

Part III: Ways of Making Ethnic Decentralization Successful

The comprehensive findings summarized above illustrated the prevalence of a number of shortcomings. On the basis of this research findings and good practices learned from other case studies, the following performance improvement reforms, listed in accordance with their priority of importance were suggested.

1. Expanding the Economic Opportunities and Assets of the Poor People

The economic opportunities and assets of the poor people can be built up and expanded when the economic decision-making authority as regards rural land, farm implements, input/output marketing, extension services and microfinance are transferred to individuals, farm households and voluntarily formed cooperatives. If the rural poor are not empowered through greater access to economic assets and opportunities, poverty cannot be reduced. This study has extensively explained the barriers to economic assets, the constraints to the scope of accumulation of assets existing inequalities and deprivations. There is lack of land and pastures; unavailability and expensiveness of inputs for farming; problems with pests and disease; lack of skill and knowledge, and lack of capital and access to credit; insecurity leading to a loss of oxen, for example; market problems, including poor roads and transport networks; lack of storage and processing; etc. The zonal administration has to solve these enormous challenges and barriers at the level of policy, planning and budgeting. The zonal administration need to take the following major actions:

- A land act designed to promote secure access to landless farmers. The land act must also set up land tribunals at local levels in order to advise the poor on land arrangement contracts and resolve disputes without excluding them.
- Introduction of a scheme to distribute cattle as a form of credit in kind, where beneficiaries are expected to contribute one of the offspring of their livestock to a rotating pool. The zonal administration should also increase its support of the distribution of coffee and other cash crop seedlings.
- The zonal administration should build the capacity of the Omo Microfinance Institution (OMI) to enable the financial system to better reach the poor in rural areas. Special attention needs to be given to savings-based approaches (such as saving and credit cooperatives) that can mobilize local funds in areas beyond the credit institution.
- The development of a bottom-up structure for extension services where farmers are encouraged to participate actively. Development agents should be relieved from administrative works in order to address key extension messages. They should be provided with resources to increase the frequency of visiting farmers and should get training to have a coherent direction in advising farmers.
- An establishment of a zonal agricultural research service for each agro-climatic area and production system in the zone.
- A funding mechanism such as a conditional grant to voluntarily formed production cooperatives.
- The introduction of a non-sectoral grant to allow local communities to identify critical production constraints and respond much more flexibly to them. For instance, if a bridge needs repairing, the community can use its funds to solve the problem rather than coping with the complexities of higher-level bureaucracy.
- To target the poor, the zonal administration must have a poverty profile of the zone. The poverty profile identifies the incidence of poor people, their geographical concentration,

differentiation according to socio-economic group and gender. The poverty profile will help the zonal administration to assess the determinants of poverty.

The above reforms are aimed at facilitating the accumulation of assets and tackling of inequalities, thus generating income not only to the individual and household but also to the zonal administration. The creation of a diversified and competitive productive base creates a propitious condition for fiscal reforms (tax assessment and collection) and the rise of privatization and investment. It is through reducing poverty and encouraging the growth of the Regional economy that the zonal administration can finance its growing budget deficit.

2. Improving Human Resource Planning

This research had found out that the Gurage zone administration had no adequate human resources to meet its overall goals effectively. Quantity wise, the sector departments were working with a 65% human resources capacity needed for the proper function of the structure. Quality wise, the position held by some employees did not much their educational qualification and experience. On top of this, a large number of skilled personnel were leaving the administration in search of new jobs in the private sector, NGOs and Federal institutions. Ironically, the zonal administration is bent on rapidly expanding public service-giving facilities in the zone through construction of various projects. It was clear that the zonal administration had reached a breaking point where it had excessively compromised the quality of services and efficiency of administration. Given the trend of shortages and migration of skilled labour, it is time that the zonal administration start to design comprehensive human resource planning in order to ensure and meet the personnel needs of the departments on a constant and appropriate basis. The zonal administration can establish a human resources committee consisting of the heads of the personnel section of the line departments. This committee can plan for the future needs and current balance by comparing the number of needed employees to the number of present employees who can be expected to stay with the departments and administration.

One of the immediate goals of human resources planning should be the creation of opportunities to keep the present employees with the departments. The salaries of the staff have been subject to long-term declines in real terms. It is therefore necessary to introduce a reform that includes a rise in salary. Motivation to stay on the job and to improve performance cannot be expected when salaries are below subsistence level. The zonal administration must understand and attend to this basic element of an organization, namely ensuring salary levels that allow the professional and technical staff to commit themselves to the departments in the zone. Given the economic situation in the country, increasing salaries may not be on the agenda. In that case one possible alternative for keeping employees is to provide benefits in the form of project allowance.

