# Strategic planning practices of Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State public organisations in achieving the first Growth and Transformation Plan of the Ethiopian Government

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## Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the strategic planning practices in achieving the first Growth and Transformation Plan of the Ethiopian Government covering the period between 2010/11 and 2014/15 with reference topublic organisations in Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State (BGRS). The study employed a concurrent mixed methods research design where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and used. This study covered six public organisations randomly drawn from 33 public organisations operating in BGRS. Questionnaires, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and archives and document analysis were used to obtain valuable information from public officials. The data generated through the aforesaid means were analysed through Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS), and thematic and content analysis techniques. The findings of the study show that the practice of strategic planning in public organisations operating in BGRS is poor. Public organisations need to design and effectively implement a performance management system (PMS), as an administrative strategy to effectively implement the strategic plans. Furthermore, BGRS Council should appoint managers or leaders for public organisations on merit-based principles beyond individuals' political affiliation.

**Keywords: 1.** Growth and Transformation Plan 2. Benishangul-Gumu 3. Regional State 4. public organisation 5. strategic plan.

## 1. Introduction

To begin with, the ambition to bring about national transformation in the shortest possible time, the government of Ethiopia (GoE) has been working to realise its vision to be one of the middle-income countries by the end of 2025. The vision was set into motion through the formulation of the first Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I) in

2010, as the highest national policy framework. GTP I is a strategic framework developed by the GoE covering the period between 2010/11 and 2014/15; and it was implemented across Ethiopia.

The current changing landscape of economic, political, social and cultural environments worldwide demand responsiveness from governments, organisations and individuals. Many countries are, therefore, reforming public organisations to meet the demands of citizens. This is because public organisations are assumed to be the lifeblood of any government given that the implementation of government policies and strategies is highly dependent on them. More concertedly, public organisations activate sustainable economic development and contributed substantially towardspoverty reduction in the given economy. Toward achieving this purpose, government needs to improve the performance of public organisations to deliver effective and efficient public services for the citizens. However, as Al-Khouri (2010:1) argues, "the ability to achieve and maintain high performance...in [public] organisations is a key challenge facing management today."

In order to have a better understanding pertinent to the results achieved, the challenges faced, and lessons drawn from the implementation of GTP I in general and the contributions (or lack thereof) of Ethiopian public organisations in realising the same plan in particular, an in-depth empirical research must be conducted.

Different authors and institutions approach the concept of strategic plan with some levels of variations. As defined by the Balanced Scorecard Institute (2002 cited inGitonga, 2013:3), "strategic plan is a document used to communicate with the organisations goals, the actions needed to achieve those goals and all of the critical elements developed during the planning exercise". Quoting the researches of West-Burnham *et al.*(1994) and Kraus *et al.* (2006), Tilaye (2010:23) notes that "strategic plans depict the route from the present position to the future desirable position described by the vision and help the organisation to improve its performance by better acquaintance of the environment."

Considering the above arguments, the GoE has been directing public organisations to design strategic plans as tools to implement policies, programmes and plans such as GTP I. In order to deliver efficient, effective and quality public services to the citizens, which in turn may lead to the full accomplishments of the pre-set goals and objectives of GTP I, the GoE has emphasised the preparation of a comprehensive, well-designed and workable strategic plan by the government during the GTP I period.

However, in many cases, a good strategic plan may not be fully implemented due to various barriers, such as vision barrier, people barrier, resource barrier, and management barrier (Tilaye, 2010:24). Hence, for the effective execution of strategic plans formulated by public organisations, it is expected to, *inter alia*, allocate adequate

resources, implement initiatives (programmes and projects), monitor and evaluate achievements against the targets, and report the outcomes thereof.

Regardless of the contribution of public organisations in the development of a given nation, there has been surprisingly little research on the practices of strategic planning in the context of public organisations in Ethiopia. It is this lack of empirical studies that provides the point of departure for this study.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was to examine the strategic planning practices of Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State public organisations during the first Growth and Transformation Plan of Ethiopia (2010/11-2014/15).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1Research Design

The study deployed a mixed methods research design to better achieve the study objectives. Among the six well-known mixed methods models or strategies, that are, sequential explanatory, sequential exploratory, sequential transformative, concurrent triangulation, concurrent embedded, and concurrent transformative, a concurrent triangulation strategy is chosen for this study.Mixed methods research integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches so that the overall strength of the study is greater than either when one uses qualitative or quantitative approach (Creswell, 2009:4).

