

## Local urban governance and citizen participation in planning: Experience from Ethiopia

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### Abstract

Decentralization and governance are supposed to bring and enhance popular participation at the local level. Urban governance as urban administration model is based on the logic that city governance needs the interaction of the government, citizen and stakeholders to better represent the need of the society. In this urban governance model participation of citizen become an important dimension specially in the planning of the city. As an objective this article try to assess how the different stakeholder that represent the local people try to play their role and involve in the planning of the city in one of Ethiopian city known Mekelle city administration. Using Mixed Research methodology that involves both the qualitative and quantitative the researcher found that citizen participation based on the urban governance model is very limited in the study area. Stakeholder participation in the city is limited due to government lack of trust on the local private and civil society sectors and such problems are only solved with close consultation and collaboration among the government, the citizen and the stakeholders and by creating awareness for mutual understandings.

**Keywords:** urban governance, citizen participation, stakeholder role

### 1. Introduction

There is no an elusive concept as citizen participation due to its adherences to different political, social and economic environment of different countries. John Gaventa and Camilo Valderrama (1999) <sup>[4]</sup> stated that understanding citizen participation is difficult for many reasons. For many times, the concept has referred to participation in the social arena, in the community or in development projects. Increasingly, however, the concept of participation is being related to rights of citizenship and to democratic governance. Nowhere is the intersection of concepts of community participation and citizenship seen more clearly than in the multitude of programs for decentralized governance that are found in both southern and northern countries. Linking citizen participation to the state at this local or grassroots level raises fundamental and normative questions about the nature of democracy and about the skills and strategies for achieving it.

Even the concept is difficult to define; there are some attempts to conceptualize it. Among them, Holdar and Zakharchenok (2002), conceptualize Citizen participation as community based process, where citizens organize themselves and their goals at the grassroots level and work together through nongovernmental community organizations to influence the decision making process. Citizens get most involved in this process when the issue at stake relates directly to them. Furthermore, citizen participation occurs when all the stakeholders cooperate to implement changes. Citizen participation is a key ingredient in the recipe for democracy. Public participation increases transparency in the decision-making process. If citizens are involved in the policy development, they will be able to make government officials more accountable for their decisions. Individuals and groups that are involved in the process of influencing decision making are defined as stakeholders. These are people who have some interest in the policy and thus want to express their opinion.

Generally, citizen participation has the following dimensions based on *Lars Hasselblad Torres (2007)* <sup>[5]</sup> conception of the term

- Informing and educating the general public about important policy issues;
- Improving government decisions by improving the information flow from citizens to decision makers;
- Creating opportunities for citizens to shape and in some cases, determine public policy;
- Legitimizing government decisions by ensuring that the voices of those impacted by government policy have been heard, considered, and addressed;
- Involving citizens in monitoring the outcomes of policy for evaluation; and
- Improving the quality of public life by restoring the trust and engagement of citizens.

Citizen participation in urban planning is a controversial concept in which it lacks clarity. Urban planning is one of many terms (city/town planning, land-use planning, urban design, developmental planning, etc.) that refer public sector regulatory powers of envisioning and translating all aspects of city development into spatial terms. In different national planning traditions different aspects of urban planning are emphasized, but in general the term covers everything from zoning (planning the function and appearance of every plot of land in the city) towards developmental planning that focuses more on the combination of functions and define axes of development in spatial terms without much attention to particular plots. The terms can also refer to strategic planning that first defines general goals towards which the overall multi-sectorial city development should be directed and then elaborate operational goals and programs to realize general goal. The term covers everything from strictly spatial

development towards social and economic developments of the city, as seen in their spatial manifestations (Masa Djordjevic, 2006)<sup>[6]</sup>.

