



Assessing the Local Government and Rural Development: Evidence from Ethiopia

Hodnotenie miestnej samosprávy a rozvoja vidieka: Dôkazy z Etiópie

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Abstract:

The main aim of the paper is to critically analyse local government and rural development in the Ethiopian context particularly the policies and strategies adopted to improve the lives of the people at the sub-national level. Fiscal practices and other resources biased in favour of the federal government and regional government, coupled with a lack of accountability and transparency among the ruling elites, hamper efforts at substantial development in the lower units of government. In terms of research methods employed for this study, mainly used secondary sources such as peer reviewed articles, books, government strategies, and policy documents for the work. Therefore, the study concluded that since local governments have been weakened by the federal and regional governments' undue interference, they have been unable to carry out their constitutional responsibilities and functions, let alone pursue rural development. Finally, local governments should aim to produce and retain revenues that will allow them to provide projects and services that will ensure that lower-level units have a good quality of life, as well as give local governments more decision-making and planning autonomy.

Keywords: Local Government, Rural development, Ethiopia, Decentralization, Development

Abstrakt:

Hlavným cieľom príspevku je kriticky analyzovať miestnu samosprávu a rozvoj vidieka v etiópskom kontexte, najmä politiky a stratégie prijaté na zlepšenie života ľudí na nižšej ako národnej úrovni. Fiškálne praktiky a iné zdroje zaujaté v prospech federálnej vlády a regionálnej vlády, spolu s nedostatočnou zodpovednosťou a transparentnosťou medzi vládnucimi elitami, brzdia snahy o podstatný rozvoj v nižších vládných jednotkách. Pokiaľ ide o výskumné metódy použité v tejto štúdií, pre prácu boli použité najmä sekundárne zdroje, ako sú recenzované články, knihy, vládne stratégie a politické dokumenty. Štúdia preto dospela k



záveru, že keďže miestne samosprávy boli oslabené neprimeraným zasahovaním federálnych a regionálnych vlád, neboli schopné vykonávať svoje ústavné povinnosti a funkcie, nehovoriac o rozvoji vidieka. Napokon, miestne samosprávy by sa mali zamerať na vytváranie a udržanie príjmov, ktoré im umožnia poskytovať projekty a služby, ktoré zabezpečia, že jednotky nižšej úrovne budú mať dobrú kvalitu života, ako aj poskytnú samosprávam väčšiu autonómiu rozhodovania a plánovania.

Kľúčové slová: *Miestna samospráva, Rozvoj vidieka, Etiópia, Decentralizácia, Rozvoj*

Introduction

The failure of traditional top-down policies, together with the development challenges posed by globalization, has prompted a serious rethinking of the validity of this approach to development planning by practitioners and scholars [1 2 3]. This rethinking has led to the rise and emergence of new types of development policies grouped under "Local Economic Development (LED) " in which endogenous and institutional factors are integrated within a comprehensive development framework with activities in support of infrastructure and foreign direct investment that would provide growth opportunities for all areas (Walter, 2008) by unleashing the economic potentials of each area cited in [4].

Therefore, decentralization has been increasingly common in recent years as a means of government reform, with national governments across the world aiming to give sub national governments more power and accountability to foster greater political involvement and democracy and increase the cost and efficiency of administrations.

Besides under the rule of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), Ethiopia has undergone a process of decentralization since 1991, especially with the promulgation of the 1995 constitution. The former unitary government system has been replaced by a federal system, which includes a federal government at just the federal level and regional governments at the local unit [5]. Therefore, Ethiopia has pursued decentralization as a tool to create an enabling situation to promote the development and good governance at the local government level. There is a consensus among development experts, government officials, and foreign donors on the proactive role that local government plays in decision making and participatory community development. The World Development Report (2003) strongly supports decentralization to improve service delivery to the poor. Several recent academic books, papers, and conference panel discussions have focused on the growing value of local government as a provider of local services, a valuable partner in community growth, and a strong laboratory for local democracy [6].

