

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**Implementation of District Level Decentralization Program: The Case of Jimma Zone, Oromiya National Regional State, Ethiopia¹**Ermyas Admasu²

Ermyas Admasu (2015). Implementation of district level decentralization program: The Case of Jimma Zone, Oromiya National Regional State, Ethiopia. *Ethiop.j.soc.lang.stud.* 2(2), 25-43. eISSN: 2408-9532; pISSN: 2412-5180.³

Abstract

The study is conducted to assess the contribution of District Level Decentralization Program (DLDP) in raising local level participation for development especially in service delivery in two selected woredas in Jimma zone of Oromiya National Regional State. The woredas were selected in consultation with officials based on their performance in implementing the DLDP. Structured and focus group interviews were held with Zonal and woreda level officials and residents from sample kebeles in the two woredas. The data obtained from various sources was systematically organized, triangulated and narrated. The study revealed that, the DLDP introduced block grant transfer empowered the woredas' to plan their own activities within the limit of the resources available, unlike the centralized budgeting system in the past which geared less towards specific local needs and demands. Moreover, the program also effected clear definition of power and functions to woredas checking the intervention of the Zone in woreda planning activities. This has opened more room for the participation of the people in planning and implementing of projects at the local level. The role of sub kebele community structures called 'Gots' in inducing more popular participation is identified. The Community participates not only in planning but also in putting projects in to practice mainly through their labor. Nevertheless, the study unearthed that development initiative at the local level is challenged by host of factors like resource scarcity, lack of human resource capacity for planning at woreda level, and the community's lack of experience and skill for participation.

Key terms: Decentralization/ Federalism/ Local Government

¹The first version of this paper has been presented in the Jimma University Annual Research Conference and published in the proceedings of the same conference.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Decentralization and empowerment of local units has nowadays become a common term and practice especially in the previously highly centralized developing nations. Many complex factors interplay behind such sweeping measures towards disaggregating decision making power nearer to the people. This process involves devolution of decision making authority to lower tiers, resource mobilization and allocation and service delivery. It also tries to address such key issues as ensuring political stability, poverty reduction, implanting a system of good governance and building capacity (Worku, 2005, p.29).

One best practical instance is the post 1991 Ethiopia. The federal arrangement implanted and the decentralization scheme practiced is unprecedented in the long history of the country. In the past exercising self rule was mere contemplation and far from being realized for the various nationality groups in the state. This is referring to the policy of homogenization and centralization followed by most governments that ruled the state rather than recognizing the heterogeneous ethnic, linguistic and cultural character of the people. The starting of this process can be traced back to the transitional period and later on gained constitutional approval with the promulgation of the 1995 constitution. This is what Tegegne (2007, p.1) calls the “first wave of decentralization” where clear division of power is effected between the federal government and the states. This juncture signified the creation and empowerment of regional governments entrusted with executive legislative and judicial powers.

However, tiers below the regional governments were less empowered and practiced limited autonomy even if the federal constitution stipulates for self governing sub regional local entities in a bid to put decision making power nearer to the people. It is this compelling background that led to the issuance and concretization of the District Level Decentralization Program (the DLDP) in 2001 which again is labeled as the “second wave of decentralization” by Tegegne (2007, p.2).

The program embraces various components and defined objectives which are finally geared towards raising the power to decide and execute on matters of exclusive interest at woreda level. This study therefore focuses on investigating how the implementation of the program contributed to development initiative activities at woreda level taking two case woredas in Jimma zone. In doing so, focus will be laid on some important components of the program like transfer of block grants, the independence in capacity on planning, grass root participation in planning and human resource constraints for planning. The study is conducted with the intended objective of assessing how the implementation of the DLDP contributed to enhancing development initiatives at woreda level and some of the challenges faced in due course. The study is initiated to bridge the scarcity of literature in the area as most studies focus on the impact of the program on improvement of service delivery in different sectors than how it enhanced grass root community participation at local level.

1.2 Main objective of the study

The main objective of this study is to assess how the implementation of the DLDP contributed to enhancing development initiatives at woreda level and some of the challenges faced in due course.

1.3 Specific objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the study are;

- i. to assess the mechanisms by which the DLDP has ensured the local population participation in development activities
- ii. investigate the extent to which the decentralization reform program enhanced the local populace engagement in planning and realizing development priorities
- iii. reveal the challenges and constraints faced in the due course of ensuring local participation in line with the reform program

2. Literature Review

2.1 Federalism and Decentralization in the Ethiopian Context

Federalism and decentralization are two sides of the same coin in the Ethiopian federal arrangement. The constitutional pledge on Article 39 (3) that states “every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has the right to full measure of self government which includes the right to establish institutions of government” calls for the realization of self ruling scheme to all nationalities by setting uncompromising condition to decentralization of power to lower units of government. In cognition and further reinforcement of this provision, article 50 (4) ruled that “Adequate power shall be granted to the lower units of government to enable the people to participate directly in the administration of such units.” This indicates that the federal arrangement from the outset bases itself upon the principles of local self rule without which it cannot materialize itself. Moreover, regions are authorized under article 52 (3) “to establish state administration that best advances self government....” putting the need for decentralization on a profound basis.

