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An investigation of kindergarten english language teachers' practices in accommodating the learning styles of their students: Selected schools in Hawassa City Administration in focus

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the practices of English language teachers in accommodating learning style differences among kindergartners in Hawassa city. The study involved 128 upper kindergarten teachers selected through simple random sampling. The data-gathering tools were questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. A mixed-method approach was employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data The findings from each research tool showed that the majority of the kindergarten English teachers were aware of the learning style differences and techniques for accommodating them, but still others have a blurred understanding of the concept. This poses a significant obstacle in learning style differences accommodation. The study also revealed that learning style difference identification and accommodation is highly ignored (impractical) at this level due to the different challenges the practitioners are experiencing. Some of the challenges are bulky lesson content, absence or lack of teaching materials, large class size, classrooms that are not spacious enough to have different learning corners, and inadequacies of teachers' training. Finally, the researcher recommended that those teachers teaching at this level need intensive on-job training, the class size needs to be reduced to a maximum of 12—18 students, and the contents in the textbook need also be of appropriate size. according to the age level of the students.

Keywords: *learning style, upper kindergarten, headmistress, differentiated instruction, accommodation*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The role the English language has in technology, education, and other areas of life at the global level is undeniable. The case in Ethiopia is not different from what the world is experiencing. Academic success is highly related to better language competence and performance.

Unless students are equipped with the necessary skills in the language, it is difficult to become successful in their studies (Murray & Christison, 2011; Webber, 2016). As early-age experience has a lot to do with later success or failure in life, much is expected from the early-age learning experience in equipping learners with a strong foundation in their language use. Educational psychologists are suggesting that the critical age to be introduced to a foreign language is between 3 and 5 (Harmer, 2007; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2009). By the same token, Piaget said that the stage of development children are found, has a great role to play in determining what and how they learn. Kindergarten is an educational level where children, aged 3-5, are engaged in learning. To meet the demands of their developmental stages and their learning preferences, teachers need to design teaching materials and methods that best help the children get the best out of their learning (Mclendon, 2011). Kahtz & Kling (1999: 413), cited in (Ellington and Benders, 2012) states, "Developing instructional methods and materials that are appropriate for a wide range of cognitive learning styles, should be a priority of all educators.

What fits one student might not fit another. Just as everyone has a unique fingerprint, every student has an individual difference in ways of taking information and processing it. This individual preference or difference between and among learners is called learning style difference. Learning style is defined as "an individual's mode of gaining knowledge" (Dictionary. com, 2012). For language teaching to be successful, the teacher must recognize the individual differences that possibly exist between and among his/her students. Among the individual differences a teacher can encounter in a classroom like age, sex, aptitude, motivation, learning strategies, and personality, learning style is one variable that needs to be taken into consideration while designing and delivering a lesson to students (Ellis, 2005).

Learning styles are explanations that try to categorize students by their different and most favorable ways of learning. There are several definitions and classifications of learning style theories; like those which categorize learners as best learners through hearing, touching, or seeing, some others categorize learners as more successful in group work, some as individual learners and the classification goes on. Whatsoever the classification and the definition may be, the purpose is the same: trying to figure out why some students receive information at a faster rate than their classmates while some are still struggling to process that same information. Learning style is about varying method of lesson delivery to meet the different learning preferences; it is about scaffolding and reaching the preferred ways for learners to receive information (Wood, 2019).

Educational experts categorized learning styles in several ways. The three most popular learning styles are: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (Gilakjani, 2012). Understanding children's learning style can aid in their ability to learn and also enhances their future ability. The one size fits all thinking is not taking us anywhere. We are having students who are left behind and struggling much in an education system that does not address them where they are. These

different learning styles and the strategies to address these styles in a classroom are given as follows:

Visual learners learn best when provided with information through their eyes. They have a natural tendency to observe, see and learn with ease. Pictures, diagrams, handouts, displays, demonstrations, flip charts, etc. are their comfort zones. Most of the time, they are heard saying 'show me' or 'let's have a look at that'. They are good at imitating others after watching them, doing things first, and remembering visual details. They are more comfortable when provided with visuals of what they are learning. Seeing is the best way for them to learn (Baker, 2017; Cox, 2020).

Auditory learners prefer information transferred through listening. The spoken words of self or others are more meaningful to them than what is seen or touched. Sounds and noises are their best way of learning. They are saying 'tell me' and 'let's talk it over' and they are good at remembering lyrics or all words of a song they hear. These learners need to have things explained orally and written instructions may cause trouble for them. They talk aloud to remember information and they talk to themselves while learning something new. They enjoy discussion in groups rather than working alone. Their listening skills are more developed than their visual skills.

Kinaesthetic learners are learners that prefer touching, feeling, holding, and doing as the best ways of learning. Information geared towards them should come in a concrete way for them to process it well. Learning happens for them best when they are physically engaged in the process or when it is practical hands-on experience. They are heard saying 'let me try' and 'how do you feel?' They are good at going ahead and trying out new tasks. They are unstable and prefer movement around while listening or talking. These are the types that are not understood at all in the traditional classroom. They are misdiagnosed as troublemakers because of what they are endowed with by nature - a learning style that the traditional classroom does not have room to entertain.

In an attempt to look at studies which are conducted on assessing kindergarten teachers' efficacy in accommodating learning styles of children, the researcher couldn't find any work conducted locally or globally at her disposal which is directly related to the topic she is dealing with. Rather there are works on analyzing the correlation between learning styles and children's academic success or works which tried to see how influential learning styles are in students' academic achievement. Analysis of the relationship between learning styles and basic concept knowledge level of kindergarten children by Balat (2014), students' learning style preferences and teachers' instructional strategies: correlations between method styles and academic achievement by Wilson (2011), and learning behaviors and academic readiness among preschool children in a private school by Johnson (2017) are some of the works. Though these papers have different topics than the one which is dealt with in this study, it is worth mentioning the contribution they have on the current study as they are works on kindergarten. Otherwise, especially for Hawassa town, this study is hoped to be a pioneer.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The very fact that learners in one classroom have differences in so many aspects, learning style differences being one aspect, and teaching being treated as a one size fits all approach, does not support addressing every child in the class, is indisputable. It is strongly substantiated

by the fact that children have an innate ability to learn a language, but it is also known that children do not learn properly if they find their lessons boring and unexciting (Ara, 2009). It is with this understanding that the notion of taking individual learners' differences into account while designing lessons and teaching materials instead of sticking to one method of teaching individuals with varying mechanisms of dealing with their environment, becomes an issue of a great concern.

Despite all the efforts made by educational experts to show how important is valuing individual differences in dealing with learners of different dispositions to learning, kindergarten educators are seen to be stuck to the traditional style of teaching which only serves those learners whose nature allows them to be advantageous in listening to long talks and explanations. Starting from the classroom setup to lesson delivery what is practiced in our kindergartens does not seem to consider the learners' ways of learning.

The practice of individual student's learning style differences accommodation is a neglected aspect of teaching in Ethiopia's education at different levels (Melka, 2022; Abate, 2013; Tadesse, 2018, 2020). Even though the researcher couldn't find a study on individual learning style differences accommodation practice in the level under discussion, she can tell from her casual observations the case in kindergarten is not exceptional from what is practiced in other levels of education. The fact on the ground tells us that kindergartens are not considering the important elements in the teaching/learning process -learners- in designing lessons. Starting from the setup of the classroom, mode of delivery, and students' activities, there seems to be ignorance of the possible learning preference differences between and among learners. How is kindergarten as a foundational stage for learning (English language learning in this case) being treated and how is the teachers' understanding and capability of incorporating learning style differences in their teaching, requires further understanding and investigation, and it needs to be substantiated with empirical evidences; this is what initiated this research.

Thus, this study is aimed at assessing kindergarten teachers' self-efficacy belief in accommodating the learning styles of children in teaching English to kindergarten students and getting a better insight into the phenomenon.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The results of this research would help teachers, especially those who are teaching at the Kindergarten level, to look into their teaching practices and make the necessary adjustments. to them. It would be of great value to English language teachers to give more attention to the consideration of learning style differences in their teaching. In addition, this study is believed to be used as an awakening bell to the concerned bodies, namely curriculum and syllabus designers, textbook writers, and educational experts at different levels to give due attention to this level of education. Curriculum designers can be benefited in such a way that they may design their curriculum so that what they have designed would be of support in accommodating the different learning styles of the beneficiaries and would be motivating to students to learn the new language. Trainers are also one of the beneficiaries of this study. The results of this study can make them focus on preparing effective educators who are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skill of teaching children effectively. It may also help to display the actual scenario in our kindergartens and it may help as a baseline for initiating other researchers in this field of study.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

1.4.1. General objective

- The general objective of the study was to assess kindergarten teachers' practice in accommodating the learning styles of their students.

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study were to examine:

- whether kindergarten teachers are aware of the existence of different learning styles among their students.
- how kindergarten teachers attempt to address the different possible learning styles among their students.
- whether there are conducive learning environments in the kindergartens for accommodating different learning styles.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Description of the Study Area

The geographical setting of this study is Hawassa City, the capital of Sidama Regional State, which is located at a distance of 273 km from Addis Ababa.

2.2. Study Participants

There are 109 private kindergartens in Hawassa city. Among them, 32 kindergartens (30% of the total population) were taken as a sample for the study by using a simple random sampling technique. The target informants were English teachers teaching at the upper kindergarten (UKG) level in the sample schools. Leaders of the selected kindergartens took a part in the questionnaire and in the interview. The target informants were teachers teaching at Upper Kindergarten Level from each selected kindergarten schools. This level of kindergarten is selected for it is a stage of learning where children get prepared for formal education; it is the last stage of kindergarten and academic activities are highly worked to lay a strong academic foundation for the students.

2.3. Study Design

The method of inquiry adopted to assess the phenomenon under discussion is mixed method research (the convergent parallel design) specifically for the advantage it lends to understanding the subject matter in a better way and also to answer the research questions at depth and length. A mixed method is a research type in which both qualitative and quantitative data are collected, analyzed, and integrated into research for it is empirically proved that the merging of the two methods of an inquiry gives a better understanding of the problem at hand than either method used alone (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2005: 52) also argues that "combining qualitative and quantitative data is the best design to understand and explain a research problem". In doing so, the researcher attempts to increase the credibility of the data gathered from different sources.

In a convergent, parallel, mixed-research design both qualitative and quantitative data are gathered concurrently and analyzed separately and the results are merged during interpretation. Such a method is believed to yield a complete understanding of a phenomenon under discussion and it is also useful in corroborating results from different methods (Creswell, 2012 ; Creswell & Clark, 2011).

The qualitative data gives a chance to gain a deeper insight into the subject through in-depth talks with teachers and experts about the nature of the phenomenon (Macky & Gass, 2005; Creswell & Clark, 2011). The classroom observation, another qualitative data in this study, gives a live experience of the classroom practice and enhances the reliability of the research. Quantitative data, on the other hand, gives a chance to get measurable evidence, efficient data collection procedures, the possibility of generalization of results to a population and to give insight into a breadth of experiences (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The blending of two (quantitative and qualitative data), provides a better understanding of the research problem than either type by itself (Creswell, 2008).

2.4. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The information gained from the Department of Education at Hawasa City Administration revealed that there were 109 private kindergarten schools in Hawassa City. As the total population is small in number (under 500), a large sampling ratio is required to be taken (30%) to get a representative sample of the total population (Neumann, 2014). Based on this, 32 kindergartens were included in this study. By using a simple random sampling method, the lottery method was used to select 32 kindergartens from a total of 109 kindergartens. In the selected kindergartens, there are 4 classrooms on average. Four teachers are taken from each school and this makes the total number of participants 128 English teachers. Among them, 5 teachers were interviewed and questionnaires were dispatched to all of them.

2.5. Sources of Data

The sources of data for this research were primary sources. The primary sources of data were English teachers who were teaching at the upper kindergarten level as they are the people to whom the problem is addressed. Classroom observation was also conducted to have a look at the actual practices in the selected kindergartens.

2.6. Instruments of Data Collection

To gather important information from the research participants, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observation were used.

Semi-structured interview: A semi-structured type of interview was used for it gives the researcher the freedom to modify and add questions as the situation demands (Macky & Gass, 2005). Semi-structured interview questions also do not restrict the views of the respondents by providing predesigned answers to questions as in closed-ended questions (Creswell, 2012).

Questionnaire: The questionnaire as a means of data collection was designed for the teachers working in the sample kindergarten schools. The goal of using a questionnaire was for triangulation purposes. It is believed that the validity and reliability of qualitative research can be increased by using multiple independent methods of data gathering tools in a single

investigation to reach the same research findings (Macky and Gass, 2005). A questionnaire also gives a chance to collect a large number of data in a short period (Debois, 2016).

Classroom Observation: Classroom observation as an instrument that was used in the study gave a chance to the researcher to observe what was happening in the classroom. During observation sessions, valuable insights into the issue under discussion were recorded in a notebook and with a video camera. The researcher developed her observation checklists which helped her achieve the goal of the research in general and the goal of the observation in particular. The researcher assumed a non-participant role in observing the classroom so that she would be advantaged in watching and recording the events without being distracted by other happenings as in a participant or changing observational role (Creswell, 2012). The observation was done in four classrooms two rounds for 30 minutes each to increase the reliability of the result of the observation. The observation was carried out two times in one classroom during the regular teaching-learning time. Together there were 8 observations of classrooms or observations of 240 minutes were conducted. It took 15 days to complete the observation from February 17 - 28, 2020 G.C.

2.7. Data Management and Analysis

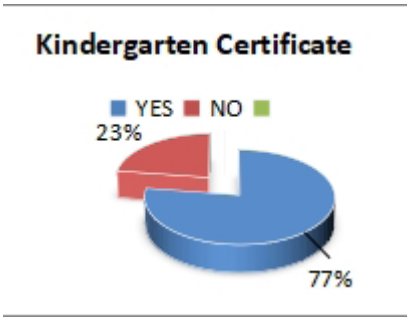
The quantitative data were analyzed using the frequency and percentage that were derived from the responses given to the questionnaire. The qualitative data obtained from the interview and classroom observation were analyzed thematically.

3. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

3.1. Results from Quantitative Data

3.1.1. Background of Participants

One hundred twenty-eight teachers and four headmistresses participated in the study and all of them were females. Their educational background and work experience are depicted below.



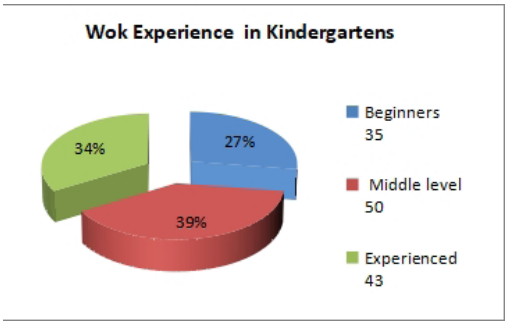


Figure 1: Availability of Relevant Training for the Job Figure 2: Work Experience in Kindergarten

As it is depicted in the figures above, 99 (77%) of the respondents had the relevant training for the job. The remaining 29 (23%) of the teachers were qualified in a field of study that is not related to the teaching of children. When it comes to the number of years of experience in the work, 35 (27%) of the respondents had work experience ranging from 1-3 years, 50 (39%) of them from 4-7 years and the remaining 43 (34%) of them had experience in working at a kindergarten for 8 and above years. From the above data, we can understand that the

majority of the teachers who were teaching kindergarten children were of appropriate years of experience. to teach the children.

3.1.2. Classroom Description

The number of students in one classroom ranged from 25-50 students. When it comes to the size of the classrooms, the physical space of the classrooms was found to be a problem in most of the kindergarten schools. One hundred nine of them had limited space. In terms of teaching materials, 20 of the kindergartens were well-equipped and the remaining classrooms had a shortage or absence of teaching materials.

Table 1: Teachers' Awareness of the Various Learning Styles

No	Items	St.Agree (SA		Agree (A)		Undecided (UD)		Disagree (DA)	
		fq	%	fq	%	fq	%	fq	%
1	Students need to use different resources related to their learning needs.	116	90.6			7	5.5	5	3.9
2	Using multisensory instruction benefits all types of students (regardless of their learning styles).	96	75.0	19	14.8	7	5.5	6	4.7
3	Spending the first weeks with my students to know them helps me understand the student's interests, learning styles, and needs to create meaningful, highly engaging lessons.	97	75.8	31	24.2				
4	Not all my students learn in the same way.	108	84.4			20	15.6		
5	Students learn best when their learning needs are met.	89	69.5	19	14.8			19	14.8
6	Designing my teaching to suit the learning styles of my students makes my teaching effective.	96	75	13	10.1			19	14.8

The data in the above table depicted that the majority of the respondents (90.6%) believed that students need to use different resources that suit their learning needs. The other 5.5% of the respondents could not express their position; the rest (3.9%) disagreed with the statement. As can be observed from the data given above, to help students learn according to their learning needs, they have to be provided with adequate resources. This is to say that the school management in consultation with other stakeholders needs to examine the materials appropriate to each type of learner and make them available as best as possible. In addition, the English teachers themselves need to be motivated to identify the different needs of their students and set different resources like teaching/learning materials, visual aids, cartoons, etc., that fulfill the needs of heterogeneous learners in their class.

In analyzing the data from item number two which asked the respondents concerning the benefits of using multisensory instruction, 75 % of the teachers strongly agreed, 19(14.8%) of them agreed, 5.5 % of them were not sure whether using multisensory instruction benefits learners of all types or not and 6 (4.7%) of them disagreed. to the statement. The above data reveal that whatsoever the learning style of students when information is presented in such a way that it targets multiple senses of students, there is a high chance for them to be benefited. Teachers need to think of presenting information through different modes of teaching to reach out to the students in different categories of learning. As a result, no child will be left behind and it benefits everyone in the classroom.

In response to item number 3, 97 (75.8%) of the teachers strongly agreed and 31(24.2%) of them agreed that spending the first weeks with their students to know and understand their students' learning interests, learning styles, and needs enable them to create meaningful and highly engaging lessons. From this data, we can deduce that teachers need to use the first weeks of the academic year to learn about their students so that they can use the information to plan their subsequent lessons based on the information they have. This is to say that collecting information about students needs to be the starting point for teaching them. This statement also supports the maxim that goes as "one size doesn't fit all".

According to the data from item number 4, 108 (84.4%) of the respondents were well aware of the fact that all their students do not learn in similar ways; 20 (15.6%) of them were not sure whether students learn the same way or not. This implies that the very fact of student variances as a reality in the classroom is well understood by the respondent teachers. This understanding is believed to be the starting point for differentiating instruction to accommodate the different learning styles of students; and it shows how fertile the ground is to design teaching in such a way that addresses student differences.

In examining the data obtained from respondents concerning the interface between the fulfillment of the student's needs to increase their level of learning, 89 (69.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 19 (14.8%) agreed and the remaining 19 (14.8%) disagreed with it. This finding suggests that when students' needs are fulfilled, their need for learning increases. If this is the reality, all stakeholders need to look for ways in which the students' needs are fulfilled, if not entirely.

In responding to item number 6, 96 (75%) of the respondents strongly agreed that designing teaching materials that suit the learning styles of their students is one of the remedial solutions to make their teaching effective. The other 13 (10.1%) of them agreed with the statement while the remaining 19 (14.8%) of the respondents disagreed with it. This implies that the teachers are well aware of the importance of teaching materials that suit the different learning styles of their students and make their teaching more effective. This, however, does not mean that the materials for teaching at this level have to be different in content. It is up to the teachers (experts) to develop materials that suit at least three different groups of learners and gradually bring them relatively to the same level. From this, we can learn that for the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process, there need to be teaching materials that suit the different learning styles of students, though it is challenging economically for a country that is striving to set itself free from poverty.

Table 2: Teachers' Practice of accommodating Students' Learning Style Differences

No	Items	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
		fq	%	fq	%	fq	%	fq	%	fq	%
1	I design modified tasks for learners who need extra help.	13	10.1			51	39.8	26	20.3	38	29.7
2	I use formal assessments to group my students based on their learning preferences.					26	20.3	44	34.4	58	45.3
3	I use informal assessment (like observation) to group my students based on their learning preferences.	51	39.8	38	29.7	13	10.1	26	20.3		
4	I establish systems and procedures early in the year, e.g. Sitting (furniture) arrangements, for group work or whole-class teaching.	45	35.1	18	14.0	26	20.3	26	20.3	13	10.1
5	I teach my students group work skills (like turn-taking, noise, meeting expected behavior and appropriate use of materials).	83	64.8	13	10.1	14	10.9			18	14.0
6	I incorporate a variety of teaching methods into my teaching.	70	54.7	18	14.0	14	10.9			26	20.3
7	I meet with small groups to re-teach ideas or skills for struggling learners or extend the skill of advanced learners.	26		45	35.1	18	14.0	21	16.4	18	14.0
8	I provide my students with several hands-on, multisensory activities (like tracing, role play, and dialogue).	25	19.5	18	14.1	28	21.9	39	30.5	18	14.1
9	I use varying time allocations for activity completion according to the pace of my students.	58	45.3			46	35.9			24	20.1
10	I use flexible grouping by the shared interest of learning topic.			20	15.6	16	12.5	75	58.6	17	13.3
11	I check students' mastery of content through written exams.	108	84.4	20	15.6						
12	I check the students' mastery of content through demonstration.					62	45.4	22	17.1	44	34.4
13	I arrange my students in different groups with different activities (reading groups, coloring groups, building block groups)	14	10.9	18	21.9	32	25	22	17.1	32	25

As Table 2 above displays 13 (10.1%) of the teachers always design modified tasks for their students, 51 (39%) of them did the designing often and the remaining 26(20.3%) and 38(29.7%) of them design extra tasks rarely and never, respectively. From this what we can learn is half of the respondents employ task modification according to the need of their students and the other half use it in a limited way. The data described above showed that half of the respondent teachers did not give full attention to set tasks that supplement the formally designed tasks. This by implication shows us that the issue of learning style difference accommodation is not uniformly addressed and this, in turn, affects the academic success of students at the level.

