

Governance Reforms in Higher Education of Ethiopia: The Case of Autonomy and Accountability in Addis Ababa University

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Abstract

This study was set to assess the effect of higher education governance and management reforms (introduced following the 1994 Education and Training Policy of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia) on erosion/extension of autonomy and accountability of the academic staff by taking the case of Addis Ababa University, the oldest and the largest university in Ethiopia.. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected in 2012/2013 from senior officials of the Ministry of Education and from senior and junior officials of the Addis Ababa University, in addition to from the University's professoriate. Policy and reform documents were also reviewed to complement the data collection process. The results suggest mixed conclusions. Senior officials complied with the content of government documents that assert great success in implementation of higher education reform, including extending autonomy. However, the Addis Ababa University junior officials (deans and department heads) and most academic staff members claimed preponderance of critical challenges in the implementation process of the higher education reforms due to government strategy of demanding more accountability without the attendant autonomy (the power to make decisions). The difference in perspectives of the two groups suggests conflicting interests: the academic staff demands more autonomy in reform planning (not

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only implementation); but officials demand more accountability for reform implementation. It is, therefore, concluded that reform strategies are more likely to succeed when implementation strategy is preceded by participation of implementers in the design process.

Keywords: *Governance reform, higher education, autonomy, accountability, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia*

Introduction

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of higher education reforms on governance of higher education in Ethiopia, focusing on autonomy and accountability of the academic staff. This introduction covers the overview of the study, statement of the problem and the research method, including the structure of data analysis and the report that has two parts: analysis of the whole higher education system using available documents; and sector analysis using the case of Addis Ababa University.

The Ethiopian higher education system, since its inception in the 1950s, sustained an extended nap until such time when society questioned its significance in development and poverty alleviation (Teshome, 2003). The issues of access to, equity, relevance, efficiency and quality of education started to become major concerns of the new government (the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia), following its explicit acknowledgement of the critical role higher education plays in national development (Teshome, 2003).

Although the Ministry of Education (MOE), in its first two Education Sector Development Programmes (ESDPs), initially focused on expanding and improving primary and general education, expanding the higher education sector

became one of its prime preoccupations starting from the ESDP III (2005/2006 – 2010/2011) that focussed on expansion; and ESDP IV (2010/2012-2014/2015) which focussed on quality and employability of graduates (MOE, 2010:62). Once viewed as a privilege of the elite, higher education began to be viewed as a new opportunity to use technologies that are improving the way in which knowledge can be generated, managed, disseminated and utilised for global competitiveness (Amare, Daniel and Wanna, 2000).

Moreover, the recognition of the importance of higher education in economic and social development in Ethiopia was preceded by the World Conference of Higher Education convened by UNESCO in October 1998 in Paris. The theme of this Conference was *Higher Education in the 21st Century: Vision and Action* (UNESCO, 1998). Consensus was reached in this Conference that higher education plays a critical role in national development, not only in its ability to create higher level professionals for meeting the economic, social, political and technological needs of every society, but in its most important role in affecting the primary and secondary level of education (*Ibid.*).

Since the new millennium, higher education in Ethiopia has shown dramatic growth. The number of higher education institutions has reached 36 universities distributed all over the country. Private higher education institutions have also expanded reaching 98 institutions accommodating around 15 per cent of all student enrolment in higher education; the total undergraduate enrolment (both public and private in 2013/14) was nearly 600,000 students (MOE, 2015). Addis Ababa University takes the lion's share by enrolling about 50,000 students in all its programmes (AAU, 2015).

Addis Ababa University (AAU) has been a flagship and the only university in the country for extended long period of time since the modern higher

education started in Ethiopia. Addis Ababa University is the mother of all Ethiopian universities as all of them depended on it in the formulation of their curricula, mode of administration and training of their academic staff. Addis Ababa University is a typical case of higher education in Ethiopia in terms of understanding the governance systems of higher education as all public higher education institutions are constituted by Proclamation 650/2009 which defines their powers and responsibilities.

Statement of the Problem

According to Teshome, the then State Minister of Higher Education, the reform process had followed three essential phases. These were: 1) a phase of policy and strategy adoption ultimately aimed at redefining the legal framework; 2) a phase of rehabilitation and expansion of facilities; and 3) a phase of improvement and revitalisation of the system.

The second and the third phases refer to the actual expansion of higher education and the reform issues necessary to maintain quality and relevance within the expanding higher education system. These systems were, however, implemented concurrently and not necessarily sequential (Teshome, 2003 pp. 2–3). These reforms were principally guided by the 1994 Education and Training Policy of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE, 1994) with the intent of transforming the structure and culture of the Ethiopian socio-economic system— which is characterised by low production and backwardness. From document analysis, this research will identified higher education reforms and assessed them from the point of governance, focusing on their effects on autonomy and accountability, which is the focus of this research.

Proclamation 650/2009, which replaced Proclamation 351/2003, allows all higher education institutions to be established with autonomy and accountability. It also

defines the governance structure to constitute board of governors, the senate, academic commissions and department assemblies. It is not, however, clear how the different higher education reforms introduced by the government have affected the autonomy and accountability of the academic staff in its endeavour of teaching and research. It is not also clear whether the two concepts, autonomy and accountability complement or conflict each other. Does more autonomy mean less accountability or does more accountability mean less autonomy?

The exercise of autonomy takes the form of taking decisions on important issues concerning pedagogic management (Ndiaye, 1998:462). In Ethiopia, the issue of institutional autonomy is seen by the faculty primarily as an issue to do with the right of the university to make its own academic, administrative and financial decisions, for instance, about the appointment of a university president, about what programmes to offer, about its priorities for research, without interference by the government under its own charter and under the authority of its own Council and Senate (Amare, 2011).

The concept of accountability is, however, far from being unproblematic (Halstead, 1994: 146; Scott, 1994:1). Its complex nature has guided different people to attach different meanings; people understand many different things by accountability. "Accountability can be many kinds, personal, political, financial, managerial, legal, and contractual". (Burgess, 1992:5). In personal accountability, Burgess argued, "most people (parents or teachers) are accountable to themselves, to their own conscience, to set of moral values, to public opinion represented by friends, to other parents, a social circle which creates shared expectations" (Burgess, 1992:6). Professional accountability implies standards of qualification, training, practice and conduct to which teachers subscribe. "Professionals are judged by other professionals. They are accountable to their peers" (*Ibid.*).