The diverse nature of the people and the difficulty of granting regional status to all of them is also a compelling reason behind decentralizing state power to lower level units. Allowing all nationalities to establish their own self government at regional level is less practical since there are more than eighty nationalities in Ethiopia. As a result, in some regions there are many nationalities subsumed under the regional governments. A case in point is the Southern Nations and Nationalities People Regional State (SNNPR), where significant numbers of the country’s ethnic and cultural groups are residing. In this region nationality groups established their own self governments at tiers below the regional government (at woreda and zone level). The federal system can pass the litmus test of entrusting self rule to all nationalities only when decision making power and resources are transferred to lower tiers of governments.

By way of reinforcing the federal constitution, regional constitutions incorporated provisions that empower sub-regional levels, specially the woreda for self rule. The constitution of Oromia National Regional State (ONRS) provides for the powers and functions of the woreda level administration. The development functions of woreda (with much relevance to this study) is provided under article 79 (a) (c) of the constitution. Accordingly, Woredas are authorized to deliberate up on and approve development plans and programs. Moreover they can mobilize the local populace for development activities.

Such constitutional and legal background necessitated a detailed program of various components to embrace the district level governments as vital elements of the federalizing process in acknowledging the rights of diverse nationalities to self rule. Hence, the DLDP has been launched incorporating empowering elements since 2001 marking the starting of “Second wave of decentralization.”

2.2 Components and Objectives of the DLDP

As of the year 2001, practical moves have been well underway to empower the district level governments through the DLDP. The activities of the program are planned for five years term involving crucial phases of enabling, deepening and consolidating. At the beginning it was implemented in the four regions of Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR and Tigray, and later it was introduced to Gambella, Afar, Benshangul and Hareri regional states (Worku, 2005, p.31 and Tegegne, 2007, p.26)

Some of the main components of the program include:

- Manning and training:- improving human resource capacity
- Grass root participation: empowering of the people at the grass root level in planning and decision making
- Region woreda fiscal transfer and own revenue enhancement: allocating financial resources to woreda level administration to promote local development and raising the capacity to raise revenue
- Institutional/organizational arrangement: refining the woreda level functional assignment and building efficient organizational structure
- Woreda planning and financial control systems :- enhancing planning capacity and setting fiscal framework and resource administration capacity (Worku, 2005, p.30 and Ministry of Capacity Building (MCB), 2002, p.12).

Among others the program put forward creation of enabling environment for empowerment, establishing effective institutional arrangement, introducing working systems for proper planning and availability of skilled manpower for planning as the core components of the program (Ministry of Capacity Building, 2002, p.8).

2.3. Structure, Power and Functions of Woreda Administration

The three branches of government at federal and regional levels are replicated at woreda level government. The woreda has its own legislative body called the council constituting members elected from each kebele in the woreda. The council serves as law-making body on powers designated as woreda jurisdiction. The executive bodies or the

cabinets emanate from the council elected by the members from the woreda council and chiefs of sector offices. The same council elects its own chairperson who automatically qualifies as the head of the woreda government. The judicial branch is filled with judges who are appointed by the regional governments (Tegegne, 2007, p.13).

Keeping this similar pattern in terms of structure, each region defines the power and function of lower level tiers under its jurisdiction. Woredas in different regions are more or less vested with the following constitutional powers and functions:

- preparing, approving and implementing the annual woreda budget
- setting certain tax rates (land use, agricultural, income tax..) and collecting
- Administering fiscal resources at woreda level
- Administering primary school health institutions
- Constructing and maintaining low grade rural tracks, water points and administrative infrastructures
- Managing agricultural development activities and protecting natural resources (World Bank, 2000, p.19).

Therefore the DLDP is implemented in light of enabling woredas to exercise these set of constitutional powers and functions.

Therefore, the major components of the DLDP aligned with the power and functions vested up on the woreda level governments were used in this study as a framework for data collection and analysis to show the impact of the program on development initiatives at the grass root level. The study is timely and relevant in the sense that many of the previous studies focused on the impact of the program on the efficient and effective delivery of services at woreda level than its impacts on development initiatives at lower tiers of government.

3. Method

From a total of nineteen woredas in Jimma Zone, two woredas namely 'Qarsaa' and 'Xiro-afataa' were selected. These woredas were selected purposively in consultation with zonal officials. The criteria used are based on the performance of woredas in implementing the decentralization program. Accordingly one best achiever and another lagging woreda were suggested for this study. Sample kebeles were taken from the case woredas constituting two from 'Qarsaa' and one from 'Xiro-afataa'. Inaccessibility reduced the size of sample kebele in the later woreda since most of the kebeles in the later woreda are remote rural kebeles. Including more kebeles in to the sample could have made the study more dependable. However, limitations in terms of time and resources bounded the sample size.