There should be some mechanism to make the experience shared among the teachers working at the level for a fair accommodation of individual differences.

According to data from item 2, 26 (20.3%) of the teachers sometimes used formal assessment to group their students based on their learning preference, 44(34.4%) of them did this rarely and 58 (45.3%) of them never used formal assessment strategies for this purpose. This data reveals that formal assessment as a way of identifying students' learning style preferences is not a common practice among the respondent teachers. From this, we can say that formal assessment, as one element of learner style differences identification is missed and this by implication tells us that learning style is not formally taken care of as one student element to impact their learning success.

Regarding informal assessment to group their students based on their learning preference, 51 (39.8%) responded that they always did it. The other 38 (29.7%) often did this while 13 (10.1%) and 26 (20.3%) did it rarely and never respectively. This indicates that the practice of identifying students' learning style differences is done through informal assessment. By implication, we can see that even if teachers do not stick themselves to formal assessment techniques of learning style identification, they have observations and other forms of informal assessment to know their students' learning style differences.

In response to item 4, 45 (35.1%) of the respondents said that they always establish systems and procedures early in the academic year, and 18 (14%) of them often establish the systems and procedures early. A few numbers of respondents 26 (20.3%) said they did this sometimes and rarely, respectively whereas 13 (10.1%) the respondents chose never as their response. Considering the age of the students under study (kindergartners) without establishing systems and procedures at the beginning of the academic year, is not a good indicator for the teaching-learning process to be called healthy. It also shows that if the teachers are not managing the physical space of their classrooms in a manner that allows the arrangement of seating chairs for the whole class, and individual and group instruction, the classroom is not welcoming to the different learning preferences of students.

About teaching their students' group work skills, 83 (64.8%) of the respondents said that they always teach their students' group work skills, 13 (10.1%) of them often teach the skill while 14 (10.9%), and 18 (14%) rarely and never do the same, respectively. This shows that the majority of the teachers use group work as a way of organizing their classrooms and it is something that needs to be shared with the other teachers for incorporating group work as a way of organizing classrooms helps students to learn important group work skills; and it also helps to accommodate different learning preferences in the classroom.

For item number 6, 70 (54.7%) of the respondents reported that they always incorporated a variety of teaching methods into their teaching, 18((14%) often did this, the remaining 14 (10.9%) and 26 (20.3%) did sometimes and rarely respectively. As we understand the attention span of students at an early stage is very short. Hence, using a variety of methodologies can motivate students to learn different language skills pleasantly.

Twenty-six (20.3%) of the teacher-respondents met small groups of students for different purposes of instruction, 45(35.1%) of them did this often, 18 (14%) sometimes, and 21 (16.4%) rarely respectively. These data suggest that the English teachers met different groups of students at different frequencies. This again gives us an implication that the English teachers did not

fully ignore meeting different groups and discussing their opinions about the activities that they were asked to do in small groups. This trend needs to be encouraged because students need to develop the habit of working in small groups right from an early age. Twenty-five (19.5%) of the respondents always provide their students with several hands-on multisensory activities. While 18 (14%), do this sometimes and never, the remaining 28 (21.9%) and 39 (30.5%) did this sometimes and rarely. In this regard, as we observe from the data, the English teachers gave multisensory activities to their students though the frequency varies from teacher to teacher. We know that different students have different styles of learning and thus when they are provided with different activities that suit their style of learning, the students benefit a lot in building their language skills.

In connection to varying time allocation according to students' pace, 58 (45%) of the respondents said they always allocate time that they allocate for different activities according to the pace of students to learn and improve their English language skills, 46 (35.9%) did this sometimes, and the reaming 24 (20.1%) never respectively. There is an understanding that all groups of students need to complete a given activity within the time that was allocated for all of them. Nevertheless, when sometimes they are allowed to work on different activities according to their pace of learning, those students who need more time to think and solve a problem will feel comfortable and gradually struggle to do activities at the same time as that of other group mates.

In checking their students' mastery of content 108 (84.4%) of the respondents always used written exams while 20 (15.6%) of them used this assessment tool often. The other 32 (25%) often used demonstration as a means of checking content mastery, 62 (45.4%) sometimes used the same technique to check the content mastery of their students, the remaining 22(17.1%) and 44 (34.4%) rarely and never used this technique respectively. From the data described above, we learn that the written exam was the most frequently used technique to check the content mastery of the students when they learned different skills of the English language. Here, the researcher, as an English teacher, wants to say that students at lower grade levels, especially at the kindergarten level, need different assessment techniques to check the level of their progress in learning different language skills because each of them can best perform in one of the assessment protocols. Concerning the assessments English teachers use, no uniformity among English teachers is exhibited. Hence, the researcher suggests that the leaders of the kindergartens need to bring the teachers together and discuss the most appropriate way of assessing students' English language skills and the assessment procedure has to be similar. Otherwise, the final decision that each teacher passes on each student's final achievement will be unfair and this will affect the quality of the whole instruction.

Using a variety of assessment techniques is a fact not only for students at lower grades level but also for those who are learning English at a higher level as well because not all students have the same attitude towards each assessment technique. At the kindergarten level, especially, since the maturity level of the students is very low, changing the techniques of assessment as frequently as possible is a means to confidently understand the whereabouts of the students.

3.2. Results from the Qualitative Data

3.2.1. Analysis and Interpretations of Data from the Classroom Observations

To be ethical in analyzing the data from observation, the researcher coded the names of the English teachers whose classes had been observed as KG-A, B, C, and D.

Reading and re-reading the recorded data from classroom observation, four thematic categories are identified. These are the availability of teaching materials, classroom size, classroom setup, and teacher's and student's roles.

Availability of teaching materials: In 3 of the classrooms observed, the researcher could learn that there was a shortage or unavailability of designed teaching materials. The lack of audio and visual materials was the most serious constraint in teaching language skills more authentically. There is also an absence of curved letters and numbers for the children to touch. It was seen that the absence of these materials made teaching children with a variety of learning preferences cumbersome. Most of the teachers were seen using the traditional method of teaching because of the absence of these materials. Because students were not engaged in the lesson and because of their unmet cognitive level, they were seen to be bored and restless and teachers were also repeatedly threatening students to keep silent and to pay attention.

Class and classroom size: Spacious classrooms and classrooms with a manageable number of students are believed to help the teacher make the best use of his/her instructional effort. Large class sizes and non-spacious classrooms were also observed in classrooms. The number of children in a class ranged from 25-50. Except for one classroom, this was a problem faced by all the observed classrooms. The physical space of the classroom did not allow multiple furniture arrangements that support different types of instructional activities. Because of the large number of students in the classrooms, it was hard for the teachers to implement the activities meant to address students' learning style differences.

Classroom setup: A traditional method of classroom organization is observed in 3 of the observed classrooms, that is, classrooms were organized to provide largely whole-class instruction. The sitting arrangement of students in the observed classroom was the same as traditional classroom sitting arrangements. The unavailability of teaching materials coupled with a sitting which was meant for the lecture method of teaching gives the classroom a look of a classroom setup that was meant for learners other than children. From the observed four classrooms, only one of them was seen to accommodate the needs of children in terms of availability of teaching materials, flexible sitting arrangement, and presence of different learning corners, with their limitations of course. Even if there were the aforementioned facilities in that specific classroom, students were seen as being treated as a whole. In two of the observed classrooms, students' work was neatly displayed throughout the room.

Teacher's and students' roles: In all of the observations done, a teacher-centered classroom was witnessed in that the teacher controlled the whole process of teaching-learning. The classrooms didn't cater to innovation and creativity because their main resources were the teachers. Learners were glued to their seats and were passive recipients of knowledge through listening to the teachers which were against the nature and the cognitive level of children. The children were seen being bored and unstable and a lot of behavior issues were there too. Students were

fighting, pushing, and pulling each other and snatching pencils from each other - unmet needs manifested in disruptive behaviors.

Figure 3: Classroom set up in KG-2

Figure 4: Classroom Set up in KG-1

3.2.2. Analysis and Interpretations of Data from the Classroom Observations

The data obtained from a semi-structured interview that was conducted with English teachers and kindergarten leaders are presented and discussed below.

Key: English teacher 1=T1, English teacher 2=T2, English teacher 3=T3, English teacher 4=T4, English teacher 5=T5

In an attempt made to analyze the interview data, four thematic categories were identified and this made it possible to discuss the views of the respondents in-depth. This is the importance of accommodating learning style differences in children's learning, ways of identifying students' learning styles differences and incorporating them, availability of a conducive or preventive environment for addressing learning styles differences, and suggested solutions to tackle the problems related to learning style difference accommodation.

3.2.3. The Importance of Accommodating Learning Style Differences on Children's learning

Regarding this issue, all the interviewees unequivocally said that it is important to consider students' learning style differences while teaching them any lesson as a whole and teaching English language skills in particular. In their further elaboration, they said that if all the differences among learners are taken into account while teaching them, the student's performance, love for learning, and confidence will be boosted significantly. One of the respondents, T3, who was certified in kindergarten teaching and had 8 years of teaching at the level example mentioned, "The very challenge I always encounter within my teaching profession is some students lack interest for learning and their inability to cope with their classmates' pace of learning and I sometimes think that this is a challenge that always tests the patience and skills of a successful English teacher".

From the data given above, we see that the teacher was of the view that understanding individual differences and helping students to learn according to their pace is one of the challenges that all English teachers need to work hard and accommodate the problem continuously.

3.2.4. Ways of Identifying Students' Learning Styles and Incorporating Activities that Suit each of them

Among the five respondents, none of them had the practice of using a formal method of assessment to identify and incorporate activities that suit their students' learning style differences. The most commonly used way of identifying the student's learning style was having an informal discussion with the student's previous level teacher. They even did this not at the beginning of their contact with the child, rather they did it when they encountered a problem in dealing with that specific child's behavior or his/her way of catching up with the class. As an example of this, T2 said, "Whenever I have a challenge with a given child, I consult the previous teacher of the child to talk about his/her behavior and way of learning and I found it to be most effective to know the child and help him/her accordingly". T4, on the other hand, said, "I arrange a meeting with the parents of the child if I face anything challenging regarding the child".

The teachers use the same method of teaching and evaluating students in their respective classes. T5 confirmed this idea by saying, "To be honest with you, I have the same lesson and the same method of teaching for all my students. Even if I come to know there are learner differences among my students; I don't have the time and the necessary resources to address that differences." All the teachers responded that they had used their observations and personal judgment to identify their students' learning preferences.

3.2.5. Challenges of Addressing Students' Learning Style Differences

A large number of students in one classroom, shortage or absence of teaching materials that are meant to make learning style difference accommodation possible, the physical classroom size which is not suitable for multiple furniture arrangements, bulky course contents that are meant to be covered within the academic year that take all the teaching hours and lack of competence, creativity and time management skill among teachers, were the existing challenges mentioned. As an illustration, we can take T2's words. She said, "I know my students are different in many aspects, but I cannot address that with the number of students I have in one class. I have time and other resource constraints".

3.2.6. Suggested Solutions to Tackle the Problems Related to Learning Style Accommodation

Making the number of students in one classroom manageable is one of the remedial actions forwarded by the respondents. The bulky content of the textbooks needs to be revised so that teaching children will not be rushing to cover it. In this regard, T4 says that "look, I have a very vast volume of textbooks to cover within a given period. So all I do is rush to cover it because if I lag behind the set time framework, I will be blamed so the volume of the book needs to be revised for me to design my teaching flexibly". On-job training needs to be arranged so that it will boost teachers' competence and creativity power. If they have space in the classroom which makes the sitting arrangement flexible; the teachers said that it will make the practice of learner difference accommodation possible. They also mentioned kindergartens should avail teaching materials which are important for making their teaching inclusive of their students.

4. DISCUSSIONS OF RESULTS

In this section of the paper, an attempt is made to discuss the results of the study which are obtained from the different data-gathering tools, namely, classroom observations, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The discussion is presented under the following three themes which are in line with the three research questions of this study. These are:

- Kindergarten English language teachers' awareness of the existence of different learning styles among their students.
- Kindergarten English language teachers practice addressing the different possible learning styles of their students.
- Conduciveness of learning environment in the kindergartens for accommodating different possible learning styles.

4.1. Awareness of EFL Teachers on Different Learning Styles of Students

The analyzed data indicated that more than half of the teachers who participated in this study have a good understanding of students' learning style differences and the impact these learning style differences have on the success of students' English language learning. Most teachers are aware that the students in their classrooms do not learn in the same way and their responsibility as teachers is to cater to these different preferences of learning. This indicates that there is a conducive ground for addressing learning style differences of students from the teachers' side. When teachers are aware of learner differences and the role these differences have on the academic achievement of students then, research supports that, there is a better chance for implementing strategies that address the different needs of learners. This statement is supported by researchers like Moosa & Shareefa (2019) ; Dixon et al. (2014) and Burkett (2013).

4.2. Practice of Addressing Learning Style Differences

The analyzed data disclosed that learning style accommodation is not prevalent in the kindergartens the case is investigated. What is identified from the analyzed data is that there is the practice of teaching all the students in the classroom by using a similar approach to language teaching without considering the preferences of students. This can affect the quality of English education for it disregards the differences among learners which are an important aspect of their academic success. Students let in the information that suits their learning preferences and the individual differences among them play a pivotal role in their success (Jonassen & Grabowski, 1993). The very fact of the absence of learning style accommodation in classrooms hampering the quality of students' learning and academic achievement is supported by research findings of Bas & Beyhan (2013) and Searson & Dunn (2001).

4.2.1. Conduciveness of the Learning Environment in Kindergartens to Accommodate Students' Different Learning Styles

Data gained from the data sources have indicated that the learning environment is not conducive to accommodating individual learning style differences. Large class sizes, limited physical spaces of classrooms, bulky lesson contents, time constraints, classrooms devoid of teaching materials, absence of on-job training on regular basis, and lack of teachers with relevant training for the level are some of the hindering factors identified for not accommodating learning style

differences among students. This finding goes in line with the findings of Roiha (2012) and Shareefa et al. (2019)

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

From the analyzed data and the findings presented above, it can be concluded that the English teachers and the headmistresses at the research site have a good understanding of the concept of learning style differences and some ways of accommodating them, except for some teachers' confusion. Learning style difference accommodation, is not that much implemented due to the different challenges the kindergarten schools have. There is no formal procedure identified as a means of identifying and accommodating the differences among the students at kindergarten. Large class sizes, limited physical spaces of classrooms, bulky lesson contents, classrooms devoid of teaching materials, absence of on-job training on regular basis, and lack of teachers with relevant training for the level, are some of the challenges the level is experiencing.

5.2. Recommendations:

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are drawn:

- The content size and difficulty level in the English language textbook need to be proportional to the age and experience level of the students so that students learn them according to their paces.
- On-job training should be part and parcel of the teaching-learning process; as a result, English teachers would have the skill and knowledge of learning style difference accommodation.
- Kindergarten owners should work hard in equipping their kindergartens with the necessary supplementary teaching materials and aids.
- The concerned educational bureau heads need to make a close follow-up with kindergartens so that how children are learning will have guidance and control from an external body.
- As there is a lack of empirical studies at the level under discussion, concerned bodies need to support this level of education by producing relevant and problem-solving research works in the field.

6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No conflict of interest was reported.

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Indigenous beliefs and healing among the Opo community in Gambella, South West Ethiopia.

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Abstracts

The Opo refers to a small group of people living in Gambella Regional State. They are one of the least studied communities in Ethiopia. In this study, we aimed to present the community's beliefs about health, and illness as well as their indigenous healing practices. We collected data from February to March 2020 through ethnographic fieldwork using observation, focus group discussion, and key informant interviews. The results of the study show that Opo conceptualizes health and healing its members based on its indigenous beliefs. Healers are engaged in healing practices using the pharmacopeia from the local environment. Moreover, healing in Opo has two layers: one is performed for the safety and well-being of their community while the other is to meet the needs of individual members. In general, the community's understanding of health, illness, and healing is highly embedded in the socio-cultural and ecological context of the community and any intervention aimed at improving the health conditions of this community should take these contexts into account.

Keywords: *Gambella, health and illness, healing, indigenous belief, medical anthropology*

1. BACKGROUND

Beliefs and health-seeking behavior are intricately intertwined to influence healing in any culture. Cross-cultural studies have documented how these beliefs being embedded in the culture of society have shaped peoples' conception of health, illness, and healing (Allen and Wiley, 2021; Lane and Scrimshaw, 2020; Kelienman, 1978; Langdon and Wiik, 2010; Sobo, 2004). The diversity of these beliefs has led to the existence of medical pluralism and at times medical syncretism because "what people do for health depends to a large degree on how they understand the causes of an illness" (Sobo, 2004, p. 6).

In this regard, Young (1980) and Foster (2016) suggested externalizing-internalizing and personalistic-naturalistic explanations respectively although anthropologists warn the dichotomies as too simplistic to capture the nature of medical systems across the world.

On the other hand, others classified healthcare systems as local, regional, and cosmopolitan (Dunn, 1976), as conventional and vernacular medicine (O'Connor, 1995), and as the popular, folk, and professional sectors (Kelienman, 978). These classifications are linked to the above illness etiology-based classifications except Dunn (1976) which attempts to indicate the geographic distribution of a specific healthcare system.

The above explanations about the link between beliefs and health are very visible in Africa where one could observe indigenous beliefs and healings working in tandem with biomedicine (Dejene, 2013). Interestingly, these beliefs and practices do not necessarily mean that they are congruent with the premises of biomedicine regarding disease and appropriate interventions. For instance, Omonzejele (2008, p. 120) argues:

> *The African concept of health is embracing; in other words, it cannot be taken in isolation. For the traditional African, health is not just about the proper functioning of bodily organs. Good health for the African consists of mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional stability for oneself, family members, and community…*

Therefore, diagnosis and treatment interventions follow the above line of thought. This makes their treatment holistic. Several cases are reported from different communities in this regard (Omonzejele, 2008, p.122-23). However, Africa is a vast continent, and generalizations often risk misconstruing the particularities found in different communities. For example, there are more than eighty linguistic groups distributed over five ecological zones in Ethiopia alone, a country located in East Africa. Different scholars from various backgrounds investigated indigenous beliefs and healing practices in Ethiopia (Young, 1980; Abera et al., 2005; Kebede et al., 2006; Mekonne, 1991; Endashaw, 2007; Ketema et al, 2013; Mesfine et al, 2019).

However, some of these studies were interested in the phytochemical properties of plants and the situation of medicinal plants, while others analyzed the policy environments under which these healing practices take place. Still, others studied the healing practices in any one of the eighty linguistic groups. Nonetheless, the Opo community is found in *Gambella* Regional State in different ecology and is relatively one of the farthest communities from the national capital city. Therefore, this study contributes to our understanding of the particularities of indigenous beliefs and healing by drawing on fieldwork conducted at one remote location in Ethiopia. In so doing, we aim to explore the beliefs about health and healing in the Opo community, describe the indigenous healing knowledge acquisition and practices in the community, and investigate the contribution of indigenous healing to the health of the Opo community. In the meantime, we conceptualized health, illness, and healing as socio-culturally and economically

situated rather than the biomedical universalization of these concepts (Parker 2001). This understanding served to frame our questions and was used in making sense of the data.

2. METHODS AND SETTING

2.1. The Study Area and Population

The study was carried out in Gambella Peoples' National Regional State (GPNRS), which is one of the eleven federal administrative regions of Ethiopia, a country located in East Africa. The administrative region is situated in South Western parts of the country, 766 kilometers far from Addis Ababa. The region occupies a vast territory of the South Western lowlands of Ethiopia. It has the lowest population density in the country, with nine inhabitants per square kilometer. This study was carried out in the Itang Special district among the Opocommunity. The district occupies a land area of 2, 188.34 square Kilometers with an altitude ranging from 350 to 480 meters. The district has 23 kebeles1 of which 22 are rural. Opo community lives in the northern adjacent of the Itang special district, inhabiting two Kebeles known as Wankey and Mera. The population was projected to be 1,161 (CSA, 2013). The community treasures a distinct cultural system of indigenous beliefs and healing practices which has been passed down from generation to generation (Gambella People National Region, 2015). However, this does not mean that there are no healthcare facilities and services in the region. There are four primary hospitals, one general hospital, twenty-nine health centers, and one hundred sixteen health posts in the region. Moreover, there are 70 medical doctors and 3282 nurses in the regional state. Of these, Itang woreda has one primary hospital, four health centers and twelve health posts. However, there is no medical doctor in health facilities in Itang woreda. Instead, one health officer and nine nurses with BSc degrees are acting as medical doctors. The other 103 nurses graduated with diplomas. Of these health facilities and professionals in the woreda, there are two health posts and five nurses at our study site until December 2022.

2.2. Study Design, Methods of Data Collection, and Analysis

This study employed ethnographic design to understand the beliefs and worldview held by the community about health and healing practices. Five community elders, five indigenous healers, and seven patients were interviewed. Twelve individuals also participated in focus group discussions (FGD) to further enrich the data. We collected data from these participants from February to May 2020 through observation, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Ethically, proper steps had been followed. We obtained an official letter from Jimma University and then presented it to the Culture and Tourism Bureau of Gambella Administrative State and Itang Special district as well as to Wankey and Mera Kebele officials. We also secured the oral consent of the participants. Finally, we transcribed the responses of the participants and looked for major themes for data analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Mode of Subsistence in the Opo Community

The Opo community subsists on foraging, fishing, and farming. They use human labor in all aspects of their activities. We shall describe briefly how this community makes a living from the three modes of subsistence as follows.

