



## Post-1991 decentralization experiments in the Gambella Peoples National Regional State, Ethiopia: Opportunities and challenges

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### Abstract

The Gambella Region's post-1991 decentralization trials were examined in this essay, with an emphasis on evaluating and recognizing the region's opportunities and difficulties. According to the study's findings, the main advantages were self-rule, political pluralism, and socioeconomic progress; on the other hand, the main challenges include inter/intra-ethnic tensions, capacity constraints locally, pervasive corruption, and insufficient fiscal authority. Based on primary and secondary data from interviews, focus groups, observations, and document reviews, the study was fully qualitative in nature.

**Keywords:** Decentralization, indigenous, ethnic group, self- rule and Gambella

### Introduction

Decentralization emerged as the preferred form of governance in the last decade of the 20th century in the most developing countries. This is partly due to its impacts on the state's political, administrative, and fiscal policies (Nina, 2009) <sup>[15]</sup>. More importantly, it enhances and promotes economic development and good governance (Stern & Dickson, 2007) <sup>[10]</sup>. Decentralized governance also provides favorable atmospheres for stakeholders to promote peace, democracy and development (Kauzy J, 2005). Decentralization arguments are also linked in one way or another with a mechanism for inclusive and responsive collective decision making, bringing public sectors closer to the peoples. These in turn, improve the effectiveness, accountability, and service delivery of the government (World Bank, 2021). Similarly, decentralization reduces the political monopolization of the public sector by the ruling party as it promotes political plurality and political competition by establishing subnational political space (World Bank, 2021). Like any other system, the motive behind decentralization is a context based varies from country to country (Boko, 2002).

For instance, decentralization was adopted with the aims to reduce the secessionist tendency of some portion of the state in Indonesia. Whereas, in Sri Lanka it was embraced to mitigates the ethnic conflicts (Cherly, 2006) <sup>[6]</sup>. In the context of Ethiopia, decentralization was adopted to address the governance crisis owing to extreme centralization, state failure to deliver basic services and accommodating politically mobilized ethno national groups (Assefa, 2019; Alem, 2012, Asnake, 2009) <sup>[4]</sup>. Thus, Ethiopia underwent through a serious politico-administrative reform that established nine constituent units ethnically based following the demise of the military junta in 1991. This instance came to be known as the first phase of the decentralization with the specifics aims to contain ethnic conflicts (Asnake, 2009) <sup>[4]</sup>. The second phase of the decentralization come in to force and established local government below the states primarily to enhance public participation and bring the government closer to the local level (Assefa, 2019; Besfat, 2021; Zemelak, 2008). In nutshell, the Gambella Regional

State, one among the nine constituent units established with the purpose of accommodating politically mobilized ethnic groups of the Nuer, Anywaa, Majang, Opo and Komo (Abraham, 2003).

Likewise, Article 47 of the FDRE constitution also granted the regions with the substantial powers to institutes another tier of government below the region. It's against this backdrop, that, the Gambella Regional State empowered the three major ethnic groups (Nuer, Anywaa and Majang) with their respective nationality zones (Art. 77(1) GPNRS, 2002 revised constitution). To this end, decentralization experiments in the Gambella Regional State more specifically challenges and opportunities are the central tenets described and analyzed in this article. The study is the product of my field visits in three nationality zones of the region from March- May 2021 and some part of it are excerpts from my unpublished MA thesis at the Ethiopian Civil Service University in 2018. Although, some literatures on decentralization in the Gambella region reveal some significant achievements. Yet, still the region faced myriad obstacles/gaps in the implementation process. As such several scholarly works had been carried out among these. A study conducted by Tegegne G/Egziaber & Abraham G/sellasie (2014) was on the assessment of the implementation of woreda decentralization in the Gambella People's National Regional State: The case of Abobo and Lare Woreda. Also, Abebe Berahnu (2015) researched the process of decentralization in Gambella Region: A comparative study of Godere and Mengeshi Woredas in Majang Zone. Similarly, the author MA thesis was on the Challenges of Implementing Decentralization in the Nuer Nationality Zone of the Gambella Regional State. Likewise, Sommer (2020) study on Ethiopian Federalism Seen from the Regional State of Gambella: A Perspective from the Border Region. More recently, Fikre Kura (2021) is worth to mention on his study entitled The Practices and Challenges of the Regional Policy Making in Ethiopian Federation: The case of the Gambella Peoples National Regional State.

