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PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN PUBLIC POLICY MAKING IN ETHIOPIA: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is briefly assessing the involvement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the Ethiopian policy making process starting from the regime of Emperor Haileselassie's to the post 1990's of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) period until the appointment of Dr. Abiy Ahmed as a prime minister of the country. Secondary data as sources were employed for this descriptive survey study. The study indicates that the emergence of stupid and dominant executive leadership, the peripheral position of the people in policy making contribution, the exclusion of the public from government role, the partisan system of the government structure, subjugation based relationship of the government and the society, rigid government structure and lack of unified organization between and among the CSOs were the major challenges which affect the participation of CSOs in the Ethiopian Policy making procedures. Therefore, this study recommends that the government of Ethiopia must revisit the organizational structure of the system in order to enhance the full realization of civil society organizations and thereby they provide the best policy making outcome.

INTRODUCTION

One distinct political development of recent decades is the increased participation of non-state actors, particularly civil society organizations (CSOs), in global policymaking. Rapid economic globalization, greater density of modern communication networks, the availability of cheap global communications systems and growing mobility are creating an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world characterized by new forms of cooperation that transcend national and cultural borders. Hence, people across the globe are re-discovering, and attaching more importance to civil society. This social realm includes NGOs, but extends well beyond them to encompass people's organizations, trade unions, human rights bodies, religious groups, community-based organizations, and policy activist bodies, associations of business and professional people and so forth. All may be found in the space termed as civil society, and thus, are called Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Managing this interdependence through multilateral cooperation has become a question of enlightened self-interest (Fries, T. & Walkenhorst, P., 2010).

Civil Societies started emerging in Ethiopia in 1950s-60s, with a significant scale during the 1970s in response to the famine. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as parts of CSOs were started to evolve as a result of the 1973 and 1984 Ethiopian famine where they involved in relief operations. Relief and emergency response to humanitarian crisis was the primary role of CSOs until the early 1990s. However, later with increased financial and material support from foreign donors and with an improvement in the situation of the country, NGOs moved progressively into long-term programs focusing on addressing basic needs (provision of basic social services). Such programs had the aim of helping the poor to build their capacity to meet their own needs and resources they control (Sisay, 2002).

Fruitful emergence of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Ethiopia came to exist at a significant level following the downfall of the military regime. The space for CSOs until then was too much focused on service delivery, especially in emergency, relief and humanitarian aid activities in the aftermath of the famine caused by the drought in the 1984-85. The spread of HIV/AIDS, increased needs in foreign adoption, health and education although were behind the establishment and registration of many national, semi-national and international CSO in during the 1990's According to the NGOs Code of Conduct adopted in 1998 in Ethiopia, CSOs are defined as "formal and informal groups and associations that are not of the public and business sectors" (Alemneh, 2015). CSOs play a variety of roles in citizen empowerment, development, human rights advancement and equality. In Ethiopia, since the mid-1970s humanitarian crisis, CSOs have been participating in relief and rehabilitation, capacity building, advocacy, and development in a meaningful way.

However, the space for CSOs in policy making has been passing through a range of ups and downs, with the current legislation being considered to be significantly restrictive in promoting rights and participation. According to European Union (EU), CSOs are ideal roots for democracy and sustainable development. An empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system and is an asset in itself. It represents and fosters pluralism and can contribute to more effective policies, equitable and sustainable development and inclusive growth. It is an important player in fostering peace and in conflict resolution.

In Ethiopia, the supremacy of the executive and its claims on policymaking had been all-encompassing during Haileselassie's years, with absolute executive powers vested in the monarchy and the person of the emperor. The combined forces of the party and executive leadership and their overwhelming dominance in public policymaking are relatively new conventions, phenomena and featured prominently in the aftermath of 1974. Ideology (Marxism-Leninism and revolutionary democracy) has since been a critical element guiding as well as justifying policy elites' claims on the choice of public policies and the institutional and structural mechanisms of implementing them. Wedged between overwhelming financial, managerial and organizational capacity as well as an inhospitable politico-administrative and legal milieu, a network of civil society institutions and the public have remained at the peripheral end in the continuum of public policymaking (Mulugeta, 2005).

