

# Assessing the Status of Community Participation in Local Development

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**Abstract-**A study was conducted in Kilte-awulaelo woreda, Tigray National Regional State, Ethiopia from February 2015 to March 2016 with the objective of assessing the status or contribution of community participation in local development. Community participation in local development is a prerequisite for national renaissance which invites dialogues among the various actors (stakeholders) concerning setting developmental objectives, and converting local views and knowledge for development and democratization. Community participation-oriented local development is a very recent development agenda in the Ethiopian political economy discourses. This study has employed a descriptive research design; and has used both primary and secondary sources of data which were collected using questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion, personal observation and document analysis. In this way, the realities of community participation in local development have been identified. Research findings show that there is manipulated type community participation on works to sustain local development, hence local development is generally developed by powerful individuals, governments, or outsiders without any discussion with the local communities. Local people have failed to vividly demonstrate their skill and knowledge on tackling poverty and underdevelopment. There was chronic rural poverty and undemocratic local leadership, which in turn limits active local community participation in the local development decisions and democratic practices.

**Key words:** Community Participation, Local Development, Development, Developmental Local Government, Endogenous Knowledge, Local Democracy

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, the idea that local communities can serve their own needs through local development initiatives has gained momentum globally and locally, as it has become clear that economic and social development cannot arise solely from the growth of national-global enterprises and state capitalists. Many policy makers of development have shifted their focus

from bureaucrat-oriented paradigms of development to community-oriented developments. This implies that local community participation is sine qua non for local development [13].

Local development is a social process by which individuals can become more competent to live with and gain some control over local conditions and the changing world. Bringing the foregoing to bear, there is need to give the main actors due opportunity to gain control over local conditions and to harness resources through effective leadership at the community levels [6, 9]. It is about exploiting the latent and existing competitive and comparative advantages of localities. Here, local development is understood as improvements in local living standards, agricultural production and the village environment. It is a process where local people can not only create more jobs; income and infrastructure, but also help their community become fundamentally better able to manage change [15]. In the context of local development, community participation refers to an active process whereby local beneficiaries influence and reflect development policies and ideologies instead merely receive a share of the decisions benefits and costs. It is a way of achieving a higher standard of living and more equitable conditions for poor people, to ensure that their fundamental needs are met and that they are involved in political decisions which determine the way society develops [4].

One of the key objectives of community participation is to incorporate local knowledge and preferences into the decision-making processes of governments, private providers, and donor agencies. When potential beneficiaries are able to make key decisions, participation becomes self-initiated action-what is known as the “exercise of voice and choice” or “empowerment.” However, local development has been narrowly practiced in least developed countries by the community, though its potential has been established [10, 4].

Ethiopia is a country of villages and its development is synonymous with the development of the people living in rural areas. It is an agrarian economic society, whereby around 80% of its total population settled in the rural areas. However, a large part of this population has been leading an uncertain economic and political life due to traditional farming methods, inadequate rural economic policies and wrong political ideologies, non-economic practices and non-harmonization incentive opportunities in agricultural sector. Ethiopia has for long time operated under a highly centralized system, with the center assuming full responsibility for policy. Ethiopian political systems under successive regimes of the past are noted for their restriction on space for local self-rule and institutional development [12].

It has embarked on federal and decentralized forms of government since 1990s which has provided space and opportunities for local development stakeholders to determine their future and spearhead their development [11, 5]. The 1995 FDRE Constitution has established the country as a federal state. Here, the intention of adopting federal State structure is to create public aspirations and ambitions to participate on their local development destinations so as to promote national development, thereby to enable Ethiopia a competent in the international political economy game. The *woreda* is considered the key level of local government of the Ethiopian federal state structure, which contains an average population around 100,000 [16]. *Woredas* have been given greater economic and political power to implement development plans based on locally determined priorities, consistent with national sustainable development and poverty reduction program goals.