Teachers are also accountable not just for their own performance but collectively for the performance of the school (Burgess, 1992:7). In most cases, the meaning of accountability has been expressed in the form of models, formulated on the basis of emphasis to any one of the three key questions: accountability to whom, for what, and how to account (Elliot, 1979: 69–73).

Burgess (1994:138) answers the first question (*to whom to account*) by using a model that located accountability in three elements; (1) answerability to one's clients (moral accountability); responsibility to oneself and one's colleagues (professional accountability); and accountability to one's employer or political masters (contractual accountability). According to Goedegebuure *et al.* (1994:9), accountability and autonomy are not considered as being necessarily incompatible; as is often said, "A right is created by a responsibility" (Ndiaye, 1998:462). "Academic rights rely on a great sense of responsibility". (Ndiaye, 1998: 462). Few, if any, universities would see the demand for respect for the principle of academic freedom as being incompatible with some sort of requirement for personal and institutional accountability, though it needs some careful analysis to clarify how these requirements might be reconciled. However, some tension between the two concepts has been experienced. One is that "Where more accountability is required, often less autonomy remains due to government's emphasis on accountability" (Goedegebuure *et al.*, 1994:9). For instance, Peter (2002: 37) said, "Accountability begins as an effort to apply democratic and public principles to higher education, but it creates a paradox: it may undermine the independence of the university vis-à-vis the public and thereby cause it to fail in its function. Independence and accountability simply are incompatible values and can only be made to appear compatible by restricting the one or the other" (Peter, 2002: 37).

On the other hand, Bailey (1980: 112–117) contended that accountability is inalienable from autonomy, that is, one cannot be accountable for actions for which one was not responsible; and one cannot be responsible for something which one was not free to decide to do or to do otherwise. Accountability necessarily involves autonomy, and that accounts of moral and professional action make sense only where the agent is considered to be autonomous. If the agent is merely responsible to his supervisors in the sense of working strictly to their orders, then, it is they, not he, who should provide the explanation and justification of his actions (Bailey, 1980: 112).

Donald Bligh (1982: 134) has developed a framework of accountability called “the slippery slope of accountability”, which is a continuum of two polar opposites, between what he called “a slippery transition from academic freedom to academic servitude” (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Slippery Slope of Accountability

The Institution	The External Agent
1. Gives a voluntary account	Receives an account
2. Is obliged to report formally	Requires an account
3. Is answerable	Asks questions
4. Receives external opinions	Expresses opinions to the institutions
5. Consults informally	Is consulted informally
6. Voluntarily does as instructed	Gives instructions
7. Complies under threat	Controls

SOURCE: Bligh (1982, p. 134)

In one extreme, an institution gives an account of itself in the announcement of its degree awards (gives a voluntary account as shown in Figure 1 No 1), in the

opposite extreme, institutions of higher education would be accountable if they had to obtain the permission of government or other bodies to put on courses of their choosing or if government could oblige institutions to provide any courses it chose (complies under threat). Bligh's framework of accountability combines various levels of freedom and accountability as shown in Fig .1. At what stage is autonomy crucially infringed in the slippery slope? Autonomy is reduced as we move from suggestions to guidance with an increasing implication that compliance is expected, and with it, a diminution of freedom (p.134). Bligh further argued that: It is when, and if, external organisations seek to impose their opinions upon the academic activities of others, that issues of autonomy or academic freedom arises. It is when 'advice' becomes 'commands to be obeyed' that academics do not decide what to do for themselves and no longer exercise responsibility. On the slippery slope from having freedom to being controlled, the shift from 'guidance' to 'commands' seems to be critical because it is at this point that responsibility is transferred. Responsibility is resigned without a resignation from office (Bligh, 1982: 135).

The autonomy of educators will be tempered by the fact that they are answerable to those they serve, and that those they serve have legitimate expectations and requirements, which should be satisfied. On the other hand, the control of education can never be so tight that educators are reduced to conveyor belts carrying precious nuggets from the mines of knowledge to the railway track where rows of empty minds are waiting to be filled (Halstead,1994: 148).

Even though the Ethiopian law (Negarit Gazeta, Proclamation 650/2009) establishes public universities with autonomy and accountability, we still do not know the status of universities vis-à-vis their autonomy and accountabilities.

What kind of autonomy and what kind of accountability do they have? What are the effects of higher education reforms on autonomy and accountability?

This study examines the effect of higher education reforms on higher education governance focusing on autonomy and accountability both at the national and institutional levels. The specific objectives were to:

- i) study the evolution of steering policies and new governance structures and examine institutional autonomy and accountability at Addis Ababa university;
- ii) examine the implications of steering policies and new governance structures for managing higher education at the national level;
- iii) analyse implications of steering policies and governance structures for institutional effectiveness from the point of view of enhancing autonomy and accountability in Addis Ababa university.

Research Methods

As this study explores both national and institutional levels of governance and management in higher education, Addis Ababa University (AAU) was selected as a case for the organisational study for it is the oldest and the largest institute of higher education in Ethiopia. Addis Ababa University, which was established in 1950 with an initial name *University College of Addis Ababa* (UCAA), is the oldest and still the largest higher learning institution in Ethiopia. In its long years of existence, the University has remained to be the leading actor in teaching, research and community services being provided to the society. The University developed its first strategic plan in 2008 (2008–2013) since the 1994 education and training policy, in which it clearly articulated its vision of being “a pre-eminent African research university dedicated to excellence in teaching, critical inquiry, creativity and public action in an academic community that cultivates

and celebrates diversity” (AAU, 2008a:iii).

In order to successfully implement its strategic plan (and partly because all public institutions have been required to undertake institutional reforms), the university embarked on Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) which was officially started on March 2008. Accordingly, the university is now organised into four core processes and another four support processes.

