



Assessing the Impediments of Good Governance Practices in Local Government Administration; Case Study in Jimma Town, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to investigate the impediments of good governance practice in Jimma town in particular emphasis on Ginjo and Mendera kochi kebelles administrations. To realize the intended objectives of the paper case study research design was employed. The necessary data for this study was collected from primary and secondary sources. In this case, primary data were collected from respondents through focus group discussion (FGD), in-depth interview and key informant interviewees. On the other hand, secondary sources of data have taken from document analysis technique. In addition, even if the challenge of good governance is the concern of the town as a whole, for the purpose of this study, Ginjo and Mendera kochi kebelles were selected based on the good judgment of researchers considering the level of severity of maladministration. Besides, the data collected from primary and secondary sources was analyzed in the form of qualitative approach and described in words. Moreover, the findings of this study reveal that local government administration lacked the courage to enforce the law and policies to enhance good governance. As a result, good governance practice in the study area is characterized by poor structural performance, lack of transparency and accountability, inactive administrative responses, low participatory system, inability to provide shelter for the poor, corruption, unemployment and Insufficient budget allocation.

Keywords: Accountability; Corruption; Good Governance; Transparency; Unemployment

Introduction

The concept of good governance has received more attention in Africa at the end of the 1980s; the time coincided with the end of the cold war. Consequently, regional institutions as well as the respective countries have acknowledged its significance. The increasing relevance of the concept for overall development policies, for strategies to speed up development processes for measures to change development institutions and for quality enhancement at sectoral development intervention is accredited. In Africa, where there has been a historical record of bad governance, improving the governance environment has been given a central place in the new partnership for African development (NEPAD) an initiative that represents the latest attempt by African leaders to take the African continent on the path of sustainable development encompassing good governance and prosperity with a consolidation of peace, security, stability (African Development Bank., 1994).

New partnership for African development has listed a number of prerequisite for African countries to move forward in their quest for development. Key among these is the proper adherence to good political, economic and corporate governance (Hope., 2003).

The concept of good governance is an appendage to the word 'governance' and it is seen as the process and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised (World Bank., 2004). Furthermore, governance includes how governments are selected, held accountable, monitored and replaced with an emphasis on the capacity of government to manage resources and respect the rule of law (World Bank., 2004; Boyte., 2005). Therefore, the word 'good' in governance connotes the proper exercise of authority, management of resources and respect for the rule of law in accordance to laid-down principles for the benefit of all in a society.

Similarly, Babawale (2007) described good governance as the exercise of political power to promote the public good and the welfare of the people. He argues that good governance is the absence of lack of accountability in government, corruption, and political repression, suffocation of civil society and denial of fundamental human rights. Besides, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP., 2005) defines the concept of governance as the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels. Governance comprises the complex mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests mediate their differences and exercise their legal rights and obligations appears as one of the themes on the discussion agenda.

In addition, the United Nations Development Program pointed out that public participation in development activities is far from being an efficient tool of governance. Similarly; other researchers also argued that the ongoing system of people's participation in governance programs have been shown to be very ineffective in local government.

Regarding this idea, (Daniel., 2006) stated that citizens in the world over look up to the nation state and its organ for high quality performance, when good governance is guaranteed citizens go about their personal business, security and pursuits enhanced expectations. On the other side of the spectrum, bad or indifferent governance not only restricts opportunities of success but it can even degenerate in to sectarian conflicts and civil wars. In such atmosphere personal accomplishments as well as social achievements get severely restricted.

In Ethiopia, it is understood that the aim of good governance is to ensure people's rights and benefits. The rule of law, transparency, accountability, and efficient and speedy service provisions are also among the government's priorities in its initiatives for good governance. Hence, government's measures and commitments to realize rapid and sustainable economic growth that will benefit all segments of society and guarantee the full respect of law and order are all relevant to our government's aspirations of building good governance for the nation.

But, despite the practice of participation in good governance, local people have failed to achieve local good governance and pro-people development. Several researchers also support the point that good governance in developing countries is impeded by lack of opportunity for people's participation in nonetheless, many international and national development agencies and researchers argue that there is little scope for the people to be effectively engaged in the affairs of local government (World Bank., 1997).

Therefore, this study was designed to assess the factors that affect the practice of good governance at the local level administration, particularly in Ginjo and Menderakochi kebelles in Jimma town of Ethiopia.

