

# **The Role of Local Governments in Federal Countries: The Case of Ethiopian Federation**



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## Local Government: Conceptualization

- Local government (LG) unit could be defined as “a political sub-division,” which is organized within a state for the exercise of duties and responsibilities granted by constitutional provisions or legislative enactments
- Therefore, local government is a *public organisation* sanctioned to decide and administer a range of public policies.

# LG in Ethiopia: Legal and Institutional Framework

- The main constitutional principles, albeit not explicit criteria, of local government establishments in Ethiopia are ethnic self-rule (Art.39 (3)) and popular participation (Art.50 (4)) (Constitution of Ethiopia, 1995).
- Article 50(4) provides that “adequate power shall be granted to the lowest units of government to enable the people to participate directly.”
- Regions are responsible to have their own legal enactments to the establishment of LGs.

# Criteria used to organize LG

- The power to establish local government units (their numbers, levels and mandates) is the competence of the regional governments.
- Security of the existence of LG: *Debates (autonomy vs regional agent)*.
- *The so-called district-level decentralisation was introduced by the federal government along with its poverty reduction and development program in 2001.*

- Criteria Used to establish LG:
- Minority ethnic groups exercise self-rule (SNNPRS, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella practices)—either at Zonal or District level)—Special zones and special District status.
- LGs have own Councils unlike other LGs.

# Phases of LG Decentralization

## **Phase I: 1991-1994**

- Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE)

## **Phase II: FDRE constitution (1995) Proclaimed**

Establishes 9 Member States of the Ethiopian Federation.

- Local Government restructuring

## **Phase III: Post-2001**

Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP):

Due to this and other factors, regional States revised their respective constitutions and subsequently enacted statutes to restructure their rural and urban local governance system in line with the federal policy.

## Structural Organization and Relevance

- Almost all constitutions of Member States deal with the organisational set up of one or more of the local government units (Zone, Special Zone, Woreda, Special Woreda, Kebele, etc).
- Normally, the woreda (district), which is composed of urban and rural kebele (wards), was the basic unit of local government that existed next to the state government.
- There are rural woredas and urban woredas (city administrations). After the regional constitutions revision discussed above, the existence of zone (collection of woredas), an intermediary between state and woreda government, was recognized.

# Powers and Functions

- The District-level decentralisation has brought about the separation of power between levels and branches of regional government;
- the organisational strengthening of woreda public institutions;
- the introduction of the Block Grant system that gave woredas the power to allocate the public funds among various operational activities and development programs
- The regional constitutions provide that each woreda will have the power to plan and implement its own social services and economic development.
- Popular participation on health, education, environmental protection...etc.

# Challenges

- Leadership challenges (Federalism concepts, conflict resolution management capacities & values of good governance challenges—local democratic behaviours, local participations)
- Local infrastructure inadequacy,
- Ever rising of local demands for development,
- Resource conflicts,
- Weak participation on matters of governance

# Lessons: Federalism for LG

- Federalism and LG for the Horn of Africa (Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea).
- Conceptual Federalism Entrenchment for LG in the Horn of Africa required.
- Hypothesis: Recognition of local government autonomy and indigenous practices likely reduce the ever rising local conflicts in the Horn of Africa. Empowering local indigenous institutions would enable them co-exist peacefully.

**WE THANKYOU**