However, these works fall short of a comprehensive analysis of the opportunities and challenges of post- 1991

decentralization in the region. Reflections upon these themes are not coherent. They are only found fragmented while the focus of these studies is among others assessing the legal and institutional frameworks, powers and responsibilities of the local government, public participation and provision of the basic services to local community. Thus, there is a gap in a focused and comprehensive analysis of decentralization experiment notably challenges and opportunities. Therefore, the need to investigate the opportunities and challenges of the decentralization experiment in the Gambella Regional State is instigated by the absence of a focused and comprehensive analysis of the issues. By doing so, this paper will contribute its fair share in bridging the gaps in the existing bodies of knowledge. It will also serve as input to explore viable strategies to address the gaps in the implementation of the decentralized system in the Gambella Regional State.

## Reviews of the Related Literatures

### 1. Understanding Decentralization

Decentralization is an interdisciplinary notion that implies distinct goals in several fields of study. It is described as the transfer of powers and duties from the federal government to local authorities, enabling the communities to make their own decisions (USAID 2006) <sup>[18]</sup>. Decentralization can be broadly divided into four categories: political, administrative, fiscal, and economic. Because of their overlapping roles, these elements are also complimentary to one another (Abraham 2011; Paul 2004) <sup>[2]</sup>. Decentralization is an interdisciplinary concept that suggests different objectives in multiple academic disciplines. It is defined as the transfer of responsibilities and functions from the federal government to local authorities, allowing the communities to exercise self-governance (USAID 2006) <sup>[18]</sup>. Political, administrative, fiscal, and economic decentralization can be widely categorized. These components complement each other as well because of their overlapping roles (Abraham 2011; Paul 2004). Fiscal decentralization is the process of assigning subnational levels of government the authority to determine their own sources of income and expenses in response to persistent fiscal imbalances. The most common method of correcting this budgetary imbalance—both vertical and horizontal—is through intergovernmental fiscal transfer (Abraham 2011; Paul 2004) <sup>[2]</sup>. Economic Decentralization through economic liberalization and market growth, the government transferred powers and responsibilities from the public to private sectors in the most comprehensive way possible (Abraham 2011; Paul 2004) <sup>[2]</sup>. Administrative decentralization is the process of redistributing authority and accountability to lower levels of government in an effort to enhance the provision of fundamental public services. It plays important responsibilities in the administration and management of financial, human, and material resources as well. Three further categories of administrative decentralization exist: de concentration, delegating, and devolution. De concentration is the term used to describe the transfer of certain functions from the national level of government to the subnational level through its representation, without a change in authority. Delegation is the transfer of responsibilities from the federal government to local government, allowing them to manage their own public services and make decisions on their own with little interference from the federal government. According to

Abraham (2011) <sup>[2]</sup> and Paul (2004), devolution is the general transfer of development strategies from the national level of government to the subnational level, wherein the latter is tasked with budgeting, planning, and resource mobilization in addition to implementation.

