

# EXPLAINING DISTRIBUTIVE POLITICS IN ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE ETHIOPIAN ETHNIC-BASED FEDERAL SYSTEM

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## ABSTRACT

Most of the literature in federal systems took specific institutions and socio-cultural variables to justify distribution in road infrastructures. The regime base analysis, called the state-building process, has been adopted in this study due to the shortcomings in the above variables to explain the share of roads in constituent units in less democratic, developing federal countries. Building an ethnically arranged polity is challenging because of constitutionally supported strikingly competing political and economic interests. Centrally made strategic decisions whose goals have emphasized achieving accelerated economic growth and ensuring equity among regions were, however, responsible to guide the state-building trajectories in post-1991 Ethiopia. Evidence from the interview and secondary sources revealed that despite enhancing the economy, the strategies have not yet equitably built member regions. For example, regional governments did not realize the equitable size of one of the means of development, all-weather roads. *This study recommends a different path of institutionalized state-building practices anchored on the negotiated decision of member regions of the Ethiopian federation.*

**Keywords:** Constitution, Ethiopia, Federalism, Public Policies, Roads, State-Building

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## 1. Introduction

If politics, as Harold Lasswell (1936) argued, is all about who gets what, when, and how, distributive politics would be the core of politics. Most literature, however, attempted to explain the effect of specific institutions to determine who gets what of roads in democratic federal systems (Mayhew, 1974; Dixit, 1986; Dahlberg & Johansson, 2002; Cox, 2006 & 2010; Milesi-Ferretti et al, 2002; Lee, 2000 & 2004; Rodden & Wilkinson, 2004; Crepsin et al, 2008; Aidt and Julia, 2012; Endicott, 2015; Kumar, 2017; and Meinke, 2018). The socio-cultural literature,

though meager, tried to figure out the outcomes of ethnic diversity and ethnicity in the distribution of non-excludable public goods such as roads (Barkan & Chege, 1989; Barkan & Chege, 1989; Alesina et al. 1999; Kimenyi, 2003; Miguel & Gugerty, 2005; Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005; Baldwin & Huber, 2010); Jackson, 2010; Burgess et al. 2015; Ghosh & Mitra, 2016). Both analytical tools, nevertheless, are short of justifying distribution in a polity ruled by one dominant party, arranged ethnically, and practiced in a less democratic political environment. This study,

thus, adopts a regime base analysis instead of taking specific institutions or ethnic factors to explain the distribution of road infrastructure in Ethiopia's federal system.

The study first sets this introductory part. Second, it reviews related literature on the distribution of road allocation in federal systems, especially attempting to identify explanatory variables, trace the gaps, and justify the analytical tool used in this study. Third, it underscores the challenges of building the federal states, and the fourth highlights constitutional factors and party politics in the trajectory of building the Ethiopian state. Fifth, the study identifies the influence of each developmental policy of the federal government on the growth of road infrastructure in Ethiopia. Sixth, it presents the physical pattern of road networks based on *kebeles*' connection via all-weather roads in each region. Seventh, this study tries sorting out the responsible bodies and the criteria they applied in selecting road projects in Ethiopia. The eighth explores respective constitutional and statutory bodies mandated to ensure fair distribution of means of development across the federation. Ninth, the study investigates the role of informal IGR mechanisms in the selection process of road projects and the party channel in the distribution of roads. Lastly, it draws conclusion remarks.

The time phase of this study has corresponded with the tenure of the defunct ruling coalition, EPRDF (1991-2018). The analysis thus attempted mainly to explain the effect of EPRDF's state-building strategies on the distribution of roads in

Ethiopia. The study collected data from institutions in the federal government and the Amhara region because of financial and time constraints. Although this study uses interview evidence, the data gathered from sources, such as the constitution, proclamation, regulation, directives, public policies and programs, and periodic reports of the relevant bodies at the federal level are also employed. Parliamentarians, appointed officials, and experts in different government organizations at the central and regional levels were respondents interviewed between September 2018 and February 2019. The respondents were each two from federal bodies such as the House of the Federation (hereafter HF) and the Ministry of Federal Affairs (MoFA), four from the Ethiopian Road Authority (ERA), and three from the Amhara Rural Road Authority (RRA). Offering similar questions to appointed officials and experts in the same organization is the method used to gain facts about the same events, filtering competing responses of the interviewees.

## **2. Literature on the distribution of roads**

Theoretical tools existed in distributive politics of road infrastructure to divide studies into two broadly synthesized pieces of literature. The first category is the studies that explore the influence of institutions on distribution in democratic countries, most in the U.S. Some tend to explore the exchange of votes and public spending at the constituent level (Mayhew, 1974; Dixit, 1986; Dahlberg & Johansson, 2002; Cox, 2010). The findings of these studies suggest that the electoral

incentive that the winning party gains from the election guides how the allocation takes place. Constituencies that endorse the winning party gain more rewards in the form of public goods than others. Gary Cox (2010) and Dixit and Londregan (1986) have attempted to differentiate voters as core and swing; the smaller public fund goes to the latter but is still larger than voters aligned with the opposition party or individual candidates.