### 3.2 Study population

The unit of analysis of this study waspublic organisations operating in BGRS at regional bureau level. The reason for limiting the sample frame to those bureaus operating at regional level was to enhance the validity and generalisability of the findings of the study. The population of the study constituted of two target groups: (a) public organisations found working at regional levelin BGRS ($N_1$=33); and (b) all permanent civil servants working in sample public organisations ($N_2$=684) including managers/function process owners).

### 3.4 Sampling technique

The study at hand appliedprobability sampling design and census method.Simple random sampling method was used to obtain samples from public organisations for the study. Among the 33 public organisations, six public organisations (*see* Table 1)were selected through simple random sampling techniques, particularlythrough the lottery system.

Function-process owners, who are in charge of coordinating and facilitating the day-to-day activities of public organisations as per the mandates given formed the other

respondent group of this study. There are 63 function-process owners working within sampled public organisations. A total of 13 (20%) function-process owners were selected by simple random sampling method. The specific number of function-process owners selected from each public organisation was allocated proportionally based on the respective number of function-process owners working in each public organisation.

**Table 1: Public organizations, number of function-process owners and sample size**

| S/n | Sample public organizations | Total number of function-process Owners | Sample Size |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1 | Agriculture and Rural Development Bureau | 12 | 2 |
| 2 | Trade, Industry and Transport Bureau | 13 | 3 |
| 3 | Education Bureau | 11 | 2 |
| 4 | Health Bureau | 11 | 2 |
| 5 | Water, Mining and Energy Resources Development Bureau | 9 | 2 |
| 6 | Rural Road Authority | 7 | 2 |
| | **Total** | **63** | **13** |

Table 2 condenses the list of sample public organisations, total number of front-line employees working in each sample public organisation and the number of samples (sample size) taken from each target population.

**Table 2: Sample public organisations, target population and sample size**

| S/n | Sample public organisations | Total number of front-line employees | Sample Size |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1 | Agriculture & Rural Development Bureau | 134 | 27 |
| 2 | Trade, Industry & Transport Bureau | 105 | 21 |
| 3 | Education Bureau | 60 | 12 |
| 4 | Health Bureau | 135 | 27 |
| 5 | Water, Mining & Energy Resources Development Bureau | 125 | 25 |
| 6 | Rural Road Authority | 48 | 10 |
| | **Total** | **607** | **122** |

*Source: Author's own construct (2021)*

For the key informants' interviews, all managers and middle level managers (deputy managers and directors) who are working within the sampled public organisations were taken into consideration for the interviews. There are 14 top level managers or executives (six managers and eight middle level managers) in the selected public organisations.

The other respondent group of this study was experts, who are working in sample *kebeles*. This group of respondent comprises Development Agents (DAs), Health Officers (HOs) and School Principals (SPs). These experts were purposively included in this study due to the vital information that they hold and the nature and positions of the jobs of the experts. There are three experts (one DA, one HO, and one SP) in each *kebeles*. 24 experts from eight sample *kebeles* were planned to involvein focus group discussions. In general, there were four focus groups.

## 3.5 Data Collection Methods

### 3.5.1 Primary data collection methods and field work

Primary data for this study were collected through front-line employee survey, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. These methods of data collection are discussed in more depth as follows.

### A) Sample survey

This study relied on a structured questionnaire as the major instrument to collect facts and information from respondents pertaining to the practice of strategic planning in public organisations. This data collection method was used particularly because of the economy of the design, the rapid turnaround in data collection, its flexibility qualities and possibilities to gather data on almost any issue in the survey.

### B) Key informant interview

The researcher used the data collected through interviews which is more of qualitative in nature to support the information gathered by the survey method. There are 14 top and middle level managers who work in sample public organisations for this study. These managers are working at main positions of public organisations which include Heads, Deputy Heads, Directors and Deputy Directors. However, out of the 14 sampled managers, only 12 managers were consulted in this study through individual interviews. These individuals were considered capable to express important personal views, perceptions, valuable arguments and expertise. They also have inside knowledge of what has been done within the public organisations.

### C)  In-depth interview

Apart from key informant interviews, in-depth interviews were conducted to find out the perceptions and opinions of function-process owners. There are 63 function-process owners working within the selected public organisations for this study. Out of these function-process owners, 13 individuals were selected for conducting in-depth interviews. All of the planned interviews with the selected function-process owners were held effectively.

