies that affect their lives (Makinde 2005).

Mulugeta (2005) further revealed that in Ethiopia there are what he calls as "policy imbalances" at two levels: first, between the executive and the legislature, and second, between policy elites (party-fused-with executive structure or institutions) on one hand, and ordinary citizens and civil society organizations on the other. However, policymaking has to be the concerns of all stakeholders. The OECD document paper forwards that "open and inclusive policymaking is transparent, accessible, and responsive to as wide a range of citizens as possible" (2009, 24). Furthermore, in a bid to prove the frequent officials rhetoric that "the policy has no any pitfall, the problem lies in its implementation" (item 8), 60 per cent of the respondents confirmed its 'truth',

while 40 per cent of them generally disagreed. The finding reveals two important points. First, it shows how shared views, whether right or wrong, are upheld as truth. Second, it is also interesting to see the policy dichotomy perceptions created between policy and its implementation, where each of them is given a separate package and agency instead of one whole package and agency. Such notions extend to divide policy actors into policy makers and policy implementers, disregarding policy process as a continuum. Attempts to create a dichotomy between the two simply paves for escaping accountability, while government should have been collectively held responsible for set public goals not achieved.

In a federal system where policy responsibilities are functionally decided rather than being based on jurisdictional criteria, regional states or lower governance levels (e.g. Zonal and Wereda) are usually targeted scapegoats to bear the blames for what they sometimes have not known. Harrison's finding (2002) attests the above reservations. She saw a gap between policy participation and its implementation characterizing it as "a vast gap between policy-making in Addis Ababa and the realities of implementation". Both federalism and its concomitant decentralization of services closer to the beneficiary do not seem to have received warm greetings from the center.

Harrison further witnessed that people in Addis Ababa feel very disconnected from what participation might mean in practice. A number of informants she contacted in Addis implied that in some sense policy-making and implementation are "mutually exclusive". This was implicated from one her respondents as follows: 'We generate policy, so implementation is not our business' (pp.602-3). Harrison added that one manifestation of this belief is the widespread use of the term "community" to describe the entity with which participatory efforts are engaged, but with little sense of what this community might comprise. Consequently, Harris characterized the modus operandi of stakeholders' participation as ostensibly participatory and less top-down approach but the true picture shows that "participation has always taken a second place to the delivery of technical inputs ----"(p.605). Consequently, The rhetoric such as 'participation' and 'stakeholders' though pervade almost all the mainstream media, they are skewed based on a segmented public, mainly related to party affiliation and sympathy (Ibid).

As regards the change of policy goal posts (item 9), respondents were requested to give their views on what people think of, whether there is feeling of building or losing trust from policymakers. Having had recent memories about the subject, respondents out rightly disagreed to the idea that it results in trust between implementers, the government, and the society at large. Consequently, 65 percent of the respondents declined, while only 30 percent of them seemed to agree. The rest 5 percent did not know it. The finding also sends the signal that change of policy goal post rather counting against building trust among all policy actors and between the society waiting for its problems get solved. The issue of accountability is directly linked to item ten. Respondents were requested to suggest whether persons in charge of policy implementation "failure "are to be held accountable. To this end, 95 per cent of the respondents fully agreed, while only a negligible (5 per cent) endorsed the "don't know" responses, showing a nearly stark agreement to the statement. Whether such policy failure may be indicative of systems or political ailment (item 11), 65 percent confirmed it, while 35 percent disagreed. Though reasons were not enquired further, issues such as political environment and its stability are some of the ingredients of effective policy implementation (Wu, Ramesh, Howlett, and Fritzen 2010).

Furthermore, respondents were requested to confirm their agreement or disagreement if failing to implement officially endorsed (approved) policy will create hindrance to people representative's re-election. In response, 85 percent fully agreed to some sanctions to be imposed on the parliamentarians from re-election. This clearly shows that policy delivery (implementation) is the basic sine qua non for re-election. However, this does not seem true in Ethiopia, as there is no official report disclosed that one or more people's representatives have been barred from competing in electoral process other than political disapproval. The situation rather may be associated with what policy scholars consider it as 'logrolling' (Dye 2005; Anderson 2006), a situation where constituents and the representatives exchange favor between the two. Finally, respondents we made to rank the level of policy conceptualization and understanding (very high, high, very low and low) among policy implementers and the general public. To this end, 70 per cent of them confirmed 'very low' and 'low' respectively, while 15 per cent opted for 'high' and no response for very high. Majority of respondents clearly indicated that the view that policy conceptualization and understanding is substantially low will in turn sheds light that many public policies are abysmally implemented or postponed temporarily.

