



Power decentralization to manage good governance problems in Oromia National Regional State: the case of Wuchale Woreda

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Abstract

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Federalism is adopted by many countries in the world as a system of government in which power is exercised as self-rule and shared rule between tiers of government. Depending on the features of federalism, Ethiopia has also practiced the decentralization of power to local governments. The intended outcomes of power devolution to a lower level are to enable self-administration and decision-making on local affairs. Even though the purpose of power decentralization brought considerable changes in the overall social affairs, it still suffers from different challenges and limitations throughout its practical implementation. To study the aforementioned problems, a descriptive study approach was used, as the aim of the study was to collect and provide more information and get an adequate understanding of the implementation of power decentralization. Non-probability and probability sampling techniques were applied to collect data, and the total sample size for this study was 244, 114 government employees and 130 customers of the selected sectors. The basic research question of the study also revolves around power devolution and its role in managing good governance problems. According to the findings of this study, the power decentralization practice in Wuchale woreda was not accomplished and could not attain the desired objectives. The practice at the woreda level remains as a deconcentrated administrative unit rather than being a fully autonomous local government. A number of constraints challenged the practice of power decentralization in the area. The following are repeatedly mentioned factors: absence of adequate power devolution, lack of skilled and trained personnel, uncommitted political leaders, low level of community participation, and weak public service delivery were among others. Therefore, to achieve the role of power decentralization and manage good governance, the study recommends the issue of devolution of authority, empowering the capacity of local governments, exercising good governance principles in practice rather than theorizing them, and creating a conducive environment for community participation.

Key Words: decentralization, power devolution, good governance, wuchale

1. INTRODUCTION- FONT

1.1. Background of the Study

Federalism is adopted by many states in the world as a system of government accommodating diversity as in the case of Ethiopia and building common and united peoples together as in the case of the USA.¹ Specific characteristics and features need to be addressed in the implementation of federalism as a system of government structure. From obvious features of federalism, power-sharing among branches of government is the concern of this study. The federal government uses a decentralized system of power devolution to implement the principles of separation of power between the national and sub-national constituencies.² Decentralization is a system of devolving power, resources, and services from one layer of government to the other to develop access to the people.³ In the decentralized system of governance, decision-making authority, resources and functions are devolved to local governments.

After decades of an extremely centralized and unitary form of government setup, Ethiopia has been following the federal system of government and decentralization policy of regional and local governance since 1991. Mainly, the issue of decentralization was first notified in the proclamation of No 7/1992 which deals with the role and functions of local governments.⁴ Since the time that recognition has been given to local governments in the Ethiopian federal system, their crucial role has become bold as they are closer to the local people.⁵ With the experience of decentralized governments in Ethiopia, there is a consensus that decentralization of power is a key to ensuring and realizing local development. The predetermined objectives of the decentralized system were to create responsive programs and opportunities for participation for local people, and coordination of national state, and local governments on various issues.⁶

Based on the objectives stated above, the system tried to manage good governance problems in society. Though activities were done to achieve these objectives, the system could not bring desirable changes at Wuchale Woreda. So this study analyzes the practical experience of the district decentralized system at Wuchale Woreda from the perspective of implementation of power decentralization to manage good governance problems.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The main objective of decentralization is to place decision-making power in the hands of the local people and empower them to verify their development methods. It creates an opportunity to establish transparency, local responsibility, and better social service delivery at local levels with decentralized power over local matters.⁷

¹Watts, Ronald L. (1996), *Comparing federal systems in the 1990s*, Institute of Intergovernmental relation, Queens University of Kingston, Ontario, Canada, p.2

²Daniel J. Elazar, (1995), *Federalism: An Overview*, HSRC Publishers, Pretoria, 1995, p.6

³Derrese Degefa, (2003), *Fiscal Decentralization In Africa: A Review of Ethiopia's Experience*. In Fiscal policy and Growth in Africa, Fiscal Federalism, Decentralization and the Incidence of Taxation, Ad hoc Expert Group Meeting, Economic Commission

⁴Article 3(5 and 6) of Ethiopian Transitional Government proclamation No 7/1992: A proclamation to provide for establishment of

⁵Ibid.

⁶ Kumlachew Getu Salilew (2016), *An Overview of Local Governance and Decentralization in Ethiopia*, unpublished accessed online at <http://bahirdar.academia.edu/KumlachewGetu> on December 18, 2017 at 6:00 AM

⁷ Id. P.1

Ethiopia engaged in the process of decentralization as a program along with the coming of the federal structure in the country.⁸ With the coming the effect of decentralization program, regional states also have been implementing strategies that enable them to succeed in delivering service to the local level governments. In this case, Woreda is the key autonomous self-governing unit to which power and resources are devolved. According to the 2001 constitution of Oromia, woreda has the power to prepare and decide on economic development and social service plans of their respective territorial area in addition to implementing directives from the regional state or the zone.⁹ The woreda self-government entities have functional organs such as a council, executive committee, and judicial administration.¹⁰

As one of Oromia's National Regional States Woredas, Wuchale has been in the process of implementing power decentralization to achieve social, economic, and political objectives at the local level. The decentralized power, however, did not answer and solve questions and problems of the citizens that are related to good governance issues as indicated in the reports from the woredas and citizens' conferences. Besides devolving constitutional power to woreda, it is also important to check its practical applications in social, economic, and political programs at a local level. Since the implementation of district-level decentralization in Oromia Regional State employs different strategies, the system devolves power to realize the decentralized power at the woreda level. Even if the decentralized system has brought changes, it is not as much as expected to solve the community's problems, particularly the problems of good governance remain untouched in the society. There are serious problems that are faced by the society. Some of them, among others, are unresponsiveness on the issues that need an immediate solution, bad follow-up and monitoring of projects like health posts, hospitals and schools in the woreda, lack of market interconnection, shortage of basic service provisions and lack of legal procedures that force corrupted officials to be accountable to the responsibilities that they have been provided.

