

## THE ROLE OF GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE VALUES IN SHAPING RURAL LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES: THE CASE OF POST-1991 SCENARIO IN ETHIOPIA

MISGANU GABAYO

misganu2050@gmail.com

PhD Research Scholar, Department of Public Administration and Development Management  
College of Business and Economics, Wallaga University, Nekemte, Ethiopia

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### Abstract

Ethiopia has demonstrated a significant shift in the country's approach to rural development since the fall of the Derg regime in 1991. The new government has made concerted efforts to decentralize power and decision-making, giving local authorities and communities more autonomy. This, in theory, should allow for more responsive and tailored policies that better address the unique needs and challenges rural populations face. However, the reality on the ground has been somewhat more complicated. While there have been some notable successes, such as expanding essential services and infrastructure in many rural areas, implementing these policies has often been hampered by a lack of capacity, resources, and coordination at the local level. The administrative values and priorities of the central government have continued to exert a strong influence on the direction of rural development. There has been a persistent emphasis on large-scale, top-down initiatives, such as promoting commercial agriculture and resettling communities, which have not always aligned with rural residents' livelihood strategies and preferences. This tension between the aspirations of the state and the realities of rural life has led to a complex and sometimes contentious relationship between governance structures and the communities they are meant to serve. Moreover, of course, anyone cannot ignore the broader socioeconomic and environmental factors that have also shaped rural livelihoods in this period, such as the impacts of climate change, market fluctuations, and demographic shifts. These external forces have further complicated the picture, requiring rural communities to be increasingly resilient and adaptable in the face of uncertainty. The role of governance and administrative values in shaping rural livelihood strategies in post-1991 Ethiopia has been complex and multifaceted, with both successes and challenges. It is an issue that requires a nuanced understanding of the interplay between policy, implementation, and the lived realities of rural communities. This paper aims to study the role of governance and administrative values in shaping rural livelihood strategies in post-1991 scenario in Ethiopia

**Keywords:** Governance, Administrative Values, Rural Livelihood, Strategies, Rural Communities

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### 1. Introduction

The collapse of the Derg regime in Ethiopia in 1991 marked a pivotal moment in the country's history, ushering in a new era of political and economic reforms (Teshome, 2006). Central to these changes was the implementation of decentralization policies, which aimed to devolve greater decision-making power and resource allocation to regional and local authorities (Yilmaz & Venugopal, 2013). This shift in governance structure was driven by the recognition that effective and accountable public institutions are essential for addressing rural communities' unique challenges and needs. Sustainability, transparency, and efficiency were critical administrative values that could guide the development and

implementation of policies and programs targeting rural livelihoods (Berman, 2017 & Rosenau, 1992). However, translating these governance ideals into tangible, long-lasting outcomes has been complex and nuanced.

Scholars have examined the interplay between the decentralization reforms and their impact on Ethiopia's access to resources, public services, and overall rural development, highlighting successes and persistent challenges (Teshome, 2006; Yilmaz & Venugopal, 2013). At the heart of this discussion lies the critical question of how the administrative values espoused by the post-1991 Ethiopian government have shaped the livelihood strategies and development trajectories of rural populations. By delving into the specific manifestations of

principles like participation and sustainability, accountability and transparency, efficiency, equity and fairness, priority, etc., this study aims to uncover the extent to which governance structures have empowered or constrained the ability of rural communities to adapt and thrive in the face of evolving socioeconomic and environmental conditions.

This paper aims to delve deeper into the status of these governance and administrative values in the post-1991 Ethiopian context, exploring their influence on rural populations' livelihood strategies. By analyzing the scholarly literature and drawing upon relevant case studies, this work will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of effective and accountable governance in fostering inclusive and sustainable rural development.

## 2. Governance and Administrative Values

Governance is the system by which a society or organization is controlled and directed. It encompasses the mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences (Rosenau, 1992). He articulated, "Governance is a system of rule that is as dependent on inter-subjective meanings as on formally sanctioned constitutions and charters. It is about creating, communicating, and enforcing social norms and institutions. It is about the processes and structures that shape the flow of and the use of authority." The authors emphasize that when administrative values like accountability, transparency, efficiency, and equity are upheld, it can lead to more responsive and effective rural development initiatives. Conversely, a lack of adherence to these principles can result in policies that fail to address the pressing concerns of rural populations.