Seyfu (2018) clearly asserted that civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ethiopia have low chances of involvement on the public policy formulation process. Regularity of participation of the civil society organizations is not sufficient. Although, they have an interest to participate, they participate once in a blue moon. Additionally, the weak involvement of civil society organizations is reflected by their deficient experience of challenging the government, when formulating wrong policies. Additionally, civil societies in Ethiopia have a low level of achievement and insignificant focus to the public policy formulation process. Mulugeta (2005) thematically crystallized the three most formidable challenges that the Ethiopian public policymaking process has experienced over the past thirty years into three issues. Firstly, the emergence and consolidation of party and executive leadership (policy elites) has been the dominant phenomena over the last thirty years with the ruling party institutions invariably overlapping with the formally constituted policymaking government structures. Secondly, ideology played a critical role in the choice of public policies and institutional instruments for implementing them. It also provided policy elites with the latitude to justify their claims on policy actions. Ideological values served to preclude the non-state players from making legitimate claims on policymaking. Finally, the expansion of the powers of the party and the executive seemed to have taken place without a corresponding development of extra-bureaucratic institutions (i.e. elections and functioning legislatures) and civil societal associations, and which in turn boils down to the exclusion of the bulk of the Ethiopian public from playing its legitimate role in the policymaking process. The ordinary citizens are highly disorganized, and tied up with attending to daily survival needs. Hence, they have little time to become fully and actively involved in holding government institutions accountable and responsive, articulating policy demands to policymaking institutions aside. Public policymaking has invariably been the prerogative of the emperors, kings and palace courts, the nobility, military dictators, and civilian and bureaucratic elites.

Due to the overwhelming power of the policy elites and their dominance, and partly because societal actors lack the organization, the autonomy, the capacity and the resources needed to counterbalance party and government players in Ethiopia, any attempt to limit the intervention of state actors and their sphere of influence has rarely been successful in the past. Therefore, one of the recurring problems in the maze of public policymaking in Ethiopia is the imbalance between policymaking institutions and policy beneficiary societal actors. More importantly, the parties and the upper reach of executive leadership (policy elites) (Dergue, Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE), Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the political executive) are the most important actors in placing issues on an agenda, assessing alternatives, as well as being in charge of implementation. As a result, central government institutions have been centralizing policymaking, and make policies that affect people down the remote districts and Kebeles (villages).This implies that the upper reaches of party and executive leadership in Ethiopia (party-fused-executive leadership) have deeply been involved in the policymaking process. The dominant party and executive presence in the policymaking sphere appeared to inhibit the growth of robust legislatures, voluntary associations and other civil society groups which are essential for viable democratic governance (Mulugeta, 2005).

Thus, the segregation of the majority of the public from participating in public policymaking tended to characterize the Ethiopian public policymaking process. In Ethiopia, policy elites (party-fused-executive leadership) play decisive roles to determine policy outcomes and the process through which issues get into the policy agenda, through which they are deliberated within government institutions; and more importantly, how they are pursued and sustained. The preponderant share of the influence to determine agenda setting, formulate policies and change institutional outcomes for their execution have been invested in the party and the executive leadership. The failure of accountability between government and citizens, and the absence of channels of communication and participation for citizens and societal groups to have a direct involvement in the policymaking process and influence policies created gaps between state-society relations (Mulugeta, 2005).

It has been recognized that the channels through which governments hold themselves accountable to citizens, and citizens communicate their demands for better policy and delivery of services, are often non-extent or dysfunctional (Balogun, 2000). For example, during the Derg regime, all the mass and professional associations that were continuously reorganized under the rubric of 'mass and professional associations' had barely any chance of becoming channels of soliciting new ideas and the generation of inputs into the policymaking process. Instead, they were auxiliary structures led by, closely tied to, and monitored by party and government leadership. Simply, their roles were limited to carrying out directives channeled from the party and government organs, and pass data and/or information to the central political organs (Schwab, 1985). The relationship between leaders and the led, even within mass and professional organizations, was built on fear and subjugation, but not on a partnership to promote the interests of members. The initiative to come up with demands that bear on policies and practices were neither expected, nor was it approved.

As a result, the mass and professional organizations remained exclusively instruments of recruiting support, means of communicating and mass political mobilization for state and party policy initiatives. The mass and professional organizations hadn't the opportunity to operate as interest groups to articulate their interests to policymaking institutions. Among the massive restructuring measures that the state and party pursued, the reorganization of rural institutions was the hallmark of rural land reform implementation. Institutional restructuring and transformation in rural Ethiopia started with the proclamation that turned rural land from landlord ownership to public ownership of all rural lands in March 1975.

