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Institutional Development and Good Governance in Ethiopia

Edited by Fekade Terefe and Zerihun Mohammed

RESEARCH REPORT

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and
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Institutional Development and Good Governance in Ethiopia: An Introduction

Fekade Terefe and Zerihun Mohammed

The concept of 'institution' is a subject of discussion and academic enquiry in various disciplines. An increasing number of economists agree that "institutions matter" when explaining economic performance. In sociology, the concept of 'institution' has always been at the centre of analysis. When comparing the concept as used in different disciplines, it is notable that their meaning differs significantly (Abu-Orf, 2018:81). Although there has been considerable interest in the study of institutions, there is little agreement on what the term "institution" actually means. As a result the term is variously defined as rules about behaviour especially decision making; rules about individual expression, information transmittal and social choice as well as political structure, referring to attributes of the existing system like size, degree of competition, extent of overlap and other attributers (Boliari and Topyan, 2007).

There are also writers who liken institutions to organizations. "Whereas we must be sure to distinguish clearly between the two: *institutions* are sets of basic rules of conduct, acknowledged by a community, and usually enforced through some form of sanction; while *organizations* are systematic arrangements of resources for achieving explicit, shared goals" (Moroni, 2010, p. 277). Although both provide the structure for human interaction, the purpose of institutions is to define the way the game is played while the objective of organizations within that set of rules is to win the game through a combination of inputs like skills, strategy and coordination.

Notwithstanding such variations, the most common definition of an institution is a set of rules, norms, or standard operating procedure that is widely recognized and accepted, structuring and constraining individuals' actions in a particular arena. Political institutions, which can be formal or informal, within government or outside it, have distinct characteristics, which are crucial to understanding how they form, how political leaders use and shape them, and

how they can constrain those same leaders' actions. Most importantly, political institutions are institutions that help structure, constrain, and mobilize political power (Walya, 2021, p. 56). Mobilizing power, in addition to structuring and constraining it, is a crucial element of political institutions because political leaders will not abide by institutions (if they can possibly avoid it) that do not facilitate the mobilization of political power (Schmelzle, 2013).

In Ethiopia, governments have made concerted efforts to institute modern governance institutions since the late 19th century. It was, however, Emperor Menelik who first established ministries in 1907. Some three decades later, after adopting the country's first written constitution in 1931, Emperor Haile Selassie established a bicameral legislative chamber. Since then, at least rhetorically, Ethiopia has embraced the separation of powers among its three branches of government. While the legislature and the judiciary remain distinct spheres, the executive is organised into multiple departments or offices, each with specific responsibilities. The number, nature and structure of these bodies evolve over time in response to changing contexts and needs.

These aside, there have been contending views about the utility value of public institutions. On the one hand, regimes in power claim that the kinds of institutions they put in place are designed to enable them to respond to the needs of the people and where there are shortfalls, they can easily be fixed. On the other hand, critics argue that public institutions are often created for short-term political gains rather than to serve citizens' needs. Evidence shows that, although institutions formally exist, they remain largely on paper with limited real-world influence. Consequently, from imperial times to the present, successive leaders have concentrated power in their own hands, undermining institutional effectiveness

Contending—and sometimes polarized—views on the nature of public institutions and their contribution to the realization of good governance have attracted attention and therefore careful considerations. Such consideration can take various forms including among others, policy research, public dialogue, or advocacy. Each approach aims at identifying shortcomings, propose practical solutions, and persuade policy makers to adopt reforms that enhance overall governance.

In light of the above and recognizing that gaps in public institutions affect governance quality, Good Governance Africa–Horn of Africa organized a five-part public dialogue series on Institutional Development and Good Governance in Ethiopia. The public dialogue series aimed at examining the state of public institutions with respect to governance and identify ways that could help to improve governance in the country. Accordingly, the dialogue series focused on critically examining public institutions' development, functions, and dynamics; analysing the major challenges these institutions face in fulfilling their duties; and identifying ways to strengthen them as effective instruments of good governance in Ethiopia.

Each dialogue forum was supported by discussion papers prepared by experts from academia and civil society, providing perspectives for conversations among stakeholders from government, civil society, the private sector, and academia. What follow are the revised versions of these papers prepared for this edited volume.

In Chapter Two, Bahru Zewde recounts the genesis of modern institutions in Ethiopia and outlines their development across regimes. In this chapter, the origins of modern institutions are traced to the mid-19th century, when encounters with Western civilization revealed that traditional structures could no longer meet emerging demands. Hence, at the beginning a clever amalgam of traditional and modern institutions was pursued in putting in place administrative set ups. Ever since, at varying times different legal and constitutional frameworks were issued to formalize and then regulate the administrative structures. In the course of this, political dictates of successive regimes informed policies that were meant to lay down the powers and functions, degree of autonomy and operational latitude of public institutions.

Building upon what has been outlined in Chapter Two, Berhanu Temesgen in Chapter Three examines the civil service in greater detail. The chapter examined evolution of the civil service, and the rationale behind civil service reorganizations across regimes and evaluates various reform programmes. It also assesses the capacity of civil service institutions to deliver public goods and reviews their performance. Berhanu then explains why and how the civil service has fallen short, pointing to factors such as insufficient transparency and

accountability, neo-patrimonial practices, lack of independence and professionalism, poor working conditions, and frequent reorganizations.

Debebe Hailegebriel, in Chapter Four examined the role of democratic institutions in promoting governance. He argues that these institutions span both the public domain and non-state actors. He defines the public domain as formal, state-run bodies—ministries, agencies, and regulatory authorities—while non-state actors operate independently of government. Under Ethiopia's constitution, key public-domain democratic institutions include the Human Rights Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Auditor General's Office, and the National Electoral Board; subsidiary legislations have also created the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission and public media outlets. Outside this domain sit civil society organizations, private media, and political parties. Despite the establishment of all these bodies, Debebe notes that democratic institutions in Ethiopia face significant challenges. Although the political transition of 2018 promised to resolve many outstanding issues, weak institutionalization and the failure to implement reform laws continue to undermine their independent and effective functioning.

In Chapter Five, Fekade Terefe takes one of the key democratic institutions—parliament—and examines its historical trajectory across three regimes. He traces the evolution and functioning of the legislative body since its establishment nearly a century ago, noting that parliament has operated under varied political systems: monarchy, military (Marxist-Leninist) dictatorship, and "multiparty democracy" under a one-party–dominated regime. In each context, representation is assessed against parliament's core functions—law making, oversight, and outreach. The chapter argues that effective representation requires an enabling political environment, robust institutional arrangement, adequate physical and technological infrastructure, skilled human resources, and sufficient funding.

In Chapter Five, Getachew Dinku examines the role of public media in providing citizens with access to information. He traces the evolution of public media in Ethiopia from its inception to the present, discussing successes and challenges in ensuring that audiences receive relevant, credible, and impartial content. The chapter highlights the institutional changes necessary to uphold core

principles—such as prioritizing the public interest—and remain responsive to Ethiopian society. Getachew argues that public media leaders and professionals must be primarily loyal to the public. He further emphasizes enhancing the role of civil society organizations in media governance and bridging the gap between policy and practice. Finally, he calls for the creation of a media consumers' council to act as a watchdog on media performance and for safeguard mechanisms to protect against undue influence from financiers.

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The Genesis and Development of Institutions in Ethiopia[1]

Bahru Zewde

Antecedents

Given the highly organized nature of the Ethiopian state, institutions are bound to be marked by longevity and durability. The consolidation and transfer of political power required elaborate rules and institutions. This was manifest in both the religious and political spheres. As it is the latter that had more direct impact on political and economic activity, we will focus on them in this paper. But a document that dealt with both aspects and even went beyond is the *Fetha Nagast*, the code of law that regulated secular as well as ecclesiastical affairs until the twentieth century. An examination of this venerable code of law and conduct (now conveniently made available as part of the giant volume entitled *Matshafa Hegegat Abayt*) shows that the issues it covered ranged from ecclesiastical appointments to commercial transactions and adultery (*Matshafa Hegegat 'Abayt*, 1962 EC, pp. 5-451).

Early Efforts

As Ethiopia came into direct encounter with the West, the inadequacy of many of these traditional institutions became apparent. The call to introduce modern or Western institutions began to be heard from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. As if the country had no institutions before that time, the call was for rule by ser'at, which connotes orderly conduct or institutionalization. Thus the visionary emperor, Tewodros, reiterated the need for instilling ser'at in his people. He instituted a system of military ranks. He tried to set up a salaried army. In the end, all this brought him nothing but growing hostility. As he found himself isolated and forlorn on the inhospitable summit of Maqdala, he could

[1] An earlier version of this paper was published as part of the Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Conference of the Ethiopian Economy, Oct. 8-9, edited by Alemu Mekonnen and Dejene Aredo (September 2000).

only lament to the British general who had led the huge military expedition against him in the following poignant terms: “My people have rebelled against me because I tried to rule them according to ser’at. But you have defeated me because you deployed a force that has submitted to ser’at” (Rubenson, 1994, p. 354).

Likewise, ser’at was a central pre-occupation of Gabra-Heywat. In his small but influential work on the reign of Menilek, he advocated the prime importance of serat in unequivocal fashion, arguing that the power of a state lies in it rather than in the size of its army. He went on to conclude that “a small town that is governed by law is to be preferred to a large nation that has no serat” (Gabra-Heywat, 1912, p. 341). The rationalization of administration, particularly of fiscal administration, was a central concern of Gabra-Heywat, as indeed it was of a number of his colleagues. And their pleas did not fall on deaf ears. To a ruler like Tafari/Hayla-Sellase who had come to appreciate the value of money for the consolidation of his political power, the arguments of Gabra-Heywat and his contemporary intellectuals were of great practical significance.

Some forty years after the tragic end of Tewodros, the more pragmatic Menilek instituted a system of ministerial government, which had relatively better fortune. Intended as much to impress the ferenji (Europeans) as to introduce a change in the Ethiopian system of administration, the order represented a clever amalgam of tradition and innovation. What happened in effect was giving the old functionaries a new cloak, or, to use another metaphor, serving the same old wine in a new bottle. Thus, the bajerond became the minister of finance; the fitawrari became the minister of war; the naggadras became the minister of commerce; and the ligaba became the minister of the imperial court.

Perhaps because of this cautious injection of modernity, the ministerial system of government came to endure, unlike the ephemeral reforms of Tewodros. It marked the birth not only of a bureaucracy (in the positive rather than the negative sense of that term) but also of a nobility of service rather than of birth. It opened an avenue for skilful and diligent commoners to rise to positions of eminence in the government hierarchy. This development continued after the death of Menilek and well into the final years of Hayla-Sellase. Names like

Naggadras/Bitwaddad Hayla-Giyorgis Walda-Mika'el, Blatten Geta Heruy Walda-Sellase, Tshafae Te'ezaz Walda-Giyorgis Walda-Yohannes and the Habta-Wald brothers (Makonnen, Aklilu and Akalawarq) readily come to mind in this connection.

Part of the explanation for the relative success of Menilek's innovation is the fact that conditions were ripe for it. At any rate, it had the support of a vigorous and articulate group of intellectuals. In some ways, it could be said to have been inspired by them. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go in depth into the careers and ideas of these intellectuals.[2] But mention could be made of at least two of them who were most insistent on the setting up of institutionalized administration: Naggadras Gabra-Heywat Baykadañ and Bajerond Takla-Hawaryat.

We have already seen Gabra-Heywat's argument for institutionalization. As for Takla-Hawaryat, no sooner had he returned from abroad before he prepared an administrative manual. His hope was that the scheme would be implemented first on an experimental basis and subsequently extended nation-wide. But he could not succeed in winning the sustained interest of the young ruler Iyyasu, on whom Takla-Hawaryat had pinned his hopes. He had to wait for the accession of the more systematic and single-minded Tafari to the throne to realize his objective in some measure. Not only did the latter adopt the intellectual's scheme of what came to be known as "model provinces" (Charchar, Guma and Gera), but he also authorized him to draft Ethiopia's first constitution.

Woefully inadequate as it was in many respects, the promulgation of that constitution in 1931 marked the pinnacle of Takla-Hawaryat's career as well as an important step in the institutionalization of government operations, more particularly in the setting up of a parliament. It is worthy of note in this context that Takla-Hawaryat was the first to express objection to the term agara-gazh, presumably because of the oppressive connotation of that term. He suggested

[2] See Bahru 2002 for details.

instead the employment of the terms meslané or endarassé. The latter term was in fact adopted in the final decades of the imperial regime.

The Period of Sustained Institution-Building (1941-1974)

Measures of the above nature, which were taken in the period before the Italian occupation, were a sort of dress-rehearsal for the more systematic process of institution-building that took place after 1941. Indeed, we can divide the developments that took place thereafter into three categories: the period of institution-building (1941-1974), the period of stress (1974-1991), and the period of restructuring (in the post-1991 era). We shall look at each of these periods in turn.

In retrospect, the period 1941-1974 strikes one by the number of solid achievements that were registered in the realm of institutionalization. Quite a number of institutions that are still important components of our life today trace their origin to this period. These institutions span the whole gamut of public administration, finance, education and infrastructure.[3]

Soon after he returned to the throne in 1941, the emperor turned his attention to the consolidation of his power at both the central and provincial levels. The order re-establishing the ministries on a new and more clearly defined basis addressed the first concern. This eventually included the formal establishment of the post of prime minister,[4] although the incumbent rarely exercised the prerogatives conventionally associated with that post. The setting up of a centralized provincial administrative system took care of the second concern. While the new system could be criticised for having been over-centralized, it nonetheless had the merit of drawing provincial boundaries that generally

[3] Some of the institutions discussed in this context might perhaps be more appropriately described as organizations. But the distinction between organization and institutions is scarcely water-tight as they both imply the systematic and organized management of human affairs.

[4] I use the term "formal" advisedly because there were *de facto* prime ministers in the pre-1935 period, such as *Naggadras* Haile Giyorgis Wald-Mikael and *Fitawrari* Habta-Giyorgis Dinagde.

tended to take into account both regional identity and economic rationality – unlike the purely ethnic re-ordering of the post-1991 era.

This new and expanded administrative apparatus required personnel. And that is where the second major institution-building process came in, to wit the expansion of education with the primary aim of creating the necessary manpower to staff the ever-expanding bureaucracy. The setting up of formal educational institutions has pre-1935 antecedents. Some of the celebrated establishments, like Menilek II and Tafari Makonnen schools, belong to that period. But the post-1941 measures represented both a quantitative and a qualitative improvement on the earlier period. Not only did the number of schools and students increase, but there was also the expansion of secondary and tertiary education, not to mention the sending of an increasingly higher number of Ethiopians abroad for second and third degrees. The establishment of Haile Sellassie I Secondary School (Kotebe) in 1943 and of the University College of Addis Ababa in 1950 heralded the new developments in secondary and higher education, respectively.

All these measures required money. The augmentation of government revenue, which had been an abiding concern of the emperor since well before he came to the throne,[5] now became even more imperative. In a way, the centralization of provincial administration assisted this process of augmentation, as revenue that was formerly appropriated by local authorities was transferred to the central treasury under the new dispensation. The Ministry of Finance now became one of the most vital departments of the government. No wonder then that two of its incumbents - Makonnen Habta-Wald and Yelma Deressa - acquired legendary status in their own time. The setting up of rules and regulations intended to augment fiscal revenue was a primary pre-occupation of the Hayla-Sellase regime (Eshetu, 1984, pp. 88-106).

Parallel with this process went the establishment of monetary institutions like banks. The old Bank of Abyssinia, which was initiated by Emperor Menilek in 1905, had already been nationalized, so to say, in 1931. The development of

[5] The most dramatic illustration of this concern is his famous eulogy of money on the occasion of his visit to the Addis Ababa Customs Office in 1925: *Fere Kanafer*, I, 15-16.

banking institutions picked up greater momentum after 1941. In 1942, the State Bank of Ethiopia was inaugurated in defiance of British obstruction. That bank eventually became the parent to the Commercial Bank and the National Bank of Ethiopia, two banking institutions that continue to dominate financial operations to this day. This was followed by the setting up of the Development Bank of Ethiopia[6] and the only private bank, Addis Ababa Bank (Befekadu, 1995, pp. 232-276).

No less impressive were the developments in infrastructure. Three spheres merit special citation: telecommunications, road transport and aviation. The telecommunication network, which traces its origin to the last decade of the nineteenth century, tied all major towns of the country to the capital, even if only rudimentary techniques were employed. Even more impressive than its spread, however, was its general reliability. Achievements in road construction surpassed the record for which the Italians had been given so much credit. But undoubtedly the most impressive achievement was registered in the field of aviation. Ethiopian Airlines, which took a faltering step into the world of international aviation in 1946 with less than half a dozen converted World War II planes, had become a jet-set continental carrier by 1962 (Bahru, 1988). A good deal of the success achieved in all three sectors can be attributed to the relative margin of independence enjoyed by their management. Over and above their intrinsic value, all three organizations became symbols or pace-setters of modernity in Ethiopian life.

Finally, the imperial regime took a major step forward in the direction of the institutionalized conduct of human relations when it formulated a series of legal codes - civil, criminal, and commercial. These were all promulgated in the years 1957-60 with the help of foreign, mostly French, legal experts. Evidence of their remarkable thoroughness and resilience is that they continued to be in force even after the revolutionary upheavals of the 1970s. The fairly protracted deliberations to revise them during the final years of the Derg passed without

[6] In a way, the antecedents of the Development Bank can be traced back to 1908, when Empress Taytu and other members of the nobility set up in 1909 what was known as the Society for the Expansion of Trade and Agriculture (Bahru 2008: 110).

bearing fruit. Antedating the codification process was the promulgation of the *Negarit Gazetta* in 1942. A permanent fixture of post-liberation Ethiopia, this official gazette has continued up to the present time as the vehicle for the transmission of government notices, orders and proclamations as well as appointments and promotions.

A signal legislative achievement of the post-1941 era was the promulgation of the revised constitution of 1955. It represented a considerable improvement over its predecessor, the 1931 constitution referred to earlier. Its major features of departure were the provisions for universal suffrage and for an elected lower house in the bicameral parliament. Its major concern, however, appeared to be ensuring the continuation of the dynasty, with over a quarter of its provisions dealing with imperial succession (Bahru, 2008, p. 339). As it turned out, those elaborate provisions could not save the monarchy from oblivion when revolution erupted in 1974!

Lest this survey sound somewhat too laudatory of the imperial regime, we would like to conclude with two cautionary notes. First, traditional forms of behaviour co-existed with the institutionalized norms; often the latter were subordinate to the former. The emperor's *Chelot* remained the final legal recourse. Ministers were subject to the vigil of the emperor through the *aqabe sa'at*, the weekly and mandatory audience with the emperor.[7] The distinction between public and royal purse was not always clearly set. The imperial secretariat exercised a power incommensurate with its legal mandate, especially when the incumbent happened to be a powerful person like *Tsahafe Te'ezaz* Walda-Giyorgis Walda-Yohannes, who effectively eclipsed the nominal prime minister for nearly a decade and a half. The epitaph on prime ministerial prerogative was uttered by its relatively most effective practitioner, Aklilu

[7] For the *aqabe sa'at*, in a way was a form of institutionalizing the relations between the Emperor, the effective head of the government, and his ministers, see Clapham, 1969: 108-110.

Habta-Wald, in 1974 when he lamented that the emperor's eldest daughter, Princess Tanañawarq, had exercised much greater influence than him.[8]

Secondly, and this is very much related to the above, the premium was placed on control rather than efficiency or development. This was particularly evident in the political sphere. Considerations of control as well as self-interest underlay the tight grip the central government exercised on the provinces. Little revenue percolated down for the development of the provinces themselves, just as little room was allowed for local initiative or autonomy. Parliament, even if it had its rare moments of courage, remained completely subservient to royal prerogative. The ultimate instrument of control remained the army, the one central institution whose modernization had understandably engaged the attention of all emperors from Tewodros to Hayla-Sellase.

The Period of Stress (1974-1991)

That army finally put an end to the imperial regime by toppling its creator in September 1974. The transformation of society that became the new revolutionary agenda had a decisive impact on the institution-building process. Old institutions were scrapped or dented. New ones were born. And revolutionary struggle and war took its toll on human resources, the most vital component of any institution.

In the heat of the revolutionary moment, all former institutions were looked at critically at best or with downright hostility at worst. The monarchy, one of the oldest institutions in the country, was abolished. The church, its partner in the age-old power structure, was disestablished. And yet, it is worthy of note that, in the long run, the church has shown greater resilience in weathering the revolutionary assault than the monarchy. The latter seems to have vanished, never to return, the activities of the royalist "Mo'a Anbassa" political organization or the prominent public profile of some younger representatives of the dynasty notwithstanding.

By contrast, although the rural land proclamation of 1975 has had the effect of cutting the economic base of the church, it has made a remarkable recovery since the 1980s. It was able to absorb the economic stress of the revolutionary

[8] *Ya-Aklilu Mastawasha* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2010).

period through various development programmes and the setting up of parish councils. The restoration of its urban property has improved its financial situation even more dramatically. More importantly, its constituency, particularly among the youth, has expanded to unprecedented levels both in breadth and depth.

Even parliament, which had not had such a glorious existence in the old system, became the first victim of the Derg. The army, from whose bosom the protagonists of the new order had sprung, was not spared either. Members of its higher echelons constituted a significant proportion of the former government officials executed in November 1974. For quite some time, the Derg toyed with the idea of replacing the old "feudal" army with a new, revolutionary "red" army. The preponderant position that political commissars came to enjoy in the military hierarchy, coupled with the retirement or physical elimination of experienced career officers, undermined the military's fighting capacity and ultimately spelt doom for the Derg.

At the same time, new institutions were created to bolster the revolutionary regime. Control, which had always been a prime driving force in the institutionalization process, assumed cardinal importance under the Derg. Thus, two of the institutions that came to survive the Derg - the neighbourhood association (*qabale*) and peasant association - have emerged as vital agencies for controlling the urban and rural population, respectively, even if their birth was embellished with revolutionary rhetoric of liberation and self-administration. The peasant associations were set up with the objective of serving as the main vehicle for the implementation of the 1975 rural land reform proclamation. That proclamation, by abolishing landlordism, changed the rural Ethiopian landscape as few other events have done before or since. The village chief was now replaced by the peasant association chairman as the lowest and yet vital official in the government hierarchy. The proclamation also had the indirect effect of making the courts, which had thitherto thrived in processing land litigation, redundant or of marginal importance. Land allocation, whether it be through fresh allocation or redistribution, became thenceforth the prerogative of the peasant association.

Institutions owe their vitality to their human element. Anything that affects human resources negatively is bound to have a corresponding effect on institutions. The terror that started in November 1974 claimed the lives of

thousands of Ethiopians, some of whom took with them irreplaceable talent and skill. An even larger number languished in jails. While some of these managed to regain their vitality on their release, others remained maimed for life. The brain drain that attended the killing and the intimidation compounded the depletion of human resources. A generation that could have revitalized the country's institutions was thus rendered inoperative in one way or another.

A general observation that one can make regarding the Derg's relationship with old institutions is that it brooked no compromise with those that competed with it for power and influence but was prepared to tolerate or even promote to some degree those that it needed for financial or other purposes. The monarchy and the church belong to the former category. Ethiopian Airlines and to a lesser degree the University belong to the second.