The study generally employed a qualitative research method as it mainly focused on opinions and views of key informants and members of the community regarding how decentralization enhanced the active participation of the wider community in development activities at the grass root level. Interpretation of official quantitative data has been the case depending on relevance and to substantiate the findings of the study from other methods.

Accordingly, structured and focus group interviews were held with officials at Zonal and woreda level and residents from sample kebeles in the two woredas. Interview and focus group discussions are used to assess how the study participants perceive a particular situation or event that affects their life. In doing so interview schedules of open ended questions were prepared. Separate set of instruments were prepared to guide the discussions at Zonal and woreda level administrations and the community groups. The head of the woredas administration and chiefs of other sectoral offices like Finance and Planning, Health, Education, Road etc... offices constitute respondents in the woreda administration. On the other hand the head of the Zonal administration and the Chairman of the Capacity Building Office were the key participants of the study.

Two Focus group discussions were conducted (one in each kebele) with residents selected by employing convenience sampling constituting six to seven people in each discussion. The focus group discussion constituted any resident from the kebeles so long as they qualify in terms of longevity of residence and are adults qualifying for participation in development activities. In most cases residents were selected during meeting days with kebele officials as residents of various types can be easily accessed during mass gatherings. The investigator facilitated the discussion on the basis of preconceived core points and took note of the major points reflected by the discussants. Each Focus group discussion took approximately an hour.

Analysis is supported with documented sources in the two woredas like budget plans and executions, the status of service delivery, regional budget transfer etc. The data obtained from key informants and the focus groups discussion was organized in to thematic areas and triangulated in the form of description and narration. Moreover, findings from focus group discussion and interviews were described in tandem with secondary data obtained from official sources.

The study is a case study of two Woredas restricted to specific location. This might not qualify it to be applied for other wider cases. However, it might show some general trends through which other similar cases can be assessed.

4. Results

4.1 Block Grant Transfer to Woredas

The regional to Woreda block grant transfer is the main component of the DLDP to bring development initiatives and service delivery closer to the people. The transfer scheme is set to empower the woreda and grass root population to decide on their local development needs. The bloc grant system started with the launching of the DLDP in 2002 and initially three parameters were employed in designing the formula for financial disbursement among Woredas in regions. The formula consisted of population size, development level of woredas and generation of own revenue allotting different weights to each. Even at this level the regional governments were at liberty to give their own weights to each of the parameters. For instance in the year 2002 the Amhara Region assigned 70%, 20% and 10% for population size, development level and revenue raising effort respectively. On the other hand, the Oromiya region assigned 55%, 25% and 15% for the same reserving, and the other 5% for geographical area (Ministry of Capacity Building, 2002, p.5; Tegegne, 2007, p.2).

Generally regional governments can prepare their own grant transfer formula based on their specific needs and emphasis. For instance, when this study was being conducted, the Oromiya Regional Government, where the case woredas are selected for this study, was utilizing the previous three parameters together with the unit cost approach for bloc grant transfer to woredas.

The constitutions of almost all regional governments designate their woreda government with the power to plan and execute their own development projects. The block grant puts the exercise of these functions by woredas in to reality providing them with the necessary resources to initiate and realize their own plans.

Head of the planning office at Qarssa Woreda indicated that “initiating development plans based on local priorities was very difficult before the implementation of bloc grant transfer. Top down budgeting lays very little focus to local needs and overseeing of critical public needs were evident.” Plans and budgets were less problem solving geared to address central than local needs and discourage woreda level development initiatives. After the institution of the block grant transfer development plans started to be initiated at Woreda level, by government organs very much closer to the people, and by people who know the top priority needs. The fiscal transfer has also helped the woredas to assert independence for development initiative from other higher level government tiers like the Zones and Regions. The Woreda officials defined the role of the Zone “as provider of technical and administrative support with delegated power from the regional government.” The Zonal government has the power of only suggesting to use the finance more for capital projects and oversee woreda plans to consider regional priorities and strategies. For all practical purposes, except these suggestions, woredas can plan independently of other levels of governments.

Another important feature of block grant transfer in the woredas in Jimma Zone and the case woredas in particular is its increasing pattern in each fiscal year. This might actually help to take more initiatives for planning and executing with more resources available. It could be more helpful to see the patterns in terms of allocation of grants for the case woredas.

