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**ESSP II Working Paper 28**

## **Agricultural Extension Services and Gender Equality** An Institutional Analysis of Four Districts in Ethiopia

Marc J. Cohen and Mamusha Lemma

Development Strategy and Governance Division,  
International Food Policy Research Institute

Ethiopia Strategy Support Program II (ESSP II)

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## An Institutional Analysis of Four Districts in Ethiopia

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## Abstract

Decentralized delivery of public services has been promoted as a means to enhance citizen voice and make service provision more responsive to users. Ethiopia has undertaken two rounds of decentralization, making first the regional states and then the district governments responsible for providing key public services. This paper explores whether decentralization has improved the quality of service delivery and citizen satisfaction with the services provided, focusing on agricultural extension. Specifically, we examine whether services are responsive to the needs and expressed demands of poor farmers, including women farmers. We focus on the institutional arrangements through which agricultural extension services are provided and how these contribute to efficiency, effectiveness, and equity in service delivery.

We carried out qualitative research on these questions in four districts in four different regional states. We interviewed district government officials, community leaders, and representatives of civil society organizations, and carried out focus group discussions with men and women farmers. In all, we interviewed 105 people.

We find that deployment of extension agents to rural communities (*kebeles*) has increased the agents' knowledge of local problems as well as access to extension services for both female and male farmers. In addition, rapid expansion of the service has created opportunities for women to become agents. Both male and female agents offer services to women farmers. However, accountability remains almost entirely upward. Until recently, the extension approach in Ethiopia has focused on top-down promotion of technology packages. Agents' incentives cause them to focus on promoting fixed technology packages rather than on adapting the packages to local needs and desires or integrating modern technology with farmers' own knowledge.

We conclude that greater emphasis on downward accountability in service provision would improve the quality. This would allow extension agents to adapt their services to the needs and knowledge of the farmers.

**Keywords: agricultural extension, decentralization, Ethiopia, gender, institutional analysis**

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

ADLI	agricultural development–led industrialization
AfDB	African Development Bank
ATVET	agricultural, technical, and vocational education and training
BoARD	Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development
CIA	(United States) Central Intelligence Agency
COOPI	Cooperazione Internazionale
DA	development agent
EEA	Ethiopian Economic Association
EEPRI	Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute
EPRDF	Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FTC	farmer training center
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
MERET	Managing Environmental Resources to Enable Transitions to More Sustainable Livelihoods
MoARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NPW	National Policy on Women
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	peasant association
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index
TPLF	Tigray People’s Liberation Front
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WoARD	<i>Woreda</i> Office of Agriculture and Rural Development

## 1. Introduction

The quality of agricultural extension services is an especially important issue in Ethiopia, where agriculture dominates the economy, accounting for 85 percent of employment, 50 percent of exports, and 43 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Over 80 percent of the country's 91 million people live in rural areas (FAO 2010; CIA 2011), and most are extremely poor, with a daily per capita income of less than \$0.50, and access to one hectare or less of land (IFAD 2011). In recognition of the centrality of agriculture in most Ethiopians' lives, government policy emphasizes what it calls agricultural development–led industrialization (ADLI).

Throughout the developing world, rural service provision is extremely difficult because of a triple challenge. Due to market failures, the private sector does not provide these services to poor rural dwellers to an extent that is desirable from society's point of view. The state, however, is not very effective in providing these services either, so there is state failure. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or communities themselves are interesting alternative providers of these services, but they can also fail (Birner and Anderson 2007).

Globally, rural women, especially those from poor households, face a particular burden. In view of the gender division of labor, they spend considerable time fetching water, getting healthcare for their children, and reaching markets. Girls have less access to education than boys, and maternal mortality is high if the specific healthcare needs of women are not met. Providing better services to women is not only necessary to realize their rights, but it contributes to economic growth and poverty reduction (Quisumbing et al. 1995; IFPRI 2000, 2005; Mason and King 2001). Providing better services to rural women is also essential in using agriculture for development (World Bank 2007; World Bank, FAO, and IFAD 2008). Women play an important role in agriculture, particularly in Africa, but this role often goes unrecognized due to perception bias. The perception of the roles that men and women play in agriculture is biased toward men, and as a consequence, perceptions about the need for rural services are biased toward men as well (Sen 1990a and b; World Bank, FAO, and IFAD 2008).