Milesi-Ferretti et al. (2002) weighted the effect of electoral systems on the allocation of public goods. According to them, proportional representation induces legislators toward programmatic funds, whereas single-member districts encourage favoring pork and patronage. Aidt and Julia (2012:1), however, studied other institutional variables, terms of tenure, in distributive politics and concluded that legislators are indifferent to distribution when they cannot seek re-election so that they may bring less public spending to their constituency. In their study of whether economic or political concern has much weight in the allocation of infrastructural investment in Germany, Kemmerling and Stephan (2002) found that party affiliation between tiers of government matters for the distribution of federal road investment grants. Consistent with the findings of Aidt and Julia, they (pp. 421) also found that local governments with a higher probability of reelection show a higher degree of propensity to invest in local infrastructure projects. In their general remarks about the effect of electoral politics on distribution, Golden and Min (2013: 74) stated that 'the goal of politicians

in allocating resources is exquisitely electoral, highly partisan, and ultimately a function of attempts at political survival'. Similarly, Cadot et al. (2006: 151) directly confront the allocation process in western democracies in a more provocative statement that 'roads and railways are not built to reduce traffic jams: they are built essentially to get politicians re-elected'.

Scott Meinke (2018) took partisan variables as an independent factor to explain the allocation of road projects in the U.S. House of Representatives. He argued that participation in the internal organization of the House's caucus or conference of the majority party extends benefits to the specific constituencies in the authorization of federal surface transport funds. Crepsin et al. (2008) supported the above assertion in their study of the U.S. senate that reiterated the institutional advantage of the majority party to bring more blessings of highway funds to their respective states.

Frances Lee's two consecutive studies are, however, paramount in explaining factors that shape the distribution in the reauthorization of the federal surface transportation programs in the U.S. Senate. In his 2000 study, Lee argued that smaller states disproportionately gained larger grants than populous states due to the lesser cost the winning coalition builders incurred in distributing reauthorization programs. His 2004 study, however, proceeded to analyze the influence of the different basis of representation of the two federal legislative chambers, the Senate and the House, in their preferences for distribution

programs. According to him, as also supported by Lazarus and Steigerwalt (2009), senators that represented states mostly need large formula grants that constitute a bulk of intergovernmental transfers to claim credit, whereas House members that represented constituencies prefer to use earmarks and narrow categorical programs targeting funds to claim credit.

What an important here is that an implicit presumption of democratic accountability in the political system where the inquiries are taking place is the basic foundation behind all the above studies. The point is that the effect of institutions, such as elections, electoral systems, party systems, party polarization, the structural difference between legislative chambers, participation in the internal organization of the majority party in the congress, etc., comes to clear in the inquiries when democratic governance triumphed out in the polity. It implies that attempting to study the specific institutions in the distribution in less democratic settings is futile. Second, the federal government shares the burden of the costs of road construction of constituent units, which are the main body for planning, designing, and constructing roads, through a separate scheme of the reauthorization act in developed countries. This sets a helpful environment for a researcher to explore the effects of the respective institutions above in the process of allocating federal transfer to constituent units. Africa's context, including Ethiopia, is different due to the trend that the federal government is, by far, the development agent, and hence is responsible for planning,

designing, and building roads, and no package of road fund transfers from the center to constituent units. Third, as Golden and Min (2013: 77) argued, improving the welfare of ordinary citizens in economically less developed societies has both normative and developmental importance. Road as one of the means of maximizing the welfare of citizens, the pork-development debate in the wealthiest democratic countries cannot hold water in the study of distributive politics in developing countries.

Most literature, despite scanty, in Africa thus saw employing socio-cultural analytical tools instead of formal institutional variables to explain the allocation of non-excludable public goods such as roads. In this case, two differently synthesized works of literature have emerged. One is the need to identify the impact of ethnic diversity on the provision of public goods and economic growth. Studies such as Alesina et al. (1999), Miguel and Gugerty (2005), Alesina and La Ferrara (2005), Baldwin and Huber (2010), Jackson (2010), and Ghosh and Mitra (2016) have all concluded that the effect of ethnic diversity is detrimental on the provision of public goods. The logic behind these studies is that the government in a diverse society faces a problem of collective choices due to various preferences for non-excludable goods. Hence, the cost of cooperation among preference of ethnic groups discourages the availability of non-excludable goods and tends to resort to excludable, short-lived, and rival goods.

The other is the focus, particularly on the influence of ethnicity in the distribution of the

same non-excludable public goods, such as road infrastructures. This kind of study is measly where the challenge of ethnicity is abundantly flourishing in Africa. Two reasons are here to justify this case. The first is 'the absence of reliable and systematic data on the allocation of government goods and services in nondemocratic regimes' (Golden and Min, 2013: 75). The researchers would have little knowledge of the criteria used by unelected political leaders in the distribution of goods and services. The second justification, related to the first, is the concern about the less transparent allocation of road construction in developing countries (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006).

Notwithstanding the challenges above, scholarly efforts have paid to explore the effect of ethnicity on the provision of public goods in Africa. By selecting eleven countries in Africa, Mwangi (2003) has researched the extent to which the political dominance of an ethnic group influences public resource allocation. He (pp. 21) argued that road provision is significantly higher among groups that have high-level government representation than among other groups. Easterly and Levine (1997) also investigated power rotation among presidents of Kenya and associated their influence with government spending to access road services to their respective ethnic communities. As also supported by Barkan and Chege (1989), they argued that when a new president came into power in Kenya, there was a noticeable drop in road-building investment in the opposition ethnic groups'

regions, accompanied by a rise in road-building investment in the community of the incumbent president. Burgess et al. (2015) also studied the relationships between political regimes and ethnic favoritism in Kenya. According to this study, ethnic favoritism was a deliberate plan by the presidents to enhance road buildings in their community in the case of an autocratic regime but the prevalence of democracy in the regime diminished ethnic favoritism for equal benefits of the masses.

