

# Innovations

## **The Decision-making Processes in Multilevel Governance: The Voice of the Local Community on the Reorganization of Guji Zone, South Oromia Ethiopia**

**Haile Chuluke Digile**

Lecturer in the Department of Governance and Development Studies at Bule Hora University, Ethiopia, and Ph.D. scholar in the Department of Political Science at Hyderabad Central University, India.

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated decision-making processes in multilevel governance and the local community's voice on the reorganization of the Guji Zone in South Ethiopia. The study employed qualitative approaches to collect and interpretive methods to analyze the data. The research sample was selected from government officials, community leaders, representatives, local residents, and Non-governmental organizations to get an insight into the decision. Convenience sampling was utilized for representatives of the Guji people in the council of the Caffee Oromia region based on their roles, influences, and involvement in decision-making processes. The participants were identified purposively to triangulate their views on the decision-making processes to reorganize East Borana Zone by reshuffling districts from Guji and Bale zones and removing Guji Zone from the previous capital, Nagele town. Moreover, interpretive and participant observation was employed to describe their feelings and involvement in the decisions. The researcher evaluated the utilized processes of decision-making in multilevel governance, the voices of local communities under participatory governance, and the institutional framework to reorganize the East Borana Zone in south Oromia.*

**Keywords:** *Decision-making processes, Multilevel Governance, Local Community participation, transparency and representations.*

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### **1. Introduction**

Multilevel governance was initially introduced by Hooghe and Marks as "the dispersion of authority in formal and informal rules across levels of government, including the supranational, the national, the regional, and the local." They contend that contacts and partnerships among various levels of government as well as at the national level also contribute to governance (Hooghe, & Marks, 2001). Concerning decentralization and local governance, the UNDP defines

multilevel governance as "a concept that recognizes the interplay of power and decision-making at different levels of government - national, regional, and local - as well as the importance of including non-state actors and civil society in decision-making processes" (Anderson, 2003). Thus, by expanding community involvement and decentralising authority to local governments, multilevel governance enhances democratic governance, makes decisions more responsive to local requirements, and fosters active citizenship and community engagement in decision-making processes. These definitions of multilevel governance make it clear that this sort of system of governance entails the distribution of decision-making authority and responsibilities among multiple levels of government, including the central/federal, regional, and local ones. It recognises that different governmental levels have unique responsibilities for planning, carrying out, and delivering services.

Public participation is the cornerstone of democracy and the democratization of the political system as it contributes to inclusive decision-making for the public good (Masango, 2002). People's participation in the decision-making of their local affairs under local governance has been a common concern in Ethiopia since the establishment of federalism. Ethnic Federalism establishment introduces ethnic politics as crucial elements in reorganizing administrative divisions and defining citizenship in Ethiopia (Mulatu, 2017). Although ethnic politics played a significant role in restructuring administrative divisions and defining citizenship in Ethiopia with the rise of the EPRDF to power, it initially began to rule the nation's political discourse following the 1974 revolution. As Clapham (1987) pointed out, the government formed Administrative and autonomous areas as geographical jurisdictions by the government in 1974 during the Derg dictatorship. But inside the autonomous regions, administrative regions are granted the right of self-administration for minorities. To create administrative divisions as multilevel governance, factors like ethnic distribution, administrative effectiveness, geographic factors, economic linkages, and security were used as criteria in the country (Clapham, 1987; Mulatu, 2017).

The post-1991 FDRE Constitution started to reform Ethiopia's administrative divisions by upholding parliamentary federalism and includes a bill of rights that ensures freedom, equality, and social justice. Mainly decentralization, federalism, and adopting a parliamentary system are some of the first actions done following the reforms (Kebede, 2015). More significantly, the Constitution institutionalised ethnic identity to define citizenship and Ethiopia's administrative structure was created along ethnolinguistic lines. In Ethiopia today, identity is increasingly politicised, and elite organisations frequently use ethnic identification as a key motivator for membership recruitment. Thus, the government established nine administrative divisions, and the FDRE Constitution's Article 39 established the definition of regions based on ethnic characteristics (FDRE Constitution, 1995; Mulatu, 2017). The State government is particularly required to establish any additional administrative levels that it deems essential, according to Article 50, (4

and 5). The lowest levels of government will be endowed with sufficient authority to permit the direct participation of the People in their governance (FDRE Constitution, 1995). Thus, those ethnic groups that were given their sub-regional administrative divisions have gained a political majority over the subsumed ethnic/tribal groups. In turn, this has led to a sense of being oppressed and marginalized by the included ethnic/tribe groups. This is the primary reason why ethnic/tribal claims for self-governance at regional, zonal, and *woreda*<sup>1</sup> status in this regional state continue to evolve (Thomas, 2013).