On the other hand, "Administrative values" in the context of rural livelihoods and development talk about the fundamental principles and priorities that shape the policies, programs, and resource allocation decisions that directly impact the lives of rural communities. In addition, Jill Findeis and Leif Jensen (2020) articulated that "Governance and administrative values are the principles and practices that guide the decision-making and management of public institutions and policies. These values are critical in shaping the policies and programs that affect rural communities, particularly in areas such as agriculture, land use, and social services." Therefore, the administrative values underpinning good governance are the bedrock upon which a well-functioning society is built. At the core, we have principles like accountability, transparency, efficiency, and equity. These values ensure that those in positions of power are held responsible for their actions, that decision-making processes are open and accessible to the public, that resources are utilised prudently and effectively, and that the needs of all citizens are somewhat addressed. The administrative values of a government or public institution can profoundly influence the strategies and opportunities available to rural populations (Scoones & Thompson, 2018). Values like participation, for instance, can determine the extent to which rural citizens can voice their needs, participate in decision-making, and shape the initiatives meant to serve them.

### 2.1. Rural livelihood strategies

Livelihood strategies are how individuals, households, and communities create and sustain their livelihoods or earn a living and access the resources they need to survive and thrive (Scoones & Thompson, 2018). It may vary widely depending on location, culture, and economic conditions and may include various activities such as farming, herding, fishing, trading, and wage labour. On the other hand, rural livelihood strategies refer to how

rural communities adapt to their environment and pursue their goals and aspirations.

In rural development, livelihood strategies are often focused on improving the well-being of rural communities and enhancing their ability to meet their basic needs. In Ethiopia, rural communities have developed a range of strategies to cope with the challenges of poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. These strategies include agriculture, livestock production, and non-farm employment.

However, these livelihood strategies are heavily influenced by the broader governance and administrative frameworks that shape the policies, programs, and resource allocation decisions affecting rural areas. For example, the government's land use policies have significantly impacted the livelihoods of rural communities, with many communities facing challenges in accessing land and natural resources. Similarly, the government's agricultural policies have had a mixed impact, with some programs, such as the ADLI strategy, promoting the use of expensive and unsustainable agricultural technologies.

## **2.2. Features of Ethiopian rural livelihoods**

One of the defining features of rural livelihoods in Ethiopia is the predominance of smallholder agriculture as the primary source of income and food security. Majority of rural households engage in subsistence-oriented farming, cultivating a mix of staple crops, such as teff, wheat, and maize, as well as various cash crops, including coffee, chat, and vegetables. The reliance on rain-fed agriculture, however, makes these households highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate variability and environmental degradation.

Alongside agricultural activities, rural Ethiopians often diversify their income sources through the rearing of livestock, which serves as a critical asset for both food production and wealth accumulation (Headey et al., 2014). The integration of crop-

livestock systems is a common feature of rural livelihoods, with households leveraging the complementarities between these two components to enhance their overall resilience.

Furthermore, as noted by Belay and Manig (2004), many rural households in Ethiopia engage in a range of non-farm enterprises, such as small-scale trading, handicraft production, and rural wage labor. These off-farm activities not only provide supplementary income but also serve as a crucial coping mechanism during periods of agricultural shocks or food insecurity.

The role of social capital and community-based institutions in supporting rural livelihoods is another salient characteristic. As discussed by Woolcock and Narayan (2000), rural Ethiopians often rely on strong social networks, kinship ties, and traditional community organizations (e.g., idir, equb) to pool resources, share information, and access various forms of social and financial support. These community-based mechanisms play a vital role in enhancing the adaptive capacity of rural households.

However, as highlighted by Deininger and Squire (1998), issues of land tenure, resource rights, and social inequalities continue to pose significant challenges for rural households in Ethiopia. The unequal distribution of productive assets, such as land and water, can limit the ability of certain groups, particularly women and marginalized communities, to engage in sustainable and remunerative livelihood activities.

In recent years, the Government of Ethiopia has implemented various rural development policies and programs aimed at diversifying rural livelihoods, improving agricultural productivity, and enhancing access to basic services and infrastructure. As discussed by Scoones et al. (2012), the impacts of these interventions have been mixed, underscoring the need for more holistic, context-specific, and inclusive approaches to supporting the complex and multifaceted nature

of rural livelihoods in the country.

### **3. Governance and rural development Framework**

After the fall of the Derg regime in 1991, Ethiopia embarked on a series of political and economic reforms aimed at transitioning to a market-oriented economy and a more decentralized system of governance. This period marked a significant shift in the country's approach to rural development, with the introduction of various policies and strategies that sought to address the longstanding challenges faced by the rural population.

