

The Making and Unmaking of Local Governments in Ethiopia: The National Picture

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Abstract

Few issues are as central to contemporary local government systems as their number and boundaries. The central aim of this study is to cast light on trends and implications related to the number and boundaries of local governments in post-federal Ethiopia. This study depicts that, since the inception of the federal system in the 1990s, the figures of local governments have experienced a conspicuous sequence of ruptures and shifts. The most obvious are changes at the woreda level while at the other levels of local governments, a similar tendency is seen in a slightly different form. Although kebeles have relatively been more expanded in Ethiopia since the early 1990s, this study focuses on woredas - the next higher and more expanded level of local government. The study attempts to respond to the following questions: Who holds the jurisdiction of creation and demarcation of local governments in Ethiopia? Does the legal framework provide clear criteria and procedures for local government creation and boundary demarcation? What comparative insights can be drawn from any relevant federal system? Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in the study. Literature review and key informant interview were the main methods employed. Findings reveal that the fundamental decision in federal matters - the creation of local government - has been reserved for the regions. The FDRE Constitution has no express constitutional recognition of local governments, nor does it contain any specific procedures that govern the creation of local governments and demarcation of boundaries. It is argued that the creation of local governments, their upgrading and change of boundaries are determined on ad hoc basis, and no comprehensible criteria have been laid down for the purpose. There also appears unclarity on how local communities participate in the demarcation of local government boundaries.

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1. Introduction

In almost twenty years following the inception of the federal system, much has been written especially about the nature and design of Ethiopian Federalism. However, the same cannot be said about local governments. Although old, these entities have not been given much attention by researchers. Nonetheless, they have recently been partially addressed in works on decentralization under the theoretical formulations of political science, law, public administration, and rural land and development studies.

A number of recent volumes have treated a broad canvas of the different issues of local government and decentralization in Ethiopia, especially as related to the design, impact and implementation of the *Woreda* Decentralization Programme (Taye A. and Tegegne G., 2009; Mulugeta, 2012). Other studies on the Ethiopian local governments attempted to evaluate local services concentrating on the analysis of single services such as education and health services, and public investments (Watson and Lissane, 2005; Gebreab, 1998; Mihret, 2007). Still some have dealt more closely with the analysis of fiscal decentralization in general, and other fiscal policy issues in particular (Eshetu, 1994; Keller, 2002; Derrese, 2003; Solomon, 2006; Paulos, 2007). Local government problems in the fields of regional-local relationships, elections, and general administration have also been explored in terms of their ability to function effectively in advancing democracy, development, accommodating ethnic minorities and rendering necessary services to their people (Assefa, 2006; Aalen, 2002; Voughan and Tronvoll, 2003; Van der Bekan, 2009; Yilmaz and Venugopal, 2008; Yonathan, 2008; Zemelak, 2011; Yonathan and Zemelak, 2011; Birhanu, 2007; Fenta, 1998; Gebreab, 1998; Tegegn, 1998; Pausewang and Lovise 2001; Pausewang and Kjetil 2000). Recently, the study of local government has been dominated by legalistic studies which focus on the formal rights and powers of municipalities (Yonathan and Zemelak, 2012; Zemelak, 2012).

Admittedly, under the current Ethiopian federal dispensation, the demand for more states has not pressed too hard. But the case of creation of additional local

governments is different although the demand itself or its possible consequences have gone unnoticed. In his work, Gebrehiwot, for instance, has astutely observed that “over the past two decades, one might observe frequent reorganization and fragmentation process of local governments” (Gebrehiwot, 2012:9). Likewise, Garcia and Rajkumar, substantiate this argument by asserting that “the number of *woredas* has been steadily increasing over the last few years because of frequent splitting of existing *woredas* to create new ones” (Garcia and Rajkumar, 2008:14). In their study of this trend, a number of scholars tended to recall some of the experiences of countries like Uganda and Nigeria. Green, for example, commented that “Ethiopia is no different from Uganda, where demands for new local government preoccupy local politics across the country and divert attention away from opposition politics in Kampala” (Green, 2011:1096). Mirroring Green’s concern with precision, Assefa, on his accounts of this event reminds us that the newly established multi-ethnic federations shall review their boundaries to accommodate new ethno-linguistic demands, “but too much flexibility may lead to the Nigerian federation’s logic of fragmentation” (Assefa, 2006: 136).

In his most comprehensive study of local governments in Ethiopia, Zemelak has shown that the absence of sufficient legal framework has led to haphazard division of *woredas* (Zemelak, 2012). He says, “the absence of a constitutional framework regulating the creation of new *woredas* and the demarcation and adjustment of the boundaries of existing *woredas* is likely to render each individual *woreda* vulnerable to random division or amalgamation” (Zemelak, 2012: 245).

Not much has been studied about local governments in Ethiopia. It can thus be said that only few studies have examined local governments’ powers and functions and limitations of local government structures in Ethiopia, with little, if any, attention given to the politics behind periodic changes to the number of such governments. It can also be said that the literature on Ethiopian federalism and local governments has paid relatively little attention to how local government maps have been drawn and revised and there is no synthetic comparative study available.

This study, therefore, attempts to provide a general overview of creation and

boundary demarcation exercises of local governments in post-federal Ethiopia. It pays special attention to the extent to which the creation of such governments in Ethiopia follows any established parameters and if the process is informed by demographic or ethnic rationale. While the level of analysis in the study is the *woreda*, other levels may be mentioned as supportive arguments.

2. A Brief Theoretical and Comparative Notes on Local Government Boundary Demarcation

Few issues are as central to contemporary local government system as that of the number and boundary demarcation. Recent years have seen increasing concern among scholars about local government boundaries. A theoretical perspective that focuses on the boundaries of local governments may seem rather narrow until one realizes that:

[B]oundaries determine who is included within a jurisdiction and define local arrangements of service provision and production, patterns of economic development, and the exercise of political power (Feiock and Carrfeiock, 2001:383)

The demarcation of local authority boundaries is often considered an important component of the process of devolution of power (Singiza and De Visser, 2015). In other words, it has been argued that the implementation of decentralization involves demarcating a country into manageable local government areas (Owusu, 2009; Shale, 2008). As a result, according to many scholars, boundaries play a central role and are probably the most popular in the discourse of local government (Razin and Hazan, 2004; Feiock and Carrfeiock, 2001; Carmichael, *et al*, 2005).

Indeed, the formation of local government represents an important form of local boundary change (Shale, 2008). It remains unclear, though, how the process of local government boundary change unfolds. Of critical importance are the criteria/norms, principles and procedures to be used to demarcate such government boundaries.

It has been maintained that local government legislation outlining the formal

structure and rules for demarcation should address the following issues: Who should draw the local government boundaries? Should the boundary authority be politically neutral? Should the general public have input into the demarcation process? Should formal criteria be established for the demarcation? If so, what should these demarcation criteria be? And what process should be involved in terms of consulting the people who in one way or another may be affected as a result of drawing/redrawing boundaries? (Razin, 2005; Razin and Meligrana, 2005).