The Oromia regional state was also among the ethnic based federation members established in July 1992 with the formation of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1994 (Balcha, 2007). As clearly in its regional constitution, '*Caffee*'<sup>2</sup> Oromia has the legislative power to create any further administrative organizations whenever necessary. According to Article 49 of the Oromia Region Government Constitution (ORGC), the "*Caffee*" shall have legislative authority. It is stated that "*Caffee*" Article 46 specifies that it is the supreme political organ of the region with full powers in the affairs of the region, subject to the applicable provisions of the Federal Constitution." In particular, sub-Article 3(b) reveals that the "*Caffee*" is accountable for determining the authority and obligation to establish further administrative structures depending on population, geography, and socioeconomic activity. Furthermore, the Oromia Regional Local Government Structures are described in Article 45, along with the body responsible for carrying them out. As a result, the Region's administrative structure comprises of the Regional Government, Zones, Districts, and Villages (*Kebeles*)<sup>3</sup>; however, *Caffee*' Oromia may construct other administrative entities as may be required (Proclamation Pro No 46/1994, 2006). To promote democracy and transparent regional governance, this ORGC defined the government's authority and responsibilities (who does what). According to Article 8 of the ORGC, the Oromo Nation's people govern the region through elected leaders and direct democratic participation. Citizen sovereignty was defined as public involvement that necessitated successful government and democratization. Thus, transparent and active engagement of local communities or stakeholders is important for democratization and successful governance in an integrated governing framework and the rule of law. According to Article 8 of the ORGC, Oromo Nation inhabitants have complete control over their government through elected officials and direct democracy. According to Article 39(1-3) of the National Rights, people have the right to self-determination, which includes the right to preserve and uphold their identity, protect and promote their history and heritage, speak, develop, and use their native language, and express their culture. The right to establish government buildings on their territory and to participate equally in the state structure encompasses complete self-governance

<sup>1</sup>District level administrative structures under Regional government next to Zone as a local governments

<sup>2</sup>Oromia Regional State peoples councils

<sup>3</sup>Lowest level of local government that people directly participate in their affairs

and fair representation in all administrative buildings, as stated in Proclamation Pro No. 46/1994, 2006.

The empirical study on local governance in Ethiopia, notably by analyzing the practices and obstacles to good governance, the local administrative authorities show a lack of accountability and transparent in the service delivery process. The study also noted several problems, such as inefficiency, poor management, political interference, bureaucratic delays, corruption, and elements that hindered the efforts to exercise good governance (Meretu, Dagneu, & Dana, 2020). The study conducted in the Oromia shows that the practise of good governance in terms of accountability, participation, responsiveness, responsibility, efficiency and effectiveness, equity, and consensus orientation was rated as low within the selected municipal government (Meretu et al., 2020). The decentralization of authority and resources is something that ethnic federalism is supposed to solve, theoretically and the regional states would have independent power. However, although the fact that supporters have praised it as a step towards democratising the state and even as a model for other multi-ethnic nations, in practice, several discrepancies and mutually incompatible policies and implementation methods have prevailed thus far (Thomas, 2013). This paper examines the decision-making procedures in multilevel governance and community involvement in which the Oromia regional executive body unconstitutionally reorganizes and divides the Guji Zone into the East Borana Zone. Rearranging administrative zones has caused serious concerns about governance, representation, and the meaningful involvement of local populations in Ethiopia, notably in the South Oromia area, specifically in the case of the Guji Zone.

The Oromia Regional State Administration Council's February 2023 redesign of the East Borana Zone as the 21st Zone, local responses, and Ethiopian multilevel governance consequences were examined in this paper. This researcher seeks to examine local government administrative unit decision-making and local community attitudes on zone reorganization in south Oromia. In the Established multilevel governance structures, the Local community views, attitudes, and voices throughout the restructuring still need to be clarified. This paper discusses community viewpoints, governance transparency, empowerment, possible conflicts, and policy options for a more inclusive and efficient multilevel government to narrow this gap and analyzed for constitutional validity, inclusiveness, transparency, and engagement.

## **2. Methodology**

This study examined individuals' and groups' multilevel governance decision-making perspectives and meanings using an interpretative method. The researcher used interviews, participant observations, and social media to gather qualitative data. Purposive sampling identified government officials (6), community leaders (3), representatives (2), residents (9), researchers (2), and

civil society groups (2). Convenience sampling was used to choose Guji legislative organ Oromia area representatives from each research district based on their responsibilities, influences, and decision-making. The informants gave their consent before interviews, and the author doesn't name them for security reasons. The researcher tells responders and utilizes pseudonyms to gather and evaluate data anonymously. This allowed the researcher to collect enough data and make participants feel protected, respected, and more eager to provide sensitive political data. To augment the basic data, books, journals, reports, news, conference proceedings, and working papers were reviewed. In-depth interviews with government officials, community leaders (Abbaa Gadaa officials and elders), and Caffee Oromia people's council delegates from the Guji Zone were undertaken. In these interviews, individuals discussed their viewpoints, experiences, and decisions. An interview checklist encouraged participants to speak out and provide details. The researcher meticulously recorded meetings, public forums, and popular rallies opposing Guji Zone reform. We also examined the sentiments and viewpoints of activists and diaspora beyond the community on significant social media accounts. The institution was chosen because it best served the research and showed public opinion on ORAC's Constitutional legality and their reaction as aware community members. The post's content and relevant excerpts were examined. The researcher used theme analysis on qualitative data. Themes are used to organize and explain qualitative data from interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory observations to detect patterns and relationships to triangulate study findings.