Objectives of Study

To Identify the political factors that affects the practice of good governance in Ginjo and Mendera Kochi kebelles is the first objective of this study; and to assess the socio-economic factors that affects the practice of good governance in Ginjo and Mendera Kochi kebelles is the second objective.

Methods and the Study Area

In this study qualitative research approach was used. Because qualitative study produces more in-depth, comprehensive information and uses information and participant observation to describe the context, or natural setting of the variables under consideration as well as the interactions of the different variables in the context (i.e service providers and service receivers). Unlike the quantitative methodology where data are collected through inventories and questionnaires, in qualitative research data are mediated through the researcher or the human instrument. It also concentrates on words and observations to express reality and attempts to describe people in natural situations (Kothari., 1985).

Based on the above justifications, the researchers were interested to utilize qualitative study to analyze the information thoroughly relevant to the problem in its natural settings with in a limited time frame. In addition to the qualitative approach, the researchers were employed case study research design. This was because, case study attempts to analyze the variables relevant to the subject under study and the focus may not be on generalization but on understanding the particulars of that case in its complexity. Therefore, since the study was focused on Ginjo and Menderakochi kebelles, the researchers were preferred to apply case study research design.

Geographically, Jimma town administration is located in the southwestern part of Oromia National Regional State a distance of 356 kms from the capital city of the country (Addis Ababa). According to the housing and population census of 2007 the population size of Jimma town is 120600 out of which 49.76% is female and 50.24% is men.

The town is bordered with Kersa Aanaa in the east; with Aanaa Manna in north, and Aanaa Manna and Aanaa Seka Chekorsa in west, Aanaa Dedo in south direction. The town is located approximately at 7°40'N 36°50'E/7.667°N 36.833°E longitude. The town is found in an area of average altitude; of about 1725 -1789m above sea level. Jimma town is also the home of many nations and nationalities including, Oromo, Amhara, Gurage, Dawuro, Keffa, wolita etc.

To produce the necessary data, the researchers were exploited both primary and secondary sources. Hence, to collect the primary sources, focus group discussion, in-depth-interview and key informant interview were conducted with good governance and justice office, civil-service office, kebele authorities and service users (receivers). On the other side, to obtain secondary sources of data, books, internet and document analysis was used. Furthermore, to select the study area the researchers were used purposive (judgmental) sampling technique. Even if good governance practice is a challenge for all administrative municipalities in Jimma town, mal-administration is highly seen in Ginjo and Mendera Kochi kebelles.

Finally, based on the results of primary and secondary sources, the data was analyzed qualitatively through triangulating the views of focus group discussants, key informant interviewees and document analysis. As a result of this, triangulation was made through narration (in words) or in a descriptive manner.