The most important agrarian institution, on which the party, central and local government administrations relied for the implementation of agricultural reforms, was the peasant association. Peasant Association (PA) is the basic rural institution in post-revolutionary Ethiopia. Initially, created for the purposes of defeating the landlords and abolishing the feudal system, the PAs are now semi-official administrative units at the grass roots level. The PA is a territorial organization encompassing 800 hectares or more. All peasant households living in area should be members. Government, local administration and the Workers' Party of Ethiopia get in touch with the peasant population through the PAs. Information on new directives and proclamations, development campaigns, public work are transmitted to the population and implemented by the PAs. They also mobilize labor for free planting and soil conservation programmes (Stahl, 1989).

The hierarchical and knitted to the party and administrative institutions, the four-tier (namely, national, regional, provincial and district levels) peasant associations became the core establishments on which the state depended for the implementation of its socio-economic transformation. But, non-state actors had neither the capacity to generate alternative policy ideas nor relative autonomy to influence policies and practices (Mulugeta, 2005).

In the post 1990's, the ruling party (EPRDF) is the brain of the revolutionary democratic system, the trendsetter, and the fulcrum of all decision-making organs. Policy objectives, strategies and fundamental socio-economic policies that guide and forge state-society relationships originate in the party. EPRDF become the sole architect, designer and promoter of fundamental socio-economic policies such as urban, rural land policies, and including Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI). Its ideology also sets guidelines and the preconditions for policy making as well as making and unmaking government institutions. But a successful policymaking process has to call for public participatory actions involving direct representation, empowerment and active decision-making (De Coning & Cloete, 2000). Participation in policymaking is a process through which stakeholders' influence and share control over development initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affect stakeholders' (Bizusew, 2009).

However, chiefly due to the ideological premises on which public policies are based, the political leadership encourages public participation in ways that generate controlled diffusion of EPRDF policies and strategies, and discourages independent initiatives in the policymaking process, like CSOs. Party and government, for instance, pose legal and administrative difficulties to be able to control the activities of non-state actors and to force them to adhere to the prevailing values of policy elites.

According to Mulugeta (2005), harsh or rigid government regulation which imposes restrictions that exclude both international and national NGOs from participating in public policymaking, is taken as the challenge to CSOs. CSOs/NGOs are entitled to registration and certification by the Ministry of Justice only when they adhere to the following restrictions:

"NGOs shall not and cannot conduct political activities, for instance, conducting public surveys on social issues; they are not allowed to organize debates around policy and political questions; and to provide financial and material support to political parties."

From this, we can easily understand that there is no space for autonomous, independent CSOs and independent-minded civil society organizations to make their critical inputs into public policies in Ethiopia. In other words, there is almost no favorable climate for creative thinking and critical contribution to public policies and genuine participation in the policymaking process. The government, in reality, showed no commitment to civil society organizations, because the government aggressively promotes a philosophy in the name of nations, nationalities and peoples, which values individual freedom very little. The values it has nurtured and the philosophy that it promotes strengthens its exclusive claims to determine who should participate, how and with what effects. On the other hand, the independent CSOs and private sector are seen as peripheral actors who merely fill the void left by the incapacity and infirmity of the state. Government and party-sponsored CSOs enjoy better support, access to the conduits of government resources and information than the independent CSOs and private sector. Organized, monitored and managed by the ruling party, civil society organizations that have come to be known as government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) such as the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), Organization for Rehabilitation and Development of Amhara (ORDA), Amhara Development Association (ADA), and youth, women and farmers associations' participation in the policy discussions forums strike government's cord.

In the other words, the government wishes to see these CSOs dominating the entire civil society space in the country. Apparently, the party-and state-sponsored organizations do not have any influence on policies and practices, nor do they make any critical inputs to the public policies and policymaking in Ethiopia. The claim that GONGOs are discussing public policies is, therefore, as much a waste of time as a mockery of participation, for they have not made any difference (CRDA, 2004). Some government officials argued that civil society organizations are not as yet well organized in the spirit of a favorable milieu. They are in the making, but they had not been there and are not already there. Furthermore, not only do the CSOs lack proper organization, but they are also incoherent and disoriented as to their policy preferences and direction.