In addition to the foregoing findings, respondents were made to express their views to the open-ended questions on policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The first category includes the listing of policy implementation bottlenecks in order of importance as follows: attitude; skills; resources; limited stakeholders' participation; lack of wider policy transparency and accountability; low policy knowledge and skills; limited deliberative and consensus building policy platform. In response to the listing, the following corrective strategies were suggested in order of importance as follows: frequent and continuous awareness raising; building policy capacity; allocating sufficient resources; formulate policies taking into account inclusiveness and addressing the needs of stakeholders; conduct policy analysis to clearly to know and

understand problems and design a problem-solving policy; ensuring participatory process; and hold people accountable while failing to discharge their vested responsibilities.

## 11. Conclusions and the way forward

### 11.1 Conclusion

Any consideration of citizen engagement in policymaking and the design of public services is the recognition that citizens in a democracy have both rights and duties. Such active participation provides opportunities for citizens to shape their world. Moreover, these concepts of ‘co-creation’ and ‘co-production’ have emerged as a systematic pursuit of sustained collaboration between government agencies, non-government organizations, communities and individual citizens (The Australian Government’s report *Ahead of the Game-the 2020 ... Australian Public Service -APS-2011*). This position clearly illustrates that citizens shape their world through public policies. However, such policies are not only made by politicians. According to Maddox (2005), they are made “by thousands of public servants and tens of thousands of women and men who petition parliaments and ministers, who join interest groups, comment through the media or represent unions, corporations and community movements, as all have a stake in it, public policy” (P. 43). In consequence, citizens are placed in the center of policymakers’ consideration *not only as targets but also as agents* (emphasis added).

Nevertheless, the long debates by policy scholars is whether the impact of public opinion expresses real public preferences that can be recognized by political elites so that it more likely tends in the direction of public opinion. As explained earlier by Manza and Cook (2002), politicians and policy entrepreneurs often have a lion’s share or room to maneuver policy in a way that is not visible to the public. Moreover, the competing and sometimes contradictory public views on key policy issues and the capacity of political elites to shape or direct citizens’ views significantly reduces the independent causal impact of public opinion. Lastly, the level of public responsiveness varies across issues to warrant desired attention to the issue under consideration.

As just aforementioned by scholars and the findings obtained from the study experts and middle-level managers, the level of policy participation and use of public opinion as an input does not seem to justify that there are sufficient and reliable opportunities to materialize it. One plausible factor is the traditions, political and policy traditions, in which things were made to function. In other words, there is a seasoned legacy of top-down policy tradition for much of the country’s history and difficult to break despite the constitutional provisions that aspire for the participation ideal. Coupled with the top-down tradition, one can argue that the culture of demanding public has not been developed to help nurture open and transparent policy modus operandi where two things simultaneously coincide: responsive public and public responsiveness. The former is what the public responds to what government does by way of policy formulation, while the latter is what the government responds to public demands. If ethically pursued, this is the right balance between the two entities.

The second point could be related to lack of comprehensive policy analysis tradition. Some of the policies put in place are not the outcome of a multidisciplinary analytic approach. Many of them are based on the obvious economic and administrative efficiency approach, where the issues of sociological, cultural, and environmental elements are unintentionally or intentionally sidelined. While policy decision is by implication a political decision, most practices indicate prescriptions favored by professional analysts who lack the complex political and distributive justice made through public policies. Perhaps, the third reason is the tendency pursued by politicians. This includes the easy policy transplantation or borrowing system, without taking into account how much they can fit into the existing socioeconomic, political, and cultural realities. While globalization is considered to have made life easy in adopting policies across nations, the mere attitude and practice of “*why invent a new wheel?*” approach is making policy implementation an uphill- struggle. “Policy globalization” had made policymakers to experience embarrassments as their role is unprecedentedly becoming minimal to influence or shape policies due to the diplomatic and economic baggages followed along bilateral or multilateral cooperations.

The above and other reasons have, therefore, brought about two detrimental outcomes: little or non-existent policy participation and public opinion on one hand, and postponement of policy implementation, which eventually results in the change of policy goal posts on the other. As a result, the policy publics in Ethiopia hangs only on two entities: the mass and elite or opinion-making publics. As Obo, Eteng and Coker (2014) have rightly pointed out, the mass public (though the largest), is with the least capacity of articulating coherent policy opinions and exerts no greater influence on public policy due to lack of information and evaluative resources necessary to adequately comprehend the complex nature of public policy. The other publics, attentive and interested, play a negligible role because of their position. Their role is only tacitly manifested in some form of disgruntlement feelings or total indifference to whatever policy is put in place. This clearly paves the way for the elite or opinion-elite public to play a lion’s share role, with limited and at times no meaningful influence from the rest.