The issue of good governance problems is directly related to the power decentralization system that has been practiced for the past years till now in Woreda. The outcomes of power decentralization are measured by the active involvement of the public on the issue of local matters and if it equitably benefits the community. The circumstance of the inability to use the decentralized power makes the woreda government not manage the problem of good governance. So, the power decentralization system practiced at Wuchale Woreda in the last twenty-seven years did not respond to issues of good governance like rapid responsiveness of officials, lack of transparency and accountability in carrying out local activities. Government officials also did not solve the local peoples' problems and the constraints that they faced at the local level by sketching short and long-term planning. Although the theoretical perspectives of the decentralization of power seem best, the practice of officials at the district level did not answer the questions of the society on the responsibility and accountability of officials as well as access to basic service delivery provisions. In addition to the above community's questions, the community also needs administrative as well as legal measures that should be taken on the corrupt officials instead of taking only political punishments.

8 Kumlachew Getu Salilew (2016), *An Overview of Local Governance and Decentralization in Ethiopia*, unpublished accessed online at <http://bahirdar.academia.edu/KumlachewGetu> on December 18,2017 at 6:00 AM

9 Oromia regional state constitution (2001), Article 79(2)

10 Dickovick, J.Tyler and Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher (2010), *Comparative Assessment of Decentralization in Africa: Ethiopia Desk Study*, USAID, p.13

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General Objectives

The general objective of the study is to describe the exercise of power decentralization and its role in managing good governance problems in Wuchale Woreda by focusing on parameters of power devolution, community participation, and service delivery.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- identify the extent of power that is decentralized to Wuchale Woreda;
- state service delivery practices and community participation in selected public sectors of Wuchale Woreda;
- identify constraints and prospects that affected the practical implementation of power decentralization in managing good governance problems in Wuchale Woreda.

1.4. Research Questions

- Does the regional government of Oromia Regional State transfer adequate authorities to Wuchale Woreda to make necessary choices, take actions, and utilize resources?
- What does the basic service delivery practice look like in public service sectors and to what level is the community empowered to participate?
- What are the constraints and prospects of the implementation of power decentralization in managing good governance problems in Wuchale Woreda?

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study would contribute to the understanding of the current status and implementation of decentralization in general and power decentralization to manage good governance problems in Wuchale Woreda in particular. As the study is an initial step in identifying the practical implementation of power decentralization at the woreda level, its outcomes would be important in planning developmental programs that can answer the demands of public service delivery. As the study is on power decentralization to manage good governance problems, the study also serves as a starting point for future researchers and practitioners on the decentralization subject matter.

1.6. Limitation of the Study

In addition to financial and time limitations, the study was constrained by factors such as a lack of prior study on power decentralization in the study area that is used as a benchmark, and a lack of organized documents and reports that are used as secondary sources of information. Even though the study faced the above limitations, the researcher used alternatives to overcome these limitations and change them to opportunities for the success of the research.

1.7. Scope of the Study

In assessing the implementation of the DLDP process, the study primarily focused on how power decentralization has been exercised in Wuchale Woreda and its role in managing problems in good governance problems. The study was geographically limited to Wuchale Woreda due to the researchers' deep interest in the issues of power devolution, capacity and finance, planning, community participation, and service delivery specifically in this Woreda.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition and Conceptual Framework

The term decentralization is a favourable term and idea in the study of local government implementation of social service provisions programs and strategies. It may suggest various things to scholars in the field of study. In recent times, there are numerous definitions of decentralization by different scholars. Decentralization means the transfer of power, responsibilities and all necessary processes and procedures to subordinate sections of governance and it is often used to refer not only to political devolution but also as a blanket term to cover both political devolution and the deconcentration of administrative authority.¹¹ On the other hand, authors like Tri Widodo indicated the relationship between power decentralization and good governance by stating that the expected benefit of a decentralization system is the realization of good governance at a local level. When power decentralization is carried out successfully at the local, the community gains authority, resources, and skills to manage their problems and prefer their choices, and the local officials also act on them effectively and accountably.¹² Dele Olowu and James S. Wunsch discussed the relationship of power decentralization with good governance saying that they are tools that enable to enhance participation and greater control over elected officials of the people.¹³ For this reason, successful decentralization requires competence and leadership quality at the woreda level, community participation, and building accountability and responsibility values.¹⁴

The decentralization process in Ethiopia takes place in two phases. The first phase decentralization document /1991-2001/ aimed at creating and empowering national/regional governments and this was termed mid-level decentralization.¹⁵ In the first phase of the decentralization process, national/regional governments were entrusted with legislative, executive, and judicial powers in respect of all matters within their specific areas.¹⁶ The second phase of decentralization enables a woreda to self-rule and makes the government closer to the community at the local

11 J. Litvack, J.Ahmad and R.Bird (1998), *Rethinking Decentralization in Developing Countries*: Sector Studies Series, The World Bank, Washington D.C, p.1

12 Tri Widodo Wahyu Utomo (2017), *Building Good Governance through Decentralization in Indonesia*, available online at: http://ir.nul.nagoya-u.ac.jp/jspui/bitstream/2237/15878/1/7_Tri_Widodo_Wahyu.pdf accessed on December 21/2017

13 Dele Olowu and James S.Wunsch (2004), *Local Governance in Africa*: The challenges of democratic decentralization, Lynne Feinner Publishers, USA, p.1

14 Taye Assefa (Ed.), (2008), *Digest of Ethiopia's National Policies, Strategies and Programs*, Forum for social studies, Addis Ababa, p. 169

15 Tegegn GebreEgziabher (1998), *The influence of decentralization on some aspects of local and regional development planning in Ethiopia*, East African social research review, vol.14, No.1, p.6

16 Yigeremew Adal (2001), *Decentralization and local governance post-Dergue Ethiopia*, in proceeding of the conference on governance and sustainable development promoting collaborative partnership, Addis Ababa, p.10

level. As Meheret indicated, by the system of decentralization, all the administrative levels in the country get a considerable degree of self-rule and administer their internal sources of revenue and development plans.¹⁷

