

Introduction

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A Brief Overview of Decentralization in Ethiopia

In the last quarter century, many countries have engaged in the process of decentralization by transferring responsibilities of the state to lower tiers of government. Such transfer of power is believed to bring not only political stability and contribute to democratic governance, but also improve service delivery and attain equity. The 1991 government change in Ethiopia has ushered in a decentralized system of governance. This is a departure from the past political system which did not allow for self-rule and institutional development and harmony between the different ethnic groups. Decentralization in Ethiopia is hoped to bring about harmony and cooperation between different groups and promote local self-rule.

The decentralization drive in Ethiopia has proceeded in two phases. The first wave of decentralization (1991-2001) was centered on creating and empowering National/Regional Governments and hence was termed as mid-level decentralization (Tegegne 1998). During this period, National/Regional State Governments were established with changes in the local and central government system (Yigremew 2001). The National/Regional Governments were entrusted with legislative, executive and judicial powers in respect of all matters within their areas, and with the exception of those that fall under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government (defense, foreign affairs, economic policy, etc.) (Kasshun and Tegegne 2004). In particular, they are empowered, among others, to issue regional constitutions and other laws, plan and execute social and economic development. Fiscal decentralization which elaborated the sharing of revenue between regions and central governments, and introduced transfers and subsidies, was part of the decentralization process. Fiscal decentralization was intended to assist Regional Governments by boosting their capacity for developing their localities through self-initiative. It is also meant to narrow the existing gaps in economic growth and development among regions (Kasshaun and Tegegne 2004). Despite this, fiscal imbalances between regions and heavy dependence of the Regional Governments on the Federal Government's transfer and subsidies have persisted.

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While the first wave of decentralization has registered significant achievements in local governance and regional self-rule, it was not capable of bringing genuine self-rule particularly at lower levels of administration where governance and decentralization matter most. Though the Constitution allows for the creation of weredas with their elected councils, the lack of power, resources and authorities has limited them to effectively engage in democratic self-rule. In addition, Zonal and Regional authorities had a controlling, checking and monitoring power over the activities of Wereda Governments.

These circumstances prompted the Central Government to take an initiative to further devolve powers and responsibilities to the weredas in 2001. This was achieved through the District Level Decentralization Program (DLDP) and Urban Management Program (UMP). Unlike the first wave of decentralization, which has a simultaneous country-wide coverage, the second wave was initially limited to the four Regional States, namely, Oromia, Amhara, Tigray and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region. The process entailed enabling legislation for local governments, fiscal reform, institutional restructuring, capacity development, etc. In terms of the institutional restructuring, Zonal Administrations have undergone a process of scaling down and more powers were accorded to weredas. Weredas are also allowed to establish more offices which were manned by redeploying personnel from the regional and zonal level offices. The main instrument of DLDP, however, is the wereda block grant which made resources available to weredas through transfers from regions. Though the transfer may not be adequate to cover all the expenses of the weredas, it has allowed them to exercise planning and budgeting which was earlier accorded to the Zonal and Regional authorities.

The above is a brief glimpse of the decentralization drive of Ethiopia. While decentralization has changed the political climate of the country, it has certainly led to questions regarding its various procedures, ramifications and impact. Along this line, it is not difficult to see that there is a room for improvement in order to maximize the benefits of decentralization. So far decentralization in Ethiopia has attracted some research and study. A lot, however, remains to be done to get deeper into the decentralization process in Ethiopia, particularly in light of recent developments. Further research and investigation will help to fill knowledge gaps and provide policy makers with adequate sufficient and reliable data to improve the decentralization drive in Ethiopia.