### **2.1. Description of the study areas**

Guji is of the subgroup of Oromo nation resides in three of Guji, West Guji, Arsi and Borana zones of Ethiopia's Oromia Region. The Guji zone is one of the 20 zones in the Oromia regional state and shares boundaries with South Nation nationalities and peoples, and Somali in different directions. The Guji Oromo appear to have practicing original indigenous cultures, and retaining the practices of Gadaa systems as Indigenous governances. In fact, it is said that they preserved and continued in maintaining the original Oromo civilisations, and the Guji societal practices still reflect the traditional Oromo customs in their original ways (Debsu, 2009; Jaleta, 2004). According to the 2007 census, Guji Zone had a total population of 1,389,800 people, of which 702,580 are males and 687, 220 are women (PCCFDRE, 2007). The area was 18,577.05 square kilometres, and the population density was 74.81 people/km<sup>2</sup>. This study used a purposive sample from Bore, Adoolaa, and Goro Dola. For several reasons, the Bore, Adola Woyu, and Goro Dola districts in this zone were chosen for data collection to symbolize different perspectives and reorganization areas and collect data because they were on the main asphalt highway from Addis Ababa, the capital, to Nagele, a Guji zone town. Next is data accessibility and availability. Bore District is Guji Zone's northernmost point, while Goro Dola is south of the old major

administrative village. The locales were chosen to symbolise different perspectives and reorganisation experiences. Data collection and analysis are feasible since the districts are accessible, have sufficient networks, infrastructure, and roadways, and can be covered by the study project.

### 3. Discussions

#### 3.1. Re-establishment of Guji and East Borana Zonal level governances in South Oromia

The (ORAC) regular meeting on January 27, 2023, at the sixth regular session of the state's third working year, announced the rearrangement of the state's main and small cities and the creation of an overlapping Zone, which the population had requested. The council said that reforming the East Borana Zone under a new administrative structure would answer people's long-standing desires for development, security, and good governance and reduce border anxieties. State media, particularly OBN TV, declared the East Borana rearrangement as a new Zonal government on February 27, 2023 ([www.facebook.com\\_February](http://www.facebook.com_February) 2023). The Prosperity Party Head Fikadu Tasamma, reacted by saying that the decision to reorganise this zone was made primarily for three reasons i.e., to preserve Oromo unity; second, protect the regional boundary; and address good governance issues and smuggled goods protections ([caffeeoromiyaa.org](http://caffeeoromiyaa.org) July 11/2023). East Borana Zone's local community opposed the local government's establishment, even though it's essential to a democratic framework for grassroots society and public engagement in multilevel government states. Guji Abbaa Gadaa, Elders, officials, and youth contacted for this research said East Borana Zone restructuring was unexpected, and no one informed or consulted the community as required by the constitution. The people strongly rejected the creation of East Borana Zone as the 21st in South Oromia Regional State. These are relevant for study on how restructuring has altered decision-making and community participation since administrative borders, governance frameworks, and decision-making procedures have changed again. At the heart of these two districts was Adola Woyyu town, where Guji Zone's capital city was suggested to go. The new zone administration announced Goro Dola Districts as part of the Guji Zone. Later, the ORAC led by Shimellis Abdisa and the Prosperity Party headed by Fikadu Tasamma compelled this district to be administered by the newly constituted Zone by virtual orders from the center. So, the researcher assessed these localities' reactions to the decision to create a new administrative zone. These three districts allowed the researcher to compare how Guji Zone districts see and respond to decision-making and community engagement. The participatory governance theory and institutional policies that influence decision-maker actions and results were used to evaluate Zone rearrangement decision-making procedures for involvement, transparency, and accountability. Institutional elements like formal regulations, governance frameworks, and

policy frameworks were examined during the Guji Zones' reorganization to determine how decision-making processes followed effective governance and the country's constitution.

### **3.2. Policy and institutional frameworks**

The institutional theories are focused on the role of institutions in influencing both individual and collective behavior as well as how they affect the procedures and consequences of decision-making. These institutions have an impact on how decision-making actors behave and how that behaviour affects the decision-making process' inclusiveness, transparency, and efficacy (Scott, 2014). Government decision-making must operate in an open and accountable manner in order to foster public trust and ensure successful governance (Gabriel & Castillo, 2020). The FDRE Constitution's Article 46 Sub-Article (1) reorganised the country into nine regional states, with Oromia Regional State being organised as an ethnically based area with Oromo residents in accordance with its people's settlement patterns, language, identity, and consent. As described in Article 45 of regional constitution, four layers of administration—the regional government, zonal administration, wereda administration, and kebele administration—make up the hierarchically organised administrative structures of the regional states. At the regional government level, political and administrative authorities are heavily concentrated, notably at the hands of the executive branch, which consists of the regional president (or chief executive) and heads of numerous sectors (Balcha, 2007).