Since the new millennium, Ethiopia has declared itself to be pursuing the path of a democratic developmental state which is inherited from the South East Asian countries [7]. It seeks to construct a Democratic Developmentalist State while also deepening its democracy and community participation on local and national development affairs. The latter is particularly made clear in the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I, 2010/11-2015) it has adopted for itself to transform the economic and political terrain of the country [8]. The interest in constructing a developmental state while also deepening democracy in to the grass roots society is to strength the exercise and assimilation of democratic principles on the public daily life, in the assumption that local democracy and local development are the two faces of the same coin. It implies that in the prevalence of poverty and economic dependency, it is difficult to consolidate and demonstrate democratic governance in the country, and vice versa.

According the Tigray Regional State's GTP (2010/11-2015), among the indicators of good governance, the first one is ensuring public participation, and as a developmental and democratic government system, it is difficult to imagine about continuing its activities and building democracy without having the common understanding and the consensus of the community [1]. So, the first task must be convincing the community for any activity so that they would be engaged on different activities on their own willing. Public participation is central to ensuring citizens own development and to the success of good governance initiatives in a sustainable way. Ethiopia has recognized *woredas'* and *kebeles'* as the legitimate governance units with legally defined authority and functions for good governance and community-based local development.

This has aimed at building participatory development as part of poverty reduction strategy and promoting holistic local development [14].

Tigray region has also devolved its political, fiscal and administrative authorities to the *woreda* and *kebele* units to enhance community participation in local development [2]. Recently, it has set a Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) on socio-economic development of the region by giving due stress in local sustainable development through upgrading community participation [1]. However, despite the gradual economic growth and the poverty reduction trajectories of the region, the existence of limited local capacities to deliver economic and social services; and the prevalence of high unemployment, poverty and inequality have probably diminished local development.

Kilte-awulaelo *woreda* is among the 35 rural *woredas*' of the region that has inevitably shared the fruits and constraints of the new development transformations. However, there is no conducted formal scientific research that evaluates the real status of community participation in local development in kilte-awulaelo *woreda*. Therefore, this study was conducted to justify the following objectives.

- To understand the dimensions of community participation in local development
- To explore the level of local community participation in local development
- To examine how the local community perceive local development
- To assess the implementation of local development approaches and policies
- To identify the opportunities of bottom-up development on the national economic transformation

## **II. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Description of the Study Area**

The study was conducted in three selected *kebeles* (sub-districts) of *Kilte-awulaelo woreda*, which is one of the seven rural *woredas* of the Eastern Zone of Tigray (see Figure 1). This *woreda* is located 45 km to the north of *Mekelle*, the capital city of Tigray Regional State. It has eighteen rural *kebele* administrative units. This *woreda* is bordered on the South by the Southeastern Zone, on the West by the Central Zone, on the Northeast by *Hawzen*, on the North by *Saesi-Tsaedaemba*, and on the East by *Atsbi Wenberta*. The total population of the *woreda* is estimated at 99,708, of

whom 48,645 are men and 51,063 women [3]. The *woreda* consists mid-land plateau ranging in elevation from 1900 meter above sea level (masl) to 2200 meters above sea level with chained mountains as high as 2500 masl at the peak. The *woreda* has three agro-climatic zones locally known as *Degua* (16%), *Hawsi-Degua* (81%) and *Kolla* (3%) which means highland, middle highland and low land respectively. The average rainfall varies from 300 – 550 mm. The main rainy months mainly ranges from June to August. More than 80 percent of the population living in the *woreda* is engaged in subsistence farming with some animal husbandry. They produce more staple food crops directly related with consumption and less with cash crops or fruits for sale. They have also practiced mixed agriculture economy (farming agriculture and husbandry agriculture).