According to [7], the terms "rural development" and "community development" would be interchangeable. The term "rural development" has a rather broad definition. Agriculture, health, education, rural infrastructure, social life, political and economic concerns, commerce and industry, and their integration with the national economy, among other things, are all part of this multi-faceted phase. Since the concept's reach is so broad, it serves as the foundation for achieving sound national development in all its forms. Rural development is often mistakenly associated with agriculture by politicians and development planners. To correct this perception, scholars in the field of rural development must carry out a systematic conceptualization of the term. Since the term "rural development" has such a broad meaning, it is important to write about an

integrated approach to its definition. The term "integrated rural development" refers to a hybrid or holistic rural development program in which all related fields, such as agriculture, education, housing, health, and jobs, are envisioned as interconnected elements in a system having horizontal as well as a vertical linkage in operational and spatial terms according to United Nations report.

Besides, in the successful implementation of community development initiatives in Ethiopia, the government and local governments have played a very important role. In the economic growth of the state and in ensuring the welfare and security of all Ethiopians, the local government plays an important role. It also offers local and regional leadership and serves the community's leisure and cultural needs. The government's community development policy objectives are to ensure that local government contributes to the formulation of policies and strategies aimed at improving the level and scope of community, social and economic development, and services; and to maximize local government access to finance and resources to provide adequate community services and facilities [8]. Promoting basic elements of good governance, including community involvement and responsibility through a decentralized local government system, has therefore been the focus of attention since the introduction of multiparty democracy in Ethiopia.

Although sub-national governments are formally given power and authority, in practice, however, all levels of government in Ethiopia are directly or indirectly controlled by one party structure, namely the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), with the party transforming into the Prosperity Party (PP) in 2020 by excluding the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), which was one of the former members of the front after Prime Minister "Abiy Ahmed" came to power. The party not only controls all levels of government but also has a highly centralized decision-making system based on the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) principle of "democratic centralism" cited in [9].

However, development studies analysts, practitioners, and financing partners consistently point out that despite some achievements, the country still faces limitations. Certain challenges hinder the contribution of the sub-national entity to effective rural development and meeting local needs.

Local governments in Ethiopia's rural woredas have the power to assess land use, including the location of schools, health centers, or clinics. They may also regulate co-ops and volunteer programs in the community. Local government authorities in municipalities may establish and enforce development plans, as well as control markets, sanitary services, slaughterhouses, fire departments, and mortuary and burial services. They can also grant marriage and birth certificates, as well as approve building plans and register assets. However, a study conducted by [10] reveals that most of these discretionary powers exist only on paper since most legislative, regulations, and planning decisions seem to be made top-down, starting with the party at the national level and passing down across regional and zonal systems to the local level. For this reason, this paper focuses mainly on reviewing local government and rural development through the Ethiopian experience. The research method employed for this paper was "desk review". This Paper critically reviews secondary sources such as published and peer reviewed articles, books, existing literatures, strategies, and policy documents from Ethiopia.

1. Conceptual Framework on Local Government

Local government is a sub-unit of government controlled by a local council empowered by the federal government and regional government to make ordinances of local application, to levy taxes or require labor, and to vary centrally adopted policies to apply them locally within the limits set by the central government. Thus, the crucial part of the definition of local government is that it is a democratically elected authority exercising policy decisions within defined boundaries, although of course local governments cooperate across boundaries and federate into quasi-federal bodies, such as urban municipalities [11].

Additionally, "like all other sub-disciplines within the social sciences, government (as a body of data and as a practice) is encapsulated in a web. As there are many writers, there are many different points of view on the topic. In the communal context, government refers to the people's political instrument for resource allocation, distribution, and power acquisition." A review of this concept reveals that it aligns with the general goals of government, which include political engagement, efficient service delivery, and resource mobilization. The desire to include people in the administration of local or municipal affairs, and thus in the decision-making process, is referred to as political involvement. Therefore, efficient service delivery, which is linked to the previous aspect, ensures that residents' basic needs are addressed as easily and effectively as possible through proper utilization of human and material resources at the local level [12].

