

Decentralization and District-Level Decentralization in Amhara Region

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the process of decentralization and district level decentralization programs in the Amhara region. It addresses the decentralization processes in Imperial, Derg, and EPRDF regimes. The depth and degree of decentralization in the three consecutive regimes were different as the process of decentralization in the current government meant to be deeper and extensive and pushed powers, functions, and roles into the local government. The process of decentralization in the current government has transferred powers and functions to the districts. However, the district level decentralization process has faced many challenges. The paper revealed that unclear assignments of powers and functions, executive dominations, upward accountabilities, top-down planning, lack of skilled manpower, lack participatory systems, failure of the councils in holding the executive accountable, lack of adequate budget, lack of revenue mobilization capacity, lack of responsiveness, and accountability among councils were the main challenges that impede in the process of the DLD process.

KEYWORDS

Administrative Council, Decentralization, District Level Decentralization, Kebele, Kebele Council, Metema, Woreda, Woreda Council

1. INTRODUCTION

Decentralization is the process of transferring authorities, resources, and responsibilities from the central government to intermediary and local governments. The major motives behind decentralization are addressing failures to foster development, strengthening democracy, provision of effective and efficient services, and combating poverty, which in a nutshell, promotes good governance. Decentralization has four forms; *Deconcentration*, *Delegation*, *Devolution*, and *Privatization*. It has also three dimensions; *Administrative*, *Fiscal* and *Political decentralizations*.

Meheret (2002) pointed out that one of the aims of decentralization is to devolving government power from the center to the lower tier of governments. As a result of this, nine ethnic-based regional states and two autonomous city-states named Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa are created. The main objective of this regionalization is to empower ethnic groups to develop their culture, language, manage their socio-economic development, and exercise self-rule to bring about the equitable share of national resources.

The process of decentralization in Ethiopia took two phases; the first phase was started in 1992 and lasted in 2001. This phase was contented with transferred powers, functions, and resources from the center to the regional governments. This process might have laid a landmark spot in the political development of Ethiopia. The second phase of decentralization began in 2001 which further deepened the process of decentralization as it was aimed at further pushing powers, resources, and functions to

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the local level governments (Meheret, 2002). The process was undertaken with a program called DLDP (District Level Decentralization Program) upheld by the EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) government to devolve more powers to the districts. This process, as proclaimed by the EPRDF government, is hoped to enhance the governance quality since it enables the government to be closer to the people and makes the local government more accountable, transparent and responsive to the local people. Therefore, this paper has critically examined the processes of decentralization in the three consecutive regimes and it also aspires to assess the process of the district-level decentralization program in the Amhara regional state.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is conducted following the qualitative research methodology. The paper examines qualitative data ascertained both from primary (interviews) and secondary sources of data. In order to conduct this paper 53 interviewees (from woreda administrative council, woreda council, kebele administrative council, and kebele councils), federal and regional constitutions, regional legislations, state annual reports, books, articles, and literature were consulted. The ascertained qualitative data are analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques. Document analysis and descriptive analysis have been employed.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 The OVERVIEW OF DECENTRALIZATION IN ETHIOPIA

3.1.1 *The Imperial Regime*

Even though the introduction of local governments is traced back to Emperor Menilek II when he had completed the state formation of Ethiopia, the first move toward the institutionalization of decentralization was made by Emperor Haileselassie I when the emperor submitted the *Awraja* Local Self-Administration Order No. 43 of 1966 to the then parliament (Kassahun, 2007).

“Haileselassie’s I major drive, with the death of emperor Menilek II, both as a regent for empress Zewditu (1916-1930) and emperor (1930-1974) was aimed at ensuring the strengthening of the central government at the expense of the provinces. The major motive of the emperor in weakening the provinces was to shatter the opposers of his coming to power and those who wanted the empress to keep on power” (Kassahun, 2007).

The gradual dismantling of the regional power bases was more or less successful and finally, with the promulgation of the 1931 constitution the dispossession of the power bases of the regional power, which historically at one time during Zemen Mesafit had even more powerful than the central government, was completely weakened. Since the constitution confirmed the emperor with the legal mandate to preserve the firm control of power over anybody in the country and the constitution also bestowed the emperor with all prerogatives that made him even above the constitution itself. As a result of this, the emperor supported, with the constitution, initiated centralized state whereby the power was concentrated in the hands of one person, the emperor, instead of in the hands of the masses (Kassahun, 2007).

Haileselassie I had fast attempts to move towards centralizing and reorganizing his government was interrupted by the Fascist Occupation (1935-41) of the country. By the time of the invasion in 1935 the country was divided into 32 *Gizatocch* (administrative regions) indeed their subdivision was not identified (Kassahun, 2007). Following the evacuation of Italy, the Ethiopia Emperor Haileselassie I had successfully restored his previous power. Once the emperor had firmly reasserted his power, he had begun to reassure his ever motive of the strong central government by culminating all resistances posed against his uncontested authority (Kassahun, 2007).

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