Most provisions often detail the criteria and procedures used and address which party, organization, or person is responsible for demarcation. Currently, the United States sits at one end of the spectrum: local government boundaries are drawn by parliament (Razin, 2005; Razin and Meligrana, 2005). At the other end of the spectrum are many European countries that have established independent boundary authorities or rely on non-partisan boundary commissions to carry out demarcation (Paddison 2005; Bockenforde, 2011; Razin and Meligrana, 2005).

The experience also indicates that the provision establishing boundary commission tends to address the composition of the commission - who heads the commission, the powers of the commission and its members, a tentative timeframe for the commission to issue its judgment, provisions for public participation and formal criteria for commissioners to consider when drawing local governments (Paddison 2005; Razin, 2005; Razin and Meligrana, 2005; Bockenforde, 2011).

South African Constitution (S155 (3) (b)) calls for the establishment of an independent authority that will demarcate municipal boundaries and for the establishment of criteria and procedures for the demarcation. In terms of the Municipal Demarcation Act (1998) the independent Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB) was established to determine the criteria and procedures for the delimitation of municipal boundaries.

The South African case offers a clearly defined case of representation of diversity as a key aspect. S(6) of the Municipal Demarcation Act says that the Board members should come from all over the country and be knowledgeable and/or experienced in matters that are relevant to municipal demarcation and include,

for example, development planning, community development, traditional leadership, municipal finance, town planning, etc. Politicians in national, provincial or local government cannot be members of the Board, nor can office bearers of political parties (S13 (13)). The demarcation procedure is set out clearly in the Municipal Demarcations Act, Sections 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30. Hence, the Act typically specifies the demarcation criteria and it also tells us how the boundaries of local governments shall be demarcated.

The Nigerian Federal Constitution gives the power to create new local government areas to the state government through the State House of Assembly. According to S8 (3);

A bill for a law of a House of Assembly for the purpose of creating a new local government area shall only be passed if:

- a. A request supported by at least two-thirds majority of members (representing the area demanding the creation of new local government area) in each of the following, namely-
 - i. The House of Assembly in respect of the area and
 - ii. The local government councils in respect of the area, is received by the House of Assembly;
- b. A proposal for the creation of the local government area is thereafter approved in a referendum by at least two-thirds majority of the people of the local government area where the demand for the proposed local government area originated.
- c. The result of the referendum is then approved by a simple majority of the members in each local government council in a majority of all the local government councils in the state, and
- d. The result of the referendum is approved by a resolution passed by two-thirds majority of members of the House of Assembly.

However, S8(5) and S8(6) required the involvement of the Federal Government through the National Assembly in the process of creating new local government areas in the country;

An Act of the National Assembly passed in accordance with this section shall make consequential provisions with respect to the names and headquarters of states or local government areas as provided in Section 3 of this Constitution and in Parts I and II of the First Schedule of this Constitution.

For the purpose of enabling the National Assembly to exercise powers conferred upon it by sub-section (5) of this section, each House of Assembly shall, after the creation of more local government areas pursuant to sub-section (3) of this section, make adequate returns to each House of National Assembly.

Hence, although the creation and establishment of local governments are functions of the state, authority for their recognition is given to the National Assembly.

In fact, this is contrary to the view that the number of local governments has been fixed for all times by the Constitution which renders the creation or the adjustment of boundaries of local government a matter of constitutional amendment.^[2] It should be noted that there could be a need for the creation of more local governments as the population and residential demographics change over time (Galadima, 2009:242).

According to S8(4) of the 1999 Constitution, a bill for a Law of House of Assembly for the purpose of boundary adjustment of any existing local government area shall only be passed if:

- a. A request for the boundary adjustment is supported by two-thirds majority of members (representing the area demanding and the area affected by the boundary adjustment) in each of the following, namely:
 - i. the House of Assembly in respect of the area, and
 - ii. the local government council in respect of the area,

2 S (3)(2) of the Federal Constitution already indicated that there shall be 768 “local government areas” and six “area councils” in the capital territory, in the federation.

and is received by the House of Assembly; and

- b. A proposal for the boundary adjustment is approved by a simple majority of members of the House of Assembly in respect of the area concerned

In brief, as Galadima stresses, this process shows that local authorities and communities exercise some control over the demarcation of boundaries by requirement of a referendum supported by at least a two-thirds majority of the affected people of the local government area and also by a two-thirds majority of their elected representatives (*Ibid*). It is assumed that these provisions will prevent the manipulations of local government boundaries and the unwarranted proliferation of local government areas for purely partisan political reasons (*Ibid*).

The 1995 Uganda's Constitution provides that the parliament is empowered to alter the boundaries of local government units and to create new ones. According to Art 179 (2), changes in or alteration of boundaries must be supported by the majority of the members of Parliament. Given that Uganda is not federal, the national government retaining wide discretion is no surprise and may not help much, may be leave Uganda out? Same is true with Ghana.

The adjustment of district boundaries or the creation of districts in Ghana is the responsibility of the President of Ghana acting as per the Legislative Instruments passed by the Parliament and implemented by the national Electoral Commission. In Ghana, the legal framework for district creation is provided by the 1992 Constitution and the Local Government Act (Act 462) 1993. Art 241 (2) of the constitution stipulates that "Parliament may by law make provision for the re-drawing of the boundaries of districts or for reconstituting the districts". In exercise of this power under Art 241 (2), Parliament in the Local Government Act, 1993, Act 462, vests the power for the demarcation of district boundaries and the creation of districts in the President. S1 (2) of Act 462 provides that the President may by executive instrument: (a) declare any area within Ghana to be a district; (b) assign a name to the district.

It can be argued that the legal framework for district creation in Ghana seems inconsistent as the Constitution gives the parliament the main role in the creation of districts while Act 462 gives the President a dominant role through an executive instrument. Similarly, the Urban and Rural District Councils Acts of 1996 in Zimbabwe give the President the power to create, abolish and alter local government boundaries.

The 1999 Nigerian Constitution assigns the demarcation of local government areas to ‘the person authorised by law to prescribe the area over which a local government council may exercise authority’ and lists the factors to which regard should be paid in such delimitation.

Sub-section 2 of the Constitution then sets the criteria for the creation of local governments:

The person authorised by law to prescribe the area over which a local government council may exercise authority’ shall:

- a. define such area as clearly as practicable; and
- b. ensure, to the extent to which it may be reasonably justifiable that in defining such area regard is paid to:
 - i. common interest of the community in the area;
 - ii. traditional association of the community; and
 - iii. administrative convenience

It can be said, as Kalu observes, that the above provision does not provide for representation of local representatives from the affected local government areas (Kalu, 2008: 236).

According to Art 179 (4) of Uganda’s 1995 constitution, “Any measure for the alteration of the boundaries or the creation of districts or administrative units shall be based on the necessity for effective administration and the need to bring services closer to the people and it may take into account the means of communication, geographical features, density of population, economic viability and the

wishes of the people concerned”.

Likewise, S1(4) of Ghana’s Local Government Act (Act 462) stipulates the criteria of population, geographical contiguity and economic viability (that is, the ability of an area to provide the basic infrastructural and other developmental needs from the monetary and other resources generated in the area), for creation of districts.