1 The lowest administrative structure of the government

3.1.1. Foraging

The Opo community relies on wild animals for meat. As people living in the forest, hunting is one of the adorable practices for both young and old men. It serves as one of the sources of their food. Moreover, it is a recreational activity, especially for youngsters. The more they practice, the more famous they become in their community. In the process, however, they take locally known safety measures. For example, one of the informants indicated they consider their safety and security as the prime priority during hunting. The Opo burn certain indigenous medicine for hunting to protect themselves from harm around the bush. One of the protections they use is *Akak.*

The Opo community uses *Akak,* for two different reasons: first by indigenous healers for treatment of abdominal ailments caused by meat from hunting and wild fruits. The second reason is used by Opo men while hunting for their safety and protection. They burn the dry part of its stems (*Akak*) for its smoke as people sleep at night in the bushes. In doing that, they believe that either human or wild animals could not come and attack them in the night due to the power released to the environment from the *Akak*.

Wild fruits are also an important source of food. Opo community practices gathering wild fruits and roots. They collect roots both for food and locally made medicines. They collect and eat some wild fruits in raw form. They believe that plants' roots, stems, leaves, and bark are an important source of medicines (FGD 1 & 2, 2020).

3.1.2. Fishing

Opo believes eating fish is good for health. They practice fishing using locally made wooden nets known as *tuka*, *dur, mer mer,* and *lek*, instead of fishing nets and fishhooks. In fishing activities, they make sure that people comply with indigenous norms of fishing. Pitching the spear or urinating around the fishing area on one hand and the coming of a woman near or even around that area is prohibited. The fishing area is permitted only for males but they will not pitch a spear or urinate at that point. These norms dictate fishing among the Opo community. The violations of these norms result in punishment. If it happens by mistake, that a woman comes nearby or a man pitches a spear or urinates at the fishing area, the consequence is punishment that both men and women would face the same penalty. They must submerge under the water three times. A strong man holds their necks forcibly and orders them to cross the river in his hands. The Opo explains that this kind of penalty to the bearer helps them regain the ability to catch fish as usual.

3.1.3. Farming

Opo does not use animals for farming because they do not have farm animals yet. The people use hand tools such as crude hoes, plows, panga, axes, and machetes for farming-related activities. They work both individually and sometimes in groups on their farms. Everyone has his farm to cultivate among family members. They grow crops such as sorghum, maize groundnuts, sesames, potatoes, yams, and okra. They also rely on root and tuber crops. Women are devotedly doing works such as threshing, seed preparation, sowing or planting, weeding, land clearing, harvesting, processing, and storing cereals in the barns. Other activities such as sowing, protecting farms from

monkeys and birds, gathering harvests, winnowing, and storing and protection are also done by women supported by men. Children also involve in the protection of the garden from birds and monkeys.

3.1.4. Marriage and kinship

Marriage is defined by Opo as *'thiyaa'* which means 'love'. The Opo community values being industrious or hardworking for a man to be a husband. They also forbid marriage between consanguine kins up to seven generations. Therefore, the involvement of parents to trace this kinship is crucial before marriage. Opo, practice different kinds of marriage such as sister exchange, marriage by elopement, and marriage due to impregnation with marital arrangements.

Sister exchange marriage is the oldest practice among the Opo. A young man can marry only by exchanging his sister with another young man's sister. Thus, a young man who has no sister will find it difficult to have a wife in the Opo community although the community devised some coping mechanisms. Marriage by elopement and marriage due to impregnation is considered illegal by the Opo. At times, they cause disputes among community members. But elders perform some rituals to approve the marriages and settle disputes due to these marriages.

3.2. Indigenous Beliefs and Community Health

The Opo community believes that illness results from malevolent spirits, seasonal weather changes, and individual misbehavior deviating from community norms. Diagnosis involves physical observation of a patient and asking questions. The healing knowledge and skills are passed on to the next generation in the family where some of the secrets are not open to non-family members. There is widespread use of medicinal plants by healers.

The healers could make preventive or curative interventions. These are locally termed *beeth* and *juum*. The healers are custodians of their community's health. For instance, they engage in two important rituals in this regard. The first is '*beeth*'. The community believes that the out-burst and receding of the flood water result in health problems. Therefore, there is a man that advises the community on how to cope with this problem. Community elders consult him in times of the outbursting and receding of the flood water. He then instructs the entire community to follow certain rules for their well-being. He prescribes for community members an indigenous medicine locally known as *caa*[2] *tuk*. This is for the prevention and curing of the annual outbreak of illness related to flood (Indigenous healer, February 17, 2020). The second one is *Juum*. This is only practiced for emergency illnesses. This healer helps the community to prevent and cure the outbreak of emergency illness in the Opo community. The healer makes two consecutive rituals in this regard. First, he takes a vessel made of gourd, unused, put water in it, and cut the dog's ear to bleed adding the blood to water because they believe that the blood of the dog can chase the disease away from them. After mixing the water and blood, the healer drinks it signifying prevention and cure of illness among

2 *Caa* means medicine in local language. The Opo uses this prefixto indicate the health problem they are dealing with. For example, *caa Joo* means medicine for snake bite where *caa*refers to medicine while *joo* meanssnake.

the community. They believe that the healer can predict health problems after the first ritual. Second, the healer will request the community to bring one dog to him and killed to defeat that emergency illness from the community. And finally, he orders the whole community to take bath in river water early in the morning. By performing this, the Opo believe that the emergency illness will be gone by the river (Interview with Community elder, February 2020).

Moreover, the Opo perform seasonal rituals related to health during harvest. The community elders take three pieces of a crop either maize or any other type, then throw one of them to the bush and the other one to the river or lake to push away ill health, and the last one is given to the youngest child in the family. They believe that major ailments in Opo could be defeated through that ritual. A notable village woman remarked:

> *When Hithpotow (peace, being healthy) prevails in the community, we adults get time to train youngsters in marriage, cultivation, fishing, and hunting activities or overall day-to-day activities. Going out in the morning and coming home in the evening by running the entire task assigned to an individual is all about hithpotow (being healthy) to us. All those activities mean health is enormous in our community (FGD 1, February 2020).*

As part of this socialization, taking or stealing others' property is taboo. It is believed that stealing brings long-term misfortune for that individual as well as his/her family. This belief discourages an individual's involvement in crime and obviously, brings peace and healthy living to the entire community.

3.3. Meeting Individual Healing Demands

In previous paragraphs, we have described how the healers try to ensure community health through different rituals. However, the healers could also work to meet the healing needs of individual community members whenever they face ill health. The following are some of the cases in point. The Opo uses the prefix *caa-to* to refer to the trees or plants used for treatment, while the suffix indicates the ailment or illness. The participants of focus group discussion and key informant interviews reported that the community experiences different kinds of illness or *Hithaaw* in the area. They listed bone fracture, snake bite, malaria, hydrocele, cough, burns, trachoma, infertility, hepatitis, incest taboo, etc. which they said they diagnose by physical observation and asking a patient about his/her feelings(FGD one, FGD two, and Key informant interviews). Below we shall briefly describe how this community deals with these health problems in their local contexts.

3.3.1. Healing Bone Fracture (Caa thiet)

The Opo people use Caa-thiet for treating bone fractures. This medicine is known only by one family in the entire Opo community. In the incident of fracture, a selected member of the family will rush to the forest to bring the medicine. The healer then slightly cuts the fractured area with a small knife. He then chops the medicine into pieces and applies it to the fractured part and wraps it with a bark of a tree. In addition to that, hot water is applied every day until the fracture is healed. The healer explained:

> *The healer can stay with the client to make sure that he/she is properly following the advice of the healer. The treatment could last for a month depending on the seriousness of the fracture. Further medicine cannot be taken without the permission of the healer (Key informant interview, February 2020).*

The healer also reported that about 1,500 Birr is paid for treatment. This was done in kind in the past. Interestingly, this charge is paid only after the patient is fully recovered. If an individual cannot pay, he /she will not be forced to pay. Instead, the healing service is considered a gift to that person by the healer's family and the entire community.

In this regard, a patient narrated his experience:

> *I had my leg broken while hunting with my friends for antelopes. We encounter elephants in the process and I fell into a hole while running away. My friends took me immediately to a healer. The healer has a secluded place in the backyard to treat his patients and he put me there. It was only me and the healer at the back of the house. He observed and touched my leg and then told me to stretch my leg. He stabbed the fractured part with a small knife and applied hot water. Then, he prepared the medicine called "thiet", put it on stabbed place, and tied my leg with straw made mat. I stayed with him. After that, only hot water was poured onto the wound. He changed the straw mat after a week. It took me three months to get healed (cured) (Interview with the patient, March 2020).*

3.3.2. Healing Snake Bite (Caa joo)

The Opo community lives in a hot environment and dense forest where the threat of snake bites is common. Hence, they use indigenous medicine for snake bites.*Caa Joo*is a local name for medicine treating snakebite (*caa* as medicine, *joo* as snake).

Oral tradition has it that before they discovered the current indigenous medicine, they used to take and swallow just ordinary soil to prevent death. The assumption was that when a victim swallows the soil, he/s will vomit the poison. But it did not help them. Eventually, a family member incidentally discovered the current indigenous medicine in use from the bush to treat his family member who had been bitten by a snake. (FGD 1 & 2, February 2020). The healer further reported "I am the only appointed person in our family. When the incident happens, the person is brought to my home, and then I chewed the medicine, and release the drops into the affected part or wound. The person stays for almost two hours with me and finally sends me home fully recovered." (Key informant interview March 2020).

3.3.3. Healing for violation of Incest Taboo (Caa cuula)

Opo strongly believes in incest and its implication for the health and well-being of its community. It is customarily prohibited to marry from the Consanguine kinships. However, whenever it occurs, the families of those who committed incest to consult an indigenous healer to "clean" them of the potential health problem resulting from incest. The healer gives indigenous medicine prepared from a root of a plant to both to chew for some days. Then, he declares that they are free and healthy from incest and its consequences. On the other hand, the Opo believe that it may cause illness and even death to both involved if they conceal the case of incest.

3.3.4. Healing Hydrocele (Caa thuuma)

Hydrocele is one of the health problems in the Opo community. In this illness, water or liquid accumulates in the scrotum of a male child or young man. This causes the swelling of the whole genital organ making it too painful and too heavy to carry. They treat this health problem by isolating a patient for some days. After a few days, the community calls a ritual process whereby people worship their creator (god) which they think brought the problem. It is believed that it is a god who chooses that person to bear the pain on behalf of the community. Recently, modern medical intervention is accessible. It is the only illness that they mentioned the necessity for medical intervention to treat among all the illnesses they encounter in their daily experiences.

3.3.5. Healing Malaria (Caa tith, Caa kutuu Caa kopcuro)

Malaria is common in Opo Community. They use *Caa tith*, for malaria treatment. It is prepared from the root of certain grass. When the community observes the malaria-like signs -symptoms, they recommend that root as the only medicine for the treatment of malaria. The medicine is known to all members of the Opo community. There is no special kind of skill needed. It is applied to all patients by anybody willing to help the patient.

In addition, the patient is ordered to chew some roots for headache (*Kopcuro*) and cough (*Kutuu*), for some days, until the signs and symptoms of malaria such as fever, headache, joint pain, and dizziness are over. Then, the family declares that the patient is fully recovered and may go back to work.

3.3.6. Healing Burn (Caa laango)

The Opo community uses two different kinds of medicine to treat burns. The medicine is known to all community members but they take advice from the healer on how to take the medicine. It is prepared from the ash of the leaves or bark of a tree. Family members add little water to the ash and apply it on the surface of the burned area. The other one is made of the fur of an Aardwolf. The furs of that animal are to be plugged and put at the surface of the wound and dry until the cure of the wound.

3.3.7. Healing Infertility(Caa puuth)

The treatment of this health problem is carried out by a healer with medicine he only knows in the community. In the process of healing, the two patients (husband and wife) are ordered to stay in-door a couple of times. The healer provides them with medicine, food, and other necessities while they stay inside the house until they are fully healed. The healing process is said to be complete only if the wife conceives which indicates the return of fertility. The patient is supposed to pay only for the medicine and other services are given for free.

3.3.8. Healing Hepatitis (Caa ajangakiw)

Hepatitis is one of the major health problems in the Opo community. The indigenous healer diagnoses the problem by observing a patient's eyes, legs, and feet. The healer

ordered the medicine prepared from the roots of a plant. The treatment takes weeks until the healer declares the patient free from hepatitis.

3.3.9. Healing Trachoma (Caa putinah)

Trachoma is a common health problem not only in the Opo community but also in Gambella Administrative Region. It affects the eyes of both children and adults. The healer in Opo prepares medicine from the leaves of a certain tree. The healer prepares the drug in the morning and applies it to the patient's eye in the evening. This healer is the only person who can do the job. He/she chops the leaves into pieces, adds little water, and applies it to the affected eyes once a day for less than two weeks. The healer may follow up with the patient until he/she is fully recovered.

In general, the healers in Opo engage in meeting the individual and community healing demands by approaching these problems from local contexts. Some of the health problems and the medicine they use to heal their patients are summarized in the following table.

Table: 1 Summary of health problems and the indigenous medicines used by the Opo community

S/N	Local Name of Medicine	English name	Health problem	Prepared from
1.	Caa thiet	Medicine for Bone fracture	Bone fracture	Plant root
2.	Caa joo/caa moti joo	Medicine for snakebite	Snakebite	Plant root & leave
3.	Caa cuula	Medicine for Incest	Incest	Plant root
4.	Caa thuuma	Medicine for Hydrocele	Hydrocele	Plant leave & root
5.	Caa tiith	Medicine for Malaria	Malaria	Plant root
6.	Caa kuthuu	Medicine for Malaria	Malaria	Plant leave
7.	Caa kopcuro	Medicine for Malaria	Malaria	Plant root leave & stem
8.	Caa laango	Medicine for Burn/injury	Burn	Plant leave
9	Caa nyaroo	Medicine for Burn/injury	Burn	Fur
10.	Caa puuth	Medicine for Infertility	Infertility	Plant root
11.	Caa jangakiw	Medicine for Hepatitis	Hepatitis	Plant root
12.	Caa putinah	Medicinefor Trachoma	Trachoma	Plant leave
13.	Caa math	Medicine for "lack of love"	To be loved by a female	Plant root & stem
14.	Caa gier	Medicine for Evil eye	Evil eye	Plant stem & root
15.	Caa tuuk	Emergency illness	Emergency illness	Plant roots

Source: Fieldwork by Domach, May 2020

3.4. Being and Becoming a Healer

The medical knowledge possessed by the healers is not uniform. It varies from one to the other. According to key informant interviews and FGD 1 & 2, there is a tendency to keep medical knowledge and skill secret. Moreover, healers are initiated into this service usually in their families. For instance, a healer known for his expertise in treating bone fractures explained:

> *As my father passed away last year, I am the only person that has acquired the healing knowledge and skills from my father. I have four brothers. However, my father made some assessments I fulfilled the criteria to become a healer. The*

> *healing is partly spiritual and partly secular. Young people are not permitted to come to place of healing because it will cause infertility to them (Key informant interview, February 2020).*

However, a healer may refer cases to other healers living in the Opo community whenever he feels he could not deal with the illness. Regarding this, one of the healers said:

> *I can treat illness like trachoma (Caa putinah), hepatitis (caa ajangakiw) and infertility (caa puuth). However, when cases like burn (caa laango), malaria (caa tith, kuutu, kopcuro), hydrocele (caa thuuma), incest taboo (caa cuula), snake bite (caa joo) and bone fracture (caa thiet) come to me, I usually refer them to the other specialist(Key informant interview, February 2020).*

4. DISCUSSION

Health, illness, and healing are among the concepts that drew much attention from scholars in social and medical sciences. However, the tendency to reduce them to objectively measurable or verifiable indicators is a common departure between them. The results from Opo indicate that they approach these concepts in such a way that it contradicts biomedicine while they use the inputs (herbs) that could be verified to have medicinal value. For instance, scholars who studied the phytochemical properties of extracts used by different people (Workineh et al., 2006; Tolossa et al., 2013) confirmed the effects of the extracts against stated health problems. However, the people situate the sources of community and individual health problems in their local beliefs. For Opo, illness results when malevolent spirits attack the victim, or when individuals misbehave by deviating from the community's norm or it may result from changes in seasonal weather conditions. In this regard, our study substantiates Omonzejele's (2008) fieldwork report from Nigeria where he indicated the holistic nature of African traditional medicine. The power of beliefs in dictating health-seeking is documented even in economically advanced countries where access to biomedicine is not a concern. This could be noted from the work on Haredi Jews where they are not compliant with biomedicine due to cultural beliefs (Kasstan, 2020:4). This could be further explained with the works of Hodes (1997) entitled "Cross-cultural Medicine and Diverse Health Beliefs: Ethiopians Abroad." Our study also agrees with the "interactions of culture and healing" (Ezuma *et al.*, 2017) and the importance of situating these issues in their specific contexts (Parker, 2001). To this end, our study agrees with (Konadu, 2008) on the necessity to closely understand the African perspectives regarding health, illness, and healing.

5. CONCLUSION

In this study, we tried to explore indigenous beliefs and healing among the Opocommunity living in Gambela Regional State, Southwest Ethiopia. They are a community of fewer than 2500 people living in two rural *kebeles* of Itang *woreda* in the region. Healing in the community is practiced in line with their indigenous beliefs regarding the causes of illnesses. They use locally available material medicine to deliver their healing services to the community and its members for health problems that biomedicine approaches from different perspectives. The study concludes that health, illness, and healing are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural ecological context of the

Opo community that attempts to make any intervention by public health professionals should take these realities into account.

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7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No conflict of interest was reported.

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Livelihood diversification in the Boricha district of Sidama Region, Ethiopia: Strategies and determinants

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Abstract

Livelihood diversification is essential to reduce risks as well as supplement the unstable scanty agricultural-based livelihood activities. This study aimed to examine farmer's main livelihood diversification strategies and their determinants in Boricha district of Sidama Region, Ethiopia. To collect primary data a multi-stage sampling procedure were applied and 286 sample households were selected through randomly sampling techniques. Data were collected through surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, and reports. The collected data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and multinomial logit model. The descriptive findings reveal that more than half of sampled households (50%) combine on-farm with off-farm and non-farm livelihood activities. The result further showed that households involved in off-farm and non-farm activities were not taken as the primary sources of livelihoods, but taken as an alternative means of income generation in additional to on-farm livelihood activities. The result from the multinomial logit regression showed that younger household heads, larger family sizes, smaller land sizes, and better credit access were positively associated with diversification, whereas livestock ownership, market distance, and extension services reduced the likelihood of diversification. The study suggests that Policies should enhance training, credit access, rural education, vocational training, extension services, infrastructure, and smallholder support to promote sustainable livelihood diversification.

Keywords: *Determinants, Household, Livelihood diversification, Multinomial Logit Model, Boricha.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Livelihood diversification is pivotal for poverty reduction, food security, and global welfare of rural rain-fed communities (Abebe et al., 2021; Asfaw et al., 2017; Barrett et al., 2001a; Jabbar et al., 2023; Kassie et al., 2017). The increasing global population poses challenges, with approximately 124 million people facing a food security crisis in 2017 (Food Security Information Network (FSIN); 2018 cited in Kassie et al., 2017). Despite a growing awareness of these challenges, 805 million people still experience food insecurity crisis (Huseynov, 2019).

In Africa, where 65% of the labor force engages in the agricultural sector(Li & Wang, 2016), the impact of climate change and population growth on traditional production systems has been significant(Alobo Loison, 2015; Chauvin et al., 2012; CLOVER, 2003). Livelihood diversification emerges as a key strategy for poverty reduction, incorporating various economic activities, including off-farm pursuits (Idowu, 2014). Despite its crucial role, the agricultural sector in Sub-Saharan Africa faces challenges, including small farm size, loss of soil fertility, climate change, unable to feed growing population and uncertain policy environment (Iiyama et al., 2018; M. Kassie et al., 2015).

Ethiopia's agricultural sector, contributing 46% to GDP and employing 85% of the population, grapples with food security risks due to rain-fed subsistence production (FAO, 2019; WFP, 2019). Moreover, rural households in Ethiopia face substantial income shocks due to climate change (Endris & Kassegn, 2021). Over three million people require humanitarian assistance annually (SIDA, 2015). To reverse the existing rural shocks, the Ethiopian government has implemented various agricultural development strategies (Asfaw et al., 2017; Endiris et al., 2021; Kassie et al., 2017). However, low agricultural productivity persists due to insufficient focus on non-agricultural livelihoods (Kassie et al., 2017).

Rural households in Ethiopia have had only limited economic opportunities, so they employ various coping mechanisms, including diversifying their livelihoods, seeking food aid, and liquidating assets (Asfaw et al., 2017; Barrett et al., 2001b; Bezu et al., 2012). Similarly, in Sidama region, environmental degradation and soil erosion intensify challenges, leading households to adopt various livelihood diversification strategies (Matewos, 20192019; WFP, 2019; Boricha Woreda Rural and Development Office, 2023).

Several empirical studies have examined the factors influencing farm households to diversify their livelihoods and highlight the interplay of demographic, educational, and resource-based factors in shaping household livelihood strategies. Age has been identified as a negative determinant, with older households less likely to diversify their income sources (Adeoye et al., 2019; Admasu et al., 2022a; Khatiwada et al., 2017). In contrast, larger family sizes encourage diversification, particularly a shift from on-farm to off-farm activities(Admasu et al., 2022; Khatiwada et al., 2017). Education plays a nuanced role, where higher levels reduce overall diversification but increase engagement in off-farm livelihoods(Admasu et al., 2022; Asfaw et al., 2017; Dufera et al., 2023; Khatiwada et al., 2017; Musumba et al., 2022; Rahman & Akter, 2014; Seng, 2015; Tsiboe et al., 2016). Livestock ownership has positively supported diversification by fulfilling household needs and contributing to income (Admasu et al., 2022a; Brüssow et al., 2017; Khatiwada et al., 2017; Rahman & Akter, 2014). Land size also influences livelihood choices, with smaller holdings driving diversification while larger holdings encourage specialization in farming(Asfaw et al., 2017; Bezu et al., 2012; Dufera et al., 2023; Khatiwada et al., 2017; Meena et al., 2017; Owusu et al., 2011; Rahman & Akter, 2014; Romeo et al., 2016; Scharf & Rahut, 2014; Seng, 2015; Tran et al., 2016; Tsiboe et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2024). Additionally, access to extension services enhances agricultural productivity but can reduce off-farm diversification(Endiris et al., 2021). Empirical studies further noted that market proximity, credit access, and income levels influence livelihood diversification (Admasu et al., 2022a; Akaakohol & Aye, 2014; Dufera et al., 2023).