### Research Methodology

The sort of research used in this study is qualitative. Its focus is on social event analysis and narrative, as well as problem-solving. Qualitative research methods including explanatory and analytical approaches will be used, depending on the goals of the study. The former includes case studies, which are a combination of several information sources, including participant and direct observation, documents, key informant interviews, and archive data. Both primary and secondary data are used exclusively in this investigation. The former is acquired via focus groups, interviews, and observation. On the other hand, the latter are gathered through the examination of pertinent published and unpublished materials, including books, journals, newspapers, reports, theses, and legal documents (such as proclamations and constitutions). Thus, in order to accomplish and meet the goals of this research. This study uses a number of techniques, such as a purposive sample for participant selection, to guarantee the participation of many stakeholders. In light of this, the study included 30 participants who are knowledgeable about the opportunities and difficulties associated with the decentralized government system in the Gambella Region following 1991. Fifteen individuals have been chosen from among government officials representing the Region, Zone, Wereda, and Kebele Administrative Council. An additional fifteen participants are utilized for focus group discussions (FGD). These participants are from various demographic groups, including men, women, and youth who dwell locally in the corresponding administrative structures.

### Results and Discussion

Drawing on the aforementioned argument, this study poses two main questions: What are the opportunities and difficulties associated with decentralized government in the Gambella Regional State after 1991? Purposive and snowball sampling were used by the researchers to gather qualitative data from the Gambella town and its administrative structures (Zone, Wereda, and Kebele) in order to address these topics. In doing so, five focus group discussions (FGDs) and fifteen interviews were carried out. In addition to this, a triangulation of the data was carried out by examining pertinent materials from electronic sources, books, journals, newspapers, reports, theses, and legal documents (such as proclamations and constitutions). Thematic analysis was also employed to examine them, and a portion of the work was taken from my unpublished master's thesis, which I presented at Ethiopian Civil Service University prior to its publication as an academic piece.

#### 1. Brief Overview of the Decentralization in Ethiopia

In 1991, with the toppling of the Derg military administration by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic front (EPRDF), decentralization emerged as a form of governance in Ethiopia. Therefore, during the national conference held in July 1991, the newly elected ruling party approved the Transitional Period Charter, which would act as the country's constitution until the 1995

constitution was ratified. The right to self-determination of ethnic groups, including the establishment of their own self-government entities beginning at the Wereda level, is recognized by both the 1995 constitution and the Charter (Zemelak, 2015). In turn, the two tiers of government—the central (federal) and sub-national (state) governments—were established as a result of the recently enacted federal state system on ethnic basis. Seemingly, two city administrations and nine ethnically oriented subnational entities were founded. The decentralization effort is said to have begun during this time. The second stage started when the central government approved the plan for reducing poverty (Zemelak, 2015).

Regarding this, Article 39(3) of the FDRE constitution gives the regional states the authority to create a new sub-national territorial unit in order to accommodate ethnic minorities living within their borders. They were also given the authority to strengthen local government, primarily with the goal of increasing community involvement in the creation of policies. These were carried out as a precautionary measure to ensure that policies, such as the initiative to reduce poverty at the local level, are carried out. Zemelak (2015) states that the creation of wereda local government structures served as a means of guaranteeing the execution of the poverty reduction program in rural areas.

Pursuant to these perspectives, during the 1991 Transitional Period Charter and later 1995 FDRE constitutions, the Gambella Peoples National Regional State arose as the autonomous self-government during the first phase of Ethiopia's decentralization process. Article 47 of the FDRE constitution grants all regional states that make up the Ethiopian federation the equal rights, powers, and functions to manage their own affairs within their respective jurisdictions. This includes the theoretical right to establish an additional layer of self-government beneath the region, though this is practically unfeasible.

Accordingly, the Gambella regional state is administratively divided into the Nuer, Anywaa, and Majang nationality zones (Article 77(1)). In 2002, the GPNRS updated its constitution. Following that, proclamations established one special wereda (Itang) and one municipal administration (Gambella town). This demonstrated that the current decentralization experiment had done well in reaching a few of its declared objectives. That being said, a number of obstacles are impeding its execution. The present study aims to investigate and ascertain the potential advantages and obstacles associated with the implementation of decentralization within the GPNRS.