Table 1: Grant Transfer for ‘Qarsaa’ and ‘Xiro-Afatta’ Woredas (2005-2009)

Woredas	Year	Grant Transferred	Percentage increase from previous year
Qarsaa	2005/06	8,165,410	-
	2006/07	10,097,969	23
	2007/08	13,093,835	29
	2008/09	15,205,045	16.12
Xiroo Afattaa	2005/06	5,672,226	-
	2006/07	7,242,452	27.6
	2007/08	10,636,453	46.8
	2008/09	12,393,3999	16.5

Source: Annual reports from ‘Qarsaa’ and ‘Xiro-afataa’ Woreda Governments

It is self evident that the rate of transfer is ascending each fiscal year and comparison between the year 2005 and 2009 shows 86.2% and 118.4% rise for ‘Qarsaa’ and ‘Xiro-afatta’ woredas respectively. According to the Woreda officials this opened more room for development initiatives in their respective Woredas and addressed more public needs and priorities.

Moreover it was reflected that the bloc grant transfer has helped the woredas to generate more own revenue from local sources in two ways. In the grant transfer formula the capacities to generate own revenue has its own weight. In this case if a particular woreda generates more revenue, it will get more transfer of grant from the region based on the assigned weight. On the other hand, generating revenue itself requires its own resources and the woredas are utilizing some proportion of the finance to improve their capacity for revenue generation. Since much of the own revenue is utilized by themselves, it adds more resources to their annual budget.

Table 2: Own Revenue Generated by ‘Qarsaa’ and Xiro-‘Afattaa’ Woredas (2005-2009)

Woredas	Year	Own revenue generated	Contribution to the total woreda budget (%)	Percentage increase from previous year
Qarsaa	2006/07	1,176,851	12.6	-
	2007/08	1,538,664	13.2	30.74
	2008/09	2,225,912	14.5	44.6
	2009/10	3,414,369	18.3	53.3
Xiroo Afattaa	2006/07	1,024,899	15.3	-
	2007/08	1,062,825	12.8	3.7
	2008/09	1,305,222	10.9	22.8
	2009/10	2,301,613	15.7	76.3

Source: Annual reports from ‘Qarsaa’ and ‘Xiro-afataa’ Woreda Governments

As depicted in Table 2, the amount of own revenue generated increased each year and shown significant increase in the last two years under consideration. However, the contribution of own revenue to the total budget is less significant and shows small amount of change in each year. This implies that increasing own revenue generation would facilitate more independence for development initiative at woreda level and decreases local dependence on the centre for resources. Most of the participants in the focus group discussion at woreda level emphasized that “the resource allocated from the region and the development needs of the woredas are incompatible.” As a result increasing the capacity for own revenue generation and expanding the revenue base is indispensable to promote development at the woreda level.

The Woreda officials participated in the discussion do have very little knowledge of the transfer formula. However, they believe that “resource is fairly distributed among woredas albeit some woredas are complaining on the amount of transfer.” The regional government allocates the transfer based on the socio-economic data sent from Woredas. So long as the woredas collected the necessary data and properly communicated to the regions, they would get what they deserve based on the objective criteria applied for all.

In this regard all woredas do not have equal capacity to collect, organize and report the data which affects the amount of revenue they get from the region.

4.2 Development Planning at the Woredas

In the earlier parts it is stated that almost all woredas in the country are designated with planning and execution function through the regional constitutions. As per the provision of the federal constitution under article 50(3), regions are empowered to establish lower level tiers by ensuring democratic participation and empowerment of the local people. However, this constitutional pledge was less practiced until the launching of the DLDP in 2001. In the pre 2001 period, woredas lacked the actual power, resources and authorities since regional and zonal authorities had controlled the activities of woreda governments (Tegegne, 2007, p.2). In light of this the DLDP laid focus areas of priorities to enhance woredas capacity in exercising the already constitutionally stipulated powers and functions. Some of the main initiatives that the DLDP carried out to enhance woredas development planning capacity includes: supplying skilled man power for planning, preparing guidelines for financial planning and controlling, and supporting for direct and vibrant community participation in planning (MCB, 2002, pp. 7-8).

The following data generated from Woreda level officials revealed that woredas are exercising the already constitutionally stipulated powers and functions:

The task of planning on matters legally designated to us is exclusively our own authority with no intervention from the Zonal level government. Unlike the period before the launching of the DLDP when Zones and Regions prepare woreda budgets and plans, now the woredas fully exercise these activities. Higher level tiers like zones might simply provide with general guidelines to ensure compliance to regional policies and strategies and poverty reduction scheme.

The planning process is found to be similar in both case woredas of the study. The planning is labeled as sectoral planning since each sector office (education, health, agriculture, road, water etc...) prepare their plan (capital and recurrent) based on their contact with the public. Each sector has to defend its proposed budget before the woreda budget and finance office (also with the presence of cabinet members) and later readjust the plan for any change. Finally, the woreda budget and finance office collects plans from each sector and prepares integrated woreda plan for the fiscal year. The final authority to approve the integrated woreda plan is vested on the woreda council.