While recognizing the importance of livelihood diversification as a copying strategy in developing countries including Ethiopia, a critical research gap exists in understanding specific factors that determine household engagement in the Sidama region, especially in

Boricha Woreda. This study, therefore addresses this gap by identifying and evaluating existing livelihood diversification activities and the factors that determine them.

This study's rationale lies in addressing the identified research gap and offering insights into the factors determining livelihood diversification activities in Boricha Woreda of the Sidama region in Ethiopia. Understanding these factors is crucial for policymakers and development practitioners to formulate effective strategies. Thus, this study aims to address this gap by exploring the following research questions:

- What are the existing farmers' livelihood diversification strategies in Boricha Woreda? and
- What factors determine rural livelihood diversification strategies in the study area?

So as to address the above research questions the study employed a mixed research design, using survey method and in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with farm household from rural Districts of Boricha of Sidama Region. Data was analyzed using quantitative analysis, and findings were presented using descriptive statistics and multinominal logistic regression.

This article is structured as follows. The second section describe the methods. The third section discusses the main empirical results, and the fourth section concludes and discusses policy implications.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Description of the Study Area

Boricha Woreda is one of the administrative unit of Sidama National Regional State in the country. It is located at about 337 km from Addis Abeba and Hawassa City, respectively. Geographically, located at 6°49'21" to 6°28'12"N Latitude and 38°35'24" to 38°50'24"E Longitude. Relatively, Boricha Woreda the border of South by Darara, North by Hawassa Zuria, West by Bilate Zuria and East by Shebedino Woreda, (Boricha Woreda Road and Transport Office, 2023).

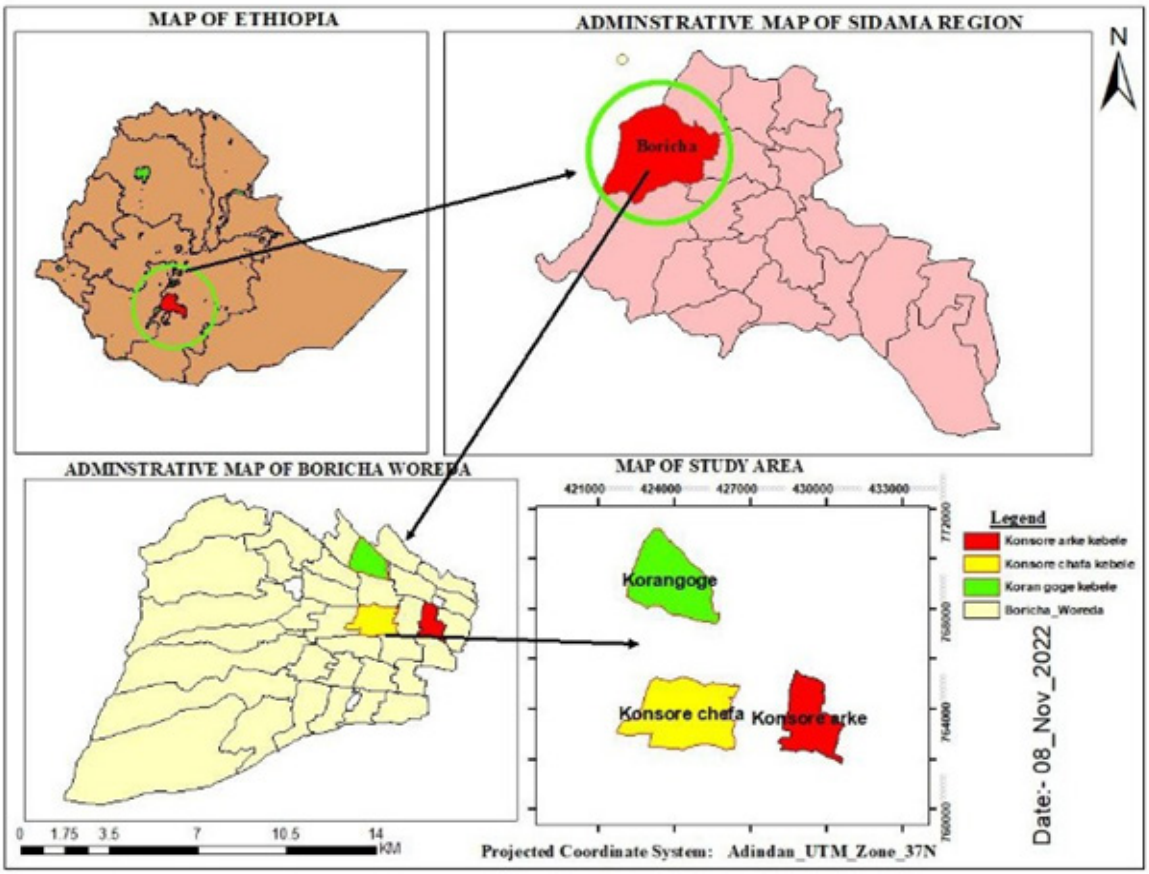

Figure 1. Map of the study area, Boricha, Sidama Region, Ethiopia

Source: Ethio-GIS

The geographic characteristics of the study area have significant implications for physical infrastructure, human livelihoods, and local biodiversity. The elevation of the study area ranges from 1,000 to 2,000 meters above sea level. The topography is generally gently undulating but is heavily dissected by a network of seasonal streams. As a result, rill and sheet erosion significantly impact the environment (Boricha Woreda Agricultural and Rural Development Office, 2023).

According to the Central Statistical Agency (CSA, 2017), the total population of Boricha Woreda is estimated at 130,715, comprising 65,106 males and 65,609 females. Approximately 88% of the population resides in rural areas, while the remaining 12% live in urban centers (Boricha Woreda Vital Events and Registration Agency, 2023).

2.2. Sources and Methods of Data Collection

The study used data generated from both primary and secondary sources. A structured questionnaire, translated into Sidamu Afoo for better comprehension, was distributed to collect primary data from 286 sampled households. The data collected included household demographics, livelihood activities, livestock holdings, market distance, land size, credit access, and extension services. Secondary data were collected from journals and published and unpublished office reports. Prior to the actual survey, a pilot study involving 10% of the sample was conducted to ensure its reliability, with adjustments made for a 10% non-response rate.

Moreover, three focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to complement the questionnaire data, each comprising 8–10 purposively selected participants of both sexes from the study Kebeles. The discussions used semi-structured questions to generate deeper insights into household livelihoods. Key informant interviews were also held with Woreda officials, development agents, and Kebele administrators. These interviews leveraged the informants' expertise and experience in managing and monitoring livelihood strategies. Field observations were conducted throughout the research process to validate the collected data and comprehensively understand the sampled households' socio-economic activities and real-life conditions.

The College of Social Sciences and Humanities Ethical Review Committee approved the study, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

2.3. Sample and Sampling Procedure

A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed to select sample households and Kebeles for the study. Boricha Woreda was purposively chosen due to its vulnerability to drought, reliance on rain-fed agriculture, prevalence of off-farm activities such as weaving and pottery, and smaller landholdings compared to other areas. These factors made it a suitable focus for investigating rural livelihoods.

Three Kebeles—Konsore Chaffa, Konsore Arke, and Korangoge—were randomly selected from the Woreda. These Kebeles were chosen for their higher proportions of off-farm and non-farm livelihood activities, better transport and market access, and significant agricultural production (Table 1). Using Yemane (1967) formula, the sample size was determined at a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, yielding a total of 286 households from a population of 1,000:

$$\text{To get the Sample size } n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1000}{1+1000(0.05)^2} = 286$$

A proportional stratified sampling formula was used to distribute the sample size among the three Kebeles, ensuring fair representation. Simple random sampling was then applied to avoid selection bias and give all households an equal chance of being included in the study.

Table 1. Sampled Kebeles and Households

Name of Kebele	Agro-climate zone	Total number of household	Sample of household	Percentage
Konsore Chafa	Woina dega	342	98	34.26
Konsore Arke	Woina dega	323	92	32.17
Korangoge	Kola	335	96	33.57
Total		1000	286	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

2.4. Method of Data Analysis

2.4.1. Measurement of Livelihood Diversification

Based on the study conducted by Admassu(2022), this study identifies four categories of household livelihood strategies: on-farm only, on-farm combined with off-farm activities, on-farm combined with non-farm activities, and on-farm combined with both off-farm and non-farm activities. To assess the level of income diversification, the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) was utilized. The HHI measures the concentration of income sources and is calculated based on the proportion of income from each source, with values ranging from 1/N to 1, where N represents the total number of income sources. A higher value indicates lower diversification, while a lower value reflects greater diversification(Admasu et al., 2022).

To address the specific objectives, the study employed a comprehensive approach to analyze the data, utilizing both descriptive and inferential statistical methods, including econometric models. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, means, standard deviations, minimums, and maximums were used to summarize and describe the data.

Building on this foundation, the study applied a multinomial logit model to examine the determinants of household livelihood choices. Following Abdulhafedh (2017), the model was used to evaluate the probability of households engaging in one of three mutually exclusive strategies—on-farm only, on-farm plus off-farm, or on-farm plus non-farm—based on various household and contextual characteristics. Probabilities for each strategy were calculated relative to a reference category, and the effects of explanatory variables were analyzed through estimated coefficients. Marginal effects were further examined to understand how variations in both continuous and categorical variables impact the likelihood of adopting specific strategies.

Data were analyzed using STATA version 14, with the significance of coefficients categorized at 1%, 5%, and 10% levels. The model's fit was assessed using Pseudo R-squared values and the Hosmer-Lemeshow test, which compares observed and predicted probabilities within subgroups(Abdulhafedh, 2017). This framework ensures a robust understanding of the factors influencing household decisions regarding livelihood diversification.

2.4.2. Dependent Variables

Following methodology from Admasu et al. (2022) this study classified livelihood strategies into four main categories: on-farm only, on-farm plus off-farm, on-farm plus non-farm, and on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm. These categories were used as dependent variables to analyze the diversification strategies adopted by households. Net on-farm activities were calculated as the sum of farm income (cash from farm and livestock sales) and the value of food produced for consumption or exchange, minus the costs of inputs and hired labor, excluding household labor. Net off-farm activities included income earned from wage labor on other farms, reciprocal labor arrangements (such as food or harvest shares and oxen rentals), and income from environmental resources, with in-kind earnings converted to cash using local market prices. Net non-farm activities encompassed wages or salaries from non-agricultural employment, income from land rentals, sales of non-agricultural products, petty trade, self-employment, handicrafts, and business enterprises, as well as remittances, pensions, welfare assistance, and other transfers. Transportation costs for semi-processed tools were subtracted from this total.

Livelihood diversification strategies: is a polytomous dependent variable rural households choice of livelihood strategies helps to broaden their income sources and reduce risk, which takes the value Y = 0 if the livelihood strategies is on-farm only, Y = 1 if the households livelihood strategies are on-farm plus off-farm Y = 2 if the livelihood strategies is on-farm plus non-farm, Y = 3 if the households livelihood strategies is on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies.

Building on earlier studies on non-farm income diversifications, such as those by Adeoye et al. (2019), Admasu et al. (2022), Khatiwada et al. (2017), Asfaw et al. (2017), Dufera et al. (2023), Musumba et al. (2022), Rahman and Akter (2014), Seng (2015), Tsiboe et al. (2016), Brüssow et al. (2017), Bezu et al. (2012), Meena et al. (2017), Owusu et al. (2011), Romeo et al. (2016), Scharf and Rahut (2014), Tran et al. (2016), Wu et al. (2024), Endiris et al. (2021), and Akaakohol and Aye (2014), and personal experience, the following variables were selected as explanatory variables: Age of household head, sex, family size, marital status, education status land size, income, livestock holding market distance access to extension, use of cooperatives, access to credit, exposure to shock, crop and livestock production risks serves as explanatory variables. The description and hypothesized effects of the selected independent variables on the dependent variable are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Definition of Variables used in the Multinomial Logit Model

Independent Variables	Type of Variables	Measurements	Expected Sign
AGEH	Continuous	Age of household in years	-ve
SEXH	Dummy	Sex of household head 1 = male, 0 = female	-ve
FAMS	Continuous	Family size in adult equivalent ratio	+ve
MASH	Categorical	Marital status of household head 1=Married, 0=non-married	+ve
EDUH	Continuous	Years of education	-ve/+ve
LDSH	Continuous	Land size in hectares (ha)	-ve
INCOME	Continuous	Income in Ethiopian Birr (ETB)	-ve
TLUH	Continuous	Livestock holding inTLU	-ve
MKTDH	Continuous	In kilometers (Km)	+ve
TOMH	Dummy	1 = polygamous, 0 = monogamous	+ve
COOPH	Dummy	1 = cooperative, 0 = otherwise	+ve
EXTCH	Dummy	Household access extension services 1 = Yes, 0 = otherwise	+ve
CREDIT	Dummy	access to credit 1=yes, 0 = otherwise	+ve
CPRH	Dummy	Household faced crop risk, 1= yes 0 = otherwise	+ve
LPRH	Dummy	Household faced livestock risk 1 =yes, 0 = otherwise	+ve

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Descriptive Results

Table 2 below shows that the average age of households surveyed is 42.9 years (SD = 10.02). The descriptive result showed that the average age of households was 42.9 years, with the minimum and maximum ages being 21 and 70 years, respectively. The overall importance of

the presence of older households suggests that some households live at an active, productive age. These 286 households were also found in different family sizes. From the average family size of the households, a family had 5.78 members (SD = 1.973). Accordingly, the minimum and maximum number of members in a family were 2 and 12, respectively. The result shows that the minimum and maximum land size is less than 0.5 and 2 hectares, respectively, with (SD = .922). The result for farm size shows that a household with a larger farm size or a household with a large agricultural area is obliged to work and at least combine work and agricultural subsistence activities. The average distance to market is 2 km with (SD =.1.3). The minimum distance to any local market is 1 km and the maximum is 5 km from the residence. Finally, the result from the survey showed that the average livestock mean is 4.133 and (SD = 2.972) the minimum and maximum are 1 and 10, respectively. Variations in land size and livestock population may influence households' choice of livelihood strategies.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Age	42.923	10.026	21	70
Family size	5.78	1.973	2	12
Income (ETB)	2.301	0.944	1	3
Land size(ha)	2.057	0.922	0.5	2
Market distance (Km)	2.189	1.276	1	5
Livestock holdings	4.133	2.972	1	10

Source: Own Survey, 2024

3.2. Household Livelihood Diversification Strategies

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of household livelihood strategies. Approximately 50% of households were engaged exclusively in on-farm activities, 14.7% combined on-farm with off-farm activities, 18.9% combined on-farm with non-farm activities, and 16.4% engaged in on-farm, off-farm, and non-farm livelihood strategies simultaneously. These results highlight that while agriculture remains the dominant livelihood activity, integrating off-farm and non-farm activities serves as a crucial adaptive strategy for households to enhance their resilience and sustain agricultural production.

Key informant interviews revealed that agriculture alone is insufficient, prompting households to adopt off-farm and non-farm activities to cope with vulnerabilities and support agricultural production.

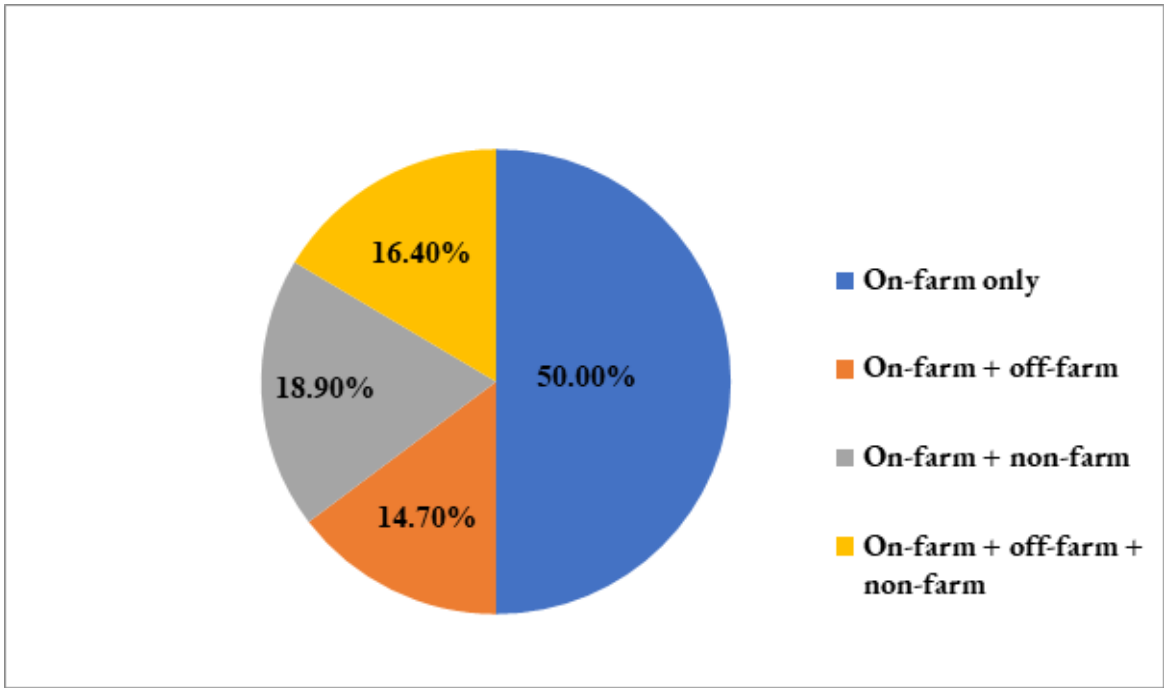

Figure 1. The Household Livelihood Diversification Strategies

Source: Field survey, 2023

3.3. Econometric Result: Determinants of Livelihood Strategies

The main objective of this study was to identify the main livelihood strategies and their determinants in the study area. The descriptive results highlighted the main livelihood practices, and to complement these findings, a multinomial logit model was used to identify the determinants of rural households' livelihood strategy choices. On-farm only activities served as the base outcome, and the results were interpreted in comparison to this category.

The results revealed no significant issues with multicollinearity among the categorical explanatory variables. The Chi-square test showed strong explanatory power for the model, with a significant effect at the 1% level (p-value = 0.0000) on the household's choice of livelihood strategies.

The multinomial logit model identified the determinant variables for each category compared to the base outcome, with on-farm only activities as the reference category. The maximum likelihood method was applied to estimate the effect of predictor variables on livelihood strategy choices. The parameter estimates indicate the direction of the effect of independent variables on the dependent variables.

The marginal effect measures the expected change in the probability of a given choice based on a unit change in the explanatory variables(Greene, 2008). Nine of twelve hypothesized explanatory variables were found to significantly determine livelihood strategies at the 1%, 5%, and 10% significance levels. These included age, sex, family size, marital status, type of marriage, educational level, livestock holding, land size, market distance, and income.

The magnitude of the effect for some variables varied across the three livelihood strategies, showing that multiple factors influenced the choice of livelihood strategies differently compared to the base outcome (on-farm only).

Age of the Household Head: As hypothesized, age was found to significantly and negatively affect the household's choice of on-farm plus off-farm, on-farm plus non-farm, and on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies at the 10%, 10%, and 5% significance levels, respectively. Holding all other variables constant, a one-year increase in the age of the household head would decrease the choice of on-farm plus off-farm, on-farm plus non-farm, and on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies by 4%, 1.2%, and 2%, respectively, compared to the base outcome of on-farm livelihood strategies. This result is consistent with the findings of (Admasu et al., 2022; Khatiwada et al., 2017) that younger household heads are more likely to embrace new and profitable livelihood strategies, both within and outside of agriculture. However, it contradicts Gecho et al.,(2014) who found that as age increases, farmers tend to have more children, which increases available labor for engaging in diverse activities. The increased number of children leads to higher demand for basic necessities.

Family Size: Family size positively influenced livelihood strategies at the 10% and 5% significance levels. Holding all other variables constant, as the family size increases by one person, the probability of engagement in on-farm plus off-farm and on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies increases by 1.4% and 333.3%, respectively, compared to the base outcome of on-farm livelihood strategies. The positive correlation between family size and livelihood strategies might be due to the relationship between larger family sizes and household labor availability. This finding is consistent with the results of (Admasu et al., 2022) and Ayantoye et al. (2017) that attest a correlation between family size and the need for income diversification. Moreover this finding align with Admasu et al. (2022) and Khatiwada et al (2017) finding that highlight that family size is a factor that increases the likelihood of livelihood diversification larger families may require more diverse income streams to meet the needs of their members.

Educational Level: The educational level was found to be negatively and significantly related to on-farm plus off-farm livelihood strategies, but positively and significantly related to on-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies at the 10% and 5% significance levels, respectively. Holding all other variables constant, an additional year of schooling can reduce the likelihood of choosing on-farm plus off-farm livelihood strategies by 8%, and increase the likelihood of choosing on-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies by 2.9%, relative to the reference category of on-farm livelihood strategies. This finding is consistent with literatures (Admasu et al., 2022; Asfaw et al., 2017; Dufera et al., 2023; Khatiwada et al., 2017; Musumba et al., 2022; Rahman & Akter, 2014; Seng, 2015; Tsiboe et al., 2016)unlike the rural areas, the situation is unexplored in the case of towns of developing economies. The objective of this study was to identify the determinants of households' livelihood diversification in a sub-Saharan town. Data were collected from 151 households and 4 key informants. In addition, secondary data were collected to supplement the primary data. Descriptive statistics were employed to identify the households' livelihood strategies. The level of households' livelihood diversification was estimated by the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index, whereas multinomial logistic regression was employed to investigate the determinants of the households' livelihood diversification. The result of the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index shows the presence of three levels of livelihood diversification among households: no diversification (11.26% that state education is widely recognized as a driver of diversification.