### D)  Focus group discussions

A detailed FGD protocol was prepared by the researcher. The discussants involved in this study were Development Agents (DAs), Health Extension Officers (HEOs), and School Principals (SPs) who work at sample *kebeles*in BGRS. The experts were selected purposively by considering that these persons hold particular characteristics which the researcher believed are necessary to the topic on focus.

Due to different reasons, out of 24 individuals who were selected for FGD, three individuals did not participate in the discussion. This means that 21 discussants (8 DAs, 6 HEOs, and 7 SPs) participated in four different focus groups at three sites. The focus group discussion sites were *Abujiharikebele*, *Agushakebele* and *Assosa* city.

### 3.5.2 Archives and document analysis

Reviewed published sources used in the study include books, journals, articles, newspapers, working papers, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, published government documents (for example, FDRE GTP I, annual reports, brochures) and researches already completed by research academics. Unpublished secondarysources were also used. These included BGRS GTP I; strategic and operational plans of public organisations; annual and five-year performance reports of selected public organisations; and relevant legal documents of the government of Ethiopia.

### 3.6Data Analysis Methods

To achieve the objectives of the study both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. This led to the application of a mixed convergent design for the analysis of the collected data. This design is important to triangulate, compare and contrast quantitative statistical results with qualitative findings for justification and validation purposes (Creswell & Clark, 2011:77). In this study, the analysis largely remained more descriptiveand inferential statistics for quantitative data (means, frequency distributions, percentages, standard deviations) and thematic and content analysis for qualitative data.

### 4.  Results and Discussion

As one actor of development, public organisations are required to realise the strategic goals and objectives set in the first Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I) of Ethiopia.

The rationale for this fact is that public organisations are responsible of ensuring high quality of service and meeting the needs of the citizens. In thissense, Ethiopian public organisations working in BGRS are expected to have a strategic planning system to develop and effectively put into practice strategic plans in order to accomplish the goals and objectives of the Regional State GTP I.

The study explored the practice of strategic planning in public organisations using a framework drawn from the extensive literature on strategic planning in the public sector. The aspects which are regarded as important in the strategic planning process as proposed by Poister and Streib (2005:48-51) are evaluated in this study. These aspects are: (1) stakeholders' involvement; (2) strategic planning elements; (3) strategic management practices; (4) allocation of resources; (5) performance management activities; and (6) performance measurement activities.

In an attempt to understand the strategic planning practices of public organisations, front-line employees were asked a number of questions which were linked to the above aspects of planning, and the responses are summarised in Table 3.

**Table 3: Employees' perception towardsstakeholders' involvement in developing strategic plans**

| Questions | Employees' response (n=119) | | | | | | |
| | Yes | | No | | Don't know | | |
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | Sum |
| Did your organisation have developed strategic plan covering the period between 2010/11 and 2014/5? | 110 | 92.4 | 3 | 2.5 | 6 | 5 | 100% |
| Did top level management (including Directors, Deputy Directors) involved in the development of your organisation's strategic plan? | 99 | 83.2 | 15 | 12.6 | 5 | 4.2 | 100% |
| Did middle level mangers (including function-process owners, department heads) involved in the development of your organisation's strategic plan? | 103 | 86.6 | 12 | 10.1 | 4 | 3.3 | 100% |
| Did lower-level employees (front-line employees) involve in the development of the organisation's strategic plan? | 45 | 37.8 | 74 | 62.2 | 0 | 0 | 100% |
| Did citizens and other external stakeholders involve in the strategic plan development of the organisation? | 23 | 19.3 | 87 | 73.1 | 9 | 7.6 | 100% |

According to the survey results illustrated in Table 3, a large number of respondents (92.4%), reported that public organisations had strategic plans covering the period between 2010/11 and 2014/15. Nonetheless, the observation made by the author affirmed that all sample public organisations have formulated a five-year strategic plan for the indicated period. This reality shows that some employees (7.5%) have a knowledge gap pertaining to strategic plans which are formulated and implemented in the organisations. The reported 92.4 percent may represent a greater increase in the use of strategic planning in public organisations in the study region.In other words, it appeared that there is an increasing familiarity with the need to develop strategic plans in the BGRS public organisations.

Respondents from front-line employees were also asked whether stakeholders were involved in the processes of developing strategic plans for public organisations. Stakeholders may include top management, middle and lower-level managers, front-line employees, the citizens and other external stakeholders. 'Involvement' in strategic planning means the full participation of the top management team and lower-level managers in developing strategic plans either because managers have skills and knowledge on which the organisation should draw, or because the motivational value of such involvement is very high" (Pirtea*et al.*, 2009:956). In general, a good plan will take into consideration the whole organisation or management unit and, therefore, all public officials should be involved in its preparation in one way or another (Bekele, 2015:9-10).