One of the cornerstone policies during this era was the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), introduced in 2002. As outlined in a study by Gebre-Egziabher and Berhanu (2007), the SDPRP emphasized the importance of strengthening local governance and community-based development initiatives to enhance the participation and ownership of rural communities in the development process. The program also prioritized investments in rural infrastructure, agricultural productivity, and natural resource management. Building on the SDPRP, the government of Ethiopia subsequently launched the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) in 2005. As noted by Gebre-Egziabher (2010), PASDEP placed a greater emphasis on the role of the private sector in rural development, while also recognizing the need for targeted interventions to address the specific needs of marginalized groups, such as women and youth.

More recently, the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), introduced in 2010, has been a key driver of Ethiopia's rural development agenda. As highlighted by Berhanu and Poulton (2014), the GTP has focused on enhancing agricultural productivity, strengthening value chains, and promoting the commercialization of smallholder farming. The plan has also sought to improve rural infrastructure, expand access to basic services, and

foster the diversification of rural livelihoods.

Alongside these national-level policies, Ethiopia has also implemented a decentralization process that has aimed to empower local governments and communities in the planning and implementation of development initiatives. As discussed by Gebre-Egziabher and Berhanu (2007), this decentralization has been accompanied by efforts to strengthen the capacity of local institutions and to promote participatory decision-making processes.

However, as noted by several scholars, the implementation and impact of these rural development policies have been uneven, with persistent challenges related to resource constraints, institutional capacity, and the need for more inclusive and responsive governance frameworks (Berhanu, 2012; Gebre-Egziabher, 2010; Berhanu & Poulton, 2014).

Overall, the post-1991 period in Ethiopia has witnessed a significant evolution in the country's approach to rural development, marked by a shift towards more decentralized, participatory, and market-oriented policies. While these reforms have yielded some positive outcomes, there remains a need for continued efforts to address the complex and multifaceted challenges facing rural communities in the country.

### **3. Role of Governance and Administrative values in shaping rural development policies**

The role of governance and administrative values in shaping rural development policies - a subject that has been extensively explored by researchers and policymakers alike. One foundational work in this area is the 2003 study by Crook and Sverrisson, which examined the impact of decentralization on rural poverty reduction across several developing countries. The authors found that the success of decentralized governance in improving rural livelihoods was heavily dependent on the extent to which local authorities were empowered, resourced,

and held accountable to the communities they served (Crook & Sverrisson, 2003).

Building on this, Ribot, Agrawal, and Larson (2006) have argued that the mere devolution of power to local institutions is not enough. There must also be a concerted effort to strengthen these institutions' administrative capacities and democratic legitimacy. Their research highlights the importance of aligning governance structures with the needs and aspirations of rural communities (Ribot et al., 2006).

In light of these insights, it becomes clear that the relationship between governance, administrative values, and rural livelihoods is nuanced and multifaceted. Successful rural development requires a delicate balance between centralized coordination and local autonomy, efficiency and equity, and between the aspirations of the state and the realities of rural life. The interplay between governance, administrative values, and their real-world impact on rural communities is a topic that deserves careful consideration. For instance, when administrative values like accountability, transparency, and equity are upheld, it can lead to the development of livelihood strategies that are more resilient, sustainable, and responsive to the unique needs of rural populations. Conversely, a lack of adherence to these principles can result in policies and programs that fail to address the pressing concerns of rural communities, ultimately undermining their ability to create and sustain their livelihoods.

#### **4. The role of Governance and Administrative values in shaping the rural livelihood strategies of post-1991 in Ethiopia**

In Ethiopia, the post-1991 government has undoubtedly made concerted efforts to promote a range of initiatives aimed at improving rural livelihoods, including the Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI)

strategy, the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), and the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP). However, the success of these efforts has been limited by a range of factors related to governance and administrative values.

As noted in the work of Teshome (2006) and Yilmaz and Venugopal (2013), the decentralization process undertaken by the Ethiopian government during this period sought to devolve greater decision-making power and resource allocation to regional and local authorities. The intent was to create a more responsive and accountable governance system to address rural populations' unique needs and challenges. While the government's efforts to devolve power have had some positive effects, the persistence of top-down, centralized decision-making and the uneven distribution of resources has limited the ability of rural communities to entirely shape their development trajectories (Teshome, 2006; Yilmaz & Venugopal, 2013). Furthermore, Gebresenbet (2014) have drawn attention to how the administrative values and priorities of the Ethiopian state have influenced the design and implementation of rural development policies. The author argues that the government's emphasis on large-scale, technology-driven initiatives has often failed to align with smallholder farmers' and pastoralists' livelihood strategies and needs (Gebresenbet, 2014).