The study conducted by the Ministry of Capacity Building/MCB (2011) indicated the serious problems faced in the process of implementing the woreda decentralization program in Ethiopia. These were lack of an integrated system of procedure of service delivery, inefficient organizational structure and absence of a locally adopted working system for planning and budgeting. Furthermore, insufficient experiences in managing federalism, and a wide gap in administrative, and institutional capacity among the regions have posed serious challenges to the success of Ethiopia's decentralization policy.¹⁸

In another case, Desalegn Rahmato remarked that the power decentralization of Ethiopia was interpreted and practiced as a means of expanding and strengthening state power into local government like woreda rather than devolving genuine power.¹⁹ Jon Abbink also further stated the same critics on the implementation of the decentralization of power in Ethiopia. He disclosed that the practice of power decentralization in Ethiopia unlike a top-down decision-making process, undemocratic practices and serious limitations to the direct involvement of citizens in the decision-making process is the base for managing good governance problems in the country.²⁰ Tegegn Gebre-Egziabher and Kassahun Berhanu also agreed on the unsuccessful practice of power decentralization in Ethiopia by referring to the studies that they conducted. They addressed the structure/system as failed because of reasons like the overriding authority of the ruling party and less visible multi-party structure in the state structure.²¹

Based on the national implementation of the decentralization program of Oromia Regional State, it transfers power to the lower levels of government structures/units like woreda to deal with self-rule and administer their local affairs. However, when we see it practically, the transferred power to the local units could not deal with issues that need authoritative solutions related to good governance problems; rather it creates dissatisfaction with the system and leads the people to take popular uprising demonstration activity in the local area.

The discussions in the above literature on the power decentralization commonly stated on the practical application of the devolution of power and they jointly agreed with the unsuccessful efforts of the power decentralization on the ground at the local level. But the gaps observed in the literature were that they did not come across the problems of good governance that emerged out of an unsuccessful application of power decentralization at the grassroots level.

17 Meheret Ayenewu, (2002), Decentralization in Ethiopia: Two Case Studies on Devolution of Power and Responsibilities in Local Government Authorities In Ethiopia: *The challenge of Democracy from Below*, In Baharu Zewude and Siegfried Pausewang (eds), FSS, p.130

18 Ministry of Capacity Building (2011), *Study on the prevalence of Good Governance Problems in Ethiopia*, Ministry Capacity Building of Ethiopia, p.29

19 Desalegn Rahmato (2008b), *The peasant and the state: studies in agrarian change in Ethiopia, 1950's – 2000's*, Addis Ababa, Custom Publishing, p.132

20 Jon Abbink (2011), Land to the foriegners: Economic, legal and socio-cultural aspects of new land acquisition schemes in Ethiopia, *Journal of contemporary African studies*, 29(4), pp.513-515

21 Tegegn GebreEgziabher (2007), A Literature Review of decentralization in Ethiopia, in Taye Assefa and Tegegn GebreEgziabher.(eds), *Decentralization in Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, Forums for Social studies, p.37

There is no major study that focuses on the practice of power decentralization specifically in Wuchale Woreda. In addition, the extent to which power decentralization had been used to implement good governance in the Woreda was not documented.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology that the researcher followed in conducting this research is an integrated method that combines both qualitative and quantitative data collection for the reason that such methodology is appropriate to deal with the problem both qualitatively and quantitatively. This in turn will help the researcher to bridge the gap with each method of research.

3.1. Research Design

Within the contents of the research methodology, a research design is categorized as a fundamental element and it is a general plan about the researcher's activities to answer the research questions and it refers to the structure of an investigation. From several types of research approaches in social science, for this study, the descriptive survey approach was used. Because the study aimed at collecting and providing more information about the problem to readers with concrete evidence on the implementation of power decentralization and the role of decentralized power in managing good governance problems at Wuchale Woreda. The problem was studied in all its dimensions and considered elements that contributed to the enrichment of the data in alignment with the selected government offices at Woreda and keeled levels. The main research tools that the researcher used to capture data were interviews, questionnaires, and observation. Because of this, the study aimed to provide and collect more information and get an understanding of the level of the power decentralization process and its significance in managing good governance problems.

As has been discussed above, the study was conducted by using both qualitative and quantitative research designs to describe and come up with solutions to the good governance problems. The data gathered through observation and interviews were analyzed using a qualitative method. On the contrary, the data from the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively.

3.2. Study Area

The study was conducted in the Oromia region, North Showa Zone, Wuchale Woreda where the decentralization process in the woreda has not yet been assessed concerning its significance to managing good governance problems at the local level. In addition, the success of the decentralization of power in resolving local problems in the woreda was not investigated before. The researcher's familiarity with the study area and practical observation of good governance problems make the area conducive for the study. So, this was also taken as a justification for the selection of Wuchale Woreda as a study area.

3.3. Sample Design

The major objective of this study was to describe the current status of power decentralization to manage good governance problems by collecting necessary data from a representative sample in Wuchale Woreda. The types of sampling techniques applied in this study were non-probability and probability sampling techniques. To identify officials and experts at the

Woreda level, the researcher identified the following six public sectors based on the purposive sampling technique. These are: Trade and Market Development office, Woreda Council office, Civil Service and Human Resource Development office, Revenue Authority, Make Turin town administration, and Woreda Administration office. They were taken as a sample because of their proximity to society with their service provision, problems of good governance were constantly heard and these sectors are perceived as institutions where the implementation of power decentralization and its impact can easily be observed.

From the above purposefully selected public officials 12 sector heads and 12 experts, two from each office were selected for the interview purpose. In addition to woreda officials and experts, 5 kebele administrators were selected purposefully for the interview based on their knowledge, experience, and skill. Ten members from the community were selected for the interview in the subject under investigation. In the purposefully selected sectors, 167 employees are currently working as experts and civil servants. Out of these 167 government employees, 114 samples were drawn from the target population and 130 customers were selected based on simple random sampling as respondents of the study. The total sample size for this study was 244, 114 government employees and 130 customers of the selected sectors.