Local government is widely regarded as a genuine agent of development and inclusion in the democratic process at the grassroots level. The concerns posed as motives for the formation of sub-national units are relevant to this paper, for example, Local government, especially in third world countries including Ethiopia, has taken as a proper tool/instrument for rural development. As a result, certain roles have been delegated to local governments by constitution or legislation all over the world [13]. This paper examines how successful local governments have been at reaching the aim of rural development.

Another important justification for the establishment of local governments is to adapt relevant social amenities and development activities to local needs and programs through devolution and delegation from federal or regional to local representative bodies. Hence, to increase awareness and organize the diverse communities within their jurisdictions to engage in the overall development of their respective areas [13]. As a result, it is highly questionable if the Ethiopian local government is providing or not adequate services to its people particularly at the local level.

When addressing local government in the form of decentralization,[14] says decentralization is divided into three types: political decentralization, Field/administrative decentralization, and fiscal decentralization, in which subnational units have significant autonomy and are given powers and obligations to carry out certain functions designated by the central government or regional government.

According to [15] the Ethiopian federalism system is flawed in that it delegates levels of government that are supposed to be coordinated and independent; otherwise, how will state governments control local government councils? [15] the closer a decision-making government is to the people, the more transparent, responsible,

participatory, accountable, and efficient, and effective it becomes. Therefore, this might happen because of the following factors, first, when it is closer to the people, it can monitor and control the local government, second, when the government is closer to the people and has substantial power, resources, and responsibility, it is easy for it to be transparent, accountable, responsible, participatory, and effective and efficient.

2. Rural Development

We need to understand the concept of development to have a clearer picture of rural development. Hornby (2000) defines development as the gradual growth of something in such a way that it becomes more advanced, stronger, etc., the process of producing or creating something new cited in [16]. This definition implies that development involves gradual or progressive change. He sees a multi-dimensional change involving changes in structures, attitudes, and institutions, as well as an acceleration of economic growth, a reduction in inequalities, and the eradication of absolute poverty. It argues that development involves the economic growth component, the equality or social justice component, and the socio-economic transformational component, all of which are self-sustaining. Seeing the concept differently [17] sees development as an improvement in the quality of life (not just the material standard of living) in both quantitative terms.

Thus, rural development, according to [18], is concerned with improving the living conditions of low-income people living in rural areas on a self-sustaining basis by changing the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities. It entails a broad-based reorganization and mobilization of the rural masses and resources to improve the rural populace's ability to cope effectively with their daily tasks and the changes that result. The above description has three main characteristics and explained accordingly:

The first is to improve the subsistence population's life conditions by mobilizing and redistributing resources to attain a desirable balance over time between social welfare and productive services available to the rural subsistence population. Second, in terms of both allocative rationality and equity, mass participation strives for distributive performance. Third, the acquisition and creation of appropriate skills, building capacity, and presence of functional institutions at all levels are needed to promote the effective use of available resources and for the growth of rural areas.

The achievement of the above goals is dependent on the interaction of the following critical variables:

- (1) “National policies: which include land tenure systems; commodity pricing and marketing systems; wages and interest rate structure.
- (2) Administrative systems impinging on devolution in governmental structures.
- (3) Scope for institutional pluralism: which implies devolution with the distribution of development responsibility among the normal government structures; semi-autonomous governmental institutions and structures, private, commercial, and traditional institutions; and elective bodies.”

“Rural development is also concerned with the improvement and transformation

of low-income rural dwellers' social, mental, economic, institutional, and environmental conditions by an organization and rational utilization of their human, natural, and institutional resources, to enhance their capacities to cope with daily tasks and contemporary demands” as cited in [19].

According to [20], multi-sectoral activities such as agricultural production, rural industrial promotion, and the establishment of effective decentralized structures that encourage mass participation in a country's development process are also included. All of these institutions, which are meant to serve the rural people, inevitably serve the interests of a few individuals who control and manipulate them.