Ethiopian Airlines experienced some of the most difficult times in its history during the first years of the Derg. Problems that had their roots in the pre-revolution period became even more compounded by developments after 1974. War and political control and indoctrination sapped its working capacity. Revenue declined precipitously, reaching its nadir in 1979. The credit-worthiness of the airline reached an all-time low. It was in the face of those grim realities that the Derg appointed a new general manager, Captain Mohamed Ahmed, in 1980 with full powers to restructure the organization the way he thought fit. And that, for all practical purposes, saved it (Bahru, 1988, pp. 140-153).

The Derg had a more ambivalent relationship with the University. In the early years of confrontation, it was viewed as enemy territory. Even after all the terrors of various hues and configurations had subsided, it was not allowed to stray too independently. The party committee stood in constant vigil on operations at various levels. The weekly indoctrination session for all staff continued almost right up to the end. The courses taught were formally made to conform to the dominant Marxist-Leninist ideology, although instructors had greater latitude in the actual process of teaching. Yet, the University was encouraged to launch a graduate programme which made significant contributions to staff development and faculty research. Some departments - notably Biology, Chemistry and History - could in fact be said to have had their heyday in both respects in the 1980s.

The Period of Restructuring (Post-1991)

Like the Derg before it, the post-1991 political dispensation tried to recast the country anew. Understandably, the army became the first target of this restructuring. An institution that had its roots in the 1940s was stigmatized as the instrument of the defunct regime. Its rank-and-file members were demobilized while a number of its officers were interned. For some time, the formal military hierarchy was eschewed in favour of the comradely relationship born in the armed struggle. But this could not last. An institution that had proven its efficacy in ensuring political control could not be ignored indefinitely. Gradually, the old norms began reasserting themselves. The Ethio-Eritrean war of 1998-2000 underpinned the central role that the army as an institution would continue to play.

In other respects, three fundamental policy shifts have had a bearing on the fate of institutions and their human resources - economic restructuring, decentralization and privatization. These entailed the re-deployment of the country's human capital as well as the scrapping of some old institutions and the creation of a few new ones. The purely economic aspects of restructuring induced by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the IMF and the World Bank do not concern us here. What is, however, germane to our discussion is the human cost of retrenchment. It is difficult to argue that at least of some the retrenchment was not dictated by considerations of removing politically undesirable elements from the bureaucracy.

Where those elements happened to be endowed with special skills and expertise, as so often happened to be the case, institutions have been deprived of competent personnel as well as the vital element of administrative continuity. While some of these retrenched personnel joined the ever-expanding Ethiopian Diaspora, others sought alternative employment at home. The private sector, civil society, and foreign agencies have invariably been the beneficiaries of this re-deployment. The question arises whether in a poor and still underdeveloped country like Ethiopia, the state could afford to lose such expert personnel that was produced at so much cost and sacrifice.

Had it not been attended with its own complications, the decentralization policy that attended the coming of EPRDF to power would have been hailed as a

welcome and salutary antidote to the over-centralization that had characterized the Ethiopian state in the preceding fifty years. Surely, after such stringent and stifling control, the country was crying for some relaxation. Yet, the ethnic basis of that decentralization, over and above the ominous shadow of strife and disintegration that it forebodes, has raised the fundamental problem of administrative competence and integrity.

Likewise, the privatization policy has had its merits. It too represents a policy initiative that was long overdue. It has had a liberating effect on private initiative and ingenuity that has been stifled for long, particularly during the Derg era. There is perhaps no more dramatic illustration of this salutary development than the proliferation of private banks and insurance companies, where previously government monopoly had prevailed. Yet, questions have been raised as to how far the ruling party played the role of an impartial arbiter rather than a patron for its favourites. In other words, the privatization process will not achieve its desired objective of liberating and promoting private enterprise unless the state guarantees free and fair competition.

In concluding this paper, it might be instructive to refocus our attention on the two institutions that we have chosen to highlight in the previous section - Ethiopian Airlines and the University. When we do that, we notice some interesting parallels as well as some divergence. In the case of the former, just as in the Derg period, the EPRDF regime initially sought to tamper with an institution that had proven its viability and efficacy. It did not take long, however, for it to realize its mistake and allow the organization to function with the relative autonomy that it has always enjoyed. As a result, the airline has registered remarkable progress in the last few decades, emerging as the largest and most successful carrier in Africa.

The University enjoyed a short honeymoon with the EPRDF regime before the latter turned against it with what in retrospect appears to be unwarranted fury. The high point of its hostility was attained in early 1993, when it sacked forty plus of its senior staff. For long, it appeared that the University was condemned to die a lingering death. Only recently has a wind of change started to blow, with the passing of a proclamation in 2023 that made all higher education

institutions, starting with Addis Ababa University, autonomous. This step, as can easily be surmised, presents a challenge as well as an opportunity.

In general, what this short historical survey seems to underscore is the fact that, all too often, institutions have been overcast by political control. They had not been allowed to function with the freedom that is so essential to their vitality. All the three regimes discussed in this paper (the imperial, the Derg and the EPRDF) have followed, if in differing degrees, a top-down approach with regard to institutions. The result has been that institutions have tended to be smothered more often than they are fostered. There is thus a strong need to depoliticize institutions, be they military, educational or administrative. Related to this is the cavalier fashion - to put it very mildly - in which the country's human resources have been handled in the past three and a half decades. As we have tried to argue, institutions are dead wood without their personnel. It is their human component that makes them tick. A poor and backward country like Ethiopia can thus ill-afford to dissipate its skilled manpower, which is so scarce and precious.

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Civil Service in Ethiopia: Administrative Reforms, Reorganization and Capacity

Berhanu Temesgen

1. Introduction

The civil service, the state's chief operating arm, plays major roles as an organ of employment, governance, and policymaking (Olowu, 1999). The significance of the civil service in the development of any country is expressed in the following five major functions: promoting governance, producing and providing public goods, developing and implementing public policy, managing public finance, and facilitating institutional development (Schiavo-Campo and McFerson, 2008). More importantly, the civil service devises strategies and policies for the rest of the society and stimulates other institutions to operate as productive agents (Olowu, 1999). It enables a government to realize its objectives by delivering effective and efficient public services, preventing corruption, and improving democratic governance. As such, the civil service is the backbone and the central nervous system of the state and this makes it an indispensable instrument to promote development in both developed and developing countries.

The ability to deliver public services in general depends on the knowledge, skills, abilities, and motivations of civil servants and the systems and procedures with in which they operate (Olowu, 1999). To ensure a professional civil service, there is a need to promote competitive entry, develop a system of accountability to ensure effective use of public resources, and design a competitive compensation system, including pensions (Olowu, 1999). So, the civil service, which facilitates the development and implementation of public policy, needs to be instituted in a manner that enables it to provide effective and efficient public services. In contrast, if the civil service is poorly instituted and functioning, it impedes government performance and undermines the trust and legitimacy of the government. Some of the principal factors contributing to this state of affairs include an unskilled workforce, unsustainable sources of

finance, and poor management of the civil service (Olowu, 1999). Such malfunctions may manifest as inadequate procedures, poor economic and social policy formulation, poor management of public resources, an overburdened public budget, and poor quality of public services (Olowu. 1999). In Ethiopia, modern public administration began with the creation of government ministries under Emperor Menelik (1889–1913) at the turn of the twentieth century. Emperor Haile Selassie (1930–1974) advanced this framework by introducing the first Constitution in 1931—which established the office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers— and adopting a revised Constitution in 1955, and founding the Central Personnel Agency in 1961. The military government (hereafter Derg) that came into power in 1974 after deposing the Emperor has not made substantial changes in the rules and regulations of the civil service. The Derg was replaced by Ethno-nationalist groups led by the EPRDF in 1991. Despite the adoption and implementation of civil service reform programmes under the wider political and economic restructuring agenda, the civil service remains beset by core challenges: an uncompetitive compensation and pension system; non-competitive recruitment processes; low professionalism and skills gaps; weak transparency and accountability; inefficiency; nepotism; corruption; and partisan interference. There is also frequent reorganization of government departments and this has also contributed to the instability of the civil service in particular and the public sector in general.

Against this background, this paper aims to analyze the rationale and impacts of administrative reforms and reorganization; assess the sector's capacity to deliver public services; and identify the main challenges facing the civil service, proposing strategies to address them.

To fulfill the objectives of the study, the writer has utilized relevant literature, consulted proclamations and statistical data as well as conducted interviews with civil servants, and experts in the subject area.

This chapter is organized in four sections. The first section provides an introduction to the study, focusing on the importance of the civil service in improving governance and service delivery. Section two describes administrative reforms and reorganization of the civil service under successive

governments in Ethiopia. The third section uncovers the capacity of the civil service. Finally, concluding remarks are forwarded.

2. Administrative Reforms and Government Reorganization

Reforming and reorganizing administrative structures is a hallmark of contemporary governments (Peters, 1992), aimed at enhancing civil service efficiency and effectiveness. Government reorganization further streamlines operations to support these reforms. Such efforts are not one time activities but constitute ongoing processes—a reality Ethiopia shares with other nations.

The subsequent sections describe administrative reforms and government reorganization efforts to date. To present the major reforms, we divide the timeline into two periods: before and after the 1990s. This division reflects Ethiopia's shift from a unitary state to an ethnically based federal system. Reforms before the 1990s highlight initiatives under the imperial and military governments, while those since then detail the EPRDF and Prosperity Party's efforts.

2.1. Administrative Reform and Government Reorganization in Pre-1990s

2.1.1. Reform under the Imperial Era

Despite the long history of Ethiopia, the genesis of modern public administration started at the beginning of the twentieth century during the reign of Menelik (1889-1913). He established ministries to modernize his administration in line with the European system (Bahru, 2001). He established the following ministries in 1907-08: justice, war, the interior, commerce and foreign Affairs, finance and agriculture, and public works (Perham, 1948:89). In addition, in 1911, the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs and a separate Foreign Affairs Ministry was established (Perham, 1948:89). These ministries were housed in palace enclosures and appointments were made based on integrity, loyalty to the Emperor and leadership capacity. Bahru (2001:178) notes that this reform displays the intention of the Emperor 'to give government an institutional basis and some degree of continuity.' It is also documented that ministers met together in a Council and passed laws during the reign of Emperor Menelik II (Perham, 1948:87). However, this Council was short-lived and it's power diminished in 1910 (Perham, 1948). Given the country's socio-economic

development, ministries mainly focused on maintaining law and order and providing rudimentary public services. This reform continued in greater scale and magnitude during the reign of Emperor Haile-Selassie. Emperor Haile Selassie (Regent, Ras Teferi, 1917-1930, Emperor, 1930-1974) made substantive contribution to developing modern public administration in the country. In addition to those established earlier, he added Industry, Education and Fine Arts, Justice, Public Works and Communication ministries, with departments for Mines and for Anti-Slavery (Perham, 1948). The major reforms implemented concerning the institutionalization of modern public administration during the reign of Hale Selassie are stated below:

The 1931 and 1955 constitutions

Hale Selassie promulgated the first modern constitution of the country in 1931 by replacing the *Fetha Negest.* In addition, a revised constitution was promulgated in 1955. These constitutions established a bicameral parliament consisting of the "Senate" and "Chamber of Deputies." In the latest constitution (1955), the executive organ of the government comprises the prime minister, ministries and executive departments. As per these constitutions, sovereignty resides in the hands of the emperor and he had the overall authority on all affairs of the Empire. The emperor had the authority to decide on the organization and regulation of all administrative departments and appoint and dismiss officials in these departments. The emperor also had the authority to appoint mayors of the municipalities from the three candidates presented in each case by the Municipal Council. This was a remarkable move in establishing a modern form of administration.

Administrative Regulation Decree No. 1 of 1942

In 1942, Emperor Haile Selassie promulgated Administrative Regulation Decree No. 1, instituting the Empire's provincial administration. Under this decree, the central government appointed governors-general, directors, *awraja* and *woreda* governors, mayors, principal secretaries, *meslänés*, and provincial police chiefs in each province (Paulos, 2001). The Governor-General, reporting to the Ministry of Inland Administration, supervised all provincial officers but had to follow the ministry's instructions. As a result, those officers answered to

both the ministry and the Governor-General, creating split authority and no single, unified direction.

Establishment of the Executive Organ, Order No. 1 and 2 of 1943

The other pertinent legal document concerns the establishment of the government's executive organ—comprising the Prime Minister, Council of Ministers, and the ministries—after Haile Selassie's restoration following the end of Italian occupation (1935–1941). In 1943, the Emperor promulgated An Order to Define the Powers and Duties of the Ministries (No. 1 of 1943) and An Order to Amend the Definition of Ministers' Powers (No. 2 of 1943). These orders clarified each ministry's responsibilities and ensured their effective implementation. Consequently, the number of ministries was expanded into eleven (Bahru, 2001). The Council of Ministers, which brought together the Prime Minister and all ministers, had significant responsibilities. It deliberated on every issue and forwarded policy decisions to the Emperor for approval via the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister chaired the Council and oversaw the ministers. Although the Emperor retained imperial prerogatives, ministries were empowered to draft their own laws and appoint junior officials (Bahru, 2001:295).

The Establishment of the Central Personnel Agency

The other administrative reform relates to the establishment of the Central Personnel Agency (CPA). The CPA was established by Order No. 23 of 1961, which was amended in 1962 (Order No. 28). It was created with the goal of ensuring a civil service that operates uniformly throughout the country, provides services efficiently, and safeguards the rights, responsibilities, and benefits of civil servants. The order also provided the detailed organizational setup of the agency, its duties and responsibilities, the definition of "government employee," and the principles and procedures for recruitment and selection in the civil service. The order also provided provisions about archival of civil services documents. Based on this order, a regulation was developed, which outlined the specific steps involved in managing human resources in government organizations. As a result of these orders and regulations, civil service positions were filled through competitive processes and based on clear employment criteria—namely academic or professional

qualifications and relevant work experience. This marked a significant step toward establishing a meritocratic civil service.

The other pertinent legislation deals with pension rights. The Pension Proclamation of 1955 detailed the types of pension, the amount to be paid, the roles of heirs, its administration, and other relevant provisions. This has strengthened the condition of service of the civil servants. It changed the system of providing plots of land to pensioners during retirement.

In general, Hale Selassie's government laid down the ground work for institutionalization of the civil service. The enactment of the constitutions as well as the establishment of ministries and the CPA were critical milestones in the development of modern public administration in the country

2.1.2. Reform Under the Military Government

The military regime, known as the Derg, took power in 1974 after the monarchy was overthrown by the 1974 revolution. The Derg ruled the country from 1974 to 1991. Once it assumed political power, it suspended the 1955 Constitution and led the nation by decrees and proclamations (Paulos, 2001). However, most of the government's work was delivered based on rules and regulations developed by the Haile Selassie government. Regarding the civil service, Paulos (2001:86) stated: "The Dergue also took some reform measures with regard to the salary scale of the civil service. The major ones were: the increase in the starting salary of the civil service from Br. 25 to Br. 50 (in 1975) and a shift in the ceiling from Br. 285 to Br. 636 for eligibility to periodic salary increment (in 1982)."

The Military government also promulgated the third constitution of the country, i.e. the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE), in 1987. As per Proclamation No. 8 of 1987, the military government established 20 ministries and 16 commissions, authorities, and institutes.

Concerning government reorganization during the military government, Paulos (2001:86) observed:

> Among some of the civil service reform measures taken during the period of the Dergue, the expansion of the state apparatus and the restructuring of the cabinet could be mentioned. Some new

ministries, commissions, agencies and authorities were created, others were merged or dissolved. Many were also renamed. A case in point is the Central Personnel Agency that was renamed the Public Service Commission.

In sum, the chief problems observed during this period were the absence of a merit system in the civil service, distrust and disrespect of the politicians toward career civil servants, poor pay an the presence of the political and functional structure in all public organizations, corruption, inefficiency and the absence of conducive environment for apolitical professionals (Paulos, 2001).

2.2. Civil Service Reform and government reorganization since the 1990s

The EPRDF-led government took political power in May 1991 and implemented several administrative reforms with the aim of improving public administration. It established a transitional government from 1991-1994 and declared a Federal Democratic Republic Government in 1995. Some of the chief measures taken under this government include changing the unitary government to ethnically based federal arrangement, moving from the command economy to market-led economy, changing the presidential system of government to parliamentary system, allowing sovereignty to reside in Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, endorsing the rights of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples to self-determination up to secession and advocating multiparty politics (see Paulos, 2001).

2.2.1. Civil Service Reform programmes since the 1990s

Donor supported civil service reforms have been implemented since the assumption of political power by EPRDF (see Paulos, 2001). These reforms can be categorized into four distinct phases considering the characteristics of the reform measures, their management, and government reorganization. The first phase begun in 1991 and ended in 1994, while the second phase covered the period from 1994 to 2010. The third phase begun in 2010 and ended in 2021. The fourth phase began in 2021 and continues to the present.

The initial phase covered the time from EPRDF's assumption of political power until the end of the Transitional Period (1991-1994). During this phase, the government implemented various reforms with the aim of improving the civil service in line with its ideology. The major reforms included: reorganizing and revising government structures and manpower plans, undertaking

retrenchment (10 percent of the workforce), terminating automatic assignment of fresh graduates of higher education to public organizations, raising the lowest salary of civil servants from Birr 50 to Birr 105, making salary increments to teachers and health professionals, allowing civil servants to resign from government positions at will, revising per diem rates and freezing recruitment in the civil service except for certain critical positions (Paulos, 2001). However, the World Bank (2008) revealed that reforms in the area of pay, recruitment, promotion and downsizing have been undermined by the persistence of patronage systems and politicization of the bureaucracy.

The second phase began in 1994 with the formation of the Task Force for Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP). This comprehensive programme comprised five major sub programmes (SP): i). The Expenditure Management and Control SP; ii). Human Resource SP; iii). Top Management SP; iv). Service Delivery and Quality of Service SP and v). Ethics and Judicial Reform SP. Each sub programme contained varied projects (see Mesfin, 2009). In 2001, the Ministry of Capacity Building was established to consolidate capacity-building activities that had been fragmented across sectors. In addition, a separate organ was established in the civil service with the aim of implementing the outputs of the CSRP. This organ was responsible for the implementation of all directives/guidelines of the programme. Besides, officials and civil servants received trainings in areas such as change management, strategic planning and management, result based performance management and Business Process Reengineering. The civil service was instructed to apply all these tools of management. This is a typical application of New Public Management concepts, which promote the adoption of private-sector management practices—such as performance measurement, decentralization, and customer-oriented service delivery—within the public sector. In 2004, a total of fourteen (14) capacity building programmes were incorporated into the country's Poverty Reduction Plan (SDPRP) (Mesfin, 2009). However, according to Mesfin (2009), the discussion the government of Ethiopia held with the World Bank regarding financial resources and technical expertise to the capacity building programmes led to the introduction of the Public Sector Capacity Building Programme (PSCAP) in 2004. PSCAP consisted of six programmes. Further examination of this programme's aims reveals that PSCAP was primarily focused on procedural matters and did not include

initiatives to develop a government workforce with the necessary skills, incentives, and ethos. It also paid little attention to public-sector accountability, which is essential for delivering quality public services (see Schiavo-Campo, 1996).

The primary challenges encountered during the second phase of the civil service reform programme included lack of a comprehensive policy; uncoordinated and poorly sequenced approach; shortage of skilled manpower; limited understanding of the realities of the Ethiopian civil service; informal, ad hoc task arrangements; and the presence of diversified clients—including the civil service, public enterprises, the judiciary, the police, the prosecution, and the military. All of these factors contributed to the limited success of the second phase of the reforms (Mesfin, 2009).

In 2010, the Ministry of Capacity Building was dissolved due to government reorganization. Its duties and responsibilities, along with those of the Federal Civil Service Agency, were transferred to the newly established 'Ministry of Civil Service.' One of the duties of the newly established ministry was to coordinate public sector capacity building activities, adopt strategies for continuous improvement of the public sector and monitor and evaluate the implementation of the same. This is a clear shift in the direction and orientation of the CSRP. The responsibility to implement results of the reform programmes lay on the shoulder of each government unit as the role of the Ministry of Civil Service is limited to coordination, monitoring and evaluation. Especially with the change of government in 2018, reform endeavors such as e-government, ease of doing business and renovation of office facilities have been undertaken in many public organizations. This state of affairs continued until 2021 and this year marked the beginning of the fourth phase.

In 2021, the Federal Civil Service Commission was reorganized as one organ of the federal government accountable to the Prime Minister's Office. The Commission reviewed prior initiatives related to the human resource management sub programme. It then developed 'Government Service and Administration' policy and the Council of Ministers approved this policy in 2024. This policy document highlights seven key issues within the civil service; i.e. absence of free and impartial/neutral civil service; insufficient representation;

poor government organization, job evaluation and compensation; absence of effective service delivery; shortage of qualified personnel; absence of organized database, and deficiencies in leadership for institutional change.

Since the early 1990s, the country's civil service reform programmes—though intended to improve service delivery—were both poorly conceived and inadequately implemented. One major shortcoming was the absence of a well-thought-out definition of "civil servant" and other fundamental public-administration values.

Three proclamations of the Federal Civil Service define the term 'civil servant' in different ways. Though there is variation in the definition of 'civil service' from one country to another (see Olowu and Adamolekun, 1999), it is uncommon to have various proclamations of one country define the civil service differently. For instance, proclamation No. 262/2002 defines a civil servant as 'a person employed permanently or temporarily by a government office.'[1] This definition fails to guarantee the security of tenure of civil servants. Inclusion of temporary employees in the definition violates the permanent nature of the civil service. And 'Government Office' is defined as 'any federal government office established as an autonomous institution by a proclamation or regulation and fully or partially financed by government budget.'

In contrast, Proclamation No. 515/2007 provides distinct definitions for 'civil servant' and 'temporary civil servant'. Temporary civil servants can serve in temporary or permanent jobs depending on the circumstances. In this context, temporary employees were recognized as civil servants. This again undermines the permanence of the civil service. Regarding the definition of 'government institution', it accepted the definition of the previous proclamation and further indicated that any government institution need to be included in the list of government institutions to be drawn up by the Council of Ministers. Having a

[1] This definition does not apply to: a). government officials with the rank of deputy minister, deputy commissioner, and with other equivalent ranks and above; b). members of the House of People's Representatives and the House of Federation; c). federal judges and prosecutors; d). members of the Armed Forces and the Federal Policy including other employees governed by the regulations of the Armed Forces and the Federal Police; e). employees excluded from the coverage of this Proclamation by other appropriate laws.

list of government institutions by the Council of Ministers is a good move as the information is not completely available in the concerned offices.

Proclamation No. 1064/2017, the latest proclamation, has adopted the definition of 'civil servants' mentioned in prior proclamations and changed the definition of 'temporary civil servants' to 'temporary employees.' This adjustment ensures the permanence of the civil service although it is not explicitly stated. This proclamation defined 'government institution' as institution financed by government budget, but does not clarify whether the funding is complete or partial. Such a definition significantly determines the scope of the civil service. On the other hand, proclamation No. 1183/2020 which deals with the Federal Administrative Procedure defines 'administrative agency' as 'an executive organ of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia dully established by law and includes the Executive Organs of City Administrations accountable to the Federal Government.' This highlights a variation in conceptualizing and thus hampers any attempt to operationalize concepts like civil service, civil servant, public service and government institution and administrative agency. This implies that consensus needs to be established among different stakeholders in view of the vision, mission and values of public administration/civil service.