Ultimately, there are no strong civil society movements and organizations that can make a significant difference in this country policy development. In so far as, they do not influence policies and practices in any significant degree, the government wants them to remain vocal. However, women's organizations whose major agenda and objectives address gender and related issues, such as Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association (EWLA), have made a remarkable role in the Ethiopian public policymaking scene. Women's organizations have over the last three or four years successfully put their imprints on family law, criminal procedures and criminal laws, not only because these groups were strong, but also because the state knew that the change or modification of such laws bring no harm to the party and executive leadership. In this way, the EPRDF enhances its image among the women, who currently constitute half of the Ethiopian populace (Dessalegn, 2002). However, EWLA has come to represent one of such fortunate CSO, whose objectives barely differ from the parameters set by the ruling party and the executive. In contrast, the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce, Teachers Association and Labor Unions, which represent hundreds of thousands of members, have not been successful in influencing government's policies, because allowing doing so has probably been well perceived by policy elites as entailing the loss of their virtual control over public policymaking power (CRDA, 2004; Dessalegn, 2002).

A classic point in this case which most CSOs devoted time and resources in bringing government and relevant societal stakeholders together in a year-long 'policy dialogue course' is the Sustainable Development for Poverty Reduction Strategy (SDPRS). But except for such crosscutting matters as gender, HIV/AIDS and environmental issues, whose incorporation into the poverty strategy program that most of the voluntary sector to have claimed credit for; SDPRS was made in a typical EPRDF fashion (Mulugeta, 2005). Even if the policy process is guided based on party and executive leadership, Bizusew (2009) identified the following key strengthens and weak sides of CSOs/NGOs participation and contribution in the development areas of the country:

- ✦ Provision of specialized training in practical approaches to organizing and strengthening business oriented cooperatives targeting regional cooperative promotion bureau staff.
- ✦ Establishment of Market linkages with Ethiopian processors and traders for products.
- ✦ International market linkages were established and some Unions are engaged in directly exporting products, including coffee, honey and bee products.
- ✦ Provision of capacity building for take-off, especially for specialized primary cooperatives
- ✦ Promotion of appropriate technologies for product diversification and improving market-orientation.
- ✦ Development of Irrigation-based cooperatives emerged from small scale schemes.

The following are some of the weaknesses of CSOs in Ethiopia:-
- ⊕ Poor networking and coordination amongst the CSOs

- ⊕ Extensive duplications of efforts and competition for limited resources
- ⊕ Shortage of resources and limited capacity
- ⊕ Lack of organizational stability because of donor dependence
- ⊕ Inaccessibility of the CSOs. Most of the organizations don't have offices in the area.
- ⊕ Lack of transparency and widespread of corruptions in the form of nepotism.
- ⊕ Lack of sustainability. Most of the CSOs focused on the temporary and ongoing problems.
- ⊕ Overstretching as most of them are engaged in so many activities with limited capacity.
- ⊕ Poor communication and access to information
- ⊕ Poor organizational set-up and high staff turnover
- ⊕ Poor monitoring and evaluation system among CSOs

The Evolution and Growth of Civil Societies in Ethiopia: Birds Eye View

Every community has its own distinct forms of social organizations, cultural and political traditions, as well as contemporary state and economic structures – all of which are central to the development of civil society and shape its specific features. The organic nature of civil society formation makes it appear elusive, complex and in some cases contested. As a result, there are different meanings and interpretations. Hence, the concept of civil society (CS) has been employed in a wide variety of contexts by scholars, thinkers and policy-makers across the world (Bizusew, 2009).

The definition of CSOs varies from one country to the other and from one school of thought to another. However, commonalities can be found in the nature and function of CSOs. CSOs have become intractable components, in poverty reduction, sustainable development practices, the promotion and protection of human rights, peace building discourses, as well as most importantly, in explaining various social movements. Consequently, it is critical to conceptually and operationally understand what CSOs are.

In broadly speaking, the concept of CSOs as civil society is understood as the web of social relations that exist in the space between the state, the market (activities with the aim of extracting profit), and the private life of families and individuals. The World Bank Social Development Department of Sustainable Development Network report (2006) defined CSOs as the wide array of non-governmental and non-profitable organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. It includes broad range of organizations, such as community groups, women's association, labor unions, indigenous groups, youth groups, charitable organizations, foundations, faith-based organizations, independent media, professional associations, think tanks, independent educational organizations and social movements.