## 2. Decentralization and Opportunities in the GPNRS

### 2.1 Right to self-rule

According to Article 47(a–e) of the GPNRS, 2002 revised constitution, it is fairly evident that the goal of the foundation of the self-autonomous regional state of the GPNRS is to uphold and defend the rights of the indigenous ethnic groups, specifically the Komo, Anywaa, Majang, Nuer, and Opou. This includes each ethnic group's ability to exercise its right to self-government, which manifests itself most strikingly in the form of region, zone, wereda, and kebele autonomy (Zemelak, 2015). In order to achieve this goal—which includes raising local communities' standards of living through better service delivery and increased public involvement in governance—ethnic-based local administrative units were created throughout the region

(Ibid). In keeping with the DLDP's primary approach for ending poverty, it also aimed to preserve the lives of the impoverished rural populations from extreme poverty (Lul, 2018)<sup>[14]</sup>.

As a result, the data gathered accurately reveals what is actually occurring on the ground. Empirically, the Gambella region in particular and Ethiopia's post-1991 political transition as a whole should be viewed as the turning moments that resulted in the creation of Ethiopia's highly atypical decentralized government system today. An informant that was interviewed brought this up. He went on to say that one of the main promises of the new ruling coalition was to address the subject of nations, or multiethnic communities, which has been around since the imperial era. In 1995, the current FDRE constitution was adopted by the newly elected government, which came as no surprise. According to Vander Beken (2014), the constitution also granted all Ethiopian ethnic groups a broad right to ethnically based decentralization, which would allow them to exercise their right to self-determination including up to secession (Article 39 of the FDRE Constitution).

In light of this, the FDRE constitution clearly guaranteed the right to self-determination, including the ability to secede (Article 39). As a result, according to Article 47 of the FDRE constitution, nine regional states with an emphasis on ethnicity were established these include; Afar, Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, Harari, Somalia, Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz, and the Southern area. Nevertheless, as titular ethnic groups are only represented in the first six regions, whose regional names correspond to the names of the biggest ethnic group, the establishment of these ethnically based regional republics is insufficient to fulfill the interests of all ethnic groups. In this instance, numerous ethnic groups lacking their own region were permitted to establish their own region, and those that did not meet the requirements for regional status were to establish other forms of self-government appropriate to their status, such as a zone, wereda, or kebele, in accordance with the constitution, with the exception of the six regions stated above (Vander Beken, 2012)<sup>[19]</sup>.

In order to put this into practice, the federal constitution gives the regional states the freedom to adopt their own constitutions, giving them significant authority to establish their own institutions and local governments as a means of defending the rights of these ethnic communities (Vander Beken, 2014). The regional state of the Gambella people was established in response to this constitutional duty. Evidently, one informant who was interviewed—a cadre and prominent politician in the area since the EPRDF's founding—said that the recognition of the ethnic right to self-determination, especially in the form of ethnic self-government, is one of the good things that came about as a result of the political shift in 1991. The Gambella People's Regional State would not have existed in the absence of this clause.

Thereby, the 1991 political reorganization with the ethnic-based federal model led by the EPRDF is what led to the founding of the GPNRS as the home of five ethnic groups (Nuer, Anuak, Majang, Opou, and Komo). The aforementioned five ethnic groups' rights and interests were intended to be promoted and safeguarded by creating the region. But the informant also said that other subnational minorities were already present in various areas, and the Gambella region was not an exception to this rule.

In an effort to address these remedies, the EPRDF enacted a law allowing the area to establish a second tier of government to handle these issues at the sub-regional level. In this context, a different informant further described how the Gambella regional state empowered local communities to engage in local governance, thereby further decentralizing its powers with the ultimate goal of strengthening and improving the efficient and effective provision of public services. Without considering ethnic identity, the Gambella Regional Administration established two zonal administrations—Zone One (1) and Zone Two (2)—for administrative ease in order to fulfill this aim. Abobo, Gog, Jor, Dimma, and Majang nationality zone were included in the latter, while the Gambella city administration, Itang special wereda, Great Akobo (now Akobo and Wonthoa wereda), and Great Jekow (now Lare, Makuey, and Jekow) were included in the former.