Autonomy for planning on matters concerning woredas would undoubtedly enhance development initiatives at woreda level. Because in this process woredas set their own goals and priorities, utilize their budget and implement development projects. However, the planning at woreda levels and specially in the case woredas is not without challenges and constraints. Some of the challenges revealed from the discussions are:

- lack of realistic plans or prevalence of over ambitious plan incompatible with the available scarce resources;
- scarcity of finance to address priorities in each sectoral office; as a result capital projects could be cancelled, postponed or finished in more than two years;

- lack of overall understanding of threats and opportunities at woreda level in preparing medium and long term plans;
- less resources allocated to capital expenditure, and
- human resource constraints in planning.

Among these constraints, the researcher wants to focus on the last two. In both woredas under consideration, the proportion of capital budget to recurrent is insignificant given the development need of the people.

Table 3: Share of Capital Budget to the Total Budget in ‘Qarsaa’ and ‘Xiro-Afataa’ Woredas (2005/6-2009/10)

Woredas	Year	Total budget	Capital budget	The share of capital budget to total (%)
Qarsaa	2005/06	9,342,261	535,850	5.7
	2006/07	11,636,633	743,760	6.3
	2007/08	15,319,747,	1,095,230	7.1
	2008/09	18,619,414	1,844,930	9.9
	2009/10	21,326,849	1,642,880	7.7
Xiroo – Afataa	2005/06	6,697,125	262,390	3.9
	2006/07	8,305,277	-	-
	2007/08	11,914,675	666,250	5.5
	2008/09	14,695,012	1,243,380	8.4
	2009/10	20,698,498	4,708,504	22.7

Source: Annual reports from ‘Qarsaa’ and ‘Xiro-afataa’ Woreda Governments

It is evident that there is suppression of capital budget in both woredas in favor of recurrent budgets and the prospect of allocating more capital budget in the near future is far from being realized given the existing pattern of increase. In ‘Qarsaa’ woreda 81% of the total budget is allotted for salary and 10.6% for other running costs in the year 2005/6 and approximately similar proportion is observed in xiro-afataa. Development activities are much more related to capital projects. Given that if the woredas are going to continue with such insignificant proportion of capital budget, attaining the aspired for woreda level development initiatives might be a far fetched reality. However, this problem is some how resolved with public participation in developmental activities through human labor and financial contributions since most of the public contribution goes to capital projects.

The nature of capital projects carried out at woreda level focus on primary health care, primary education, water, agriculture and road (small level rural trucks). There are some observed improvements in the quantity of the service delivered in the case woredas.

Table 4: Improvement in Service Delivery for Some Selected Services (health, education and water) in ‘Qarsaa’ and ‘Xiro-afataa’ woredas (comparison between the year 2005 and 2009)

Woreda	Type of service	Pre-DLDP (year 2005) status	Changes observed (year 2009)
‘Qarsaa’	Coverage of clean water service	15%	35%
	Number of health stations	1	6
	Number of health posts	8	30
	Number of health workers	7	180
	Number of schools		
Xiro-Afataa	Primary education coverage	33.8%	68%
	Number of schools	20	60
	Number of school teachers	154	526
	Health extension coverage	14.8%	93.3%
	Health officer to population ratio	2:100,000	8:100,000
	Senior nurses to population ratio	8:100,000	17:100,000
	Clean water service coverage	0%	28.1%

Source: Annual reports from ‘Qarsaa’ and ‘Xiro-afataa’ Woreda Governments

As demonstrated in table 4, some of the services delivered to the local community have been improved at least in quantity terms for the period considered in the study. It is well enough to note among others that clean water service coverage has increased from 15% in 2005 to 35% in 2009 in Qarsaa Woreda. On the other hand the number of schools raised from 20 to 60 and health extension coverage climbed from 14.8% to 93.3% in Xiro- Afataa Woreda.

It might not be feasible to directly attribute all these changes only to the implementation of the DLDP since there are many uncontrolled variables (at least for this study) that could have negative or positive impacts on the services mentioned above. However, one cannot also rule out that some proportion of these changes could be attributed to the implementation of the program given the periodic improvements observed and the practical autonomy vested on woreda level governments.

4.3 Human Resources and Planning for Development

Staffing and training is one but very crucial component of the DLDP. From the outset it was recognized that woredas lack sufficient trained human power to exercise the power vested on them. Initiating plans, prioritizing and executing development activities requires qualified personnel. The staffing and training component of the DLDP is

directed towards increasing the availability of sufficient man power and enhancing professional competence and leadership at Woreda level (Worku, 2005, p.30). Human resource constraint was the most serious concern towards realizing the DLDP because woredas were facing shortage of qualified man power: less skilled of existing man power, high staff turnover in some woredas, absence of advanced training system, and inappropriate man power placement (PSCAP for Oromiya, 2004, p.6). Cognizant of this Woreda Human Resource Capacity Building was imperative if the DLDP has to be put in to action.