Livestock Ownership: Livestock ownership was found to negatively and significantly affect households' participation in on-farm plus off-farm, on-farm plus non-farm, and on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood diversification strategies at the 5%, 5%, and 1% significance levels, respectively. Holding all other factors constant, the likelihood of rural households choosing on-farm plus off-farm, on-farm plus non-farm, and on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies decreases by 1.0%, 5.0%, and 60.3%, respectively, as livestock holdings increase by one Tropical Livestock Unit (TLU) compared to the base category of on-farm livelihood strategies. A possible reason is that households with more livestock may earn more money by selling livestock, allowing them to strengthen their financial position and invest in on-farm income-generating activities. This finding contradicts the findings of (Admasu et al., 2022a; Rahman & Akter, 2014)unlike the rural areas, the situation is unexplored in the case of towns of developing economies. The objective of this study was to identify the determinants of households' livelihood diversification in a sub-Saharan town. Data were collected from 151 households and 4 key informants. In addition, secondary data were collected to supplement the primary data. Descriptive statistics were employed to identify the households' livelihood strategies. The level of households' livelihood diversification was estimated by the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index, whereas multinomial logistic regression was employed to investigate the determinants of the households' livelihood diversification. The result of the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index shows the presence of three levels of livelihood diversification among households: no diversification (11.26%, that households with substantial livestock assets may generate sufficient income from livestock, reducing their need to diversify.

Access to Extension Contact: Contrary to expectations, access to extension contact negatively and significantly influenced on-farm plus non-farm and on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies at the 1% and 5% significance levels, respectively. Holding all other factors constant, the likelihood of choosing on-farm plus non-farm and on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies decreased by 7.4% and 92.7%, respectively, for those who had access to extension services from development agents (DA) relative to the base on-farm only livelihood strategies. This result contradicts with findings of Endiris et.al(2021) who emphasized the role of extension services in promoting off-farm activities. Moreover, it contradicts with Lorato(2019), who found that households receiving extension services are more likely to engage in different combinations of livelihood strategies.

Land Size: As expected, land size was significantly and negatively related to on-farm plus off-farm, on-farm plus non-farm, and on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies at the 5%, 10%, and 10% significance levels, respectively, compared to the on-farm only livelihood strategies. The negative coefficient indicates that households with larger land sizes are less likely to engage in off-farm and non-farm livelihood strategies, and more likely to focus on on-farm livelihood diversification. The likelihood of engaging in on-farm plus off-farm, on-farm plus non-farm, and on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies decreased by 1.7%, 3.3%, and 5.0%, respectively, compared to the on-farm livelihood strategy. This finding corroborates the findings of Admasu(2022) that households with smaller landholdings are more likely to diversify their income sources as the agricultural output from their limited land may be insufficient to meet their needs and Kaakohol & Aye (2014), households with larger landholdings might have the resources and capacity to specialize in farming activities.

Market Distance: In line with expectations, market distance negatively and significantly affected households' participation in on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies at the 10% significance level. Holding all other variables constant, a one-kilometer increase in

market distance decreased the likelihood of households choosing on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies by 4.9%, compared to the base on-farm livelihood strategy. This result align with findings that proximity to markets is generally seen as a factor that facilitates diversification (Admasu et al., 2022b; Akaakohol & Aye, 2014; Dufera et al., 2023; Endris & Kassegn, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022; Owusu et al., 2011; Romeo et al., 2016)

Access to Credit: Contrary to expectations, access to credit had a positive and statistically significant relation with the probability of participating in on-farm plus off-farm, on-farm plus non-farm, and on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies at the 10%, 1%, and 10% significance levels, respectively. Holding all other factors constant, as access to credit increases by one unit, the probability of choosing on-farm plus off-farm, on-farm plus non-farm, and on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies increases by 12.4%, 9.8%, and 4.2%, respectively, compared to the base on-farm livelihood strategy. This result is consistent with those empirical findings who found that access to credit can provide the capital needed to invest in new income-generating activities, thereby supporting diversification efforts(Admasu et al., 2022b; Akaakohol & Aye, 2014; Asfaw et al., 2017; Dufera et al., 2023; Endiris et al., 2021; Imai et al., 2015; G. Kassie et al., 2017; Meena et al., 2017; Musumba et al., 2022; Owusu et al., 2011; Rahman & Akter, 2014; Shaheen et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2016; Tsiboe et al., 2016)unlike the rural areas, the situation is unexplored in the case of towns of developing economies. The objective of this study was to identify the determinants of households' livelihood diversification in a sub-Saharan town. Data were collected from 151 households and 4 key informants. In addition, secondary data were collected to supplement the primary data. Descriptive statistics were employed to identify the households' livelihood strategies. The level of households' livelihood diversification was estimated by the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index, whereas multinomial logistic regression was employed to investigate the determinants of the households' livelihood diversification. The result of the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index shows the presence of three levels of livelihood diversification among households: no diversification (11.26%.

Income: As expected, income had a positive and significant influence on the household's choice of on-farm plus non-farm livelihood strategies and a negative and significant influence on the choice of on-farm plus off-farm livelihood strategies at the 5% significance level. Holding all other factors constant, as income increases, the probability of choosing on-farm plus non-farm strategies increased by 2.0%, while the probability of diversifying into on-farm plus off-farm livelihood strategies decreased by 5.0%. This result suggests that farm households income levels are likely to influence diversification decisions(Duong et al., 2021; Khatiwada et al., 2017; Meena et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2022; Pfeiffer et al., 2009).

Table 3. Multinomial Logit Model Results

Household Livelihood Diversification Strategies									
	On-farm + off-farm			On-farm + non-farm			On-farm + off-farm + non-farm		
Vars	Coeff.	Std. Err	Dy/dx	Coeff.	Std.Err	Dy/dx	Coeff.	Std.Err	Dy/dx
AGE	-.036	.019	-.040*	-.005	.017	-.012*	-.005	.018	-.020**
SEX	-.611	.512	-.015	-1.49	.409	-.167	-.731	.456	-.041
MARS	.508	.23	.057**	.246	.242	.023	.167	.291	.039**
EDUC	-.125	.118	-.080*	.243	.116	.029**	-.005	.113	-.0800
FAMS	.047	.093	.014*	.048	.087	.500	-.006	.091	-.333**

TOM	-.264	.221	-.013	-.461	.218	-.049	-.257	.207	-.015
LADS	-.133	.202	-.017**	-.209	.184	-.033*	-.329	.204	-.050*
MKTD	-.087	.147	-.001	-.243	.16	-.045	-.348	.13	-.049*
INCO	-.056	.196	-.020**	.073	.185	.050**	.133	.193	.014
TLU	-.010	.061	-.010**	-.043	.057	-.05**	-.037	.06	-.603 ***
EXTC	.402	.097	.093	-.657	1.04	-.074***	-1.00	.733	-0.93**
CRED	6.151	.074	.124*	3.31	.001	.098***	9.7	2.513	.042*
CONS	-3.7	1.53		.139	1.33		-184	1.4	

Mean dependent vars	1.510	SD dependent vars	0.811
Pseudo r-squared	.140	Number of obs	286
Chi-square test	65.339	Prob > chi2	.000
Akaike crit. (AIC)	456.651	Bayesian crit. (BIC)	559.019

Source: Own survey

Note: Dy/dx is marginal effect for factor levels is the discrete change from the base level.
*, **, and *** indicates statistical significance of 10%, 5% and 1% levels respectively,
The reference (comparison group) base category is 1 (on-farm only).

4. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Agriculture is the main economic activity and key source of income for rural families. However, owing to small farm sizes and unregulated growth in population, agricultural productivity has dropped over time, forcing people to seek alternate work opportunities in order to stabilize livelihood, mitigate risks, achieve food security and reduce poverty in rural areas. This study investigates farmers' main livelihood diversification strategies in the Boricha district of the Sidama Region, Ethiopia, and examines the factors that influence these strategies.

The descriptive findings highlight that on-farm activities dominate household livelihoods, with half of the households relying exclusively on them, while others diversify into off-farm and non-farm activities. Findings from the regression indicate that the key factors influencing diversification include age, family size, education, livestock ownership, land size, market distance, income, access to credit, and extension services. Younger household heads, larger family sizes, smaller land sizes, and better credit access were positively associated with diversification. In contrast, livestock ownership, market distance, and extension services reduced the likelihood of diversification. Hence, policies should support younger households with training, improve access to credit, and invest in rural education and vocational training. Enhancing extension services, reducing market distance through better infrastructure, and supporting smallholders and livestock management can foster sustainable livelihood diversification.

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7. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Factors associated with male partner participation at participatory learning action meetings in Malga District in Sidama of Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study investigates factors associated with male involvement in the Participatory Learning Action (PLA) program in Malga District, Sidama Zone, SNNPR. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing three focus group discussions, each comprising 10 to 12 participants. Two of these groups—one male and one female—consisted of members actively participating in the PLA program, while a third group, composed of non-PLA male participants, served as a comparison. Data were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that, although community knowledge and understanding in areas of reproductive health, maternal and child care, and family planning have improved, various factors still discourage male participation in the district. Traditional cultural norms, particularly among older men, were identified as the primary barrier to male involvement. Additional factors include the distance to program centers and the availability of household labor, both of which limit participation. Age and gender differences also emerged as significant factors influencing men's engagement in the program. The study suggests that addressing cultural norms is essential for increasing male participation.

Keywords: *PLA program, Male involvement, Reproductive Health, Malga Woreda*

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, there was a substantial reduction in maternal and child mortality between 1990 and 2010 (Prost et al., 2013). However, sub-Saharan Africa and Ethiopia remain among the poorest-performing regions in this regard. According to the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey, infant mortality decreased from 97 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 48 in 2016. Under-five mortality also markedly declined from 166 per 1,000 to 67 per 1,000 live births during the same period (DHS, 2017).

Despite these improvements, the 2016 survey reported that only 28% of births were delivered by skilled health professionals, and just 32% of women had at least four antenatal care (ANC) visits during their last pregnancy. Alarmingly, 37% of women in Ethiopia had no ANC visits, with rural women being more likely to fall into this category compared to their urban counterparts (41% versus 10%). Additionally, the pregnancy-related maternal mortality ratio was 412 per 100,000 live births, while neonatal mortality stood at 29 per 1,000 live births, reflecting a 40% reduction over the past 15 years (CSA, 2017). These statistics indicate that Ethiopia is among the countries with the highest maternal and neonatal mortality rates.

Despite recent gains, addressing maternal and neonatal mortality remains a priority. The country has adopted a renewed focus on these issues within its current health sector transformation plan, aiming to reduce maternal mortality from 412 to 199 per 100,000 live births by 2020, in line with sustainable development goals (FMOH, 2015). Community-based interventions play a crucial role in achieving these targets. In such programs, community mobilization is facilitated through Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) cycles with women's groups. This approach involves a four-phase participatory process, guided by a trained facilitator, during which women's groups collectively identify priority actions and organize activities accordingly. The cycle consists of the following phases: Phase 1) identifying and prioritizing problems during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum; Phase 2) planning activities; Phase 3) implementing strategies to address priority problems; and Phase 4) assessing the activities (WHO, 2014).

Although the participation of men in reproductive health, maternal and child health programs, and family planning is vital for the success of these interventions, their involvement has historically been minimal or neglected until the 1990s. Since then, male involvement gained significant attention following the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (Onyango et al., 2010; Davis et al., 2016). This shift has been explored in greater detail elsewhere (Davis et al., 2016; Sternberg & Hubley, 2004; WHO, 2015).

Engaging men in reproductive health, maternal and child health programs, and family planning is crucial for several reasons: first, it addresses "the needs of men themselves"; second, it recognizes men as significant factors in the reproductive health of others, where they can either support their partners positively or act as barriers to health; and third, it highlights men as potential service providers (Groenewold et al., 2004). However, it is essential to design "context-appropriate" strategies to address men's concerns and enhance their engagement (Davis et al., 2016).

This study reports the findings of a study investigating factors associated with male involvement in the PLA program in the Malga District, Sidama Zone, SNNPR. By doing so, it aims to broaden the existing body of knowledge regarding men's behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes toward reproductive health issues (Cleaver, 2000), maternal and child health, and the understanding, attitudes, and practices of local communities in this regard. The study was part of an ongoing maternal and newborn health project in the district that employs PLA as a primary intervention strategy. The general objective of the study was to identify factors associated with male involvement in the PLA program. Specific objectives included exploring factors that promote or hinder male involvement, assessing the level of male participation, and examining the perceptions of both men and women regarding male partners' involvement in the PLA program.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Study Location

The study was conducted in the Malga Woreda (District) of Sidama Zone, located in the South Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Regional State. Malga district is approximately 30 km from Hawassa town. According to the 2007 population and housing census, the total population of the district is estimated to be 137,772, with 68,786 women and 68,986 men (CSA, 2008). Administratively, the district is divided into 23 rural and 3 semi-urban kebeles, with a significant proportion of the population (93%) residing in rural areas.

2.2. Study Design and Data Collection

This study employed a qualitative data collection design, utilizing three focus group discussions (FGDs) comprising 10 to 12 participants each. The first group consisted of ten women who were all members of the Participatory Learning Action (PLA) program, while the second group included twelve men who were also members of the PLA program. The third focus group consisted of twelve men who were not involved in the PLA program. All participants were farmers, with the exception of two students who practiced agriculture during their free time. Since all participants were from the Malga District, the composition of the discussion groups is believed to be homogenous and representative of the district population.

The focus group discussions were conducted under the guidance of facilitators, all of whom were native Sidama speakers. In addition to the FGDs, a review of available literature—both local and global—as well as the health sector's local strategic plan (FMOH, 2015) was conducted. This literature review assisted in providing a broader analysis of the situation, including insights into the existing healthcare system, social conditions, government efforts, and a comprehensive list of stakeholders. By reviewing these documents, a clearer understanding of the study objectives was achieved.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data gathered from the three focus group discussions (FGDs) were analyzed qualitatively and thematically. Initially, the audio recordings were transcribed from the Sidama language to English by a trained research assistant. The transcribed data were then thematically organized to identify patterns and relationships among the themes. When necessary, direct quotations from individual participants were included to accurately reflect the insiders' perspectives within the community.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Women's level of participation in PLA meetings and knowledge of the PLA program

All the participants were born in the Malga District and live in Malga District; therefore, it is a homogenous group. Discussants focused on key problems in their community including sexual, maternal, and child health, family planning, livelihood issues, and others. The level of participation and knowledge about PLA differed from group to group as presented below in groups.

3.1.1. Occupation and daily activity

There are ten women in this focus group discussion; all women except two are housewives who regularly farm, especially ensete farming, besides domestic chores. Two of the females who participated in this focus group discussion are students who also do regular domestic work besides schooling; one of the students also participates in petty trade in her free time. One female student also said that "they are organized in local student groups and advocate about sanitation and use of private pit toilets". All the women also participate in kebele community meetings when the kebele calls them to discuss communal issues.

3.1.2. Knowledge about maternal and newborn health

Women participants in this group discussion told the facilitator that they have good knowledge of maternal and newborn health and have good knowledge of what to do during pregnancy and after birth. Most of the participants believe that "mothers should regularly visit health clinics & check their pregnancy status"; moreover, they said, "mothers should visit health clinics regularly to check their health status besides following the advice of health workers". Almost all participants also believe that "delivery should be in health centers where there are medical facilities and where professional health attendants provide the necessary support to mothers". In health centers, health attendants check blood pressure, check weight, and teach about maternal and childcare health, sanitation and cleanness, what foods to eat during pregnancy, and how to keep and care for children. If laboring women need a blood transfusion, health attendants advise them to easily access blood transfusion.

Most participant women also have a good understanding of keeping clean and environmental sanitation including using toilets, washing hands, utensils, and clothes. Moreover, as one woman said and others also agreed, "mothers should eat a balanced diet like fruits, meat, milk and kocho, ensete food; eating good food is for mothers health and the health and growth of the fetus". After delivery and before delivery, mothers should strictly vaccinate and avoid problems and complications that may result from being unvaccinated.

Most discussant mothers also know about the dangers of home delivery using unpasteurized tools and with the help of untrained traditional delivery attendants; "this should be taught to women in the community regularly" as one woman said. Most participant women also agree that "pregnant mothers should also avoid heavy work & carrying heavy things". Health workers check blood pressure during pregnancy & at the time of delivery. We have a saving program and we discuss the advantages of saving.

3.1.3. Knowledge about the ongoing PLA program and participation in the program

All the partiipants in the focus group discussion agree that "most women in their neighborhood participate in the PLA program and discuss on issues related to mothers' and childrecare, pregnancy, family planning, regular check ups and learn lots of things about these issues; we also discuss about the importance of cleanness and sanitation keeping cleann, and what materials to prepare for delivery time". By participating in this group "we learn a lot and know what we did not know before this program began" as the participant women said. Because of this participation and the awarness and knowledge we gained from the activities and discussion, "health problems we used to encounter during delivery have now been reduced; for example,

in the past delivery was at home with the help of untrained traditional delivery attendants who used unsafe tools and herbs but this is not practiced anymore problems and death related with home delivery have been reducing significantly", as the discussant women spoke.

In addition to health-related issues, women also discuss saving, supporting each other, and other important things environment related to our health benefits for the current and future lives of all mothers. Through participation in the program, mothers share their experiences.

By participating in the PLA meetings, "we have learned and gained knowledge; we have changed our attitudes about many things related to maternal and child health, about family planning, and the like and these have improved mothers' health situation", which reduced mother and child mortality as most participants agree. One woman summarized her experience gained from participation in the PLA programs as follows.

> *We will exchange information and experiences with each other; for example, I, recently delivered at a health clinic during which time I learned a lot about child vaccination, suckling until six mothers when to start complementary food, and what types of additional food to give to my baby after six months. I also learned delivery in a health clinic reduces the tendency of excessive bleeding; moreover, I learned that suckling the first breast milk is good for the development of babies. In the PLA meeting, I share all this information with other women. Therefore, participation in the PLA meeting and the knowledge gained have changed our previous behavior and attitude towards reproductive and child health and care and family planning. These all have changed our sanitation behavior, our way of feeding, and money saving, and these all have brought significant changes to our life.*

3.1.4. Level of participation in PLA program and perceptions on partner participation

As most women participants reported, most men do not participate in the meeting because they are not invited. One participant woman reported that her partner does not participate; she disclosed that "my partner participates in other kebele (village) meetings. However, when there is home-to-home training about mother pregnancies, mother's health, and child care by health extension workers, which often takes place in the morning, he participates"; he does not participate, she said, "because he is not invited; had he been invited he would have come to the PLA meeting". "It was nice if he participated because it is important for both of us", she said; "I can't educate and orient him personally for he is not willing to hear or believe me; so, it is good if they invite him. "If he had attended the PLA program meeting and heard what I heard, he would understand and accept my perspective on our family issues, which could have made our lives easier. Had we participated together, we would share a similar understanding of the program," she reported

On the other hand, however, some women reported that they are not happy with their partner's participation because, as one woman put it, "My husband must keep the garden while I go to the PLA meeting; if he leaves home, I would do the something. We can't leave home at the same time and be unattended. Who will take care of our children and cattle if we leave and go together to the meeting? I would have been happy if we participated together, but one of us must take care of our family and cattle when one of us goes to the PLA program meeting". However, this does not mean that women are against men's participation; although

they support men's participation, they want to balance the safety and protection of the family and cattle PLA program participation.

Generally, many women think that men's participation in the meetings is very good because men's participation will increase men's awareness about family planning, maternal, reproductive, and childcare issues. However, they want to balance the safety of their family and the program.

3.1.5. Impression on the PLA program and assessment of its use for mothers and the community

The ongoing PLA program is very helpful for mothers because it helps to improve their and their family life situation as many women agree. Participant women reported that the program has

> *taught women ways of maintaining environmental sanitation, children care, health checkups during pregnancy, how to avoid disease-causing practices, how to improve community life, and how to protect against any danger, for example at the time of pregnancy and delivery, and how to support each other, how to prepare oneself for delivery, how to adjust the material to carry a baby, how to protect children from different diseases like measles, the advantages of regular visit to health facilities and so on.*

The use of family planning was very rare in the past; however, many women are now participating in the service program and this was made possible due to participation in the PLA program, incessant teaching by health extension workers, and expansion of health facilities by government and non-governmental organizations. In the past, for example, there was no family planning; recently, however, the use of the service has helped many women to have gaps between children as the number of children causes livelihood problems such as a shortage of food for many children.

3.1.6. Factors that encourage or discourage participation in the ongoing PLA Program

The program should have equal access to men as women; men must be aware, counselled, educated, and advised to understand the advantages of the ongoing PLA program; on the other hand, women also must share what they learned and heard in the meetings to their husbands. But many women participants agree that "there should be separate awareness creation programs for men; as you called us, you must also call men separately and educate aware them about the program; if you do so, they will be convinced and accept the program; if you do so, men will be willing to participate in the program with their fellow men and friends". This is an issue that almost all women address, and it must be given special attention.