Likewise, he noted that the establishment of these two administrative divisions represents the first step towards implementing the subnational government's mandate to provide improved public services to local communities, as stipulated by the FDRE constitution. Furthermore, some other informants noted that, the establishment of nationality zone administrations for the three largest ethnic groups in the GPNRS—the Nuer, Anuak, and Majang—as well as the granting of kebele to minorities like Opou and Komo, whose population numbers prevented them from owning zones or weredas, is another noteworthy accomplishment of the post-1991 self-government provision in the region (Article 77, 2002 revised GPNRS constitution).

## 2.2 Political pluralism

Ethnic decentralized governance is the model followed by the newly formed self-government units in the region. Gambella People Liberation Front (GPLF), a group dominated by Anywaa, was guaranteed political independence in the area by the federal government's then-ruling coalition party, the EPRDF. Meanwhile, the GPLF's exclusionary policies against other indigenous ethnic groups prevented it from delivering inclusive governance (Dereje, 2006). Political tensions in 1991 were sparked by the GPLF's exclusionary policies, particularly between the Anywaa and the Nuer. In response to a political party that favored one ethnic group over another, the Nuer-based Gambella People Democratic Unity Party (GPDUP) was established right away in order to guarantee their representation in the regional state council and executive (Dereje, 2006). According to the informant who was interviewed, the years after 1991 were marked by an odd kind of political pluralism in the area, whereby political parties based on ethnicity emerged to represent their own ethnic groups. This phenomenon was not evident in the preceding regimes, though it did result in intense conflict and bloodshed (Dereje, 2006).

For example, the GPLF (Anywaa) and GPDUP (Nuer) are the political parties controlled by the respective ethnic groups in the region's first general election in 1995. In this instance, the alliance between the opposing political parties, led by the Anywaa-dominated party, would form the post-election government and share proportionate political power in the state council and regional executive. As a result, one informant claimed that the only effective mechanism that had resolved the ethnic tension between the two ethnic groups vying for regional political control—the Nuer and

Anuak in particular—was the inclusion of the various political parties in the post-1995 government. Up until the 2005 Ethiopian legislative and regional elections, there was a protracted political power struggle in the Gambella Region between the Anywaa, Nuer, and Majang political groups. Despite fierce competition amongst the various political parties, the ruling party has dominated regional elections since 1991. The Gambella People Democratic Unity Movement (GPDUM), the then-ruling party in the region, held an unusual election in 2010 without a rival. This was because the majority of opposition politicians were reluctant to form their own political parties to compete, citing their memories of previous regional election results that showed widespread intimidation, torture, and election-rigging by the ruling regime.

## 2.3 Socio-economic development

The post-1991 decentralization program aims to improve socioeconomic services and physical infrastructures, including clean drinking water, electricity, transportation, communication, health, education, and agricultural development, in order to support or enhance grassroots community local development (Zemelak, 2018). Moreover, under the post-1991 governance system, this principle is enforced by the establishment of sub-national states, such as GPNRS. The post-1991 decentralization program aims to improve socioeconomic services and physical infrastructures, including clean drinking water, electricity, transportation, communication, health, education, and agricultural development, in order to support or enhance local community development (Zemelak, 2018).

Moreover, under the post-1991 governance system, this principle is enforced by the establishment of sub-national states, such as GPNRS. The regional state established village centers in rural areas to expand local development to grassroots communities with the aim of putting these principles into practice (Abraham, 2011)<sup>[2]</sup>. The distribution of the fundamental public services is facilitated by these rural hubs. In order to act as the local development centers for the surrounding villages, the present nationalities zones, wereda, special wereda, and kebele were established. Next, the relevant local administrative units in the GPNRS get the distribution of socio-economic services such roads, schools, health facilities, and so forth. In nutshell, certain interviewees contended that the GPNRS's post-1991 decentralization was effective in enhancing socio-economic services in the majority of local districts, with results comparable to those achieved prior to 1991.