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) were used to collect data that shows the picture of the issues at national level. Moreover, review of policy documents, legislations and research reports complemented the national level higher education analysis. Officials of the Office of the State Minister for Higher Education, Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA) and Higher Education Strategy Centre (HESC) now called Education Strategy Centre (ESC) were interviewed.

Sources of Data

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected at national and the university, i.e. AAU levels. The national picture of the issues was captured qualitatively through interviews with higher education officials at the Ministry of Education, the Directors of Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQAA) and the Director of Higher Education Strategy Centre (HESC). The research participants were asked about the content and intent of the reforms. They were also asked about the effects of these reforms on higher education institutions from the point of view of institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

For the case study of the AAU, quantitative and qualitative data were collected from members of the central senior management, four colleges and one school, namely; College of Natural and Computational Sciences; College of Social

Sciences; College of Education and Behavioural Studies; College of Informatics, Management and Economic Sciences; and School of Law. The qualitative data also included interviews with the AAU President, Academic Vice President, and various executive directors.

About 80 questionnaires were distributed to the four selected colleges and the school. Distributing and collecting the questionnaires took about two months (April-March 2012). The return rate was 72 complete questionnaires. The rest were either incomplete (with no-response items) or un-returned questionnaires. The distribution was the same, about 16 questionnaires from each college/school. The profile of the research participants varied from the most senior, full professor to the most junior, lecturer. Most of them had a teaching experience of more than 10 years. Assistant lectures and graduate assistants were not included due to the fact that they had limited experience (less than 7 years) as academic staff in the university

Documentary evidence on the content and effect of the reforms was solicited and collected from national offices as well as different colleges and departments of the Addis Ababa University. Moreover, university-wide documents were obtained from the respective central offices.

Data Collection

Three data collecting instruments, namely, document analysis, questionnaire and interview were used to elicit both primary and secondary data at national and the AAU levels. Here is how they were used.

- **Document Analysis:** Various documents, including policy and sector development programme documents, proclamations, higher education reform programme documents, annual reports, and assessment reports were consulted to solicit data on implementation of reforms both at

national and institutional levels.

- **Interviews and FGDs:** Structured and semi-structured interview questions were prepared to gather information from the Office of the State Minister of Higher Education, Directors of HESC and HERQA, Members of the AAU Governing Board, Members of the University Management, Chief Academic Officer, Deans and Finance and Administration Officers. A few FGDs were carried out with some members of the different officials. Most of the data were collected in the form of interviews. The discussion outcomes were recorded in field notes.
- **Questionnaire:** Questionnaire with both close ended and open ended question items that focus on effects of governance reforms on autonomy and accountability of higher education institutions were prepared and distributed to 80 academic staff members working at the four colleges and the school at the AAU; and the data were analysed using descriptive statistics (See Annexes, 1a–1k).

Analytical Strategy

Seven thematic categories were selected to organise and analyse the qualitative data that were collected using the semi-structured questions and taken down onto the field notes; these were: 1) introducing cost-sharing to higher education; 2) changing the financing system of higher education; 3) devolution of power in managing higher education institutions; 4) establishing Council of Universities; 5) establishing critical regulatory bodies; 6) changing the governance structure; and 7) changing the curricula of higher education institutions.

Analysis of variance by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 16) Version 16 was carried out for analysing the quantitative data. Seven variables pertaining to the different forms of autonomy (academic, financial, governance) were examined to understand the extent to which autonomy and accountability were enhanced or eroded by the higher education reform policies.

Results and Discussion—Governance Reforms at National Level

Introduction

Proclamation 650/2009 is the second proclamation that has reinstated autonomy of higher education institutions and academic freedom of the academic staffs after the Imperial Charter of Haileselassie I University (issued in 1954) that became defunct by regulation of the Military Government in 1977 (Negarit Gazeta, 1977).

Proclamation 650/2009 provides all higher education institutions to be established with autonomy and accountability. It also defined the governance structure to constitute independent board of governors, the senate (constituting academic deans and directors with a few elected academics), academic commissions and department assemblies.

This legal framework has clearly defined the scope, type and nature of higher education institutions and set requirements to establish and develop universities, colleges, schools and institutes. It has defined the powers and limits of higher education institutions in addition to formulating their general objectives.

This legal framework has also defined the rights and responsibilities of academic staff that all promotions of academic staff are to be implemented within the institution with the exception of full professorship which has to be approved by the Board. Tenure of academic staff is reinstated as proof of efficiency in performance. The duties and powers of each structure starting from the Board down to the Department Head are clearly defined in this framework. Article 17 articulates the autonomy of each organ of the institution, such as academic freedom, administrative autonomy, finance and other affairs. The particulars of each organ are left to be determined by law establishing each institution. The organisation and administration of colleges, schools, institutes and departments under a given institution; the appointment of their respective heads and other

affairs are left to be determined by the law establishing each institution. Division or merger of institutions is the prerogative of the government, the Ministry of Education, of course, with consultation or proposal of the respective boards. The framework has also spelt out the conditions under which higher education institutions can generate income by establishing business firms or enterprises. The initial capital necessary for establishing of these enterprises may be a budget allocated by government. Through the approval of the government and the board, the institution can establish an “Income Fund” for funding activities, such as capacity building and prizes.

This framework, for the first time, has allowed establishment of private higher education institutions in Ethiopia. It also defined the conditions, rights and responsibilities of private higher education institutions to operate with integrity by maintaining standards of quality. For this purpose, it has set criteria and procedures of accreditation. Moreover, a number of higher education reforms were introduced in accordance with the national development plans and the Education Sector Development plans. The following seven critical reforms are identified and discussed in this paper.

1. Introducing cost-sharing to higher education
2. Changing the financing system of higher education
3. Devolution of power in managing higher education institutions
4. Establishing Council of Universities
5. Establishing critical regulatory bodies
6. Changing the governance structure
7. Changing the curriculum of higher education institutions

Introducing Cost-sharing and Privatisation of Higher Education

In the cost-sharing policy, each student of higher education is expected to cover 15 per cent of the education costs, in addition to covering his/her costs of housing and meals, which used to be fully covered by the government in the past, contrary to primary and secondary education students who covered all education costs except tuition. Recognising unfairness in the old financing policy of education, the authors of cost-sharing lamented that, “the Ethiopian government was providing not only free higher education, but, in fact [loc cit.], the government was paying the higher education student for attending higher education” (HESO, 2002:5). In the new financial policy, student loans are arranged by the government which, in turn, retrieves these loans through a system of graduate tax. Each employing organisation (private, public or other) is entrusted with the responsibility of taxing the employee and transferring it to the government accounts.