The short term solution employed to resolve human power constraints at woredas was transfer of man power from zones and regions to woredas. By the year 2002 woredas had 50% of the required man power and key posts were either vacant or occupied by under qualified professionals (Worku, 2005, p.34).

The response from woreda level interviewees confirmed that “scarcity of qualified and experienced man power is still the main problem as far as planning and execution is concerned.” Similarly, zonal officials emphasized that “woredas human resource condition is showing improvement in terms of quality, quantity and mix over time but still a source of problem to their performance and for equitable development among them.” Discussions at woreda and Zone level revealed multitude of problems related to planning and initiating development caused by human resource scarcity. Among others they laid due emphasis on:

- lack of wise use of available human and material resources and inability to exploit opportunities and do away with threats;
- overseeing important areas of popular concern in planning or inability to prioritize;
- unfulfilled plans or plans that failed to address some basic components;
- non participatory plans because of lack of skill to mobilize the people;
- over ambitious and unrealistic plans that need to be polished now and again once it is prepared;
- wastage of resources by allocating excess resource for some areas while others are in scarcity, and
- consuming too much time in preparing plans and failure to accomplish preparation of plans in the required time frame.

Woredas have the full mandate to plan their human resource need and employ professional, semi professional and support staff. This was out rightly confirmed by the discussion held with Zonal and woreda level officials except that woredas are recommended not to lay too much focus in employing support staffs. However, woredas lack the required capacity and access to employ highly qualified personnel. To deal with this problem, they communicate their human resource need to zonal and regional levels that recruit and employ the required man power and dispatch it to respective woredas.

Woredas could not practically utilize the full mandate for personnel employment for two reasons. One is capacity problems and the other is what zonal official labeled as “problem of doing the right thing.” According to them, “employers at woreda level usually give priority for people whom they know or those who have lived or have attachment to the specific locality.” To avoid this, the region took the mandate to employ

BA holders and above whereas the Zone to employ diploma level personnel and the Woreda to employ staff required at certificate level.

In addition to employing new staff and personnel redeployment, the DLDP commanded the possibility of upgrading the quality of woreda personnel through short and medium term trainings. In this regard, woreda officials underlined that it is not usual to allocate budget for training needs because of the meager resources available. Trainings are arranged only if the woreda administration is able to generate extra resources from non governmental organizations or any other means. Sometimes the Ministry of Federal Capacity Building might offer training opportunities for some staff members; however it might not directly address the gap and specifically identify training need at woreda level.

4.4 Community Participation in Planning

Decentralized governance among other things enables to strike a balance between hierarchy and participation in service delivery. Community participation in planning maximizes the possibility of local institutions delivering service in response to the needs and wishes of the recipients. This makes increased community participation in planning and prioritizing key element to the successful implementation of decentralization reforms (World Bank, 2000, p.5).

The channel of participation illustrated by the DLDP document mentioned local organizational arrangements like sub-kebele, community development teams, village executive committees, kebele administration development council, Kebele assembly and sub-woreda development coordination units. The discussion with woreda officials and sample kebele residents revealed the existence of some of these formal and informal channels for participation.

The officials asserted that “the development need of the community is in harmony with the sectoral offices structured at woreda level like education, health, water and road.” Each sector office keeps in touch with the community and arranges community discussion sessions through other sub-structures like the kebele and sub-kebele units called ‘Gots’. The community, through these discussions prioritizes its needs. The outcomes of these discussions enable to decide the priority areas for planning at the Woreda level.

It is further commented that “plans are prepared at different hierarchies.” There are house hold level plans (what to produce, how to produce, land use, sending children to school), sub-kebele ‘got’ level plan where 30-50 house holds plan about their locality, kebele level plan to harmonize the sub-kebele plans. Finally all kebeles dispatch their plans to woredas for consideration.

The role members’ of kebele council play is reflected below by focus group discussants of kebele residents:

Members of the Kebele council are people who live within the community. They are part of any opportunity or challenges faced with in the community itself. These people play crucial role in reflecting community needs and demands at kebele level. Moreover, the Kebele council has a standing committee of fifteen members. The members of this committee discuss with the community and communicate any need and wish to the kebele council.

The residents also testified that woreda administrators frequently appeared to discuss with the community even if sometimes discussions were dominated by political issues. However, the kebele residents were not sure as to whether their plan was incorporated in woreda plans for final action and the channels of how these plans were communicated to the woreda. Generally, they were in doubt about the weight given to kebele plans at woreda level since the woreda officials kept in touch with the local community and their observation and discussion made much more difference.