Apart from enhancing the fundamental public services, the post-1991 era also afforded due respect to the social rights of Ethiopia's nations, nationalities, and peoples, including the ability to speak, write, and develop their own languages, to express, develop, and promote their own cultures, and to preserve their own histories as an integral part of their internal aspect of self-determination, as outlined in Article 39 of the FDRE constitution. Empirically, the native ethnic communities that own the GPNRS started learning their own regional dialect as the medium of teaching as early as primary school. Thus, under Article 78 (3(a)) of the GPNRS 2002, revised constitution, local administrative units were also given the authority to choose their official working languages in their respective nationality zones, even though none of the nationality zones had formally launched or exercised such an authority in their respective entity.

Additionally, the FDRE constitution's Article 32, which recognizes citizens' unrestricted right to free movement inside Ethiopian borders, also applies to the peoples of Gambella. This promotes democratic practices. In contrast, before 1991, the native populations residing in the current Gambella region were not allowed to travel freely to other parts of Ethiopia. With the exception of obtaining a travel document to a certain address specified by the state authorities.

However, with the regime change of 1991, citizens started to use their democratic right to unrestricted free movement. Accordingly, an informant also contended that the right to exercise this privilege to the utmost extent possible is another significant achievement of the post 1991 in GPNRS.

### 3. Decentralization and Challenges in the GPNRS

As was previously mentioned, the main objective of the post-1991 decentralization framework is to provide ethnic groups the ability to exercise local self-government, so empowering them. For this reason, the five indigenous ethnic groups recognized in the constitution established the Gambella region as their own autonomous territory. Thus, the region is provided with the required powers and functions to manage its own internal affairs, including creating and carrying out development goals, promoting good governance, and improving local populations' access to vital public services. Unfortunately, the information that was available showed that, for a variety of reasons, the region frequently had little trouble implementing the decentralization that served as the main justification for its foundation. Among these are, for example, conflicts between and within ethnic groups, extensive corruption, insufficient fiscal authority and capacity constraints locally.

#### 3.1 Inter/Intra- Ethnic Conflicts

Ethnic conflicts within and across the regional border are frequently caused by political power struggles, kidnappings and cattle raids, conflicts over vital natural resources such as land and water (Cascao, 2013; Gatluak, 2012) <sup>[12]</sup>. Importantly, since 1991, inter- and intra-ethnic and cross-border conflicts have been the most frequent ethnic conflicts that have posed a serious danger to regional development and governance (Dereje, 2006). Accordingly, the most important of these conflicts is the one involving the dominant ethnic groups, the Nuer and the Anuak. It is an interethnic conflict based on political power struggles, ethnicity, and disputes over citizenship and land between the two ethnic communities (Dereje, 2006). Accordingly, the most important of these conflicts is the one involving the dominant ethnic groups, the Nuer and the Anuak. It is an interethnic conflict rooted on historical factor, power struggles, ethnicity, and disputes over citizenship and land between the two ethnic communities (Dereje, 2006; Jal, 2013).

Analogously, the second primary difficulty of the post-1991 Gambella pertains to the intra-ethnic aspect within the sub-clans of the three principal ethnic groups in the Gambella region: the Anywaa, the Majang, and the Nuer (Dereje, 2006). Thus, after the sub-national administrative divisions were reorganized along ethnic, clan, and sub-clan lines, the informant who was interviewed disclosed that intra-ethnic relationships more frequently turned hostile. However, this tactic is typically used as a means of accommodating the intra-minorities inside local government units, particularly

through the establishment of weredas and kebeles as well as the division of political authority according to clan and sub-clan membership.