Changing the Financing System of Higher Education

The financial reform of 2003, which introduced cost-sharing also introduced a block grant system, replacing the old financing system, *line item financing*. The block grant system, which was intended to give more financial autonomy to public higher education institutions to utilise the government funding fully, is determined on the basis of five-year strategic plan where 20 per cent of this grant is disbursed each year. The grant is computed with six types of cost drivers (such as type of programmes— undergraduate, graduate and research, female enrolment, etc.) and estimated using enrolment and course cost (calculated on the basis of six course bands). This implies the educational loan of each student varied depending on the band to which this student belongs.

Devolution of Power in Managing Higher Education Institutions

Proclamation 351/2003 has clearly underlined the importance of autonomy with strong accountability by spelling out self-administration of the higher education institutions and the regulatory and coordination role of the government.

The Administrative Board of each university which has a joint constituency of the government, the business sector and the academia, plays a supervisory role; while two buffer organisations, HERQAA and HESC, which were independently created regulate the standards and relevance of higher education offered by higher education institutions (public and private). The Ministry of Education (MOE) coordinates higher education institutions using the Office of its State Minister and the Reform Council of Universities (RCU), which is composed of the President of each university.

Establishing Council of Universities

According to the interview results of MOE officials, the Reform Council of Universities, which constitutes the President of each public university, provides a forum for reviewing the implementation of the reform in each university. This forum serves the State Minister to get feedback regarding the performance of the entire system. The Council was supposed to meet quarterly for deliberations and exchange of best practices. In addition, the Council is expected to make regular peer reviews on performance of each university vis-à-vis implementation of the higher education reforms. Usually, an independent review commission is appointed by the Council to review performance of each university and rank them. League Tables are then prepared to encourage internal competition and high performance among all public universities. The government has responded positively to this system as Presidents and Vice Presidents of high performing universities have been awarded higher posts in government.

Establishing Critical Regulatory Bodies

Two independently organised bodies, Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQAA) and Higher Education Strategy Centre (HESC) were established by law (Negarit Gazette, 2003) to regulate higher institutions

regarding standards and relevance. The two organisations stand for setting standards and assessing quality and relevance of higher education provided by public and private higher education institutions. HEARQAA was established in 2003 mainly due to public and government dissatisfaction regarding quality and relevance of higher education provided by public and private higher education institutions that were proliferating following a government policy of expansion. The tradition of trust in the faculty was found difficult in the context of a highly complex higher education in the globalised world.

HERQAA was given the mandate of assuring relevance and quality of both public and private higher education institutions by setting standard criteria of assuring quality and assessing the performance of each institution to produce evidence for granting or denial of accreditation. In addition, HERQAA advises the government and the higher education institutions themselves, through its various publications and conferences on quality and standards of higher education.

HESC is entrusted with the authority of providing, designing, and developing strategic directions of higher education with the aim of ensuring relevance. It also prepares strategic plans of higher education development to be approved by government. In a way, it is an advisory organ of the government pertaining to type and number of higher education programmes. In addition, it has the mandate of assessing and determining the demand and supply of highly skilled human power of the country. It seeks ways of promoting and encouraging investments in higher education. The formula for allocation of higher education budget to the institutions is also prepared by this Centre.

Changes in the Governance Structure of Higher Education

According to the assertion of higher education officials in MOE, before 2003, all higher education institutions were governed directly by a Department in the MoE,

with the exception of two universities, Addis Ababa University and Haramaya University which were ruled by their respective Board of Governors.

At present (after 2003), higher education is led by a State Minister for Higher Education, but mediated by buffer organisations. Two buffer organisations, HERQAA and HESC have the mandate to regulate standards and relevance of education. The two organisations are supposed to be autonomously organised with their own boards of governors. Their relationship with universities is not direct. They influence the universities through their assessments and publications. Of course, HERQAA has the power to accredit private higher education institutions, and programmes of public higher education institutions. But, each university has its own board established by proclamation making it autonomous from the direct interference of the Ministry of Education.

Changing the Curriculum of Higher Education Institutions

Pursuant to deficiencies observed in higher education graduates, improvements in curriculum were expected to take place by introducing four courses—designed by a Taskforce appointed by the Ministry of Education—to be offered uniformly in all higher education institutions. These courses are Civics, Ethics, Entrepreneurship Development, and Communication Skills. These courses are expected to address deficiencies of graduates in: (HESO, 2003: 1-19).

- communication skills that are required in the global world;
- teamwork skills;
- personal integrity and identity to be good citizens
- democratic perspectives, as graduates demonstrated rather more totalitarian attitudes.

The four courses, with a total of 11 credit hours (Ethics is credited only 2 hours, the rest are 3 credit hours each) are expected to improve the professional and

moral skills of higher education graduates who are expected to contribute to the national call for “accelerated development programme for poverty alleviation” (HESO, 2003:5). One, however, wonders whether or not these accountability measures interfere with the academic freedom of professors to teach whatever they like in whatever they see fit.

Relationship between and/or among the MOE, Buffer Organisations and Autonomous Institutions

According to the officials of MOE, higher education institutions became legally autonomous from routine interference by the Ministry of Education (MOE) after 2003. Their link with the MOE started to become loose, with a changing role of MOE to be more of supportive than administrative. The new roles of the MOE became steering reforms and coordination of higher education institutions. While governance shifted to the boards and the institutions themselves, the roles of regulation and supervision were taken over by the buffer institutions, such as, the Reform Council of Universities, HERQUA and HESC. Instead of directly accounting to the MOE, higher education institutions have now different accountability centres where they have opportunities of deliberation and improvement. The role of the buffer organisations, such as HESC and HERQUA, according to the view of MOE officials, is to mediate the power and authority of the MOE to the extent that the interests of the government and those of the universities could be negotiated. The buffer organisations set standards, collect data and provide advice for higher education institutions to learn and understand themselves for improved performance.