3.4. Data Types and Sources

To achieve the objective of the study, data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected using the tools: interviews with selected officials and experts, observation, and questionnaires were also applied in the process of gathering primary data. Secondary data was collected from published and unpublished materials that are available as journal articles, and books.

3.5. Data Collection Instruments

Primary data were collected by interviews held with experts and head offices from governmental sectors and questionnaires. These selected interview informants had the experience, knowledge, and skill on the subject under study. Open and close-ended questionnaires were employed for sample respondents to access data on the issues of power decentralization and good governance problems. The questionnaire was prepared in English and translated into the local language, Afan Oromo to gather available data with confidence. Observation of government institutions and customer service practices were also used to collect primary data in situations when respondents' responses may not deal with the issue sufficiently and also contradict the reality on the ground. Secondary data gathering tools are employed by analyzing written documents that are published and unpublished materials.

3.6. Methods of Data Analysis

The data obtained from interview and observation was organized, analyzed, and interpreted using qualitative data analysis procedures. The data were categorized, themes were identified and their implications were narrated. The quantitative data collected through questionnaires were analyzed after converting the data into tables, percentages, and figures.

3.7. Research Ethics

The researcher received an official permit from the Ethiopian Civil Service University, School of Law to conduct this study on power decentralization to manage good governance problems in Wuchale Woreda. Wuchale Woreda was willing to assist the researcher in giving the needed information due to its significance for the involvement of their institutions. Quantitative respondents and qualitative survey informants were provided a detailed explanation of the overall objective of the study ahead of their involvement in responding to the items. The interview was administered after getting the free will of the interviewees. Respondents were informed that they could decline if they don't want to be interviewed. Information provided by interviewees and questionnaires would not be transferred to a third party or would not be used for any other purpose apart from this study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Decentralized Powers and Functions

The success of power decentralization depends on the definition of duties and powers of each level of government usually provided by the central government to enable the decentralized units to obtain goods and services effectively and manage them independently along with their resources.²² Along with decentralization strategies, decentralization programs need to devolve the necessary powers as well as functions to lower tiers of government for the best accomplishments and successful results of the program.²² Since Ethiopia launched its decentralization program at the district level through two phases, powers and functions are also devolved and practiced at grassroots levels.

4.2. Decentralized Powers

Devolution of power is a formal transfer of authority and responsibility to legally constituted local government authorities and it is followed by functional activities. It is an important as well as a politically sensitive issue that makes local governments control various decentralized functional activities.²³ These powers of local governments are categorized into policy-making power, executive power, financial power (revenue and expenditure powers), and power over personnel.²⁴ As stated in the reviewed literature, decentralization is the transfer of legal and political authority to plan, make decisions and manage public functions from central government to subordinate units. Because decentralization is enhanced when there is active participation and responsiveness. The degree of decentralization is measured based on the extent of independent decision-making of various governmental levels for effectively delivering social and economic services.²⁵ The federal constitution, DLDP programs and ONRS need to constitutionalize the powers that are devolved to each tier of government at the state level.

The powers and functions of the Wuchale Woreda Council are enshrined even if they hold power according to the revised 2001 constitution of ONRS. The woreda council has the power

²² Ibid

²³ Meheret Ayenewu (2007), A Rapid Assessment of Woreda Decentralization in Ethiopia: *In Decentralization in Ethiopia*, Taye Assefa and Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher(eds), FSS, Addis Ababa, p.80

²⁴ World Resources Institute , Supra note 51 at 8

²⁵ World Bank(2001), *Ethiopia Woreda Study* (In Three Volumes) Volume I: Main Phase, World Bank Country Office in Ethiopia Country Department 6 Africa Region, pp.3-5

to make decisions about political, administrative, and fiscal matters in their jurisdiction within the framework of regional and federal constitutions.

The interview with the Wuchale woreda council speaker shows that the woreda council did not have the authority to make policies, rules, and regulations that govern their people. These powers are left to regional governments. But the woreda council has the power to issue and implement directives on different affairs of the woreda community. The speaker of the woreda council also added that there are major constraints in issuing and implementing directives. According to the speaker, the human capacity problem and lack of the required budget of the office made them not issue the necessary powers assigned to them. Along with the speaker's responses, the expert of the council also stated that the acute financial problem is an obstacle to issuing directives and other constitutionally devolved powers.

4.3. Decentralized Functions

The decentralized functional activities from higher to lower levels of government tiers mainly depend on the purpose and situation of decentralization. ²⁶ In the revised constitution of ONRS, the structure, power, and duties of regional, zonal, woreda, and kebele are clearly stated. But the constitution does not spell out which functions might be undertaken at each level of government. Even if the revised 2001 constitution of ONRS has not stated the decentralized functional activities of Wuchale woreda, functional activities like education, health, agriculture, revenue, and water were devolved to be carried out by woreda tiers of government.

These functional activities were assigned to Wuchale woreda public institutions to be performed at the local level. The administrator of the woreda under investigation revealed during the interview that the authority of the woreda has to carry out these functions, which have been stipulated since the 2001 woreda decentralization initiative issued by the Oromia Regional State. According to the administrator, there was significant achievement development to perform its assigned functions compared with the previous centralized government system. For instance, in the case of budget, the past trend was submitting the budget proposal to the zone for approval, but currently, no need to do that, rather the woreda council has the authority to adopt and approve its budget. The government officials that were interviewed indicated that the woreda has been attempting to function through a variety of services. Although there were developmental indicators in terms of carrying out assigned functions, gaps are observed in public sectors in providing necessary services to the users. As the officials revealed, despite some progress to devolve function to the woreda level, public institutions lack the required skilled and experienced personnel and uncommitted leadership. They also further added logistical,

²⁶ Mahat Daud (2007), *District Level Decentralization Program in the Somali Region: preliminary assessments with Particular Reference to Jig-Jiga and Babile Woredas*, Unpublished MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, PP 44

administrative, and financial constraints, and weak planning and lack of coordination among sectors were impediments to the woreda decentralization process, policies, and programs.