The results demonstrate that no direct democratic involvement or constitutional rights were exercised on this topic of forming and rearranging a new zone. Region administrative councils used passive participation tactics to discuss Guji Oromo's problems, violating their right to self-determination and government. Guji, Borana, and Bale Zones were affected differently and refused to acknowledge it as illegitimate conduct by Oromia regional governments commanded by President Shimellis Abdisa. The Bale considered the choice undemocratic and refused to partition their traditional and sacred territory for Borana's relocation. However, Moyale's adjacent districts had longer service distances. Guji decried deportation from their ancestral home as illegitimate by senior officials without community input, and there were problems with implementing government decisions. As Ball (2009) pointed out, both the efficiency of government decision and of administrative processes are enhanced by transparency. It entails more information for decision-making and, ultimately, for the general public so that people can support political decisions.

I interviewed community leader Guji Abbaa Gadaa Midhaga Netee for my first Key informant interview to understand about decision-making. The researcher approached him first because this newly reformed local governance choice will affect the Guji community and since the study was limited in the Guji Zone for two reasons. First, the newly constituted East Borana Zone restructured most Guji

Zone settlements. Second, the regional council chose Adoola Reedde as the Guji Zone's capital, replacing Nagele, which had held the title for twenty years as of the 2001 G.C., in Oromia. The Guji Abba Gadaa Midhaga said they learnt of the East Borana Zone's new administrative structure when Bale, Guj, and Borana were reformed under Oromia Regional State as new Local Governances. The Abbaa Gadaa recounts:

*“...While attending to family social issues in our district, Tadele Udo, our Zone governor, informed me that the Oromia Regional State President sought a meeting in Finfinnee. The Oromia Regional State President instructed us to convene at the Ministry of Defense in Finfinnee. The Guji, Borana, Bale Zone Administrators, and Abbaa Gadaa received invitations from outside. Following their meeting with Abbaa Gadaa and the three Zone governors, each official announced the reorganization of the East Borana zone, which involved the removal of districts from Guji, Bale, and Borana. The new Zone capital would be Adoola Rede, with Nagele, the old Guji Zone headquarters, serving as the base”* (Interview with Abbaa Gadaa Midhaga Netee, 2 March 2023, Finfinnee).

Immediately several groups, individuals, associations and people, including *Kontoma Darimu*<sup>4</sup> alliances, various Guji diaspora in the USA, Mr. Nagesa Odo, a lawyer and former Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) opposition party members living in the USA, Mr. Badhasa Hailu, a human rights activist, journalist, and former OFC opposition party members from Canada, among others, denounced the decisions as illegal acts violating the constitutional rights of the local communities. In an interview with *Jirra Media*, activist, and journalist Mr. Badhasa said that a small number of politicians imposed the decision and that the interests of everyone were not taken into consideration in the social cohesiveness and historical links these societies had with one another. The Guji demanded the complete cancellation of the newly organized zone and Eviction of the Guji Zone without an inclusive decision. In the interview with *Jirra Media*<sup>5</sup>, Mr. Badhasa and others argued why Guji was against the regional government decisions for the following six main reasons: First, this decision was made without consultation with the community and its representatives and deprived them of their constitutional right to self-determination. Secondly, in the ORAC that made and passed this decision, Guji was not represented in terms of the extent of its districts and people and its socio-economic contribution. Thirdly, the decision did not take into account the history, settlement, and interests of the ethnic groups settled in the area. Fourthly, the seat of the new zone will exacerbate good governance services problems but not improve them since the distances of services lengthened than the previous and reduce trust between Guji and Borana, and other communities. The fifth is the majority of the villages around the district capital, Nagele—more than 50%—are inhabited by the Guji Oromo ethnic

<sup>4</sup> Civil society Organization works on the socio-economic wellbeing's of Guji Community

<sup>5</sup> Private online media

groups. Lastly, the decision is not transparent and has created conflicting information at various times, exposing the community already in severe security and famine to further damage. Guji Opposed the so-called "Decision" as it attempted to be implemented by using military forces. He further explained his argument as Guji and Borana defended the Oromia boundary together during difficulty and were buried together in these areas to preserve the Oromo people's Unity and protect the regional boundary. Thus, their decisions were unreasonable and did not consider the reality that this society as a whole had in these areas; instead, they made sudden decisions to appease select groups over the majority while ignoring common interests (www.youtube.com, July, 16/2023). Existing policy and institutional frameworks lead multilevel governance decision-making, and their relevance to the Guji Zone's restructuring wasn't more open and participatory and encountered opposition from diverse sections. Several stakeholders, including government officials and community members, rejected the Guji Zone reorganization because they were not represented, consulted with, or involved in regional state and nation decision-making and constitutional principles. The discussions showed that the Oromia region state administrative council violated constitutions' inclusion, openness, and accountability for their selfish political intent and was challenged on several grounds.