The woreda officials stressed that one of the advantages of planning and implementation at Woreda level is the sense of ownership and feeling of belongingness nurtured among the administrative body and the local people. The woreda officials should go always to the community to convince them to participate in developmental activities. The community convenes with officials and forwards ideas and options regarding its needs and demands going through debates and exchange of views amongst itself. According to officials, “participation in the discussion is tantamount to participation in planning, since the actual technical task of preparing the plan is translating the community’s view in to manageable forms considering the resources available.”

For any project undertaken at the local level, the human and financial resources that can be obtained from the community is planned in consultation with the community. In implementing projects, the community predominantly contributes in terms of human labor in constructing school or health facilities and small scale roads, digging bore hole, maintaining the environment and others. In most cases the financial estimate of labor cost doubles the total cost allocated for a specific project. Otherwise the woreda budget combined together cannot cover the whole cost of capital projects undertaken at woreda level.

The same is confirmed by discussions held with different community groups. They stated that “the community contributes a lot in human labor.” The community’s roles and contribution is defined in every kind of project affecting its life. However, the community is not usually happy when requested to contribute money which could be attributed to the meager financial resources of rural residents and the view that the government should fully finance the cost of delivering public services.

Woreda officials and even kebele residents stressed that “mobilizing the community for development is not an easy task.” Among others they identified problems like community wide dependency syndrome over governments for every need, lack of awareness on the benefits of participation, educational level of the community and in some instances lack of good will are contributing factors for low community participation.

The mechanisms employed to deal with these challenges are multi pronged as expressed by woreda officials and Kebele residents. For one thing, efforts are always under way to convince the community for participation through different channels and discussion forums. Among others inter-Kebele experience sharing (high performers with low and the benefits accrued), approaching elderly people and religious and cultural heads before approaching the community and convincing the later through such recognized figures are used to promote greater participation from the community. Accordingly, there are observable and considerable changes in the level of community participation over time especially in contributing their labor in implementing projects.

In real terms, in a society where centralized system of governance has been practiced for long where administrators in the higher hierarchy believed to know and decide on every community affairs, instigating active and vibrant community participation could be really a challenging task. Nevertheless, the people are the key component in the process of decentralization carried out and hence popular participation should be ensured using every possible peaceful means.

5. Discussion

The regional to Woreda block grant transfer is meant to empower the local community to initiate their own developmental projects. The constitutionally designated power and authority cannot be realized unless it is complemented with the necessary resources to put decisions in to actions. The results of the study indicated that, before the introduction of block grant transfer there had been a top down budgeting system that overlooked local priorities and needs. Development projects and priorities were set at the higher echelons of the regional government and by people who are very far from existing local realities. Under such circumstances plans and budgets were more focused on centrally than locally set priorities.

The block grant transfer has changed that existed trend by allowing not only the power to decide but also the power to allocate resources to execute the decisions. Woreda level governments started to assert decision making and fiscal independence from higher hierarchies of the regional government so long as they are functioning within the scope of national and regional developmental strategies.

The findings also revealed that the amount of block grant transferred to the two woredas has been ascending for all the years considered under the study. This widened the resource capacity of the woredas and opened the room to address more local needs and demands. It has also improved their local resource generation capacity because the block grant transfer system encourages local authorities to generate more revenue from own sources. In this regard woredas who generate more revenue from local sources were provided with incentives based on the weighted values of grant transfer system.

Nevertheless, the study has disclosed that the contribution of revenue generated from own sources to the total budget is insignificant. This may promote persisted dependence of the woreda governments on regions in the long run downplaying their autonomy and independence from the regional government.

In the light of enhancing the authority for planning development projects, the DLDP reasserted the constitutionally designated power of woreda governments which was only a blue print and not materialized before 2001 (the launching of the DLDP). The results from the study have shown that the launching of the DLDP enabled woreda level governments to exercise their constitutionally designated power.

The whole process under the reform measure empowered them to set their own goals, priorities and to realize their own developmental projects. However, the very practice of planning, execution and budget utilization at woreda level is at its nascent stage and is challenged by a host of factors related to lack of capacity to set realistic goals and plans in line with the top priorities and demands of the local community. The results

therefore revealed that the challenges may persist until capacity issues are well addressed and experiences are gained in running a self-governing and autonomous local entities.

This has been clearly exhibited by the allocation of budget which is considered to be more development focused than recurrent budget for capital projects in the two woredas. In both woredas the amount of budget allocated is highly skewed to recurrent budget compared to capital budget. The worst case scenario is the share of capital budget plummeting as low as 5.7% of the total budget utilized in the 2006/07 in Qarssa Woreda and 3.9% for the same year in Xiro Afataa Woreda. Achieving development might be a very challenging endeavor given such asymmetrical budget distribution between recurrent and capital budget. This implies that, building human resource capacity for planning, allocating budget, and implementing decisions is critically vital and is at stake to achieve the aspired for local development through the reform measure.