So, the rural development in Ethiopia has a relatively long history than many sub-Saharan African countries. It has also enjoyed increasing government support over years, though not to be at the level expected. A review of the evolution of the Ethiopian rural development policy under different political systems reveals the significance of prevailing policies and development strategies on the contribution to agricultural development [21].

Under the Imperial Period, development policies, as quoted by [22], favoured industrial development, overlooked the agricultural sector, and worked predominantly with better and commercial farmers in and around major project areas. The political situation, however, favoured collective and state farms at the expense of individual farmers during the periods between 1974 and 1991. The contribution that rural development policies might have made has been undermined by skewed macroeconomic policies, political instability, and large villagization and settlement programs. The post-1991 era is also marked as Agricultural-Led Industrialization with the most prominent and lasting economy-wide strategies (ADLI), the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), Participatory and Accelerated Sustainable Development to Eradicate Poverty (PASDEP), and successive Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP I and GTP II). These strategies were intended, Inter alia, to achieve food self-sufficiency at a national level by increasing productivity of smallholder farmers through knowledge and technology produced by research, increasing the supply of industrial and export crops, and ensuring the rehabilitation and conservation of natural resource base, taking special account of package approach [23 24 25 26].

3. Local Government and Rural Development

Communal effort has not been a recent phenomenon. It dates back to the time of primitive communalism when people searched for their living communally. In the early state of man, he always sought ways of conquering nature [28]. [29] argues that the concept of community development is not new, that rather it is an old ideology. The reality in Bentham's assertion that community development is a man in the society can be sustained by the fact that communities throughout history constructed and maintained their roads, bridges, sunk their well for drinking water supply, and constructed their markets, and village halls by community efforts.

Besides, local government, as the government nearest to the rural community, is one of the most powerful institutions for generating motivation and mobilization of the public, as well as ensuring the much broader participation of local people in decision-making during the planning and implementation process. As a result, to ensure the

delivery of basic services, local control and collaboration must be facilitated, and this can best be achieved by local people's involvement in both local government and community issues. It is therefore essential to note that the presence of Ethiopia's lower tier of government can at the very least prevent the deterioration of living standards in rural areas.

4. Effective Approaches for Rural Development

Although the trickle-down theory was based on the belief that an expanded macro economy could improve the living standards of impoverished people, its effectiveness has been questionable. However, its failure does not necessarily mean that efforts should be focused only on the grassroots level. After all, rural development cannot be achieved without paying attention to urban areas, which are the main consumers of agricultural products. If traditional development projects were effective, rural poverty would have improved more significantly. Therefore, it is clear that the traditional approach to rural development needs to be improved. So far, rural development has been dependent on external aid from abroad. However, due to the current poor financial conditions of donor countries, external contributions have become reluctant. As a result, rural development support needs effective external inputs to achieve sufficient results and bring about further improvements. To realize this, development issues need to be understood in a comprehensive and cross-cutting manner. It is also necessary to maximize the use of human and material resources in rural areas. Some possible approaches are described below according to [29].

Endogenous Development

Emphasize holistic local development for the protection of human rights, human development, and the qualitative improvement of standards of living focused on the conservation of the environment and sustainable social development.

Focusing on sustainable local development for the promotion of human rights, human development, and the qualitative improvement of standards of living focused on the conservation of the environment and sustainable social development.

Adopt an approach to growth that facilitates inter-industrial partnerships through the comprehensive use of local resources, strategies, markets, human resources, communities, and networks that respect mixed economic working conditions. It is also important to introduce legislation and instructions to encourage collaboration between towns and the local economy. To promote community involvement in the policy making and implementations process. To create local autonomy through community engagement, decentralization, and simultaneous resident self-governance, to build regional realities-based project implementation bodies.

Participatory Development

Promoting the development of human and physical resources in rural areas requires recognition of the fact that local people themselves are the main contributors to development projects. When people passively participate in projects, they become inactive and become dependent on external inputs. To avoid this situation, local decision-making in project planning and implementation is important. In other words, a project that local people plan and implement themselves is given priority because local

materials and human resources are used effectively through local people's initiative and responsibility. Local independence and the sustainable development of project results are promoted through the effective use of local resources.