South African Municipal Demarcation Act of 27 of 1998, S24 and S25 of the Demarcation Act laid down the criteria that the Board had to take into account. S24 deals with demarcation objectives and S25 lists the factors that have to be taken into account when determining municipal boundaries. The criteria governing how boundaries are to be drawn by the Demarcation Board are fully spelled out in S25, and are as follows:

- a)* The interdependence of people, communities and economies as indicated by:
 - (i) existing and expected patterns of human settlement and migration;
 - (ii) employment;
 - (iii) commuting and dominant transport movements;
 - (iv) spending;
 - (v) the use of amenities, recreational facilities and infrastructure; and
 - (vi) commercial and industrial linkages;
- (b)* The need for cohesive, integrated and unfragmented areas, including metropolitan areas;
- (c)* The financial viability and administrative capacity of the municipality to perform municipal functions efficiently and effectively;
- (d)* The need to share and redistribute financial and administrative

resources;

(e) Provincial and municipal boundaries;

(f) Areas of traditional rural communities;

(g) Existing and proposed functional boundaries, including magisterial districts, voting districts, health, transport, police and census enumerator boundaries;

(h) Existing and expected land use, social, economic and transport planning;

(i) The need for co-ordinated municipal, provincial and national programmes and services, including the needs for the administration of justice and health care;

(j) Topographical, environmental and physical characteristics of the area;

(k) The administrative consequences of its boundary determination on:

(i) municipal creditworthiness;

(ii) existing municipalities, their council members and staff; and

(iii) any other relevant matter; and

(l) The need to rationalise the total number of municipalities within different categories and of different types to achieve the objectives of effective and sustainable service delivery, financial viability and macro-economic stability.

From the above, it is clear that in South Africa, boundary changes take into account ethnically neutral factors such as economic, geographic and infrastructural features.

The Australian experience offers similar theoretical, political and economic justifications for local government boundary demarcation. In Australia, those Local Government Acts that set criteria to be taken into account when considering

boundary changes tend to dwell as much on matters of community of interest, local values, impacts of change and democratic representation – although the relative weighting to be given to such factors is not stipulated (Aulich, *et al.*, 2011).

Based on the experience of countries discussed above, it is submitted that there are no silver demarcation bullets, no single set of structures or principles or criteria that are uniformly ‘best’.

From the above, it is clear that a set of criteria for formation of new local governments should be decided and laid down by law. It can be taken for granted that a set of criteria will provide clear information to the existing local governments about the size and structure of local governments accepted in the future. In addition, there is more recognition now of the need for independent boundary commissions staffed by non-partisan civil servants. As such, it can be said that despite some variations, comparative experience to date emphasizes that independent and permanent boundary demarcation bodies represent a clear best practice. Indeed, their perceived neutrality and independence from political interference lends credibility to the demarcation process.

3. The Legal and Institutional Framework for Local Government in Ethiopia

The 1995 Constitution lays down some essential principles of local government. Art 50(4) of the FDRE Constitution contains provisions specifically related to local government, and requires the state to be divided by law into administrative sub-divisions. In its broad provision, the FDRE Constitution, Art 50 (4), reads:

State government shall be established at State and other administrative levels that they find necessary. Adequate power shall be granted to the lowest units of government to enable the People to participate directly in the administration of such units.

Although the above provision does not explicitly assign the power of creation to regional governments, it does at least refer to an option for the creation of a new layer of governance at the regional level. At the same time, this provision prohibits the states from denying adequate power to local governments. Apart from that statement, further indication is provided in Art 39 of the FDRE Constitution. Art

39 does not specifically mention the word local government, only, “the right to full measure of self-determination that includes the right to establish institutions of government” (FDRE Constitution, 1995, Art 39). To this end, Art 88(1) of the Constitution further ensures the right to self-rule at all levels.

From the Federal Constitution, one can easily notice two fundamental provisions: first, the option for creation of local governments and second, the submission of local governments to the respective regional governments. Accordingly, the sphere of the local governments is left to the mercy of the regional government, though the last item of Art 50(4) calls for autonomy to satisfy the needs of the inhabitants. Not much else is clear about local government creation. Consequently, there is nothing in the constitution to suggest how many local governments there should be, or how they should be constituted.

Another crucial issue at stake here is that, so far, many of the regional states have neither developed nor implemented any comprehensive legislations of local government. However, it is encouraging that some regional governments are slowly moving in convenient direction by adopting a number of legislations in the field. In Tigray, for instance, the creation of *woredas* is governed by Proclamation no.99/2006. Art 6(1) of this Proclamation authorises the executive council to define the criteria for the creation of a new *woreda*. According to Art 6(3) of same proclamation, the criteria shall be deemed to include capacity to deliver services, administrative convenience, and the communities’ culture and preference.

Similar provisions are at place in Benishangul-Gumuz as well. According to Art 11(1) Proclamation no. 86/2010, population size, capacity to cover 25 percent of its expenses from own resources, population settlement structure and the history, culture and interest of the community are deemed to be considered in the creation of local governments.

The Oromia origin has adopted a hierarchical classification of city governments based on population. Accordingly, the greater the population, the higher the grade of the city will be.

Art 6(1) of Proclamation No. 65/2003 stipulates the grading of cities.

The cities in the Region shall be grouped into four grades as follows:

Grade one (greater than 90,000 residents),

Grade two (from 45,000 to 89,999 residents),

Grade three (from 10,000 to 44,999 residents)

Grade four (from 2,000 to 9,999 residents)

Art. 6(4) provides that “where the number of residents is less than 2,000 and the place serves as a seat of the district or zone administration, the Regional Executive Council may decide to confer the status of grade four cities and exercise the power and functions thereof”. It is also provided in Art. 6(5) that the criteria for urban grading may be modified by the Regulations to be issued by the Regional Executive Council based on the study conducted by the Bureau. Art 6(6) of the Proclamation stipulates that;

The subsequent standing of the cities in the region in improving or declining from their grade, the waiting period and other requirements shall be determined by the Regulations of the Regional Executive council.

Given that the rural local governments are Constitutional and the urban local governments are established by ordinary legislation, the most probable direction in Oromia is in favour of the rural local governments.

The above cases provide for subsequent alteration of local government boundaries and the criteria for doing so. In the case of both Tigray and Benishangul, the proclamations explicitly leave it to the state executive council to prescribe the criteria of demarcation. Broadly, the proclamations of each State characterise local government in similar terms. They each provide for the maintenance of a system of local government; describe executive councils as bodies that are responsible for demarcation criteria; and allow the relevant State’s legislature to make any laws it considers necessary for, or with respect to, local government. It is important to note that both proclamations entail the condition that the coun-

cil, in the exercise of this power, has to take into consideration the proposal of the Regional Bureau of Finance and Economic Development as well as that of the Administrative and Security Affairs Bureau (Tigray Pro 15 (2006), Art. 6(4); Benishangul-Gumuz State Pro 87 (2010), Art. 10(4)). I am not sure if one can make it for this paper, but in my July 2015 field visits in four regional states, including Amhara and Tigray, I observed that there is a lot of discontent with regard to local governments. In brief, each of the proclamations contains a set of provisions that goes only some way toward prescribing the precise criteria of demarcation.