Moreover, conversations with experts in the field uncovered that the reform measures have not properly addressed the major elements of the civil service which are neutrality, competence, merit, representativeness, executive leadership, being free from neo-patrimonial attitude, differentiating the ruling party from the government and national unity (see also Berhanu and Vogel, 2006; Teshome, 2009). Furthermore, the World Bank (2008) emphasized the absence of good diagnosis and analysis led to inappropriate reforms.

The literature in public human resource management provides four traditional public HRM systems such as patronage/spoils, civil service, collective bargaining and representativeness (Llorens, Klingner and Nalbandian, 2018). These HRM systems still exist in the civil service of many countries. But the key issue is the development of meritocratic civil service that allows politicians to assign qualified and competent professionals in leadership position without having a permanent tenure. In the realm of collective bargaining, labor unions within

government organizations negotiate with the government on terms and conditions of employment. The other important issue relates to representation. This needs careful and well thought-out measures given the fact that such a move should not dismantle a civil service which is capable of delivering impartial and neutral public services. To address this, the civil service needs to use targeted recruitment mechanisms to select qualified and competent people from groups of the society which are not fully represented in the civil service. Besides, there is a need to develop a common identity as servants of the country as well as emphasizing on missions of public organizations (Blum and Rogger, 2020). On the other hand, emerging trends in public HRM include privatization and partnership, which introduce flexible employment arrangements aligned with the ideals of the New Public Management.

In conclusion, as Schiavo-Campo (1996:10) underscored, while cost containment is a vital element of civil-service reform, it cannot stand alone. An efficient, motivated civil service is essential for good governance, the delivery of public goods and services, sound economic policy, and prudent expenditure management. Ultimately, reform must aim to build a workforce endowed with the skills, incentives, ethos, and accountability needed to fulfill the government's mandate. The reforms to date have been undermined by inconsistent definitions of "civil service." Future measures should therefore begin by establishing a clear, unified definition of key concepts and embedding core values—neutrality, competence, merit, and representativeness—within a framework grounded in a rigorous diagnosis of Ethiopia's context.

2.2.2. Government Reorganization since the 1990s

The institutional design of the executive organs of the government plays an important role in initiating, developing, formulating and implementing public policy. The extent of change/reorganization of these executive organs depends on the form of government (i.e. presidential, parliamentary, and semi-presidential). Especially, the executive in a parliamentary type of government has a tremendous influence on the bureaucratic structure of the government. Many of the reform agendas emanate from the head of the government. Since he/she has the majority seats in the parliament, whatever reforms that he/she brings into their attention will be approved. This has been the case in Ethiopia.

Government functions are organized at the top level into ministries or departments, each led by a high ranking political appointee. Beneath these primary units, functions are further divided into departments, divisions, branches, and sections. Countries such as Japan, Italy, Israel, Kenya, and Ethiopia use the term “ministry,” whereas Burkina Faso, Cameroon, France, the United States, and the United Kingdom refer to their top-level units as “departments.”

Hence, it is difficult to think of developing a homogeneous type of structure of government for all countries. Context matters. Regarding this, Schiavo-Campo and McFerson (2008:74) note that organizational structures need to be developed in view of the size and complexity of the country, the nature of the political system and the policy objectives and priorities. This does not mean that there are no general guidelines in shaping government structures. The grouping of government functions can be made based on functions, products, clients and process (Schiavo-Campo and McFerson, 2008). In addition, Schiavo-Campo and McFerson (2008) identify three key factors that explain how functions are allocated to ministries: the significance of each function, the optimal grouping of related functions, and the desired level of central control. They caution, however, that this allocation is ultimately a political process.

In view of these organizing principles, the basic principles applied in reorganization efforts of the government in Ethiopia included: function (such as education, defence, labor) clients (women, pastoralist, youth, children, public enterprises), and process (such as water resources, public works).

In determining the number of ministries, decision makers need to take into account cost, the nature of coordination, accountability, and the pressure for bureaucratic expansion. Most countries manage the day-to-day activities of the government with 12-18 central ministries (Schiavo-Campo and McFerson, 2008:109). Against this background, the following sections detail the major government reorganization efforts undertaken since the 1990s.

Reorganization, which can vary in scope, can take place in different levels of the executive branch (Mansfield, 1969). In the context of the Federal Government, minor modifications can be done across varied ministries and administrative organizations. These organizations in the executive branch undergo

modifications in their structure by either merging or demolishing units or by adjusting manpower needs of different organizational units. Such kind of changes in most cases are handled by the Federal Civil Service Commission or the Prime Minister's Office. However, major changes in the reorganization of federal executive agencies including ministries, commissions and others are undertaken by the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers. Nonetheless, there is no specific provision that clearly indicate the role of the Prime Minister in determining the organization of the executive branch.

However, the Council of Ministers has the power to decide on the organizational structure of ministries and other organs of government responsible to it (Article 77/2). This indicates that it is the Council of Ministers which is led by the Prime Minister that has the power to make decisions on the organization or reorganization of the executive branch. Given this, the role of the legislative branch is minimal in making decision in this regard.

The House of People's Representatives (HoPR) has the mandate to approve the appointments of members of the Council of Ministers but does not have direct role in approving the structure of the executive organ. Accordingly, the Council of Ministers had been empowered to reorganize the federal government executive organs by issuing regulations for the closure, merger or division of an existing executive organ, the establishment of a new one or for change of its accountability or mandates. This provision has been stated in Proclamations No. 691/2010, 916/2015 and 1097/2018. In the following sections, attempt is made to describe the objectives and characteristics/features and implications of government reorganization efforts over the last three decades. In the following sections, we will review the objectives, key features, and implications of government reorganization efforts over the past three decades. This discussion does not, however, cover the detailed structure or day-to-day operations of each executive organ.

Objectives of government reorganization

Over the last three decades, a number of proclamations have been promulgated to provide the definition of the powers and duties of the executive organs of the FDRE. Except few proclamations, most of them did not specify the basic purposes of government reorganization. From those proclamations one

can understand that reorganizations are basically made because of two basic reasons. First, to bring about administrative effectiveness and efficiency and second, to advance political agenda. Further, the latest proclamation aims to ensure the sustainability of organizational structure and designation of institutions.

Features/Characteristics of Reorganization

Government reorganization refers to the rearrangement of the structure of the executive organ of the government. In this activity, the roles and duties of some ministries could be merged or a new ministry could be established. Government reorganization is a common undertaking in the Ethiopian Public Administration. Over the last three decades (1993-2021), every five or less years, there was restructuring of the executive organs of the federal government. During this period, the number of ministries has fluctuated between 15 and 25. The smallest number of ministries was organized in 1995, while the largest number of ministries established in 2015. Currently, there are 22 ministries in operation.

As indicated, this section deals with the reorganization endeavors that have taken place over the last three decades (i.e. 1993-2021). In this period, a major shift has been made in 2001 after the split of the TPLF. Four super-ministries—Rural Development, Infrastructure, Federal Affairs, and Capacity Building—were created to accelerate execution of government plans for socioeconomic development. Moreover, Ministries of Rural Development and Capacity Building were granted authority to supervise other ministries, an unprecedented move that violated the unity-of-command principle. This structure remained in place for five years before being revised in 2005.

A major change took place in 2015 with a significant expansion of ministries. After the 2015 legislative elections, Prime Minister Haile Mariam Dessalegn grew his cabinet to 25 ministries. Functions once grouped under a single Agriculture and Natural Resources ministry were split into three: the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources; the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries; and the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change. Likewise, responsibilities of the former Ministry of Urban Development and Construction were divided between the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing and the Ministry of Construction. The former Public Enterprises Authority was also

elevated to ministerial status as the Ministry of Public Enterprises. The following sections detail the reorganizations undertaken across the economic, social, and administrative/general-services divisions of the executive branch.

Economic Sector

Reorganization of the government over the last three decades highlights that there is no stability in the organization of the executive organ. This can be attested by the repeated reorganizations made in ministries that are categorized under the economic sector, a case in point could be what happened to the agriculture sector (discussed above) in 2001, 2005 and 2015. This could have contributed to the instability of the sector. Change of duties from one ministry to the other could jeopardize the day-to-day activities of the organization. Besides, it demands substantial effort in sustaining and building a new culture of the organization by merging different work units.

The Ministry of Mines and Energy has also undergone frequent changes. The ministry has been in this name till 2001. In 2001, the energy part was reorganized under the Ministry of Infrastructure Development. However, in 2005 the 'Ministry of Mines and Energy' was reestablished. In other words, the energy part has been reinstated to the ministry. Although the naming of this organization varies from time to time, there is no change in the duties and responsibilities of this executive organ since 2010. In other words, the name of the ministry has been changed without altering the major duties and responsibilities of the same. This ministry performed its duties and responsibilities for about 15 years since 2010. But powers and duties related to the energy sector have been merged with other ministry. This reveals that there is no agreement among decision makers regarding the exact definition of mines and energy. This is a clear manifestation of the inadequacy of conceptualization of the profession and discipline. This demands the need to develop clarity for specific terminologies depending on the nature and domain of the discipline and profession.

The Ministry of Water Resources has been organized as one executive organ since 1995. In 2010, the powers and duties concerning the energy sector has been incorporated into this ministry, i.e. Ministry of Water and Energy. Although its name has changed through time, the duties and responsibilities

entrusted to this organ have generally continued unaffected. However, duties and responsibilities related to irrigation have been transferred to a newly organized executive organ, i.e. Ministry of Irrigation and Lowland. Such kind of executive organ should have been organized in the form of Authority under the executive organ of the government as this relates to project type activities.

The Ministry of Transport and Communication has served as one of the executive organs of the government since 1987. As indicated, a major shift was made in 2001 when the Ministry of Infrastructure Development was established with duties and responsibilities including transport, communication, energy, works and urban development. However, in 2005 the Ministry of Transport and Communication was reorganized excluding duties and responsibilities related to construction and energy sectors. In 2010, a Ministry of Communication and Information Technology was established, taking over communication and telecommunication duties and responsibilities from the Ministry of Transport and Communication. Since 2018, the Ministry of Innovation and Technology was organized by assuming duties and responsibilities related to technology and information technology. In this line, both the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology and the Ministry of Science and Technology were dissolved in the subsequent reorganizations.

Industry and trade roles/functions were organized as two separate ministries in 1993. However, these two ministries were merged for about 15 years from 1995-2010. Since 2010, the two ministries were organized separately once more. In 2018, the ministries were merged together again. Lastly, since 2021, trade and industry were organized as separate ministries. Such reorganization needs to take into account the development of the country in different sectors of the economy. As of 2022/23, the contribution of agriculture, industry, and service to the GDP accounts for 32 percent, 28 percent and 40 percent respectively (African Development Bank, 2024: IX).

Social sector

This part deals with the reorganization of tasks of the government in the social sector. The Ministry of Health has not exhibited significant changes except in terms of including some additional duties and responsibilities. Over the period under study, most of the time, the Ministry of Education has been assigned

duties and responsibilities concerning primary, secondary and tertiary education. However, during the period from 2018 to 2021, the tertiary education sector was organized under a separate ministry, i.e. Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs was in existence as an executive organ until 2021. Currently, the powers and duties of this ministry have been divided into two. Some of the duties related to labor were taken to a new Ministry, i.e. Labor and Skill. The remaining tasks connected to social affairs have been merged with another Ministry, i.e. Women and Social Affairs. The other executive organs in this domain that have gone through reorganization include tourism, culture and youth.

Administration and General Service

Regarding ministries grouped under this classification, substantial change has not been observed in terms of reorganization. The following ministries have continued as is with certain modifications of duties and responsibilities: Ministry of National Defense, Foreign Affairs and Justice. The Ministry of Revenues was organized in 2001 and provided services until 2008. However, the Ethiopian Revenues and Customs Authority was established in 2008 by taking the duties and responsibilities of the Ministry of Revenues. This has been the case for the past one decade. In this arrangement, the Authority has tremendous autonomy in managing its personnel and providing services to the public. However, ten years later the Ministry of Revenues was reinstated in 2018. So, the powers and duties provided to the Ethiopian Revenues and Customs Authority have been transferred to the Ministry of Revenues.

A separate ministry was also organized for the administration of the civil service for about eight years (2010-2018). It was replaced by a Civil Service Commission that was established in 2018. Likewise, the Ministry of Capacity Building which was functional for about ten years from 2001 as supra-ministry was dissolved and its duties and responsibilities transferred to sectoral ministries which it used to supervise.

The Implications of Government Reorganization

The above section highlighted that over the past three decades government functions have been either consolidated, dispersed, merged or eliminated in restructuring process of the executive organ of the government. Besides, authority relation has changed among functions of government. Some of the major weakness in such endeavour include, among other things, the following:

- Lack of support for the continuity of the executive organ of the government;
- Obstacles to execute one of the critical tasks of the civil service, i.e. managing personnel and other related records of the work units;
- Confusion among senior citizens regarding the location and operations of government organizations;
- Difficulties in completing studies initiated by one ministry following a merger or dissolution;
- Interruption of ongoing initiatives that seek decisions or further actions;
- Risks to existing projects during transitions in political leadership within the ministry;
- Challenges in cultivating a new organizational culture after ministries have merged; and
- The need for additional measures to establish structure for the restructured or newly formed ministry, which involves assigning civil servants to specific roles and this can disrupt the regular operations of the ministry.

In the end, over the past three decades, the initiative for government reorganization has been primarily generated from the Prime Ministers' office. In particular, the Prime Minister, either alone or in collaboration with senior ministers, set the goals to be achieved in government reorganization. Reorganizations may be undertaken to address capacity and efficiency issues within the civil service. However, some restructurings of executive agencies are driven by political calculations, aiming to consolidate the ruling party's control over the bureaucracy and reward loyalists.

Often, reorganization studies take place around the end of the fifth parliamentary year. Rreorganization happens when a new government (cabinet) is established following legislative elections. In many instances, the Federal Civil Service Commission has played an advisory role in government reorganization, with its experts advising on the feasibility of proposed changes and on the authority relationships between independent public organizations and federal ministries. However, government reorganization framework was developed by the former Planning and Development Commission after engaging with different stakeholders. Ideally, this responsibility should rest with the Federal Civil Service Commission or a dedicated unit in the Prime Minister's Office. Moreover, the task needs to be carried out by the task force established in the Prime Minister's Office—specifically the unit assigned to such work—or by an independent body.

3. Capacity of the Civil Service

While frequent government reorganization influences the stability and continuity of the civil service, it may also facilitate and enhance the formulation and implementation of public policy by streamlining tasks and work flows. However, additional resources such as human resources, financial resources, conducive internal and external environment and so on are essential for the civil service to fulfill its roles effectively. Among these, human resources play a significant role. Accordingly, this section focuses on the capacity of the civil service in relation to its human resources.

Capacity is defined as "the ability to perform appropriate tasks effectively, efficiently and sustainably." (Grindle and Hilderbrand, 1995:445). It implies capabilities aimed at bringing about development. Polidano (2000) defined public sector capacity in terms of three components: policy capacity, implementation authority and operational efficiency. These components illustrate the public sector's role in shaping public policy, executing it, and ensuring overall effectiveness and efficiency. However, this does not mean that these are the only capacities that contribute to the accomplishment of the roles of the public sector in general and the civil service in particular. Grindle and Hilderbrand (1995) identified five dimensions of capacity that contribute to the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the public sector. These

dimensions are: the action environment, the institutional context of the public sector, the task network, organization and human resource. All these dimensions can constrain or facilitate the accomplishment of particular tasks. So, capacity is not something that can be obtained from one source. As mentioned, the civil service performs tasks that apply to all sections of the society. To perform these tasks effectively, efficiently and sustainably, there is a need to pool capacities from all these dimensions.

Of all these, particularly the human resource dimension somehow overcome performance problems that could emanate from organizations and task network dimensions of capacity. In addition, the human resource in the civil service needs to demonstrate technical, regulatory and administrative capacity in view of its roles. This section examines the civil service's capacity using broad indicators—size, regional distribution, gender composition, educational qualification, and salary range—to provide an approximate assessment of its overall capability.

3.1. Size of the Civil Service

Since the establishment of the CPA, the number of the civil service employees has increased from time to time. Over the past six decades, the civil service personnel has grown from nearly 47,000 civil servants to more than 2.2 million, distributed across the entire country (FCSC, 2015 Eth. Cal.).

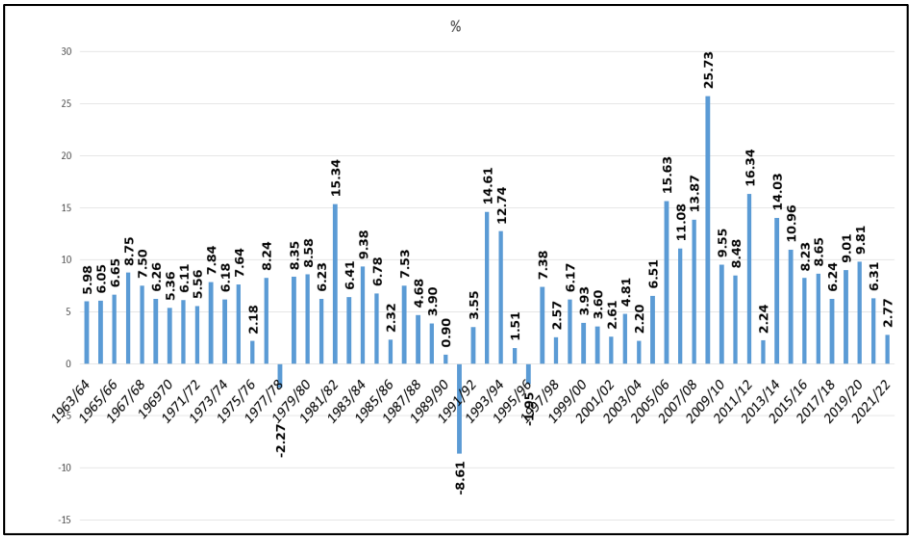
In the fiscal year 1962/63, the number of civil service personnel was less than 47,000. Within a span of less than twelve years, this figure doubled by 1973/74. By 1981/82 fiscal year, the number of civil service personnel reached nearly 158,000, reflecting a 15 percent rise compared to the previous year. This growth was attributed to the expansion of the civil service in the country. Prior to 1991, the number of civil service personnel reached a total of 216,058.

In the fiscal year 2004/05, the number of permanent civil service personnel nearly doubled, exceeding four hundred thousand. By 2005/6, civil service personnel increased by nearly 16 percent. This happened when opposition parties secured all seats in the Addis Ababa City Administration and many seats in the House of People's Representatives during the 2005 general elections. This condition probably forced the ruling party (EPRDF) to increase civil service

personnel to address concerns of the public. The growth continued and the number of civil service personnel reached more than one million in 2011/12. This growth of the civil service personnel can be explained from the philosophy of the government, i.e. considering the state as the engine of growth and advocating for a developmental state model. The number of the civil service personnel reached more than two million in 2021/22, i.e. within 10 years.

In general, there is a tremendous increase in the civil service personnel over the last three decades. Although a number of factors could contribute to this growth (i.e. the application of the concept of developmental state, the need for public services, the presence of patrimonial system etc.), a major contributing factor stems from the form of government adopted, i.e. the federal type of government (see also Meheret, 2018).

Figure 1: Annual growth rate of permanent employees of the Civil Service in %



Source: Civil Service Personnel Statistical Abstract, 2022/23 (2015 Eth. Cal.)

Figure 1 above displays the annual growth rate of permanent employees of the civil service. Between 1963/64 to 1976/77, the growth rate fluctuated from two percent to nearly 9 percent. However, in 1977/78, the annual percentage growth rate plummeted to -2.27 percent. By 1981/82, the growth rate reached 15 percent. During this time, most of the conflicts in the country reduced and public service was provided to many parts of the country. The other lowest

annual growth rate was recorded in 1990/91 and it was nearly -9 percent. This is probably due to the demise of the military government and the absence of government infrastructure in many parts of the country. In the subsequent years of 1992/93 and 1993/94, the annual growth rate was 15 and 13 percent respectively. However, by 1995/96, the growth rate was nearly -2 percent. This was due to the implementation of the retrenchment policy. Over the last six decades, the highest growth rate, i.e. nearly 26 percent, was recorded in 2008/9. In 2005/6 and 2011/12, the growth rate was 16 percent. In 2007/8 and 2013/14, the growth rate was 14 percent. This trend indicates the government's commitment to expanding public services, including at the lowest echelon of its hierarchy. This growth needs to be seen in line with regional distribution.

3.2. Regional Civil Services

Table 1 below displays the number of civil servants for eleven regional governments and two federal city administrations from 2017/18 to 2021/22. During this period, Oromia, Amhara and the former South Nations, Nationalities and People's (SNNP) regions recorded the highest number of civil servants. As indicated in Table 1, the growth rate of civil servants in regional governments declined and reached 3 percent by 2021/22. In contrast, the growth trend in the federal government was the highest in 2019/20. But by 2021/22 the growth rate of civil servants in the federal government reached negative. The percentage share of civil service personnel in regional governments has declined from time to time (see Table 1).

Table 1: Total number of civil servants by region, 2017/18-2021/22

Region	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Oromia	515,624	538,731	575,182	598,285	616,424
Amara	367,301	387,316	405,891	417,368	420,053
SNNP	310,419	346,704	312,146	343,511	291,927
Addis Ababa City Gov.	115,398	120,746	144,418	161,463	162,427
Ethio-Somale	71,647	117,986	120,945	123,268	132,761
Tigray	100,173	109,178	114,637	114,637	114,637
Sidama			80, 468	92,814	97,241
South West Ethiopia					73,639
Afar	35,658	35,722	36,554	36,367	40,186
Benishangul-Gumuz	30,278	34,684	29,761	35,270	35,785
Gambella	22,369	21,646	25,644	26,571	27,819
Hareri	6,412	6,546	10,014	11,049	11,227
Dire Dawa City Admin.	8,508	8,237	9,621	9,785	9,994
Total-Regions	**1,583,787**	**1,727,495**	**1,865,281**	**1,970,388**	**2,034,120**
% change		8.32	7.39	5.33	3.13
% Share of the Regions	90.90	90.95	89.43	88.86	89.26
Total-Federal	158,617	171,933	220,435	246,984	244,650
% change		7.74	22.00	10.75	-0.95
% Share of the Federal	9.10	9.05	10.57	11.14	10.74
Total-National	**1,742,404**	**1,899,428**	**2,085,716**	**2,217,372**	**2,278,770**

Source: Civil Service Personnel Statistical Abstract, 2022/23 (2015 Eth. Cal.)

3.3. Gender Composition of the Civil Service

The gender composition of the civil service personnel is depicted in Table 2. This table demonstrates the gender representation at Federal and Regional levels over five years (2017/18-2021/22). During those years, especially in regional

states, the percentage change of female workers is not that much significant. The general trend shows a snail pace change. The current percentage of women in regional governments which is nearly 38 percent is well below the proportion of female population to the total population of the country (i.e. 50 percent).

The overall trend regarding the composition of female employees in the federal civil service is either declining or stagnant. However, the gross percentage of female employees at federal offices is by far better than regional offices (i.e. nearly 43 percent). Nonetheless, this figure remains lower than the national ratio of females to males. This highlights the need to enhance the representation of females who fulfill the criteria for each position.