### **3.3. Challenges and barriers to effective decision-making**

The literature clearly indicates that, the effectiveness of public decision-making system can be identified within the parameters of participation, communication, decision-making, and the scope of authority. Additionally, Legitimacy, fairness, and effective governance are three significant concerns with democratic governance that the institutional design space should be adapted to handle the voices of stakeholders. To produce more desired practices and outcomes from collaborative decision-making and action, public engagement works best when it works in harmony with representation and government (Fung, 2006). This study found that local residents opposed the ORAC decision as unlawful and non-participatory. The government intimidated them using military and police power. Civilians and students were shot and killed during peaceful protests. On the first day of Bore town's rally, three people died and many were injured. Respondents believed that murdering innocent protesters and arresting students, local government officials, and elders were forceful measures to execute the decision. Boree, Arda Jila, Me'ee Bokko, Adoola Woyyuu, Girja, Shakkisoo, Daawwaa, Haroo Waacuu, Wadera, Gooroo Dola, Jidolaa, and other district towns had rallies, which were captured on social media and interviewed by participants. The empirical literature shows that, people's engagement in their affairs defined legitimacy and voice. They can participate in decision-making directly or through intermediaries. The underlying tenets of such pervasive involvement are freedom of association, expression, and the capacity to actively contribute (John & Amos, 2003). The demonstration continued when the authorities refused their plea. As

the people demanded their rights, the regional government pressured the personnel to move the split office property to Adoola, arrested people who claimed to have the answers, explained why they didn't believe them, and held them for up to four months without a court ruling. Property burning and a ban on vehicle and business activity have hampered implementation. Due to the community's claim of no involvement and the government's coercive decision-making and implementation techniques, the South Oromia reorganization's decision-making procedures were impeded. The scholars argued that community involvement in decision-making has had a number of positive effects, including public participation in the policy-making process, teamwork, and consensus-building, which are essential components of good policy implementation practices (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). According to respondents, a few chosen groups still dominate ORAC decision-making. The Guji communities in Oromia are underrepresented in administration councils, which might increase social, economic, and political inequality and marginalize already disadvantaged groups. Exclusion, alienation, and mistrust weakened Guji Oromos' decisions for successful implementation. as opposed to Article 104 (4) of the Oromia region constitution, which requires public participation in policymaking, implementation, and monitoring. Transparency and accountability go hand in hand, and a transparent governance structure fosters high levels of transparency by fostering stakeholder communities' confidence and efficient policy execution (Ong & Gabriel, 2018).

### **3.3.1. The controversy on renaming and clan Identity relationships**

Among the source of dispute is the contentious rebranding of the new Zone Administration capital city from the former and historical name of Nagele to Nagele Borana, which has been challenged across Ethiopia's ethnic federalism framework (Dube, 2023). Nagele is a capital city of Guji Zone, though mainly three Oromo sub-groups and particularly the Guji, Borana, and Arsi of Oromo, have lived together for long time. Historically, the name Nagele came from those groups fathers' agreements who declared peacefulness of the place and lived together in unity. The elders further explained that, in contrast to what their forefathers did to restore peace and harmony to the place *Qarsaa Bilbilo* <sup>6</sup>by renaming it as Nagele and declaring it as peace for all groups, the so-called government destroyed that love and unity by giving ownership by favouring Borana sub-group as Nagele Borana. The elders and official respondents said the historical name and its inclusivity for all groups that live in it are contested as empowering one sub-identity over the other by the government without local community consent, as all groups are Oromo. Guji Zone officials, selected district officials, and elders disputed that Oromo unity could not be achieved under the name of Borana one group because the decision excluded other groups and gave

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<sup>6</sup> Original name OF Nagele Town before it's renaming by Guji, Arsi, and Borana Oromo clan

Borana ownership over Guji, Arsi, and other Majority groups in Nagele Town and Liban Districts. The empirical study reveals that the Ethiopian ethnic federation in a multilevel government produced a new entitlement system by providing authority over ethnic groupings. Thus, titular people resided in their ethnic homelands, whereas non-tertiary people lived there. Individuals of all ethnic groups have made use of the right to self-administration as a constitutional possibility ever since the creation of Ethiopia's federal system, especially those who identify as "indigenous" or "natives" (Nigus, 2019). These respondents further falsified the stated problems of good governance, as there were no other measures that the government took to correct wrongdoers. In the author's interview with authorities, they clearly disclosed that the decision to create the East Borana Zone was made by high party leaders and government officials, who notified the lower-level layers of the hierarchy without questioning or objecting to them (Interview with Officials and elders, 10-20 march 2023, Bore, Adola and Harkelo). The scholars' finding indicated that in Ethiopia, Government practices with structural and ideological reinforcements that promote patronage above deserving principles have hindered the growth of good governance in the country. Hence the absence of a democratic culture throughout the country's lengthy history appears to be one of the main structural issues that have hampered good governance in the entire country (Fekedu, 2014)