As can be inferred from Table 3 (second row), of the total individuals included in the front-line employee survey, more than 80 percent reported that top level management and middle level managers were centrally involved in the process of formulating public organisations' strategic plans. However, the involvement of front-line employees and citizens and other external stakeholders was very limited (cited by only 37.8 and 19.3 percent of the survey participants, respectively).

In line with the above findings, from the in-depth interview held with one of the core function-process owners at the BGRS Rural Road Authority, it was discovered that the organisation's plan lacks to fulfil the necessary preconditions to involve most of the organisation's stakeholders, in particular lower-level employees. However, lower-level employees were directed by the top management to report regarding the performed activities and the achievements of strategic plans without really understanding the importance of doing so.

It is clear, according to the findings, that public organisations had limitations in providing opportunities for stakeholders to involve and contribute in the development of strategic plans. More importantly, the participation of lower-level employees and citizens was very low. Almost all sample public organisations were following a top-down management in the process of developing the strategic plans.

Strategic plans include elements that describe an organisation's present state, aspirations, intentions for the future, and approach for going forward (Gates, 2010:4). According to Poister and Streib (2005:48), any strategic plan is expected to contain at least 10 elements. Gates (2010:5) has also described 12 elements of strategic planning. The elements identified and explained by these two authors are more or less the same. Figure 1(next page)shows the proportion of respondents who reported the use of particular elements of strategic planning by public organisations.

The most frequently reported elements were the development of goals and objectives (80.9%) and the development of action plans (71.8%), followed by the development of a vision for the organisation (70%). This implies that the strategic planning processes in the studied public organisations emerged as being focusing on the future, setting goals and initiating plans for implementation.
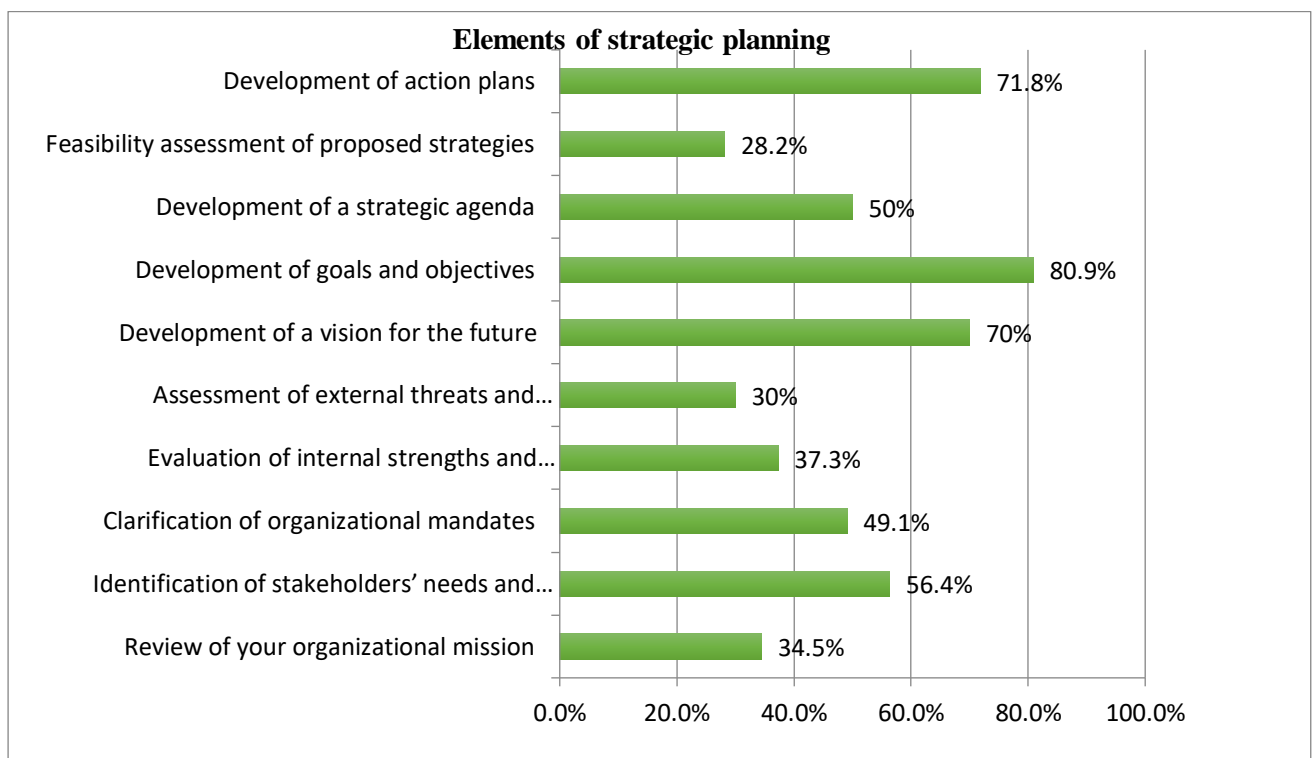