Table 2: Gender representations of the Civil Service Personnel, (2017/18-2021/22)

Year	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Regional- Total	1,004,165	579,622	1,093,168	634,327	1,163,370	701,911	1,226,362	744,026	1,264,084	770,036
%	63.4	36.6	63.28	36.72	62.37	37.63	62.24	37.76	62.14	37.86
Federal- Total	93,176	65,441	97,485	74,448	125,135	95,300	141,891	105,093	140,690	103,960
%	58.74	41.26	56.7	43.3	56.77	43.23	57.45	42.55	57.51	42.49
Grand Total	1,097,341	645,063	1,190,653	708,775	1,288,505	797,211	1,368,253	849,119	1,404,774	873,996
%	62.98	37.02	62.68	37.32	61.78	38.22	61.71	38.29	61.65	38.35

Source: Civil Service Personnel Statistical Abstract, 2022/23 (2015 Eth. Cal.)

3.4. Educational Qualification of the civil service

The primary duties and responsibilities of the civil service focus chiefly on policy making, implementation, service delivery, monitoring and evaluation. These tasks and responsibilities require employees with appropriate qualifications. Well-educated personnel are better equipped to fulfil their roles with commitment, diligence and care. They also contribute to the stability and continuity of the civil service.

Table 3: Educational qualification of civil servants

Educational Background	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Quantity	%
Read and write	25,175	1.44	45,139	2.39	14,748	0.71	4,255	0.19	15,331	0.67
Up to 12th grade	237,558	13.63	186,818	9.84	275,991	13.23	292,410	13.19	286,618	12.6
Certificate (10+1)	50,419	2.89	46,180	2.43	52,612	2.52	52,100	2.35	39,390	1.73
College Diploma	836,543	48.01	821,311	43.47	935,872	44.87	1,102,542	49.72	924,553	40.6
Sub Total	1,149,695	65.98	1,099,448	57.88	1,279,223	61.33	1,451,307	65.45	1,265,892	55.6
1st degree	539,407	30.96	579,420	30.5	710,256	34.05	651,420	29.38	858,959	37.7
2nd Degree	41,704	2.39	48,183	2.54	70,455	3.38	87,391	3.94	102,586	4.5
PhD	2,476	0.14	2,968	0.16	4,459	0.21	6,532	0.29	6,093	0.27
Sub Total	583,587	33.49	630,571	33.2	785,170	37.65	745,343	33.61	967,638	42.5
unknown	9,122	0.52	169,408	8.92	21,323	1.02	20,722	0.93	45,240	1.99
Grand Total	1,742,404	100	1,899,428	100	2,085,716	100	2,217,372	100	2,278,770	100

Source: Civil Service Personnel Statistical Abstract, 2022/23 (2015 Eth. Cal.)

Over a span of last five years, the percentage of employees whose educational qualification was only 'read and write' had declined (see Table 3). During this period, more than 55 percent employees had educational qualification below a first degree. By 2020/21, nearly 43 percent of the civil service personnel had first degree and above. However, there have been public concerns regarding the lack of technical expertise among federal civil servants while civil servants themselves believed they have adequate skills for their roles (World Bank, 2019). This situation highlights the importance of filling civil service positions with individuals capable of effectively delivering public services. Furthermore, considering the essential roles of the civil service, it is appropriate to enhance recruitment efforts to attract and retain qualified and competent candidates. The conditions of service including the salary of the civil servants need to be discussed to understand the capability of the civil service to attract the best and the brightest.

3.5. Salary range of the civil service

The other pertinent issue that needs to be raised in connection with the capacity of the civil service personnel relates to the salary and conditions of service. Overall, the capacity of the civil service to attract the best and the brightest predominately relates to the salary and conditions of service. If the

salary is attractive, many qualified and competent individuals are more likely to join and make meaningful contribution to the civil service.

Table 4: Grades and Salary range of Civil Service Personnel in terms of Gender (2019/20-2021/22)

Range of Grades	2019/20		2020/21		2021/22		Salary Range
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
I-VIII	253,069	234,600	289,888	259,126	281,652	252,140	1,100-3,934
% within	19.64	29.43	21.19	30.52	20.05	28.85	
% with other	51.89	48.11	52.8	47.2	52.76	47.24	
Total	487,669		549,014		533, 792		
IX-XVI	618,802	345,095	714,574	391,239	747,597	415,156	4,609-11,305
% within	48.03	43.29	52.23	46.08	53.22	47.5	
% with other	64.2	35.8	64.62	35.38	64.3	35.7	
Total	963,897		1,105,813		1,162,753		
XVII-XXII	25,187	5737	31,319	7,767	37,060	8,281	12,579-20,468
% within	2	0.72	2.29	0.92	2.64	0.95	
% with other	81.45	18.55	80.13	19.87	81.74	18.26	
Total	30,924		39,086		45,341		
Appointment	10,757	2,275	7,242	1,925	10,193	2,866	
% within	0.84	0.29	0.53	0.23	0.73	0.33	
% with other	82.54	17.46	79	21	78.05	21.95	
Total	13,032		9,167		13,059		
Others	380,690	209,504	325,230	189,062	328,272	195,553	
% within	29.55	26.28	23.77	22.27	23.37	22.38	
% with other	64.5	35.5	63.24	36.76	62.67	37.33	
Total	590,194		514,292		523,825		
Grand Total	1,288,505	797,211	1,368,253	849,119	1,404,774	873,996	
%	100	100	100	100	100	100	

Source: Civil Service Personnel Statistical Abstract, 2022/23 (2015 Eth. Cal.)

The data on Table 4 provide important insights regarding gender variation in the salaries of civil service personnel. Among the total number of male and female civil service personnel, 20 percent male and 29 percent of female earn monthly salaries ranging from 1, 100 Birr to 3, 943 Birr. This indicates a higher percentage of female employees receive lower salaries compared to their male counterparts. On the contrary, 53 and 48 percent of male and female

employees respectively earn salaries that range from Birr 4,609 to Birr 11, 305 per month. As salaries grow, the share of female employees decline. Similarly, among the total male and female employees, nearly 3 and 1 percent respectively earn a salary that ranges from Birr 12,579 to 20,468 per month. From this it is possible to understand that female employees are engaged in jobs that worth low salary. In other words, most of the positions that earn relatively greater salaries are held by male employees. In general, the above table clearly demonstrates that the salary of the civil service personnel is below the market rate for each job and the cost of living in the country. Besides, it does not attract the best and the brightest to engage in the civil service.

Without making any distinction based on gender, 23.42 percent of the employees earn less than Birr 3,934 per month. Fifty one percent of employees earn a salary that ranges from Birr 4,609 to Birr 11,305 per month. Nearly two percent of the employees in the civil service earn a monthly salary that ranges from Birr 12,579 to Birr 20,468. This data excludes those employees who are political appointees and others of similar position. In general, civil servants in Ethiopia receive low basic pay and few incentives. The salaries of the civil service personnel is not comparable to employees working in private enterprises and nongovernmental organizations. In addition, there is wage erosion due to inflation and market-led foreign currency exchange. There is also salary compression that is 'a reduction of the ratio of the salary differentials between the highest and lowest paid in the civil service' (Olowu and Adamolekun, 1999:91). These negatively affect the recruitment, retention and overall civil service personnel productivity.

The terms and conditions of employment in the civil service is poor. The government has made changes in the salary scale of the civil service since 1994. On average, every three years there was a change in the salary scale. However, major modifications to the salary scale were made over a six-to-seven-year period, spanning 2000-2024. Taking many years to review the salary scale could erode the purchasing power of the civil servants and this has tremendous impact on their morale and productivity. In contrast, the private sector and government-owned public enterprises periodically adjust their salary scales in response to their performance and the prevailing economic conditions. Civil servants in Ethiopia earn monthly salary determined for the position they hold. Some government organizations provide house and cars to directors, team leaders and other employees on the basis of their position. Almost all civil

servants, especially in the capital, Addis Ababa use transport services provided by the Public Service Transport Enterprise free of charge. However, there are no other benefits and incentive systems available for civil servants in Ethiopia. Serving the public could be the only incentive that motivates civil servants. These days (2023-2024) especially in some regional governments, particularly in southern Ethiopia, civil servants are not receiving monthly salary in time. This condition coupled with the dire cost of living could force civil servants to engage in malpractices. This needs urgent action on the part of government.

Further, in the context of Ethiopia, the civil service as a source of employment does not attract the best and the brightest due to the low level salaries and conditions of service. This is evident from the statistical data shown above. In essence, its ability to attract, retain, and nurture the most talented individuals is limited. As a result, the capacity of the civil service to provide invaluable advice and effectively deliver public service will be at risk. A human resource without basic knowledge and skills in providing service will likely indulge in rent seeking behavior.

Another essential issue is the lack of open and competitive recruitment procedure. Each civil service organization manages its own recruitment process and this does not foster competition. Currently, all applicants are supposed to apply for each individual organization. If there were a centralized system for submitting applications, then it would likely enhance the competitive nature of the process to some degree.

4. Concluding Remarks

This study has examined major administrative/civil service reforms, government reorganization, and contemporary capability of the civil service in Ethiopia. It utilized primary and secondary sources of data and information. Various proclamations, books and articles were analyzed, and interviews were conducted with civil servants and knowledgeable scholars in the domain of the study.

Although Ethiopia is ancient country, modern public administration started in the early 20th century under the rule of Menelik. Since then, successive governments have made their contribution to the development of the country. The extent and nature of administrative reforms have differed from one

government to another. But none of them have succeeded in establishing a full-fledged professional, merit-based, impartial and permanent civil service.

Fundamental changes have occurred during the reign of Hale Selassie and the EPRDF-led government. Haile-Selassie enacted constitutions, established the CPA, strengthened the executive branch of the government and instituted provincial administrations. Among these initiatives, the establishment of the CPA was paramount. This Agency aimed to develop a merit based civil service. It replaced the patrimonial system of assigning individuals on the basis of hereditary relationship with meritocracy. This was a landmark development in the management of human resources in public organizations. However, Haile Selassie's government failed to respond to the political, economic and social demands of the society at that time.

The other fundamental change in the civil service occurred during the reign of the EPRDF-led government. Key reforms related to the civil service include, among others, the following: changing the unitary form of government to ethnically based federal arrangement, moving from a command economy to market-led economy, changing the presidential system of government to parliamentary system, allowing sovereignty to reside in Nations and Nationalities and Peoples, endorsing the Rights of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples to self-determination up to secession and advocating multiparty politics. All these changes have had an impact on the development of the civil service.

It can be drawn from the preceding discussion that significant problems identified within the civil service, among other things, include the following: i) Inadequate transparency and accountability, ii) deficiency in national values and unified thinking as one country, iii) prevailing neo-patrimonial attitude, iv) challenges in differentiating the ruling party from the Ethiopian government within the civil service, v) lack of neutrality, representativeness, autonomy, independence and professionalization in the Civil Service; vi) poor conditions of services and remuneration; vii) lack of qualified and competent workforce; viii) inability to curb the alarming rate of corruption and maladministration in the civil service; ix) frequent government reorganization x) weak institutional framework for guiding reforms and delivering public services effectively; and xi) limited understanding of the context of the civil service.

To address the significant challenges facing the civil service, it is essential primarily to foster consensus among the various stakeholders regarding the vision, mission and values of public administration in Ethiopia. In addition, the government should focus on the following actions: i) institutionalizing meritocracy and professionalism within the civil service by rooting out 'neo-patrimonial rule' and promoting national values; ii) enhancing accountability and transparency in the civil service; iii) strengthening watchdog institutions, such as the Federal Auditor, Office of the Ombudsman, Human Rights Commission, Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission; and iv) providing at most attention to curb corruption and maladministration.

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The Role of Democratic Institutions in Improving Governance in Ethiopia

Debebe Hailegebriel

1. Introduction

Although there appears to be a general consensus on the role and function of democratic (independent) institutions, the kind of institutions which fall under this category, types of specific functions and the degree of autonomy and accountability vary from one country to another. Some of them are established as constitutional bodies, recognized by the constitution of the country, while others are established by subsidiary legislations. Moreover, there are also such institutions recognized by international instruments.[1] For instance, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good Governance calls up on State Parties to the Charter to establish democratic institutions, ensure their independence and accountability and provide resources to perform their assigned duties effectively and sufficiently.[2]

Democratic institutions that are commonly regarded as such vary in terms of institutional setup and area of operation. Recognizing this variation, the most common public bodies designated as independent institutions with oversight mandates include: electoral commission and tribunals – often called electoral management or electoral justice bodies – tasked with ensuring impartial election administration and adjudication; the Office of the Ombudsman which investigates citizens' complaints against the administration; Human Rights Commission, the Auditor General, Anti-corruption Commission, Public Service Commission, Judicial Service Commission and the Attorney General.

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[1] E.g. Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions (The Paris Principles) adopted by the General Assembly Resolution No. 48/134 of 20 December 1993 (see UNGA, 1993). Also, the UN Convention against Corruption (UN, 2004), African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good Governance (see AU, 2003).

[2] See Article 15 of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good Governance (AU, 2003)

There are also other independent institutions which are usually outside the purview of government but play a key role in the democratization process and therefore considered as democratic institutions such as political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the media. These institutions are the building blocks of democracy, essential for establishing rule of law and constitutionalism, as well as for ensuring the protection and promotion of human rights and enabling public participation (Luckham et al., 2003). On the other hand, the inability of these institutions to carry out their legally-assigned roles results in the erosion of accountability, violation of human rights and ultimately political instability. Therefore, the strengthening and proper functioning of these institutions help entrench democracy, thereby promoting good governance and development.

In the case of Ethiopia, the FDRE Constitution accorded recognition to the establishment of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Ethiopian Institution of Ombudsman, the Auditor General and the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. There are also other independent public institutions established by subsidiary legislations such as the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission and public media. Outside of the public domain, civil society organizations (CSOs), private media and political parties are also important democratic institutions contributing to improving governance.

2. Assessment criteria

Despite the difference in mandate and degree of autonomy, independent institutions do share common values of “improving the quality of governance, strengthening rule of law, encouraging transparency and accountability, preventing corruption and ultimately reinforcing both the quality and the resilience of democracy.” (Alexandra Academy Trust, 2025, p.4). In addition, these institutions are expected to be politically neutral and independent so that they can effectively carry out their mandates. With the objective of ensuring such independence, these institutions are usually made accountable to parliament.

Drawing on internationally accepted experience, we assessed the contribution of different Democratic Institutions to quality governance in Ethiopia. These criteria include independence, accountability, accessibility, situational monitoring and reporting, effective complaint handling and enforcement, public awareness and collaboration.

2.1. Independence

Five dimensions for assessing the independence of democratic institutions have been identified: institutional independence, personal independence, financial independence, functional independence and behavioural independence. The following table illustrates each of these attributes.

Dimensions	Descriptions	Roles of parliament
Institutional Autonomy	The institution's independence is enshrined in the legal framework	● Ensure independence of the institution from the executive branch as codified in law
Personal Autonomy	Selection, remuneration and stability of tenure of the leadership and staff enables impartiality and professionalism	● Security of tenure is codified in law. The institution's founding law includes transparent selection, appointment and dismissal processes, with the aim of ensuring that appointees are insulated from removal or retaliation for political reasons ● Timely appointments are made, based on both behavioural and functional competencies ● A requirement is included in the independent institution's enabling law that vacancies be filled within a reasonable timeframe. ● Staggered terms of office are codified in law. ● Adequate remuneration and benefits are included in the annual budget for independent institutions, in line with other similar institutions and the judiciary. ● Provision on immunity for actions taken in an official capacity is included in the institution's enabling act

Dimensions	Descriptions	Roles of parliament
Financial Autonomy	The institution has sufficient resources and control over their use to fulfil its mandate.	● Sufficient budget is provided to enable the independent institution to carry out its legal mandate, with a realistic timeline for disbursements as needed throughout the year. ● Reviews of the budget proposed by the independent institution consider the institution's strategic plan and/or annual operational plan ● Budgets are allocated directly to the independent institution ● The independent institution has control over decisions on how to use allocated funds to meet its mandate
Functional autonomy	The institution has decision-making powers and resources that prevent interference in its activities by political executives or other powerbrokers	● The institution's decision-making power is defined in the law. ● The mandate and responsibilities of the independent institution are clearly codified in the law, and any overlap with other institutions is limited to areas where there is a benefit to institutional multiplicity. ● Government avoids interference in policymaking of the independent institution within its defined mandate. ● Government avoids interference in internal rule-setting process of the independent institution.
Behavioural autonomy	The institution clearly demonstrates its independence through its decisions, actions and activities.	● The independent institution in practice is able to establish and maintain: ● Impartial policy and decision-making. ● Administrative culture that places priority on mission, public service, ethics, integrity, impartiality, competence and professionalism. ● Institutionalized transparency, including via accessible and comprehensive web presence. ● Effective and consistent collaboration with external stakeholders. ● Effective monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Table 1: Independence democratic institutions and the role of the parliament (IFES, 2022).

Recognizing the importance of independence for democratic institutions, several but complementary instruments are identified as effective tools for enhancing their autonomy. On top of these comes the relevance of institutional set-up. In this regard, parliament may involve in selecting and appointing the heads of independent bodies and members of their governing bodies (boards). It may also enact relevant legislation which sets minimum qualifications and technical knowledge requirements for the head of the institutions. The law may require heads of the independent institutions to cease all political functions and activities within political parties. The second instrument relates to the right to propose legislation to parliament. Based upon their experiences and expertise, it would be worthwhile to enable independent institutions to directly approach parliament with a draft legislative initiative. Issues pertaining to budget design and approval as well as staffing and human resources are also important instruments. As for the former, the ability of independent institutions to design and decide upon their budget is an important tool to strengthen them and safeguard their independence. Regarding the latter, the idea is that the institutions ability to independently determine their staffing and human resources policy guards their autonomy from interference.

2.2. Accountability

The “independence criteria” prescribed by national laws vary significantly and remain highly controversial. Since no state institution can be fully autonomous, it is essential to ensure their accountability and transparency. Whatever the form of specialization and institutional placement, independent oversight institutions need to be integrated into the system of checks and balances essential for democratic governance. In the exercise of their powers and the discharge of their duties, independent oversight institutions should strictly adhere to the principle of rule of law. Forms of accountability of these institutions must be tailored to the level of their specialization, institutional placement, mandate, functions and most of all, their powers against other institutions and individuals. In all instances, such institutions are required to submit regular performance reports to the legislative body and enable and proactively facilitate public access to information on their work. Therefore, independence should not amount to lack of accountability. The following table, adapted from the works of IFES, describes the kind of accountability dimensions regarding these institutions.

Accountability Dimensions	Descriptions	Role of the Parliament
Statutory accountability	Accountability mechanisms and reporting requirements for independent institutions are enshrined in law	● Requirement for periodic reporting is codified in law with specific format and content requirements. ● Relevant parliamentary oversight committee has the resources necessary to apply rigorous and appropriate scrutiny of reports and give feedback, if necessary. ● Independent institutions are required to develop and report on strategic goals and/or annual performance expectations. ● Annual internal audit and periodic external audit is required of all independent institutions. ● Freedom of information legislation is in place with appropriate parliamentary oversight mechanisms and resources to assess its implementation. ● Legal framework is established for the adjudication of complaints and disputes involving independent institutions.
Public accountability	The implementation of outreach, public accessibility and transparency measures to ensure that independent institutions remain accountable to public interest.	● Open question sessions and periodic performance reviews of independent institutions are held. ● Periodic reports submitted by independent institutions to relevant oversight committee(s) are publicized. ● Freedom of information legislation is fully respected and applied by independent institutions.
Internal accountability	The adoption of robust standards for professional and ethical conduct and internal performance monitoring that contribute to a culture of integrity throughout independent institutions.	● Independent institutions are legally empowered to report to parliament and stakeholders on their own initiative. ● Disclosure of ethics violations in independent institutions is required in their annual reporting. ● Whistle-blower and no retaliation policies are in place. ● Codes of conduct and ethics are in place.

Table 2: Independence of independent institutions and the role of the parliament (IFES, 2022).

As with independence, accountability is strengthened through specific instruments. Foremost among these is the regular submission of narrative activity reports, both annual and progress updates. Financial and performance audits, mechanisms for appealing institutional decisions internally and

externally, and structured consultation and coordination with stakeholders, beneficiaries and citizens also serve to enhance the accountability of democratic institutions.

3. Democratic Institutions under Ethiopian Laws

3.1. Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

The House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) is mandated by Article 55(14) of the FDRE Constitution to establish the Ethiopian Human Right Commission (EHRC), and hence the House promulgated proclamation No 210/2000 as amended by Proclamation No. 1224/2020 to establish and determine the powers and responsibilities of the Commission. The overall objective of the EHRC is "to educate the public to be aware of human rights, see to it that human rights are protected, respected and fully enforced as well as to have the necessary measure taken where they are found to have been violated" (See Article 5, FDRE, 2000). The Commission is established as autonomous organ accountable to the HoPR. The amended proclamation (2020) emphasizes on the need to strengthen the institutional and execution capacity of the Commission so it can carry out its mandate effectively, and enhance public trust.

The works of human rights institutions are highly interlinked with governance initiatives. The promotion and protection of fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, association and assembly as well as the right to participate in government affairs are key in democratic governance and strengthening civic engagement. Therefore, "linking human rights and good governance promotes greater transparency and accountability, which may provide more effective communication and engagement between national human rights institutions, governments, civil society, and victims of human rights violations" (Kumar, 2003, p. 262). In light of the preceding, the following features highlight the autonomy and functional latitude accorded to the commission by its establishment proclamation.

a. **Independence:** the institutional independence of the Commission has been affirmed by Proclamation No. 210/2000 which also guaranteed the immunity of appointees and investigators of the Commission while carrying out their duties. Unlike other independent bodies – such as the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) and Ethiopian Institution of Ombudsman (EIO), EHRC is authorized to open branch offices or centres in any part of the country without the approval of the HoPR (See article 5, FDRE, 2020).