4.4. Assessment of Implementation of Power Decentralization in Wuchale Woreda

4.4.1. Organization, Powers, and Functions

According to Article 79 of the Revised Oromia National Regional State/ONRS, the Wuchale woreda administration has organizational structures. These are the Woreda Council that has been established by the combination of popularly elected representatives of the kebeles organized under it; the Woreda Administrative Council has been set up by the Woreda Chief Administrative himself designated by election from among members of the council; and the first instance of Court/Judicial body/ established according to the regional constitution. The woreda administration shall have the power to prepare and decide on economic development and social services, plans, and implement policies and directives issued by the regional state and zone organs. The woreda council within the territory of its establishment is the highest body of the administration. In an attempt to show the powers of the Woreda Council, the constitution of the regional state indicated Woreda Council has the right power to exercise self-administration, develop development plans and determine its internal affairs.

According to the data from the field study, the administrative structure consists of an executive committee, an elected council, and civil servants. The executives and civil servants are permanent full-time workers, whereas the council is a semi-permanent assembly that meets every three months to deal with and discuss the social, economic, and developmental plans of the woreda. The council has also the authority to approve woreda's budgets and supervise the overall progress of different developmental projects which are carried out by sector offices and the executive committee of the woreda government. The woreda is administered by an executive committee, it is also known as the cabinet. The chairman of the executive committee is the chief administrator of the woreda and the deputy usually serves as the vice administrator and the head of the woreda agriculture and rural development office. The coordinating committee of executive cabinets of the woreda rules the day-to-day activities of executive sectors and their numbers range from 5 to 7. These members of the coordinating committee of executive cabinets are also heads of different poverty reduction sectors such as education, health, agriculture and rural development, youth and social affairs, finance, and economic cooperation. The Council allocates block grants received from the regional state, whereas the main duty of the executive committee is to implement policies and decisions made by the council.

Constitutionally woreda council has the power, such as to approve the woreda social service, economic development, and administrative plans and programs. The woreda administrative council is also empowered to implement the approved plans and programs.²⁷ However, as the response of interviewed officials and experts revealed, even though the powers and functions of the woreda administrations and woreda council are specified under the constitution, there is still regional and/or zone government interference in the functions and powers of the woreda council and woreda administration as well. According to them, there were problems related to the execution of powers and functions of the woreda council that are provided by the

constitution. The council members meet only to approve the annual plans and budget other than to carry out their defined powers and duties in the constitution.

Does the Woreda administration have decentralized authority to decide on its own?

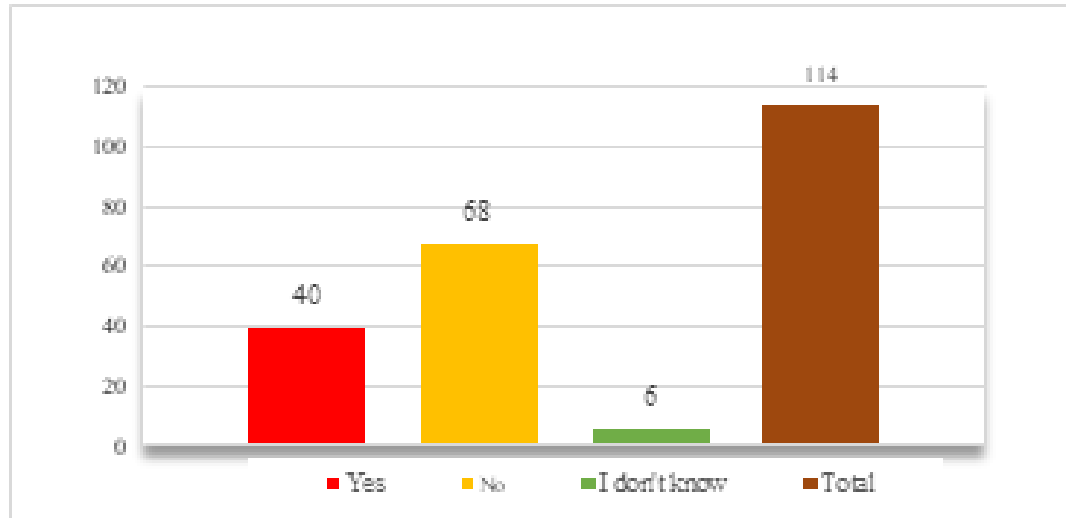


Figure 2: Government employee responses on Woreda's decentralized authority

Source: This [study \(2018\)](#)

As observed from the data in above figure 2, in the respondent's response on the decentralized authority of Wuchale woreda, 40 (35.1%) of government employees agreed on the decentralized authority to make decisions on its affairs, 68 (59.6% of the respondent's responded that they did not agree on having decentralized authority and the remaining 6 (5.3%) of participants of government employees did not know whether authority is decentralized or not. As the responses of government employees with the decentralized authority to make decisions on their own, most of the responses underlined that the woreda did not decide and take a decision on its own on local matters. According to the constitution, Woredas are formally declared to be independent and have decentralized authority, but in practice, there is a great deal of supervision and control by regional and zone governments over woreda's affairs.

According to the data gathered, the degree of autonomy of woreda and kebele to perform its duties and functions varies from time to time. As a result, 67 (51.5%) of respondents responded that the woreda and kebele had weak autonomy to discharge their function, 41 (31.5%) of the respondents categorized the autonomy of woreda and kebele administration as fair, 18 (13.8%), 2 (1.5%) and 2 (1.5%) respondents responded the autonomy of woreda and kebele administration according to the degree of their function discharge ability as high, very high and very weak, respectively.

According to responses from interviewed government experts, though the Wuchale woreda government has been constitutionally granted powers to run the woreda's day to day activities in line with the reality of local context, zonal intervention, and directives which cannot reflect the district's situation, are challenges of district's autonomy. In addition, unconstitutional and top-down orders using unofficial means are also the main factors that are threatening the district's autonomy. Therefore, the lack of autonomy by the district is another important challenge of local governance.