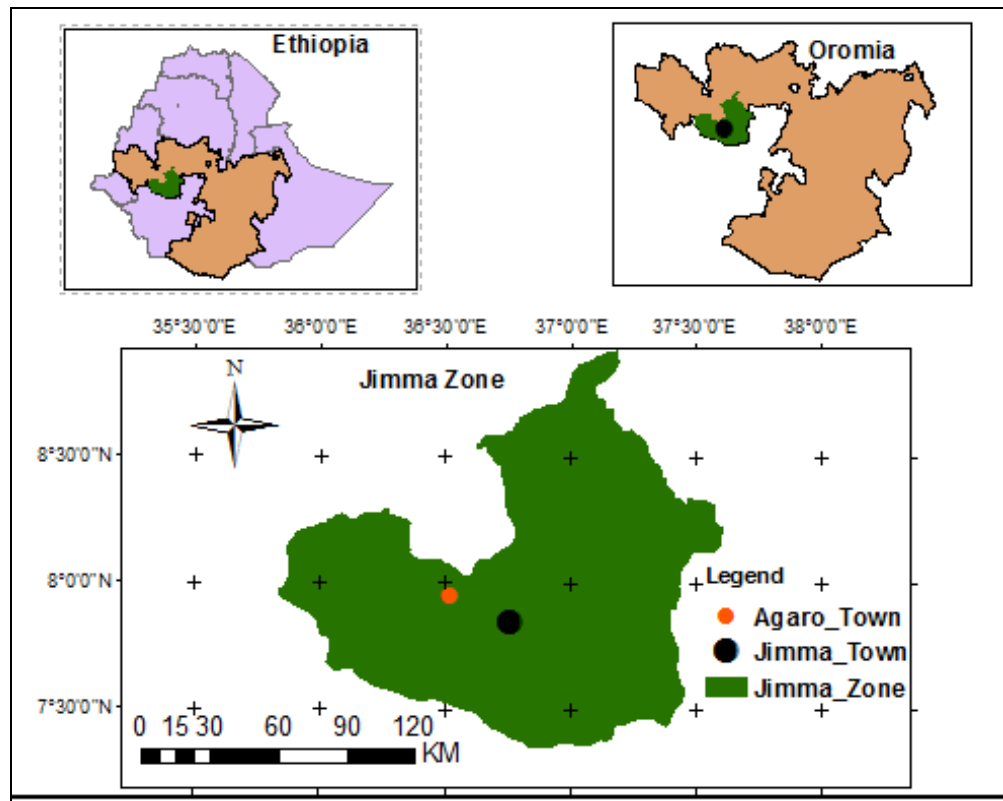


Fig. 1 The study area

Source, Jimma town finance and economic development office

Results and Discussion

Despite the continuing efforts of Ethiopian government to enhance the quality of governance in the country, it is still suffering from numerous and diverse governance-related problems and complexities both at the national and local levels of government. In this regard, the study was identified the following political and socio-economic factors that hinder the practice of good governance in Jimma town with reference to the study areas.

Political Impediments of Good Governance Practices ***Structural Impediments of Good Governance***

According to the respondents, different factors are contributed for the inhibition of the advancement of good governance in the study area. The factors that hinder development of good governance are both structural and ideologically motivated government policies that encourage patronage rather than merited principles. One of the major structural problems that prevent the realization of good governance in the study area is the absence of democratic culture in the kebelles in particular and the country's long history in general. The country had undergone considerable part of its history under traditional feudal rule that was characterized by absolute loyalty that legitimizes the exploitation of the

poor. Under the feudal system, Ethiopian social fabric was characterized by gross inequality between the largely aristocratic elite consisting of landowners, lords, nobles, the royal family, government officials, and elements of the clergy and the impoverished peasantry.

Similarly, focus group discussants stated that in these kebelles there are limitations of democratic culture and system of accountability to the public about the actions and decisions of authorities. Besides, they added that ‘still at the national level there is a paternalistic society where its institutions from the smallest, the family, to the largest unit, the state, are pass through by authoritarian values of obedience. Loyalty is held in higher esteem. Such proclivity to complete subservience is the result of people’s powerlessness’. Furthermore, as an old saying in Ethiopia goes ‘He who does not ‘eat’ while in power, will regret it when he is out’, appointment into public service sector is not perceived as serving the public rather it is to the advantage of the appointee. Such attitude is still evident at every level of authority.

Even though the country has undertaken two revolutions in the last four decades, firmly entrenched feudal power relations and repressions are still well and alive rendering good governance efforts useless. So, as stated above, the situation is constrained Jimma town administration particularly the study area to exercise good governance practice due to the absence of democratic culture, patronage relation of officials and the attitude of opportunism in the kebelles is taken as an impediment or setback for good governance practice.

Weak Decision Making Process of Authorities

The data obtained from respondents reveal that the challenge to the realization of good governance in the kebelles are the existence of weak decision making process regarding the political, social and economic activities of the town. As a matter of fact, this problem is still firmly maintained by the officials of the kebelles. The existence of such weak decision making and implementation is attached to undemocratic practices such as extreme loyalty to party discipline, restricting rights of citizens and economic freedoms as well as party apparatuses are more powerful than formal governmental institutions.

In addition, the respondents added that, in Ethiopia decision making process is secretive and there is no any effective mechanism to hold government officials accountable to the public due to the authoritative connection from the bottom to top. Due to this, opportunistic network among government officials at the kebele level are extremely weak and incapable of ensuring accountability of government.

Lack of Transparency and Accountability of Officials

The data collected from interviewees’ shows that lack of transparency and accountability is the other problem that affects the implementation of good governance in the kebele administration. This is due to the existence of connections among officials and failure to openly discuss political, economical and social issues with citizens.

Therefore, the limitation in the flow of information freely and accessibly to the people could be the source of mal administration in the study area. Even if consensus-oriented approach is required in good governance, leaders are not ready to initiate the people in decision making process rather peoples are forced to implement the enacted rules and regulations.