4. The Number of Local Governments

1.1 The Dynamics: Consolidation and Fragmentation

Ever since the establishment of the Ethiopian Federation, units of local government seem to be in a condition of almost constant flux. Over the past two decades, the number and boundaries of zones, *woredas* and *kebeles* have been changed noticeably. The experience indicates that some *woredas* have been subdivided into two or three *woredas*, while other two or three adjacent *woredas* have been combined into a single *woreda*.

Of all units of local government in the Ethiopia, few have experienced as much change as *woredas*. We can most clearly understand the nature of these changes in a genealogy across two phases—before and after the District Level Decentralization Programme (DLDP). There was a trend to merge small *woredas* into larger ones in the mid 1990s, which has resulted in reduction of the number of *woredas* by almost twenty percent (Gebrehiwot, 2012:9). During the early Transitional Period, there were 676 *woredas*. It has been noted that during the mid 1990s, the number of *woredas* seems to have stabilized at around 550. Most regions, therefore, had fewer *woredas* in the mid 1990s than at the beginning. There were a number of reasons for this collapse. On the one hand, it was claimed, among other reasons, that administrative efficiency was a major consideration in the decision to pursue the merger. According to Ghebrehiwot, for instance, the amalgamation of the *woredas* was widely considered necessary “to make use of the available scarce public resources by minimizing administrative costs” (*Ibid*).

Accordingly, the amalgamation was expected both to maximize efficiency and administrative capacity of local governments. From this point of view, then, other factors were far less important. Hence, the issue of local populations and the size requirements for services provision (thresholds and scale economies) were minor considerations in the merger process. On the other hand, the official rhetoric and justifications aside, it has been argued that the dominant reason was the vigorous agenda of the federal government (Garcia and Rajkumar, 2008; Vaughan, 2003, Yilmaz and Venugopal, 2008). Hence, from this point of view, even though the merger rationale is often formulated as administrative expediency, it was primarily a political project which was initiated by federal centre.

The assessment indicates that there has been no law that regulates the conditions and procedures for mergers. It has been claimed that a number of referendum schemes have been pursued at the local level, although this has not been firmly entrenched in legislation at the national or regional level. However, the evidence indicates that despite the potential impact of mergers on local communities, residents had not in many cases taken an active stance in voicing their opinions to mergers (Gebrehiwot, 2012:9).

Conversely, since the early 2000s, Ethiopia has witnessed a major transition in its local politics, with the execution of the District-Level Decentralization Programme (DLDP), which marked a new beginning for the *woredas* in Ethiopia. The DLDP has introduced quite a significant change in the federal arrangement by decentralizing considerable authority and resources to the local governments (MoFED, 2006). At the commencement of DLDP, there were only about 550 *woredas* in the entire country (see Table 1 below). In 2013, *woredas* rose in number to a total of 801 nationwide, an increase of more than 31 percent, since 2002. Cognizant of the fact that data for each year are not readily available, this study tries to make comparison over different time periods. These time periods are some years before DLDP, and some years after.

Table 1: The number of *woredas* before DLDP, 1998

Region	Population	Area in thousand Km²	No. of <i>woredas</i>
Tigray	3,358,358	60.2	35
Afar	1,131,437	77.0	28
Amahara	14,769,360	188.8	102
Oromia	20,012,952	360.0	176
Somali	1,978,600	215.9	47
Benishangul Gumuz	492,689	46.8	13
SNNPR	11,064,818	112.0	71
Gambella	194,755	26.1	8
Harari	143,587	0.3	19
Addis Ababa	2,341,964	0.4	28
Dire Dawa	277,245	1.6	23
Total	55,765,765	1089.1	550

Source: Adopted from Lovise Aalen, 'Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience, 1991-2000', Unpublished PhD Thesis, Chr. Michelson Institute 2002, p.6

As we see from Table 1 above, the number of local governments varied across regions: Oromia had 12 zones and 176 *woredas*, and Gambella had only 2 zones and 8 *woredas*. The number of zones and *woredas* in the SNNPRS has been changed in 2000, when North Omo zone was split into several zones, and in 2001 when the Silte formed their own zone, separated from the rest of the Gurage zone. The evidence indicates that since DLDP went into effect, more than 250 new *woredas* have been created increasing the total number of *woredas* in Ethiopia by roughly 31 percent, during nearly ten years of the reform era. Around 2004, in the 'heyday of decentralization', shortly after the commencement of DLDP, a slew of towns were separated from their "parent" *woredas* and given the status of town administrations with separate administrative boundaries and with *woreda* status (Interview, an official from MoFED, March 21, 2015). It is clear, therefore, that, of all forms of local government, the number of *woredas* increased most, while

zones have been relatively the most stable feature of Ethiopia's local government. It is, furthermore, evident that the growth has not been uniform throughout the country. As will be detailed below, the number of *woredas* varies considerably among the states, and has only a weak relationship to population size.

Table 2: Population, area and *woreda* share by regions

Regions	P o p u l a t i o n Share (%)	Area Share (%)	<i>Woreda</i> Share (%)
Tigray	6.02	5.53	5.9
Afar	2.03	7.07	3.7
Amhara	26.48	17.34	19.5
Oromia	35.89	33.05	38.7
Somali	3.55	19.82	6.7
Benishangul Gumuz	0.88	4.30	2.7
SNNPR	19.84	10.28	20.2
Gambella	0.35	2.40	1.6
Harari	0.26	0.03	0.5

Source: Author's Compilation (analysed from Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Central Statistical Authority)

The following table shows the percentage changes in the number of *woredas* in Ethiopia across different periods.

Table 3: The number of *woredas*, 1991-2013

Year	No. of <i>Woredas</i>	Percentage change
1991	676	
1998	550	-22.9
2002	552	0.3
2004	612	10.8
2008	769	25.6
2010	774	0.65
2013	801	3.4

Source: Author's Compilation (analysed from Regional Block Grants, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MOFED))

Table 3 shows the number of *woredas* from 1991 to 2013. Column 3 shows the change in percentage of number of *woredas* which, in fact, was quite significant. As indicated in the table, between 1996 and 1998, there was a sharp drop in the number of *woredas* due to amalgamation. Whereas there were 676 *woredas* in 1991, the number declined to 550 in 1998. This suggests that too many *woredas* existed in the early 1990s relative to the mid 1990's. The evidence indicates that in the years that followed the DLDP, however, the number of *woredas* rose vividly. There came to emerge 612 *woredas* in 2004, 769 in 2008, and 801 in 2013.

A conclusion from this outline of post-federal practice is that the number of local governments has been in a state of flux. One may consider that this process has, in fact, been going on since the inception of the federal system, but has taken on new momentum in the last decade, especially at the *woreda* level. The trend described above shows that the creation of *woredas* took place from time to time at a slow pace and within each region. Admittedly, as hinted above, *woredas* have increased in number and scope of their activities. The findings indicate that just as the number of *liyu* zones was relatively stable, so also, though to a lesser degree, was the number of *liyu woredas*. This demonstrates that simultaneous with the increase in the number of *woredas*, that of other forms of local government has either increased, remained level or decreased due to mergers.

