

EFFECTIVENESS OF DECENTRALIZATION IN OROMIA REGIONAL STATE: THE CASE STUDY OF HARU DISTRICT

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Abstract

This thesis was conducted with objective of assessing effectiveness of decentralization in Oromia regional state, West Wollega Zone: Haru district in focus. For this study, mixed method research approach was used in a way that quantitative methods had augmented or supported by qualitative methods. Concomitantly, embedded research design was employed. Simple random sampling was used to select 378 households from 11 sub-districts in which sample size was determined by Yemane's formulae and distributed questionnaire while purposive sampling was used to select 8 informants and FGD for interview. Hence, questionnaire, interview, FGD and observation were deployed to collect data from primary and secondary sources and verged together. These data were triangulated after analyzed descriptively and thematically. Finding of the study vindicated that devolved power, authority and resources had not been implemented effectively due to interwoven problems emanated from lack of capacity, rampancy of corruption lack of synergy of action, sporadically reshuffle of leaders, lack of commitment and false documents with local discretion in Haru district. In nutshell, effectiveness of decentralization was a kind of Pyrrhic victory in which the same administrative, political and fiscal question had been replicating itself since decentralization reform had ushered in the country at large and in the district in particular. Hence, in order to ensure efficacy of decentralization researcher recommended resuscitating strategies such as watch-dog during session of deliberation of the council of the district, effective asset register, extension of effective EACC at district level, repudiating intermingling of party affiliation and professionalism, using proportional representative electoral system than FPTP electoral system at local government and ensure transparency in budgeting and planning.

Key words: District, Decentralization, Effectiveness, implementation

1. Background of the problem

Over the past three decades, EU involvement in matters of decentralization and local development has gone through a cycle of experimentation and learning by doing which passed through different phases. In the first Phase, (1980 to mid-1990s) local development had intervened through several generations of community-driven micro-project schemes, mainly aimed at fostering rural development and providing basic infrastructure. In Phase two (mid1990s to 2010), there was a growing interest on the part of the EU to provide more tailored forms of support. Over time, these projects helped enhance the capacity of local administration in addressing issues such as social cohesion, local economic development, environmental sustainability and internally displaced persons. In the third phase (2005 onwards), the growing

international recognition of local authorities as development actors — propelled by vocal local authority associations at various levels — led to the EU's gradually integrating local authority into its cooperation processes. The final Phase (2013 and beyond), decentralization and development reconnected through territorial approach—holds the potential to re-establish the link between decentralization and development. It seeks to combine the bottom-up approach to development, enriched by a broader territorial perspective, with the elaboration of supportive national decentralization policies and institutional changes that help to create the conditions for genuine territorial dynamics (European Commission, 2016).

From the mid-1980s onwards, a wave of decentralization reforms swept across the developing world. In similar vein, the wave of decentralization in Africa started between the late 1980s and early 1990s, often in the context of public sector reforms associated with structural adjustment programs. Decentralization has been a major policy agenda item across many African countries over the last few decades (Conyers 2007), and efforts to strengthen local governments have been aimed at dealing with the region's continuing problems with governance (Kassa *et al.*, 2017). However, decentralization in Africa is glooming, as there are no undisputable success stories in terms of governance outputs and outcomes at local level. Failure has been explained, inter alia, by: over-centralization of resources, limited transfers to subnational government, narrow local revenue base, lack of local planning capacity, limited changes in legislation and the absence of a meaningful local political process (Robinson , 2003). Indeed, Conyers (2007) argues, however, that decentralization is yet to have a fair trial in Africa, as few African countries have experienced true devolution of powers and resources to local governments. Furthermore, weaknesses found with decentralized governance are a reflection of problems affecting governance more broadly, such as lack of accountability mechanisms, poor administrative capacity of the state and weak civil society.

Ethiopia ushered decentralization with complex socio-cultural, economic and political problems diffused from the predecessor government. As result, it needs ample time in order to answer questions of the time. To do so, the first phase of decentralization (1991-2001) embarked on answering nationality questions. It has registered significant achievements to answer nationality question (Zemelak, 2014), however, it did not bring better service delivery particularly at

lower levels of administration. In addition, zonal and regional authorities had an unlimited controlling, checking and monitoring power over the activities of the district governments (Kassa, 2015). District Level Decentralization Program (DLDP), enacted in 2002 was considered dynamic change since it featured political, administrative and fiscal changes at a national level. All of these prompted the central government to take an initiative to further devolve powers and responsibilities to the districts in 2002/2003 through DLDP. Unlike the first wave of decentralization, which has a simultaneous countrywide coverage, the second wave (since 2002/03) was initially limited to the four regional states, namely, Oromia, Amhara, Tigray and SNNPR (Melkamu et al., 2015). Nonetheless, decentralization had been denounced in Ethiopia because of its ineffectiveness.