Such perception bias is a serious problem in Ethiopia despite the enactment of gender equality policies. Although anyone who has spent just a short time in rural Ethiopia can readily observe that in most parts of the country women are intimately involved in all aspects of agricultural production, marketing, food procurement, and household nutrition, the view is widely held that women do not farm. This cultural perception remains strong even though numerous agricultural tasks are deemed women's work, including weeding, harvesting, preparation of storage containers, management of all aspects of home gardens and poultry raising, transporting farm inputs to the field, and procurement of water for household use and some on-farm uses (EEA and EEPRI 2006). In many parts of Ethiopia, certain tasks are considered culturally inappropriate for women, notably plowing, even though female household heads often do their own plowing.

The past decades have seen a range of governance reforms that can help to improve rural service provision (Birner 2007). These include democratization and decentralization. Eighty percent of all developing countries have engaged in some form of decentralization during the past decades (Work 2002). These governance reform approaches have been linked with various efforts to improve gender sensitivity in service provision, including gender budgeting, quotas for women in political leadership positions, and so forth. Even though local empowerment is not always the explicit or implicit goal of decentralization, it brings government closer to the people, thus improving their options to make their demands heard and to hold public-sector agencies accountable. In Ethiopia, two waves of decentralization since 1991 have put first regional governments and, more recently, district governments in charge of delivery of key rural services. In keeping with the National Policy on Women,

formulated in 1993, at all levels of government there are agencies and officials charged with ensuring gender equality in program implementation.

By gender equality we mean equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys, based on the premise that women and men should be treated in the same way. Gender equality is the absence of discrimination on the basis of a person's sex in opportunities, in the allocation of resources and benefits, or in access to services such as agricultural advice. It implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity among different groups of women and men.

In this paper, we explore how decentralized delivery of agricultural extension services in Ethiopia has affected the quantity and quality of services and whether it has improved gender-equitable service provision. The paper reports on the results of our research in four districts in four different regions of Ethiopia.

Ethiopia has a long history of top-down approaches to governance featuring primarily upward accountability methods. Nevertheless, we found some promising moves away from this command-and-control approach to public services in our study districts as well as some substantial efforts to improve service quality. This is in keeping with the high priority that the government's policy agenda gives to capacity building and decentralization. The posting of agricultural extension agents (called development agents, or DAs, in Ethiopia) in the communities they serve has improved their attentiveness to farmers' needs and constraints, and has also enhanced the working relationship between these advisors and their clients. At the same time, DAs' technical skills have improved, since an increasing number have at least three years of postsecondary training in agricultural development.

The extension service has historically been top-down with inadequate adaptation to local agroecological conditions and needs. The government of Ethiopia has taken diverse initiatives to advance agricultural development in the last two decades. The agricultural sector is developing with increasing participation from the private sector, including progressive farmers and farmer cooperatives, and this participation requires revisiting the extension system to better fit it to emerging demands in the agricultural sector (from small farmers, farmer investors, and the private sector).

We find that the current institutional arrangements for extension service delivery in our four study districts have great potential to facilitate sustainable, participatory, gender-equitable development and poverty reduction. But in order to achieve these goals, the institutions need to marry existing top-down policy guidance and resource flows with responsiveness to bottom-up demands for services, planning, and management, as well as the provision of appropriate capacity development and support, particularly at the local level.