On the whole, the findings imply that two Regions, Oromia and SNNPR, boast well over half of all the *woredas* established in the country. Likewise, according to the 2007 statistical data, Oromia and SNNPR respectively had around 36 and 20 percent share of the national population, more than half of the population of Ethiopia as a whole. The data, in fact, indicates that SNNPR had a much smaller number of *woredas* than Oromia. The figure, however, is very different in relation to *liyu woredas*. Most of the *liyu woredas* and zones in the country were established in the SNNPR. The figure reveals that in SNNPR, there was a marginal increase in the number of *woredas*, a slight drop in *liyu woredas*, and a small increase in *liyu* zones. The recent period has, however, witnessed a fall in the number of *liyu woredas* in the Region. At the same time, one could also observe a relative increase in the number of *woredas* and *kebeles*.

The contention here is that, despite this nearly continual increase in the number of *woredas*, the trend has been toward a decreasing number of *woredas* per capita. The overall trend suggests that SNNPR and Oromia, contrary to conventional wisdom, have usually contained growth more through the expansion of existing *woredas* than the creation of new ones. It can also be argued, looking at the distribution of local governments among the regions, that there is a marked structural imbalance with the Oromia and Amhara having more local governments than all other regions put together.

The other observation to make from the findings of this study is that aside from splits at the *woreda* level, a number of new zones and *kebeles* have also been formed. Somewhat by contrast, it may be observed that the number of zones hardly changed at all in the post-DLDP period. Hence, it can be stressed that the number of zones has remained relatively stable whereas that of the *woredas* and *kebeles* has not. It is clear, as hinted above, that *kebeles* are by far the most numerous types of local government in Ethiopia and continue to grow swiftly. A massive increase of *kebeles* took place during the late 1990s, following the increase in the number of *woredas*.

Overall, this study indicates that over the last two decades, there has been a slow but persistent increasing tendency in the number of *woredas*. The finding shows that there was no swift ascending trajectory in the trend toward greater number of *woredas*. However, it needs to be pointed out that although there has been some variation over time, the number of *woredas* has steadily climbed since the beginning of the implementation of DLDP. The evidence also indicates that the growth rate is not uniform but varies from region to region. In addition, with the adoption of the new decentralization policy, the status of towns underwent significant changes. It has been maintained that the towns have been raised to the status of *woreda* because of their high population and economic growth (Interview, an official from Oromia Regional Government, also member of EPRDF, January 15, 2015). It can be perceived that at the zone level, there would appear to be little justification at present for any drastic changes. Part of the reason for this relative stability may be that zones are less visible and less public than *woredas*. Similarly, given the past trends and the continuing emphasis on *woredas*, we

can reasonably expect that the *liyu* zones and *liyu woredas* might possibly remain much as they are.

The figures cited above constitute incontestable evidence that of all the levels of the state, the *woreda* is the most often subjected to change. The number of *woredas* grew significantly overshadowing the growth of other forms of local government, particularly zones, *liyu* zones, and *liyu woredas*. Likewise, the foregoing assessment suggests that in the last twenty years, the number of *woredas* has continued to increase while the number of Regional States has stood at nine. Today, as indicated above, the number of *woredas* totalled about 800, which often but not always corresponded to electoral constituents, an average of 88 per state.

1.2 Population Size and Number of *Woredas*

As indicated above, the FDRE Constitution does not lay down the manner in which new local governments are created. One might also take the view that the criteria for establishing *woreda* are uncertain as many of the regional constitutions too are silent on the issue. As was noted in the previous section, the provisions of the FDRE Constitution dealing with creation of local governments do not entail a requirement for demographic threshold. Similarly, regional legislations to form new *woredas* stipulate no specific demographic criteria.

Interview responses were far more consistent as political officials tend to construe correlation between demographic size and *woreda* creation. From the responses, it can be argued that demographic change is the prized instrument to “officialize” *woreda* creation (Interview with an official from MoFED, March 21, 2015, and with an official from Oromia Regional Government, also member of EPRDF, January 15, 2015). Therefore, the relationship between demographic size and the number of *woredas* requires consideration.

It is generally submitted that the practice of *woreda* creation followed the criteria given in the Ethiopian Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (EIPRSP) and Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme (SDPRP), which invariably mention that ‘the district forms the unit base for representation in the federal and regional assemblies, with a population of 100,000’ (MoFED,

2000: 13; MoFED, 2002: 40). Hence, Ethiopia's current *woreda* structure is designed to include approximately equal population. Accordingly, it could be argued that the variable determining the original number of *woredas* was population. In practice, however, it was implemented with considerable flexibility and tended to operate at best in an *ad hoc* fashion, and at worst existed only on paper. The analysis supports the assumption that *woredas* were not created principally on the basis of population (though there were demographic minimums that had to be satisfied). In other words, creation of *woredas*, in many cases, does not reflect the size of populations. To throw some further light on this argument, Table 4 examines the distribution of local governments across regions per 100,000 populations using the 2012 Census data (Population data here are only a projected estimate based on the 2007 census).

Table 4: Distribution of *woredas* by regions per 100,000 populations

Region	Population size (2012)*	Land area (Sq. Km)	No. of <i>woredas</i> (A)	No. of <i>woredas</i> based on the national rule 100, 000 (B)	Deviation from the national rule (100,00) (A-B)
Tigary	4, 929, 999	41, 409.95	53	49	+4
Afar	709,997	72,052.78	30	7	+23
Amhara	18,866,002	154,708.96	171	188	-17
Oromia	31,294,992	284,537.84	304	312	-8
Somali	5,148,989	215,900	54	51	+3
Benishangul	982,004	50,698.68	20	9	+11
SNNPR	17,359,008	105,887.18	156	173	-17
Gambela	385,997	29,782.82	8	4	+4
Harari***	104,000	333.94	NA	NA	NA
Dire Dawa ***	387,000	1558.61	NA	NA	NA
Addis Ababa**	3,041,002	526.99	116	30	+86
Total	84,320,987	957397.75	796	793	NA

Source: Author's Compilation (analysed from Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Central Statistical Authority, Ethiopia Statistical Abstract 2012 (Addis Ababa: Central Statistical Authority, 2012)), p. 24.

* The population size is a projected figure on the results of the May 2007 National Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia, FDRE Population Census Commission, 2012

**The Addis Ababa City Government has reorganized the previously existing 99 *kebele* administrations into 116 *woredas* as of June 2010.

***Harari and Dire Dawa are respectively divided into 9 *kebeles* (6 urban and 3 rural) and 47 *kebeles* (9 urban and 38 rural).

N.B: Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa and Harari are excluded from the observations.