The socio-cultural base, therefore, brings a less analytical solution for the study of distribution in Ethiopia due to the challenge of having data on how long the road network each ethnic group received. Challenges from territorial administrative arrangement coupled with the spillover effect of roads that crossed the administrative boundary of ethnic groups exacerbate the unlikely chance of having credible evidence and mislead the conclusion.

Looking at the regime whose ideas, rhetoric, and commitments were the prime factor in building states, instead of the specific institutional factors or socio-cultural variables, guides the researcher to reach the large picture of distributive politics in developing countries of the above characters. The state-building strategy that the ruling party followed led to the cause of road buildings in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), whose tenure went over a quarter of a century, had its means of reconstructing the Ethiopian state, either reifying through deconstructing ways (ethnic arrangement)

or consolidating through material infrastructures such as roads. Accelerating the economy and prevailing equity were two grand objectives in the EPRDF's consolidation of the Ethiopian state-building trajectories. This study argues that these objectives shaped the Ethiopian road distribution and the road map pictured in 2018.

### **3. State-Building in a Federal Political System: Federalism, Public Policies and Road Development**

Timothy Mitchell looked at the state as an object of analysis that appears to exist simultaneously as an 'abstract domain of collective coherence and attachment' (see also Shapiro, 2003:272) and the material force (Mitchell, 2006:169). The state is reified through ideas, images, perspectives, and discourse and constructed through public services such as the military, infrastructure, monuments, maps, and other practices (Eriksen, 2002; Radcliffe, 2001). Accordingly, Von Bogdandy et al. (2005: 584) defined state-building as establishing, re-establishing, and strengthening public structure in a given territory capable of delivering public goods. Moreover, Brenner et al (2003) argued that state-building is a planned and regulated project, and Deutsch mentioned (cited in Okechukwu et al. 2014:3) that it is an architectural design built based on the authority, needs, and plan of the designer.

Particularly, Van de Walle and Scott (2009: 8) vehemently expressed that public services had contributed to state building. They further stated that 'physical networks (railways, roads) and networked services (post offices) gave to a

physical and mental integration of the state territory and carried and diffused the values of the state' into the society. Bachmann and Schouten (2018:386) mentioned that the value of roads in constructing each state of the world was gigantic and inimitable. In the same vein, Kaplan and Teufel (2016: 2) mentioned that road infrastructure strengthens common identity by enhancing social cohesion, improving stability, growth, and governance; and Weber (1976) stated roads enhanced the effectiveness of institutions across distances. Consistent with the conception of state-building as a planned and regulated process, Kaplan and Teufel (2016: 2) argued that the location of transport infrastructure not only determines which citizens, businesses, and regions benefit but also what trajectory the country as a whole takes. That was why Weiner raised the question of equity by regions, tribes, linguistic groups once' the state takes domestic road investment in a country (cited in Okechukwu et al, 2014:3).

The material forces and ideological narratives applied to build a federal state (especially an ethnic one) substantially differ from the practice in a unitary state (Sturm, 2016: 12). An ethnic-federal system would be arranged as a cultural and territorial solution, allowing two strikingly competing political interests to coexist and operate within the same state (Levy, 2004: 163). One of these interests is the need to preserve a unique cultural and political identity of segments of the federation through self-rule arrangement while the other is to prevail over the territory of

the whole under the shared rule framework. Hence, the federal constitution, as a pact document (Elazar 1984: 4), divides the state power into these two competing interests; the system exists so long as such constitutionally craved equilibrium is kept during the operation (Watts, 2008; Bratton & McCahery, 2006; Figueiredo & Weingast, 2005; Gagnon, 1993). The 'pact document' shall, as Norman (2006:85) suggested, thus be designed to check the ambition of the entities in their respective building projects.

Political entities are sovereign in their constitutional power so it is their right to build their citizens and territory by constitutional means. Consistent with state-building as an intentionally planned and regulated long-term gradual project, these entities 'will be keen to control the tools most effective' to build their respective member and territory (Norman 2006:97). In this case, public policy becomes the tool through which such political entities attain the built environment. (This study understands public policy as a narrowly defined concept that refers to the government's synthesized documents that prescribe intended goals and series of actions to solve problems and that do not bear legal coercive measures).

Though different spaces the subject matter of road infrastructure occupies in federations' constitutions, both levels of government have, in practice, participated in various degrees and aims (McDowell & Sheldon, 2002; Docwra, 1993). Literature related to fiscal federalism paid attention to explaining criteria for allocating

capital spending in a federation. Economic efficiency and ensuring equity are independent factors in empirical investigations (Hambleton, 2021). The efficiency criterion presupposes that the federal government invests in public services such as roads if the benefit it provides is greater than the cost it incurred (Bird, 1999:280). In an extreme case, as advanced by proponents of market-preserving federalism, Weingast (1995: 6-7) argued that since the central government is inefficient and poses a threat to a healthy function of a market, it must leave the matter to lower-level government, which living in a set of competition that would protect the market and enhance economic growth, and whose natural territorial position allows to sense the great value of cooperation for mutual benefit.