**Figure 1:Reported use of various elements of strategic planning**

The remaining seven elements among the above elements of strategic planning were cited by fewer respondents. Elements reported by somewhat fewer respondents included identification of stakeholders' needs and concerns (54.6%), development of a strategic agenda (50%), and the clarification of organisational mandates (49.1%). The elements reported by the fewest respondents were evaluation of internal strengths and weaknesses of public organisations (37.3%), review of organisational mission (34.5%), assessment of external threats and opportunities (30%) and the feasibility assessment of proposed strategies (28.2%). Therefore, the study results show a large number of Ethiopian public organisations operating in BGRS are not using most of the elements of

strategic planning during the GTP I period which were deemed to be very important to enhance organisational performance.

The front-line employee survey used in this study also include a number of questions to gauge the extent to which public organisations tie organizational level plans to other management processes to assure the accomplishment of strategic goals and objectives. One model for assessing the successful design and implementation of a strategic management capacity in a government jurisdiction was developed by Vinzant and Vinzant (1996 cited by Poister&Streib, 2005:48-49) and consists of the following four levels:

> **Level 1**: Completion of a full-fledged strategic planning process.
> **Level 2**: Production of a strategic planning document
> **Level 3**: Changes in resource allocation to support the accomplishment of strategies
> **Level 4**: Changes in control and evaluation processes to provide feedback on the implementation of strategic plans

**Table 4: Extent of strategic management practices in public organisations**

| Strategic management practices | Employees' response (n=110) | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | | No | | Don't know | | |
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | Sum |
| Your organisation had completed at least one round of the strategic planning process. | 61 | 55.5 | 34 | 30.9 | 15 | 13.6 | 100% |
| Your organisation has produced a strategic plan document over the past five years | 110 | 92.4 | 3 | 2.5 | 6 | 5 | 100% |
| Your organisation' annual budgets strongly supported the goals and objectives set by the strategic plans | 74 | 67.3 | 28 | 25.5 | 8 | 7.2 | 100% |
| Your organisation used performance measures to track the accomplishment of goals and objectives laid out in the strategic plans. | 37 | 33.6 | 64 | 58.2 | 9 | 8.2 | 100% |

Based on the findings in Table 4, of the 110 respondents who indicated that the organisations had a strategic plan, 61 (55.5%) respondents reported that the organisation had completed at least one round of the strategic planning process. This implies that public organisations operating in BGRS had attained, or will attain, at least

level one. As discussed earlier in the preceding sections, all sample public organisations had developed strategic plan documents for the last five years. Approximately 93 percent of the respondents confirmed this reality. Thus, the results revealed that almost all public organisations working in BGRS can be classified as having arrived at level two of the strategic management capacity.

More than 67 percent (*see* table 4) of the respondents indicated that public organisations' annual budgets strongly supported the goals and objectives set by strategic plans. In terms of sample public organisations, almost two-thirds of these organisations can be classified as having attained level three. The remaining one-third of sample public organisations did not change the system (approach) of resource allocation, or such organisations are still using line-item budgeting system in an attempt to achieve the strategic goals and objectives spelled out in the strategic plans.

Finally, only one-third of the respondents (33.6%) replied that the organisations used performance measures to track the accomplishment of goals and objectives laid out in the strategic plans. On the other hand, two of the six sample public organisations can be classified as having attained level four in the Vinzant and Vinzant model of strategic management capacity.