There are many approaches regarding urban planning but most of them ignore the importance of citizen participation in planning. However, approaches such as the Communicative planning understand the importance of citizen participation and it assumes that importance of information input from all strata of society into the planning process. This means that community based groups, as well as formerly excluded individuals have to be integrated into the formulation of plans. The content of these deliberatively derived plans is then seen to represent the public interest. It is assumed that the process of negotiation allows the participants to learn about differing world views and to create a common interest which is more than the sum of all special interests. This approach to planning allows including different competing political interests. It puts an emphasis on context, as all problems only exist in and are defined by a certain environment. The different stakeholders and their interests are recognized and they are included into the deliberate effort of deriving plans.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

In environments with poor traditions of citizen participation decentralization is considered as an important first step in creating regular, predictable opportunities for citizen state interaction. Within Africa itself, decentralization has also been opted for as a solution to political challenges that seem to threaten national cohesion. Countries with a history of linguistic, ethnic/tribal, and religious tensions have often found the federal approach to national governance as most suited for national harmony. Both Ethiopia and Uganda, for example, derive their initiation and commitment to decentralization from past history of political upheaval (UNDP, 2002)<sup>[13]</sup>.

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) provides the legal basis for ensuring Citizens' Voice and participation in socio-economic and political processes. Legal and institutional arrangements aimed at ensuring interface between the government and Ethiopians are enshrined in the Constitution.6 Article 43 (sub-article 2) explains that citizens have the right to "participate in national development and, in particular, to be consulted with respect to policies and projects affecting their community."

The current planning process in Ethiopia involves setting broad objectives, preparation of guidelines, formulation of plan proposals, implementation of plans and monitoring and evaluation of the plan (Tegege, 1998)<sup>[11]</sup>. However, study by the Ministry of Urban Development, Housing and Construction (2014) find out that looking at the participatory mechanisms, concerning urban development in Ethiopia, the major source of problems are gaps in urban planning and implementation efforts; the manner urban plans are prepared and applied; whether residents have say or not.

Most of the time citizen involvement in development issue is a top down approach that is for instance a local development plan is formulated and finalized and come to the local people for mere approval. The local people do not identify, prioritize and set its own agenda through its locally elected councils rather the elected councils serve as a means loyalty to the already formulated plans.

So this study focuses on the locally elected council's role in planning and how the planning goes from inception to approval. It also tries to examine how the local people need and priority is expressed by the elected councils at the local council.

## 3. Methodology of the Study

Source of data

Both primary and secondary data was employed in this study to validate the research questions such as

Who involved in the planning process?

What is the role of the elected council in the local plan?

How is the local people need and priority incorporated at the local plan?

To answer such question the researcher used secondary data and existing documents to look into the content of the plan and their implementation report. Primary data of both interview and questionnaires' also used. Interview is conducted with local officials to gain understanding how planning is formulated. Closed ended questionnaires' were also distributed to half of the local council members to know their perception on local planning, their role and their relationship with the local people.

## Sampling Strategy and Techniques

For the interview a purposive sampling method is employed for five top local officials at an interval of a week to raise questions. The interview conducted from March to May 2015 consolidating each next question from the lesson of the past interview. For the questionnaires stratified sampling is applied as a strategy and the lottery method as a technique. The city council has 256 elected councils from seven local administrations and each local administration roughly represented by 35 members each. From each local administration 12 people are selected and a questionnaires' are handed to them by the local administration public officer and returned on time. So, 84 city council members were involved in this study and almost all of them return the questioner. Hence, a total of 89 respondents are take part in this study.

## Data Discussion and Analysis

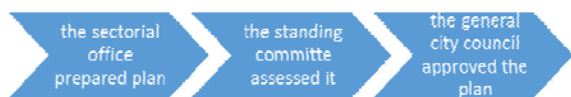
For the questionnaires a descriptive method of analysis are employed using a computer based package known as SPSS. To see the relationship a chi-square is employed in addition to frequency and descriptive statistics such as mean, median and standard deviation. The data from the interview are also analyzed based on thematic categorization of variables to gain an understanding on the general objective of the study.

## 4. Results

Planning at lower level of governance is considered as an inclusive involving all stakeholders and the citizen at large. Some scholars argue that the very essence of decentralization and local governance is to make the local people owner of their affairs by making them participant in the planning, decision and implementation of any project. In Ethiopia local urban governance is design in a way that can able and ensure local people participation in the planning and decision making. The Mekelle city administration has a strategic five year plan that focus on creating employment, capacity building, health and educational infrastructure and good governance.