Data for all years were retrieved from FDRE Central Statistical Authority (2012) publication. As is clear in Table 4 above, there is an uneven distribution of territory, population and *woredas* among the nine regions. Accordingly, of all the regions, Oromia is by far the largest in terms of territory and population while Harari is the smallest. Hence, the differences between the largest and the smallest population (31,294,992 in Oromia and 104,000 in Harari), or the differences between the largest and the smallest territories (284,537.84 sq. km in Oromia versus 333.sq. km in Harari) are striking. Accordingly, the Oromia Region accounts for about 36 percent of the total population of the country while Harari makes only 0.2 percent, the lowest share.

The 2012 projected demographic data were used to find out whether there were local governments in each state formed more or less on the basis of their population size. Column five shows the number of *woredas* each state should have based on their national average population of 100,000. The figures in the column are obtained by dividing the population of each state by 100,000. In the last column of the table are the standard deviations from the national quotas of *woredas* they are entitled to, based on the national average of 100,000 population.

The figures in the column are preceded by plus and minus signs to indicate the number of *woredas* which they possess above and below their national quota while zero implies possession of their normal national quotas. The figures in column five are subtracted from those in column three to obtain those in column six. Five regional states possess 3 to 23 *woredas* above their national quota while 3 possess 8 to 17 below their national quota. It is only two states (Tigray and

Somali) that relatively possess their normal national quota of *woredas*. Looking at the absolute differences (fourth column), the disparity seems to be huge. Afar exceeds its national quota of 7 by 23 and has 30 *woredas* while the SNNPR is short of its quota of 173 by 17 and has only 156.

The evidence shows that differences in the number and percentage of *woredas* across the states is not simply a function of population, as demonstrated by the large number of *woredas* in relatively low population states such as Afar and Benishangul and the relatively small number of *woredas* in heavily populated states such as Amhara and SNNPR. Hence, this finding does not reinforce the notion that *woredas* are more apt to spring up in growing states, with the probability of *woreda* creation increasing as state population increases. Likewise, it can also be stressed that the criteria of population size has not been strictly adhered to within the regional states too, since, in some of the regional states, *woredas* have been created in territorial areas with significantly smaller or larger population sizes. Two examples are sufficient to illustrate this point. In Oromia, for instance, according to the 2007 Population and Housing Census, *woredas* vary in population from Dedo, with 290,450 inhabitants, in Jimma zone, to Sendafa, the smallest, with 10,750, in North Shewa Zone. Similarly, in the SNNPR, according to the same source, *woredas* vary in population from Borecha in Sidama Zone, with 236, 341 inhabitants, to Bero in Bench Maji which has only 12,239 residents. These examples show that population size which was said to have guided the creation of *woredas* was not applied consistently in all cases. In other words, the demographic requirement of a minimum of 10,000 inhabitants, initially regarded as the most important criterion, has not been followed or consistently applied across the regions in the country. The deviation in *woreda* population size from the average is a significant indicator of the flaw in population-based and demographic measures of *woredas*. Taken together, these data do not prove that new *woredas* are more likely to emerge in states with expanding populations. In other words, the trend doesn't provide strong support to the generally held view of a direct relationship between increased population and local government creation.

According to the 2007 Population Census, the average population size of a *wore-*

da is about 173,000^[3]. However, the same census reveals that the average population size of *woredas* in Gambella is less than 24, 000, which is the lowest average among all states^[4]. Based on 2007 population census, the average population size of *woredas* in Oromia is a little more than 150,000, which is below the national average.^[5] Similarly, the average population size of *woredas* in the SNNPR is about 124,000, still far below the national average.^[6]

The average population of *woredas* is now 100, 0000. Despite the addition of 250 new *woredas* over the last two decades, Ethiopia's population per *woreda* has increased slightly from about 90,900 in 1991 to 100,000 in 2012. Similarly, it can be observed that physical size has not been taken into consideration. Tigray has 53 *woredas* while Somali, which is almost five times the size of Tigray, has only 54. Also, Amhara, almost two-third of the size of Somali, has about 170 *woredas*.

The analysis indicates that, beyond population threshold, the Ethiopian Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper provides no other criteria to define a *woreda*. The analysis also indicates that regional legislations regarding formation of new *woredas* stipulate no specific demographic criteria. The results further support the contention that although many *woredas* were split and population size was claimed to be considered, there is no evidence to suggest that the new *woredas* were formed to correspond with economic capacity.

The Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme (SD-PRP) proposed a likelihood of re-demarcation of local government boundaries

3 In Ethiopia, 2007 Population and Housing Census, *woredas* vary in population from Dima, with 7000 inhabitants, in Gambella, to Awubere, with 339,000 in Somali Regional state(2007 Population and Housing Census Results, FDRE Population Census Commission,2008)

4 In Gambella, according to 2007 Population and Housing Census, *woredas* vary in population from Dima, with 7000 inhabitants, to Godere, with 38,763 inhabitants. The average population size of *woredas* in Gambella is 23,379 (2007 Population and Housing Census Results, FDRE Population Census Commission,2008)

5 In Oromia, 2007 Population and Housing Census, *woredas* vary in population from Dedo, with 290,450 inhabitants, in Jimma zone, to Sendefa, the smallest, with 10,750, in North Shewa zone (2007 Population and Housing Census Results, FDRE Population Census Commission,2008)

6 In SNNPR, population from Borecha, with 236,341 inhabitants in Sidama Zone to Bero, the smallest, with 12,239 in Benchi Maji Zone (2007 Population and Housing Census Results, FDRE Population Census Commission,2008)

(MoFED: 2002: IV and 40). With respect to scale economies, these policy documents presented neither conceptual nor concrete explanation on either the meaning or lack of viable local jurisdictions. They simply hint, as indicated above, that boundaries of local government could be re-examined on the basis of viability and to accommodate shifting demographic patterns. But so far no practical measure has been taken with regard to such proposal as no full scale re-demarcation exercise has been witnessed. Hence, it can be said that, thus far, the proposal has not gained ascendancy and no linkages have been sought between local government creation and economic viability. In other words, although *woredas* were officially acknowledged to be re-examined on the basis of population growth and economic viability, no such revision has taken place yet.

The other observation to make from the findings of this study is that due to a substantial increase in the scale of local government, *woredas* are relatively large. In the beginning of the 20th century, there were 550 *woredas* comprising an overall population of just over 50 million people. A slow paced but steady process of creation resulted in a lift to 801 *woredas* in 2012 while the overall population had risen to nearly 85 million people⁷. Indeed, the number of *woredas* has increased since then and so has the population. Yet, the extent of the increase is not consistently related to population. Ethiopia's very high population growth rate means that its population-*woreda* ratio is still higher today than it was in the late 1990s. Yet, there is little evidence from the practice that there is any relationship between population and the number of *woredas*. In other words, there is a significant gap in the average number of *woredas* as a ratio of the population. Therefore, it is clear that *woredas* have increased not only in number but also in their population. However, although a significant demographic shift has occurred over the years, the study does not prove that there is an apparent relationship between population growth and the number of *woredas*. This study inferred that the preferred method for dealing with demographic increase was simply permitting

7 According to a projected estimate by the Central Statistical Agency (CSA) based on the 2012 Inter-Censal Population Survey (ICPS), the population size in 2013 has reached 85.89 million.

the existing *kebele* population to expand. Contrary to what one could be tempted to assume, increasing population resulted in densely populated *woredas*, which meant larger *woredas* rather than more of them.