Nevertheless, as Braga (2002:3) mentioned, equalization is more explicit in federal states than in unitary. Given that resources have unevenly distributed in constituent units of a federation (Bird, 1999: 278), the federal government shall construct necessary infrastructure like roads in less advantageous regions to provide equal opportunity to the level where the fortune regions reach (Watts, 2008; Yamano & Toru, 2000). Though this criterion entails equal treatment, development, and solidarity among constituent units in building a federal state, as Dafflon (2012:138) argues, the challenge inherent in redistributive justice makes things complex. Not only hard to deal with reconciling the 'donors' and 'donees' regions in the efforts of closing the gaps, but the timely overhauling of perpetual

inequalities is the challenge that the federal center should strive to solve in each infrastructure development (Bird, 199: 278 & 282). Unless a balancing system exists, this problem exacerbates cleavages and hinders the possible cohesion in a multiethnic federal system (Chandra, 2017: 3; Watts, 2008: 109).

#### **4. State-Building in Ethiopia: Federalism, a dominant party system, Public Policy, and Roads Provisions in the FDRE Constitution**

Federalism and ethnicity are the two guiding political principles by which the current Ethiopian state came into arrangement. The main purpose to adopt federalism in Ethiopia is thus to accommodate the interests of ethnic groups. Though many ethnic groups exist (said to have been above 80), only nine ethnically arranged regional self-governments come to the order with the power of, among others, formulating and implementing public policy, levying regional tax, and forming police force (Art 47 and 52 of the FDRE constitution). Despite lacking the powers of statehood above, the ethnic group is paradoxically sovereign, bearing unconditional internal and external rights to self-determination up to secession (Art 39 and 47 of the FDRE constitution). Accordingly, Ethiopia's second chamber has uniquely arranged at the center as an institutional guardian of the political and economic interests of ethnic groups. The HF is a non-legislative body anomaly of trends in other federal states, which set two competing legislative bodies at the central level. Conforming to the above expression of the constitution, HP is given

powers, among others, to solve ethnic questions related to self-determination and to affect the distribution of federal subsidies to regional governments (Art. 62 of the FDRE constitution).

As a remedial solution to the above centrifugal provisions, the FDRE constitution institutionalized the federal government to have a unicameral lawmaking house, namely the House of Peoples' Representatives (HPR). The members of this House are elected directly by the people to make laws for all matters belonging to the federal government based on the principle of democracy, one person-one vote, in a multiethnic Ethiopia (Art. 55 & 59 of the FDRE constitution). The centripetal variant of the constitution is also in the assignment of lucrative taxing power to the federal government (Art. 97 of the FDRE Constitution), which is, in turn, the source of fiscal imbalance and the reason behind federal spending on activities of regional significance.

Within this constitutional backdrop that road as a constitutional competence exists to be provided by the federal and regional governments. Art. 51(9) of the constitution of FDRE stipulates that the federal government is responsible for 'the development, administration, and regulation of air, rail, waterways and sea transport and *major roads linking two or more States*, as well as for postal and telecommunication services' (Italic is the author's). In other words, the federal government shall construct, alter and maintain roads that connect two or more regions. In parallel, the regions would be responsible for building and maintaining roads outside those



designated by the federal government. Reserving such a kind of mandate to constituent units supports planning their future development paths based on their regional circumstances. Despite this benefit, this constitutional competence requires huge expenditure costs irreconcilable with available constitutional revenue sources of constituent units, thereby probably opening room for unfair competition among the latter to have the federal transfer.

The FDRE constitution allows each level of government to formulate public policies. Art. 51 (2) confers the federal government to form and implement policies, strategies, and plans in respect of overall economic, social, and development matters; Art. 52 (2) allows constituent units to formulate and execute economic, social, and development policies, strategies and plans of the regions. The problem with these provisions is the likelihood of duplication and conflict of policy decisions between levels of government. Such intergovernmental challenge exacerbates due to the absence of stipulation to delineate the range of each government in the formulation stage and the lack of provision to rule out the contradiction of policy decisions.

Two different views are there on the division of policymaking in Ethiopia's constitution. For those who defend regional self-rule, the absence of a provision to limit the involvement of the federal government in each policy domain comprises the right of the regions to formulate policies complying with their unique circumstances.

According to proponents of this argument, the federal government must stay framing the skeleton of each policy domain and leave substantial space for regions to describe details based on their peculiar conditions (Assefa, 2006). For those who support the overarching role of the federal government in Ethiopia, in addition to the taxing power and the arrangement of the unicameral federal legislative house, this provision supports the federal government to suppress excessive centrifugal forces. Adds that it helps to achieve constitutionally aimed goals, 'building a political community' and 'living as one economic community' (stated in the preamble of the FDRE constitution).

A hegemony party system was a reality (Assefa, 2018:360), albeit the constitution desires multiparty democracy in Ethiopia. EPRDF was a party that ruled the country since ousted the military regime in 1991. As a coalition of four regional parties supported by its allies in the other five regions, it controlled all lawmaking bodies, executives, and other administrative and judicial apparatuses. As discussed in the subsequent sections, this political scenario created favorable conditions for the-then incumbent party to design the Ethiopian state-building projects alone. Constitutional constraints on pursuing a hegemonic party in a multiethnic federal system influence less the ruling coalition, giving a chance to craft the building strategy without incorporating the opposition's political and economic ideologies.

## 5. The Nexus between Public Policies and Road Networks in Ethiopia

This topic highlights public policies adopted and implemented since EPRDF seized state power in 1991. It briefly describes the grand objectives of these policies; comprehends how the policy trajectories strictly followed by the federal government shape the pattern of provision of road services in Ethiopia. Besides showing the relation between such public policies and road sector reforms, it identifies the kilometers of road networks constructed in each policy phase of the federal government.