Oromia was one of the four regional states¹ that had ushered decentralization reform from Zone to the district level by 2001 (Yilmaz and Venugopal, 2008), however, its practice remained paper value. In this line, Merera (2007) revealed that there had been different pitfalls in decentralization experiments in Oromia. Likely, Haru district had been charged with implementing devolved power, authority and resources came into effect as the result of DLDP since 2001. Despite decentralization reform, the district had continued to persist without showing any progress in terms of quest for effective decentralization.

In nut shell, effectiveness of decentralization had been debilitated by intermingling of many factors emanated from lack of effective implementation of devolved power, authority and resources which replicated in administrative, political and fiscal sphere paves ways for lack of good governance. As the result, study about efficacy of implementation of decentralization is sobering in this study area.

1. Statement of the problem

Previous research denoted that prevailing decentralization design and its practices have clearly influenced its effectiveness in decision-making and implementation in Ethiopia (Melkamu *et al.*, 2015). Thus, implementation of devolved power, authority and resources had been denounced for its ineffectiveness stemmed from the fact that the establishment of local government was

¹ Amhara, Oromia, SNNP and Tigray

driven by the central state and hence was not a regional response to regional challenges (Kena, 2016). In addition, the institutional and organizational capacities of the Local Governments in today Ethiopia do necessarily not put them in the position for them to have the competencies and capacities necessary to allow a total devolution of powers and resources to them in the decentralization process (Kena, 2016).

Research revealed that lack of effectiveness of decentralization at local level in Ethiopia is resulted from the overall government system. One of these challenges is lack of clear guidance for local government population size in either the constitution or decentralization documents. These pressures influence the effectiveness of the decentralization process to improve public services provision (Melkamu *et al.*, 2015). Some scholars assert that decentralization in Ethiopia is indeed rhetoric than practiced. The *raison d'être* is the fact that regional constitution and statutes dealing with local government maintain the hierarchical structure (Zemelak 2011). Indeed, as a 2008 comparative study in four regional states² demonstrates, service delivery by the sub-district remains largely top-down, supply-led, government-organized and standardized in spite of the official rhetoric of participatory and accountable local administrations (Emmeneger *et al.*, 2012).

Due to the backdrop mentioned above, this research had given due attention to research gap emanated from little concerns given by researcher to interwoven of the overall bottle necked pitfall of decentralization with the fabric of locally induced discretion. This is because effectiveness of decentralization is overwhelmingly juxtaposed by locally induced addition to problem emanated from higher level of government. To put simply, they gave much more attention to either higher level of government tier or local problem than the interwoven of the problem from both. Indeed, as much as reviewed, attention given to prevalence of amalgamation of higher and locally induced problem in tandem has not analyzed sufficiently by previous researchers.

²Oromia, Amhara, Tigray and SNNPR

2. Method and material

Based on the problem concerned, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were deployed sequentially for this study. To this effect, sequential embedded research design was used in a way of supporting each other. Simple random sampling was used to select 378 respondents from total of 7092 households in the eleven kebele selected randomly. Data were gathered through questionnaire, interview, observation and FGD. Collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics using SPSS while other data were analyzed thematically and triangulated altogether at the end.

3. Implementation of decentralization

The nexus between lack of capacity and implementation of decentralization in Haru district is manifested by public resources wasted thereof due to lack of executing their skill properly. In this token, the focus group discussant from water supply office revealed that problem faced water supply office in Haru district is of two folds: inability to thoroughly investigation site of the project, and lack of executing necessary professional skill needed.

In Haru district, councilors lack capacity enables them to play the ideal role of being representative one else. In this vein, (Yilmaz and Venugopal, 2008) denounced the district council, they are often passive on over sighting of procurement. It is not involved in selection and awarding contract. The councilor neither receives any report on procurement nor is formally informed who is awarded the contract and why. The oversight function of the council are seriously compromised due to conflict of interest as most cabinet members in all district are also members of the council and are thus unable to objectively oversee the cabinet. Similarly, such problem occurred in Haru district, when contract awarded and delivered on road to Kabi Mariam and construction of Qaki secondary school.