Taken together, these findings do not promote the contemplation that new *woredas* are more likely to emerge in states with expanding populations. It follows, therefore, that the issue of “numerical significance” could not be the sole criterion involved in the creation of *woredas*. Indeed, the study indicates that there was no strict reference to the underlying principle in the official account. Consequently, it is certainly possible to argue that while important, the change in demographics is not sufficient to explain the differences. One cannot, therefore, assume that *woreda* creation depends on the size of population. The evidence indicates the appliance of population threshold has a number of practical flaws. Many *woredas* don’t meet the prescribed population criteria. This does not mean that in some instances, the system had not defined an area and population which is not too large to handle nor too small to be ineffective. The tendency, therefore, was for *woreda* to grow to well beyond the population of 100,000, a tendency further intensified in areas experiencing rapid demographic growth. There could be *woredas* with population fewer than the statutory 100,000 but usually there were significantly many with more population than the stipulated figure. Eventually, most *woredas* came to be thought of as territorial rather than demographic. The findings, then, support the contention that *woredas* in official discourse thus became mere units of territorial account bearing little relation to actual population.

In short, it can be asserted that as long as *woreda* population is not redefined periodically, there is no way to preserve its originally demographic character. Ironically, however, the findings of this study demonstrate that *woreda* boundaries were seldom altered, for that would have introduced a measure of unwanted instability into the spatial structures of local society. In addition, the findings suggest that another issue was administrative efficiency: it was simpler for a government to repeatedly use the same boundaries rather than redraw them on the basis of population. It is evident, therefore, that new provisions are necessary to deal with recent developments. This study suggests that the demographic provision need to be updated to suit present situations.

1.3 Ethnic Diversity and the Nature of Local Governments

As stressed previously, there is a compelling evidence that population size is not the sole consideration in local government creation. It is to be noted that the consideration is also affected by cultural or linguistic distinctiveness, distinct styles of life and territorial concentration. Indeed, the emergence of *liyu woredas* and *liyu zones* has been one of the underlying features of local government restructuring over the last 20 years. These units have been established in five of the nine regions in the Federation. Of the five regions, SNNPR has the largest number of *liyu zones* and *liyu woredas* (14 *liyu zones* and five *liyu woredas*). Afar has one *liyu woreda*, Amhara has three *liyu zones* and one *liyu woreda*⁸, Gambella has three *liyu zones* and one *liyu woreda* and Benishangul has two *liyu woredas*.

The Regional Constitutions contain two sets of principles that send mixed messages regarding the constitutional position of these ethnic-based local governments. The Afar, Amhara, and Gambella Regional Constitutions distinctively indicate the ethnic groups for which a *liyu zone* or a *liyu woreda* is recognized (ARS Constitution (2001) Art. 73 (1), AfRS Constitution (2001), GRS Constitution (2001) Art. 77 (1)). However, the regional constitutions of SNNPR and Benishangul-Gumuz provide only for the establishment of a *liyu zone* and a *liyu woreda* without specifying the ethnic groups for which it is to be established (SNNPR Constitution (2001) Art. 80 (1), BGRS Constitution (2001) Art 74(1)).

While this study does not firmly establish that local governments are determined by ethnically defined distinctions, it does, however, suggest that the more diverse the state is, the greater the probability that *liyu woredas* or *liyu zones* will be formed, confirming a widely held belief about the impact of ethnicity. There is evidence, of course, of an ongoing process of separation along ethnic lines and this has been observed in some regions and is most evident in the SNNPR where the debates regarding the creation of local government are mostly rooted in ethnic grounds, and in geography and language.

Ethnicity has, therefore, been a re-occurring feature, overtly and covertly, in the

8 The question Kimant people for separate administration has also been recognized; increasing the number of nationality based local government in the Region to five.

local government creation exercises in Ethiopia. Hence, it can be argued that while the description of ethnicity is problematized to some extent, the prioritization of ethnicity over any other criteria in the creation of local government continues. Nowhere have these trends been more prevalent than in the SNNPR. However, it is important to note that the ethnic dimension of local government creation has not been entirely straightforward. The practice shows that it was defined differently for different groups, depending on the political mobilization of the group. According to this view, the argument that ethnicity necessarily entails creation of local government seems vastly overstated.

In this regard, the lack of lucid constitutional direction has made it uncertain whether local governments are made the loci of ethnic self-rule in states. This arguably resulted in the states' discretion to decide on to whom to grant local governments.

1.4 The Nature of Local Government Boundaries

As indicated in a previous section, although the FDRE Constitution does at least refer to an option for the creation of a new layer of governance, at the regional level, it does not specify what those boundaries would be. The FDRE Constitution provides only for state border changes. Art 48(1) states that "All State border disputes shall be settled by agreement of the concerned States". It further states that "where the concerned States fail to reach agreement, the House of the Federation shall decide such disputes on the basis of settlement patterns and the wishes of the peoples concerned" (*Ibid*). According to Art 48(2), "The House of Federation shall, within a period of two years, render a final decision on a dispute submitted to it pursuant to sub-Article 1 of this Article".

In brief, what should be clear from existing provisions in the FDRE Constitution is that no procedures governing the demarcation of local government exist. There is also no fixed criterion stipulated for demarcation. It can, therefore, be stated that the FDRE Constitution does not provide how boundaries between local governments may be changed, how new boundaries may be founded or old units

From the practice, it is clear that there has been no consistent pattern in the demarcation of local government boundaries. Although the different patterns used in each region are complex and contain many sometimes overlapping elements, they can be conveniently classified into two general types. Accordingly, the practices of two regions, Oromia and SNNPR, hints that two distinct, if not contrasting, principles were followed. In view of that, the SNNPR is a good example of how ethnicity was implicated in the demarcation. The practice reveals that the demarcation of boundaries of local governments in the SNNPR was effected along clearly recognizable lines of ethnicity. Today, a large number of local governments in the SNNPR are organized on the basis of a shared cultural identity, although there are exceptions and, in the last few years, concerns of administrative convenience and development have also been factored into the formation of new local governments. The whole SNNPR region was divided into 21 so-called *liyu woredas* and zones, of which six were named on an ethnic basis. In 2011, four *liyu woredas* (Amaro, Burji, Derashe, and Konso) were merged together into single zone called ‘*Segen*’ Zone (Interview, Ato Lema Genzume, Speaker of Council of Nationalities, Jan. 24, 2015).

Consider the insistent demands made by several delegations from the SNNPR. Kucha’s attempt for separation demonstrates how historical and ethnic arguments and a new political discourse of democracy and development mingled to produce a highly strong combination that still resonates in local demand for separate district. One respondent believes that if they were able to have authority over their own districts, they would receive services more efficiently and effectively. In explaining this, one of the delegations entrusted to voice the demands of the Kucha has mentioned, “We are marginalized in terms of service delivery and development. To remedy this situation, our area should be upgraded to a district” (Interview, an elder, Jan. 30, 2015). One of the greatest fears of the Kucha is assimilation into Gamo whereby it is feared that such assimilation might lead to the extinction of their culture and language (see *Addis Admas* Newsletter, December 28, 2014).