The governance and administrative values that shape rural livelihood strategies in Ethiopia can be grouped into three main categories:

**Top-down approach:** The post-1991 government has adopted a top-down approach to development, which has resulted in the imposition of policies and programs on local communities without their input or consent (Yilmaz & Venugopal, 2013). This approach has led to a lack of ownership and participation by local communities, undermining the success of rural development initiatives. The

authors found that while Ethiopia's decentralisation reforms aimed to devolve more power to local authorities, the persistence of centralized decision-making and uneven resource distribution continued to limit the ability of rural communities to shape their development trajectories.

**Lack of transparency and accountability:** The government's lack of transparency and accountability has resulted in corruption and mismanagement of resources, which has harmed rural livelihood strategies (Berhanu & Poulton, 2014). For example, the PSNP has been criticized for its lack of transparency in the selection of beneficiaries, which has resulted in the exclusion of vulnerable groups and the inclusion of those who are not in need. In addition, the distribution of resources and support to rural communities has often been influenced by political considerations rather than a genuine commitment to addressing their needs (Berhanu & Poulton, 2014).

**Inadequate attention to local contexts and prioritization:** The government's policies and programs have not considered the local contexts and conditions, resulting in the failure to address rural communities' specific needs and priorities. For example, the ADLI strategy has promoted the use of expensive and unsustainable agricultural technologies, which are unsuitable for the local conditions and have displaced traditional farming practices (Gebresenbet, 2014). The author argues that the government's emphasis on large-scale, technology-driven initiatives has frequently failed to align with smallholder farmers' and pastoralists' livelihood strategies and priorities, leading to a disconnect between policy and practice.

These governance and administrative values have significantly impacted Ethiopia's development and implementation of rural livelihood strategies. The top-down approach has resulted in the imposition of policies and programs that are not aligned with the needs and priorities of local communities. The

lack of transparency and accountability has led to corruption and mismanagement of resources, undermining the success of rural development initiatives. Finally, inadequate attention to local contexts has failed to address the specific needs and priorities of rural communities, which has led to the displacement of traditional farming practices and the promotion of unsustainable agricultural technologies.

**Efficiency:** This value emphasizes the need to optimize the use of resources and minimize waste in the implementation of rural development initiatives. Efficient administration can help ensure that resources are used effectively and programs are implemented on time. The pursuit of efficiency can also lead to a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach that fails to adequately account for individual rural communities' unique contexts and needs. As Yilmaz and Venugopal (2013) have observed in their research, the persistence of centralized decision-making and uneven resource distribution in post-1991 Ethiopia has limited the ability of local authorities and rural residents to shape the development initiatives that affect their livelihoods.

This tension between efficiency and responsiveness is a common challenge in public administration, which the Ethiopian government has grappled with to improve rural well-being. The emphasis on large-scale, technology-driven initiatives, as highlighted by Gebresenbet (2014), is a prime example of how the pursuit of efficiency can sometimes come at the expense of aligning with the livelihood strategies and needs of smallholder farmers and pastoralists.

**Participation:** This value emphasizes involving local communities in designing and implementing rural development initiatives. Participation can help ensure that programs are tailored to local communities' specific needs and priorities and can help build ownership and commitment among local stakeholders. In the Ethiopian context, the

decentralization reforms implemented in Ethiopia following the collapse of the Derg regime in 1991 were, in part, aimed at enhancing citizen participation in the decision-making processes that affected their lives. The devolution of power and resources to regional and local authorities was intended to create a more responsive and inclusive system of governance. However, the reality on the ground has been rather nuanced. While there have been some notable successes regarding increased community engagement and the empowerment of marginalized groups, the overall picture has been somewhat mixed. Scholars like Teshome (2006) and Yilmaz and Venugopal (2013) have highlighted the persistent challenges in ensuring meaningful and equitable participation, particularly in rural areas. They have observed that decentralization has often been hampered by a lack of local capacity and the persistence of entrenched power structures and patronage networks. Ultimately, the status of "participation" as a governance and administrative value in post-1991 Ethiopia remains a complex and evolving landscape.