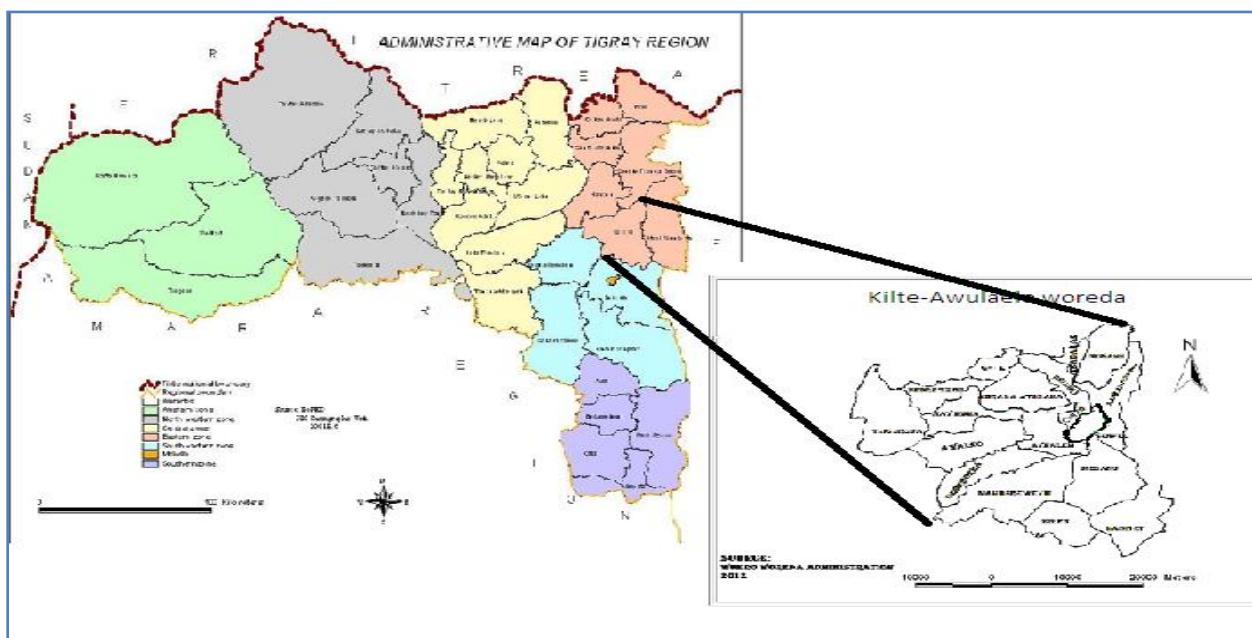


Fig1. Map of Tigray region showing the selected woreda (study site)

### **Study Design and Procedure**

A cross-sectional research design was employed to conduct this study in order to investigate the factors that affect community participation in local development through generating the primary and secondary data that are needed to achieve the predetermined objectives. Simultaneously, this study has used both quantitative and qualitative research approach in order to look at issues from different perspectives and to triangulate the findings.

### **Sample Size and Sampling Procedure**

The three sample *kebeles* (Abreha-we-atsbeha, Gemad and Gule) were selected using purposively sampling technique. Key informants and focus group discussants were also recruited using purposive sampling techniques. The questionnaire participants were however selected through simple random sampling techniques. For the sake of collecting valuable data, from each *kebele*, about ten (10) individuals had been taken for interviewee. Hence, a total of thirty (30) households will be involved in the interview study method. In addition to this figure, ten interviewees were selected from the *woreda* officials or sector offices. The same number i.e. ten (10) household leaders or local residents which were not involved in the interview had been selected from each sampled *kebeles* with the help of the information obtained from the extension workers to be involved in the focus group discussion and hence a total of thirty (30) households were involved in the focus group discussion. Household survey questionnaire was also conducted with two hundred ten (210) household heads per the selected *kebeles* to elicit household's perception about the challenges of community participation on local development in the study area. Thus, the total sample size used for this study was 270.

### **Method of Data Collection**

Both primary and secondary data were employed in this study. The primary data was collected using questionnaire survey, focus group discussion, key interview and personal observation; and the secondary data was obtained from relevant policy documents and research works at national, regional and local levels. In addition, specific documents on local development such as local economic development strategic plans and UNDP documents were reviewed to learn the essence of local development in Kilte-awulaelo *woreda*.

### **Data Analysis**

The questionnaire part of data has been analyzed using SPSS version 20 for descriptive and analytical statistics from which counting of frequency occurrences and calculating percentage were done. The data gathered from interview, FGD and personal observations were analyzed based on the inductive data analysis, and by classifying data into major and minor categories. Thus, data were interpreted using the data triangulation techniques, which compare and contrast the data gathered through both qualitative and quantitative tools.