Thirdly, the region's post-1991 autonomy is hampered by cross-border warfare. A multitude of factors contributed to the conflict in this dimension, such as the Republic of South Sudan's position on the westernmost point of the regional border, the region's porous border, and insufficient border administration. The Murle and Lou Nuer ethnic groups in South Sudan, for various reasons, used this as a pretext to regularly launch cross-border attacks against the sub-regional districts near the border (Tasew, 2017). Nevertheless, there are other explanations for the cross-border assault by these two ethnic groups on the communities residing in the border region (Gatluak, 2012) <sup>[12]</sup>. The Lou Nuer, on the other hand, are linked to conflicts over range and grazing land with the surrounding Ethiopian communities, which are poorly managed by the state and federal authorities—the latter particularly so, given that their mandate is to protect the international border. For instance, the Murle attack is explained in terms of a primitive way of life that includes the desire to kidnap children and raid cattle (Ibid). Therefore, these kinds of conflicts affect the decentralization initiatives in the region.

#### 3.2 Widespread corruption

As was already mentioned, corruption has evolved into a defining feature of the subnational government structure. Thus, the informant also identifies the causes of the pervasive corruption in local government units as the engagement of the regional political elite in local administration activities. The appointment of the local administrative council, particularly the top administrators of the nationality zones, or wereda, is one way in which this is demonstrated. Article 90(29d) of the GPNRS, 2002 updated constitution assigns the wereda council, which is composed of the directly elected representative of the kebele, to elect the top administrator, speaker, and deputy at the local government, remarkable wereda.

The interviewed informant, however, described the opposite, in spite of the explicit constitutional provision regarding the nomination and appointment of the wereda chief administrator and other members of the wereda administrative council. He went on to say that, in actuality, the majority of the time, the regional elites' interests—particularly those of the regional executive members who represent that specific local government in the regional administrative council—are taken into consideration when choosing the chief administrator of the wereda in the Gambella region.

As a result of these incidents, a favorable environment was created for the regional politicians to pick the chief administrator, who would then advance and defend their political interests in local government. As a result, individuals with political ties and close families were frequently appointed. While the latter upholds and safeguards the powers, the former serves to advance clan/family interests. Local informants, therefore, characterized such a local administrator as the local representative of the regional politicians, with little upward or local accountability. These situations give local administrators the opportunity to misuse monies meant for local development, which is meant to guarantee that local populations receive the most basic public services. Local

decentralization in the region has consequently made pervasive corruption worse, including nepotism and theft by local elites who act more in the interests of the regional elites than the general public.

### 3.3 Local capacities constraint

Regarding local capacities, the FGD participants disclosed that following the devolution of powers, the region's local sub-regional units, such as zones, weredas, and kebele, faced significant hurdles due to the capacity issues of local officials with relation to the decision-making process. As a result, the growth of local institutions is hampered by the low skill levels of the local officials in the GPNRS's sub-regional administrative divisions. The informant determined that the design choices, such as those based on clan and sub-clan, as well as the procedures for local unit representation, were the root causes of the issue with local capacities in the majority of local government units. For example, since 1991, the national and regional governments have adopted an ethnic basis for the decentralization process. The same pattern of the clan/sub-clan way is followed at the sub-regional levels, such as the zonal, wereda, and kebele levels. Since the wereda and kebele are the clan/sub-clan units, the appointment of local officials in this regard represents the clan representation, regardless of the candidate's qualifications, including his or her educational background and other personal characteristics.

Abraham (2011)<sup>[2]</sup> conducted a study which revealed that the low level of development/backwardness in most local administrative units in the region, coupled with the absence of basic services and modern infrastructure such as electricity, clean drinking water, internet access, asphalt roads, and health facilities, were contributing factors to the reluctance of university-educated, skilled youths to seek employment in the zone, wereda, or kebele units in the GPNRS. The primary reason for the ongoing budget deficits in these local government entities is a shortage of qualified professionals (manpower). These frequently have an impact on how development activities are funded and how staff salaries are paid on a regular basis. To this purpose, the available facts identified all the above issues as the key reasons that impeded the capacity development of the local government entities.