Mr. Badhasa noted in an interview with Jirra Media that the creation of a new East Borana zone administrative structure occurred without adequate examination and illegal judgements, thereby violating the constitution's citizen rights and good government principles. The authorities that the author contacted for this study argued that the decision to create new administrative zones was hasty and ignored local reality. This implied a disregard for the distances between zones, the proximity of administrative services, and the interests of the local community. Authorities said that since the reform of the new zone, the distance between Moyale district and Yabeloo has increased to kilometers. The distance between Harena Buluk and Bale Zone rose from 200 to 380 km. They expressed dissatisfaction, arguing that local government should prioritize better serving the people. Their comparison of Bale, Borana, and Guji Oromo communities in all three zones was another difficulty. Guji Oromo, who lived in Borana and Bale zones, had 13 and 12 villages, respectively, while those in Borana and Arsi had 10 and 3 villages. The officials also stated that Shimellis Abdisa's administrative council changed Nagele to Nagele Borana without local permission, continuing Emperor Haile Selassie's legacy. The officials asserted that the Emperor took this action to honor and reward the Borana tribe, which had united and became known as the Nagele, over the Guji, Arsi, and other local ethnic groups. Elders believe Emperor Haile Selassie subdued the Guji Oromo, who resisted the empire's expansion similarly. According to officials and elders, the Guji Oromo Zone Capital City relocation from Nagele, where they had lived peacefully for years, favored the brothers' tribes over each other for political gain. The fact that

the name change affected their ownership violated the community's constitutional rights without considering the sociocultural context, consultation, or engagement. From the Participatory governance and institutional frameworks, the Local government is essential to the development of a democratic structure to address grassroots society and increase public engagement. That is, to provide services, reduce poverty, and promote growth. But the local government in developing countries place more emphasis on the institutional arrangements of local governments than their practical features (Meretu et al., 2020).

### **3.3.2. Decision-making power distribution in ORAC**

The sharing and distribution of decision-making power is how authority, responsibilities, and decision-making processes are divided and assigned across various levels of government. In the context of regional and local governments, it affects to the sharing of decision-making power between these two levels (Bindseil & Hantke, 1997; Hendriks & Tops, 1999). The legislative, executive, and judicial organs of regional governments are described in Article 46 (1-3) as having equal constitutional authority to make decisions in Oromia state under Ethiopian Ethnic Federalism. The ultimate organ of the Regional State and the one with the legislative authority is "Caffee" Oromia, who is also accountable to the region's voters. The ORAC, which is answerable to "Caffee" Oromia, has the highest executive authority in the Regional State. However, only the regional courts have jurisdiction over the Regional State's legal affairs (Proclamation Pro No 46/1994, 2006). According to the aforementioned legal account, the allocation and distribution of decision-making power determines which government body at the regional and local levels has the authority to make decisions on specific issues. Regional governments receive this autonomy and authority to make decisions that directly affect their respective jurisdictions and the entire regional population. The regional government, zonal administration, woreda administration, and kebele administration are the four levels of multilevel governance that comprise the regional state's hierarchically organized administrative structures and the decentralization of its role, as stated in Article 45 of the regional constitution. Local governments may receive some decision-making powers, enabling them to make decisions that directly impact their communities, while the regional government retains other powers. In Oromia Regional State, the executive branch, also known as the ORAC, comprised of the regional president, the chief executive, or heads of various sectors, wields significant political and administrative power (Balcha, 2007). With this significant power, they discuss and pass decisions on different issues that affect the region's socio-political, economic, and other affairs. The Article 8 of the ORGC, every people in Oromia has complete control over their government through elected officials and active democratic participation.