The EHRC Council, composed of the chief, deputy chief and other commissioners is mandated to issue directives, rules of procedures and guidelines based on federal civil service principles for the administration of its human resources, property and finance (See Article 11, FDRE, 2019). It also has independent authority to determine staff benefits.

b. **Appointment and Removal of Commissioners**: as stated under Article 10(1) of Proclamation No. 210/2000 the Chief Commissioner, the Deputy Chief Commissioner and other Commissioners are appointed by the HoPR. This proclamation and its amendment also provided for the procedure to be followed during the nomination and appointment process. Making the nomination and appointment procedures participatory and transparent was one of the objectives considered to amend Proclamation No. 210/2000. In addition, the law provides for the grounds and procedures for the removal of the commissioners.

c. **Budget**: after consulting with the Council of Commissioners, the Chief Commissioner is required to submit the draft budget of the Commission to the HoPR directly. The amended Proclamation accorded full right to the EHRC to administer its budget. In addition, the Council of the Commission is mandated to issue internal financial rules and regulations based on government financial principles.

d. **Reporting**: through the Chief Commissioner, the EHRC may undertake study of recurrent cases of human rights violation and submit the same with recommendations to the HoPR. In addition, the commission may propose legislation on matters of human rights issues and submit it to the House for consideration. The Chief Commissioner is also required to prepare and submit regular reports to the House on the activities of the Commission as well as on matters of human rights.

e. **Enforcement of Recommendations**: the EHRC has been engaged in investigation of various human rights issues throughout the country and produced reports which have implications on various actors including, in most cases, the government. Initially, there were resistances from government institutions to accept the findings and recommendations of the EHRC but this has changed through time at least at the federal level. There are few regional states (e.g. Gambella and Afar) which were not in good terms with the works of the EHRC due to misunderstanding of the mandates

and roles of the Commission. A weak culture of respect for the rule of law and government accountability may underlie these failures. However, acceptance of the EHRC's recommendations on draft legislations is improving. When exercising its oversight mandate over executive bodies, Parliament and its members rely on EHRC's recommendations as reference points. The EHRC has also established a follow-up mechanism requiring concerned authorities to submit action plans and report implementation status every three months.

f. **Accessibility of the Commission**: the Commission is using various means to ensure its accessibility including phones, emails and hotlines, monitoring activities, networking with CSOs and individual human rights defenders, etc. The EHRC has opened branch offices in various parts of the country to ensure its accessibility. There is also a plan to introduce a system of satellite offices in areas where there are human rights concerns.

g. **Collaboration**: to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency, the EHRC is collaborating with various stakeholders. Both at the federal and regional levels, it has established commendable working relationships with legislative bodies. It has a formal platform with CSOs working in areas of human rights. However, the capacity of CSOs at grass root level is very week to facilitate and support the work of the Commission. The Commission suggested continuous capacity building training to local CSOs focusing on the promotion and protection of human rights.

3.2. Institution of the Ombudsman

Article 55(15) of the FDRE Constitution calls for the establishment of the Institution of the Ombudsman by the HoPR. Accordingly, the House established the Ethiopian Institution of the Ombudsman (EIO) in 2000 by Proclamation No. 211/2000 which was amended by proclamation No. 1142/2019. The EIO has the objective of "bringing about good governance that is of high quality, efficient and transparent based on the rule of law, by way of ensuring that people's rights and benefits, provided for by a law are respected by organs of the executive". This law stressed the need for 'independent and free Institution of Ombudsman with high institutional and functional autonomy' to ensure good governance in the country. Accordingly, the Institution is made accountable to the House of Peoples' representatives (see article 8, FDRE,

2019). How much the institution of the Ombudsman has been autonomous can be explained in reference to the elements below which serve as a yardstick.

a. **Independence**: although the EIO has been established as independent body accountable to the HoPR, there are areas which cast doubt and challenge the full autonomy of the organization. Unlike EHRC, the appointees and staff of the EIO do not have immunity while carrying out their activities. As a result, there were incidents whereby its investigators were arrested by police while on duty. The Institution can open branch office only upon the approval of the HoPR. It is empowered to prepare and implement its own organizational structure suitable to its activities and mandated to determine a special salary scale and benefits to its staff. However, this decision of the EIO requires the approval of the House unlike EHRC. Against the requirement of the law, the Speaker of the House refers structural and salary proposal of the Institution to the Civil Service Commission, and as a result the independence of the Institution to design and implement its own structure is severely affected. Consequently, staff turnover remains one of the challenges of the Institution.

b. **Appointment**: Ombudsmen[3] are appointed by the HoPR, and Council of the EIO comprising of all the Ombudsmen is the supreme organ in charge of issuing directives and rules and determining budget and human resource. Like the appointment, the law puts procedural safeguards for the removal of ombudsmen, and this mandate is given to the Parliament.

c. **Budget:** The Chief Ombudsman is required to submit to the HoPR its draft budget which is first discussed by the Council of the Institution. The House reviews and approves the budget of the institution (See article 12(2)(B), FDRE, 2019). Fair amount of budget is being allocated by the HoPR to the Institution.

d. **Addressing Complaints**: the volume of the work which is increasing from time to time is not compatible with the capacity and personnel of the EIO. The proposal of the EIO to restructure its human resources couldn't get

[3] EIO has the following appointed Ombudsmen: Chief Ombudsman, Deputy Chief Ombudsman, Ombudsman of women, children, persons with disability and Elders and the branch Ombudsman. (See Article (2), FDRE, 2019)

acceptance by the Parliament (the Speaker). As a result, the Institution's complaint investigation speed is found to be poor. Moreover, investigation skills of the officers are questionable because they lack the required level of experience and professionalism. The Institution lacks the capacity to monitor the government's mega projects which are exposed to public grievances.

e. **Accessibility**: the Institution's limited branch network has impaired accessibility. Complainants often must travel long distances at significant cost, and language barriers—with the exception of the Oromia region—further hinder access.

f. **Enforcing Recommendations**: in recent times there is an improvement in implementing the recommendations of the Institutions[4] as compared to previous period. However, the parliament has still been criticized for not using the findings and recommendations of the Institution, while exercising its oversight mandate.

g. **Situation Research and Report**: the institution doesn't have a well-established and strong system to monitor and closely follow governance situations in the country. Due to capacity limitation, the Institution couldn't carry out its legal mandate to regularly supervise that "Regulations or Administrative Directives issued by Executive Organs or decisions given by Executive Organs and the practices thereof do not contravene the Constitutional Rights of Citizens and a Law as well". The EIO lacks the capacity to conduct periodic and regular research, and to provide feedback on draft legislation. It rather issues press releases and reports on the state of current affairs.

h. **Public Awareness:** there is a huge gap in raising public awareness on governance issues in line with the mandate of the Institution. The amount of budget allocated for such core activity of the Institution has been too small. Cost of the media is too expensive as compared to the financial position of the Institution. Consequently, due to lack of awareness about the mandates of the Institution, a significant number of cases of complaints (42%) coming to the EIO are out of its mandate and this has resulted in

[4] The assessment team was informed that the implementation of the recommendations has been improved from 48% to 75%

waste of time and money both for the public as well as the EIO. In addition, lack of awareness about the mandate of the Institution has become a contributing factor to the resistance of government bodies towards the works of the Institution.

i. **Collaboration**: collaborative approach is imperative to the works of democratic institutions. Nonetheless, the Institution doesn't have a strategic engagement with stakeholders such as the media and CSOs. The engagement, if any, is often based on availability of budget. The EIO is closely working with complaint hearing bodies of the executive, and has a regular engagement with these bodies. The Institution used to work with mass-based associations such as professional associations, chamber of commerce, youth and women associations but this relationship has been halted due to lack of adequate finance. Likewise, the efforts of the Institution to establish working relationships with academic institutions couldn't be successful due to budgetary constraints.

3.3. Media Institutions

Media institutions are critically important for deepening democratic and responsible governance. In a democratic society, the media can play important role in holding the government accountable for its decisions, and hence serve as 'watchdog', exposing the transgressions of public officials and other power holders (Waisbord, 2000). Therefore, the media can make a significant contribution to good governance and accountability. Recognizing their pivotal role in strengthening the democratization process, the Ethiopian government has granted government media institutions special autonomous status. Under Proclamation No.1097/2018 which defines the powers and duties of executive organs, these bodies were removed from executive control and made directly accountable to the HoPR. They include the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, the Ethiopian Press Agency and the Ethiopian News Agency.

The Ethiopian media, both government and private, are surrounded by arrays of challenges which can be broadly classified as internal and external. In a nutshell, these include: limited professionalism, political interference, lack of enabling environment including absence of adequate legal framework, the failure of the sector to ensure self-regulation through media council (despite recent attempts to strengthen the Council), ethnic and political polarization,

etc. Due to these limitations, the role of the media in strengthening democratic governance and ensuring civic engagement is found to be very low.

As one journalist informant puts it, "the media in Ethiopia can't be influential with very limited capacity to set public agenda. The private media is yet to evolve and until recently all electronic media (TV and radio) were owned by the government or the ruling party and as such they were averse to diverse and alternative opinions. Government media is used as a tool for the propaganda of the government and the ruling party which are in practice one and the same".[5]

The culture of public debate is also limited because of a prevailing view that public policy making is purely the domain of the State. There are few forums for open public debate on important issues, in person or on the media, and few opportunities where citizens can raise questions publicly to duty bearers. The absence of meaningful demand side engagement and pressure is a fundamental detriment to governance. The reality is that people are not so keen to engage because they do not have the trust that their voice matters. Lack of awareness of rights is also a key constraint to people participating in public life. Perceptions of the government as monopolizing authority, and a limited sense of citizenship may act as a barrier. Fear of reaction and possible retribution can be a factor preventing people from speaking freely

3.4. Civil Society Organizations

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), in the modern sense, are relatively recent phenomenon in Ethiopia. Although there are traditional and self-help organizations which exist at grass roots level, there is generally a weak culture of associational life focused on political and governance issues among citizens. The earliest CSOs emerged in the 1930s as faith- based or missionary groups, and their numbers grew in the 1950s and 1960s with the founding of the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, the Boy Scouts Association, and the Women Welfare Associations. The 1973 famine was a landmark incident that attracted various international humanitarian NGOs to come to Ethiopia. The historical development of civil society in Ethiopia shows that their main areas of intervention were related with relief and humanitarian activities rather than governance or rights issues. CSOs engagement in governance, advocacy and

[5] Interview with a senior private media editor, December 2023, Addis Ababa

human rights is, therefore, a recent development which happened mainly following the advent of EPRDF to power in 1991.

The 1991 change of government and the reforming of the Ethiopian political system made remarkable contributions to the growth of the CSO sector both in terms of number and diversity. During the period between the early 1990s and the last years of 2000s, the number of CSOs working in areas such as human rights, advocacy, and peace and governance had shown increase. In light of such a favourable context, CSOs are believed to perform a wide range of tasks and roles ranging from basic service delivery to advocacy and lobbying that can be conducted at local and national levels. They can play a watchdog role in the implementation of civic engagement initiatives, serve as voice for the voiceless, empower the community, facilitate cooperation and collaboration with local government authorities, provide organized and professional inputs in policy planning, etc.

However, as part of its campaign to restrict the operation of democratic institutions such as political parties, the media and CSOs in the aftermath of the eventful 2005 general elections, the government enacted the 2009 draconian CSO law[6] which brought a radical shift in the existence and operations of CSOs. As a result of this law, the overwhelming majority of advocacy CSOs were forced either to change their mandate, scale down their activities or shut down their offices. Due to the restrictive legal environment CSOs working on human rights education and monitoring, empowerment, social mobilization, and advocacy have been curtailed or eliminated. Independent CSOs were not able to support citizens to organize, identify and channel their demands and hold the government accountable. It appears that such restrictions to the role of CSOs and their lack of voice on matters of public interest was having a negative impact on citizens' articulation of interests.[7]

The amended CSO Proclamation of 2019 which is believed to be one of the advanced and liberal laws by international standards provides a strong basis for the CSOs in Ethiopia to play an active role in enhancing the civic engagement initiatives. Therefore, although few in number and limited in their scope of

[6] Charities and Societies Proclamation No. 621/2009 (See, FDRE 2009)
[7] Interview with a Human Rights Activist, December 2023, Addis Ababa

work, CSOs are able to make significant contribution through the Social Accountability Programme (see Ministry of Finance, 2021).

Another characteristic feature of the CSOs landscape in Ethiopia is the presence of large membership organizations, commonly referred to as mass-based organizations. These include youth, women and professional associations. However, these organizations lack independence as they usually have been subject to influence by the ruling party. Party mobilization wings may also be conflated with, or referred to as mass-based organizations. As a result, mass based organizations and party political mobilization wings have monopolized the space that should have been left for independent citizens' organizations.[8] Civic and political activities have become confused and merged, and the civic space was politicized when its liberalization was seen detrimental to the existence of the ruling party.

Generally, the capacity of CSOs to play this role has been constrained by various external and internal factors.[9] Internally, lack of national agenda as a sector, poor constituency, limited capacity to claim and defend their space, negative impacts resulting from the 2009 legislation as well as weak collaboration, partnership and networking are factors that challenged the third sector in Ethiopia. Moreover, politicization of activities which make their non-partisanship questionable, poor internal system of governance and accountability, weak linkage with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and grassroots associations and insufficient expertise in the areas of human rights and governance also fall within the domain of internal challenges the sector has faced. Externally, the government's lack of trust in CSOs as development partners, the absence of regional CSO laws and regional governments' inadequate understanding of the federal law governing the operation of CSOs as well as government authorities' confusion of CSOs engagement in advocacy with political activity have been the major constraining factors.

3.5. Political parties

Political parties play roles of representation and making the government accountable. They continue to embed democratic values in society in several

[8] Interview with Bilen Asrat, former Executive Director of Forum for Civil Society Organizations

[9] Interview with Kusia Bekele, Director of Resource Center for Civil Society Groups Association (RCCSGA)

ways, including by entrenching accountable governance and civic participation norms.

The historical development of political parties in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon. Ethiopia had been under the rule of absolute monarchies for an extended period of time and hence had no culture of party politics. The two pioneer political parties, All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (Meison) and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), were the result of the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM), which was very active in the 1960s challenging the imperial regime (Merera, 2007). In addition, there were liberation movements such as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)) operating in different parts of the country in various forms, including armed struggle. However, lack of internal democracy in the parties and intolerance towards each other resulted in the fragmentation and polarization of the political parties. The coming of the military into power following the 1974 revolution had also contributed to the further polarization of the country's body politic (Merera, 2007). Taking socialism as its guiding ideology and sanctioning only one vanguard political party (the 'Workers' Party of Ethiopia[10]), the *Derg* regime officially banned all political parties, and hence until 1991, there was no single opposition political party operating officially in the country.

The advent of EPRDF to power in 1991 opened up the door for a multi-party political system, albeit with severe practical challenges. As Merera (2007) rightly stated, 'the EPRDF leaders appear to have never envisioned a role for opposition parties'. In its policy documents, the EPRDF described opposition political parties and other democratic institutions such as CSOs and the media as rent-seekers contributing nothing to the overall development of the country. Besides, the political parties which in most cases are influenced by ethnic politics suffer from the absence of institutionalization, lack of strong constituencies and a culture of compromise. According to data from the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), until March 2019, there were close to 130 political parties registered and waiting for registration. However, this number is expected to fall down significantly in light of the requirements set by the new electoral law (see Proclamation No. 1162, FDRE, 2019).

[10] It was legally established in 1989.

For much of the EPRDF years, the political economy of the country features a developmental state model which has repudiated some elements of the neo-liberal thought such as deliberative democracy. The emphasis was on state-led macro-economic planning where the state has the power to control the economy. The government assumes authority for almost everything with limited tolerance to dissent or active engagement of citizens in matters affecting their lives. As the main focus of the developmental state is on economic development, democratic rights and active participation of citizens were marginalized.

Pluralist political system is yet to be fully developed, founded on solid policy frameworks and a set of competent institutions with integrity and capacity to enable the participation of the broader population. This is the most significant factor which structurally limits the significance people's participation in political processes.

3.6. Federal Auditor General

The Federal Auditor General is one of the democratic institutions recognized by Article 101 of the FDRE Constitution and made accountable to the HoPR. The Constitution mandates the Auditor General to "audit and inspect the accounts of ministries and other agencies of the Federal Government to ensure that expenditures are properly made for activities carried out during the fiscal year and in accordance with the approved allocations, and submit his reports thereon to the House of Peoples' Representatives." (See article 102/2, FDRE 1995). This mandate plays an instrumental role in efforts to establish inclusive and responsive governance in the country. Cognizant of such constitutional recognition, the government has issued Proclamation No.669/2010 (which was amended by Proclamation No. 982/2016) to establish the Office of Federal Auditor General. As declared by the Office, its vision is "to strengthen the performance, transparency, democratization process, accountability as well as the good governance of the Federal Government for the benefit of the Ethiopian people." (OFAG, n.d.). However, parliament's delay and reluctance to implement audit findings of the Auditor General have raised concerns about its capacity to effectively oversee government institutions and ensure their accountability.

3.7. The Federal Parliament (the House of Peoples' Representatives)

The House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPRs) is the legislative chamber of the parliament with high-level decision-making powers on matters within the federal jurisdiction. The Council of Ministers is, in turn, the highest executive body of the government accountable to HoPRs. It is the Council of Ministers that is responsible for preparing the social and economic development plans as well as the national budget. The development plans and budgets are subsequently submitted to the House for approval.

Within such milieu, ensuring the participation of people in matters affecting their lives is undertaken through their representatives in the legislative assembly. Public engagement plays an important part in the interface between parliament and citizens. The facilitation of public participation and involvement in legislative and oversight processes is central to the mandate of parliament. Accordingly, article 153/6 of the Rules of Procedure of the Federal Parliament contains specific articles providing for consultation and public hearings. Standing Committees are required to publicize the means with which individuals who cannot attend sittings give their opinions on parliamentary agendas.

3.8. Civil Service Commission

The Commission has been re-established by Proclamation No. 1097/2018, a proclamation issued to redefine the powers and responsibilities of the executive organ. The Commission is made accountable to the executive, being directly answerable to the Prime Minister. Among others, the Commission has the following objectives (see article 32(1) (b), of Proclamation 1097/2018);

- Adopt strategies for continuous improvement of service delivery in the public sector; coordinate public sector capacity building activities; monitor and evaluate the implementation of same; and
- Ensure that Federal Government offices establish and implement service delivery standards, complaint submission and handling procedures for customers.

The Civil Service plays a significant role for good governance as it is in charge of implementing government policy and providing basic services to the public. As emphasized by Egualaye and Monday, "one of the foremost responsibilities of the public service is the attainment of good governance as it affects the welfare

of citizens and also accounts for the pace of socio-economic development of the country." (Egualaye & Osemeke, n.d.). A presentation prepared and shared by the Commissioner of the Federal Civil Service Commission identified the following key challenges in building responsive governance in Ethiopia;

- Unbalanced Politics–Administration Relation (excessive intervention and manipulation of politics)
- Incompetent Workforce
- Eroded Civil Service Values and Bad Ethical Behaviour
- In-efficient and in-effective Service Delivery
- Poor culture of transparency and public accountability
- Weak stakeholders' engagement in governance process

Politically motivated recruitment to government offices compromises professionalism in the civil service and co-opts the motivation of officials towards political objectives rather than good governance. Moreover, capacity limitations in civic engagement are clearly exhibited in government. While the government has demonstrated capacity to improve infrastructure and services, and create structures which penetrate to grassroots levels, evidence shows that there are limitations in the capacity of regional level government bodies. Regional and also *woreda* and *kebele* staff lack professional capacity to conduct proper planning and consultation, to collect and analyse data that can be used as evidence to shape policy.

3.9. Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (FEACC)

The Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (FEACC) was first established by a parliamentary bill in 2001. Ever since it has witnessed several cycles of amendment to its establishment proclamation which in effect narrowed and widened its mandate and also altered its accountability relation between the legislative and executive organs. There are also important international treaties adopted by the HoPR such as Proclamation No. 544/2007 for the ratification of the United Nations Convention against Corruption and Proclamation No. 545/2007 for the ratification of the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption which generally provide for the need to safeguard anti-corruption watchdogs. However, as per Proclamation No. 433/2005 as amended by Proclamation No. 883/2015 the commission was made accountable to the executive. Thought the most recent amendment

proclamation issued in 2021 changed the Commission's accountability to the House of Peoples' Representatives, there has not been much change in the realm of practice. Moreover, Proclamation No. 943/2015 transferred the Commission's power to investigate and prosecute corruption to the Attorney General, limiting FEACC's mandate to the promotion of ethics and this status has not been changed ever since.

According to an informant from the Commission, corruption still remains one of the key challenges of the government. Petty corruption at lower-level government offices are believed to be high. The commission has conducted two "Corruption Surveys" and the third is in progress to be finalized soon (2024). According to the informant's assessment, administrative corruption is getting worse at all levels.

> We are facing corruption supported by the administration itself. The system doesn't allow the Commission to deal with political corruption which is rampant and contributing to economic corruption. The ethnic based political arrangement is also contributing to the spread of corruption because ethnicity has become a good hideout to corrupt individuals. Mega projects lack transparency and the Commission has not been allowed to conduct investigation on these projects including the Grand Renaissance Dam.

In spite of these, the relatively better engagement of democratic institutions such as the media, CSOs as well as opposition political parties witnessed in the past two years has become good source of support to the work of the Commission. Members of the parliament are also becoming active in expressing their concern and questioning the executive regarding corrupt practices.

4. Conclusions

Following the 2018 political change commendable legal reforms have been made to widen the space for democratic institutions. But this effort couldn't bring the expected changes mainly due to lack of institutionalization and implementation of the intent and letters of the laws. In this paper, an attempt has been made to assess the role of democratic institutions in Ethiopia in promoting governance, their institutional frameworks, challenges and prospects. The following is a summary of the key findings common to all democratic institutions covered by this assessment.

1. **Weak Institutional Capacity**: no sufficient budget is allocated by the government to the core activities of the institutions. In some cases, more than 80% of the budget is for running costs, mainly salary.

2. **Weak Independence**: the overwhelming dominance of the executive branch in Ethiopia's politics and its control of public resources continue to be one of the challenges to ascertain the independence of the institutions. As a result, principal requirements of democratic governance such as accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and access to information are sometimes lacking.

3. **Poor public awareness**: the awareness of the people on the roles and mandates of the institutions is poor in general. This is mainly attributable to the failure of the institutions to promote their works. The manifestation of this is the fact that some such institutions are seen engulfed with complaints not falling within their mandate.

4. **Situation reports and researches**: apart from regular organizational activity reports, most of the democratic institutions (except the Human Rights Commission) do not engage in conducting research and producing periodic situational reports. The shortfall in this regard is attributable to lack of capacity to conduct research and investigation on the status of a given right that falls under their mandate.

5. **Collaboration**: cross-sectoral collaboration among democratic institutions and with other actors are found to be very weak. Absence of strategic engagement with the media and CSOs as well as the academia is a common limitation to all in this domain except EHRC.

6. **Accessibility**: the accessibility of the institutions both in terms of distance and facilities needs considerable attention. Their accessibility to people living in rural areas, women, children, and persons with disabilities is not to the standard and to the satisfaction of citizens.

7. **Oversight, legislative and representative capacity**: participation of the people in the legislative and oversight activities of the HoPR is found to be very poor, albeit the commendable measures since recently to improve the situation. Lack of qualified experts and technologies to support the works of members of both Houses of parliament have remained the main challenge.

5. Recommendations

5.1. Strengthening the capacity of democratic institutions

Due consideration should be given to bolstering democratic institutions' independence, accessibility, budgets, research capabilities, situational reporting and enforcement of recommendations. Empowering citizens through guaranteed rights to speech, association and equal justice—as well as mechanisms for information access, feedback, consultation and policy-making participation—will deepen accountable governance and civic engagement.

5.2. The need for a civic engagement policy

To institutionalize community input, the draft Civic Engagement Policy (CEP) should be adopted. This policy would formalize citizen and community participation in legislative and policy processes, establish clear dialogue platforms and ensure ongoing institutional arrangements for consultative engagement.

5.3. Strengthening the capacity of local CSOs

Civil society organizations are essential for accountability, but currently lack the skills to design and sustain meaningful citizen engagement or contribute to audits, budget tracking and project evaluation. The Ethiopian Social Accountability Programme (ESAP) has laid groundwork in basic services across 317 *woredas,* but fell short of a human-rights-based approach. CSOs should build on ESAP's service-delivery model while integrating rights-based principles to ensure sustainability and institutionalization.