### 3.4 Inadequate fiscal sources

Autonomous local government units were established in the subnational states as a result of decentralization beginning in 1991. According to Article 90(2(f) of the Constitution, these local administrative entities are given the authority and responsibility to generate their own funds. Some examples of these funds may include land use tax, sales tax on products, and income from agriculture. Similarly, the nationality zone, wereda, and kebele are local government units in the GPNRS that are solely authorized by the constitution to accept funding for their own operations. Unfortunately, the majority of local government units, most notably wereda, lacked the trained professionals necessary to generate sufficient revenue to support their own expenditure functions. As a result, most local administrative units in the region frequently experienced a persistent fiscal gap or budget deficit. In summary, the informant identified nepotism and bribery as the main drivers of inadequate funding for local governments, citing difficulties related to corruption. The former concerned their relatives who held

administrative positions in local government hiring unskilled workers as tax collectors. The latter involves local administrators using their share of local revenue to retain their political authority by paying the top regional executive members. Furthermore, the evidence that is now available indicates that the local government units' reliance on regional government transfers for funding their capital and ongoing budgets also played a role in the fiscal imbalance or deficit. The population distribution and income disparities among the local units (zone, wereda, and kebele) also lead to the similar situation. For example, the three nations of the Nuer, Anywaa, and Majang find it extremely difficult to meet their own financial obligations as a result of the region's underdevelopment. The reality is that there are insufficient sources of revenue, including property taxes, infrastructure taxes, sales taxes on goods and services, and agricultural income taxes. Thus, the implementation of local decentralization in the region is rendered less functional and ineffectual due to the sub-regional government units' insufficient budgetary and fiscal authority.

### Conclusion

From the discussion above, several reasonable conclusions about this study can be made. According to this viewpoint, the investigation comes to two contradicting conclusions. In the Gambella Region in particular, the post-1991 decentralization experiment on one hand had led to the achievement of some positive aspects in the region, such as political pluralism, ethnic rights to self-rule, socio-economic development, including the right to use one's own language, promote culture, preserve one's own history, and the right to free movement. Other positive aspects included the provision of basic services like health, education, roads, drinking water, electricity, and communication facilities, though at a partial level. These outcomes were comparable to the pre-1991 development in the nation of Ethiopia and the Gambella Region in particular. On the other hand, there are also constraints that thwart the implementation of the program in the region, among these; inter/intra- ethnic conflicts, corruption, capacities constraints and inadequate fiscal power were found to be the critical factors that contributed to the ill implementation of the decentralization in the GPNRS in the post 1991. In this respect, its explicit that decentralization as the system of the governance is not panacea to the entire debacle. In Ethiopia the system was implemented to deals with specifics issues related to overconcentration of the powers, service delivery and accommodation of the ethnic diversity despite the drawback owing to the complexity of the Ethiopia's state. However, the post 1991 decentralization at the country level Ethiopia in general and subnational state of the Gambella regional state in particular is blessing more than a curse taking in to account the potential opportunities derived from the implementations of the decentralized governance in the post 1991. Furthermore, Ethiopia's before the modern decentralized framework its state structure had always been characterized with the monopolization of the state powers in the hand of the few elites and inadequate provision of the basic services. These instances often lead to the mass grievances, discontents of the local communities and eventual popular protests and armed struggle against the regimes in powers. It's this process that had contributed to the realization of the decentralized objectives notably self-government, socio-economics and political spaces to the

previously disenfranchised groups. In sum, the post 1991 decentralization experiments in the Gambella regional state has almost achieved most of its cardinal objectives notwithstanding the constraints in the implementation process.

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