Ethiopian public policies have common characteristics. First, the party is responsible to initiate, ferment, and craft policy domain before bodies of the government change it into a formal policy framework. Second, although the FDRE constitution allowed for doing so, no region adopted and implemented public policy of its own. The regions rather implemented centrally made policies since the adoption of the federal arrangement, albeit socioeconomic backgrounds of the regions are strikingly vary. Third, institutional reforms in road sectors of the federal and regional governments have always followed the order of each policy. As indicated above, each policy formulated at the federal center in post-1991 has ignited institutional reforms in ERA and RRAs.

## 6. PADETES and Road Sector Development Program (RSDP I) (1997-2001)

In EPRDF's early period, the significance of roads seized a place in terms of installing security and

administrative apparatus in Ethiopian territory (Ibrahim, 2011; ERA, 2010). The economic value came later in the Participatory Demonstration and Training Extension System (PADETES). This policy, formulated in 1997, stated that the road is a means to increase farmers' income through disseminating agricultural extension programs to the rural community, delivering the package of fertilizer and improved seed (Ahmed et al, 2019:195; Diax, 2010). The same year introduced episodic road sector reforms and launched the first five-year plan called Road Sector Development Program I (RSDP I). The federal government reorganized ERA through Proclamation No. 80/1997. It also required RRA of regions to restructure their organization in line with the program formulated in ERA (Emmenegger, 2012: 15). Under RSPD I, 8709 kilometers of roads were constructed greater than roads built in the past ten years of EPRDF rule (1991-2001) (ERA, 2016:2).

## SDPRP and RSDP II (2002-2005)

Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), adopted in 2002, was a broader public policy than its predecessor, aiming to increase economic growth by augmenting agriculture productions and expanding public infrastructures such as education, health, water, power (electric), telecom and road transport (Wondemu & Weiss, 2012; 420; Wubishet, 2004: 174; MoFED, 2002). This public policy has required ERA to inaugurate the second stage reform called RSPD II and obliged regional RRA to take a new program of connecting

one *woreda* (the lowest budgetary unit in the hierarchy of governments in the regions) to the other. SDPRP came to be a cause for 11589 kilometers of new road networks in RSDP II (ERA 2003; 2008:26).

### **PASDEP and RSDP III (2006-2010)**

The Plan for Accelerated Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) came into effect in 2006 and incorporated new packages such as industry and urban development to accelerate economic growth (MoFED, 2006). It continued exerting influence on the road sector and caused the inauguration of the third phase, RSDP III, and succeeded in 12395 kilometers of new roads (Ahmed et al, 2019:195; ERA 2010:17; ERA, 2016:2).

### **GTP I and RSDP IV (2011-2015)**

Growth and Transformation Plan I (GTP I), adopted in 2010, was unprecedentedly ambitious to achieve tremendous economic growth by enlarging the share of manufacturing firms in the economy while keeping productivity in agriculture. It defined roads as a vehicle to reach the goals and thereby caused the adoption of the fourth stage of RSDP and the reformation of RRA at the regional level. The new package of the federal government called Universal Rural Road Access Program (URRAP) changed the trend and pattern of road provisions in Ethiopia. It compelled regions to de-concentrate road authority to the *woreda-level* government to connect their *kebeles*. It was instrumental in tremendous success in reducing the average travel

time of rural communities to reach all-weather roads. Besides the above, this program aimed at reducing unemployment in Ethiopia. At the end of GTP I and RSDP IV I, 23447 km of truck roads and 62,413 km of rural all-weather roads (more than ever in any policy period) had been obtained (ERA, 2016:2).

## **7. The Physical Pattern of Road Networks in Ethiopia**

The policy endeavors of the federal government have so far influenced the provision of road services in Ethiopia. Though much remains to attain the vision of joining middle-income countries, aimed by GTP I, the achievement is magnificent. The question here is the distribution of it in terms of the regional territory. As Mushir and Hailemariam (2015:851) stated, the connection of the road network of Ethiopia has concentrated in the northern part of Ethiopia. According to this study, until 2009, the Tigray region achieved the highest road network that connected most *kebeles* (92 %), followed by Afar (73%). Regions that connected their respective *kebeles* by all-weather roads next to the above two were SNNP, Amhara, and Dire Dawa, respectively.

The realization of a vast portion of road connections in Tigray was, argue Mushir et al, determined by the combination of recent efforts and past legacies. The war between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the endeavor of the regional ruling party, TPLF, are the reasons for the nearer time, and the Italian invasion and the strategic position of Tigray for silk trade in antiquity are the historic

legacies through which the Tigray region incidentally blessed with (Mushir & Hailemariam 2015: 851). Furthermore, this study identified factors such as topography, economy, and political constraints as the cause of unequal road distribution till 2009 in Ethiopia.

ERA's 2010 report, which rated regions according to all-weather roads, matched the report of the above study with slight variation. The Oromia region, which was in the group with less road connection in Mushir and Hiale mariams' study, was grouped with those that achieved better off next to the Tigray and Afar in the report of ERA. The status of the Amhara region is the same as in ERA's 2010 report released after the completion of RSPD III.