Building human resource capacity is one of the major components of the DLDP. Staffing and training is taken as the core component of the reform measure because of the dearth of human resources to spearhead the development process at woreda level. Practicing the constitutionally stipulated powers and functions by local administrative bodies like woredas cannot be an easy task, unless offices are staffed with qualified professionals. In light of this, the study revealed that there is a critical shortage of qualified man power in both woredas, keeping the administrations from exercising the authorities legally vested up on them. The woredas also lack the required level of capacity, skill and access to employ qualified professionals and upgrade the existing ones by arranging long and short term training.

The point boils down to the fact that no matter how much decision making power and resources are decentralized to local level governments, the project of realizing local development initiatives cannot be a reality unless such levels of governments are equipped with qualified and competent professionals. The challenges could finally culminate in re-inventing the wheel by promoting local governments' dependency over higher level hierarchies. This may depress the essence of decentralization and thus initiating grass root development might be a remote possibility.

Moreover, grass root development does not only refer to formal government institutions at local level. The local populace is a key actor being the major source of ideas through participation, contributing financial and material resources and labor to development projects. The study revealed that discussions with the community at the grass root level is a usual practice and such discussion are utilized as a forum to solicit ideas on the needs and demands of the community which can later be incorporated as components of the development plans of the woreda governments. However, community groups on the other hand complain about such discussion being dominated by political issues and they are not sure as to whether their views are really translated in to development projects. This may indicate that the political leadership at local level should be able to build trust with the community and practically accommodate their views as far as capacity allows.

However, the communities in both woredas have significant contribution in realizing development projects. The findings from the study indicated that in some projects the contribution of the community in terms of labor doubles the total cost of the projects. For every planned project there is an estimate to what can be obtained from the

community. This has been reflected as an effective way of involving the community in local development activities which needs to be encouraged.

However, challenges surface out when officials are approaching the community to bring it on board to support local level development which has been pointed to the long lived dependency syndrome over government in providing basic services and facilities. Such challenges might be dealt with by building strong collaboration between local government institutions and the community, by enhancing institutional trust, by empowering the community, by enabling its voices to be heard and interests to be represented.

5. Conclusion

The 1995 federal constitution facilitated the playing ground to effect clear division of power between the Federal government and the regions and leaving the task of instituting self governing local units to the later. In line with this, almost all regions established their own local structure defining their power, functions and responsibilities. However these local units and specially the woredas did not practically exercise their autonomy until the launching of the DLDP in 2001. The program laid focus in building woredas capacity to enable them exercise their constitutionally granted power.

One of the components of this program is bloc grant transfer to woredas to enable them to prepare and execute their own plans. Unlike the past when priorities were set and budgets were prepared at the higher hierarchies of government, currently plans are prepared in the administrative levels that are very much closer to the people. More over the access to the resource also contributed for public participation in prioritizing their needs. The amount of own revenue generated is also raised because the woredas are able to allocate budget to build their capacity to tap more resources from the public, from tax and non tax sources.

The woredas are also actively engaged in planning their own activities. The planning process and views collected from respondents confirmed that woredas prepare and execute their own plan independently using their own structures and man power. Lack of the required qualified personnel, however, is still a challenge that woreda governments are facing. Observation in the two case woredas has also testified that significant portion of the budget is allocated to recurrent expenditures than capital projects. This could really inhibit practical development initiatives at woreda level since capital projects lead to more expansion of service to the local populace than recurrent expenditures.

Building human resource capacity is still a task at stake. The assessment in the case woredas revealed that, though there is an improvement from the past, lack of qualified and professional personnel for planning and execution is a challenge posed against woreda level development initiatives. Initiating short and medium term trainings and allocating the necessary budget could help in improving the human resource capacity of the woredas.

Wide popular participation in development projects that affect its life is one of the kernels of the Ethiopian federal system. The needs and wishes of the people can be addressed if their participation is ensured in setting priorities for plans and execution. In the case woredas there are multitude of formal and informal channels for public

participation and all these channels raised wider community participation in developmental projects. The people plan such projects with woreda, kebele and sub kebele level bodies and participate in execution. Popular contribution to the realization of development projects is mainly through human labor which in some cases doubles the total projects cost allocated by the woredas. However, wider popular participation is at its nascent stage because of many reasons and especially because the people is short of experience to directly involve in its own affairs. But, nurturing the will and interest of the people for participation is the key to achieve development at woreda level given the scarce resources allocated to development projects.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I would like to thank Dr. Dereje Feyissa for his constructive comments to improve the overall quality of the study. My special appreciation goes to the officials of the Qarssa and Xiro-Afatta woredas of the Jimma Zone who extended their unreserved support in availing themselves for interviews, providing secondary data, and calling the community for discussions. I would also like to convey my gratitude for the Secretariat Office of the 5th International Conference on Federalism for funding this research project. Finally, I would like to thank Jimma University for allowing me to conduct the research.

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