5.4. Strengthening the capacity of the media

Despite the potential of investigative journalism to advance human rights and good governance, most Ethiopian journalists lack training in investigative methods, public debate facilitation and ethical independence. The media remain concentrated in urban centers and access to public information is limited. Targeted training in investigative reporting and a concerted effort by government to expand timely, clear and accessible public information will enhance informed civic participation and media oversight.

5.5. Supporting civil service reform initiatives

A competent, values-driven civil service underpins effective policy-making, service delivery and accountability. Achieving this requires sustained human, technical and financial resources, alongside skills development, ethical frameworks and a culture of stakeholder engagement. Supporting the Civil Service Commission to build an independent professional cadre, strengthen human resource systems, uphold ethics, enhance service delivery and promote transparency will drive broader governance improvements.

5.6. Strengthening the oversight capacity of parliament

Effective parliamentary oversight—covering human rights protection, budget scrutiny and executive accountability—depends on expert support, clear guidelines and enforceable legal frameworks. Ethiopian federal and regional legislatures currently lack qualified advisors, standard operating manuals and mechanisms to involve CSOs and the media or to enforce recommendations from the Auditor General, the Ombudsman and Human Rights Commission. Addressing these gaps and enhancing legal mandates will fortify parliamentary oversight and improve governance.

5.7. Promoting implementation of the Federal Administrative Procedure Proclamation

Enacted in 2020, this proclamation establishes judicial review of administrative acts, mandates public consultations during drafting, requires timely decisions and guarantees a fair hearing. Reluctance by agencies to abide by the provisions stipulated in the proclamation undermines transparency. Rigorous enforcement of these provisions—public notices for comment, accessible directives, and acknowledgments of filings and prompt rulings—will strengthen accountability and elevate governance quality.

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The Legislature and Representation in Ethiopia: A Review of the Trajectory across Regimes

Fekade Terefe

1. Introduction

A legislative organ evolved gradually between the 14th and 17th centuries as monarchs convened assemblies primarily to levy and mobilize for warfare (Thompson, 2001). Such elected institutions are composed of deputies with fixed terms, but with possible extension upon re-election. The salient feature of such institutions is that they lay at the heart of a representative political system (Tan, 2013). Elected institutions derive significant political authority, which is why they are regarded as embodiments of the people's will.

This idea is strongly connected to the consent of the governed. Thompson (2001), citing Pitkin (1967), notes that the term 'representatives' to describe members of parliament first appeared in Britain in 1651. By the 18th century in Britain, the bond between representation and popular rule had become so strong that it effectively created a constitutional monarchy under parliamentary supremacy. Political representation is a response to Montesquieu's call for a separation of legislation and execution 'lest the same monarch or senate should enact tyrannical laws, to execute them in a tyrannical manner' (Vatter, 2001)

In this context, representation is understood as a political process through which citizens' interests and voices are made "present" by their representatives. As Brennan and Hamlin (1999:109) note citizens do not make decisions on political outcomes directly – rather, political outcomes are decided by some group of 'representatives.' Therefore, "…political representation is viewed as delegation of power from a constituency or group of voters …to a particular party or MP…" Andeweg and Thomassen (2005:510). Representation is a relationship between the represented and representatives whose nature is guided by an agreed set of rules and norms for the relationship to be legitimate.

In light of the preceding, representation has four main dimensions. According to Urbinati and Warren (2008), representation forms a principal-agent relation

in the sense that constituencies established on territorial basis elect agents to act on their behalf, thus separating the source of legitimate power with those who exercise it. In the second dimension, electoral representation identifies a space within which the sovereignty of the people is identified with state power. Thirdly, electoral mechanisms ensure some measure of responsiveness by representatives who act on behalf of voters. Fourthly, the universal franchise endows electoral representation with an important element of political equality. These can be summed up in the words of Salih (2005:3) who characterizes parliaments as "… representative institutions ideally established to represent citizens and reflect the range of citizens' preferences as expressed in elections".

In Ethiopia the legislative organ has a history of close to a century. Its functioning has passed through various and dissimilar political contexts involving a monarchy, a military dictatorship and a 'pluralistic' but single party dominated political systems since its establishment following the promulgation of the first written constitution of the country. This chapter, therefore, tries to make sense of the representative function of the Ethiopian parliament in light of the acknowledged role of representative institutions mentioned above. In so doing it consulted related literature, constitutional/legal documents and made use of parliamentary documents as primary sources of information.

2. The Start and Evolution of the Parliament in Ethiopia

Parliament is a potent symbol of the sovereignty of the people, which holds that it has absolute authority, and is supreme over all other governance institutions (Oliver, 2013). Historically as well as in the contemporary world, no institution can be more important than parliaments in the democratic transformation of a nation. One of the best lessons that can be drawn from the world's longest and strongest democracies, including the UK and the USA, is that democracy and human freedom are inconceivable without strong representative institutions that serve as checks on absolute power and safeguard the rights and freedoms of the population who elected them. Obviously, Ethiopia cannot be an exception in this regard.

The history of parliament in Ethiopia, in a modern sense, goes back to the early 1930s. It was formed following the adoption of the first written constitution of the country which was promulgated in 1931. The constitution brought to the scene a bi-cameral parliament composed of the Senate and the Chamber of

Deputies. Members of the Senate, the upper house of parliament, were appointed by the emperor himself from among dignitaries while members of the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house, were chosen by dignitaries and local chiefs. The roles of members in either of the Houses were generally advisory. The parliament was given the power to discuss laws with the exception of organization of government, the armed forces and foreign affairs. However, according to Tesema and Zekarias (2007), the emperor was bestowed with overwhelming executive powers over the centre and provincial local governments and controlled both the legislature and the judiciary. The workings of this arrangement was interrupted during the brief Italian occupation from 1935.

Following the restoration of sovereignty in 1941, the constitution and the parliament were re-instituted. However, this came about with new developments. According to Yacob (2007), the provinces were restructured into 12 units and each were given 20 electoral districts. Of the 20 people to be elected from the electoral districts by secret ballot, five will be chosen to represent the province in the Chamber of Deputies.

Developments after the restoration within the country and abroad necessitated changes in the workings of the government including constitutional reform. Particularly the constitutional reform, according to Kassahun (2005:165), "…led to changes in the mode and manner of conducting elections and constituting the legislature". Hence, as it came about the revised constitution of 1955 also provided for the constitution of a bi-cameral parliament. As a result, the previous arrangement of a bi-cameral parliament was retained. The constitution also promised to define and distribute duties and powers among the major branches of the government. However, the powers of the parliament remained limited in the realm of practice. In this connection members of the Senate continued to be appointed by the emperor for a term of six years while members of the lower chamber were popularly elected for a period of four years on the basis of the principle of universal suffrage. The new development that the revised constitution brought was that it subjected members of the lower house of parliament to direct popular vote. There was, however, a property qualification for anyone to contest in the elections.

It was against this backdrop that the 1974 revolution came about and ushered in a new era where the constitution and the parliament of the old order were

suspended and subsequently the country was ruled for the next thirteen years only by a series of decrees. It was after the promulgation of the 1987 constitution that a new cycle of electoral exercise was made. This time around, the election brought a new feature where candidates represented a political party-WPE-though it was a lone runner. Furthermore, the new constitution established a unicameral legislative organ called National *Shengo* whose members were about 835 popularly elected for a period of five years. It was however nominal.

The National *Shengo* convenes once a year. The routines of the legislature were rather undertaken by a council of state having 24 members drawn from the top leadership of the Workers Party of Ethiopia, the sole legal political party in the country. The state council was chaired by the head of state and had seven commissions headed by ministers without portfolio. This explains the very thin veil that separates what stand for the executive and legislative branches of government even at the formal level. The council of state was therefore the most powerful institution which functioned on behalf of the National *Shengo*, according to Yacob (2007).

Following the coming to power of EPRDF, the Council of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia was established as a result of the Peace and Democracy Conference, which took place in Addis Ababa from July 1-5, 1991. The conference adopted a transitional charter that led to the establishment of an interim legislature for the period of transition. The Council of Representatives of the Transitional Government was thus founded by several political forces, including movements, political parties, and the armed forces which took part in the July 1991 conference. The Council Representatives having 87 members was made to serve for four years with its primary duty being to lay a foundation for the transition. During the period of transition, several cycles of elections were conducted to establish local and regional level representative bodies under the purview of the Council of Representatives. The first of such elections was held in June 1992 with the aim of establishing local and regional governments. Following that, in 1994 another election still within the period of transition was conducted to elect members of the constituent assembly that was responsible for approving the draft constitution. The federal constitution was approved in December 1994 by the constituent assembly. In light of the preceding, the Council of Representatives was undertaking parliamentary functions for four years and towards the end of its tenure approved the FDRE constitution and

then handed over its power to the newly elected Government on August 21, 1995 (Miheretu, 2024).

Following the end of the transition period and the adoption of the federal constitution in 1995, the country became officially a federal democratic republic. The new constitution provided for the establishment of a bi-cameral parliament, an executive to be led by the council of ministers presided over by the prime minister and the judiciary as independent organ of government. The House of the Federation, the upper house of parliament, is composed of representatives of nations and nationalities either designated by regional councils or directly elected by the people. The House of Peoples' Representatives, the lower chamber of parliament, having legislative and oversight functions, is made up of not more than 550 members of which 20 seats are reserved for minority groups. Members of this house are popularly elected for a five-year term from electoral districts on the basis of plurality of votes cast. The House of Peoples Representatives maintains the highest political authority as per the provision of the federal constitution. In light of this, it has the power to make laws on matters falling within the jurisdiction of the federal government, exercise oversight over the executive and undertake representative functions.

Ever since, five parliamentary elections were held during the reign of EPRDF. The outcome was more or less similar, ranging from allowing the opposition to have a couple of seats through a dozen more presence as in 2000 in the context of the Ethio-Eritrean war to the ruling party's absolute claim as in 2015. A notable exception in-between was the parliament formed following the eventful 2005 election. In this cycle, the representation of alternative voices in parliament reached a combined 173 seats. However, a new parliamentary rules of procedure approved in 2006 limited meaningful deliberations. According to Merera (2011), the new rules of procedure raised the number of MPs to propose agenda for deliberation from 20 to one-third of the total seats in parliament, which is about 182 members. Moreover, the time allotted for members in deliberations became too small to build meaningful argument while rebuttal was not allowed. Such a procedural arrangement made it almost impossible to make meaningful deliberation in parliament and therefore negatively impacted constituency representation.

To recapitulate the developments outlined above, it can be said that for quite a long time, parliamentary procedures in Ethiopia have been influenced by the executive because of a long tradition of authoritarian political culture. Since World War II, the Ethiopian state has had three regimes with radically different ideological persuasions and basis of legitimacy, including the Imperial era that ended in 1974; the Derg military dictatorship from 1974-1991; the reign of EPRDF that run from 1991 onwards and the post-EPRDF period from 2018 to the present. All the three have had the unenviable record of being authoritarian in the governance and democratic realm. More specifically, the parliaments under the three regimes were not genuinely democratic institutions, and there has been very little public participation and involvement in the policy- and law-making process. Whatever citizen participation and involvement in governance and development has there been, it has always been highly structured and formalistic and not substantive.

There might have been times when there were some public participation or consultation in the formulation and adoption of important laws, like, for example, the ex-civil society law. But the inputs or suggestions that came from citizens were often ignored and did not have any impact on the structure and content of the final version of the law. Simply put, be it under the imperial regime or the successive republican regimes under the Derg and the EPRDF, the government-cum-party has most of the time its sway, and very little of the inputs and suggestions from citizens or the public are considered (Meheret, 2018; Dessalegn and Meheret, 2004). As pointed out earlier, the authoritarian political order and the tradition of top-down decision making administrative and governance structure entrenched under Ethiopia's three post-World War II regimes precluded any meaningful public participation in the law- and policy-making processes (Andargatchew, 1993; Keller, 1989; Dessalegn and Meheret, 2004).

Focusing on the recent part of the trajectory, due to various reasons, the state of representation in the House of Peoples Representatives of Ethiopia leaves much to be desired, which indicates that the country has a long way to go towards participatory and democratic governance. Since coming to power in 1991, the EPRDF-led government has conducted five nationwide elections to institutionalize parliamentary democracy and participatory governance whereby citizens will have a say in government decision-making through their elected representatives. However, since the political system has largely

remained authoritarian and top-down with a single ruling party monopolizing state power for long, the ideals of representative democracy with the needs and concerns of the people being taken into consideration through their representatives have remained far from a reality. Kassahun (2005:175) also concurs arguing that "the role of the Ethiopian parliament in monitoring and implementing laws and policies is either totally absent or negligible at best".

In recent years, there have been some modest attempts by the current Ethiopian parliament to democratize its working practices and enhance its scrutiny over the executive. For example, an assessment has been conducted on parliamentary oversight tools and mechanisms used by the Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR, July, 2018). In addition, a draft policy document on national civic engagement policy has been prepared and distributed for comment by relevant stakeholders (UNDP and OPM, January, 2019). However, no concrete steps or tangible outcomes in the parliamentary procedure in the Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) worthy of mention have been witnessed.

Among other things it was this state of affairs expressed in societal frustration resulting from the failure of the regime to deliver its promises on democracy which accumulated over years that turned to aggressiveness particularly beginning 2015. This gradually won the support of people from the ruling coalition itself. Finally, Prime Minister Hailemariam resigned giving way to Abiy Ahmed to capture the helm of power. Abiy pledged to "transition" the country to democracy and quickly won popular support. As part of his pledge, his administration freed political prisoners and invited exiled parties to come home. It also initiated legal and institutional reforms pertaining to election administration, CSOs, the media etc.

Especially in connection with elections for the national legislature, the new administration amended the political parties' proclamation, re-established the national electoral board and appointed officials for the board who generally are viewed as non-partisan and of high integrity. When the national election was held in 2021, after a year-long delay officially owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the outcome showed an overwhelming win for the ruling party while nearly a dozen of seats were won by other parties. Though the ruling party fielded non-party member personalities in the elections and therefore its contingent in the parliament can be taken as displaying diversity, the parliament still remains

dominated by ruling party representatives. The decision of the ruling party to share some three cabinet portfolios to opposition parties has not led to the easing of the domination of the executive over the parliament.

3. The Legislature and Representation

The House of Peoples' Representatives forms the lower house of the federal parliament assuming the highest political authority in the country. Since its establishment following the adoption of the federal constitution, the House has been undertaking enormous functions in law making, oversight and representation. The undertaking of these important functions of the House vested in it by the constitution need, however, to be appraised against the rising demand of the people to get involved in the undertaking of parliamentary functions particularly in light of the ongoing political reform which requires, among other things, sustained engagement of stakeholders to make sure that diverse opinions and interests are adequately represented. What follows, therefore, is an assessment of the practice as pointed to the core parliamentary functions.

3.1. Law Making and Representation

Representative institutions at the federal and regional levels alike concur on the idea that engaging the public in parliamentary activities remains to be one of the priority areas of their concern. This may attest to the fact that maintaining contacts with their constituency is pivotal for parliaments at whatever level. In spite of this, however, the practice hitherto has never been impressive.

In the House of Peoples' Representatives, in spite of the recognition of its utility, bringing the electorate on board remains an on-and-off kind of business. This can be observed in all the core functions of the parliament and the budget approval process. One of the pillars of parliamentary functions is law making. As the parliament makes a piece of law, constitutionally on matters under federal jurisdiction, it becomes binding on all covered by the scope of application. From the outset, the mere fact that the law applies on citizens requires the participation of citizens in its making through their representatives and directly by engaging in parliamentary activities.

In view of the foregoing, the HoPR has rules of procedure and code of conduct which under article 52 provides that legislative procedures follow a three-tier reading in the course of which the standing committees which take

responsibility for further scrutiny after the full house debate, call public hearings whereby officials of the institution which initiated the bill present the intent of the draft law and invited people raise questions and concerns for consideration. However, public hearings usually draw very little attendance. There are various reasons for why people are not joining the debates on proposed laws even when they are called. Among others, the calls for public hearing are most often on short notice. The calls themselves usually advertised on mainstream media are not attractive in terms of inducing the public to spare time to join hearings. The bias in choice of the media, mainly government ones, and the non-use of digital media are additional hiccups.

On the other hand, people are selective in deciding what to debate on and what not. In this regard, for instance, on specialized issues such as disability or sports, concerned individuals turn out in large numbers for public hearings when a proposed law is tabled for debate. This is corroborated by an informant who observes that the revised higher education proclamation was one of the draft bills that drew larger attendance compared with others.

All others said, more glaring in this regard is the fact that public hearings on draft laws are limited to the capital Addis Ababa in terms of participation, observes an informant from the secretariat of the House of Peoples' Representatives. While the scope of application of the laws approved by the House embraces all federal matters, people in the regions are not taking part in debates. In fact, in calls for public hearings, the advertisement invites people from across the country to mail in their views. However, this has not been useful for two reasons. First, the calls are most often issued upon short notice and as a result people do not have time to send their views via mails. Second, in a country like Ethiopia where the degree of literacy is so dismal, the mail-in mechanism is not, obviously, an effective tool.

In what appears to be an effort to offset the deficit, there were times when regional councils were taken on board in creating platforms for debating draft laws on behalf of the HoPR. This is, however, intermittent. Its utility is rediscovered when there is a feeling on the part of the House that the substance of any piece of draft law merits using the avenue. This in itself is testimony to the non-existence of an established mechanism for using regional platforms for public hearings on draft laws. Such a missing link between the two reinforces

the problems which limit turn out to public hearings to Addis Ababa, whatever the size of the turnout is.

Approving the federal budget for each fiscal year is also within the purview of the HoPR. Though budget approval simply forms a part of the legislative task of the parliament, it stands out special because of the implication is has to the political economy of the country. Hence, unlike many other bills the budget bill takes a relatively longer period. The rules of procedure and code of conduct of the HoPR state that the budget approval process shall enjoy a period of one full month after reaching the house. In other words, the budget bill shall reach the house at least one month before the end of the current fiscal year. This, however, is too short even by African standards where the parliaments of some of our peers in eastern Africa take up to three months before the conclusion of the budgetary process.

After reaching the house and passing the first reading which is normally followed by directing it to pertinent committees, the responsible committee organizes a lengthy discussion on the proposed budget, sometimes taking two to three days. Such discussions are meant to understand in a much more detail the basis, rationale and principles followed in preparing the draft budget bill. In the course of deliberations, in attendance are predominantly members of parliament, invited experts, professional associations and, of course, officials from the Ministry of Finance. As a further step in the process, the responsible committee calls a public hearing in the usual way inviting anyone interested either to attend or to send their questions, comments and views or call the committee to get their concerns registered. And, finally the budget bill will have to be approved by the full house.

Despite the modest attempt in getting the public on board, the budgetary process to begin with is heavily dominated by the executive. The executive responsible for preparing the budget is in a much better position in terms of the requisite knowledge and technical knowhow. On the other hand, the House of Peoples' Representatives, and particularly its secretariat, is by comparison under-sourced primarily in reference to trained man power (Kebede, 2023). Instead of making itself capable of producing counterfactuals, the House remains dependent on the executive for explanations on what is hazy to it. One way of boosting its capability in this regard could be creating a pool of experts within its structure. If this happens to be beyond its means, an alternative could

be cultivating a network of experts, drawn from notable professionals, universities, civil societies etc. who are not on regular payroll and parliamentary working space but can be tapped into use whenever the need arises not only for issues related to the budget but also for other parliamentary essentials.

3.2. Legislative Oversight and Representation

The other important parliamentary function is oversight on the performance of the executive. Parliamentary oversight is a litmus test to gauge whether there is a real, not theoretical, separation of powers and a system of checks and balances. In parliamentary democracy, it is the legislature that is sovereign. So is the case with Ethiopia, because the constitution stipulates that sovereign authority rests in the HoPR. But, in practice the dominant party system guided by revolutionary democracy generally made the parliament a single party caucus. This is because, except in a few cases, such as some 12 non-ruling party seats following the 2000 elections and around 173 seats as a result of the eventful 2005 elections, the parliament has been dominated by the ruling party. Moreover, in both theory and practice, there is fusion of the executive and legislative branches of government in parliamentary systems. This is more vivid when the case is with a dominant party system. Therefore, whatever modest oversight the HoPR may have had over the past nearly three decades shall be viewed in light of the foregoing.

Against this backdrop, the oversight function of the parliament is undertaken primarily by standing committees. The House's rules of procedure and code of conduct in its chapter 23 article 162 states that standing committees may have a membership size of 11 to 25. The standing committees are entrusted with the power of oversight as per article 163 of the rules of procedure. In the discharge of their responsibilities, the committees follow different ways and means. These include requiring periodic reports and demand-driven reports from executive offices, scheduled site visits and unannounced site tours to get first-hand information.

When executive officials submit periodic reports, the forum for debating may be either the full House or a committee meeting. In cases when the report is to be presented to the full House, the responsible committee calls the public to send or register questions, comments and views to the committee by mail, email or call the committee and inform. The information thus gathered will be raised to the official at the plenary. If the executive official is to present the

report to the committee, the public is called either to attend the meeting and raise concerns in person or to send questions, comments and views by mail, email or call the committee and inform. In both cases the turn out most often is very little. Exceptions are very few. It is when the reporting institutions are known for being shrouded by controversy that there is a relatively better turn out.

The other means of exercising oversight involves site visits, scheduled or unannounced. Scheduled visits are part of the annual plans of the committees and are known by all concerned when they are to be undertaken. Usually, on-site observations are guided by prepared checklists. Such visits avail the opportunity to be consulted and heard for operators/ordinary actors in the institutions concerned. That serves for fact-checking by balancing official and unofficial data from the institution under parliamentary oversight. Likewise, unscheduled site tours are made by committees as part of their oversight over the executive. Such visits are usually induced by tip-offs from the public and scandals and gossips over the media pertaining to a particular public institution.

Although such kinds of visits are useful in getting raw data 'not cooked for official purposes', there is no established working mechanism in place. They simply are induced by sudden tip-offs from the public or driven by controversies arising from media programming. Interestingly, media-related inducements for site visits start with individual MPs' access to information, perception and pursuit. Such individuals bring a topical issue on the media to the attention of the committee and that is where it starts in terms of whether to decide to make unscheduled visits. Though this appears to be helpful there is no system of making it sustainable. To offset such deficit, one useful strategy would have been putting in place a media monitoring unit which is responsible for tracking developments and undertaking situation analysis for submission to pertinent offices within the structure of the HoPR.

3.3. Constituency Outreach as Representation

In representation, which is an important and core function of parliaments, the HoPR undertakes two rounds of engaging the public every business year. As per the rules of procedure and code of conduct, these rounds of engagements are conducted during the month of February when the parliament adjourns for recess and the summer recess during which the parliament closes for about a three-month's long vacation. Therefore, MPs meet people in their constituency

twice a year for about two weeks each time including travel days. Whatever stems out of discussions with the local people is reported to the local administration and upwards in the structure of governance. A report is also similarly developed for submission to the speaker of the HoPR.

The idea in doing so is to bring the local people on board in rectifying malpractices and enabling them to have their voices heard on matters affecting their lives. Despite the novelty of the idea, however, to begin with, the duration of their stay is too short that they cannot afford to meet as many people as they wish. As a result, they visit some select kebeles within the district and talk to few people mostly drawn from different mass-based organizations on matters of concern to the local people.