**Sustainability:** The decentralization reforms implemented in the aftermath of the Derg regime's collapse were, in part, aimed at fostering a more sustainable approach to resource management and public service delivery. However, the reality on the ground has been rather complex. Scholars like Teshome (2006) and Yilmaz and Venugopal (2013) have highlighted the persistent challenges in translating the rhetoric of sustainability into tangible, long-lasting outcomes, particularly in rural areas. One of the key issues has been the tension between the imperative for rapid economic development and the need to safeguard the country's fragile ecological systems. For instance, the push for increased agricultural productivity has sometimes come at the expense of sustainable land-use practices, leading to soil degradation and water scarcity in many rural communities. That said, some promising initiatives and pilot projects have

sought to integrate sustainability principles into Ethiopia's governance and administrative frameworks. These range from community-based natural resource management schemes to innovative renewable energy and waste management approaches.

The key lies in fostering a more holistic and integrated understanding of sustainability within the country's public institutions. This would involve aligning policies and programs with environmental, social, and economic sustainability goals and building the capacity of local authorities to implement and monitor these initiatives effectively.

These administrative values can shape rural livelihood strategies in several ways. For example, focusing on efficiency can help ensure that resources are used effectively and programs are implemented promptly. Focusing on transparency and accountability can help ensure that resources are used to benefit the intended beneficiaries and those responsible for implementing programs are held accountable for their actions. Focusing on participation can help ensure that programs are tailored to local communities' specific needs and priorities and can help build ownership and commitment among local stakeholders. Finally, a focus on sustainability can help to ensure that resources are used in a way that does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

These administrative values—accountability, transparency, efficiency, equity, sustainability, and participation—form the bedrock of good governance. They are the guiding principles that help ensure public institutions serve citizens' best interests.

In an ideal scenario, administrative values would require those responsible for designing and implementing rural development programs to be held accountable for their decisions and actions. This would help ensure that resources are used

judiciously, that programs are targeted towards the intended beneficiaries, and that the needs and priorities of rural communities are genuinely reflected in the policy-making process.

## Conclusion

The paper discusses the concept of governance and the core administrative values essential for effective and accountable public institutions. This delved into accountability, transparency, efficiency, sustainability, participation, equity, prioritization, etc., and how these guiding principles shape the decision-making and management of government policies and programs for rural livelihood strategies and sustainable development. Building upon this foundation, the paper then examined the critical role that good governance and sound administrative values play in influencing the livelihood strategies of rural communities in Ethiopia post-1991 GC. In addition, the impact of the governance and the administrative values was discussed, mainly focusing on how the interplay between decentralization reforms and their implications for access to resources, public services, and overall rural development has been a subject of scholarly inquiry, particularly in post-1991 Ethiopia.

It was concluded that the balance between economic development, social equity, and environmental protection has emerged as a critical factor in determining rural livelihood strategies' long-term resilience and sustainability. The administrative values prioritising these considerations directly affect the opportunities and constraints rural communities face.

The post-1991 scenario in Ethiopia has seen a range of policies and programs aimed at improving rural livelihoods. However, the success of these initiatives has been limited by inadequate governance and administrative values. To address these challenges, it is essential to promote governance and administrative values, including transparency, accountability, and participation.

These values can help ensure that policies and programs are designed and implemented in a way that considers the needs and priorities of local communities.

## Recommendations

*Promote transparency and accountability in governance:* The government should ensure that decision-making processes are transparent and accountable and that local communities are involved in designing and implementing policies and programs.

*Foster participation and inclusion:* The government should promote the participation of local communities in decision-making processes and ensure that policies and programs are inclusive and equitable.

*Strengthening local institutions:* The government should invest in strengthening local institutions, such as village councils and community-based organizations, to enable them to promote rural development more effectively.

*Supporting sustainable agriculture and natural resource management:* The government should promote sustainable agriculture and natural resource management practices, such as organic farming and agroforestry, to ensure that rural communities can access healthy and productive land and natural resources.

*Improving access to social services:* The government should invest in improving access to social services, such as healthcare, education, and water, to ensure that rural communities have the necessary support to pursue their livelihood strategies.

*Attention and prioritization of local context:* prioritizing specific administrative values over others is a critical component of the governance framework and its impact on rural livelihoods. It is, in essence, making a deliberate choice about which principles and ideals will take precedence in the decision-making process, allocation of resources,



the design and implementation of policies, and the system's overall responsiveness to the needs of rural communities. Promoting sustainable rural development is essential to promote governance and administrative values, including transparency, accountability, and participation. By doing so, the Ethiopian government can harness the benefits of efficiency while ensuring that its rural development efforts are tailored to the lived realities and aspirations of the people it aims to serve. It is a delicate balance, to be sure, but essential for achieving truly sustainable and equitable improvements in rural livelihoods.

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