African Development Bank (1999) also defined civil society as comprising a constellation of human and associational activities operating in the public sphere outside the market and the state. It is a voluntary expression of the interests and aspirations of citizens organized and united by common interests, goals, values or traditions, and mobilized into collective action either as beneficiaries or stakeholders of the development process. Example, NGOs, people's and professional organizations, trade unions, cooperatives, consumer and human rights groups, women's associations, youth clubs, independent radio, television, print and electronic media, neighborhood or community-based coalitions, religious groups, academic and research institutions, grassroots movements and organizations of indigenous peoples (as cited in Bizusew, 2009).

CSOs in the Ethiopian context are those formal or informal institutions existing in the intermediary space between the states and the lowest unit of social life, the family. They organize themselves with specific objectives to construct common benefits and promote the interest of their constituency or beneficiaries. Thus, CSOs combine NGOs, trade unions, research and study instructions, professional associations, interest groups, mass organizations (youth, woman and other group associations), traditional institutions (elders and various committees), as well as community based organizations (Bizusew, 2009).

In line with the above points, Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) summarized the concept of CSOs as follows:-

- ⊕ The sector of voluntary action within institutional forms that are distinct from those of the state, family and market, keeping in mind that in practice the boundaries between these sectors are often complex and blurred;
- ⊕ A large and diverse set of voluntary organizations, often competing with each other and oriented to specific interests. It comprises non-state actors and associations that are not purely driven by private or economic interests, are autonomously organized, and interact in the public sphere; and
- ⊕ Independent actors from the state, but it are oriented toward and interact closely with the state and the political sphere.

The existence of civil society in Ethiopia is not a new phenomenon. Civil society in the form of self-help system has long existed in the country. However, the emergence of modern, formal and legal Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) such as trade unions, professional associations and Non-government Organization (NGOs), is a recent phenomenon (Sisay, 2002).

According to Sisay (2002), civil societies in the form of self-help system (traditional mutual-help associations) were established with the main purpose of dealing with various social problems. The proclaimed aim of these systems was to enhance self-reliance of individuals, households and the public at large. Some of these self-help systems have been registered as neighborhood associations since the 1960's. These can be considered as the forerunner of what are currently designated as Community Based Organizations (CBOs). For instance, the workers struggle that started in 1945 by Franco-Ethiopian Railway workers and intensified by other workers in the 1950's with the development of new industries was first organized and initiated through workers' self-help traditional associations, called ' iddirs'.

As time went, such initiative of workers together with the democratic ideas of young intellectuals, paved the way for the establishment of labor associations in Ethiopia for the first time. The Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) which was established in 1949 by few school teachers in the form of traditional self-help association can also be taken as another example. ETA became one of the strongest CSOs after some years of its establishment and thousands of teachers became its members.

The following are few organized self-help systems operating in Ethiopia until today:

1. '**Debo'** is a system of mutual aid among farmers. Farmers who benefit from the help of others provide food and drinks.
2. '**Afarsata'** is a local court of village elders which meet after a crime has been committed. It is aimed at reconciliation and payment for damage.
3. **Equb** is a traditional financial institution whereby a group of people contribute certain amount of money regularly; on a weekly or monthly basis and give the amount contributed to one member of the group who is selected by lot or according to order of priority.
4. **Ezen**: Ezen is a self-help system among Muslims where contributions are made by each household to the mosque, during the days of a funeral.
5. **Idir:** Idir is a social institution whereby a group of people who live either in a certain area or even in different places, contribute a certain membership fee on a regular bases so as to support members in case of emergencies such as the death of members' or close relatives. It is the best-known self-help-system in the Ethiopian society.

Interdependence of State-Civil society organizations

The concept of civil society organizations (CSOs) has been used in a wide variety of contexts by scholars, thinkers and policy-makers across the world. CSOs have become intractable components, in poverty reduction, sustainable development practices, the promotion and protection of human rights. Bizusew (2009) asserted the concept of CSOs broadly as the web of social relations that exist in the space between the state, the market (activities with the aim of extracting profit), and the private life of families and individuals. Interlinked with the concept, civil society is the idea of social capital: the values, traditions and networks that enable coordination and cooperation between people. CSOs, therefore, involves qualities associated with relationships, with values, and with organizational forms.