As mentioned above, men often do not come to the PLA meetings because they are not invited. More than this, however, the issue is related to the conservative traditional norm that does not allow men and women to gather together and talk about sexual and reproductive issues. For example, about two male participants, among others, responded to the question, "Do you think the man should participate? Yes, why? No, why?" the following answers:

Participant 1

> *It is difficult to discuss these shameful [reproductive and sexual] issues in a meeting where men and women are participating together because our culture prohibits discussing sexual and reproductive issues with women, one's younger brothers, wife, children's wife, etc.*

Participant 2

> *If men and women participate in the meetings separately, they can raise different issues without any secrecy and hesitation; but if men participate with women in the same meeting they do not talk about various health reproductive issues because this is breaking a cultural taboo.*

Similar reflections from male participants have been documented in other societies. Onyango et al. (2010: 38), for instance, report, "Culturally, men don't like discussing issues surrounding reproduction with their wives. They'd rather discuss them outside with other people." Conducting meetings together to discuss sexual and reproductive matters is often avoided, with one participant noting, "Even calling the father-in-law by name is not allowed for women." Treis' research (2005) reinforces this observation. According to Treis, groups such as the Sidama, Kambata, Hadiya, and others in southern Ethiopia practice avoidance language, known as ballisha in Sidama and Kambata, to refrain from using names of mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, husbands, and clan names. Given these cultural norms, it is unsurprising that both women and men abstain from gathering together to discuss sensitive topics such as sexual, reproductive, and childcare issues.

Age difference presents another challenge; as one woman participant explained, "Elder people are not willing to discuss sexual, reproductive, and family planning issues with younger people because they feel ashamed to talk about these topics with young girls, boys, and women." Educational disparities also contribute to this hesitation, as uneducated individuals often fear embarrassment from educated young people who might highlight their lack of literacy. Young people, on the other hand, feel uncomfortable discussing sexual and reproductive issues with elders and women in public. Additionally, men show limited interest in matters of pregnancy and reproductive health, as they lack firsthand experience with the physical and emotional aspects of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood. Young people are more likely to change their views through awareness programs and education, but shifting the perspectives of older individuals remains challenging. Therefore, the PLA program should consider strategies to address these cultural barriers to foster inclusive participation in discussions about sexual and reproductive health.

3.1.7. Ways to improve men's participation in the PLA program

Continuous education, awareness creation, and advocacy by government agents, NGOs, and community leaders could eventually solve the problem. The use of separate meeting venues for men and women and different age groups is necessary and this could be facilitated by the government and NGOs. Men and women who participate in the PLA program and meetings need to share their experiences with those who do not participate. Using the authority of community leaders and government officials like village association leaders will encourage people to participate in the program and attend the meetings.

3.2. Men's level of participation in PLA meetings and knowledge of the PLA program

3.2.1. Occupation and daily activity

There were 12 participants in the male PLA program focus group discussion. Of the 12 individuals, eleven men are farmers while one individual is an elementary school teacher who works in his farming when he has free time and when he is out of school. The farmers do not have additional work; their livelihood depends on mixed farming: cultivation of crops and raising animals.

3.2.2. Knowledge about maternal and newborn health

Most participants understand that motherhood has many problems that sometimes result in death; therefore, they say "Mothers should check their health status including blood pressure, their weight, and the lying position of a fetus in their uterus regularly. Mothers also need adequate rest and sleep; this is good for the mothers and normal development of the fetus" as one male participant described. Most men discussants also know and agree that a balanced diet is good for the health of mothers and healthy and normal growth of fetuses and children. Good food includes meat, vegetables, and kocho, etc." as one participant described. Delivery should take place in health clinics with the help of trained health professionals. As some discussants said, the Sidama formerly used different kinds of herbs like soicho to prevent disease in pregnant women. Currently, taking soicho is waning because of advocacy programs that informed mothers to avoid soicho and take more fluid during pregnancy.

Male participants also believe that after birth children should get regularly vaccinated and mothers should follow up on their health status. In addition to these, "husbands must support and facilitate transport and provide the necessary money for health service and other facility expenses, and additional food purchase if necessary" as most male participants agree.

3.2.3. Knowledge about the ongoing PLA program and participation in the program

Many participants are aware that the PLA program is a very important program to sensitize men about mothers' and children's wellness and health. In these meetings, participants learn lots of things from the discussions that revolved around "vaccination, birth spacing and utilization of family planning service, eating a different type of food, sanitation, regular health checks, ways fathers could help mothers to lessen the workload of mothers, postnatal childcare, and breastfeeding" as one male participant summarized it.

Men also discuss how to support mothers in domestic work when they are pregnant and weak to do every domestic work like fetching water and wood and farming. Many men discussed that they are not mostly invited to the meetings. One male person summarized the frequency of male participation as follows:

> *I live a bit further from here; I walk for 2 hours to reach here. Due to this, I have no chance to participate frequently although I participated one day in the meeting by invitation of Mrs. Aster from our church. At that meeting, she informed us lots of very good things including the benefits of washing the breast and giving breast milk on the first day to a baby; formerly, we were taught that feeding breast*

> *milk to a newly delivered baby was bad; this was a new lesson and knowledge that I learned that day. The other thing I learned was about the vaccination of a newly born baby and children who must take 9 types of different vaccinations. Generally, before this day I did not have any interest in the program; this meeting has taught me a lot and I hope to participate in the future.*

Thus, the result of this research strengthens the claim of Davis et al (2016: 2) which says, men "have been excluded from reproductive, maternal and child health services and education" and this makes men not make an informed decision on reproductive, women and childcare health issues.

Other discussants also reported that they discussed harmful practices like female genital mutilation which causes too much bleeding and increases pain to mothers during childbirth. Moreover, men often also discussed how to take a pregnant mother to health centers quickly in the absence of an ambulance; "when we encounter this situation, we use a local stretcher (raro) to carry the woman to health facility center". "Family planning, livelihood, economic and saving issues as well as improving environmental sanitation and use of latrines were all very interesting and useful topics of discussion". All focus group discussants agree that they learned a lot from the PLA program.

3.2.4. Level of participation in PLA program and perception about partners partner participation

Most men discussants responded that their women partners participate in the PLA meetings every 15 days. However, some men responded that their partners did not always participate because their house was too far away to regularly come to the meetings.

3.2.5. Impression on the PLA program and assessment of its use for mothers and the community

Most people live in the lowland areas of the Malga district; because of this the wives of some people do not regularly participate in the PLA meetings and lack similar understanding and are less active in the PLA meetings compared with the people who dwell near the PLA program center. However, because now the advocacy is also provided through the church (in church compounds), our wives attend the program in church compounds closer to them and have good awareness. In the church meetings, our women are oriented on what types of clothes to dress when they go to church and attend church programs and prayer; moreover, they are oriented on the importance of wearing clean clothes. "Our women did not wash their body and clothes in the past and applied butter to their hair and this was unhygienic", as one participant puts it. Now many women wash their clothes and body and do not apply butter to their hair, at least when they go to church and PLA programs; so, they are now more hygienic and cleaner because of the PLA program and its meetings. "Many women have learned a lot from the ongoing PLA meetings and have improved how to handle their home affairs and children" many men agree, and they are happy with this change in the behavior of their wives. Moreover, men are happy with this program because, as one person put it, they have noticed "attitudinal and behavioral changes in their wives; in the past women did not like visiting health clinics, getting support from health professionals, and delivering in health centers; in the past women were did not even show their body to non-kin during pregnancy and childbirth. Showing one's naked body to another person was offensive to the morality of the woman and the society and

transgression of Sidama norm". Although this was reported by women, the attitude of men on this issue is not known; however, probably men also share cultural norms and attitudes because cultural norms and attitudes are shared by all or most community members, I think. On the other hand, "women were often given different types of herbs to pregnant women to expedite labor instead of going to health centers and get support to lessen labor pain and to hasten delivery; newly born children were also given different types of herbs". Most men agree that this is changing a lot nowadays and many women go to health clinics for checkups, delivery, and vaccination instead of herbs.

Those women who regularly participate in the PLA meetings inform the importance of the PLA meetings to women who do not participate in the PLA program because of different reasons. This experience of sharing and exchange of ideas in the community is changing the attitude and behavior of women. For example, "In the past, a woman stayed at home and other women put many clothes on her and waited until she gave birth; now a day, however, when a woman has any sign of labor, she goes to a health clinic by herself; therefore, carrying mothers to hospitals is now decreasing". Some men said ambulance usage is decreasing because pregnant women go to health institutions by themselves although this is probably an overstatement. Whatever the case, due to participation in the PLA program and experience sharing through the meetings, the community is changing, and men are very happy with these changes.

Men and women are learning lots of important things in their lives, including improvement of reproductive and child health, antenatal childcare, and nutrition. "For example, if one mother gives birth to a second baby before the first one matures, the mother could not feed enough breasts for both children and this affected their growth. This makes both babies prone to disease and this indulged the family into trouble. Therefore, many mothers who are participating in the PLA program are now aware of the advantages of spaced birth" as one man explained. This shows that family planning service is strengthening its roots in the community and the PLA program is playing an important role. Because mothers' care for children is improving, associated with the increase in health facilities, the number of children dying in their early childhood is decreasing as most men say. In the past, mothers gave additional food to their children at 3 or 4 months; due to the teachings of health extension workers and participation of women in PLA meetings or programs, mothers now give additional food to their young children at and after six months.

Participating men in the PLA meetings and the program is very useful because it helps men to understand family planning, mother and children's health, and to make informed participation and decisions on family affairs as described earlier. Men "are now supporting mothers when they are pregnant and weak; this support includes fetching water and wood and farming; husbands also sometimes accompanying them to health centers", as one male participant explained. On the other hand, the participation of men in the PLA programs and meetings enables the improvement of gender relations; moreover, participation could encourage men to be involved in daily household activities that were solely left to women. It also enables men and women to have similar awareness and knowledge on family planning, reproductive mothers' and children's health, and prenatal and antenatal childcare. This shared knowledge and awareness helps to improve the family relationship, reproductive health, and gender relations. Participating in these meetings and the PLA program enables men to facilitate transport to health centers, allocate necessary money for mothers' and children's health, etc. As one participant also put it,

in the past talking about reproductive health with women was a shame; after men started participating in the PLA program, and due to the knowledge gained from these meetings, their attitude is slowly changing in a positive direction. In the past, when families wanted to have additional babies, they said, 'ilammohu itawore dihooganno', meaning 'babies will grow according to their luck'. This means, that when a mother wanted to participate and use family planning services, she did not tell her husband because he may not accept her idea; this situation is changing now a day due to the increased participation of men in the PLA meetings and the awareness they get from these meetings. But more has to be done to bring significant change to men's attitudes.

Many men also opined that they encourage women to participate in the PLA program; some men even said that by participating in the PLA program, women came back home with new information to their husbands. However, as one participant says,

sometimes uneducated husbands suspect their wives for they frequently go to the PLA program meetings; this suspicion increases if a woman does not tell the whereabouts of their husband and if the husband does not clearly understand why she participates in the PLA meetings regularly; thus, male participation in the PLA meetings and increased awareness about the program could erase suspicion.

When the PLA program started, many men did not participate because men were not invited; because of this, more women were participating than men. However, as one participant explains, "After the PLA program agents reviewed their approach and widened their focus to include men, many men, including my friends, are participating and even men from faraway places are participating in the program". The level of participation, however, different individuals have different understanding; according to some people also distance discourages participation.

On the other hand, some men are still unhappy to participate with women in the program due traditional attitude that still guides gender relations in the community. Generally, men and women did not have equal participation because of the information gap during those initial periods; currently, however, although men's participation is growing, it is still lower than women's. However, the problem is not related only to tradition; in the context of this rural community, as some male participants say, women and men cannot attend the meeting on the same occasion because when the wife goes to the meeting, the husband must stay home to look after the house and the cattle and the vice versa.

3.2.6. Factors that encourage or discourage participation in the ongoing PLA Program

One way to increase male participation in the PLA program is networking and organizing men separately; as one participant put it, "Men who participate in the meetings should mobilize fellow men by telling them the advantages and importance of participation in the meetings. On the other hand, men's participation could be increased by increasing and assigning men facilitators than women facilitators."

As one participant says, in Sidama culture, people do not say "I am hungry even though they are very hungry". We do not tell many things to another person because we are afraid, but now we understand everything is for our benefit, so we inform them what is taking place in the meetings and mobilize them to participate in meetings". However, one thing is also important:

"if there is payment for participation in meetings, more men participate in different types of meetings". Generally, greater understanding and awareness of the PLA program increases when there is increased awareness about the benefits of participation in the PLA program.

Older people are embarrassed when they see female facilitators; this is due to the traditional dominance of the patriarchal system in the community which assumes public spaces are only for men; as one participant described, "Men should gather with men and women with women". Discussion on sexual issues, FGM, contraceptives, etc., in meetings where the participants admix me, women and young people are unacceptable for adult men as most of these tissues are taboos not to be discussed openly in public between males and females. For young and educated individuals of both sexes, this is not the case, anymore. "Younger and educated people are not fettered by traditional taboo and attitude and are free to discuss harmful cultural practices like FGM, piercing of gingival, and the like" as participants said. Generally, the traditional culture is the main factor that discourages the participation of men, especially adult men. Another person also told the interviewer that "some people may not regularly participate in the program because they could face a shortage of labor or have fewer children to look after cattle if the husband and wife go to the meeting together". Thus, the availability of household labor power is one factor that discourages participation in the PLA program. The availability of male facilitators is also a factor that discourages men's participation in the meetings.

3.2.7. Ways to improve men's participation in the PLA program

To increase men's participation, women should discuss with their husbands the importance and the challenges related to mother and child reproductive health problems that need the participation of both partners to solve the problems; "traditional norms are very conservative and do not change quickly; therefore, continued education is needed to bring about attitudinal changes in men. This must be done by the government to expand adult education and literacy" as one male participant explained. With education comes a culture of open discussion between partners. NGOs and kebele offices should design alternative strategies for the participation of males and females. "Because the responsibility of preparing food for the family falls on the shoulders of wives, wives must prepare breakfast early in the morning and send husbands to the program or meetings", another participant says. Women and men should also share what they learned from the meetings with each other because the information shared between wives and husbands enables them to have similar awareness of the PLA program.

There should be strong networking among neighbors- men with men and women. "NGOs may assign different tasks to different neighborhoods and this might result in competition between neighborhoods to agitate and mobilize more men to participate in the program," a teacher says. Assigning knowledgeable and experienced men to educate their fellow neighbors could be a good strategy to increase men's participation. While following strict application of schedules increases participation, interruption of schedules discourages participation.

On the other hand, the government should network and use other agents like agricultural and educational extension workers with health extension workers, NGOs, and community leaders to educate and tell the benefits of participation in the PLA program; it should also regularly disseminate information about the PLA program to community members and different stakeholders to increase men's participation. In addition, the government should also create experience-sharing forums besides giving financial and material support for the PLA program if need be; for example, the government should take the responsibility to arrange meeting

places or halls because if meetings take place in the open air, the sun and rain could discomfort or even disrupt the meetings, factors which may discourage future participation. NGOs on the other part should have awareness programs to orient about the PLA program. As the main actors of the PLA program concerned NGOs should provide stationery and other necessary materials needed to conduct the meetings; facilitators should also strictly inform the attendants to participate in meetings.

Other stallholders should be involved in mobilization and educating the community about the advantages of the PLA program meetings. Moreover, they should give different kinds of aid and support to those people who are physically disabled to positively influence them to participate in the meetings. Churches and other religious institutions are places where most people congregate occasionally for prayer and program purposes. Thus, religious institutions, especially churches should advise and orient their followers to participate in the ongoing PLA program and meetings. On the other hand, elder people should use the seera, Sidama traditional judiciary institutions, to control those community members that do not attend the PLA program meetings.

3.3. Non-Participant Male Partners' knowledge of the PLA program

3.3.1. Occupation and daily activity

There were 12 men in the male non-PLA program focus group discussion. All are farmers although half of these men also practice petty trade when they have ample time, especially in the rainy season when farming is not practiced.

3.3.2. Knowledge about maternal and newborn health

Although men in this focus discussion group are non-PLA participants, they know that pregnancy is a time when mothers are very weak and need support and care. According to most discussants, "mothers must visit health clinics for regular checkups; they must take vaccination and eat good foods. If she does not eat good foods she may face challenges during pregnancy time; a proper diet is also good for the baby's growth. Mothers should not do heavy work during pregnancy because doing heavy work and carrying heavy loads, which is common in our area especially when they go and come from the market, is not good for the mother's health and the fetus". They also suggested using other options like using horse-driven carts to carry loads. Mothers should vaccinate a baby after birth following the given schedule; this enables the baby to have proper growth, health, and strength. Thus, husbands must support mothers, especially during pregnancy, and should think about how their wives could consume a balanced diet to make them and their babies healthy. Mothers must keep clean and wash their hands and breasts before feeding their babies. Generally, although men in this group are non-PLA, they have good information about the PLA program because they had information from other participants as one person described. They did not mention they have other information sources on maternal and newborn health.

3.3.3. Knowledge about the ongoing PLA program and participation in the program

Most men in this group say they do not participate in the PLA program and meetings because they are not often invited. Because of this, most men do not have enough awareness and knowledge about the program and its importance. Most women in my neighbors participate in

the program and talk about health issues, pregnancy, vaccination, childcare, personal hygiene, environmental sanitation, cleanness, diet and food, and about saving and development. Most men agree that mothers in their neighborhood participate in the meetings.

3.3.4. Level of participation in PLA program and perception about partners partner participation

Although the men in this group do not participate in the PLA program and its meetings, almost all of them said their wives participate in the program and the meetings and they are happy about this. By participating in the meetings, women learn many things about the mother's health, what to do and what not to do during pregnancy, vaccination, how to take care of children, hygiene and cleanliness, and how and when to do her work chore. By participating in the meetings, my wife will be aware of washing her body and clothes regularly, and how to prepare good and balanced food necessary for the health and growth of children. In the meetings women also discuss the issue of saving; therefore, participation in the meeting enables her how to manage and expend money.

3.3.5. Impression on the PLA program and assessment of its use for mothers and the community

Most men agree that after their wives started participating in the PLA program meetings and educational programs, they regularly washed their hands and their babies every three days; they also shared what they learned from the meetings with their neighbors who did not participate in the meetings. The men also observed, "Their wives wash their hands when they prepare food and at meal times, they regularly wash household utensils. Moreover, they vaccinate their babies according to schedules and follow family planning methods".

None of the respondents in this group participated in the PLA program meetings. However, most non-PLA male discussants believe that the ongoing PLA is very helpful for mothers and families because "it has enabled most mothers to send their children to school, to take better care of their babies, to have active participation in development issues raised in their community, to keep their environmental sanitation and to use pit latrines more than before.

Although some discussants agree that men should participate in the PLA meetings because, as one of the focus group discussants said, "we get knowledge and awareness about reproductive health, family planning, mother and childcare, and sanitation", many participants in this group do not agree on conducting meetings with women together because talking on topics that focus on sexual issues and pregnancy are not culturally proper to discuss with women in public, as one participant pointed out:

I agree men should participate, but not together with women, younger brothers and sisters, and girls; how can you discuss sexual and reproductive issues with young girls, female relatives, your younger brothers, or brother's wives?" asks one discussant; "it is also taboo in our culture to see males or females sex organ; the picture you show us is also shameful that different sexes should not see together.

Therefore, most men agree there should be separate meetings and teaching arenas for different ages and different sexes. However, most non-PLA male participants said that most of their friends do not participate in the PLA as most discussants said.

3.3.6. Factors that encourage or discourage participation in the ongoing PLA Program

Women and men, young people and elderly people should conduct the meeting separately; otherwise, we have decided not to participate with women at the same meeting place. The facilitators should also be separated, and male facilitators should facilitate men's meetings the men and female facilitators should facilitate women's meetings. There should also be different meeting venues for different age groups.

As mentioned above discussing sexual and reproductive issues between men and women discourages both men and women from participation.

3.3.6. Ways to improve men's participation in the PLA program

To increase men's participation male facilitators should be assigned and the meeting venue should be separate for males and females; this would increase male participation. The government and NGOs should continuously create awareness creation programs. The government special should facilitate meeting venues; religious institutions should advocate and convince their followers to participate in the PLA program.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings from this study show that the PLA program is working well with women. Distance from the program center and the availability of household labor are common factors that discourage participation in the program for males as well as females. Age differences, sex differences, and cultural norms are the main factors that mostly affect males' participation in the program. Another related factor is traditional gender roles that favor males in public places. As it is known one purpose of discouraging females from the public arena is a traditional control of women. This is seen in the form of suspecting women when they regularly participate in the program and when they appear in the public arena.

On the other hand, these are all related to a lack of education, lack of awareness about the program, and backward culture. Some community members, like elders and men in general, prefer separate meeting venues because traditional norms prohibit open discussion between different age groups and sexes. Therefore, the program should design strategies that enhance male participation. This includes the preparation of separate meeting venues for males, females, and different age groups. Elders, women, and youngsters' sexual behaviors, gender norms, languages, and related cultural norms should be studied, and strategies should be designed based on the results of the findings.

Furthermore, the program must network with agricultural extension workers, development agents, and religious leaders, especially churches as churches are the main congregation areas of community members. On the other hand, the media should be a crucial instrument for awareness creation; dramas and music in the local language are very important instruments for awareness creation and intervention designs. In general, issues related to cultural norms must be studied in detail and used to strengthen the PLA program participation of males and other interventions related to family planning, reproductive health, and maternal and child care.

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6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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The state of multiparty democracy and multilevel governance under the ethiopian developmental state model: A Retrospective analysis

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Abstract

Ethiopia's experiment with the developmental state model (DSM) within its federal system has been widely contested on the grounds of its compatibility with the country's democratic and federal systems of governance. This paper argued that even though DSM tends to favor centralized state structure and authoritarian governance system, these features however are not necessarily inherent features of the model as the experiences of countries like India and South Africa demonstrate. They managed to build a democratic developmental state under a constitutionally decentralized state structure. Regarding the Ethiopian experience with the model, the article shows that Ethiopia's experiment with the DSM has been largely driven by revolutionary democracy which led to authoritarian developmentalism which significantly undermined both multiparty democracy and multilevel governance system in the country.