A hiccup in this regard is the fact that members of parliament will have always to fall in line with their party's perspective. Dismal as it may sound, whatever the reality on the ground and the concerns the local people raise, informed by their party's direction MPs tend to have the issue looked at from the perspective of the ruling party. This is a disincentive to the local people in wanting to meet their representatives and discuss their concerns.

Furthermore, issues that arise from discussions with the local people and that require resolution are submitted to the various tiers of government. Once the duration of stay is over, MPs return back home leaving the issues seeking resolution to different executive offices. Because of the absence of a system of follow up, the issues remain unaddressed until the next round of meeting between MPs and people in their constituency. Under the circumstances, the local people develop apathy as a result of the loss of confidence in the capability of members of parliament individually and in the legislative organ collectively. Moreover, facilities and funding are in short supply, eventually impinging on the quality of the task.

In a nut shell the relation between members of parliament and people in their constituency is so week that it is not sufficient enough to encourage public participation in parliamentary activities. This in effect negatively impacts upon the quality of the promised system of parliamentary democracy. The failure of the parliament to effectively address the concerns of constituencies, mainly related to infrastructure development and good governance, leads to the erosion of public trust in the legislature, argues Challa (2022).

Had it been in other contexts, for instance Kenya in Africa, members of parliament would have constituency offices in their electoral districts. Such districts enjoy substantial budget for the duration of the term of office of members of parliament which can be allocated for staffing and parliamentary outreach activities. As a result, MPs are in a good position to remain connected with voters and regularly abreast of developments in their constituency.

4. Conclusions

Parliament, in any form so long as it forms a representative institution, is taken as the embodiment of the will of the people. It can, however, live up to expectations when it involves stakeholders in the undertaking of its functions. This is true for any kind of political system, be it parliamentary, presidential or semi-presidential.

However, in a parliamentary system, the legislature holds a special place. It is the parliament that makes government. It is also the parliament that breaks government; through, in this case, the vice versa is also possible. It is for this reason that the legislature is the locus of sovereign authority in parliamentary form of government. In Ethiopia, too, the House of Peoples' Representative is entrusted with the highest political authority as per article 50 (3) of the Federal Constitution.

In spite of this, a parliamentary system of government is known for the fusion of the executive and the legislative branches of government. Potential adverse effects that may stem from its very nature are tamed by maintaining the constitutional division of power and a system of checks and balances. When both are adhered to in both principle and practice, the parliament stands out as the real sovereign from a political point of view. In a more pragmatic way, however, the parliament can be taken as the embodiment of the will of the people when it acts 're-presenting' the public in the undertaking of its core functions.

In the Ethiopian case, the constitution stipulates that members of parliament shall be guided by their conscience, the will of the people and the constitution in the undertaking of their duties. This implies that parliamentary activities shall always involve and be informed by public opinion. Likewise, the parliamentary rules of procedure and code of conduct provide that standing committees of the House of Peoples' Representatives are duty bound to involve stakeholders

in the undertaking of the core parliamentary functions. Despite such promises, the attempts at involving the public in parliamentary activities are modest.

Engaging the public in the undertaking of parliamentary activities helps to ensure legitimacy, quality and trust. These essentials for any parliament can be realized when its representational roles are supported by an enabling political environment, institutional arrangement, physical and technological infrastructure, trained and skilful human resource and sufficient financial outlay.

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Ethiopia's Public Service Media and Citizen's Access to Information

Getachew Dinku

1. Introduction

In many countries in the world, the public service media (PSM) emerged and grew to be a powerful institution in the 20th century. For several decades, they have provided citizens of the nations they serve with trusted platforms to come together and discuss issues of national interest. The PSM have been considered among the instruments of building a unified national culture while at the same time bringing high-quality contents nationwide to every citizen of a given country. They play pivotal roles in shaping widely shared narratives about a country's collective achievements and challenges. The celebration of BBC's 100th Anniversary on 18 October 2022 marked a milestone for public service media worldwide.

While states provide some funding and general directions on the Programme types, public media are basically promised editorial independence from incumbent governments. Since the PSM institutions are not dependent on commercial revenues, and attempt to keep the government at arm's length, they are considered a relatively autonomous public sphere (Larsen, 2017). That is why several scholars link the essence of public service media to Jürgen Habermas's (1989) theories of the public sphere and deliberative democracy.

There is a widespread belief that the publicly-funded media, in response, would provide impartial news and high-quality Programmes owing to the relative independence they have. When such contents are produced and circulated, it is highly likely that public interests of a given society are served fairly well. The significance of the public service broadcasters is also commonly justified on the grounds that the commercial media are usually not in a position to provide public interest information as they are often influenced by the opinions of their owners and the pressure from advertisers.

In spite of their identity tags and the rhetoric surrounding their values/principles, the public media institutions contrasted in terms of living up

to the ideals that legitimized their presence. The respect and trust their audiences accorded to them have never been the same across institutions and nations. They have been operating in divergent political and economic systems. The states greatly varied in terms of their commitment to press freedom and respecting the editorial independence of PSM in their respective countries. Accordingly, the PSM differ in terms of the degree of public trust and the chance of surviving the current waves of challenges that tend to make their continued existence at stake.

In light of such crucial trajectories and contexts of the PSM, this paper examines the evolution of the public mass media in Ethiopia and their successes and challenges in terms of providing citizens access to relevant, credible and impartial information. It also tries to highlight the changes they need to maintain PSMs' established guiding principles of prioritizing public interest and remaining relevant to citizens of Ethiopia.

2. Conceptualizing Public Service Media

The naming, nature and scope of the public service media have evolved over the years. Until the digital media came into being, following the advent of the Internet in the early 1980s, the public service media were basically radio and television. With a bid to include the digital platform-based public services, people lately started to refer to public service broadcasters (PBS) as "public service media" or simply "public media". In this paper, both expressions are interchangeably used, notwithstanding the fact that the traditional public broadcasters have been the main actors in the Ethiopian media landscape.

As reflected in the ways various scholars and organizations defined the public service media, the essence does not seem to have changed much. Basically, the PSM are distinct from other media in the sense that they are financed and controlled by the public. They are neither commercial nor state-owned and are supposed to be free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces. PSMs are also known for their commitment to the formation of public values and democratic cultures. For example, UNESCO (cited in Harding, 2015:11) describes public service broadcasting (PSB) as:

> …broadcasting made, financed and controlled by the public, for the public. It is neither commercial nor state-owned and is free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces. Through PSB, citizens are informed, educated and also

> entertained. When guaranteed with pluralism, programming diversity, editorial independence, appropriate funding, accountability and transparency, public service broadcasting can serve as a cornerstone of democracy.

The largest global association of public service broadcasters with a membership of 50+ public TV and radio broadcasting, The Public Media Alliance, defines PSM as "publicly owned multi-platform media organizations that provide relevant, credible and impartial news, entertainment, and education to their audiences."[1] The way article 2:11 of the Ethiopian Media proclamation No.1238/2021 defines the PSM is not different except that it also includes the levels of their existence (federal and regional states) and what government body they are accountable to.

> Public service broadcasting means a radio or television transmission established at National or Regional State level, accountable to the House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) or to Regional Councils; wholly or substantially financed by government budget with a mandate to provide contents that guarantee public interest while remaining neutral and independent of government.

The classical PSB features highlighted in the above and several other definitions of the PSM are enlightenment and democracy. The Public Media Alliance asserts the PSM are essential for informed and effective democracies to survive and thrive, and should be accessible and accountable to all citizens. They have a duty to convey objective information which, in turn, provides a basis for the free forming of opinions. Similarly, UNDP (2015:5) argues, "public service broadcasting has the potential in ensuring the public to receive a wide diversity of independent and non-partisan information and ideas, to promote a sense of national identity, and serve the needs of minority and other specialized interest groups". The PSMs are supposed to guide the formation of quality pubic opinions by providing comprehensive, factual and unbiased information to the audience.

[1] The Public Media Alliance. https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/about-us/what-is-psm/

Although the underlying principles guiding the public service media seem pretty clear, it is not always the case. Rumphorst (1998) cited in UNESCO (2005: 14) argues:

Public service broadcasting is a unique concept. Although easy to understand, it is more often than not misunderstood, sometimes profoundly, sometimes even intentionally. Some languages do not even have a term fully corresponding to the English word "public", and the closest translation appears to confer the notion of state/government/official. Where this is the case in a country which has had a tradition of state broadcasting, this linguistic barrier constitutes the first obstacle to a clear understanding of the real nature of public service broadcasting (which is anything but 'state', 'government' or 'official' broadcasting).

It is often argued that the public service media models have been developed essentially due to the inherent weaknesses of the two dominant broadcasting models - the state-controlled model and the profit-oriented commercial media model. In terms of addressing the public mistrust with these two models, the public service media should strive to play some roles. Various sources list down missions of the public service media. The roles listed down by Holznagel (2000: 2) highlight eight dimensions of the roles PSM should play in society:

Information remit: the PSB has a duty to convey objective information as a basis for the free forming of opinions. Coverage, therefore, has to be comprehensive, truthful and factual.

Guiding role: as a source of independent and unbiased information, PSB provides reliable, credible reference points and, consequently, guidance for a free forming of opinion.

Role of forum: PSB has to ensure that all relevant opinions on a particular subject receive a hearing. They have to offer a forum for public discussion in which the relevant social groups can participate.

***Integration role*:** PSB should aim for mutual understanding and, thus, foster social cohesion.

Benchmark: PSB has the obligation to provide guiding, high-quality, and innovative programming. In this way they set standards.

Cultural mission: PSB programming has to reflect a nation's cultural diversity and the events taking place in all the regions of the country.

Mission to produce: appropriate fulfilment of the respective obligations cannot be guaranteed by the mere acquisition of foreign productions. Because of that, PSB has a mission to produce independently and creatively.

Innovative role: PSB is encouraged to take an innovative lead in testing and using new technology and new services in the broadcasting sector.

Some important conditions should be fulfilled for the PSM so they can deliver on their responsibilities. According to Smith (2012), these include the presence of "a clear legal mandate", "nationwide access", "an independently-appointed strategic board, with protection from government and commercial interests", "substantial funding", and "a range of accountability and transparency mechanisms". It would be interesting to see the standing of the Ethiopian public media system in light of these crucial features.

3. Public Mass Media in Ethiopia- the Start and Evolution

3.1. Radio

Unlike the experiences of most African countries where radio was established by colonial powers, in Ethiopia it was the government that got the first radio station set up in the early 1930s (Skjerdal, 2012). In 1935 (a year before the Italian occupation), the station started broadcasting. Under the looming danger from Italian colonialists, the radio station opted to serve national interests of mobilizing Ethiopian citizens and urging them to defend their country. Owing to the limited capacity of its transmitter (first 3KW and later upgraded to 5KW), the signals of Radio Addis Ababa were received in the capital and its surroundings. The station continued to broadcast in both Amharic and English languages until the Italian occupation of the capital in May 1936.

During the post-occupation years Radio Addis Ababa, whose service was disrupted by the invasion, resumed broadcasting in 1941, first in Amharic and then in English, two years later. With the support of the USA, a 10 KW transmitter was installed and, as a result, the signals covered many parts of the county. However, Ethiopian households who had a radio set were very limited (Ibid).

According to Meseret (2013), in the decades before the 1960s, Radio Addis Ababa was an institution that was solely set up, financed and run by the Ethiopian state. However, Radio Voice of Gospel (RVOG) which was founded and run by Lutheran World Federation was launched in 1963 aiming to spread the Christian faith. The station was nationalized in 1977 and was renamed as the External Service of the Voice of Revolutionary Ethiopia (ESVRE) (Ibid).

During the Derg period radio was arguably the most important medium because of its reach, increased availability of radio sets and cultural appropriateness of content to a large portion of citizens. Radio was widely employed by the government to denounce the monarchy and to propagate the socialist ideology, among others (Skjerdal, 2012). In addition to the existing Amharic, English, Afar, Somali and Arabic languages, Afan Oromo (1974) and Tigrigna (1975) Programmes were added to the radio broadcast.

The first commercial FM radios (Sheger FM and Zami FM (lately changed its name to Awash FM) were issued license and went operational in the 1990s. Currently, 12 commercial radio license holders are broadcasting FM radio, based in Addis Ababa and regional towns. Fana alone has (under a dongle license) about 10 relay stations which are located in various regional towns, (Ethiopian Media Authority).

3.2. Television

Television was first introduced to Ethiopia in 1955, when the BBC set up a temporary experimental closed circuit TV studio and broadcasted the silver jubilee anniversary of the Coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie (Meseret, 2013). In 1963, again, on the occasion of the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the summit was broadcast on closed circuit television to inhabitants of Addis Ababa. Then the country started broadcasting to the wider public following the launching of the Ethiopian Television in 1964 (Ibid). TV shows focusing on agriculture, health, industry, women, youth, and children were introduced, on top of the news casts (Mekuria, 2013).

Privately owned, commercial TV stations joined the Ethiopian media landscape from 2017 onwards. The previously party-owned, quasi commercial[2] media,

[2] Fana and Walta hold commercial media licenses. But the shareholders happened to be individuals drawn from the four parties that made up the EPRDF. Many people do not seriously take them as privately owned, independent media outlets, also because

namely Fana Television (2017) and Walta (2017) were among the first to launch "commercial" TV. They already had the resources and experience running party radio (Fana) or information center (Walta) for more than a decade prior to embarking on the world of TV. A year later (2018), privately owned satellite stations like EBS Television, Nahoo TV, ARTS TV, Kana TV, Asham TV and the Oromia Broadcasting Service (OBS) joined the Ethiopian media landscape. Between 2019 and 2024, at least 13 other TV stations have been issued commercial TV licenses. However, not all of these are currently broadcasting (Ethiopian Media Authority, 2024).

3.3. Major features of the Ethiopian Broadcast Media

Ethiopian media from its early stage was government-owned except for some publications that were run by foreigners. These media were under authoritarian system and they were instruments of the ruling class. The media were filled with opinionated pieces and pure propaganda. In the early age of the Ethiopian media, media independence was unthinkable. Public interest journalism or critical approach to reporting on the government were dangerous and a few dared to produce content. The media mostly did stories on themes like praising the rulers, soliciting public loyalty to the government of the day, modernizing the country, patriotism, among others. Before it was abolished by the 1992 press proclamation, every media content was subject to censorship by government bodies. Although the 1955 Ethiopian Constitution stated freedom of speech and of the press was guaranteed and correspondence shall be subject to no censorship except in time of declared national emergency, the provision failed to materialize. As Daniel (2019) noted, until six months before its downfall, freedom of the press and of expression, and the lifting of censorship were among the changes the student movement demanded the imperial government to make.

During the military dictatorship, media rights such as freedom of expression, public right to information and media professionals' editorial independence were unthinkable. The media were subject to prior censorship as a matter of law and in practice (Daniel, 2019). Media were concentrated in the hands of government and controlled by party structures. The existing media reflected diversity only through the use of different languages. Compared to the

of the loyalty they show to the ruling party (former EPRDF and the current Prosperity Part).

Emperor's time, many local languages were used for transmission. There was relative increase in the opportunities for professional training in journalism, mostly by friendly socialist countries (Meseret, 2013).

During the EPRDF period, the media landscape in Ethiopia had, in general, seen notable improvements. The prominent developments include diversification in the media types, the restructuring of the state media (through the enactment of a proclamation) as public media institution and the proliferation of regional and community broadcasters. It was during this period that the media started discussing the need for upholding professional standards of journalism and introducing media-self regulation as an alternative to the long-standing government regulation of the media industry (Skjerdal, 2012).

The media had gone through many ups and downs in its quest for independence and desire to fulfil its function of informing the public and holding power to account. As Skjerdal (2012) rightly points out, the political leadership of the EPRDF era mostly regarded the media as an integral part of its governance strategy, similar to the approach of preceding regimes. Public liberties were restricted through tight control of the state media channels, albeit referring to them as "public media" that are formally granted editorial independence.

The media ecosystem during the reign of the Prosperity Party (which succeeded the EPRDF in 2019) is characterized by remarkable increase in the number of media outlets, including the digital media. Progressive media policy was introduced, for the first time, and a more liberal media bill was also passed. However, what deemed to be a very promising moment of press freedom seemed to have changed when the government started tightening regulation. In addition, in the context of ongoing conflicts in the country the presence of biased and sensationalized reporting, ethnic-based hate narratives, and political activism (guised journalism) have also contributed to the current substandard journalistic practices.

Generally, the media in Ethiopia have been mostly run and controlled by the state. The hope for media liberalization and development appeared to have been hampered by the government's desire to continue using the media as an instrument for consolidating political power. Thus, the general public's quest for open public forum and independent press that serve their interests remains unaddressed. Not even private broadcasters operating independently of the state have earned public respect, as their journalism is influenced by political

and financial interests. Despite the merits of the digital media in terms of providing space for public discussion, one cannot deny the fact that they also contributed to the circulation of mis/dis-information, hate speech and therefore resulted in the fragmentation of the audience.

4. The Current State of the Public Service Media in Ethiopia

Smith (2012:7) summarizes UNESCO's Media Development Indicators that are particularly relevant to public service broadcasting. She lists down the following Key Indicators, as the major ones:

- The goals of PSB are legally defined
- The public service remit of the PSB is clearly defined in law
- The PSB has specific guarantees on editorial independence and appropriate and secure funding arrangements to protect it from arbitrary interference
- The PSB is publicly accountable, through its governing body
- The PSB has a proven commitment to consultation and engagement with the public and CSOs, including a complaints system
- Public involvement in appointments to the governing body.

Along with these indicators of PSM development, attempts are made to examine the state of the public service media in Ethiopia today. The sections hereunder present reflections based on personal experiences (as a journalism educator and as a person who got involved in the process of crafting and implementing Ethiopia's media policy and law) and scholarly discussions captured in various relevant documents.

4.1. Legal Arrangements for Public Service Media Operation

Public interest is at the centre of public service broadcasters. However, pubic interest may not be in the best interest for every party; political and market forces prioritize their own agendas and push the media to privilege those motives, often at the expense of citizens' needs. Thus, legal and institutional frameworks are necessary to safeguard the public's right to authentic information on critical issues. To this end, every government since the mid-1950s—including the monarchy, the military regime, the EPRDF, and the Prosperity Party—has enacted or adopted legislation intended to guarantee

freedom of expression and the press. For example, the Imperial Constitution of Ethiopia states, "Freedom of speech and of the press is guaranteed throughout the Empire in accordance with the law," (Article 41, the 1955 revised constitution). Similarly, the Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) promulgated in 1987 indicates, "Ethiopians are guaranteed freedom of speech, press, assembly, peaceful demonstration and association," (Article 47). The 1992 press bill the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) passed was instrumental in liberalizing the media landscape. The law declared the abolition of censorship and this led to the mushrooming of private newspapers and magazines. After the completion of the period of transition, the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia adopted in 1995 did the same like its predecessors. Article 29 of this Constitution affirmed freedom of speech and of the press without restriction.

Furthermore, following the passing of the 2007 Broadcasting Service Proclamation, licenses were issued to public, commercial, and community broadcasters. In 2007, Zami (currently Awash FM) and Sheger were established as the first commercial radio stations in the country. In 2008, a new Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation No. 590/2008, was passed marking another important landmark in the history of the Ethiopian media. The proclamation guaranteed citizens' rights to access, receive and impart information held by public bodies. The bill abolished the licensing of print media.

Upon taking over political power, the government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed signalled its intention to introduce liberal reforms that included building independent and vibrant media that equip the public with the information they need to be able to participate in public dialogues that lead towards democracy.[3] Very positive steps (acclaimed by the international community) were taken towards ensuring freedom of the mass media. In 2020, the Council of Ministers adopted the country's first media policy, signalling the government's commitment to further liberalize, diversify, and support the mass media sector. In 2021, Media Proclamation No. 1238 was enacted in a bid to "fully enforce the right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media which are guaranteed under the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of

[3] Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's Inaugural address to the Ethiopian Parliament, April 2, 2018 (Abiy, 2018).

Ethiopia, as well as international human rights instruments which are binding on Ethiopia"[4] Article 31 of this bill lists down four categories of broadcasting service licenses of which "public service broadcasting license" is one. This type of license is issued to applicants that meet the criteria, without any competition. The persons that do not qualify to get the public service broadcasting license include political parties, organizations of which a political party is a stakeholder and organizations of which a member of its management is in the leadership of a political party. "Unless otherwise permitted under exceptional considerations by law, governmental institutions cannot be issued broadcasting service licenses," states sub-article 4 or Article 40 of the proclamation.

4.2. Institutional Arrangements for Public Service Media Protection and Regulation

The country's existing media policy and law clearly express the need to protect the independence of the public service media. Under section 3.2 of part three, the FDRE's Media Policy (2020) requires that, "National public broadcasters and regional broadcasters shall maintain their organizational and editorial independence so that they shall provide public service." Accordingly, these frameworks point to measures that need to be taken to halt interference and give the PSM the space they require to competently inform, educate and entertain citizens. Among the mechanisms of fending the PSM from possible interference, especially from the executive bodies, the policy suggests, "The management board [of the PSM] shall be led by independent and impartial members drawn from civil society organizations and appointed by the federal House of Peoples' Representatives or regional councils." (Ibid). The policy also stresses the need to provide public funding to these media outlets so that they produce high-quality content that contributes to the country's peace, democracy, socio-economic development.

Similarly, Article 47 sub-article 2 of the current media bill (No. 1238/2021) states that, "The media should be free from governmental, political or economic influence; and the influence of those in control of the material and infrastructure resources essential for the production and dissemination of its publications and services." Any media, provides the bill, has the right to not only "gather, receive and disseminate news or information" but also to "express

[4] Preamble, Media Proclamation No. 1228/2021, p. 13113

opinions and engage in critical reporting on issues," (Article 47, Sub-Article 1). These provisions are consistent with the essence of the rights under Article 29 of the Ethiopian Constitution and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Hence, it is no wonder favourable policy and legal frameworks are in place in Ethiopia. As Amare Aregawi[5] repeatedly says our constitution and laws include articles that are "copied, word for word from international covenants". However, there are complaints, recorded instances, and reports by local and international organs and study findings that attest the presence of practices that contravene the laws.

Regulation of the broadcast media is an international practice which is justified on the grounds of protecting the public from potential harms the electronic media could inflict. Moreover, due to the allocation of scarce frequencies to broadcasters, it is important to have a close regulation and monitoring of their activities (Siune and Hulten, 1998). Hence, regulation of the broadcast media is necessitated given their speed of information dissemination, wider reach and impact.

When it comes to regulation of the broadcast media in Ethiopia, the legal and policy frameworks seem to have stricken a balance between guarding freedom of the press on the one hand and holding the press to account in cases of legal and ethical breaches. We see such justifications and concerns in Article 47 (Sub-Articles 3 and 4) of the Media Proclamation No. 1238/2021. Article 3 states that, "Regulation of the content of broadcast material should only be conducted to ensure that the media operates with responsibility by respecting public peace and security, to work with impartiality, to protect the public from harm and consumers from misleading advertisement and unfair trade competition". Article 4, in its part provides, "The content regulation shall be implemented by ensuring freedom of expression and freedom of the press is not endangered by censorship and without endangering the right of the media to publish accurate information and quality news and Programmes"

The desire to ensure the independence and impartiality of the media regulatory organ (Ethiopian Media Authority (EMA)) is clearly described in the current

[5] Amare Aregawi is a veteran Ethiopian journalist, entrepreneur and media leader. He has been serving, in various capacities, both in the public and commercial media outlets in Ethiopia for over 30 years. Currently he is the managing editor of *The Ethiopian Reporter* and Chairperson of the Ethiopian Media Council.

media bill. The proclamation requires open and transparent recruitments in the media governance bodies and outlines, in detail, the processes to follow in the nomination and appointment of the Director General and the Management Board as well as in maintaining balance in the composition of the board and representativeness of its members, among others. Further safeguarding the media governance system of the county, the media Proclamation, under Article 9, states:

1) The Board shall have nine members which are selected by considering gender composition and shall be appointed by the House of Peoples' Representatives, upon recommendation by the Prime Minister.