4.4.2. Structure, Powers, and Functions of Kebele Administration

The kebele administration, as being the lowest administrative hierarchy of the regional state, is closer to the local community than the other administrative tiers of government. The data obtained from the field study revealed that the authorities of the kebele administration were very limited and did not enjoy their decision-making power; because their power was not devolved in the real sense. Interviewed kebele officials also pointed out that most kebeles did not have offices and archives. Kebele officials were neither permanently employed nor paid; they gave free service in their free time. There is no budget allocated to the kebeles nor do they have revenue sources. Kebeles collected land use revenues and other fees but submitted them all to woreda. As the lowest and closest unit of the administrative hierarchy, Kebeles are a place where democracy is practiced first in the process of election and community mobilization for different activities. But in Wuchale woreda, kebeles serve as a place for administrative and political purposes rather than mobilizing the community to participate in different development activities.

4.4.3. Service Delivery Practice in Wuchale Woreda

One of the objectives of decentralization is to realize improved delivery of basic service at a local level and solve good governance problems. This is because of the reason that local governments are closer to the public and they can easily identify the needs and interests of the community than other government hierarchies. Local governments are standing local forces to meet the public needs, as the local community renders services closely by the local governments, they are willing to pay taxes for the services they gain and participate in the local affairs confidentially.²⁸

The Wuchale woreda and kebele officials, as well as experts, and interviewees, agreed that the major challenges in public service delivery are related to the provision of pure water, electric power service, and road. The researcher, while being in the area, has observed the people who search for water, paid unnecessary expenditures for motor generators, and many travellers to the rural areas are transported by motorcycles paying more money without safety. In this case, the woreda has limited power and resources to deliver all kebeles pipe water and is also unable to provide grand projects at the local level because of a lack of adequate budget. Interviewed customers in selected public institutions also agreed that the quality of service providers' institutions like schools, health posts, and roads constructed at woreda also lacked appropriate evaluation and monitoring systems before their inauguration ceremony. From the observation of the researcher in the study woreda, financial and skilled human power challenges and problems of coordination have contributed to lower service delivery in the woreda. For open-ended questions, the respondents responded that the community remains for two or three

²⁸ Beresa Abera (2015), Assessment of Local Governance under the Policy of Administrative Decentralization: The Case of Horro District, Journal for Studies in Management and Planning, Vol.1, issue 05, pp.383

weeks without having access to clean water and electric power. This, in turn, creates problems of good governance in the provision of services to the community in need.

4.4.4. Community Participation in Planning and Implementing Development Programs

Participation involves both political and economic characteristics in decentralized local governance. As discussed earlier in the theoretical parts, the advantage of having decentralized local governance is to reverse centralized decision making and top-down planning and implementing system of the government.²⁹ The importance of participation in decentralized local governance as a process of initiating, facilitating, and ultimately institutionalizing the participation of the local community is a bottom-up approach.³⁰

The interviewed officials and experts in the study woreda relate the participation of the community with development projects. Accordingly, the interviewed customers and experts revealed that the level of involvement of the community in identifying and setting priorities was too weak or almost nil. They were not willing and committed to participating in local issues. This was because the reason that they are called for a meeting only when the higher officials visit in time of developmental project inauguration ceremony, election period, or when the officials want the meeting for their reports. So, during these meeting times, the community could not address the local issues in detail with their solutions, rather the officials always discuss how to participate in the political party, the party's political agendas, and recent security and peace issues of the national government.

According to the respondents' responses to questionnaires, 75 (57.7%) of the respondents stated that they did not participate in the decision-making process. 55 (42.3%) of the respondents indicated they participated, but the time of their participation was different. 33 (60%) out of the total participants in the decision-making process meet quarterly and the remaining 22 (40%) of the respondents attend with local officials annually to discuss the local community's issues. 57(43.8%) of the respondents' responses show citizens have the right to ask about woreda officials' behaviour and actions toward their needs and priorities, and 65 (50%) of the respondents responded that they have no right to ask the officials about their needs and priorities. The remaining 8(6.2%) of the respondents did not know the issue.

As participation is the main gate to expressing the demands and needs of society, the selected public sectors of Wuchale woreda did not open their door to public views and critics starting from the planning to implementation phases. Customers of the selected public institutions also revealed during an interview that public service delivers like Muke Turi town administration did not consider the priorities and needs of the society, rather they planned and implemented development programs that did not respond to immediate questions of the community. The

²⁹Marito G, Andrew S. R (2008), *Achieving Better Service Delivery through Decentralization in Ethiopia*, World Bank Working Paper, No. 131

³⁰Kibre Moges (1994), *The conceptual Framework for Fiscal Decentralization*, In Eshetu Chole (Eds) *Fiscal decentralization in Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa University Printing Press, Addis Ababa, p. 1

public sectors were not obliged to accept the feedback and ideas as a means of input for their further development plans. They were relying only on directives, proclamations, and other rules that directly transferred to local levels.

4.4.5. *Good Governance Problems in Wuchale Woreda*

To define it in a precise manner, local good governance is the practice of principles of good governance at the local level.³¹ Based on the definition of good governance, one can understand that the principles of good governance are implemented at the grassroots of administration. For the effective success of the implementation of good governance at the local level, there must be a need to have a system that suits preserving life and liberty as well as democratic participation of the community in their affairs.³² So to have good governance at a local level, decentralization of power is necessary. In one or another way, the ultimate goal of power decentralization to local governments is to properly handle good governance problems of the society.

Good governance promotes accountability, transparency, participation, responsiveness, and equity in public institutions at a local level. These principles of good governance can be realized if proper power decentralization is exercised at the local level.³³ In addition, creating awareness of decentralization and its features is needed to manage good governance problems.

Good governance problems do not come out of the space but with the dissatisfaction of the society in implementing the administration system. The governance system of government is mainly related to the actions and behaviours of officials found at different governmental hierarchies.