The buffer organisations are independent themselves as they are ruled by their own Board of Governors. Instead of simple top-down linear relationship between the MOE and higher education institutions, the present relationship is complex

and characterised by multiple directional flows of information. This type of structural relationship allows multiple interests to be reflected and deliberated on for consensus building. The presence of these buffer organisations also defines the centres of accountability and at the same time allows some degree of autonomy for higher education institutions to manage their own affairs with minimum direct interference of the government.

Governance Reforms at University Level

This section documents the changes made in Addis Ababa University (AAU) following the 2003 Higher Education Proclamation that granted autonomy with accountability to all public higher education institutions of Ethiopia (Negarit Gazeta, 2003). It mainly deals with areas affected by the reform, the reform process itself, and the effects of the reform.

Prior to the Higher Education Proclamation of 2003, in late summer 2002, the Ethiopian government organised a three-week deliberation with all academic staff of all higher education institutions in a number of cities. In these deliberations, the government made it clear that higher education institutions would be good partners in its commitment of the national vision, “accelerated development and poverty reduction”(MOFED, 2002:49) by producing highly skilled and relevant human power that is capable of performing competently in the civil service, industry and in a wide variety of government projects.

Governance and Management at the AAU

To implement the reforms, the government appointed a new AAU leadership in December 2002. The new leadership started implementing the reform process by creating a new executive office (the Reform Office) in the position of Vice Presidency as a starting point.

To implement the 2008–2012 Strategic Plan, the AAU embarked upon what it called Business Process Reengineering (BPR) in March 2008, of course, mimicking the approaches of most public institutions of the country.

Six principles governed the governance reform of the AAU, according to the BPR. These are: 1) vertical decentralisation, 2) horizontal decentralisation, 3) effectiveness of self-governance, 4) inclusiveness, 5) transparency, and 6) recourse. In general, these principles relate to extending academic autonomy, academic freedom and academic democracy by creating decision-making assemblies and committees all the way through the highest bodies to the smallest units, that is, all the way from programme units and departments to faculties and colleges in such a way that they are fully empowered to enable devolution of authority from higher to lower levels of university government. Academic democracy is enhanced through horizontal decentralisation by encouraging full participation of academic staff and students in relevant decision making processes.

Effective delivery of services and fast work flow were aspired with accountability to be assured through transparency using communication tools, such as deliberations, report of proceedings, and producing regular assessment and evaluation reports. Appropriate structures were also planned for handling complaints and facilitating hearing mechanisms.

To advance self-rule of the academy and accomplish its research ambition, AAU put in place a very extensive governance structure with five offices of the vice presidency. These offices are: 1) the Office of Academic Vice President, 2) the Office of Vice President for Business and Development, 3) the Office of Vice President for Research and Postgraduate Programmes, 4) the Office of Vice President for Communication and External Relations, and 5) the Office of Vice President for Health and Black Lion Hospital. Six new senior academic offices

were also created under these vice presidents.

The new organizational structure that followed the BPR (AAU, 2008b) created seven colleges by clustering the old faculties and schools; thus, creating additional tiers of the Offices of the Directors in addition to the Faculty or School Deans. A more interesting story is the parallel accountability of College Directors and Faculty Deans. The former reports directly to the University President while the latter to the Vice Presidents. Some departments took the opportunity to bifurcate themselves into academic units and collectively forming institutes headed by a different type of director (different from the College Director). These Directors report to the Vice Presidents in contrary to the College Directors who directly reports to the President of the University. Academic units, instead of departments, constituted the bottom level of the AAU academic hierarchy.

The seven colleges were more autonomous than before in legislating, executing and supervising their activities. Their autonomy extended to becoming budget centres, a new type of financial autonomy that did not exist before. In the past, only two or three campuses were budget centres in that they got their budgets directly from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) instead of the University Central Administration. There was time even when the University did not get its budget from MoFED but indirectly through the MOE. The present autonomy gave each college the freedom to use its budget without the approval of officials in the central administration of the University.

Yet, departments that are activity centres are not budget centres. Departments execute the daily activities of the University. Nevertheless, they depend on the schools, institutes or colleges for daily expenditures. In other words, budgets are controlled by regulators instead of executors. Here one observes more responsibility in departments and more authority in faculties and colleges.

Departments lack autonomy in decision making regarding the use of resources, specially their financial and material resources.

Changes in Financing and Implementation of Cost-sharing

The AAU almost exclusively depends on government budget. This financial dependence on a single source had restricted its financial autonomy in using its funds on the basis of its convenience and priorities. The University had used much of its meagre generated income (through sale of services, donations from SIDA-SAREC research fund) for financing its postgraduate programmes for a long time. One of the reforms was government budget allocation to finance the postgraduate programmes. This government policy change was necessitated by the new higher education policy of 'graduate expansion'. The need for graduate expansion became urgent to staff the ever expanding universities. In less than a decade time, the number of public universities has risen from two to more than thirty. Following the policy of graduate expansion, therefore, the budget of AAU has more than doubled, according the report of AAU officials during the interview.

The 2003 higher education proclamation had allowed block grant to higher education institutions. The block grant system is different from the traditional system of *line-item* financing in that the former gives more latitude in freedom of utilising the funds allocated for the designed period. Unutilised funds during the given year are rolled to the following year. In the latter, however, unutilised funds are disbursed back to the government accounts.

The block grant has not yet become a reality. At present, the University still continues to use the old system of line-item financing in spite of the proclamation that granted block grant system that gives more autonomy in using it.

Changes in Academic Activities

Following the reform policy of the government, many changes have taken place in the academic arena. Some of the major changes include: establishing multidisciplinary centres, expansion and diversification of programmes, and strengthening science and technology programmes (HESO, 2003).

The establishment of new centres and institutes (15 institutions and centres of excellence) was primarily intended to shift paradigm, from the conventional disciplinary method of education and research to competency-based training and education-for-work (AAU, 2008b).