Researches indicate the need to link the strategic plan of an organisation to its performance management system. As presented in Table 5 below, of the 110 respondents represented front-line employees, 68.2 percent and 74.6 percent of the respondents indicated that the objectives established for department heads and other managers and those for front-line employees were derived from the strategic plans of public organisations, In line with this, 84 (76.4%) respondents reported that individual department heads and managers were responsible for implementing specific initiatives and projects emanating from the organisations' strategic plans. As a result, the top management holds middle and lower-level managers and other public officials responsible for implementing strategic plans (cited by 60% of the respondents). However, not more than 38 percent of the respondents indicated the use of the accomplishment of strategic goals and objectives for evaluating front-line employees, managers and department heads.

**Table 5: Linking performance management systems to strategic plans**

| Performance Management | Employees' response (n=110) | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | | No | | Don't know | | |
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | Sum |
| Objectives established for department heads and other managers come from the overall organisation's strategic plan. | 75 | 68.2 | 32 | 29.1 | 3 | 2.7 | 100% |
| Objectives set for front-line employees come from the overall organisation's strategic plan. | 82 | 74.6 | 26 | 23.6 | 2 | 1.8 | 100% |
| Individual department heads and managers are responsible for implementing specific initiatives and projects that are part of the strategic plan. | 84 | 76.4 | 26 | 23.6 | 0 | 0 | 100% |
| The top management holds middle and lower-level managers, and other public officials responsible for implementing the strategic plan. | 66 | 60.0 | 41 | 37.3 | 3 | 2.7 | 100% |
| Annual evaluations of managers and department heads are based largely on the accomplishment of strategic goals and objectives. | 41 | 37.3 | 68 | 61.8 | 1 | 0.9 | 100% |
| The evaluation of the front-line employees is based on accomplishment of the strategic goals and objectives. | 42 | 38.2 | 62 | 56.4 | 6 | 5.4 | 100% |

Performance measures help us to know a number of issues such as: how well we are doing; if we are meeting our goals; if our customers are satisfied; if our processes are in statistical control; and if and where improvements are necessary (Oak Ridge Associated Universities, 1995:4). However, as shown on Table 6, the efforts of public organisations to link performance measures to strategic plans are far less common in the study region.

More than 67 percent of the respondents indicated that public organisations report performance measures associated with the progress of implementing strategic plans to the BGRS Council on a regular basis. On the contrary, only 20.9 percent of the respondents said that public organisations report performance measures associated with the performance of strategic plans to the general public regularly. This indicates that information about public organisations' performance is not accessible for the public

which is against one of the principles of good governance, that is, 'transparency'. However, a number of public organisations operating in BGRS have articulated the statement 'providing information for the public' in the organisations' Citizens' Charter documents as one of the organisations' values.

**Table 6: Linking performance measures to strategic plans**

| Performance Measures | Employees' response (n=110) | | | | | | Sum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | | No | | Don't know | | |
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | |
| Your organisation uses performance measures to track the implementation of projects or other initiatives called for by the strategic plan. | 42 | 38.2 | 68 | 61.8 | 0 | 0 | 100% |
| Your organisation uses performance measures to track the accomplishment of goals and objectives. | 41 | 37.3 | 63 | 57.3 | 6 | 5.4 | 100% |
| Your organisation reports performance measures associated with the strategic plan to the Regional State council on a regular basis. | 74 | 67.3 | 29 | 26.4 | 7 | 6.4 | 100% |
| Your organisation reports performance measures associated with the strategic plan to the public on a regular basis. | 23 | 20.9 | 84 | 76.4 | 3 | 2.7 | 100% |
| Your organisation benchmarks performance measures against other organisation to gauge the effectiveness of strategic initiatives. | 31 | 28.2 | 77 | 70 | 2 | 1.8 | 100% |
| Your organisation tracks performance data over time to determine whether performance in strategic results areas has improved over previous levels. | 56 | 50.9 | 52 | 47.3 | 2 | 1.8 | 100% |

On the other hand, almost 51 percent of the respondents reported that public organisations track performance data over time to determine whether performance in strategic results areas is improving. However, public organisations were not using performance measures to track the implementation of projects or other initiatives (cited by almost 62% of respondents) and the accomplishment of goals and objectives contained in the strategic plan (cited by 57% of the respondents). Surprisingly, few number respondents (28.2%) reported that public organisations benchmark

performance measures against other similar organisations to gauge the effectiveness of strategic initiatives.

Management literature shows the need to communicate the organisational plans to all employees regardless of employees' level of working. For instance, Armstrong (2006:8) explains that strategies and objectives of the organisation should be cascaded from higher level of the organisation to the lower-level teams and individual employees, and the objectives of each team and employees are set based on the overall goals of the organisation. Cascading what the organisations aspire to achieve is one of the management approaches (including PM) to accomplish meaningful organisational performance improvement. Through this approach (cascading), the overall strategic goals and objectives of an organisation are used to determine and analyse the goals and objectives of each employee in a work unit.