The process of planning began at sector level in which every sector in the city administration developed and proposed its own annual plan. Next, after the sector approved it, it forwards the proposed plan to the council standing committee. The standing committee assessed it and with its comments and correction it forward to the general council and the general council approved it. Based on proclamation 223/2004 E.C the city council has the highest authority in planning in the city that is it has the highest power that falls within its jurisdiction (3/10 of the proclamation). Accordingly the city council has Has the right to and authority to prepare the overall city directions

- Prepare and approve the city short, medium and long time plans
- Approve budgets of the city
- Determine and collect internal revenue via taxes
- Nominate and select the mayor and vice-mayor of the city



Before the plan coming to effect, every stakeholder is able to review it according the data from the interview. The plan is given to every council member and stakeholder to discuss, comment and rise questions. Most of the time the local councillors given the chance to make any comment before the plan come to an effect whether it goes with the people interest they represent at large. The stakeholders are also informed about the plan to forward their questions and their reservation both the private and the civil society organizations.

In the planning process the standing committee which is a composition of the city council members has an important role. It is the bridge between the executive and the council for planning and it the group that represent the local people. Every member of the city council is at least a member of one standing committee to review and approve the plan. There are around eight standing committee that represent the social, economic and political dimension of the council and represent the local people. Therefore, the city council members are one way or another part of the planning process if not the centre of the planning process in the city.

Since the city council members are at the centre of the city planning process, they are requested to reflect their view on the general planning and strategic vision of the city. For the question to what extents are you involved in the city strategic planning, the respondents indicate their involvement by ratting from very low to very high. As result 44 per cent from the total respondents indicate that they are involved in the city strategic planning to high extent, 28 per cent of the respondents indicate to very high extent they are involved in the city strategic planning and 21 per cent said that they are involved in the city strategic planning to a medium level. The median for all the respondents indicate at 4 in which according to level of involvement indicates high involvement. So, from the data it is clear that the city council members are involved in the strategic planning in the city to high extent.

To the question to what extent is aware to the contents of the annual plan of the city, the city council members indicate the level of their awareness by indicating from very high to very low. As a result, from the total respondents 41 per cent from

the total respondents they indicate that they are aware of the content of the annual plan 37.5 per cent indicate they are aware of the annual plan to the moderate extent and the rest as the table below indicates. From those total respondents the median that indicate central tendency of respondent's concentration is four and accordingly most of the councillors are aware of the city annual pan contents to high extent.

Councillors extent of awareness on the city annual plan

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low	6	7.4	7.5	7.5
Medium	30	37.0	37.5	45.0
High	33	40.7	41.3	86.3
Very High	11	13.6	13.8	100.0
Total	80	98.8	100.0	
Total	81	100.0		

Plan is also be familiar with those who execute it that is the employee of the city administration could also know about the public plan in the city administration. For the question are you familiarized with city annual plan, the respondents from the city administration employee 51 per cent from the total respondents say no that is they are not familiar with the city plan while 45 per cent said they are familiar with the city annual plan. From this it is clear that the city employee is simply execute what they are ordered to do that they are have no awareness on the content of the plan that would help for mobilization and efficiency.

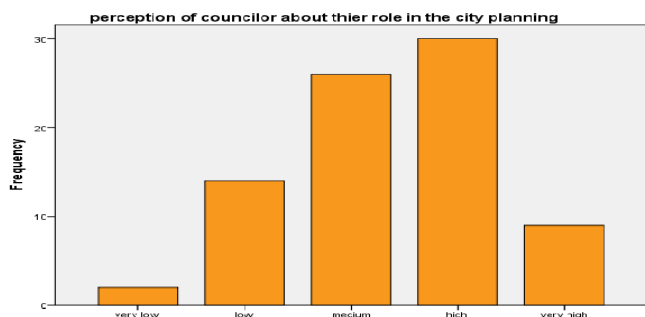
### Who Involved In the City Planning?

From the above discussion it is clear that the planning process involved the government, the civil society and the private sector who are engaged as stakeholders in the city administration. However, many researches indicate that the mere involvement in the planning process doesn't mean that the local people interests are represented. For instance in his study about urban infrastructure in Mekelle city administration Yigzaw (2005) found that even the Mekelle city plan is responsible for planning, it is the regional office that play a dominant role. Such intervention from the higher level of government really decreases the role of the councillor in planning and decision making.