The statistics of the district indicates that water coverage has grown into about 86% as 2018/19. However, having this figure in mind, it is too simplistic to notice that this much number can contribute nothing to life of people as the water pole remained simple tomb. The respondents condemned this contradiction by admitting failure than success as many water pole are out of service due to lack of skill in inauguration one way and ironically the coverage grew up to 86% on paper.

Impact of lack of capacity on implementation of devolved power, authority and resources is vindicated by many factors. One of such factor is infrastructure made under required quality. In the case of Haru district, inaugurated infrastructures under required quality such as school, road and water poles can be typical example. In case of political sphere, lack of capacity was vindicated by inability to entertain diversified political outlook.

Corruption has great impact on administrative capacity in this study area. None the less respondents vary a little bit on cause of the corruption. Indeed, respondents from competent political party on their part deemed absence of working with political party is exacerbating the prevalence of corruption. The reason is that if the competent political parties would be able to work with the leading party, there would have been prevalence of check and balance that contribute a lot in reducing abuse of power.

During field survey, researcher had observed many projects ruined because of embezzlement of a million birr in virtue of projects so far. As the result a million worth projects have terminated; others are delivered with very poor quality yet. In 2017/18 eight million worth road project was delivered as though it was finished (OBN, 2018). In similar vein, unknown amount of money has embezzled in virtue of project of Qaki secondary school and water scheme across the district.

To be genuine candidate, one has to offer bribe. The bribe is offered not only to promote but also to stay in power. Right claimant has been asking for whether they were ready to offer bribe or not via technical phrase *Harka moo miillaan deemtaa?* (Which literary mean, do you have something you pay at your hand or do you get ready to pay bribe?) is a jargon used to identify the dedication of right claimant to offer and/or not the bribe.

Bribe also has been used as genuine criteria to select the civil servant to send to training. Civil servants have chosen to be sent for a given training if and only if they agree to pay the half of the training fee. In 2018/19, candidates are selected three times to send for the training of National Census in search of loophole for bribe. In addition, issue of false document has been one of the hotly debatable throughout 2018. However, it becomes cooler and cooler later on. A lot of document has seized, yet no action has taken. Payment of ghost worker also had been common.

Salary has been paid in pay roll of workers who had left the district during and/or before 2017/18.

From the view point invoked above, it can be concluded that corruption had constrained implementation of devolved power, authority and resources overwhelmingly in Haru district. Reciprocally, lack of effective implementation of devolved power, authority and resources in its turn prompts rampancy of corruption. The intermingling of both factors preclude effectiveness of decentralization in Haru district.

Despite whether decentralization can combat or rejuvenate corruption is very controversial (Blume and Voigt, 2008), the result of this thesis, however, revealed that decentralization increases rampancy of corruption (bribe, nepotism and embezzlement) in case of Haru district. It gave relative autonomy for local incumbent to engage in corruption often using local discretion. It has been going on in away prevalence of the one pave ways for the others often paradoxically.

In Haru district, incumbents had been reshuffled exhaustively up to seem unreasonable yet with no effect. Because of such sporadic reshuffle, leaders were not allowed to manifest their leadership skill because of instant reshuffle. The reshuffle of leaders is perhaps necessary and can have positive impact on effectiveness of decentralization if it takes into account resolving weakness of the leadership. Notwithstanding, the reshuffle has been made in Haru district not because of mitigating the weakness of leadership. The reshuffle is not emanated from the people either. It has been guided by regional government regardless of performance of the leader in their respective district. In line with change of leaders, fragmentation of planning and executing often coined as barriers. This discontinuity has great impact on implementation of devolved power, authority and resources which in its turn debilitate effectiveness of decentralization in Haru district.

The net effect of the above back drop concludes that some leaders had been using the reshuffle to camouflage themselves from being responsible for what had done. Such reference helped them to escape from wrong done in the past. In doing so, they try to ensure their innocence, whereas ex-leaders remain immune from being responsible to the wrong done. In nut shell, reshuffle of incumbents had great impact on implementation of devolved power, authority and resources not

only by letting pass the wrong doers but also it affects consistence of the function in different aspects.

The nexus of synergy and effectiveness of decentralization in Haru district is characterized as hate- love personal relationship. When people born in boundary of the district occupy the decisive position the synergy would be likely solidified. If the head is not from the district per se and/or if he is not the individual they deserve to be, the former staff technically boycott the new incumbent so as to gradually wreck him out of power. Such prevalence is very deep rooted among the experienced incumbents. They technically drive him towards fault whenever they fear that he would not ally with them in near future. Worst of all when reshuffling take places the former incumbent even hide and/or collapse the necessary documents from the upcoming incumbent so as to make him confused. For example, in 2017, in civil service bureau file had distorted because of rivalry over power. This is because the former incumbent deliberately distorted the file from computer as counter response to the newly promoted individuals. As the result of this rivalry, the researcher was one of the victims that our monthly salary was extended until necessary document was compiled.