A higher education discourse has now developed in the AAU that requires realignment of training programmes in the model of trans-disciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity and outcome-based designing. Other disciplines were expected to identify their stakeholders and employers and redesign their academic programmes and course offerings in such a way that they respond to stakeholder needs.

To support the industrial transformation effort of the country, the government has demanded more graduates in engineering, science, and medicine with competency in transfer and use of technology. Thus, to support these economic priorities, the government needed large number of highly skilled workforce in science and technology than in the other large blocks and streams of education and training. To that effect, a 70/30 graduate mix policy was issued for all universities to be pursued in their admissions.

In its reengineering and design of postgraduate programmes, the AAU introduced the policy of modularisation of the curricula and courses. The main driving force for this decision was the philosophy of customer satisfaction, the students (AAU, 2008b: 1).

Expanding Infrastructure and Capacity Building

According to the research participants of the Administrative wing of AAU a number of buildings were constructed in the various campuses of the AAU since the reform, mainly to house the ever expanding student population. For instance, a high rising building was exclusively dedicated to the postgraduate programme of the Faculty of Science (Natural Science). New buildings were erected for the Faculty of Business and Economics, College of Education (although assigned to other purposes by the then new administration), College of Health and College of Veterinary Medicine.

Government PhD scholarships abroad were offered to the AAU junior academic staff, mainly in India, as part of the capacity building effort of AAU.

Moreover, Indian expatriate staffs were employed with better remuneration than their Ethiopian counterparts, albeit their performance, which was questioned by the university community, according to the report of research participants. They felt that this state of affairs is unfair for Ethiopian academics who are contributing as much as the expatriates if not better.

Many short-term training programmes were arranged locally and internationally to AAU managers and heads on such themes as governance and management, monitoring and evaluation, benchmarking, business process reengineering, and balanced score card (BSC).

Accountability Measures

Contrary to the intention of the BPR design which aimed at optimising efficiency in service delivery and improving the core work processes (AAU, 2008b), the change created a highly complex structure and complicated centres of

accountability. The original intention was to be accountable for efficient public service delivery in the form of teaching and research as demonstrated by results. Accountability for results was a government strategy clearly articulated in its strategic national plans. In the case of the AAU, accountability for results means producing high number of graduates mainly, in the fields of engineering and health

The University had also planned to use communications, assessments and deliberations as forms of accountability. For this reason, it created offices and structures that represent each of these. The complex structure of self-government represents offices of different levels, assemblies of different types and levels, and standing committees of different types and levels.

Assessment of the Changes

Introducing reforms using the tool of BPR had aimed at transforming the University into a robust research university in Africa (AAU, 2008a). According to the report of AAU Administrative Staff during the interview, BPR had two components: design and implementation. The design was more or less completed. Implementation was, however, far from completion. Reforming the human resource for support staff has not been started. They added that there are now about 5000 support staffs but only 2000 academic staffs. It was supposed that the redundant support staff members would be trimmed, yet, still pending implementation. Moreover, change management strategy and change implementation plan, which were important tools of implementing the change, were not created.

Effects of the Changes

A general dissatisfaction developed within the University academic community, the government and stakeholders following the reform process

resulting in change of the University administration in the beginning of 2011. A new reform council assessed the governance system of AAU and made six conclusions (AAU, 2012). All these conclusions are critical of the former change implementation process and proposing further changes.

The Effects of Reforms on Autonomy and Accountability: Views of the Academic Staffs and Higher Education Officials

This section presents the views of the academic staffs of the Addis Ababa University and those of the officials in the MOE, higher education buffer organisations and Addis Ababa University. Quantitative data, through using questionnaires, were collected from the academic staff and qualitative data collected from officials in the Higher Education wing of the MOE.

Views of Senior Management at the National and AAU levels

The views of officials in the MOE demonstrated that the reform has liberated universities from their extreme dependency on MOE for many of their decisions. One official from the MOE

Higher education institutions (HEI) never had administrative autonomy. At present, according to this official, HEIs take their budget directly from the Ministry of Economic Development and Finance. “Previously, even air ticket was bought by MOE”. Higher education officials in the Ministry believed that government involvement in HEIs at present is merely supervisory and not administrative or managerial; “Are-HEIs-delivering?” is the only interest of the government, said the official.

From what the officials lay claim, HEIs have become autonomous; but, with accountability for results and pursuance of government rules in using the funding

they are allowed to administer. Insisting on the autonomous nature of universities, since 2003, the time of the higher education proclamation, the MOE officials argued that since the reform, the government has restricted its interference in university affairs. Its involvement is related to merely capacity building, steering, appointing university presidents and board of governors.

However, other officials, such as, directors of the buffer organisations viewed the autonomy granted after the Proclamation of 2003 is not as ideal but practical. Their contention arises from the fact that the Proclamation gave the highest authority to the President not the Senate, which was the case in the traditions of Addis Ababa University before. The President used to be accountable to the University Senate. The Proclamation, however, reversed the direction of accountability, making the president more powerful than the Senate.

Emphasising the importance of accountability, a senior AAU official said, “The University is autonomous and there is ample academic freedom; the problem is lack of accountability”. He acknowledged the absence of monitoring and evaluation system in the University. Responding to specific issues of autonomy, another official asserted that AAU couldn’t fully use the autonomy at hand that the present government interference in the University is only in the engineering programmes, due to the high attention promised in its emphasis in the Growth and Transformation Plan.

Views of the AAU Middle Level Management

Face-to-face interviews regarding the introduction and implementation of higher education reforms after 2003 were carried out with members of the AAU middle level management, including Chief Administrative Officers (CAO), Deans and Department Chairs. Their views were similar to each other as well as to the views

of the lecturers and professors. Generally, they were more critical and sceptical than the senior management group. A dean said,

We are in a worse situation in terms of our relationship with students, in quality of education, and in governance and management. People did not understand BPR. Even “czars” and “process-owners” did not understand BPR. This is what happens when changes are imposed from above. The major consequence of top-down reform is passivity on the part of professors.