Keywords: *Developmental State Model, Ethiopia, ederalism, Multiparty Democracy, Multilevel Governance*

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the Ethiopian government's official adoption of the developmental state model (DSM) as a viable path to realizing rapid economic growth and industrialization, the model has served until recently (2018, a year of major political change) as the driving ideological framework for the country's political economy. However, the DSM's implementation under the leadership of the now-defunct Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF) has been a subject of debate in academic and policy circles(see for example Clapham, 2006, 2009 & 2017; Asnake, 2011; De Waal, 2012 & 2018; Lefort, 2012, and Fantini, 2013). The debates relate to, among other things, the question of whether the DSM harmoniously co-exists with the constitutionally decentralized and democratic federal system of Ethiopia.

On the one hand, proponents of the Ethiopian DSM (EDSM) argue that the model was essentially grounded in federal and democratic governance. They maintain that the democratic DSM implemented by the EPRDF delivered tangible results, as seen in the country's double-digit economic growth and the legitimation of its top leadership in successive national elections (Bereket, 2011 & 2017). On the other hand, others argue that the application of the DSM under the EPRDF's leadership was characterized by and large by "development authoritarianism" that significantly undermined democratic federalism, in particular regional autonomy, multiparty democracy, freedom of the press, and freedom for civil society organizations (CSOs) (Lefort, 2013).

The DSM has indeed been implemented in many countries across the globe, although the model's status as a distinct developmental path and its compatibility with democratic governance has been a widely contested issue among scholars and policy-makers (Mkandawire, 2001 & 2010; Leftwich, 2005). Two main arguments are espoused: the "incompatibility thesis" and the "compatibility thesis" of the model with democracy and pluralism. Indeed, many studies of the nature of the DSM have linked it to "authoritarianism". As a considerable number of scholars who studied the experiences of the East Asian developmental states (DSs) have argued (Leftwich, 2005), the model tends to promote a governance system that is "hegemonic, centrist and interventionist" and whose priority is to realize economic development above everything else, even democracy (Prado et al., 2016).

However, even though dominant scholarly views on the DSM associate it with authoritarianism, there is a counterargument, albeit less dominant. Some people oppose such an association and argue for the possibility of building a democratic developmental state model (DDSM) (Mkandawire, 2010). According to proponents of this view, who argue that there indeed are 21st-century DDSMs, authoritarianism is an exogenous, rather than an endogenous feature of the DSM and the model can thus be democratic.

But as several studies of successful East Asian developmental states such as South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan, the prototypes of the DSM, have found, the DSM is antithetical to a democratic and decentralized governance system, which weighs in favor of the "incompatibility thesis" (see for example Chang, 2002; Johnson, 1999; Kim, 1999; Evans, 1995, and Mkandawire, 2001 & 2010). The application of the DSM in a federal political system associated, at least in theory, with federal democracy raises serious questions about the compatibility of the former with the latter. In the federal political system (FPS), the essence of federal democracy lies in constitutionally entrenched multilevel governance anchored on the division of state power that confers autonomy to regional states along with political pluralism (Watts, 2002). A well-functioning federal democracy is indeed essential for the meaningful exercise of both self-rule and shared rule in a federal political system (Elazar, 1995). Hence, the experiment of DSM within the Ethiopian federation should be examined within a broader context of these ongoing debates, as well as of the country's constitutional federal political system, which provides for decentralized and democratic governance of development.

Some studies have explored the EPRDF's conception and execution of the DSM as well as the model's interplay with the country's federal system. These studies can generally be placed into two broad categories(See for example: Clapham, 2006 & 2017; Batch, 2011; Mesay, 2011; Fantini, 2013; Abbink, 2017; Berket, 2011; Addis Alem, 2013). The first comprises studies that support the "incompatibility thesis", and the second, those that support the "compatibility

thesis". Indeed, even within these broad categories, the studies vary in terms of their focus of investigation and approach of inquiry as well as their outcomes.

In terms of their focus of the investigation, studies that support the "incompatibility thesis" typically address at least one of four major themes: 1) the challenges and desirability of building a DSM; 2) the relationship between the DSM and democracy; 3) the relationship between an ethnic-based federal arrangement and the DSM; and 4) the pitfalls of applying the DSM in certain policy areas. Generally, most of the studies that support the "incompatibility thesis" share the argument that the practice of the DSM in Ethiopia by the EPRDF has undermined the country's federal system.

These studies, however, fall short of providing a comprehensive explanation of the EDSM's interplay with, and impact, on Ethiopia's federal system. They are also scanty and not sufficiently empirically rigorous in their analysis of specific policy areas and institutions. Specifically, the studies have two major limitations. First, they do not adequately explore how the DSM in and of itself (i.e. independently of other factors such as the EPRDF's ideology of "revolutionary democracy", the nature of political culture in the country, and the design of the Constitution concerning the vertical division power between tiers of government) is linked to the tendency towards centralization. Secondly, the studies appear to succumb to the myopic argument that because the DSM has worked well in East Asian countries within a context of unitary state structures and centralized systems of governance, it would not work in countries with a decentralized governance system, such as Ethiopia.

Similar is the case with studies that generally appear to support the "compatibility thesis" and the possibility of building a DDSM, and which argue that the EDSM has been executed harmoniously with the country's federal system. These studies also fall far short of critically examining and adequately explaining how the model's authoritarian tendency and the EPRDF's hegemonic rule under the EDSM have played out in the country's federal system, particularly when it comes to running a democratic and decentralized development governance system. That is, they do not specifically indicate how the implementation of the model – which is often associated with a largely authoritarian and centrist governance approach – could be reconciled with the core values and institutions of a genuine federal political system, such as democratic governance, subnational policy autonomy, policy innovation, and accountable and responsive governance.

Against this backdrop, this article aims to re-assess the impact of the practice of the DSM on multiparty democracy and multilevel governance in Ethiopia. In doing so, the specific objectives of this study are twofold. First, it points out the impact of the EDSM on multiparty electoral democracy in Ethiopia; and secondly, it pinpoints the impact of the EDSM on the country's constitutional multilevel development governance system, which guarantees autonomy for regional states to make and execute their regional development policies, as outlined under the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE).1

1 The FDRE Constitution provides for a decentralised and democratic governance of development underpinned by the core values and principles of a federal democracy and a constitutionally delineated vertical division of power between tiers of government. See Articles 1; 8; 9; 10; 12; 13; 39(1), (2) and (3); 41; 43; 50(2), (3), (4) and (8); 88; 89; 90; and 92 of the FDRE Constitution.

2. METHODOLOGY

This article assesses Ethiopia's experiment with the DSM vis-à-vis its impacts on democratic federalism from late 2002 until April 2018 (a critical juncture that saw key political changes, namely the demise of EPRDF). The study uses a retrospective research design that looks back at Ethiopia's experiment with the DSM to examine the latter's interaction with and impact on the norms and institutions of democratic federalism enshrined in the FDRE Constitution. This study employs mainly qualitative procedures for collecting and analyzing data from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include policy documents, strategic plans, and legislation. In addition, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with opposition party figures as well as senior government officials and technical experts who occupied various posts at the federal and regional state levels under the EPRDF-led government.

In selecting samples, the study relied on purposive sampling techniques, and due consideration was given to ensure that the selection of participants was fairly representative of the different socio-economic development levels of regional states across Ethiopia. Accordingly, a total of five regional states were identified and selected as participants in this study: the Gambella Peoples' National Regional State (GPNRS) and the Benishangul-Gumuz National Regional State (BGNRS), from the 'emerging regions'; and the Amhara National Regional State (ANRS), the Oromia National Regional State (ONRS), and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), from the 'developed regions.

This article is arranged into 7 sections and main parts. The first section is this introduction. Section two provides the methods and material of the study. Section three discusses the theoretical and conceptual framework of, and normative discourses on, the DSM in general. Section four describes the relationship between DSM and authoritarianism. Section five provides the core normative and institutional underpinnings of EPRDF's DSM. Section six presents the empirical analysis and findings of the paper specifically on the implication of EPRDF's experiment with the DSM against multiparty democracy and multilevel development governance (MLDG). Section Seven, concludes the paper by recapping the core arguments and findings of the study.

3. THE DSM: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In contrast to the neoclassical narrative that downplays the role of a big state on the grounds of its inefficiency in resource allocation, in the DSM, as its proponents argue, the state "governs" or regulates the market rather than letting market forces set the price of wages and goods and services. In the DSM, state intervention to address market inefficiencies is believed to create economies of scale, particularly in transitional Third World economies dominated by the primary sectors of the economy (Kim, 1999). This is one of the main attributes of the DSM as an alternative means to create capabilities to pave the way for rapid industrialization. Furthermore, citing as an example the developmental state in post-war Japan (later emulated by South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong in the 1970s and early 1990s), Johnson argues that markets do not exist in isolation but arise as a result of deliberate action in the state and politics (Evans, 1995).

It is widely argued by many scholars that the DSM draws on aspects of all of the conventional paradigms or models of economic development; as a result, it is often seen as a mid-way point

between socialism and market-led liberalism (Leftwich, 1995; Woo-Cumings, 1999; Ghani et al., 2005). While experiences with the DSM differ from one country to another, one can point out certain core elements that are shared by all of the countries that have adopted it.

First and foremost, the DSM emphasizes the importance of active state intervention in managing, governing, and regulating the economy. The state plays an active role in regulating the market, building essential public infrastructure, redistributing resources as well as producing and providing goods and services which the private sector is unwilling or unable to provide (Leftwich, 1995, p. 400–402). The DSM specifically allows for state-led capitalism within liberal economic principles. This in turn requires the "developmental" state to have at least two essential attributes: the state must have the capacity to control a vast majority of its territory, and it must possess a set of core capacities that enable it to design and deliver various development policies (Ghani, 2005). This is one of the main reasons for considering the DSM as an alternative path to bringing about rapid economic growth and structural transformation towards industrialization in transitional economies with huge market inefficiencies, such as Ethiopia.

Secondly, nationalism and a national vision lie at the heart of the DSM. This is so because it is not sufficient for the DSM to only have development-oriented goals and policies; it also needs to be capable of effecting national mobilization towards these goals. National mobilization is crucial for gaining consensus on developmental projects and enabling the state to mobilize or rally broad sections of the populace for their execution (Woo-Cumings, 1999). This means people from the apex of power down to farmers in villages need to align themselves with, and sing to the tune of, the "development agenda" set by the leadership at the top (Woo-Cummings, 1999).

Thirdly, embedded autonomy is another key tenet of the DSM. "Embedded autonomy" refers to the nature of the relationship that should exist between a strong interventionist state and other social agents, such as influential private businesses, landlords, and the like (Evans, 2005). According to Evans, under the DSM, the state is believed to be autonomous as long as it has a rationalized bureaucracy characterized by meritocracy and long-term career prospects – traits that make civil servants more professional and detached from the influence of powerful rent-seeking groups. It is this "autonomy", according to Evans, which gives a state the ability to define and pursue its strategic developmental goals; the "embeddedness" of this "autonomy" is created by forming alliances with key social groups that enable the state to achieve its developmental goals.

As the experience of successful East Asian developmental states shows, it is also essential that, under the DSM, there are pilot agencies responsible for policy planning, coordinating, and overseeing implementation (Chang & Evans, 2005). For instance, during its experience with the DSM between the 1960s and the 1980s, South Korea had a powerful pilot agency known as the Economic Planning Board (EPB), with the responsibility not only to undertake policy and strategy planning but also to control the allocation of budget. The primary role of the EPB was coordinating the activities of other key players in the economy, including the then Ministry of Commerce and Industry, which was in charge of formulating and implementing sectoral policies as well as all overseeing banks and state-owned enterprises. The same holds for Taiwan, Singapore, and Japan (Chang & Evans, 2005).

Meanwhile, another important institutional factor for the DSM relates to the party system. Under the DSM, the party system plays a crucial role in defining the appropriate ideological orientation, institutions, and policies to be adopted; the success of the DSM is often linked, among other things, to the party system in that the latter is the main driver of the ideology of developmentalism and its translation into institutions and practices (Bogaards, 2013). Based on the number of parties and the level of democratic competition, party systems can be categorized as one-party, two-party, and multiparty systems. A one-party system is an autocratic power where only a single party is constitutionally entitled to rule a state and all forms of political opposition are banned by law. Cuba, North Korea, and China are examples of one-party systems. In a two-party system, the political arena is, of course, dominated by just two parties – other parties might exist but they have little or no political significance. A multiparty system represents broader political constituencies and integrates society into the democratic process; it forms the basis for stable political coalitions and governments, particularly in situations of great uncertainty about electoral outcomes and political matters generally. See Bogaards (2013).

In developing states, party politics are usually associated with either a dominant party or a hegemonic-party system (Woo-Cumings, 1999, p. 9). According to Woo-Cumings (1999, p. 5), a dominant-party system, otherwise known as a hegemonic-party system is one in which the incumbent is dominant to such an extent that its victory at elections is a mere formality. In these systems, incumbents face a very limited degree of competitive electoral challenge. The DSM often tends to embrace party politics that expedite developmental policy-making and enforcement with little or no procedural hurdles (Woo-Cummings, 1999). Under the DSM, therefore, a dominant, if not hegemonic, party system is viewed as apposite for expedited collective action that facilitates centralized rent creation and distribution (Booth, 2012). The importance of a hegemonic party under the DSM is underlined by Leftwich (1998, p. 400):

In the DSM, without a dominant-party political rule, developmental elites would be divided or paralyzed and relative state autonomy would have been impossible and the bargaining demands of special interests would have come to predominate and the bureaucratic continuity and capacity may be compromised in a way that would be unlikely to serve national developmental goal/national development goals.

Last but not the least, the other feature of the developmental state is its tendency to change itself toward authoritarian regimes. Indeed, studies conducted on the nature of the DSM have often linked the model with - authoritarianism. As a considerable number of scholars who have studied the experiences of the East Asian DSs have often argued, the model is largely viewed as tending to promote a governance system that is - hegemonic, centrist, and interventionist- whose priority is to realize economic development more than anything else, even democracy (For more on this, see: Chu, 2016; Prado et al., 2016). East Asian DSs often described to have had traditional marks of heavy temptations toward authoritarianism which is in the words of Samuel Huntington's - legacies of oriental despotism- as their shared behavior (Leftwich, 2005, p. 686). Some of the explanations given to the authoritarian governances embedded with the DSM are the state must ease itself from the procedural hurdles of democracy to deliver fast economic growth not to mention that governments need to stay in power for a longer period to ensure continuity of policy that would transform the country (Fantini, 2013).

Even though the dominant scholarly views on the DSM associate it with authoritarianism, there is a counter narration, albeit not dominant, that opposes such association and argues for the possibility of building a democratic developmental state model (DDSM) (see Mkandawire,

2010; Chibber, 2014). According to the proponents of DDSM, authoritarianism is an exogenous, rather than endogenous, feature of the DSM, and the model can be democratic arguing that there indeed are 21st century democratic developmental states (Chibber, 2014, Evans, 2010; Mkandawire, 2010). In Ethiopia too, the dominant view is that the EPRDF- s DSM has had authoritarianism as its dominant characteristic feature of the Ethiopian DSM (see Abbink, 2017; Clapham, 2018; Ermias, 2021). There are however some who maintain that Ethiopia- s experiment with the model has been one of a DDSM, and they further argued that the model has been implemented in a manner that complements the country's federal arrangement (see for example Berket, 2011; Meles, 2012; Addis Alem, 2013). Let's then see the relationship that DSM has with an authoritarian mode of governance.

4. DSM AND AUTHORITARIANISM: ARE THEY INHERENTLY LINKED?

Leftwich (2008) maintains that democratic consolidation has three fundamental features, namely, legitimacy, the institutionalization of rules and procedures, and the exercise of policy restraint by the winning parties. As Leftwich (2008, p. 127) argued, the DSM tends towards an authoritarian governance system as a necessary evil to address the underdevelopment problem by curtailing the consolidation of democracy. In this regard, the dominant conception of the DSM, as argued by considerable scholars (Huntington, 1987; Robinson & White, 1998; Prado et al., 2016; Ohno, 2008; Chu, 2016) pays little heed to democratic governance but for development authoritarianism. Indeed, one of the contending issues that often arise in the case of DSM is the interaction of the model with democracy (Woo-Cumings, 1999; Chibber, 2014). This is, noted by Fritz & Menocal (2007, p. 536) as 'historically, many developmental states have been based on various forms of non-democratic political regimes: monarchies in nineteenth-century Europe, capitalist dictatorships in South Korea and Taiwan, and communist authoritarian regimes in contemporary China and Vietnam. Furthermore, in describing the importance of an expedient governance system under the DSM over democracy which is viewed as a hindrance for it provides procedural cumbersome in decision-making and enforcement, it is pointed out by Fritz & Menocal (2007, p. 36) as follows:

> In the case of authoritarian developmental states, power tends to be centralized in the hands of a few key actors and/or institutions, enabling political leaders to make and implement decisions (especially 'difficult' ones that may be opposed by certain segments of the population) more quickly. One of the characteristics of a democratic system, in contrast, is the diffusion of power among various sets of actors and institutions both inside and outside the government, which inevitably slows down the decision-making process, and makes it more difficult to take decisions that hurt important constituencies.

Some scholars even considered authoritarianism as an essential element for the success of DSM and as one of the factors that enhanced the developmental capacity of the Asian developmental states in the 1970s and 80s (Huntington, 1987). For instance, Huntington (1987, pp. 14-15) in his analysis of the incompatibility of democracy and development in transitional poor societies pointing that democratic governments would simply be too "soft" and hence unable to mobilize resources, curtail consumption, and promote investment to achieve a high growth rate. Therefore, he stresses that, during the process of political development in developing countries, political leaders must focus on strengthening political authority, maintaining social order, and promoting political institutionalization to create a favorable political environment for economic development (Woo-Cumings, 1999).

Similarly, Leftwich (2008) argues that the discourse that dominates the course of development governance under the DSM is overcoming the 'structural contradiction' between democracy and development represents the most significant challenge in realizing democratic developmentalism. This is due to the lengthy process and sometimes stalemate that may arise in democracies where consultation, deliberation, and consent an ingredient of the process of democratic decision-making. Whereas, in DSM expediting radical decision-making is more desirable than the lengthy and costly democratic process (Leftwich, 2007, p. 127). In a similar vein, Bolesta (2007, p. 111) asserts that the DSM would be difficult to sustain in a fully democratic system in which people enjoy extensive political rights. According to this view, if the management of the state is developmental, then a form of authoritarianism can probably replace a democratic system, where the power legitimacy is drawn from developmental achievements and not directly from public elements (Fujiwara, 1992). In this regard, an effective DSM inevitably requires developmental dictatorship where according to Fujiwara (1992, p. 329) "economic development requires the centralization of power and stability, while democratization needs the separation of powers and institutionalization of political changes." Such an 'economic development first' argument is embedded in the DSM that emphasizes that in developing countries if democratization is sought before economic development, it would be disadvantageous and not conducive for conditions of development to arise (Fujiwara (1992, p. 329).

Indeed, successful East Asian developmental states were authoritarian in their approaches to enforcing developmental policies to realize fast growth within a short period (Mkandawire, 2001). In these countries, fearing that adherence to democracy would lead to unruliness and disorderly conduct that would be disadvantageous to development, they considered democracy in the short-term as a luxury they could hardly afford, and thus they focused more on developing discipline than democracy (Mackie, 1998). Their impressive success is some claims that should not implicate that states need to be authoritarian to be developmental (Mkandawire, 2001). The proponents of this view, point out several authoritarian but anti-developmental or non-developmental states in Africa and Latin America. In this regard, Brazil, Botswana, Mauritius, and South Africa are very good examples (Mackie, 1998).

However, the fact that it is possible to name a good number of authoritarian developmental states does not settle the issue as there are however few democratic experiments (Chibber, 2014). Contrary to the description of the DSM as authoritarian in its tendency, there are, however, they are few, who argue that development authoritarianism is rather exogenous than endogenous factors in the DSM and it can be democratic and even there is essentially 21centuray democratic developmental state (Chibber, 2014, Evans, 2010; Mkandawire, 2010). According to this view, unlike the 20th century's DSM, in the 21st century, the DSM is conceived as being primarily concerned with human well-being, and development strategies and policies cannot be formulated by technocrats but must be derived from organized public deliberations (Evans, 2010). In this regard, deliberative and participatory democratic institutions are seen as central to a 21st-century conception of the DSM (Evans, 2010).

The general assertion that the DSM is inherently authoritarian is therefore challenged as it is hardly possible to make a simple generalization about the inherent relationship between the DSM and authoritarianism given some democratic experiences such as Japan (Chibber, 2014). Randall (2007, p. 635), for instance, contends that the DSM must be democratic as authoritarian systems are a major hindrance not only to political development but also to economic progress. Democracy has a detrimental role in enhancing the effectiveness of the

state in bringing about development (Lange & Rueschmyer, 2005). As Mkandawire (2005, p. 47) argues, a democratic DSM that embraces a system of checks and balances and one that is based on broad-based state-society alliances ensures popular participation in governance and the transformative processes. Thus, the conclusion is drawn that the DSM is autocratic by nature and thus not fitting with a democratic context. Such a conclusion is erroneous because first, not all the east Asian tigers were authoritarian. For instance, Japan was democratic while South Korea was authoritarian. Second, that the Asian type of the DSM was autocratic does not mean that others too have to be also autocratic (Randall, 2007).

Generally, even though it may not be appropriate to describe the DSM as inherently undemocratic, as shown above, a considerable number of scholars characterize it as being often associated with 'development authoritarianism'. For example, Woo- Cumings (1999, p. 19-20) notes that the DS can be "good in terms of its effectiveness but it can also be ugly for its undemocratic and authoritarian tendencies, explicitly or implicitly" Given such a normative depiction of the DSM as an authoritarian mode of governance, what would be the issues of incompatibility - at least in principle - that the application of the DSM in an FPS may raise given that the latter is often attributed to democratic governance that promotes political pluralism and multilevel governance system? Let's see the Ethiopian experience concerning multiparty and multilevel governance perspectives.