2) Members of the Board must be appointed in an open and transparent manner and, shall in the process:

    a. Give the public the opportunity to nominate and share their opinions of candidates;

    b. Publish the selection process of candidates and a shortlist of candidate's via media and other electronic means of dissemination, taking into account the objectives and principles of this Proclamation.

5) Among the Board members,

    a. Two of them shall be drawn from civil society organizations, two of them from media and two of them from other institutions that have relevance to the media sector;

    b. The other three shall be drawn from relevant government organs.

Additionally, Article 11 of the bill lists specific set of criteria to be used to recruit board members. A person is qualified to be appointed as board member if that person is Ethiopian citizen; possesses suitable qualifications and expertise or experience in the media sector; is not a member or employee of a political party, just to mention some. These are very progressive, bold moves which, if practiced, could be considered steps in the right direction in terms of setting up a truly independent media governing institution in the country. When such an institution is up and running the likelihood of having vibrant media in general and PSM in particular would be high. Nevertheless, the experiences of the last four years (since the bill was passed) do not suggest an independent media governance system was in the making. In fact, very frustrating setbacks have

been witnessed in some cases. Some of these will be discussed in subsequent sections.

4.3. Editorial independence of the PSM in Ethiopia

Proclamation No. 1278/2023 (Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) Re-establishment Proclamation) describes EBC as "an autonomous public media institution having legal personality to render public services" (Article 3:1). The objectives of the corporation include "making the public participate actively in the prosperity of the country by creating awareness about all affairs taking place in the country and abroad, using radio, television and digital media" (Article 5:1). EBC is also mandated with the task of strengthening unity among peoples, promoting fraternity and national unity by creating national consensus" (Article 5:1) and "playing key role in the efforts made to create a strong democratic system in the country" (Article 5:3).

Despite their legal designations and formal mandates, Ethiopia's so-called "public service media" fail to meet the fundamental criteria of genuine public service media. They are more of state media, at best. It is not difficult to get evidences supporting the claim that these media diligently serve the ruling party/government in visible ways. These media outlets fail to maintain basic independence and impartiality one expects from the PSM because of the systematic pressure the political leadership exerts. The following cases illustrate how PSM editorial independence is subject to significant pressure.

Internally, actors such as the media managers, gatekeepers and boards of directors of many media outlets find it increasingly difficult to adhere to basic journalistic principles such as balance, objectivity and fairness, let alone ensuring public interests are served by the stories and programmes they do. When these leaders and self-declared party members and ardent supporters of the ruling party get into conflict of interests and face pressures from their colleagues and influences coming from outside their media institution, they usually make decisions which are in favour of the party/government to which they are loyal. This has been the dilemma media gatekeepers constantly face in making decisions on issues worthy of coverage and on how the stories should be framed, if the case is found worthy of coverage. It is argued (by people who try to justify decision-making processes in the PSM) that most content decisions

are made by editorial committee,[6] which is guided by the editorial policy of a given media house, and decisions are passed following debates and discussions. In reality, decision-making typically rests with one or two committee members who occupy key roles both on the committee and within the media company, and who maintain direct ties to influential government bodies. When journalists see colleagues loyal to the government promoted to higher positions and rewarded with better pay and benefits—such as personal vehicles—they often resort to self-censorship and frame their reporting in a way that appeases their superiors. The privileging of loyalty over professionalism frequently frustrates journalism school graduates who join the public media. They see that the theories and principles of journalism they studied for years do not sit well with the norms in the media houses. In a situation like this, it is fair to wonder what avenues are left for the interests of citizens (e.g. democratic deliberations, investigative journalism that warrant good governance) to be served.

Moreover, appointing PSM chief executive officers and board members from the ruling party has made it nearly impossible for them to maintain independence. Appointed by the Federal House of Peoples' Representatives on the Prime Minister's recommendation, these individuals maintain unwavering loyalty to the executive and the ruling party, thereby undermining PSM independence.

An ad hoc committee—commonly called the "media committee" within the ruling party—meets weekly to set the agenda for public media. Chaired by a senior government official (either the Minister of Government Communication Services, the chairperson of the Ethiopian Media Authority's board, or a trusted member of the Prime Minister's Office inner circle), it also includes the CEOs of the national broadcaster, regional government media organisations, major government print outlets, and the Ethiopian News Agency. For urgent matters, story pitches and framing directives are sent to these CEOs through a dedicated WhatsApp group. In all cases, directives flow almost exclusively from the committee to the media heads. Griffin (2006: 73) poses the question, "Who sets the agenda for the agenda setters?" While in many countries it is the politicians,

[6]Editorial committee is a committee/board in a media house that provides overall content/focus direction to journalists involved in content production. The committee is usually led by the CEO (or a deputy CEO) of the media house and is composed of the editor-in-chief, deputy chief editors, managing programme/section editors, directors, and editors depending on the structure and size of the media house.

public relations practitioners (spin doctors), and interest groups that drive the media agenda, in Ethiopia its ruling party's ad hoc "media committee" dictates the agenda for public service media.

Whilst continuing with their "autonomous" rhetoric, the supposedly public service media in Ethiopia seem to be captured and serving various vested interests. Media capture refers to "…a situation in which the media have not succeeded in becoming autonomous in manifesting a will of their own, nor able to exercise their main function, notably of informing people. Instead, they have persisted in an intermediate state, with vested interests, and not just the government, using them for other purposes," (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013: 41), cited in Abdissa (2013: 17)). Drawing on Stiglit's (2017) four classification, Abdissa explains that during the two-year war (2020-2022) between the Federal Government and the Tigray forces, the media in Ethiopia were captured through mechanisms of ownership, financial incentive, censorship and cognitive means (being instrument of a certain organ's communication strategy). There are strong evidences suggesting these mechanisms of media capture are no more at work after the war, at least in the case of the PSM in Ethiopia.

4.4. Stable Funding Arrangements for the PSM

One important condition for the independent functioning of the PSM is the availability of sufficient and stable funding at their disposal. Constant public funding for the PSM is believed to help insulate them against financial threats and attempts of media capture through financial incentives. Money from advertisers and corporate entities might affect PSM's ability to report without compromising pubic interests. For example, corrupt organizations may incentivize a media outlet and, in return, demand favourable reporting so they can hide bad deeds that can harm society.

The PSM in Ethiopia get a large chunk of their finances from annual government budget and advertising. It is stated in Article 14 of Proclamation No. 1278/2024 that the national TV broadcaster, EBC, generates its income from government budget support, service fees collected from TV set owners and revenues from the other services it provides. For example, in the 2023/24 budget year, EBC got 39% of its total income from the government while income collected from TV set owners and other revenues (advertisement, air time sell and sponsorship)

amounted to 12% and 49% of the total respectively. [7] Whether the public has to put some type of cap on the amount of money PSM should generate is a subject of serious discussion. Especially the "sponsorship" part that allows corporate entities (like Ethio Telecom and Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (CBE)) to pump large resources into the public media system is troubling. On top of the tens of millions of Birr they provide to the pubic media houses every year, these businesses have built extraordinary studios for the PSM and got them named after their organizations. How can citizens expect these media to critically report on these organizations? For example, EBC found it difficult to report the incident in a timely manner when, in April 2024, mostly college students exploited a loophole in the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia's ATM network to withdraw approximately $40 million (2.3 billion ETB) that was not in their accounts. Would it fair for a media that claims to "serve the public" not to cover an issue which was of a wide public concern at the time? However, EBC was swift to report the successful efforts of the bank to recover most of the funds. If this continues to be the case, there is no ground to argue that EBC is not going to sell its editorial independence.

4.5. Accountability and Public Engagement

The work of building democracy cannot be left to politicians or to specialized experts (like journalists). To thrive, democracy must involve the full participation of citizens. Thus, it is important that citizens are involved in the governance of public institutions. Even more important is the fact that the public at large shall keep an eye on PSM, not only because they are financed by and belong to the public, but also because these institutions have crucial contributions for the formation of a well-informed citizenry, quality opinions and the widening of democratic spaces and culture.

In this regard, it is good that the public media institutions are made accountable to the House of Peoples' Representatives, the councils of the regional states and the councils of city administrations. These bodies of citizens' representatives should go beyond the regular report hearing and supervision and to closely look into such areas as the levels of participation of civil society in the governance of public media outlets and a more meaningful involvement of citizens in their content production process (Dragomir, 2021). Whether the PSM in Ethiopia have put in place user-friendly feedback mechanism for the

[7] Information obtained from Finance Department of EBC

audiences should also be checked. In this time of digital economy and content-saturated media ecosystem, argues Dragomir, "public service media can gain a competitive edge only if they engage citizens in innovative, meaningful ways. Without the citizen participation element, they risk becoming a marginal player or, worse, a thing of the past, "(Dragomir, 2021:26).

The public service media in Ethiopia have to be more transparent regarding their funding sources and expenditures of the resources they raise. Beginning from April, 2018 EBC might have raised the largest sum of resources since its establishment. It is highly unlikely that even the Democracy Affairs Standing Committee of the House of Peoples' Representatives is sufficiently informed on the sources of millions of dollars recently spent on renovating its current headquarters, the Shegole compound (formerly owned by the military- run former Metals and Engineering Corporation (METEC)). It is also important to know the financers do not affect the editorial independence of EBC.

Occasionally, studies have to be conducted, by independent institutions, to learn about the expansion (or retention) of audience and the levels of audience trust the public media have earned (lost). Given the high expectations and huge investments, it is necessary that the public gets values matching the inputs being injected into the PSM systems. The outcomes of audience studies that media houses conduct should be published and analysed by scholars and other civil society institutions. The assessment of the executive branches of the government may not always be fair as they can possibly see PSM's success in terms of their roles in producing discourses that legitimize government actions while denying critical views.

4.6. Decentralization of the Public Service Media and its Implications

A recent media development assessment report (UNESCO, 2022) reveals that Ethiopia, being a country of more than 110 million people that have great diversity in languages, politics, culture, societal values, and other aspects; has only 76 radio and 38 television stations. Lack of transmission equipment made it difficult to send strong radio signals to some parts of the country until very recently, despite the intent to establish regional radio stations. Even after challenges with the transmission infrastructure improved, the EPRDF government was reluctant to issue licenses, especially to commercial broadcasters. Thus, there were no radio stations broadcasting out of the regional towns, except the satellite stations (of the Voice of Ethiopia).

As of the middle of 1995, at least Oromia and Ahmara regions started to produce 30 minutes long weekly TV Programmes, and transported the VHS tape recorded contents to Addis Ababa and got them aired on the Ethiopian National Television, Ethiopian Television (ETV), currently known as EBC. After the 2007 Broadcasting Service Proclamation authorized licencing to commercial, public and community media, regional TV stations began to emerge. Public broadcasters funded by the regional states (Tigray, Oromia, Amhara, former South Nations, Nationalities, Peoples Region (NNPR), Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa) joined the Ethiopian media landscape later on. Currently, almost all the regional states (with the exception of the newly formed ones) have their own broadcast media.

Around 2009, regional governments commenced establishing their own FM stations beginning with Adama and Mekele in Oromifa and Tigrigna languages respectively (Skjerdal and Mulatu, 2020). These moves enabled audiences in different parts of the country to access media content that better reflected their socio-cultural contexts. While expanding access to audiences to the breadth of the national population and representation of diversity are steps in the right direction, the multiplicity of sources might have also heralded the end of an era for the national media's monopoly over discourses.

The regional governments are not only financing the regional media but also involved in managing these PSMs, directly or indirectly. By and large, the main purpose of the regional media is believed to be building the image of the region and advancing the interests of the regional government that finances them. Ethnic politics affects the media systems by attaching much credence to one's ethnic identity than professional stature. So, it sets a quota system to recruiting managers, and now in growing pattern, journalists as well. The loyalty of these recruits is basically to their ethnic group, not to the profession. In this regard, Skjerdal & Mulatu (2020) observed tendencies, in the media, of "an intensified ethnification process". Explaining what that is supposed to mean, they have the following to say:

> By this we mean that ethnic belonging and identity politics are gaining significance as central frames of reference in the current Ethiopian media discourse. Ethnicity is being employed as a key to interpret media messages, and it outlines a frame for classifying media channels and personalities.

It is true that the regional and the federal media alike were the locus of contestation during the latest war in the northern parts of the country (more importantly the one between the Federal Government and Tigray forces). In those days, most of them were engaged in doing propaganda and disseminating hate speeches. However, such unprofessional behaviour and evident biases stem from the longstanding lack of independence experienced by public service media. When the structural problems are addressed and they gain relative independence, these regional media outlets will continue to be important in terms of giving better access to information that is more culturally relevant to people in the peripheries.

5. PSM in Ethiopia and Public Access to Information

Enshrined in the Ethiopian Constitution is the right to freedom of expression without any interference. This right, according to Article 29, includes the "freedom *to seek*, *receive* and *impart information* and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, *or through any media of his choice*." Despite the declared commitments to freedom of expression, in the constitution and various media-related laws and policies, accessing authentic information that may affect their decisions and livelihood has been a big challenge for millions of Ethiopians. It is even harder for the media and individual citizens to get government-held information that is relevant to them. The 2008 access to information act has not brought about marked differences. Similarly, the post-2018 government failed to deliver on its promises of ensuring access to information and transparency.

As Kovach and Rosenstiel (2003:17) contend, "The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing,". According to these media scholars, "Telling the truth so that people will have the information that they need to be sovereign" is the primary role of media personnel (ibid). When the media shed light on issues that matter to a society, people will find their own ways of dealing with situations. It is believed, "The welfare of citizens increases when they have more information about their agent (in this case the government) because the agent (or the government) behaves better" (Abdissa, 2023).

It is customary that newly sworn in leaders try to observe democratic rights (including the right to access information) until they safely afoot in the reign of power. In this regard, both the EPRDF and the Prosperity Party presented

themselves as pro-freedom of expression and multiplicity of public discourses in their first couple of years in office. The public and the media also celebrated such 'wave' of democracy. When the going seemed good, when the politicians thought their power was cemented properly and when they did not care about public scrutiny any more, they resorted to their old tricks of muffling the discursive public space. For example, the significant positive changes the national "public" broadcaster, ETV, made in its reporting, following PM Abiy Ahmed's taking of office in April 2018, caught the public by surprise. However, such reporting practices and the accompanying public approval have since disappeared.

The media (including the PSM) turned a blind eye on grand incidents and issues the government did not want them to report on. In the last couple of years, many Ethiopians needed timely, nuanced and authentic information on such issues as the armed conflicts in various parts of the country, wars, kidnappings, killings of civilians, arbitrary detentions, mobility restrictions, hiking cost of living, inflation, corruption, foreign relations, just to mention some. The public service media (PSM) have failed to provide sufficient, high-quality information on these issues. Even when they choose to cover stories, they tend to strictly adhere to government framing, amplifying the positions of the ruling party and the administration. In some cases, they waited until the problems subside and later on do reports that accuse others for wrongdoings and justify government measures or inactions. In the face of rampant corruption and when the journalists themselves might have experienced it, the PSM had to wait until Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed told them to do investigative journalism. It is not clear why "the fourth estate" needs to be reminded of their duty by the head of the executive body of the government. It is also not clear what has changed owing to the investigative reporting practices of the PSM and how their stories helped ameliorate situations.

It is understandable that journalists find it difficult to get information from the ground, like in the case of armed conflicts. Their safety is important. However, security concerns do not hold water when peaceful events that are unfolding here in the capital city, right before citizens' eyes, remain unreported by the PSM. In situations like this, citizens are left with no choices other than consuming stories (often one-sided, incomplete and biased) crafted by untrained, fellow citizens and get circulated via social media platforms. For example, all the PSM did not cover the demonstrations, called in February 2023

by leaders of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, to protest against what it said was a government supported coup attempt to overthrow the Holy Synod by the "illegal group." There were big crowds of Orthodox Christians, wearing black clothes around their churches, including the ones near the EBC headquarters. That was an epic example of how the media may ignore newsworthy moments, when the stories are not in the best interest of the political leaders of the day.

In general, the public media fail to inform the public on certain issues usually because they prioritize government interests over that of the citizens. A recent study on media development in Ethiopia (UNESCO, 2022) reveals that media is one of the least trusted institutions in Ethiopia currently, owing to its history of strict government control and being bound to serve the ruling party and government only, rather than the Ethiopian public.

6. The Predicaments Facing the Public Service Media in Ethiopia

Globally, public service media are faced with a radically new environment that poses numerous challenges to the functioning of any genuine PSB. Today's media environment is characterized by upsurge in commercial broadcasting, convergence, digitalization, globalization and audience fragmentation. In light of these developments, many are questioning PSB's relevance and role in the 21st century. The public service media in Ethiopia cannot be immune from the dynamics the media in general and PSM in particular are experiencing. However, they need to navigate their way going forward, without losing sight of public service ethos.

Highlighted below are major tensions that characterize the major predicaments the public service media in Ethiopia are currently experiencing.

PSM in Ethiopia should justify their existence by way of addressing basic citizens' needs of getting timely, comprehensive and authentic information on issue of public significance. This has not been the case for the good part of their lifetime.

The PSM can achieve their goals of satisfying citizens' needs only if they maintain editorial independence from political and financial pressures. It has been witnessed, time and again, that governments want to get hold of the media and make sure they serve as instruments of advancing their political goals. They try to justify their grip of the publicly funded media by stating that the media should focus on giving priority to public/national agenda like

"development", "prosperity", "peace and security", "sovereignty" etc. For example, the editorial policy of EBC which has been guiding its reporting since 2013, describes "image-building" as an important role for promoting the growth and transformation plan of the country which deemed Ethiopia to become a middle-income country by 2022 (EBC editorial policy, 2015).

It appears that the PSM in Ethiopia cannot get the editorial independence they require to provide the type of journalism people need. Those who are controlling the PSM cannot willingly set the captured media free. Thus, concerted efforts of the general public, audiences, civil society organizations, the masses of voters and audiences are needed to help the PSM get the space they need to do quality journalism that caters for the needs of citizens.

There is no way the PSM can obtain public support unless they listen to the public and unless they are accountable to the public. They should be able to overturn the serious credibility deficit they seem to have currently faced by recommitting themselves to prioritizing public interest. They cannot go on justifying themselves in the public's name but continue overlooking the public need for information that helps them make informed decisions and actively participate in substantive public affairs.

7. Conclusions

The reasons that brought the public service model of media remain, at least in Ethiopia. The people want the public service media to transform themselves and meaningfully contribute to the building of citizenship, community, democracy, and enhanced participation of citizens in the governance of political, social and economic sectors of the country. It appears there are great lengths to go in terms of fostering social cohesion and building democratic culture. Independent public service media could be good sites for the development of values that tie people together and ensure good governance. Political economies like Ethiopia's need the PSB more than in nations with liberal democratic orientations. Given the country's current socio-political context, people need quality journalism that sets standards of excellence with regard to providing independent and unbiased information. Citizens cannot afford to leave such responsibility to our country's lately emerging commercial media which are mired with multiple challenges.

Historical records show that in some countries, public broadcasters evolved into state broadcasters, abandoning their original mission of serving the public. In

contrast, state media in countries like South Africa, Tanzania, and Mongolia were transformed into public service media following democratic developments. Remarkably, in Thailand, this transformation occurred, while the country was under military rule. These shifts were largely driven by pressure from civil society and other media organizations (Smith, 2012). There are also countries which closed down their public service media. At the same time there are nations where the PSM continue to be credible sources of information. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge these varying trajectories and deliberately chart the course that Ethiopia's public service media will follow.

Concluding this paper and against the backdrop of the preceding arguments, the writer would like to make the suggestions hereunder with the hope of seeing all stakeholders play their roles in helping the PSM to look into their modus operandi and recalibrate themselves sooner than later:

The media in Ethiopia have been operating primarily as relay stations for political elites, propagating the agenda of real agenda-setters who dwell outside of the media house buildings. If PSM are to serve the public and fulfil their role as the fourth estate, direct dictation of their content by a "media committee" or similar bodies must cease. The government should be able to stop capturing the PSM, through mechanisms of ownership, financial incentive, censorship and monopoly over narratives.

The government and leaders of the media need to be reminded that media's (and more importantly the public media's) first loyalty is to citizens. Ensuring that the media are loyal to the government needs to change. Accordingly, appointing party members and sympathizers as media CEOs and using the public media as propaganda and public relations tools should be meaningfully reduced, if not abandoned.

Media issues should surface out as one of the agenda of public discussions and debates. The nature of PSM in the past and present as well as their contributions to peace and conflicts have to be studied, discussed (by the rightful stakeholders) on public platforms like the media, the HoPR and, national dialogue forums which are currently underway.

The support of civil society can be crucial to the proper functioning of a PSM. So far, the PSM appeared to be a no-go zone for the civil society organizations in Ethiopia.

All relevant stakeholders should make sure the current disconnect between the rhetoric and laws on the one hand and the governance and practices of the PSM on the other hand should be addressed.

There is also a need to set up a national media consumer's council (membered by a diverse group of people) which can watch on the "watchdogs". Along with the discussions they hold and feedbacks they give to the public media and the general public; it would be great if civil society organizations carry out national surveys that compile the levels of audience satisfaction with the contents of the publicly financed media. For example, the Public Media Alliance noted that in the 2023 Reuters Institute Digital News Report ranked above their commercial competitors in terms of trust in consolidated democracies around the world. Study results like this are needed to be able to gauge the performance of the PSM.

There is a need to closely follow the finance sources of PMS and make sure that their roles are not compromised because of pressures from financers other than the state. The government has to make sure they get fair amount of budget that fends them from falling prey to other interests, while striding to raise funding. Putting caps on the number of resources they can take might also help.

All the lofty goals of PSMs are realized and all the investments are justified only when information is duly received by the audience. The reception of the contents of the PSM in the country is highly questionable. It is also important to regularly check to what extent the public trusts information from PSM. UNESCO (2022) found out that the media is one of the least trusted institutions in Ethiopia currently, owing to its history of strict government control and being bound to serve the ruling party and government only, rather than the public. To this end, audience surveys and rating of media outlets should be conducted by independent bodies like think tanks, civil societies and universities. Results of the assessments should be made accessible to society.

Continued candid discussions on the quality of the PSM in Ethiopia should lead to carving out a model that works particularly to the needs and contexts of our country.

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This monograph explores the evolution, dynamics, and performance of Ethiopia's public institutions in promoting good governance. Drawing on insights from a six-session public dialogue series, it examines how institutions have adapted to changing political and social contexts, redefined their roles and responsibilities, and contributed to advancing accountability, transparency, and citizen-centred governance. By bringing together reflections from scholars, practitioners, and policymakers, the volume offers a nuanced understanding of institutional development in Ethiopia and its implications for the country's governance trajectory.

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