Basic Needs Approach

A basic needs (BN) approach to development gives priority to addressing the basic needs of all the people. The actual content of BN has been specified in different ways: it often involves the fulfilment of certain nutritional requirements and the universal delivery of services for health and education for the people. They sometimes also cover other material needs, such as shelter and clothing, and non-material needs such as work, engagement, and political freedom are often protected. The concept of meeting such basic human needs a development goal is neither novel nor complex; it stems from the simple belief that development should prioritize reducing total deprivation [30].

5. The Evolution of Rural Development Policy in Ethiopia

Ethiopia's rural policies have evolved with political changes and in parallel with economic development. Before 1991, both the monarchy (1941-74) and the Derg period (1974-91) emphasized the industrial sector. National development strategies were mixed export-oriented (mainly during the imperial period) and import-substituting industrial development strategies, and the agricultural sector was used more as a source of foreign exchange. Since 1991, Ethiopia's development strategies have changed dramatically from emphasizing industry to emphasizing policies driven by the agricultural sector. In 1991, the agricultural sector and rural development became the focus of the national development agenda. This led to the establishment of the Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization strategy (ADLI) as the main framework for national development. The ADLI acted as the main pillar for all national development strategies that gave priority to the development of the smallholder sector at sub-national level.

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Table 1. (Table 1.): The of Summary the Evolution of Rural/National Policy 1950 till the Present. [31 32]

Political ruling	Monarchy	Dergue government	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)
Period	1950-74	1974-91	1991 to 2019
National development strategies	Industrial growth by import substitution and industrialization	Centrally organized, industry-led development	Home-grown, agricultural-led, export-oriented development policies
Selected policy areas	Much of the properties were owned by state and church during this period Establishment of huge commercial farms producing coffee, as a method of earning foreign currency Prioritized the advancement of non-agricultural industries	Nationalization of land and other productive assets Collectivisation of farms and promotion of villagization programs Mixed economic policies (1988-89). Distortion of markets through price controls, and overvaluation of the Ethiopian birr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land remains state-owned • Changed national development priority to agricultural development <p align="center">Adoption of SAPs and export-oriented open economy</p>
Main rural development questions	Food shortages Neglect of cereal production despite accounting for 80% of the cultivated area	Severe droughts and famine in 1983-84 and food insufficiency Civil conflicts	Persistent food shortages The rise in rural population Environmental degradation and climate change-related shocks

The GoE implemented a series of restructuring reforms that had been underway since the early 1990s. The national development strategies were used to implement these reforms such as the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), the Growth and Transformation Plan I (GTP I), and (GTPII). Table 0.2 shows the main differences in the policy approaches of the plans and highlights some of the development strategies and policies that specifically target the grassroots level or rural areas. The progress of Ethiopia's national development strategies reflects changes in the country's socio-economic dynamics since 1991. From 1991, the Ethiopian government invested extensively in rural areas. The national focus on agricultural productivity had two objectives. First, the Ethiopian government wants to address the persistent problem of food insecurity in the country. Second, it wants to increase agricultural production for industrial development and enable Ethiopia to achieve the agenda 2025 goal of becoming a middle-income country.

Therefore, Ethiopia's national development strategies have gradually expanded their remit to take into account the growing role of urbanization and urban areas in national development. The Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), as well as GTPI and GTPII recognize the key role of urban areas, particularly in Ethiopia's industrial development agenda. The PASDEP stands out among the national development plans as it is the only plan that explicitly promotes the urban agenda, has a comprehensive urban component, and integrates the National Urban Development Policy (NUDP) into the development plan objectives. The

PASDEP and the NUDP are distinctive in their approach. Both plans take a broader spatial approach and recognize the need for greater urban-rural linkages, inclusive rural development, and the promotion of small-town development. The two plans are well aligned and the PASDEP embeds the key objectives of the NUDP as part of its urban development agenda. However, this approach is not carried forward in subsequent development strategies.