During the interview with the city council spokesperson it is stated that the city council approved the plan after it gets feedback from all stakeholders and the role of the higher level of government is limited to technical support only. She said that "after the local citizen through their representative, the civil society, the Non-governmental organization and the private sector review and forward their comment on the plan and budget of the city, the city council approved it after a discussion with cabinet and the mayor office." She adds that too "the exact role of role of the other stakeholder such as civil societies are just to reflect their view on and to assess whether the interest of the people represented is incorporated in the plan."

Using the questionnaires the respondents from the city council are requested to what extent they think they have a role in the planning process of the city. To the greater extent the councillors in the city administration think they have a great in the city planning process. That is 37 per cent from the total respondents think they have high role in the city planning

process, 33 per cent to medium level and 17 per cent to low level role in the city planning process.



In relation to this councillors are asked whether they think they affect the plan content by their decision most of the respondent agree that they affect the plan content to high extent. As a result 39.5 per cent from the total respondents think they affect the content of the planning by their decision, 27 per cent from the total respondents think they can affect the content of the planning to a moderate level while 16 per cent of the respondents think they affect the content of the plan by their decision is low. From descriptive statistics the average respondents think they affect the plan content to medium extent that is the level their decision affect the plan to moderate level. From this, it is clear that the city plan is also affected by other level of government. A chi-square is used to see the association between two categorical variables and in this case it is run to see the association between the role of councillor in planning and their ability to affect the plan content by their decision. As a result there is an association between the role of councillor's role in the plan and their ability to affect the plan content by their decision.

Based on the urban governance model, the stakeholders in the city administration should also take part in the planning process. However from the total respondents of 123 in the city administration employees only 9 per cent believe that the stakeholder genuinely involved in the planning of the city while 83 believe they don't believe the stakeholders are involved in the planning process and the rest are unsure whether the stakeholders are involved or not. From the total 81 council member who involve in this study 72 per cent believe that the stakeholder have low involvement in the city planning, 17 per cent as medium involvement and 12 per cent of the respondents believe that the stakeholders have high involvement in the planning of the city.

Response to stakeholders involvement in the city planning

Are the stakeholders involve in city planning	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
yes	11	8.9	9.2	9.2
no	99	80.5	83.2	92.4
unsure	9	7.3	7.6	100.0
Total	119	96.7	100.0	
Missing	4	3.3		
Total	123	100.0		

Regarding the involvement of the private sector involvement in the city planning there are a mix of answers. From the interview, it is found that the government is open the door for the private sector to involve in the planning and present their

interest in the planning process. The city administration officials admitted that the private sector is has a limited role in the planning process due to lack of willingness and commitment from the sector side not from the government one. In the interview conducted with heads of association's it is found that the government is not willing to incorporate the private sector in the planning process due to the reason the government officials don't think the private sector has a role in social development. Furthermore, the civil society organizations and community based organization are also neglected during the planning process.

In addition the employee of the city administration are requested to reflect their view regarding the involvement of the private sector in the city planning and 65 per cent from the total respondents believe the private sector has low involvement in the planning process 24 per cent believe that the role of the private sector in the planning is very low and only 7 per cent of the total respondents believe that the private sector has a role in the planning process of the city administration.

### 5. Findings

The roles and involvement of stakeholders in the planning process of the city is very limited. From the government side it believed that the lack of interest and willingness from the stakeholder's side is the main reason for poor participation while the local government and the regional government lack of trust on the potential contribution of the stakeholders are the main reason from the stakeholder's side. In between the potential benefit that are gained from working in collaborative manner in the city administration is lost.

The government alone is involved in the planning process without due consideration to the potential role of citizen and stakeholders role in the planning. Moreover, in this study, it clear that the standing committee is the main organ in the planning process however from the data found from the city council members it clear that their involvement is very limited specifically in the content of the plan.

### 6. Conclusion

Decentralization and local governance are designed on the logical base of enhancing popular participation on critical issue such as planning. However in Ethiopia even though the mechanism and the policy for such involvement are in place, lack of awareness, commitment and lack of capacity affect the planning process in the local governance. Governance by definition is the interaction of government, stakeholder and citizen in the city affairs such as planning. However, in practice governance in Ethiopia specifically urban governance and citizen participation in planning is limited in practice in which the government dominates the planning and decision affairs of the city without any viable citizen involvement.

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