In implementing DLDP at a district level, accountability is the basic principle of good governance and the rationale for the effectiveness of power decentralization. In principle, Article 84 (1) of the 2001 revised ONRS constitution clearly states that the woreda administration is accountable to woreda councils which are in turn accountable to the people who elect them. But, in practice, there is a problem with downward accountability to the public; rather there is upward accountability of the woreda governments to regional and zonal level executive organs and officials. This practice of the woreda administration is also explained in the proclamation of ONRS 163/2011. Article 56 (5) of this proclamation stated that the woreda administrator shall have a duty to discuss with zonal concerned officials before appointing members of district councils as heads of offices.³⁴

As depicted in the respondents' response, 72 (55.4%) of the respondents confirmed that both woreda and kebele officials were not accountable to their elected people. 43 (33.1%) responded that they were accountable to their elected community. The remaining 15 (11.5%) replied that they don't know. Of the respondents who said woreda and kebele officials were accountable to their elected people, the degree of accountability of the woreda officials seems 26 (60.47%), 16 (37.21%), and 1 (2.332%) indicated sometimes, mostly, and always respectively. In the above

31 Young J. (1998), *Regionalism and Democracy in Ethiopia*, 19(2), *Third World Quarterly*, p.56

32 Mahat Daud, *Supra* note 28 at 63

33 Hyden, G (2000), *Governance: The Study of Politics in Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton, Governance and Politics in Africa*. Boulder, Colorado; Lynne Rienner Publishers pp. 123

34 Oromia Proclamation No. 163/2011, *A Proclamation to provide for the Reorganization and Redefinition of the Powers and Duties of the Executive organs of the Oromia National Regional State*, Megeleta Oromia, April 9, 2011

responses of customers, one can detect that there was an absence of accountability of woreda as well as kebele officials toward local people in the woreda. Related to the transparency of government official appointments, 88(77.2%) of respondents answered the appointment of woreda cabinets was not based on transparency and accountability. 37(3.5%) of the respondents agreed on transparency and accountability in the process of appointment of executive cabinets. The remaining 11 (9.6%) of respondents did not know about the issue.

Based on the responses from the open-ended questionnaire, corruption was one of the challenging factors for the prevalence of good governance problems in public institutions in Wuchale woreda. The respondents indicated a lack of a strong monitoring and follow-up system, lack of appropriate and required knowledge and skill, patronage and blood relationship of sector heads, and neglecting public interests were factors that aggravated and accelerated the level of corruption in public sectors.

Interviewed customers selected from public institutions also agreed on the prevalence of corrupt and rent-seeking activities in the service provider institutions in Wuchale woreda. As their responses show, the problem has seen more in kebele social courts than in other public institutions. This did not mean that the remaining were not free from corruption and rent-seeking activities, more of the level and severity of the problem in the other public sectors was based on systematic and complicated networks than kebele social courts. Delay of cases, unpaid social court judges, and misleading customers without considering the laws were the issues that related to the severity of good governance problems in kebele social courts. Most of the respondents agreed that those corrupt and rent-seeker government officials were not asked by the concerned body, rather when a woreda official distrusted and committed corruption, he/she can only change to the other public institutions, even be appointed to a sector that is better than the previous. So, in this case, the official gets additional lapse time for corrupt activities rather than resigning and being brought in front of the court.

Responsiveness is another important principle of good governance in which the needs and interests of the community are put into practice by the concerned officials at the local level. The ultimate goal of responsiveness of government officials at the local level, such as woreda, is to serve and respond to the interests of people at the desirable time. One advantage of the existence of local government at the local level is the geographical proximity to the governed people and access to information on local needs. In this study, the researcher tried to measure the level of responsiveness of the Wuchale woreda officials by taking indicators like decisions of government officials to reflect the demands and interests of the public, the responsiveness level of officials of the community's questions, and the decision of the woreda /kebele administration reflect the larger community's preferences and needs. Based on questionnaires, 85 (74.5%) respondents said that woreda officials were not responding to the needs and questions of the community, while 26 (22.8 %) of the respondents agreed on the responsiveness of woreda officials. The rest 3(2.6%) respondents did not know the responsiveness of woreda officials. Regarding the degree of responsiveness of government officials, 88 (67.7%) respondents said woreda and kebele administrations sometimes give immediate responses to the needs and questions of society. 33(25.4%) of customers responded that they give immediate responses to the questions and needs of society. The remaining 9(6.9%) responded that woreda and kebele administrations were not given immediate responses. So, the majority of the customers were not satisfied with the responsiveness of the woreda and kebele administrations in giving immediate responses to the needs and questions of the community.

The interviewed customers and experts seriously underlined the main problem exhibited in the demands and needs of the people in service delivery. It is related to the reluctance of the Woreda and kebele administrations to offer immediate responses to the community. In another way, according to the responses of the interviewed woreda officials, the main reason for this was related to a lack of commitment from leaders, a lack of appropriate capacity of officials, and financial and resource constraints of executives at woreda and kebele levels.

4.5. Constraints of Power Decentralization and Good Governance in Wuchale Woreda

The decentralization program has been practiced since 2001 in Wuchale woreda as a system with the view of improving public service delivery efficiently and effectively at large. Despite the improvements in using devolved authority, the decentralized power was constrained by a lack of training and awareness, financial constraints, and legal and capacity problems at the woreda level. The interviewed government officials and experts explained that the constraints of the power decentralization at Wuchale woreda were related to the implementation problem of the system at the local level. As they said, woreda officials were not fully aware of the program and well trained on power devolution, the legal frameworks on power devolution also lack clarity on decentralized functions and powers. In some public sectors, officials and personnel do not have the required skills and experience. So, these were also other challenges of the devolved power at the local level.

In the open-ended questionnaire, respondents revealed that top-down decision-making and interference of higher officials influenced power decentralization negatively. Most of the policies and strategies developed by the regional government obliged the woreda to be responsive and accountable to the higher organs rather than the elected people.