Elder interviews revealed a lack of community involvement in the ORAC. Therefore, this zone restructuring decision must be more participatory and inclusive to reflect their council interests. The eventual state constitution needs to provide these local communities with decision-making power. The author questioned young participants who said the Shimellis Abdisa Leadership denied these local communities constitutional representation in state administrative council decision-making and local government governance. The Shimellis Abdisa Leadership demoted and transferred community-respected leaders to different zones and districts. Thus, ORAC members from Guji Zone villages must assert their rights in regional government decision-making and other areas. Officials and interviewees also mentioned the difficulties of recruiting the correct local government official as a barrier to complaining about local communities' economic involvement (Interview with Elders and Officials, Bore, Adola, and Gooro Doola, 10-20 March 2023). This violated public sovereignty and regional administrative body engagement, according to the study. It harmed communal authority and decision-making. The researcher questioned government officials, local community leaders, civil society groups, and community members to assess decision-making roles. The author's interviewee demonstrated that Guji Oromo groups immediately protested, boycotted, and locked down once the media publicized the decision. They wanted the Oromia regional state government's behavior criticized as undemocratic. The respondents asserted that the government implemented decisions without involving local communities in the region and that the regional administrative council lacked a Guji representative. The country's constitution accuses them of not listening to local people and making policies that hurt communal interests. Kontoma Darimuu Alliance and other significant personalities opposed the Oromia regional government's demand to incorporate society (Interview with Elders and Youth, Bore, Adola, and Goro Dola, 10-20 March 2023). The FDRE Constitution, specifically Article 43 (1&2), grants the Ethiopian Peoples the right to participate in national development and consult on policies and projects that impact their community (Proclamation No. 1/1995, 1995). As a result, ORAC deliberately excluded government officials, community leaders, civil society organizations, and local community members from the decision-making processes for the reorganization of this East Borana Zone, violating the constitutional principles of good governance. The participatory governance framework stresses meaningful stakeholder engagement and inclusion in life-changing decisions. In advance, community members should be given the option to voice their opinions, participate in decision-making, and influence reformation efforts (Haque, 2018).

#### **3.3.4. Transparency and accountability of Decision making**

The study's participants expressed a sense of estrangement from the government due to inadequate information about the government's reasons, considerations,

and tactics in selecting this newly reorganized zone. Guji Zone and district officials assert that "decisions made behind closed doors without meaningful public consultation can create the perception of arbitrariness, bias, or vested interests influencing the decisions." Unopenness undermines government power, judgments, and decision-makers' accountability. The respondents also said opaque decision-making procedures make it impossible for community members to hold decision-makers accountable, reduce governance checks and balances, and encourage impunity. The researcher observed that ignoring respondents' opinions and difficulties discouraged decision-making (Interview with Elders and Officials, 10-20 March 2023, Bore, Adola, and Goro Doola). The empirical study reveals that the country's democratic institutions, good governance principles, and governance capacities are still in the process of development. An issue of execution arises from the constitution's formal language. This survey also found that Ethiopian governance was among the worst in the world regarding legitimacy, accountability, openness of government operations, the rule of law, and government competency (Fekedu Geleta, 2014; Kebede, 2015).

Though the Oromia and FDRE constitutions, based on participatory democracy, transparency, and government duty to the people, included executive body controlling concepts. However, in contrast to these constitutional components, the decision-making process remained opaque, solely serving to inform and enforce decisions without taking into account the concerns of the local population. As the researcher observed in public meetings and respondents confirmed, stakeholders and mechanisms for holding decision-makers accountable are still unlawful and unconstitutional throughout the area, even though the constitutions explicitly state the decision-making processes and results. Ingrams (2016) states that openness allows people and outsiders to understand about an organization's activities (Gabriel & Castillo, 2020).

### **3.3.5. Community perceptions and satisfaction on Administrative structures**

The research examined the perspectives and consensus of local communities over the decision to reorganize the new zone by merging three current zones. The respondents provided insights into the reorganization zone's procedures, engagement, representation, and impact on their lives. Bale and Guji expressed opposition to the Oromia Regional State Council's decision to reorganize the organization of the East Borana zone and the community segments it would impact, according to the author's primary source. The Borana community lauded the reaction to their plea for excellent governance, although other individuals censured its deficiency in transparency, openness, and democracy. Thus, they allege that it violated democracy and ideal governance under the constitution. They said that Bale is holy and historical, so it should stay that way, while the Guji said the State Council's decision was discriminatory and neglected their dependency on Borana. A public conversation with Oromia area officials about

the community's protest revealed that local societies had been actively raising their concerns over the unjustified withdrawal of the Guji Zone from Nagele town for over 20 years. They assert that the ORAC region unjustly eliminated the Guji Zone by deciding on a matter that the *Caffee* House of Representatives should have handled under the constitution. ORAC had violated communities' democratic right to participate in their affairs, they said. The community declared the decisions illegitimate and unlawful because they violated the constitution's principles of people's sovereignty by not following the separation of powers when determining *Caffee* Oromia's constitutional authority. The community criticized the administration, encouraging them to quit and underlining the necessity of keeping their relationship with Borana and not forcing Guji off their ancestral land in public. The decisions were criticised on various grounds in the position statements made by various community groups living outside their homeland and Civil society organizations. The Kontoma Darimu Alliance and the Guji Diaspora in Arizona, USA, denounced East Borana Zone's so-called new zoning arrangement as unresponsive to community reality (March 4, 2023; March 6, 2023), respectively. They further accused the ORGAC of authoritarian decision-making without consulting community leadership, people, or community groups. They object, stating it's wrong. Cutting off more than 500 km of territory from Moyale to Bale does not improve governance and damages ties between the two ethnic groups. Thus, Guji and Bale residents strongly reject this choice. The Oromia Regional Council requested reconsideration because their judgment did not fully evaluate the region's history.