This volume brings together scoping studies made by FSS and other studies of decentralization. The purpose of the scoping study is to identify knowledge gaps for further research and generate debate on decentralization in Ethiopia. The scoping study has two parts. The first one is a literature

review which attempts to document existing studies on decentralization in Ethiopia and highlights some research gaps. This part is prepared by Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher and Kassahun Berhanu. The second part is a field work that involved a rapid assessment of eight weredas and two kifle ketemas in Addis Ababa. This part is prepared by Meheret Ayenew. The other three studies included in the volume are synopses of masters theses submitted to the Institute of Regional and Local Development Studies of Addis Ababa University.

Highlights of the Papers

Tegegne and Kassahun present a broad canvas of the different issues of decentralization in Ethiopia. The topics reviewed cover the design, impact and implementation of the decentralization program, in addition to other cross-cutting issues such as non-state actors, gender and environment. Tegegne and Kassahun note that under the political and legal framework it is important to investigate whether the solemn pledges made are feasible in the face of the diversities of sub-national governments. The ethno-linguistic considerations as a cornerstone of decentralization and regional-local self-rule in Ethiopia need a thorough investigation though at present most authors make only nominal observations. Most of the studies done on fiscal decentralization pertain to the situation prior to the recent wereda-level decentralization. The current arrangements of fiscal decentralization that include region-wereda transfers and wereda fiscal decentralization have barely been investigated. The value added of DLDP and wereda decentralization needs to be rigorously examined in order to better understand the ramifications of the recent move in decentralization. Decentralization has various impacts: Service delivery, socio-economic development, poverty reduction. Studies related to accountability of service providers to users, representation and participation of users in planning and decision-making processes, and structures for participation and representation are cited as important areas of investigation. The synergies between decentralization and pro-poor policies are not clearly known to date. This presents an important area of investigation since pointing out how synergies could be attained and exploited is necessary to harmonize decentralization with other policies. Similarly, the impact of decentralization on quality of services and infrastructure need to be examined. Tegegne and Kassahun note that decentralization in Ethiopia is one of the instruments in expediting poverty reduction. Though some desk-based studies along this line have been made, a systematic study investigating the poverty-decentralization link is still yet to come. The authors point out that various studies have highlighted implementation

problems such as capacity, resource and other constraints. There is, however, a need to articulate the achievements of the decentralization program.

The relation of environment, gender and non-state actors with decentralization is little studied though these cross-cutting issues are influenced by decentralization. To what extent decentralization has improved environmental protection and resource management, how non-state actors are influenced by and influence decentralization, whether decentralization has brought real empowerment to women are all areas awaiting for further and deeper investigation in Ethiopia.

Meherets' paper is a rapid assessment of wereda decentralization in 8 weredas drawn from four regions. In addition, two kifle ketemas in Addis Ababa were part of the sample. The empirical part of the paper highlights great variation in population size among weredas and in fact questions the assumption made by the wereda decentralization program that weredas have a population size ranging between 100,000-120,000. This has implication not only for present budget allocations but for future redivision of weredas as well. The study of the sample weredas also shows differences in terms of available services (education, health, drinking water). Factors underlying such differences need to be known in order to inform policy for equitable provision of the services in future.

The study notes that weredas are administered by the Executive Committees, otherwise known as *Cabinets*. The chairman of the cabinet is the chief administrator. Cabinet members are drawn from wereda councils and are responsible for the day-to-day running of the economic and social aspects of the wereda. The cabinet is answerable to the council and implements decisions and policies passed by the council. The council members are elected and serve as part-time, non-salaried deliberative bodies and meet four times a year to exercise oversight function over Wereda Executive Committees. The situation in Addis Ababa is different as a temporary structure with one year tenure has been put in place for an interim period.

Meheret notes that representation of women among cabinet members is limited, but they have a higher representation among councils. The levels of qualification and training of cabinet members indicated that though there are differences among weredas, most have diploma, certificate or higher qualifications. The level of qualification in the critical areas of public services, local economic development and good governance, however, is far from desirable.