Passive Administrative Responses to People

As stated by focus group discussants, the administrative scene is marked by few successful improvements and practices in public service delivery and a large number of pathetic performances. In addition, the weakness of accountability mechanisms is an impediment to improve services across the sectors bureaucratic complexities and procedures make it difficult for residents to navigate the system for timely and quality delivery of services. Besides, the lack of transparency and secrecy that have been associated with the administrative system besides generating mal-administration, has also led to injustice and favoritism.

In other words, the frequent transfer of civil servants from one office to the other office has contributed to failures in delivery of services and passive responses to societal demands of service provisions. Respondents added that, in these study areas there is no urgent action taken by officials to enhance public service capacity, the provision of adequate incentives to public servants to retain highly qualified and motivated staff, increase performance and answerability.

Low Participatory Governance System in the Administration Process

According to the informants, there are basic over-arching issues that make participatory governance to be difficult is the weakness of the democratization process in the town and the lack of legitimacy on the part of accountability and transparency. In addition to informants, the information obtained from focus group discussants shows that inadequate capacity and insufficient resources are the primary obstacles that undermine meaningful participatory governance processes at the kebele level. This is due to the capacity problems that are located at sub-national levels of government reinforced by the continued decision-making power of the centre regarding the budget of local governments.

Moreover, failure to strengthen local government institution in the wake of successive reform processes makes municipalities weak institutions with little economic, political and ideological power. More importantly, participatory governance in Ginjo and Mendera kochi kebelles are affected by local authorities who tend to reproduce a highly bureaucratic form of administration in which service providers are sometimes working to benefit their personal interests by neglecting the needs of citizens.

Ineffective Decentralization of Power and Authority to the Local Government Administration

According to respondents, decentralization, or the policy of devolution of power and authority to sub-national governments or local governments is perceived as a way of building legitimacy at the grass root levels. Although, sharing of power is increasingly being exercised at the national level; it is subjected to limitations, which include the lack of ability of local administrations and the voicing of the population's needs towards legitimate local governance.

As, Jimma town civil services office stated that the threat to ineffective decentralization scheme is the lack of resources at the disposal of municipalities to be effective in providing proper services to service receivers (citizens). In addition, the unwillingness to deliver sufficient economic powers to kebele administration results in a vicious threat to be ineffective in handling good governance practices.

Similarly, the office of good governance in Jimma town pointed out that even if decentralization is set in legislation and is escorted by intra governmental economic reform, there is still a danger of failure if the process is not supported by a comprehensive capacity building programme to equip administrative and elected officials to function responsibly.

Such capacity building programmes should cover a wide range of inputs to build institutional readiness and a skills-base to operate effectively. For instance, in systems with limited local powers and autonomy, administrative officials often become the critical actors in making municipalities function efficiently. Thus, decentralization policies in a democratic structure tend to undermine their power-base and require administrative managers to work with elected leaders and accept their mandate as the final word of their people. The office added that, the shift of power within local government institutions is a difficult process and can lead to a breakdown in communication if not handled properly.

Socio-Economic Impediments of Good Governance Practices In Ability to Providing Shelter for the Poor

The local government administration in Jimma town particularly in Ginjo and Menderakochi kebeles is unable to meet the demand of the urban inhabitants for housing. As Jimma town urban and housing administration described even if the local government is involved in the provision of social housing, still a limited success is seen in addressing for citizens particularly for the poor one.

In the same way, focus group discussants pointed out that, even if we see government involvement to social housing interventions, the supply is by no means able to meet the growing demand of fast population growth. Consequently, this led to the rapid growth of illegal settlements which account for a significant portion of the provision of new housing in the study area. Thus, this tendency is strengthened by the inappropriate state housing that is simply out of the attainment of the poor and then it can be the cause for the conflict of interest between citizens and the government.

Impediments of Urban Land Management

As the results of focus group discussants and interviewees showed that land is the main cause of corruption in the study area. Informants were also asked the extent of rent seekers in their kebele. Thus, respondents agree on the high level of rent seekers on their kebelles. The participants were bitterly argued that the service that has been given by the land administration authorities is not satisfactory.