Related research vindicated that lack of synergy in case of Oromia region is part and parcel of recommendation for a cabinet that merely based on recommendation of OPDO. As the result there is lack of cooperation between OPDO nominee and other civil servants. On other hand, sub-district administrators often suspect these professional so that they do not want to cooperate with them (Emmanager, 2011).

Lack of political commitment exacerbate problems pertain lack of implementing devolved power, authority and resources. This is because decentralization is firmly based on the existence of a political willingness and commitment on the part of the higher political authority. Meaningful decentralization and development cannot be expected to materialize in an environment where the power and pressure groups and structure operate in such a way that the interests of the center prevail over the interests of the periphery (Hailu, 2001). He succinctly stated the requirement of and decisiveness of political willingness and commitment in decentralization as:

Decentralization, in whatever forms it occurs, is a political agenda, it takes place within and under a political regime and the regime should be properly committed for the achievement of the political objective (Hailu, 2001).

Different previous research attest that process of decentralization have been challenged by serious capacity problems in terms of administrative, technical as well as resources to plan and implement their responsibility (Tegenge and Abrham, 2014). Inappropriate placement of man power and lack of qualification among the executive to plan, implement and manage appropriate social and economic development project and basic public service in locality (Ibid). As the result, decentralization may lead to duplication, wastage, intergovernmental conflicts, fiscal and economic imbalances resulting from ballooning wage bills, fiscal and monetary indiscipline, and inefficient and ineffective utilization of resources (ECA, 2017).

Head of civil service of the district revealed that in 2018 about 21 false documents were seized. Some of the owners of false documents were exposed themselves while others were exposed through whistle blowers. Ironically, no action was taken against them so far. This vindicated that these people had been doing things they do not have necessary knowledge. Due to this fact, the abyss of lack of implementing devolved power, authority and resources had emanated from such gap.

In general, the implementation of devolved power, authority and resource is metaphor that has never realized in Haru district so far. Lack of implementation of devolved power, authority and resources in required manner, therefore, would likely affect the effectiveness of decentralization. In case of Haru district, implementation of devolved power, authority and resources has been affected by concomitant problems emanated from lack of lack of capacity, lack of synergy, sporadic reshuffle of incumbents and lack of commitment, corruption and false documents.

4. Pyrrhic victory of decentralization since May 2018 in Haru

Effectiveness of decentralization continued to be perplexed in Haru district even since May 2018. Some people argue that transformation is not only echo and amplifying the rhetoric change but also tracing back to the old fashion. These group, therefore, denounce EPRDF for its confinement to changing the name and reshuffling the incumbents. The change couldn't go

beyond change of individual and name of the party. Cumbersome attitude and bureaucracy hasn't changed yet.

Another perplex is the confinement of change at central government. People still continued to denounce vehemently the government for failure to ensure changes at local level. The absence of change at local level paves way for incumbent to go anti- democratic manner. The reshuffle of leaders of course made, however, it is top down assignment. Thus, their accountability is not for local community rather to the upper incumbents. Moreover, council in Haru district continued in the way they have had before. Local militia are continued to intimidate people by strengthening their cooperation with regional and federal defense force. Amount of incentive and daily payment has increased than before.

Hegemonic power of ODP continued to be undisputable. Thus, attempt to criticize ODP is deemed to be anti- change. Assuming about other competent party is considered as barriers to the change led by ODP. Asking for social service in Haru district is rendered as obstacle to change. Give the above backdrop, people has to keep quit and waiting for what is said that interacting. I personally realized that fate for competitive party pessimistic than before if it continued in the status quo. Considering the backdrop above ODP office energetically dedicated to thwart other political parties. Inevitably, juxtaposition of political freedom prompted serious public grievance.

To sum up, efficacy of decentralization remains vivid in Haru district. This is because implementation of devolved power, authority and resources remain inefficacy due to amalgamation of overall problem and its juxtaposition by locally induced discretion. In other words, devolution of power, authority and resources *per se* is not a magic bullet unless it is accompanied by effective implementation. However, implementation of devolved power, authority and resources in Haru district remained echo and amplifying of rhetoric due to lack of capacity, rampancy of corruption, sporadic reshuffle of incumbents, political commitment unleashed by personal benefit, lack of synergy in decision and prevalence of false documents.