Table 1: Kebele accessibility of all-weather roads

No	Region	No. of Woredas	No. of Kebeles	No. Kebeles connected by all-weather Roads	
				No	%
1	Tigray	35	666	363	55
2	Afar	29	371	156	42
3	Amhara	124	3234	1074	38
4	Oromo	295	6814	2575	38
5	Somali	50	401	90	23
6	Benishangul	23	400	90	23
7	SNNP	134	3806	1473	39
8	Gambella	11	198	64	32
9	Dire Dawa	1	47	18	38

Source: ERA's report on October 2010

According to ERA's 2016 report released after the conclusion of RSPD IV, the achievement of connecting *kebeles* by all-weather roads of the Amhara was much lesser than regions of its level, even lagging behind one labeled as an emerging region. As can be observed from the table below, the connection rate of the Amhara region was 65%. The Benishangul Gumuz, which connected less in the past policy period, was 67% in ERA's report

Table 2: Level of Kebele Connectivity by All Weather Roads

No	Regional States	No. of Rural woredas	No. of Rural kebeles	Kebeles connected by all-Weather Roads	
				No.	%
1	SNNPR	134	3,808	2,536	67
2	Amhara	129	3,217	2,089	65
3	Oromia	295	6,478	6,058	94
4	Tigray	35	714	567	79
5	B/Gumuz	20	377	252	67
6	Dire Dawa	1	38	38	100
7	Harari	3	-	25	
8	Gambella	11	198	87	44
9	Somali	50	401	122	30
10	Afar	29	371	193	52
Total		707	15,602	11,967	77

Source: ERA's report on October, 2016

The World Bank (2017) released a report that showed the Amhara region is one of the regional territories that possessed lesser road infrastructure vis-à-vis the others (Kanth & Geiger (201). According to this report, which was the product of ten years study (2006-2016), Tigray and Oromo

regions, including Addis Ababa, have relatively been connected more with road networks than the Amhara region and others the report calls remote and economically lagging regions. The World Bank report attempted to figure out networks of all-weather roads in Ethiopia to imply that more road connectivity achieved better cause development.

Road infrastructure is one of the conditions to attract industrial investment in a particular area (Admasu et al, 2012:4); World Bank, 2017). According to the statements in the 2017 report of the World Bank, a country/region that has built roads possibly pulls in investments, domestic or foreign. Admasu also appreciated the effect of road infrastructural development on the spatial location of manufacturing sectors. According to this study, 'manufacturing firms are experiencing the most direct and maximum effects of improvement' in transport infrastructure (Admasu et al, 2012:4). Mohammed and Tigezaw (2019:51) revealed that manufacturing firms in the Amhara region are fewer than industries built in Addis Ababa, SNNPR, Oromia, and Tigray regions which are experiencing a better-off road connection. According to this study, of the total number of 2043 investments in manufacturing sectors operating between 1992 and 2017, the above four regions (Addis Ababa hosts 615 firms, SNNPR 557, Oromia 337, and Tigray 303) alone accounted for 90%. The rest regions, including Amhara (with 119 firms), shared a small contribution, roughly 10%, of manufacturing industries in Ethiopia.

## 8. Selecting Road Projects in Ethiopia

Legally speaking, ERA is a federal organ given the mandate to select highways (Proclamation No. 80/1997), albeit this proclamation does not provide criteria to select highway projects. ERA adopts factors such as the potential for economic development, cash crop growing areas, new access to population centers, and isolated areas to choose new projects. But, the project may not be selected even though it is enabled to pass the above threshold unless the benefit of the project, calculated by taking into account the vehicle operating cost and travel time savings, is more than the construction and maintenance cost of the road (ERA, 2016: 9).

As discussed above, the policy documents of the federal government aimed to accelerate the economy and defined roads in line with this. It is, however, the criteria designed in ERA that frankly show the goals behind the distribution of road infrastructure in Ethiopia. ERA focused more on economic efficiency than closing road infrastructural disparity among regions. Though the criteria for efficiency and equity seem to seize equal weight, comparing the cost and benefits of the particular road project enable the efficiency criteria to dominate in the designating process. As an appointed official in ERA informs, regions' RRA are required to submit their demand to ERA. Then ERA selected among competing interests and prioritized projects according to the chronological order of the starting timeline. According to Admasu et al (2012:9), once ERA has approved the five-year plan, the number and

type of road projects remain intact except for minor adjustments to accommodate unanticipated road projects.

The other source in ERA informed that it is the party's Executive Committee (EC) that passes the final decisions on all road projects in Ethiopia. According to this source, to reconcile the purpose of public policies to practical realities, the ruling party explores the potential of road projects and decides where they are going. He added that the EC of the party sends the selected projects to the Council of Ministers (CM) to wrap it up as a formal decision of an authoritative federal organ and for budget consideration. Then the latter sends the lists to the ERA for execution. If this is the case, ERA is the constructor instead of the selector of road projects in Ethiopia. The respondents in the Amhara RRA also mentioned that they do not have information on how ERA selects among projects submitted by regional RRA.

Lastly, this study reached the fact by offering the same question to the third source in ERA. According to this source, after finishing the feasibility study of each project, there is a trend in ERA sending designated projects to the EC of EPRDF for approval. EC then sends it back to ERA, mostly with minor adjustments of prioritizing projects to conform to prospects in economic growth. ERA has to execute the approved road projects. This study learned that the EC is more ambitious to see the potential of economic growth in every project than ERA whose guiding criteria seem to make it unparallel with the pushy EPRDF.