Another dean expressed his concern of AAU's change of paradigm from academic competence (theoretical strength) to operational competence (practical skills) that arises from vocationalisation and modularisation of curricula. He believed that disciplinary knowledge, which produces educated elites who can serve as leaders, designers, policy analysts and researchers, is critically needed for any country in addition to professionals and technicians. He believed AAU had highly established disciplines which now are being challenged to modularise and vocationalise their curricula.

Contesting the newly established 15 vocational centres of excellence, he said, “We need academic centres of excellence that can provide leadership and production of cutting-edge knowledge in this country instead of depending on foreign consultants”.

One director (CEO) who has an appreciation of the BPR blamed the way it was designed and practiced in the AAU. He wondered where-in-the-world the BPR designers travelled for benchmarking. He argued that the intention of BPR was to give ‘one-window’ service and remove all structures in the university that do not add value. “Why should you keep a system that demands the signature of 10 officials before your business gets done”? He argued. According to this director,

the reform had to cut off those unnecessary bureaucratic steps that are more costly to the customer (the student) and to the university as well. These arguments arise from the implementation of BPR with more instead of fewer offices and officers.

Views of Officers in Finance and Administration

The finance and administration officials of AAU viewed the reform, BPR, differently. One official said “The “*as is*” and “*to be*” process of BPR was a futile exercise; a lot of resources including huge amount of money were wasted for no results. About 70 developers were paid remuneration, fuel allowance and transportation allowance for more than six months.

According to the interviewed finance experts, inflated payments were a common practice to favourites, Diaspora and unknown visitors. The university’s special fund account (money donated in the form of assisting research and graduate programmes; money collected from sale of university services, etc.), which the university uses freely without accounting to the government, was misused in discretion and abuse.

Views of Academic Staff

The academic staffs of AAU were asked about changes in six areas of autonomy and accountability: these are 1) decision-making structures, 2) academic programmes, 3) staff management and evaluation, 4) financial management and corporatisation, 5) admissions and student management, and 6) administrative

procedures. The statistical data are presented in Tables 1a–1k displayed in Annex 1. The results are mixed with a minority affirming and the majority strongly disaffirming.

The majority of the academic staffs viewed these reforms as important; yet, their implementation was seen as dysfunctional. They argued that the University lacked leadership to guide the reform process, including establishing consensus in the academic community. They said that the reforms were not well communicated and discussed. They asserted that they did not understand these reforms in their true sense.

Other comments of the academic staff are that the BPR, the main instrument of the reform, which focused on modularisation of curriculum and changing the structure of university governance has brought about duplication of offices and office holders, causing “hassles in the academic programmes by introducing additional tiers, such as the position of an academic director in a college. Key operational decisions were not made to be carried out at the department level. Others said, departments are engaged more in trivial issues than in strategic initiatives. Departments should not be considered mere implementers of reforms, but active participants in the reform design process. Autonomy presumes the competence of departments to carry out major academic decisions. The chain of command is still dysfunctional.

In the perspectives of the academic staff, reform implementation in AAU was derailed. It produced many bureaucrats. It failed to distribute academic freedom and autonomy to the department and the professor. Accountability was in its worst shape. Above all it made the university’s business less efficient and costly. The demand of the government to comply with reforms designed without the participation of the academic staffs ultimately creates a ‘resigned professor without resigning from office’.

Linking the Stories: Different Eyes, Different Truths

This study suggests that the government had shown a great interest in higher education, viewing it as an important partner to its goals of economic and social transformation. It invested on huge infrastructure in higher education institutions, including constructing elaborate buildings, capacity building efforts, such as provision of massive international scholarships, training of academic staff in using information communication technologies, and provision of laptops and other equipment. It also produced legal frameworks and introduced planning tools, such as BPR and BSC for institutions to use them as tools of planning to transform their respective institutions. It has more than doubled the budgets of higher education institutions. Moreover, it has introduced capital budget into the higher education institution for the first time. The different parties hold different views as to whether or not these changes work well in advancing autonomy and accountability (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of views of higher education officials and instructors

	Types of autonomy	MOE officials	AAU senior officials	AAU junior officials	AAU academic staff	Official documents
1	Financial autonomy and Access to resources	yes	yes	No	No	Yes
2	Research	yes	yes	No	No	Yes
4	Academic programmes and Selection of courses	yes	yes	No	No	Yes
5	Governance& management	yes	yes	No	No	Yes
6	Levy fees	no	no	No	No	No
7	Admission and placement	no	no	No	No	No

One observes in Table 2 that people working in the higher education subsector did have divided views regarding the effect of reforms on autonomy and accountability. The officials complied with the official documents that boldly claim positive impact while junior university officials, such as deans and department heads and the general academic staffs subscribe to the contrary view, that is, these reforms did not enhance autonomy and accountability. It is, at best, to be naïve to believe

that these reforms worked well without the full endorsement and ownership by the broader academic staffs. The conflicting views of leaders and followers are also stumbling block for achieving the goals of an institution.

Why didn't the reforms work well? The government, higher education officials, and the academic community acknowledged that the reforms did not work well in the AAU. This had been recognised by the government as evidenced by the immediate replacement of all the AAU officials in 2011. There are two critical points that mainly contributed to why the reform failed to work well. These are: (1) absence of deliberation and communication; and (2) absence of commitment to the change. These two reasons are briefly discussed as follows.

Absence of Deliberations and Communications; It is clear that the reforms were initiated by the government not by the universities. However, design of strategies and implementation of the reform fell within the jurisdiction of the universities. Yet, what was designed and implemented in the BPR of AAU excluded the wider participation of the university community. The university community did not get the chance to debate and comment on the design and implementation of BPR.

To design the BPR, the Management selected certain experts from different faculties and research institutes to work out what is called the 'AS-IS' and 'TO-BE' components of the AAU's BPR, in a secluded place, at the then *Akaki* Campus of AAU. It took about six months to complete the design process. For unknown reasons, implementation did not commence immediately.

Implementation of the BPR started with international travels of the reform team to selected countries in Africa and the West for benchmarking of the governance system. No deliberations took place on the choices of the benchmarks copied

from different universities. The reform, therefore, could not get onboard because consensus was lacking among the university community due to the non-participatory approach in the design and implementation of the reform. Aside from displaying the document in the AAU website, these reform documents were not even sufficiently communicated with the university community.