The statistical results (*see* Table 7) of this study revealed that slightly more than 53 percent of the respondents reported that the strategic plans of public organisations were cascaded to the lower levels of the organisations (function-processes, departments, and case teams). In contrast, almost 44 percent of the respondents asserted that the strategic plans of public organisations were not cascaded to the lower structure of the organisations.

**Table 7: Extent of cascading strategic plans to lower levels in public organisations**

| Questions | Employees' Response (n=110) | | | | | | Sum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | | No | | Don't know | | |
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | |
| Did the strategic plan of your organisation cascaded down to the lower levels of the organisation (function processes, departments, and case teams)? | 59 | 53.6 | 48 | 43.6 | 3 | 2.8 | 100% |
| Did the strategic plan of your organisation cascaded to individual level in the organisation? | 63 | 57.3 | 46 | 41.8 | 1 | 0.9 | 100% |

In a similar fashion, 57.3 percent (*see* Table 7 last row) of the survey participants replied that the strategic plans of public organisations were cascaded down to individual employee levels, while 41.8 percent of the respondents said public organisations' strategic plans were not cascaded to the lower employee levels.

From the above discussions, it is possible to understand that employees' perception regarding whether the strategic plans of public organisations are cascaded down to the lower hierarchy of the organisations is varied and mixed. The implication of the above findings is that public organizations have limitations to effectively and fully communicating the strategic plans to the lower organisational hierarchy and to all employees across the organisations.

Front-line employees were also asked whether employees who work in public organisations are clear about the objectives, performance targets and activitiescontained in the strategic plans of public organisations and how to measure organisational performance. The data in Table 8 below show that slightly more than 54.6% the respondents replied that employees have no information pertaining to public organisations' objectives intended to achieve during the strategic plan period, while most of the respondents (67.2%) do not know clearly the performance targets set in strategic plans. However, slightly less than 100 percent of the respondents (96.6%) reported that employees clearly know the activities expected to be performed by public organisations.

**Table8:Employees' clarity pertaining to objectives, performance targets, activities and performance measurement**

| | Employees' response | | | | |
| | Yes | | No | | |
| Questions | f | % | f | % | Sum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Did you have information about the objectives of your organisation stated in the strategic plan? | 54 | 45.4 | 65 | 54.6 | 100% |
| Did you have information about the performance targets laid out in the strategic plan of your organisation? | 39 | 32.8 | 80 | 67.2 | 100% |
| Did you have information about the activities implemented by your organisation during the strategic plan period? | 115 | 96.6 | 4 | 3.4 | 100% |
| Did you have information how the performance of your organisation was measured? | 51 | 42.9 | 68 | 57.1 | 100% |

The data collected from informants are also in line with the perception of survey participants. One of the function-process owners at the BGRS Health Bureau explained that "the lack of claritywith the objectives, goals and performance targets set in the previous strategic plans (2010/11 to 2014/15) of public organisations is due to the

limited participation of employees during the planning phase of strategic plans; organisations' failure to cascade the strategic plans down to individual levels, and to some extent, employees were not also interested to know the contents of the organisations' plans."

Table 8 also reveals that more than half (57.1%) of the respondents do not have enough information on how the organisations' performance was measured. These statistics indicate that there is information asymmetry among public officials within public organisations.

The obvious implication of the above results is that most front-line employees were trying to implement the organisations' strategic plans without clearly understanding what the organisations need to attain (objectives and targets). Indeed, this situation affects employees' productivity, commitment and motivation negatively which in turn may result in low organisational as well as individual performance. Unless the objectives and targets are clear, unambiguous and realistic an organisation may find itself slipping into decline (Andrews *et al.,* 2006:277). Verbeeten (2008), as cited in Aubert and Bourdeau (2012:580), also found that the establishment of clear and measurable goals was associated with increased performance, both in quantity and quality. This indicates the need to develop and implement a PMS in public organisations which makes the objectives, goals and targets of the organisations clear.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the discussions presented above, the following conclusions have been made.

In organisations, planning is a management process concerned with defining goals, objectives, and targets for an organisation's future direction and determining on the missions and resources to achieve those targets. In this sense, the study at hand assessed the strategic planning practices of BGRS public organisations to identify the best practices and shortcomings in the process of planning.