5. Conclusion

The quest for effectiveness of decentralization had been continued perplexedly in Haru district. This is because implementation of devolved power, authority and resources had been constrained

by lack of capacity, lack of political commitment, lack of synergy of action, sporadic reshuffle of leaders and rampancy of false documents. In this study area, the bottle necked challenges emanated from the overall problems pertain to decentralization had thoroughly interwoven with locally induced discretion replicated itself since decentralization reform had ushered. Thus, efficacy of implementation of decentralization had juxtaposed in terms of administrative, political and fiscal aspects. As the result, lack of good governance, ill political treatment, recklessness and prodigality in utilization of budget are highly negated effectiveness of decentralization in this study area.

In case of Haru district, effectiveness of implementation of decentralization is a kind of Pyrrhic victory in which the same socio-economic and political questions had been replicating since decentralization reform had ushered in so far. This is because people are suffering from abyss of socio-economic and political problem emanated from lack of efficacy of decentralization. In status quo, let alone claim for efficacious decentralization, quest for basic infrastructure in terms of health, education, transportation and political freedom is continued to be perplex. Surprise is, however, not only persistence of socio-economic and political problem but also its replication in alarming manner since commencement of decentralization reform to date. In similar to argument against decentralization, this research ensured that the net effect of decentralization in Haru district is a kind of zero-sum game that had played nothing role to ensure effectiveness of decentralization.

Paradoxically, claim for efficacious decentralization had been politicized. Hence, the quest for effective decentralization is interpreted in line with party shield. Ironically, the wrong done has orchestrated by reshuffle of position or places. Wrongs are bizarre to be treated as crime if it is done among party affiliated, while the same thing for non-affiliated party surely is. It is such proceedings that paved ways for incumbents of the district to escape from being responsible for their failures in ensuring efficacy of decentralization.

6. Recommendation

The main recommendation revolves around how to boost effectiveness of decentralization in all rounded sphere: administrative, political and fiscal. To do so, the following alternative boosting mechanisms were suggested as part and parcel of recommendation. These are:

1. Nurture implementation of devolved power, authority and resources. This includes:

- **Co-operation with higher institution:** linking the district with Wollega University and other institutions so that they could get updated training and support that foster capacities of civil servants, strength synergy, inspire political commitment and so forth.
- **Co-operating with EACC:** linking the district with the nearest EACC which can reinvigorate efforts to minimize rampancy of corruption and thereby controlling false document.
- **Asset register:** asset register can force civil servant to restrain from accumulating wealth that its source is unknown. This plays prominent role to minimize extravagancy in budget.
- **Secularism:** that means differentiating intermingling of political agenda of party and professionalism so that civil servant cannot camouflage their weakness under umbrella of party shield. This paves way to rejuvenate capacity to implement devolved power, authority and resources to ensure effectiveness of decentralization.

2. Ensure good governance

- **Educating:** [Re] inculcating those communities are ultimate sources of power of the governance of the districts. This can vivid the community to participate actively in socio-economic and political activities of the district. This enables them to lobby local incumbent to boost their accountability. It also paves ways for people to nurture the sense of ownership to public property so that they play role of watch dog to ensure effectiveness of decentralization by fostering capacity of the incumbents of the district.
- **Inclusion of indigenous knowledge-** this includes institutionalizing Gada system. This is because Gada system is egalitarian system that contravenes hierarchical top-down structure. It vivid everybody to participate to foster their capacity. This can foster sense of accountability across the society.

- **Watch dog:** inviting watch dog to session of council of the district from competent political party, professionals, youth, civic societies and others during session. This can nurture transparency and accountability and thereby ensure effectiveness of decentralization via fostering capacity of the representatives.

3. Liberating political activities in this district.

- **Ensure fairness in political competition:** This can be done via providing fair treatment to opposition party like the same protection, payment and ample time to campaign.
- **Change electoral system:** using electoral system to makes sure that no vote is wasted. This can be realized by changing the current electoral system from FPTP to proportional representatives. This is because the latter offer opportunity for minorities to have proportional seat in district council that paves way for check and balances.

4. Sophisticating budgeting and planning:

- **Nurture ownership:** this helps to vivid the public so that the budget is the tax they had paid which paves way for sophistication of collection of taxation.
- **Ensuring transparency in budgeting:** this can be done through watch dog from civil society while auditing.

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