Absence of Commitments for the Change: The BPR reform had many process owners in name as stated in the documents. Yet, its implementation status suggests absence of owners, committed leaders and actors. In most cases, reforms succeed if they are led by visionary, committed and competent transformational leaders. Transformational leaders have the capability to build team spirit and mobilise followers toward a certain vision. However, AAU was unlucky in possessing these virtues. No one tried to defend BPR when critics questioned its theoretical and practical value to the university. Although a Communication Office was organised at a higher level, no communication material was produced and distributed by the Office in defence of BPR. The process then started to lack credibility, which then led to wider resistance by the front line actors as well as officials.

The Way Forward

The new AAU leadership, which has assumed responsibility in 2011, has acknowledged the weakness of the AAU BPR both in its design and implementation. It has promised to redress the weaknesses and commence implementing the reform by applying a new planning tool called Balanced Score Card (BSC).

In a one-year period, the new AAU leaders have brought about several changes. These include changing the governance and management structure, changing the senate legislation, abolishing the office of college directors, reducing the number

of CAOs, incorporated the centres of excellence into their respective colleges and appointed new officials for all positions. The responsibility of the Postgraduate Programmes which used to be in the hand of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Programmes was transferred to the Academic Vice President. Research institutes became autonomous from their old governance by the colleges.

In spite of these changes, however, the top-heavy nature of academic governance is still sustained. The positions of five vice presidents (with three to five directors each) are still maintained. The Office of the President is crowded with a good number of assistants who are highly posted directors.

Applying one of the BPR principles, “less is more”, demands squeezing senior management to two vice presidents (Academic Vice President and Vice President for Administration and Finance) to oversee the performance of colleges, institutes and others. The three senior leaders (the President and the two Vice Presidents) can provide senior leadership to deans and directors who, in turn, can manage the colleges and research institutes towards the vision of the university. Multiplying offices of supervisors, executives, legislators, advisors and regulators by adding tiers makes academic governance more bureaucratic, less efficient, and more costly. If need be, the President and Vice Presidents can be assisted by a Senior Management Team (SMT) which incorporates some capable and senior academic staff members.

The centres of activity, colleges, institutes and departments, need to be empowered. This demands transferring decision-making authority (with accountability) to them. Their accountability can be assured by results-based Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (PMP). This demands creating a robust Monitoring and Evaluation Office. This Office shall make regular assessments and produce feedback on the basis of plans and baseline data. It shall function to

produce feedback on performance to the SMT and the colleges themselves for improved performance, and not for control.

Good governance structures are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for effecting results. They need transformational leaders who are “first among equals”, not chiefs isolated from their colleagues. They must attract capable and committed and authentic leaders, not characterised by Hippocratic loyalty. Transformational leaders are change champions and enjoy a wider public appreciation with good results. AAU calls for transformational leaders who are badly needed now.

Note

1. This research was funded by IIEP-UNESCO as part of the project, *The Role of Steering Policies and Governance Reform in the Management of Higher Education in Africa*.

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Annex 1a. Data on governance and management

Missing	System	2	2.8
Total		72	100.0

Annex 1b. Responses on whether or not the reforms enhanced the freedom to prioritise research areas/domains

	Responses	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Agree	12	16.7	16.7	16.7
	No opinion	14	19.4	19.4	36.1
	Disagree	28	38.9	38.9	75.0
	Strongly disagree	18	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	72	100.0	100.0	

Annex 1c. Responses on whether or not the reforms strengthened the academic programmes of the university

	Responses	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Strongly agree	2	2.8	2.8	2.8
	Agree	14	19.4	19.4	22.2
	No opinion	8	11.1	11.1	33.3
	Disagree	24	33.3	33.3	66.7
	Strongly disagree	24	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	72	100.0	100.0	

Annex 1d. Responses on whether or not The reform measure improved access to and the sharing of faculty resources

	Responses	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Agree	6	8.3	8.6	8.6
	No opinion	24	33.3	34.3	42.9
	Disagree	26	36.1	37.1	80.0
	Strongly disagree	14	19.4	20.0	100.0
	Total	70	97.2	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.8		
Total		72	100.0		

Annex 1e. Responses on whether or not the reforms led to the increased administrative workload of the academic staff

	Responses	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Strongly agree	8	11.1	11.1	11.1
	Agree	34	47.2	47.2	58.3
	No opinion	14	19.4	19.4	77.8
	Disagree	8	11.1	11.1	88.9
	Strongly disagree	8	11.1	11.1	100.0
	Total	72	100.0	100.0	

Annex 1f. Responses on whether or not the reforms reduced administrative costs

	Responses	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Agree	4	5.6	5.9	5.9
	No opinion	16	22.2	23.5	29.4
	Disagree	22	30.6	32.4	61.8
	Strongly disagree	26	36.1	38.2	100.0
	Total	68	94.4	100.0	
Missing	System	4	5.6		
Total		72	100.0		

Annex 1g. Responses on whether or not reforms led to increased academic workload

	Responses	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Agree	26	36.1	37.1	37.1
	No opinion	16	22.2	22.9	60.0
	Disagree	20	27.8	28.6	88.6
	Strongly disagree	8	11.1	11.4	100.0
	Total	70	97.2	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.8		
Total		72	100.0		

Annex 1h. Responses on whether or not reforms led to more monitoring and evaluation

	Responses	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Strongly agree	2	2.8	2.8	2.8
	Agree	4	5.6	5.6	8.3
	No opinion	16	22.2	22.2	30.6
	Disagree	22	30.6	30.6	61.1
	Strongly disagree	28	38.9	38.9	100.0
	Total	72	100.0	100.0	

Annex 1i. Responses on whether or not reforms led to strengthened accountability measures of the staffs

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Agree	4	5.6	5.6	5.6
	No opinion	12	16.7	16.7	22.2
	Disagree	24	33.3	33.3	55.6
	Strongly disagree	32	44.4	44.4	100.0
	Total	72	100.0	100.0	