On the other hand, the regional constitution provides for the local executive to be accountable to the woreda council. But, in practice, the scope of this downward accountability has not been seen; rather the executive at Wuchale woreda was under the control, direction, and supervision of the zone and Oromia executives. Woreda Council, which is the highest political organ on behalf of the woreda people within the woreda administration, is weak in terms of the power and authority they have. The woreda executives did not know and were aware of the authority that decentralized to each public service provider sector, rather they were aware and knew the importance of the influence and interference of higher officials. These officials extended their duration in position by accepting the direction and message of the top-down alignment.

Interviewed customers also indicated the constraints of power decentralization and the management of good governance problems in Wuchale woreda. As to their response, the main constraints of the system emerged out of the low self-confidence and neglecting public interests of the sector heads in the woreda. The officials were interrelated by the patronage and familiarity networks. They were not in a position to solve the problems of the community; rather they did for the satisfaction of their personal needs and their facilitator officials. In addition, employed government experts also have low capacity and awareness of the system. Some of them lack professional ethics in delivering the necessary service to users. They participated in rent-seeking and corruption activities while discharging their responsibility in the wrong manner. So, this action of officials and experts puts a negative connotation on the implementation of the required decentralized authority to solve the good governance problems.

The significance of good governance in achieving social and economic prosperity is no doubt. For this reason, it has been widely agreed that without good governance structures, one cannot address multi-faceted social and economic problems of the community. They underlined that low performance in implementing power decentralization also had a direct impact on the practice of good governance at Wuchale woreda. Lack of capacity, low level of commitment to perform desirable functions, the patronage and blood relationship of officials, weak management in setting priorities and needs of the community, low planning capability, non-responsiveness of officials to questions and demands of the community, and upward accountability of officials were taken as the challenges of good governance in Wuchale woreda.

The interviewed customers and government experts disclosed that using the decentralized authority autonomously to resolve the socio-economic problems of the society is the expected action that needs to be done by the woreda officials. As to the regional constitution, the power to decide on local matters resides in the hands of the woreda administration and service provider's institutions in the woreda. So, using this decentralized authority in an accountable and responsible manner to respond to the needs and interests of the society in which good governance problems will be addressed is obstructed. The management mechanism of good governance problems is directly related to the way of implementing devolved authority at the local level. As discussed earlier, the majority of the good governance problems originated with the lack of an accountable and responsive way of administration. This, in turn, is related to the performance, skill, and administration ability of the officials in the woreda.

5. FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Findings

Although powers and functions are specified in the revised constitution of ONRS, it has not made clear the responsibilities of officials and functions in the woreda. This implies the absence of clear demarcation points on the responsibilities of government organs. Lack of an integrated system of procedure in service delivery, lack of efficient organizational structure, and lack of a locally adopted working system for planning and budgeting are among the constraints that are challenging the performance of woreda decentralization in Wuchale woreda, as the discussion of the data revealed.

The study found out that even if Wuchale woreda has the power to make decisions on various issues, these powers are constrained by the absence of a clear legal framework and regional as well as zonal independence. As the responses from the open-ended questionnaires and interviews conducted by officials and experts, the appointment of executive cabinets and other sector heads was not carried out with the consultation of the community and woreda council, rather through a direct letter of zonal administration which is does not conform with the regional constitution.

Although implementing power decentralization at the local level makes local government accountable and transparent, the situation in Wuchale woreda did not reflect that. The government employees and customers' responses to open-ended questionnaires revealed that because the power decentralization system was not carried out adequately and successfully, local officials were involved in corrupt activities like rent-seeking, nepotism and bribery.

The interviewed experts agreed on the importance of power decentralization to handle good governance problems easily at a local level. But, they indicated that, because of the lack of capacity and skill of officials rather than solving and managing, the problems aggravated to a high peak. So, these problems need to be managed by the decentralized authority in Wuchale woreda.

The findings of the study indicated that the practical implementation of power decentralization is not in a position to manage good governance problems. In this regard, an absence of accountability to the public, lack of transparency in the decision-making process, low involvement of the community in local affairs, lack of dissemination of information to the public, and non-responsiveness of officials and civil servants were emerging out of the low-level implementation of power decentralization at Wuchale woreda.

5.2. Conclusion

- In Ethiopia, DLDP is being implemented in two phases for the past years in its different forms such as administrative, political, and financial decentralization. The main objectives of the decentralization process are ensuring democratic work procedures, good governance, immediate responses to the community's needs and interests in basic services delivery and enabling the local population to participate in local affairs.
- It is not enough to generalize about the whole DLDP process of the Oromia Regional State by taking the findings in connection to the good governance in Wuchale Woreda into account. At each tier of government, the community and the government prefer the system as a better solution to the development they wish. Although the power decentralization system needs full autonomy to be effective, the finding of the study shows woreda had limited decision-making authority.
- The success of power decentralization in managing good governance problems mainly requires a commitment of political leaders, both at the regional and woreda levels, and local officials' accountability and responsiveness to local community needs and questions.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are forwarded to have a better implementation of power decentralization and manage good governance problems at a local level.

- The practice of decentralization of power at the woreda level shows that the woreda has not used the decentralized power at the local level efficiently. To be successful, any woreda should use the constitutionally devolved authority sufficiently in decision-making power and adequately respond to good governance problems.
- To ensure successful power decentralization and manage good governance problems, there should be strong political commitment and allocation of necessary human, material, and financial resources to local governments.
- Public service providing institutions should implement their devolved power to avoid bureaucratic delays, unresponsiveness, and many processes that create dissatisfaction of customers.
- To have accountability, transparency, and responsive local government officials, there

should be strong legal and administrative punishment mechanisms for wrongdoers and corrupt officials.

- The community also needs to have a possibility to assess the performance of their leaders. Along with this, the community should be involved in identifying priorities and needs, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating local developmental activities.
- To address good governance problems through decentralized power at the woreda level, public institutions need to be open for public review and evaluation.
- Finally, the researcher recommends that, in addition to this study, more studies be conducted to assess the general implementation of DLDP and its role in managing good governance problems at the regional level and provide more conclusive findings on the process of the system.

6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No conflict of interest was reported.

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