## 9. Formal Federal Organs

In this section, there is exploration of the institutional and practical capability of concerned federal organs toward achieving a fair distribution of road development in Ethiopia. Moreover, their constitutional and legal position makes them aspirant to institutional led state-building trajectories. Because they are the focal point to dovetail regional interests into negotiating circles at the federal level, and have an explicit legal mandate to ensure fair distribution of infrastructure development across the federation.

### a. The Role of HF

As highlighted somewhere above, HF is a federal organ bestowed power mainly to solve ethnic related issues and interpreting the constitution. Regarding infrastructural development, HF has statutory responsibility to 'ensure that the essential federal infrastructures for investment in the economic sector are fairly distributed' (Article 37 (5, c) of the Proclamation No. 251 of 2001). The HF has also a constitutionally mandated organ to create a formula to deliver federal subsidies to regional governments (Article 62 of the FDRE constitution). What was the practice to effectuate these constitutional and statutory mandates?

As a source in HF revealed, no committee or subcommittee was formed in HF to deal with the fair distribution of infrastructure in federal Ethiopia. What was taken place in the general meetings of members of the HF related to this subject matter? According to this source, no ever researched lists of road infrastructural gaps of regions were brought to the floor for discussion in

the general meetings unless the common understanding of representatives for gaps in less developed states. No experience in making a more detailed discussion on a particular issue because of the limited days for the meeting since members of HF are not full-time legislators who may not meet more than two times a year. So, looking into a forum that may allow lengthy discussions about infrastructural development and gaps is vital. In this regard, the standing committee of revenue allocation might allow lengthy discussion and may have adequate data on infrastructural development in the process of adopting the formula for a federal subsidy to the regions.

The level of development is one of the three indicative variables to disburse funds to regions, as a source in HF revealed. Road is not the only one, demands for infrastructures such as education, electrification, health, and water are also the package to determine the level of development of the particular region. He added that no formal question reached the committee to reconsider road development gaps in the Amhara region in revising the budget formula. The other source in HF confirmed that the Amhara region has never officially submitted a formal application to HF to cause equitable development, especially the fair distribution of road infrastructure.

#### b. **The Role of MoFA**

The difference exists among constituent units to execute their constitutional responsibilities in the Ethiopian federal system. Accordingly, the constitution recognizes differences and stipulates an obligation statement upon the center to provide

‘special assistance to Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples least advantaged in economic and social development’ (Article 89 (4) of FDRE constitution). Though the federal government has sporadically exerted certain attempts, the best measure toward this is the adoption of Regulation No. 124/2011 by the CM and the effort to ensure its implementation on the ground.

This regulation was one of the strategies the federal government designed to support policy directions embedded in GTP adopted a few months before this regulation came into being. As informed above, GTP I and its predecessors (SDPDP & PASDEP) identified six sectors on which the government exerted more effort than others to ensure accelerated growth. These sectors were water, telecommunication, energy/electricity, education, health, and road. Therefore, Regulation No. 124 of 2011 exists mainly to reduce the lagging conditions of emerging regions in these developmental sectors and to ensure equitable growth across the federation. This regulation established a board at the federal level comprising federal ministries to render affirmative support to lagging regions. Health, education, water, energy, agriculture, road, and the Ministry of federal affairs were members of the board.

The role of MoFA is emerging here. Since one of the establishing objectives of MoFA is to ensure equitable growth and development among regions, this regulation took MoFA as a focal organ (or secretariat of the Board) to organize the efforts of the above ministries toward achieving goals. The

Board adopted Directive No.1/2011, which specified expected assistance from each Ministry. The directive also stretched its reach to developed regions to assist emerging ones. Since the road is one of the sectors in the policy papers and the regulation above, the Amhara region should support its emerging neighbors to enhance their mobility.

As confirmed by a source in MoFA, the Ministry went far to accomplish success and achieved many goals in the working plan of the Board. ERA's 2016 report showed that one of the emerging regions of Ethiopia, the Benishangul-Gumuz, succeeded much in connecting its *kebeles* by all-weather roads. The Benishangul-Gumuz region accomplished only 23 % in RSDP III, but it achieved 67% in the IV phase. The same report unveiled that the Amhara region (called a developed region by Directive No. 1 of 2011 of the Board and was demanded by the same to assist the Benishangul- Gumuz) achieved about 64% lower than the achievement accomplished by the Benishangul-Gumuz.

## **10. Informal IGR mechanisms and the party channel**

### **a. Informal IGR mechanisms between ERA and RRA of the Amahara region**

Rare intergovernmental relations to foster negotiation and cooperation between ERA and RRAs of regions exist. According to sources in ERA, there may be an *ad hoc* meeting between ERA and a regional government where the road project situates. This kind is not uniform for all road projects. It comes when federal political

officials (individuals from the party apparatus) show interest. As the sources have described, in most cases, this bilateral meeting often takes place in the time close to the general election of the country. Since several residents would gather to celebrate the inauguration of the new road project, which is of indeed multifaceted purposes for the local community, governmental officials take the crowd as one of the opportunities to boldly show what will follow next if the party in power is kept intact. When the supermajority convened, regional officials, including the president, managing director of the regional RRA, administrators of the zone, the *Woreda*, and the *Kebele* where the road project situates, were members of the gathering. From the federal level, the managing director of ERA and some higher political officials have shared the ceremony of commencing the road project.