## **III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Demographic Characteristics of Sample Households (Questionnaire Participants)**

Majority of the questionnaire participants included in the study were male (59.5%) and the rest (40.5%) were female. The majority of the respondents were between 40-50 years age; while about 47.6 percent of the respondents were able to read and write. The majorities (125) or 59.5 percent were employed in small and traditional family farming, getting monthly income range from 100-500 Ethiopian Birr (22 Ethiopian Birr =1 \$US).

### **Community Participation in Local Development:**

**Practicing of Community Participation in Woreda kilte-awulaelo-** the majority questionnaire participants had understood that there is absence of active and self-initiated community participation on the local development activities. In support to this statement, key informants had highlighted that instead of inviting and allowing the local people to actively participate on local development, they are commanded by the *woreda* officials through a channel of *kebele* administrators. There is high coverage of maladministration, and local patron-client affinities with high degree of discrimination which deteriorated social morals and hopes to build democratic political system.

Though demonstratively the regional and national constitutions aimed at strengthening local participation, unfortunately the local government has failed to manipulate this opportunity to promote local development. The local government serves to consolidate political base of the ruling regime at the local level. As a result, participation had been limited to local elites only and the mass population remained outside the boundary of decision-making. The skewed decentralized and federal state structure contributes towards creating a politically motivated interest local class and serves at a local level to protect the interest of the central or regional ruling political parties.

**Active Community Participation in Local Development-** according to the majority household respondents, local residents were marginalized and excluded from actively participating and voicing in the local socio-economic and political matters, this in turn negatively affects the national and local dreams of local democratization and development accelerating process. On top of that, key informants had clearly stated that there are less conducive economic and political circumstances to invite active public participation. Hence, there is narrow dialogue space for the common people who were contained in tension and stagnant social atmosphere. Boldly, almost

all key informants (including discussants) have stated that there is a limited room for the local people to express their needs and problems openly.

**The Role of Local Institutions in Local Development-** dominantly, the *kebele* household respondents were stated that local institutions have failed to work in cooperation and coordination to deal with the local problems like poverty, unemployment, gender discrimination, land-based conflicts and bad administration. The most responsible for this coordination decay is the local administration (*tabiya bayto*), a publicly five year politically elected body, unlike serving its electorate; it firmly works for the political and ideological interest of the regional ruling party (TPLF). There was personalization of local institutions by the local political leaders. However, those local communities are in patient and tolerance of the institutional exploitations in a sense that “today’s regime and political administration” is relatively better than the previous regimes (Imperial and Dergue regimes) in mind that today there is relative shallow peace, citizens can freely move from place to place without time limitation, and no bandits on the day.

**Democratic Developmental Local Government-** though Ethiopia have claimed its own as follows “Democratic Development State” as its national development program, most of the research respondents have retreated to claim the local government is democratic and developmental one, and it is hard to associate with accountable and responsible principles of good governance. Though there is national and local election every five years in Ethiopia since 1995, the macro-politics and micro-politics is overwhelmingly dominated by the ruling party, TPLF/EPDRDF. The elected representatives seem to have developed a patron-client relationship with the village elites in sharing mutual benefits which keeps the poor and the marginalized outside the development process. Thus, the dreams of democratic developmental state in are still suspended at the local level.

**Gender Equality and Local Development -** The majority of the respondents concisely revealed as there was unsatisfactory or low role of women contribution or involvement on local development activities. This indicated though women constitute a majority section of the local population, they have played a minimal role on the local and national development and democratic building, and institutional reconstruction. They are excluded from participating in politics, economics and socio-economic affairs. They are not sufficiently represented on the local and national decision making process. Key informants and discussants have also stated that local women are marginalized and deprived to waste their domain time and labour of household works such as

rearing a child, cooking and fetching woods and water; who are also highly exposed for domestic violence.

**Environmental Sustainability and Local Development-** the questionnaire survey that deals with the public participation and awareness on environmental protections and management implies as the majority respondents cumulatively had replied as there is low communities' understanding concerning the value of environment on their economic development. Of course, the people waste their time and energy on working for the environmental rehabilitation and recovering the barren mountains by the means of "work for food" existed for than two decades. The residents of the local *kebeles* of the case study were participated on the environmental protection and management works either forced by the local administration.