5. AN OVERVIEW OF THE EPRDF'S DSM

As recorded in various party and official government documents, the EPRDF's DSM largely draws on the emulation of the development path of the NICs, such as South Korea and Taiwan that had proclaimed the essence and aspects of its hegemonic developmentalism under its DSM (EPRDF, 2010; Altenburg, 2010; Abbink, 2011a). In this regard, for example, the Ethiopian government invited Japanese and Korean experts to advise the country on industrial policy (Altenburg, 2010). The various development policies prepared by the federal government exhibit policy parallels with that of the east Asian DSs where they state, as their pillars, early focus on boosting agricultural productivity to accumulate capital; increasing supply for agro-industries; providing incentives for export orientation; and implementing - carrot and stick-policies for enterprises (Abbink, 2011a). In this connection, as stated by Abbink (2011a, p. 598) ADLI, IDS, and GTPs, along with other party documents, are the best indication that the adoption of the DSM in Ethiopia marks the fourth phase in reforming and shaping the post-1991 Ethiopian state.

Generally, as often argued by the EPRDF (2010), the DSM that the party sought to build in Ethiopia has at least three core features (EPRDF, 2010; Meles Zenawi Foundation, 2017). These are a firm conviction that development must be considered and treated as an existential question; political and economic independence of the state or government from the influence of the economic elite; and ensuring the hegemony of developmental thinking. According to EPRDF, by embracing these principles and features, the EDSM will eventually help to extricate the country from poverty, to attain a middle-income economy as of 2020-2023 (EPRDF, 2010, p. 45). Consequently, undertaking development and bringing about structural transformation is considered to be not only an economic objective but also - perhaps primarily - a political one as well (Altenburg, 2010; Abbink, 2011). This, as some argue, is an indication of the EPRDF's motive and intent that it had sought legitimacy to stay in power that is derived not from the ballot box but principally from its developmental success (Bach, 2011, pp. 641-663). This has been implemented by the EPRDF by blending its old political program known as revolutionary

democracy- propelled by - democratic centralism- with DSM which it had sought to make a hegemonic ideology to govern the political economy of the country. This is underlined in one of the front political documents as - The Developmental State Model needs a developmentally-oriented dominant party that would stay in power until and up to its developmental mission is achieved when the core tents of developmental objectives are realized(EPRDF, 2010, p. 45).

Indeed, as can be gleaned from major party and government policy documents, such as democracy and development (2006), rural development and transformation (2002), capacity building (reforms on civil service, education, and justice sector), etc., the influence of revolutionary democracy tuned developmentalism is apparent. As some argued, by blending the ethos and institutions of the DSM and revolutionary democracy, it seems the EPRDF sought to project itself as a vanguard party and sought to obtain - legitimacy- from its developmental success through the proper implementation of the DSM (Abbink, 2011b, pp. 596-618). Hence, as Lefort (2013) noted that the EPRDF in its effort to institutionalize the DSM in Ethiopia includes undertakings to build a vanguard capitalist state where the party (EPRDF) is the omniscient and omnipresent propeller of the political economy of the state, along with the principles, paths, and goals of developmentalism.

The EPRDF however has often claimed that the developmental success recorded over the past two decades was the result of its efforts and effective leadership in applying a democratic DSM in Ethiopia (Bereket, 2011). In this view, the EPRDF- s efforts in building a democratic DS helped the party to get the legitimacy to stay in power through the free consent of the public, who expressed their approval of the party at the various national elections, as recognition of its success in entrenching democracy while achieving a commendable double-digit economic growth since late 2002. On the contrary, critics have often castigated the mode of execution of the DSM by the EPRDF, claiming that it was characterized by development authoritarianism, specifically by undermining regional autonomy and multiparty democracy, press freedom, and freedom for civil societies (Hagmann & Abbink, 2011; Lefort, 2017). Let us now turn to see the impact that the experiment with the DSM made on democracy and multilevel development governance as enshrined in the FDRE Constitution.'

6. IMPACTS OF THE EPRF'S DSM ON MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY AND MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM IN ETHIOPIA

6.1. Impact on multiparty democracy

Various scholars argue that the adverse consequences of the practice of the EDSM by the EPRDF began to make themselves felt in the country's political space and democratization process following the much-contested 2005 general elections. According to these scholars, this period was a watershed moment that saw a marked intensification in the developmentalist discourse as the DSM started to take root at a practical level.2 The post-2005-election period is thus often depicted as the climax of the EPRDF's hegemonic rule, but unfortunately, it also

2 Since the federalisation of the Ethiopian state in 1995, one national election has been held every five years. Except for the 2005 elections, which saw relatively stronger results by opposition parties, the EPRDF has been the winner in all four elections. Indeed, after the demise of the EPRDF, a national election was held in 2021 in which the "successor" of the EPRDF (after the merger of three of its parties except TPLF) Prosperity Party won a slide victory but some opposition parties and individual contenders secured few seats.
Interview with an opposition party member and former member of the HoPR during the 3rd Parliamentary Season, 5 November 2018, Addis Ababa.

marks an apparent regression in political pluralism in general and multiparty democracy in particular (Abbink, 2011b).

Such a practice of dominant-party politics by the EPRDF under the guise of pursuing a DSM in Ethiopia has been widely criticized for undermining political pluralism, as the party's hegemonic developmental discourse and practice adamantly adhered to exclusionary politics and policies. As one informant put it:

The intention and the practice on the ground had been to keep an iron grip on political power where the EPRDF has long been controlling the political space and all of the state apparatus. The EPRDF, especially following the historic 2005 elections, had been unleashing widespread smear campaigns against the political opposition, independent media, civil society, and the like, using such humiliating labels as "enemies of [the] developmental path", "agents of neoliberalism", "anti-peace elements", and, in the worst cases, branding them as terrorists, which makes them a legitimate target of the party's clampdown measures taken in the name of development.3

The adoption of the DSM in Ethiopia has led to a regression in the country's electoral democracy, with a reversal taking place in the trend of progressive increase in representation of opposition parties in Parliament witnessed during the first three national elections before 2010 and culminating in literally no opposition representation at all in the 2015 elections. Such a situation is consistent with the prevailing view in the literature on the DSM that the state under the DSM has to be undemocratic to stay in power for long enough to be able to achieve its developmental agenda.

Despite this regression in electoral democracy and political pluralism in a supposedly multiparty system, some see the matter otherwise. Various scholars maintain that the mere fact that all of these national elections were held periodically is in itself a sign of a well-functioning democratic process and a testament to the EPRDF's commitment to democracy and development. In this regard, one key informant stated the following:

[The party] had been able to win the hearts and minds of the rural majority [which] led to its victory in the last four general elections held in the country. And its long-standing political dominance and stay in power in the country is a result of changes in the political culture in the country where it is getting into a new era where we have one dominant party – the EPRDF – which played the game according to [the game's] rules, [rules that] paved the way for its [victoriousness] within the context of a multiparty setting as outlined under the [FDRE] Constitution.4

For those who are of the view that the DSM is compatible with a democratic system, the EPRDF's practice under the EDSM is seen as similar to the experience of countries like Japan and South Africa, where a dominant-party system exists within a democratic milieu. Such commentators thus try to justify their claims by equating the EPRDF with the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and the National Democratic Party (NDP) in Japan, which would imply that the EPRDF had been obtaining the popular mandate to rule the country through democratic elections in a competitive multiparty context where state power follows rules of the game that accord with principles and institutions set forth under the 1995 FDRE

3 Interview with an opposition party member and former member of the HoPR during the 3rd Parliamentary Season, 5 November 2018, Addis Ababa.

4 Interview with the head of the Institute of Policy Studies, March 2018, Addis Ababa.

Constitution. Such a view, however, is fiercely opposed by the EPRDF's critics, who see the party's conception and implementation of the DSM in general and its conduct of dominant-party politics in particular as a cover-up for iron-fisted, authoritarian rule (Mesay, 2011; Lefort, 2012). According to these critics, the EPRDF's politics falls within the ambit not of a dominant-party system but of an authoritarian, hegemonic-party system – one where the outcomes of elections are a foregone conclusion and there is a lack of strong opposition parties.

Overall, the EPRDF's attempt to establish itself as a dominant party championing the ideals and institutions of the DSM brought about major changes in the country's political landscape. Under the EDSM, the EPRDF sought to project itself as a hegemonic developmental party, and in so doing acted against the values and principles of the FDRE Constitution.5

6.2. Impact on democratic multilevel development governance

Democratic multilevel development governance is embedded within the FDRE Constitution, which prescribes that development governance has to carry out in transparent, accountable, participatory, and responsive ways. 6 Specifically, Chapter 10 of the FDRE Constitution provides for the respective tiers of government in the federation and sets out, in Article 85, the objectives and governing principles for the formulation and execution of policies on social, economic, and environmental matters. The question is how the authoritarianism that characterized the EPRDF's developmentalism affected democratic multilevel development governance in Ethiopia.

Some criticisms of the EDSM were directed at how various development policies and projects were formulated and executed, while others raised concerns about economic efficiency and sustainability, environmental feasibility, fair distribution, and equitable benefit-sharing at national, regional, and local levels. Leaving aside the criticisms about economic efficiency and feasibility (as important as these questions are), the criticisms raised against such projects based on other grounds are related to the guiding rules, principles, and values of the federal political system of Ethiopia, which guarantees a democratic and decentralized development governance system at all levels in the country. This is specifically reflected in terms of such important considerations and virtues of a federal arrangement as the regional states' policy autonomy, as well as the core values and principles of a federal democracy that promote, among other things, responsive, participatory and accountable governance.

The approach to development governance under the EPRDF's "developmental hegemonism" was characterized largely by the federal government's extremely centralized and authoritarian policy-making and execution practices. This was reaffirmed by participants in the FGDs, specifically, those who were members of the House of People Representatives (HoPR and regional councils, who said it was a grave disciplinary offense to challenge policies already endorsed by the party's executive committee. This, as most of the FGD participants noted, was due to the unwritten rule that members may raise questions only on issues of implementation rather than on the policies themselves. According to one participant from the HoPR, "challenging the party's policies would be tantamount to challenging the party itself … it could result in one being subjected to criticism [- -] and self-criticism [- - -- -], and even sometimes

5 Interview with the head of the Press Secretariat at the Office of the Prime Minister, 10 March 2018, Addis Ababa.

6 For example, see Articles 12, 52(1)(a) and 52(2)(c), 43(2), and 89(6) of the FDRE Constitution.

disciplinary measures for those who persisted in their stand".7 Similarly, an informant from the ONRS observed as follows:

> The EPRDF created conditions in which, far from being able to exercise their policy-making and implementation autonomy as clearly provided in the FDRE Constitution, regional states were not permitted to have a say about policies developed at the center. Instead, once a policy was endorsed by the party, it simply rolled down to regions, where regional officials had to enforce it, with little to no opportunity available to them to challenge it.8

The informant mentioned, as an example, the case of the Integrated Addis Ababa-Oromia Master Plan, which affected surrounding areas of the ONRS. Some of the participants said that the EPRDF's tight party control intensified, especially following the much-disputed 2005 national elections, with top-down intervention justified based on an urgent need to serve the national interest. This deprived the platform of entertaining diverse views and critical voices that could have helped to ensure better ownership of the government's development projects by the public.9 The EPRDF's exclusionary approach to development policy planning and execution, as one informant described it, "hindered the building of a common national development agenda".10

The EPRDF seems to have been attempting to apply the DSM based on its age-old Leninist belief in a vanguard party guided by the "I know for you" logic – all of which contributed to the apparent lack of ownership among the public of the policies made by the central government, not to mention the disfranchisement of the grassroots and the erosion of the accountability of regional and local administrations to the general public. For example, the Large Scale Commercial Farming (LSCF) projects, which are based on geographical differentiation, are often mentioned as an illustration of the EPRDF-led government's elitist and exclusionary approach to developmental policy planning and execution. These projects were oftentimes designed and executed with little or no prior consultation with the concerned bodies, be they regional and local administrators or the general public that would be affected by the projects.11

Indeed, some research participants criticized the government's choice of lowland areas for LSCF projects, saying it evinced an intrusive and exclusionary approach. 12 In turn, the government sought to justify its actions by pointing out the need to exploit the comparative advantages of these lowlands, given their combination of sparse population density and vast expanses of land with flat topography that makes it particularly suitable for irrigated mechanized farming.13 The government's preferred policy approach here has been to promote the leasing of land to foreign and domestic investors. This approach, as one informant from the GPNRS, commented, constitutes:

> [a] double-standard approach between the highland areas and the lowland areas. People in the lowland areas, such as the GPNRS, have been at the periphery of the power relations with rulers at the center of Ethiopia since the 19th century. And the EPRDF has simply maintained

7 Interview with a member of the HoPR and Chairperson of the Trade and Industry Affairs Standing Committee on Addis Ababa, 14 July 2019, Addis Ababa.
8 Interview with members of ONRS State Council, 18 February 2019, Addis Ababa.
9 Interview with an official at ONRS Plan and Development Commission, 5 December 2019, Addis Ababa.
10 Interview with a member of the HoPR, 14 July 2019, Addis Ababa.
11 Interview with a member of BGNRS State Council and a former official at the GPNRS Agriculture and Natural Resource Bureau, 5 December 2019, Addis Ababa.
12 Interview with the former President of the GPNRS and an official at the GPNRS Agriculture and Natural Resource Bureau, 14 October 2019, Addis Ababa.
13 Interview with a former official at the Ministry of Agriculture, 9 July 2019, Addis Ababa.

this historically lopsided center-periphery political relationship, where the center dominates the peripheries and dictates to them to execute development plans formulated by the center with little or no consultation.14

In a similar vein, a key informant from the BGNRS noted that there has been a hierarchical relationship between the center, led by the EPRDF, and the peripheries, led by affiliated parties.15 There is no doubt that, as far as developmental policy-making and execution are concerned, the EPRDF dominated the entire process in an apparent violation of what is enshrined in the FDRE Constitution, be it the sovereignty of nations, nationalities, and peoples or the regional states' autonomy to make and execute their policies without undue influence by the federal government. The practice, moreover, has been that the central government's development plans result in the dispossession of resources from the peripheries for mega-development projects such as industrial parks, hydroelectric dams, and LSCFs. In most of these projects, deals were made with domestic and foreign companies without the involvement or consent of the respective regional state governments and the local residents, particularly so in lowland areas such as the GPNRS and BGNRS.16

Similarly, in the case of Industrial Park Development Projects (IPD), informants from the respective IPD agencies of the ANRS and the ONRS underscored that the federal government often obligated the regional states to provide land for the development of industrial parks in their respective regions by the federal government, parks which were designed with little or no consultation.17 The absence of regional-state participation in the planning and execution of development projects such as LSCFs and IPDs, as an informant from the ONRS Planning Commission, explained,

closes up avenues that could create democratic and non-authoritarian social, political, and economic relations between and among the federal government and regional states, eventually ensuring that peoples' right to development and their freedoms and democratic rights are not undermined in the name of developmentalism as pursued by the EPRDF under the helm of the DSM.18

Similarly, as informants from the SNNPR noted, the absence of participation by regional states in policy and project design at the federal level denied them important platforms, inter alia, for expressing regional interests and priorities in the exercise of the rights to self-determination, self-rule and shared governance enshrined in the FDRE Constitution.19

The lack of participation and engagement of stakeholders and citizens often resulted in severe criticism and grievances which, according to some observers, led the EPRDF to dig its own grave, as seen in the case of the Integrated Addis Ababa-Oromia Master Plan (IAOMP).20 This has been mentioned as a typical case that shows the ramifications of the EDSM's authoritarian developmentalism.21 The IAOMP was widely castigated by observers for being

14 *Interview with a former official at the GPNRS Agriculture and Natural Resources Bureau, 19 October 2019, Addis Ababa.*
15 *Interview with an official at the GPNRS Office of the Chief-Administrator, 19 October 2019, Addis Ababa.*
16 *Interview with a former official at the GPNRS Agriculture and Natural Resource Bureau and member of the central Committee of the then ruling party of the BGNRS, 19 October 2019, Addis Ababa.*
17 *Interview with an official at the ANRS Industrial Parks Development Corporation and an official at the ONRS Industrial Park Development Cooperation, 19 July 2019, Addis Ababa.*
18 *Interview with an official at the ONRS Plan and Development Commission, 7 November 2018, Addis Ababa.*
19 *Interview with an official at the SNNPR Council, 18 April 2019, Hawassa.*
20 *The IAOMP, the tenth subnational integrated plan, was designed to be implemented from 2014 to 2037. The aim of the Master Plan, as stated in the original document, is "to developmentally link Oromia special zones and the City of Addis Ababa to improve the quality of life of citizens as well as contribute to the economic growth and development of the nation" (AACPO, 2017).*
21 *Interview with an official at the ONRS Urban Development Bureau, 5 December 2019, Addis Ababa.*

carried out in an authoritarian manner, as manifested, among other things, in the top-down, exclusionary, and coercive formulation and implementation of development policies with no, or little, consultation with and consent from concerned stakeholders such as the ONRS, local administrators and farmers. 22 Degefa (2019, pp. 1–2) describes the practice as follows:

The plan is imposed "from above" as has always been, while a real development plan needs the free and informed consent of the affected people and includes measures to avoid or minimize any possible destruction to local communities. The designers of the Master Plan refuse to recognize examples from other parts of the world concerning legitimate development and ignore Oromo protests of unprecedented scale that have already led to hundreds of innocent victims. Such patterns are clear indicators of the designers' intent to destroy the Oromo identity in the area under the guise of the "Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan".

These sentiments were confirmed by an informant from the ONRS, who explained the process of planning and (attempted) execution of the IOAMP as follows:

> *The problem with this Master Plan is both in its content and manner of enforcement. When I say "content", I mean the federal government does not have the power to make detailed plans such as the IAOMP and oblige regional states and local governments to enforce [them]. The fact on the ground was that in the case of the Master Plan, the administration in the ONRS was pressured by the EPRDF's officials at the party's higher echelon to enforce the IAOMP, which [was] prepared from the very beginning with little consultation and consent from the region, which, as seen later, erupted in fierce disagreements between the EPRDF leadership and the OPDO [Oromo People's Democratic Organisation].23*

What the IAOMP illustrates is that plans are often prepared with little or no consultation with the stakeholders concerned, be they regional or local officials or people at the grassroots.24 Most of the informants from the ONRS stated that the IAOMP was prepared by a few elites, with little consultation, coordination, and cooperation between officials of the ONRS and Addis Ababa from the inception of the plan up to the stage where it was to be implemented.25 The IAOMP was formulated within small circles, mainly by EPRDF "big men" on its executive committee and a few confidante-technocrats. One informant from the ONRS planning and development commission said that "if you want a textbook example of centralized governance by the EPRDF that disregarded the federal system in general, and regional state autonomy in particular, it's the Addis Ababa-Oromia Special Zone Integrated Master Plan". 26

Indeed, the IAOMP is mentioned by a considerable number of scholars as a watershed moment that marks the pinnacle and decline of the centrist, top-down and exclusionary approach to development governance of the EPRDF. The announcement of the Master Plan triggered massive public protests across the ONRS, which eventually led to the disintegration of the EPRDF's democratic centralism and the resignation of Prime Minister HailemariamDessalegne in April 2018.

22 *Interview with a member of the ONRS Council, 7 November 2018, Addis Ababa.*
23 *Interview with a former official at the ONRS Finance and Economic Development Bureau, 18 February 2019, Addis Ababa.*
24 *Interview with an official at the ONRS Urban Development Bureau, 5 December 2019, Addis Ababa.*
25 *Interview with a member of the ONRS Council, 7 November 2019, Addis Ababa.*
26 *Ibid.*

7. CONCLUSION

This article examined the impact of the DSM on Ethiopia's federal system in light of the Constitution's framework, on the vertical division of policy-making, execution, and administration powers between the federal government and regional state governments. It showed how the core ideological and institutional drivers of the EDSM – a dominant-party system and a hegemonic, centralized, top-down approach to policy formulation and execution – significantly undermined the democratic multilevel system of development governance provided under the FDRE Constitution.

Generally, the practice of the DSM in Ethiopia under the leadership of the EPRDF undermined the essence of a democratic system of multilevel development governance anchored on the values and principles of a federal democracy and a vertical division of power between tiers of government, as outlined in the 1995 FDRE Constitution. The result has been a regression in multiparty democracy and an infringement of regional states' autonomy to formulate and implement their local development policies and plans.

Consequently, the EPRDF's mode of execution of the DSM in Ethiopia contributed to the frequent civil unrest and public protests that the country witnessed from 2015 onwards and which culminated in a reshuffle of the top political leadership within the EPRDF as well as the government. Moreover, there has since been a series of political developments that have triggered profound changes in the political arena, in particular a shift towards a liberal political-economic model and a waning of the DSM and the EPDRF's long-held "revolutionary democracy" ideology. In the process, the EPRDF has even been dismantled and rebranded as a new party, the Prosperity Party, led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

On taking office in March 2018, the Prime Minister announced major reforms across the political, economic and social frontiers of the country that were previously considered off-limits by the EPRDF. Importantly, he began his premiership by criticizing the DSM as an outdated political-economic ideology (Ahmed, 2018). It is thus hoped that this article will serve as a background source for researchers interested in considering what the fate of the DSM in Ethiopia will be going forward.

8. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No conflict of interest was reported.

9. FUNDING INFORMATION

No fund was received

10. REFERENCES

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Reference to software:

Coon, E., Berndt, M., Jan, A., Svyatsky, D., Atchley, A., Kikinzon, E., Harp, D., Manzini, G., Shelef, E., Lipnikov, K., Garimella, R., Xu, C., Moulton, D., Karra, S., Painter, S., Jafarov, E., & Molins, S. (2020). Advanced Terrestrial Simulator (ATS) (Version 0.88) [Computer software]. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3727209.

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