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(Table: 2). Summary of Evolution of Rural Strategies and Policies in Ethiopia. [33 34 35 36
37 38 39]

	Duration	Plans and strategies	Key policies
Development strategies	Since 1994	ADLI	A basis for all national development policies, with the development of the agricultural sector, acknowledged as a catalyst for economic change.
	2003-05	SDPRP	Builds on the ADLI, focusing mainly on poverty reduction, macroeconomic stability, and meeting the expectation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) standards
	2005-10	PASDEP	Within the ADLI framework, but encourages large-scale commercial farming, development of manufacturing sector; Promotion of rural-urban linkages
	2010-15	GTPI	Reprioritized commercialization of smallholder agriculture, set dual objectives of agricultural and industrial sector development. Urban areas are recognized as a catalyst for industrial development.
	2015-20	GTPII	Builds on GTPI and GTPII mainstreams the ADLI and continues to position urban areas as a catalyst for economic transformation and development of the light manufacturing industry.
	2003	(RDPS) Rural Development Policy and Strategy.	The first explicit rural development strategy. For the promotion of smallholder agricultural development-driven growth.
Policies targeting rural areas	2003	Food Security Program; PSNP; Resettlement Program	Aims to provide valuable and consistent support to poor and food-insecure rural and urban households with systematic and reliable assistances.
	1997-2010	Road Sector Development Program	Road infrastructure development programme to deal with the country-wide infrastructure gap. The programme focused on the restoration of existing roads and the building of new infrastructures like roads.
	2010-15	Universal Rural Road Access Program	Program for road infrastructure follow up
	2010 to present	AGP	Investment in targeted high-potential agricultural areas to enhance agricultural commercialization and creation of important chains
	2017	RJOCS	A strategy for aligning rural job creation strategies within the framework and the objectives of GTPII.

Conclusion

This paper has conceptualized the position of sub-national units on rural developments in Ethiopia from different viewpoints. Local governments in Ethiopia are disempowered and unable to carry out their constitutional duties and functions as expected, let alone play their part they should in rural development, based on the structure and federal practice. Different approaches to rural development were addressed like participatory approach basic need approaches and others.

The local government is at the forefront of the government's development efforts. People's contributions must be properly mobilized to efficiently strengthen sub-national units. A focused combination of local people's hard work and resources with that of the government to improve socio-economic conditions and promote political participation is the most important factor in rural development. The aim of rural development as a strategy is to enhance the economic and social well-being of the communities. Hence rural development includes participatory development; a basic needs approach, an integrated development framework, and the utilization of human and other resources to facilitate the delivery of social wellbeing and infrastructure. The local government should continue to be the organizational environment for fostering rural development.

Recommendations

Some recommendations were suggested to improve the effectiveness of the local government's position in rural development in Ethiopia:

Lack of good governance was seen as a major obstacle preventing local government from playing its role at the expected level. The federal government and regional government should preserve good governance by showing transparency, accountability, and participation of local government.

The various models of the Local Government system have been found wanting because they have not been given adequate autonomy as the federal or regional government continues to interfere with them unduly. This, therefore, implies that local governments should be given full autonomy so that they can exercise their full power to improve their functioning.

The sub-national units should aim to produce and sustain revenues that will enable them to provide infrastructure and services that will improve the quality of life at the local level. This has the potential to minimize migration between rural and urban areas.

The local governments need to be more people-centered to promote rural development through the required collaborative effort with the concerned bodies.

Agricultural extension agents and consultants should be proactively employed by local governments to teach and impart modern farming methods to improve the lives of the local community. This would have the benefit of implementing the requisite adaptive farming methods with increased yields, ensuring sufficient food supply, and reducing agricultural reliance.

Public participation in the governance the nearest form of government to the citizens in local government. As such, it is the first entry point for people to gain access to and influence government decision-making. Citizen participation in local government

is rapidly gaining significance in all the countries chosen. Through the electoral system, the most popular method of participation is.

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