Such a bilateral meeting gradually becomes important for road officials for additional solutions. It comes to facilitating compensation for those individuals displaced from their areas or incurred damage. As the sources have informed, the inability to settle the compensation process in time caused delayed road projects and exposed them to incur additional costs. It is thus to use the cult of the regional president to influence local officials urgently solve the problem. As understood from the analysis above, regions did not have the opportunity to participate in the selection process, but are the instrument to solve some problems related to executing centrally chosen road projects.



## **b. Party's Role**

An advantage of controlling the political space of the federation under a single-party rule is preventing competing public policies at the regional level and handling a comfortable position to craft policies based on the ideologies of the incumbent party. Accordingly, the policies of Ethiopia have been nourished by the economic and political ideologies of the government party, EPRDF. The party kept them growing fast in such a way that incorporating new focuses in the package of strategies and overhauling gaps created in the design and implementation stages throughout its past. Party forum wherein some incumbents of regional government are the members initiated and discussed public policies. As informed above, the EC held the approval position to decide the destination of road projects. Sources in ERA appreciated the political involvement due to its position to prioritize road projects to comply with objectives of public policies crafted principally by the party. .

Variation exists between the EC of EPRDF and the CM of the federal government in power and representation. The EC is the equal number of representatives from each four regional member parties of EPRDF, namely OPDO, ANDM, TPLF, and SNNMP. This party constellation of EPRDF decides not only on roads but also on all other mega developmental projects in Ethiopia. On the other hand, the CM is the formal executive government body that practically attempts to encompass officials from different ethnic groups which could not secure membership in the EC. Its

nature to include representatives from diverse groups makes it aspirant to hold an appropriate position to bargain federal decisions. But, its role is limited to rubber-stamping the needs of the EC.

The interest stipulated in Art. 89(4) of the constitution, which lays burdens on the federal government to provide support to least advantaged regions, has been attempted most to be fulfilled, albeit many things remain. The ruling party initiated and framed important decisions to accomplish this, though it formally did not take-in representatives from supported regions. The paradox emerges at this point. The status of the Amhara region, governed by the ruling party, on all-weather roads was lesser than all regions governed by the same EPRDF and even lesser than a region outside of the formal membership of the ruling party and labeled as emerging. One may wonder where the bargaining power of ANDM was in the negotiating room of the coalition. Of course, sympathetic relations between 'least developed' and relatively 'developed regions' should be the hallmark in practicing federal bargaining in the Ethiopian federation to create the condition for the former to the level where their counterparts of relatively developed regions reached.

According to a source in RRA of the Amhara region, there would have been readjustment in the party decision-making forum, or there should be other remedial solutions to keep growth in the developed territory if the sympathizer lagged behind the region for which the sympathy intended. There shall be no policy actions to

thwart, accidentally or deliberately, the development of the relatively developed one until the emerging are labeled equal.

Thus, the party's desire to equalize emerging regions with relatively developed ones resulted in again inequality in the distribution of road development in Ethiopia. The Amhara region has lesser all-weather road connectivity than the Benishangul-Gumuz labeled as an emerging region. The Party's role can, of course, be praised for eliminating contradicted decisions in the process of building the Ethiopian state and for the smooth flow of relations between the federal and regional governments, and among the latter in its tenure of incumbency. However, if the solutions do not facilitate equitable growth, it consequently creates disgruntlement in member regions of the federation.

## 11. Conclusion

The federal government, particularly the party at the center, has formulated public policies that resulted in the success achieved in economic growth in Ethiopia. These policy endeavors were an inducing factor for the resplendent road infrastructural development, especially connecting the rural communities severed from poverty. However, the distribution was inequitable among member regions of the Ethiopian federation. The Amhara region has had fewer than all other developed regions to connect its *kebeles* by all-weather roads, even smaller than one of the emerging territories.

This research argues that the state-building endeavors of the ruling party explained the variation of road distribution among member regions of the Ethiopian federation. The grand aim embodied in each policy domain of the federal government that was accelerating economic growth was much responsible. The dominant effect of the efficiency principle that is boldly shown in the formal criteria of ERA to designate road projects was the result of efforts to align with the aim of each public policy of the federal government. The efficiency criterion that has directly encouraged accelerating economic growth lastly created disproportional development of road infrastructure among member regions of the federation. Moreover, a separately designed rule that aimed to close the disparity among regional governments in a time of accelerating economic growth also did not achieve its establishing goal.

Formal government institutions empowered through legal instruments to ensure equitable means of development did not discharge functions toward it. HF, which has explicit constitutional and statutory mandates to ensure equity in the distribution of road infrastructure, did not yield the expected outcomes. Though MoFA is statutorily brought into ministerial position mainly to closing inequalities, its endeavor accidentally supported the creation of unintended inequality in one developmental means, road, among members of the Ethiopian federation. Moreover, IGR mechanisms trusted to foster negotiated solutions in federal systems have not yet created similar effects in Ethiopia.

This study indicates the political imperative that strategically designate policy inputs intended to

build a multiethnic federal system justifies road distribution. Ethiopia's experience shows that centrally maneuvered strategies of the ruling party determine not only the magnitude of economic growth but also the pace and location of road infrastructure in the developing federal system where the one-party system is the rule of the day. So, the study of the distribution of means of development in general and road infrastructure, in particular, should not be dealt with separately from the state-building endeavors at the macro level. It specifically requires looking into the interface of public policies adopted at the center, federal principles, and the role of the dominant party.

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