Consequently, other than providing consent and support, both remaining publics do not have the forum to move far beyond. In most of the cases, both publics take what the opinion elite tell them to believe. This,

however, does not rule out some of the dynamic challenges this remaining publics pose by way of opposing the policies handed to them. A stark and concrete example is the recent policy reversals that took place in the country, where the public tried to find out where the process went wrong and forced policymakers to think twice. The popular response, though not then coordinated and based on critical thought-out wisdom, could be taken as an important signal to halt policy implementation paths that forced the government to concede to popular disapprovals. Though it may seem anecdotal, this unique event has forced the government to look for ways to deal within the principle of public-responsiveness. This will remain a hard lesson for government to base any public policy decision on transparent and consensual approach, primarily with that of stakeholders' full knowledge and consent. Such critical and principled state of affairs testifies the sovereignty of citizens expressed through their opinions and preferences of the majority of the citizenry in the policymaking process (Suberu 1991, 83). It also implies that governments only derive their mandates from the people and can only retain their influences with the trust they obtain from the latter.

To Anderson, *"elected public officials who totally ignore public opinion and do not include it among their criteria for decisions, should any be so foolish, are likely to find themselves out of luck at election time"* (emphasis added, 1997, 147-148). Policy reversal has its deep-rooted causes. Hirschman (1975) in Cokery and associates vividly informs us a situation where policymakers often decide matters without first having obtained full and detailed knowledge of possible consequences of their decisions, gradually come to "motivation outruns understanding" style of policymaking. Policy decisions emerging from such a process are likely to set off a chain of unanticipated actions, which, in turn, lead to "a swift policy reversal (Howell 1992).

## 11.2 The way forward

1. Ethiopia has adopted a spate of public policies since close to three decades now. This trend would undoubtedly continue along the national and global dynamism to be on the footstep of our doors. In response, we need to enhance our policy transparency and networks and attend to public demands. Public institutions and policymakers have to distance themselves from limited and sometimes 'back-room' policy negotiations so that their tolerance would not be dissipated. It is also important to ensure that citizen participation should transform itself to real "citizen power", not tokenism in nature (Arnstein 1969).
2. In a bid to broaden the policy space, it may be important to harness the potential and virtues of traditional institutions which are still operating at grass root levels. While Botswana's example could provide treasures of wisdom, Ethiopia has even more modernized potentials if determined to use institutions such as the *Gada* system of the Oromo, an element of a democratic ideal that can be transformed into people's everyday life; the *Guurti* of the Somali, the *Mada* of Afar People and the cross-cutting notion of "*Shimglina*", which are widely experienced in the country. If effectively used, such inclusive institutions can bridge the policy participation and communication gaps that are frequently witnessed and sometimes cause for policy postponement, which is costly and an unfortunate precedence.
3. Enhance policy dialogue culture not only during limited events (e.g. election campaigns) but as part of regular policy quests and deliberation to raise policy awareness. Scholars have it that a "receptive" policy environment is necessary that helps to begin the matter with a question rather than the answer in order that relevant institutions are mobilized to support it.
4. Enhance the skills and use of policy analysis, while making sure that the outcome is not prescriptive and goes beyond professional limits as policy decision is finally a political decision. Technocratic role of experts should not exceed description of issues and suggestion of plausible options.
5. Ensure that popular policy concerns are well attended to and responded timely by appropriate authorities in charge to build stakeholders' trust and consensus.
6. It is important to ensure transparency and accountability in public policy spheres in a bid to achieve set public (stakeholders') goals. Transparency in policymaking helps government to see how the community reacts to ideas before they are fully formed, and enables to anticipate the politics of pursuing different courses of action. In other words, Ethiopia should create a receptive policy environment with the will of the people in charge.
7. One significant policy aspect is to develop the culture of providing sufficient time to listen to the public. If the public, as main policy agent, show some level of refrainment from accepting and implementing a set policy, it is advised not to hesitate admitting and correcting mistakes, as there is no more concerned agency than the agency for which the policy is meant to serve. After all, government should recognize when groups and individuals begin setting themselves aside and move out of the company of the policy designed by elite of the mainstream. This must be understood as the first signal that rifts are created and the state of affairs ends up with brewed crisis.
8. Finally, it is essential to know what matters in a bid to save public policies from crisis. According to Lynch (2007, 5-7), there are six points that matter to save a policy from crisis: strong public service; preparation, capacity and analytics; networks; delegation; communication; and strong balance sheet (resources).



Policymaking in Ethiopia should also take into account these important “dos” to make public policies more inclusive and fruitful.

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