The study concludes that the extent to which public organisations involve stakeholders in the process of developing strategic plans during the GTP I periodwas very low. Top management, and middle and lower-level managers of public organisations were centrally involved in the formulation of strategic plans. However, the participation of front-line employees, citizens, Civil Society Organisations, Community Based Organisations, local and international NGOs and the private sector was low. This in turn clearly confirms that public organisations followed a top-down management approach in the process of designing strategic plans. This results in lack of commitment, responsibility, sense of ownership and motivation from the employees' side and other stakeholders. According to Denisonand Mishra (1995:214), "high levels of involvement and participation within organisations create a sense of ownership and responsibility,

which in turn creates greater commitment to the organisation and a growing capacity to operate under conditions of autonomy."

The strategic plans of public organisations covering the period between 2010/11 and 2014/15 had clear goals, objectives, mission and vision and supported by action plans to change the plan into reality. However, public organisations have failed in evaluating the internal and external environment; reviewing the organisations' mission; conducting feasibility studies of proposed strategies; and clarifying the organisations' mandates for stakeholders. Therefore, this study concludes that the strategic plans designed by a majority of public organisations in BGRS have limitations in fully incorporating most of the elements of strategic planning. Missing all these elements may have a direct effect on the overall performance of public organisations.

Ethiopian public organisations found in BGRS have a good strategic management capacity; and thus, these organisations can be classified as having attained 'level three' in the Vinzant and Vinzant model of strategic management capacity. Most public organisations in the region have been followed the strategic planning process; developed strategic plan documents and supported the goals and objectives set in the strategic plans through annual budgets. However, these public organisations had limitations in using performance measures to track the accomplishment of goals and objectives laid out in the strategic plans. Furthermore, there are some public organisations in the region that had not begun to develop a strategic management capacity and such organisations might be classified as being at the 'pre-strategic management stage'. In general, this study concluded that the Ethiopian public organisations operating in BGRS had succeeded in aligning the organisations' plans to other management processes, such as financial management to assure the accomplishment of strategic goals and objectives.

The study further concludes that there is no strong relationship between public organisations' resources allocation (mainly, annual budgets) and the organisations' strategic plans in the study region. This is mainly justified by the fact that public organisations did not pay due attention to strategic goals and objectives by allocating 'new money'. Moreover, the capital budgets allocated by public organisations did not reflect the strategic goals and objectives expressed in the strategic plans; the strategic goals and objectives of public organisations were not considered in reviewing annual budgets and public organisations did not tie performance data to strategic goals and objectives. Surprisingly, the strategic plan of public organisations had no strong influence on the budget requests submitted by department heads and other managers. All these confine public organisations to maximise the extent of achieving the strategic goals and objectives during the GTP I period.

Amos *et al.*(2008), as cited in Munzhedzi (2011:2), make clear the reasons for introducing performance management system (PMS) in the public sector. According to

these authors, monitoring, reviewing and assessing performance; training and developing underperformers; and promoting and encouraging a sense of responsibility in employees are some of the reasons for developing a PMS within an organisation. This implies the need to link PMS of public organisations to strategic plans. However, most public organisations in BGRS did not use PMS as the basis for performance evaluation purpose. Likewise, far fewer public organisations in the region utilise the accomplishments of strategic goals and objectives to evaluate the performance of managers, department heads and front-line employees. Therefore, this study concludes that Ethiopian public organisations working in BGRS did not significantly align PMS to the strategic plans. This means that public organisations under consideration failed to get the benefits from introducing a PMS.

BGRS public organisations had limitations in effectively and fully communicating the contents of strategic plans to individual employees. As a result, majorityof employees working within public organisations were not clear of the goals, objectives, performance targets and measures set out in the organisations' strategic plans. This shows that most front-line employees were trying to implement the strategic plans without clearly understanding what the organisations need to attain at the end of the plan period. This indicates the need for developing and implementing an effective PMS which makes the goals, objectives and targets of an organisation clear and which clarifies job responsibilities and expectations of employees. Armstrong (2006:8) explains that strategies and objectives of the organisation should be cascaded from higher level of the organisation to the lower-level teams and individual employees, and the objectives of each team and employees are set based on the overall goals of the organisation.

Finally, the results of the study suggest that the practice of strategic planning in Ethiopian public organisations working in BGRS has critical problems as compared with what the theory of strategic planning suggests. However, there are a few strategic planning and management practices within the study area which are inconsistent across all public organisations.

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