This is due to the lack commitment and responsiveness. The authorities have also problem of interpreting the land proclamation and land administration. Moreover, respondents stated that rent seeking activities are the main disease of the development of their kebele and confined to maladministration. Especially in the kebelles the major areas of mal-practice are connected to land administration where land is traded and becomes the main source of income for the rent seekers.

Corruption

As stated by key informants, the level of corruption in the study area is widely perceived as a main obstacle in improving the quality of good governance implementation. While human greed is clearly a driver of corruption, it is the structural inducements and poor enforcement system to punish the corrupt that have contributed to the rising bend of attach in the study area. The lack of transparency system of authority and control, monopoly of the government as a service provider, underdeveloped legal framework, and lack of information diffusion and weak notion of citizens' rights have provided incentives for fraud.

As mentioned above, nepotism is shown as the a major problem where individuals are appointed for job opportunity through intimate relations or by close friends with those in power, where it leads to

discrimination, favoritism and unfair treatment of a person on the basis of prejudice. Favoritism and politicization in public administration is another curse of the kebele management. Moreover, the authorities in power give opportunity and unfair benefit to their family members and relatives on public resources.

Similarly, bribery is the other form of benefit to influence some action or decision on the part of receipt. This is initiated by a person soliciting the bribe or the person offering the bribe to the official in the form of money and materials to execute his or her duties without the principles of ethical codes and the one who offered money can administer his/ her goal with a short period of time. Contrarily, those who want to under taken their duties in line with the guidelines or the fundamental ethical principles are forced to have more appointments and they miss their time, energy and money. As a result, the threat of corruption and dishonesty in public service delivery remains to be the obstacle to the practice of good governance in the study areas of Jimma town administration.

Unemployment

As the data obtained from key informant interviewees and focus group discussants, inhabitants particularly youths are not benefited from economic opportunities of the kebele administration, because of the less focus of officials in creating job opportunity for individuals. They added that, failure to generate job opportunity for people resulted psychological and physical disorder on societal livelihoods. Thus, the situation of unemployment, forced youths to be drug addicted and engaged in theft and crime in order to earn some sorts of income.

Respondents added that, unemployment rate is increasing time to time even if the government is working to solve the questions of job opportunity. This situation is occurred due to the existence of corrupt officials who hinders the job opportunities of citizens through looting the budget of the government and hinders investment opportunity of the town which served as a source of income for the residents.

Thus, joblessness is an increasing and extremely serious problem of the town administration. For instance, graduate students from colleges and universities are remaining unemployed in their field of specialization.

Insufficient Budget Allocation

As the information obtained from informants, insufficient financial resource is the other major challenging factor for the proper operation of the kebele administration. Even though, the people question the administration to provide adequate financial budget, still there is no improvements in financial allocations. Because officials replied that the problem is not from the kebele administration rather the problem is arising from the finance and economic development of the town where insufficient budget is released late that could not consider the number of people and projects to be under taken. Therefore, budget constraint is the major problems that hinder the kebele administration to be effective and efficient in delivering public service provisions.

Conclusion

The finding of this study shows that the practice good governance is impeded by different factors in Jimma town administration particularly in Menderakochi and Ginjo kebelles. Even if good governance is theoretically characterized by the principle of accountability, rule of law and transparency, on the ground it is seen as facing challenges to put into practice the premises. As this study stated, the practice of good governance has multiple constraints in delivering the needs and interests of the people at the local level administrations. The lack of well-functioning public sectors, the existence of weak institutions, lack of transparency and accountability, abuse of power and lack of adequate resource distributions are the main obstacles to good governance practices in Jimma town local administration. In general, the inability or the lack of capacity to implement the basic elements of good governance becomes the source for peoples' dissatisfactions in public service delivery and mal administration.

Recommendation

Based on the results of this study, the authors forwarded the following possible recommendations to enhance good governance practices at the local level administration.

- Invest in people to enhance economic opportunity, social capital and community cohesion.
- Civil service offices should coordinate knowledge sharing, mobilization of human and material resources for agencies involved in governance projects in the country. This can be done through research and policy institutes at the national, regional and local levels
- People should have the spirit of patriotism, discipline, self-control, and honesty in enhancing good governance at the national and local levels.
- Real decentralization of power should be fragmented to the tiers of government for the success of good governance at the local level administration.
- Independent anti-corruption commission should be established to create awareness about the impacts of corruption and to take measure on corruptors.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have declared that there are no financial, professional and personal interests that might be influenced the quality of this article.

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