The absence of competitive party politics at the local level, the predominant presence of underpaid and not so well qualified administrative personnel, the discrepancy between the law and the actual practice are some

of the observations made. Meheret emphasizes that the dominance of the ruling part in council and cabinet membership reduces the political space for non-state actors to participate in economic and political issues affecting the locality. This has a negative implication for participatory governance and downward accountability of wereda governments. One of the issues raised by the author is the problem of unfunded mandates which leaves weredas to shoulder responsibilities without adequate means of discharging their responsibilities. Therefore, the service demand of the local people cannot be met by the wereda governments. Weredas at best are using their resources to cover salaries and administrative costs instead of capital projects. The current wereda decentralization also suffers from problems of skilled personnel, equipments and facilities. On the policy front, the author emphasizes that, with the exception of the Amhara region, there is a marked absence of detailed legal/regulatory framework specifying inter-governmental relationships, wereda finance, etc. The author also notes the limited decision-making authority, responsibilities and resources devolved to the Kebele levels of administration. This reduces the possibility of empowering kebeles for improved service delivery.

Among the other three studies, Tesfaye's and Kumera's concentrate on service delivery since the introduction of wereda decentralization. Tesfaye examines decentralized education services in Moretena Jirru and Bereh Aleltu weredas of North Shoa. The assessment was made along four variables: institutional and resource capacity, school personnel, community participation and budget. The wereda education office in Moretena and Jirru is reported to have a problem of durable leadership, unattractive working environment though the situation in Bereh Aleltu is better due its proximity to Addis Ababa. The Kebele Education and Training Board (KETB) and the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) are local institutions created for education service. The KETB is, however, found to be less effective compared to the PTA. The school personnel in the study weredas have lower qualifications than what is required. Staff shortages and poor logistics for school supervisors were also noted. In addition, very low remuneration, lack of housing and even lack of proper classrooms render the working situation in Bereh Aleltu uncondusive for provision of quality education.

Community engagement in the delivery and management of schooling is crucial, and is emphasized in the strategy. The form of community engagement, however, is limited to material contribution, which is far from the true sense of empowering the community. In terms of budgetary resources, though the education sector is the highest recipient of the wereda budget, most of it goes to salaries and wages. The budget constraint in Moretena Jirru wereda has posed difficulty to achieve the standard per capita budget allotted to students. Schools in both weredas do

not have the mandate of allocating and re-allocating budget, with a consequence of delay in providing school supplies and interruption in the learning process.

The author concludes by saying that though school functions such as construction, recruitment, upgrading, budget allocation are devolved to the wereda level, most of the decisions are undertaken by a few individuals, while community associations, and school personnel are simply implementers. This is in direct contradiction to community empowerment, a fundamental principle of decentralization. This, coupled with the shortages of skilled manpower and logistics, imply that devolution of power does not necessarily lead to improved service delivery.

Kumera examines the performances and constraints of selected public services: education, health, water supply and rural roads in view of wereda decentralization. The study was conducted in Digelu and Tijo Wereda of Oromia region. The overall performance of the different services were noted to have shown improvements after decentralization. The improvements, however, become negligible when the efforts of actors other than the wereda institutions are disregarded. Financial and manpower constraints and problems of coordination and participation have contributed to the low performance of the wereda. The absence of commonly designed and agreed upon plans poses difficulty for the wereda government to address the service needs of the community. This means that besides providing adequate budget and resources for improving service delivery, it is imperative to improve the efficiency of the public sector in order to create an effective and responsive system of service delivery.

Mohammed's paper is an evaluation of the performance of the wereda decentralization program. The study was held in Amhara National Regional State with the emphasis on Legambo Wereda of the South Wello Zone. The author notes the achievements and constraints of wereda decentralization. The achievements include the effort to make the three branches of government independent of each other, the effort to decentralize power to wereda government structures, the effort to launch a pool system, the application of fiscal decentralization, and the effort to generate resources from the people for local development. The constraints include shortage of well-trained, experienced and committed pool of manpower and lack of competence among members of the political leadership. These constraints are believed to be related to the lack of proper training and motivation.

References

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