The UNDP report of (1993) has defined CSOs as —Civil Society, together with state and market, is one the three spheres' of interference in the making of democratic societies. Civil society is the sphere in which social movements become organized. The organizations of civil society, which represent many diverse and sometimes contradictory social interests, are shaped to fit their social base, constituency, thematic organizations (e.g. environment, gender, human rights) and types of activity. They include church related groups, trade unions, cooperatives, service organizations (NGOs), community groups (CBOs) and youth organizations as well as academic institutions. CSOs in the Ethiopian context are those formal or informal institutions existing in the intermediary space between the states on the one hand and the lowest unit of social life, the family, on the other. Moreover, they organize with specific objectives to construct common benefits and promote the interest of their constituency or beneficiaries. Thus, CSOs combine NGOs, trade unions, research and study instructions, professional associations, interest groups, mass organizations (youth, woman and other groups associations), traditional institutions (elders and various committees), as well as community based organizations.

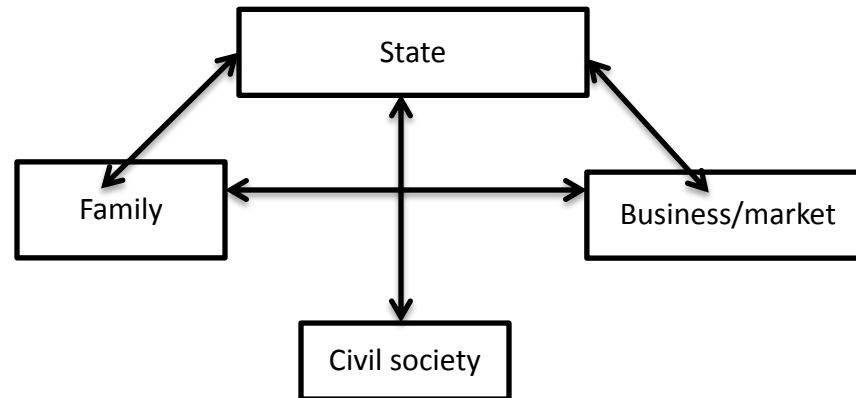Conceptual framework of CSOs as the independent and interdependent development actors

Figure 1: CSOs as the sector (adapted from Paffenholz and Spurk, 2006)

The concept of public participation has formed part of development, public policy and academic discourse especially after the period 1991 in Ethiopia. Greater and genuine public participation in the policymaking process results in much more representative policy-making as well as enhancing the quality of services provided by policies and programs. A true public participation exercise should, therefore, extend beyond manipulation of the public by government and party policy preferences to actual control of decisions by citizens. Public involvement is meaningless unless it accords true decision-making power to citizens. Participation has come to mean more than voting and can include writing or calling on elected officials, attending public hearings, contributing written comments on agency rules, lobbying, educational efforts aimed at informing public opinion, general petitions from the public regarding their policy preferences, lobbying for or against legislation, and actual delegation of decision-making power to stakeholders in decision-making processes.

In fact, public hearings could probably afford citizens high chances of influencing policy agendas, for they provide citizens with the opportunity to convey information to policymakers about the prevailing public views on public policies, influence public opinion, set future agendas and communicate with other citizens, although they have still been ill-suited for fostering a direct and binding influence on the policy process (Adams, 2004). The emerging global phenomena of renewed emphasis on democratization and the empowerment of civil and social movements and fledgling civil society organizations in Ethiopia offer the opportunity for a repositioning of the policymaking process to get the social movements involved in the deliberation, formulation and implementation of policies. The civil service reforms that the EPRDF government has been implementing over the past five years, under the strategy of Five years Growth and Transformation Plan, to make the public bureaucracy more accountable and responsive can become fruitful and successful, if the independent and autonomous civil movements are provided with space extending well beyond the realm of the state. And government circles and active civil society groups have presumably recognized a well-functioning and strong civil society as the hallmark of good governance. Civil society's important role as an articulator of social demands also cannot be effectively played in the absence of required state capacity (Friedman, 2003).