Another aspect of the human resources planning is to design training and development programmes. A training programme ensures improving the current job performance, while the development programme is aimed at developing skills for future jobs. Both types of programmes ensure that the departments have a steady supply of experienced and capable personnel. In addition to improvements to job performance, training opportunities can serve as a rewarding system, especially in conditions where salaries are low.

To develop skills for future jobs, the human resource development committee must interact very closely with the Regional training institutions to have its own input on the type and

contents of the training courses provided by them. The committee must analyse the quality and relevance of the courses to the practical needs of the various sector departments. To materialize the plan, the zonal administration must allocate sufficient budget for training and development programmes. Financial resources for training and a systematic human resources development are important instruments in capacity building of public sectors.

3. Promoting Local/Regional Democracy

Enhancing the democratic process and institution is an essential condition for sustaining and deepening the devolution of power and local autonomy. This can be done through strengthening the representative councils at the zonal and district levels. These councils should have diverse membership to represent a broader range of interests. The ethnic minorities, the Amharas and the Oromos, should be represented in the zonal and district councils. The privilege should not be limited to the Marekos and Kebene ethnic groups. Despite their majority status in the zone, women were also relatively less represented in the councils. Local businessmen and members of mass organizations were not sufficiently represented in the representative councils. There should be a way to assure the mandatory representation of these groups. A Zonal Administration Code can be decreed which requires a given percentage of the voting membership be given to these groups both at the district and zonal councils.

Once new constituencies can participate and gain representation in the councils, the next step should be to strengthen the capacity of the representative councils. The presence of elective councils is not sufficient by itself. Formal power for council representatives means little if there is no committee system working. There is always a question of how the representative council can effectively control the executive part of the administration. This can be done through the establishment of standing committees for the purpose of making legislation according to the Regional Constitution, reviewing the reports of the executive administration and activities of the various sectors. If professional staff assist these committees, they can increase their ability to analyze information and draft laws.

The development and plurality of the civil society is a necessary condition for democratization. In the Gurage zone the civil society (professional associations, mass organizations and local communities) are weak both financially and in leadership to fulfil the varied interests, functions and objectives entrusted to them. It is, therefore, important that the Federal Government and/or international NGOs encourage their development and proliferation. But the civil society institutions should not be left to pursue their narrow interests. If left to their own self-development, they can serve as a rock-bed for the bureaucratisation of the zonal administration and creation of constitutional authoritarianism in the zone. They should be politicised to raise relevant public issues other than their own limited and particular interests.

This again requires the encouragement of contending political forces in the zone. The Federal Government and international NGOs should help to strengthen political pluralism in the zone. The three local opposition parties in the zone have challenges of developing and solidifying their party identity and constituency. They need technical and financial assistance, since they can serve as a cornerstone of democracy in the zone. Without strong contending parties and politicised civil associations, there is a risk for local autocratic rule by petty executive officials of the ruling party.

4. Enhancing Organizational and Administrative Efficiency

Even though the design of decentralization is appropriate in the context of the Gurage zone, there is room for further improvements. The distribution of functions between the Regional State and the zonal administration and between the latter and the districts was done not by legislative acts but through informal agreements and understanding. A system of function sharing through negotiation and consensus will create ambiguity in responsibilities. It is better if the distribution of functions across levels of administration is defined by declared rules. That will enhance commitment to the rules and constitution of decentralization.

As regards administration, there is a need to review the system of procedures for accomplishing works. As pointed out, in the zone the basic systems and procedures were in place and the staff knew what must be done, when and how. However, since the structure of the departments was not stable due to constant changes in the allocation of functions among the sector departments, it is necessary that basic job descriptions should be revised from time to time. Efforts should also be made to alleviate the problems of communication facilities such as vehicles. The execution of a considerable number of rural development projects requires a continuous mobility to get access to the project sites and to the beneficiaries. A system of development that relied on mobility and on constant interaction with the beneficiaries could not function under poor communication facilities. Considering the central role given to projects in the development of the Gurage zone, it is also absolutely essential that the zonal administration establish a project evaluation committee located within the Department of Planning and Economic Development. For the purpose of planning and quality control, it is necessary that the impacts of projects be analysed before proceeding with further construction.

The above improvement suggestions will not by themselves contribute to the success of decentralization in the Gurage zone. Since the Gurage Zone Administration interacts with its larger environment, the macro situation at the federal level can hinder or accelerate the progress in the zone (see Part IV). The Federal Government should continue the effort to make decentralization real and successful. It must also ensure democratic governance and be able to solve conflicts with the mutual consent of the regional states.

Tsegaye Tegenu, Ph.D.
Stockholm University
Tsegaye.tegenu@humangeo.su.se