The author interviewed Guji Abbaa Gadaa, who was disappointed by the ORAC ruling. Residents of Guji and Bale expressed dissatisfaction upon discovering that a new government would restructure this zone. The decision to reorganize a new zone excluded local communities from the decision-making process in the three zones, negatively impacting their overall happiness. This alienates and violates diversity, openness, and accountability. The KIIs and local youth feel that the government favors the Borana group while ignoring other Oromo and ethnic groups. Politicians' benefit has led to feelings of impotence, dissatisfaction, and a sense of neglect (Interview with Elders, Officials and youth, 10-20 March 2023, Bore, Adola, and Gooro Doola).

### **3.4. Consequences of the administrates level Reorganization on Local Communities**

In assessing the consequence and success of the citizen involvement process, two beneficiaries (government and citizens) and two tiers of benefits (process and results) must be taken into account (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

Following the regional administration's creation of the new zone, the participants observed several repercussions and noted that the Guji Zone was facing several crises and challenges. During peaceful protests that denounced the government's decisions as non-participatory and democratic, the government subjected

peaceful protesters to various forms of torture, including arrests, killings, transportation bans, and the closure of over 82 schools, the absence of over 60,000 students from school, the suspension of government work, and the escalation of security threats in Guji Oromo's areas. In Gooro Doola district, Guji Oromo protested government decisions and claimed several health issues. The government's force and pressure caused all ethnic groups in the area, including Guji, Arsi, Sumale, and others, to unify and stop buying and selling. The community decided to establish Gooroo Nageso in the Gooroo Doola District. Governor Galgalo Odo and Deputy Governor Ariti Jarso led to the arrest of many others, including Mr. Awalu Butula, Ethiopia's and Africa's tallest man. However, the District Court acquitted people arrested by security forces and opposed by the police and military when trying to release Ethiopia's tallest man, Mr. Awalu Butula. The Gooroo Doola District Council, initially unstructured in the decision to create a new district, objected to being the center of the new zone established by the ORAC authority and chose not to be ruled there, in accordance with their constitutional authority. Despite ORAC's vigorous suppression of military denials, the government repressed popular ideas and demands using military force, rather than considering them, and imposed popular norms that the people did not want (Interview with Elders, Officials, and Young, 10-20 March 2023, Bore, Adola, and Gooro Doola)

As a result, local communities' dissatisfaction with government representation stems from their disinterest in decision-making. It violates democratic inclusion, openness, and accountability. Their protests, demonstrations, and collective action demanded expanded involvement and engagement in decision-making in all Guji zone districts due to political division, mobilization, and activity. Throughout this investigation, researchers found profound divisions and competing groups with differing opinions in local communities between those three reformed and reshuffled administrative zones. This divide caused local government organizations to struggle to collaborate with neighbors. A lack of local decision-making may cause political instability. The Oromo Liberation Army's fight with security forces has caused political instability since 2018, which might lead to regional unrest. It also produced social unrest, interest group conflicts, and societal instability in affected communities. The instability had a negative impact on both the regional government and stability. These make decision-making less equitable, inclusive, and effective for the Guji Community's disadvantaged groups. It can worsen social inequality and undermine efforts. Gabriel and Ong (2018) pointed out the interaction between openness and accountability promotes public political participation and builds public trust. The openness and information flow between the government and the people depend on accountability, which encompasses transparency (Gabriel & Castillo, 2020).

#### 4. Conclusion and the way forward

In conclusion, the findings show that there are feelings of marginalization or exclusion as a result of the uneven distribution of decision-making authority. Decision-making was not transparent, information was not readily available, there were conflicts of interest, and communities lacked confidence in government and one another. The Guji community felt underrepresented in the ORAC and that the decision-making procedures were unsatisfactory.

The Guji Oromo subclan views Oromia the regional government administrative council's reorganisation of East Borana Zone as unjust, exclusive, or favouring some groups, causing social divisions, conflicts, and tensions. This harmed social peace, cooperation, and population well-being. Thus, developing administrative structures with local community input is crucial to improving multilevel involvement in Ethiopian ethnic federalism that follows good governance principles. Promote institutional coordination, resolve power imbalances, promote participatory procedures, increase openness and accountability, and match policies with community needs and aspirations.

In multi-layered governing frameworks, ethnopolitics requires collaborative and inclusive problem-solving with varied local communities. The Ethiopian government must recognise sub-ethnic identities within institutionalised ethnic federalism. The reorganization affects Guji and Borana communities' social cohesiveness and stability.

To make Guji Zone reorganisation decisions more inclusive, responsible, and effective, these effects must be addressed. Addressing the listed issues improves community ownership, social cohesion, policy execution, governance, and regional sustainable development. Strengthening participatory governance mechanisms, promoting transparency, and enhancing stakeholder engagement to improve decision-making processes and governance effectiveness in the Oromia regional state were forwarded to improve efficacy and misuses of power.

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