In 2002, the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) completed its Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP). An operating principle of the SDPRP anticipates an evolution in the relationship between the state and civil society organizations towards promoting and strengthening partnerships between government and other development actors. This creates new opportunities for and new demands on all development actors. The fundamental rationale for the program is the recognition by government that it cannot achieve the objectives of promoting development, reducing poverty, and strengthening democracy set out in the SDPRP simply through its own institutions, agencies and programs but must work in close collaboration with other development actors. This represents a shift in thinking from previous eras, and a change in the 'rules of the game' from one where government monopolizes the development process to a situation where promoting development involves a partnership between government, the private sector and civil society organizations (FDRE, Ministry of Capacity Building (MoCB), 2004). In relation to managing and monitoring government service delivery, civil society wishes the capacity to understand and address issues of: cost-effectiveness, resource mobilization and cost- sharing service quality, sustainability as well as coordination with other agencies.

The participation of CSOs/NGOs in the overall development effort of the country has had a significant impact: on the lives of the poor and the disadvantaged, and the broad range of basic services made accessible to them; on the country's economy and the development programs; on the process of democracy building, access to justice and good governance; on public awareness and empowerment; on the capacity of government agencies especially at the woreda and kebele levels. In the current multi-year poverty reduction program (PASDEP), Rural Development and Food Security is one of the broad thematic priorities where the various associated endeavors are envisaged to attain the goal of enhanced food security through improvement in employment generation, private sector involvement in agricultural production and better natural resources management. The majority of operational NGOs have rural and agriculture focused objectives and operations. Therefore, CSOs working within the terrain charted out by the government is very important to accelerate and effectively implement the country's overall development policies and strategies within the specific

time frame (Seyfu, 2018).

In general, building a market economy, rectifying the deficiencies in public accountability, addressing the issue of good governance through devolved decentralization, more openness in government, and effectively fulfilling governmental functions depends as much on a less interventionist state and on an active and vibrant civil society organizations. Professionally calibrated, private, interdisciplinary and independent arms-length policy think-thank institutions are more likely to resolve the growing shambles in public policymaking in Ethiopia. Civil society institutions such as Ethiopian Economic Association/Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute and Forum for Social studies can probably provide added significance to professionalizing and pragmatizing of policymaking in Ethiopia.

Furthermore, forging the balance between state and society and making government responsive as well as accountable calls for improving the policymaking capacity of government. For the policymaking system to accommodate the demands of the public as well as to have a high chance of success necessitates significant redesign of the central policymaking process and the initiative that can also serve as an effective mechanism for the institutionalization of policymaking and analysis in the entire governance structure (Dror, 1986; Seyfu, 2018).

Conclusion

The economic development of a country depends on the quality of its policy making procedure, the decisions taken, and the processes involved in formulating each decision. The involvement of different stakeholders such as CSOs could play significant role in the policy formulation process. However, CSOs were not influential and they do not have such crucial capacity to contribute for the policy process in Ethiopia. For this, the absence of proactive civil society organizations coupled with passive legislatures that only rubber stamp the decisions of the party and executive leadership certainly reduces the citizenry's role in the policymaking process in Ethiopia. Shortage of financial resources and qualified experts, the concentration of activities in urban and accessible areas, poor CSOs coordination, and self-censorship represent other challenges that hinder the full realization of CSOs' potential in policy making process in Ethiopia. Similar speaking, the CSOs' participation in the policymaking process has been hampered as much by the legal and political contexts as by weak capacity, insufficient resources and weak motivation to contribute to public policymaking. As a result, government and party-sponsored CSOs have predominantly dominated the public participations in the public policymaking process in the country. Hence, the participation of the CSOs is still weak in the policy making process of Ethiopia, but better now when we compare with the past political regimes prior to 1990's.

Policy implications/Recommendations

For the public sector to benefit maximally from civil sector contributions and for the CSOs to substantially play the policy direction and final solutions, CSOs need to participate from the beginning of the policy making process. That is, CSOs need to be involved from the point when various policy options and instruments are designed and analyzed during the stage of policyformulation. The government of Ethiopia during policy making process should incorporate the interest of the community because the quality decision making process will be applied if different diversity of ideas come from different angles as well as perspectives of the CSOs. The party dominance in the policy process should be minimized and the government should hand off itself from monopolizing the public policy making. Finally, interest of the public should be considered while formulation of country's overall development and governance related policies. This would further used to scale up the achievement of sustainable development goals of 2030.

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