Unlike the two sample *kebeles*, *Abreha-we-atsbeha kebele* is relatively better works on the environmental preservation by minimizing grazing scales on the common pool resources and areas (mountains and grassing fields) by limiting the practice of rearing livestock animals.

**Local Resources Distribution and Local Development-**to pursue sustainable development, there should be justice and fair distribution of local resources among the residents of local jurisdiction. The data obtained from questionnaire survey deals with the equitable and fair distribution or allocation of local economic resources, social resources and political powers among the community, which shown that there is no equity allocation of local resources among the local community members. This indicates that local resources are concentrated in the hands of local elites, who have established a consolidated local based patrimonial network to captured incoming local budgets or loans/aids, and exploiting the existed local resources.

**Local Service Delivery System and Capacity and Local Development-**local services refer to the economic and social services such as schooling, electricity, healthcare, police service, transportation, telecommunications, water, marketing, administrative, legal services, and post office, etc. According to the numeric implications the majority questionnaire respondents have responded as there is a bureaucratic decay and administrative inefficiency to supply public services to the local society. On reality, there are no enough availability public service centers comparing with the size of the local population. The scantily existed public institutions are poorly equipped and staffed. Local institutions have been personalized by the local administrators who in turn act as an agent and representative of the higher echelon officials. The schools and the healthcares are the most marginalized institutions, staffed by low ranked and unqualified

professionals. But, those two sectors are the most crucial area to produce educated and healthiest societies. Rational and energetic individuals are more important to achieve sustainable local development. Similarly, the information obtained from the key informants and focus group discussants indicated that there were poor and unqualified services delivered to the community. The worse is also the less educated professionals in the local level are under the supervision and control of the uncertified (even no formal education from elementary school) local political leaders or chairpersons. There was excessive political intervention on the local public social service centers. The local farmers have been forced to buy agricultural chemical fertilizers (200 kg per *hectar*) twice a year even in the time of no rainfall or no irrigation. There were no public recreational centers in the local areas to make entertainment the local youths.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

- This study disclosed that the residents of the *woreda* or *kebeles* are farmers who possess small farming plots which failed to produce even subsistence production; thus, they lead their livelihood under chronic poverty.
- Concerning the community participation in the local political, socio-cultural and economic affairs, unlike the governmental and non-governmental reports, there is manipulated or/and passive community participation on the local political (administrative system and democratic establishment), socio-economic practices and environmental rehabilitation works.
- The local people are conservatives and traditionalists who lack exposition to the modern realities and technological information; they have little experience with different political economy philosophy, and they have no basic understanding concerning the national and regional political and economic ideologies and programmes. As a consequence, the local communities have illusion responses and understandings on the points defining local development. The local peoples have little knowledge as local development fundamentally derives from local self-initiated and active community participation. According to local community perception, local administration is the sole local actor to achieve their political and economic developments.
- Furthermore, there were no effective local institutions (both political institutions, economic institutions and socio-cultural institutions) that spring out community participation on local development. Those local institutions were personalized by the local elites.
- At the local level, a final destination of any policy and program implementation lacks benevolent developmental local government.

## V. Recommendations

Based on the results and conclusions acquired from this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- It is necessary to believe that active community participation is the sine qua non for consolidating local development and maintaining environmental rehabilitation.
- It is better the government should work to minimize or alleviate poverty to upgrade community participation in local development; hence in the prevalence of mass poverty, the local people have lost morality and confidence to voice their interest on the public discourses.
- To reinforce community participation in local development in the Democratic Developmental State or developmental local government in which Tigray/Ethiopia claims, it requires qualified educational system and curriculum intended to maximize educational quality and coverage that the educational sector enables to produce brilliant and sufficient human power.
- The local ordinal people need “industrious revolution” to believe on working hard and self reliance which has no place for beggary and dependency.
- Raising wages for the physical labour workers in the works of environmental rehabilitations, and scheduling and accepting “oxygen payment” for the households in return for their commitment on planting and green environment protections.
- Launching training programs or workshops may help change the mindset of the local government officials and the people regarding participatory practices in local development interventions.

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