A similar pattern can be seen in Loma as well. Delegations of 11 *kebeles* from Loma visited the House of Federation asking to become a district. And once again, the solution is seen only in terms of creation of a new district. For instance, a key informant in the Council of Nationalities noted told the researcher that the creation of Loma District is technically justified as it was very cumbersome to administer the area due to the long distances, and in addition, that they are populous enough to form a district. (Interview, a member of the Council of Nationalities, Feb. 4, 2015).

In my interview with a member of the Regional Parliament of Oromia, in the Region, it is, on the other hand, taken for granted that local government boundaries were drawn for political convenience and were treated as mere administrative expediency. From this perspective, the demarcation of local government is seen as administrative expediency, without any particular ethnic significance or ethnic justification. An informant explained that local government boundaries are created purely for administrative convenience and the delivery of socio-economic services by the government (Interview, member of the Regional Council and also member of the ruling party, March 15, 2015). According to another informant from the Regional Chief Executive:

The levels of political manipulation or bias are very low, which suggest that the demarcation process was politically neutral to a great degree. The most likely reasons for this are that there was a very high level of transparency throughout, and extensive efforts to involve local people to give their inputs to the process. As a result, there has been relatively little controversy over the process as a whole (Interview, member of the Regional Executive Body, Feb 25, 2015)

In an interview with a top official of the Oromia Regional State, it is learned that *woredas* in Oromia were grossly unequal from their inception, though these disparities can, to a certain extent, be justified by considerations of geographical criteria. However, the demarcation process in Oromia was impaired by a number of other issues such as the quality of the population data used and the interests and even political motivations of the bureaucrats at different levels.

In most of the interviews, senior officials of the *woreda* council and the *woreda* chief executives do not know the exact limits of their boundaries. The boundaries of *woredas* were based on physical features such as rivers, ridges of mountains, hills, lakes and trees (Interview, a member of the Regional Executive Body, Feb 25, 2015).

According to reports by the *woreda* officials, when the new Chewaka *Woreda* was carved at the end of 2003 as a resettlement area originally in Bedele *Woreda*, the rationale proffered was administrative convenience (Interview, Ato Ame Duri, Chief, Chewaka *Woreda* Administration, Feb 18, 2015; Ato Teklu, Mayor, Bedele Town, Feb 19, 2015). The partition from Bedele *Woreda* was meant to facilitate the independent development and streamline the administration of Chewaka (Interview, Ato Arega Shigut, Chief, *woreda* administration, Feb. 20, 2015). However, it seems likely that the decision has also taken into consideration the religious and cultural divergence of the settlers, in addition to political necessity. The evidence points toward the fact that, in Oromia, there is no clear ethnically contrived pattern or Oromia has no special arrangement for minority ethnic groups. It would not be possible, however, to conclude that purely technocratic considerations - administrative and geographical issues alone - were employed in the demarcation of the boundaries of new local governments.

It is obvious from the above that the two regional experiments provide evidence to the widely held view that the objective of local government creation has significant implications for the practice and law of boundary demarcation. As noted above, the experience indicates that the basis of demarcation was neither purely ethnic in character nor simply geographic. It was rather an interplay between the two. One general implication of this is that there are limitations to understanding boundary demarcation in Ethiopia solely within the paradigm of ethnic politics.

In almost all instances, *woredas* are defined commonly by list of *kebeles* subordinate to them. Accordingly, *woreda* boundaries are defined regularly by counting the number of *kebeles* included in each *woreda*. The assessment also indicates that each *woreda* is made up of a varying number of *kebeles*. As a result, there is significant variation in the size and geographical profile of existing *woredas*. The

practice confirms that regularly *woredas* were simply named. Indeed, most *woredas* carry the nomenclature given to them during the old imperial and communist periods. In some cases, *woredas* are numbered in a series in each zone.

As already indicated, *kebeles* are currently the lowest level of formally recognised local government administration in Ethiopia. Following the *Derg* practice, they were often numbered rather than named; they were, within individual *woredas*, numbered consecutively. The study indicates that, very occasionally, the numbering would start all over in each *woreda* so that *kebeles* had to be identified by *woreda* and number rather than by number alone.

The distribution of these *kebeles* across *woredas* is far from uniform. Indeed, since *woredas* were not demarcated principally on the basis of population (though there were certain demographic minimums that had to be satisfied), there is no ground to expect *woredas* to have the same number of *kebeles*. In other words, just as zones did not boast the same number of *woredas*, neither did the *woredas*, despite their demographic definition of 100, 000 population, have exactly the same size of *kebeles*.

The data indicate that the number of *kebeles* in a *woreda* could vary from two to six, the average being four, while the number of *woredas* in a zone could range between five and 15, the average being around 10. *Kebeles* were used more as rough indicators for *woredas* within a zone than as precisely defined units.

The practice indicates that the creation of new *woredas* in Ethiopia may not involve demarcating new boundaries but entails ‘promoting’ one or more of a *woreda*’s constituent units (*kebeles*) to the *woreda* status. This demonstrates that *woredas* in Ethiopia only exist by virtue of the list of *kebeles* that they encompass. Accordingly, the boundary of *woredas* is determined by a list of *kebeles* rather than a demarcated boundary. Therefore, boundaries of *woredas* could hardly be understood without reference to the list of *kebeles*.

Conclusion

The brief comparative evidence suggests that a set of criteria for creation and demarcation of local government boundaries should be decided and laid down by

law. The comparative evidence also suggests that there is more recognition now of the need for independent boundary commissions staffed by non-partisan civil servants.

The FDRE Constitution acknowledges the importance of decentralization, but offers few specifics regarding local government. It has been shown that the FDRE Constitution left the creation of local governments within the powers of each region. An argument can, therefore, be made that one essential decision in local matters, the creation of local government, has been reserved for the nine regions and the two City Administrations. But this provision does not go far enough. There is nothing in the constitution to suggest how many local governments there should be, or how they should be created and their boundaries are demarcated.

In addition, the laws governing local government do not adequately define mechanisms envisaged for consulting and involving the communities in matters of local boundary demarcation. Indeed, political officials tend to construe the correlation between demographic size and *woreda* creation. Accordingly, demographic size is the prized instrument to “officialize” *woreda* creation. One of the lines of criticism of this study is a denial of any link to the demographic size or on the question of how demography could easily be used to justify local government creation. In addition, the study does not establish direct correlation between the number of local governments and ethnic diversity. Substantively, three findings deserve a mention. First, the ethnic arguments are supported in this exploratory analysis only in the sense that demand for new local governments is most likely to come about in ethnically diverse areas. Second, demographic variables are also significant only in the sense that controlling for the other effects, the most densely populated regions have created more *woredas* than their sparsely populated counterparts. Contrary to the dominant rhetoric, population size does not contribute to explaining the creation of *woredas*. Third, similar to the lack of systematic relationship with population size, this study also does not find any significant relationship between the level of ethnic diversity and the extent of *woreda* creation.

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