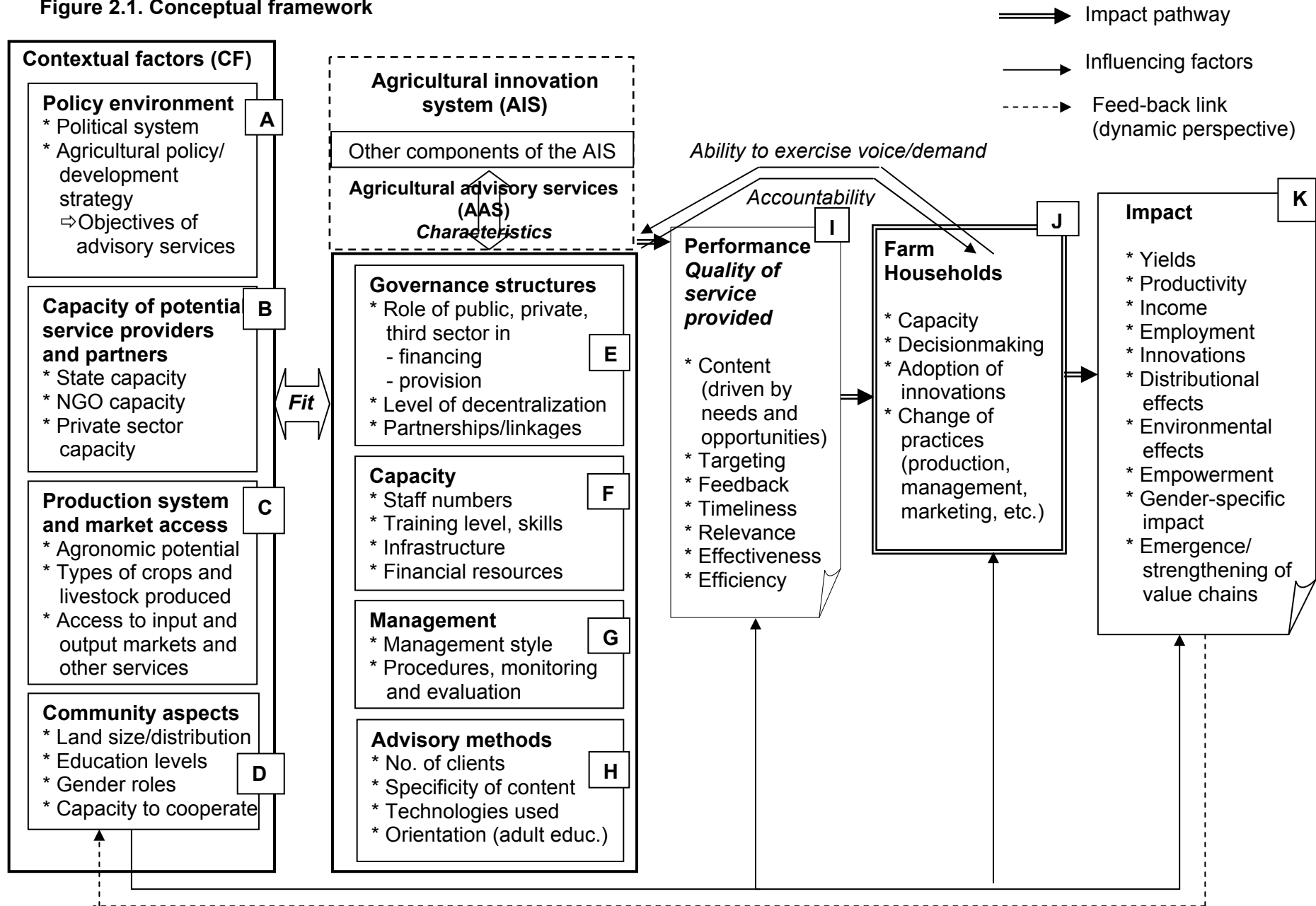
We proceed as follows. The next section discusses our conceptual framework, methodology, and data. We then discuss in turn the context of the issues we are exploring and the questions of quality, gender equity, and voice and accountability in agricultural extension service provision in our study sites. The final section provides our conclusions and recommendations.

## 2. Conceptual framework

This paper employs the conceptual framework developed by Birner et al. (2009) and reproduced in Figure 2.1. It distinguishes between factors that constitute choice variables for policymakers concerned with agricultural extension services (such as the features of extension captured in the box AAS) and variables that either are difficult for them to change or go beyond their area of influence (such as the contextual factors in box CF), including gender roles.

The governance, capacity, management, and delivery methods of the agricultural extension system—and the extent to which these factors constitute a best fit with Ethiopia’s existing policy environment, service provision capacity, agricultural systems, and sociocultural and economic conditions—in turn influence the quality of agricultural extension delivery (Box I). However, what is of ultimate interest is how the quality of extension contributes to outcomes related to development and well-being. These may be defined more narrowly in terms of outcomes in the sector (such as agricultural productivity and incomes) or more broadly in terms of overall household income or consumption, gender equality, or empowerment (Box K). High performance in extension provision will not, however, result in improvement in these outcomes unless extension advice leads to appropriate changes in farmers’ agricultural practices by influencing their capacity, incentives, and knowledge base (Box J). In the rest of the paper, we will relate the overview information as well as the empirical findings back to this conceptual framework.

Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework



Source: Adapted by authors from Birner et al. (2009).

### 3. Methodology and data

Prior to starting our research, we carried out a preliminary qualitative scoping exercise in Dejen district in December 2007. Subsequently, we carried out qualitative case studies in four additional districts in November and December 2008 (see Table 3.1). We purposively chose these four districts; the Oromia D-BG D pairing includes a district government with responsibility for service provision and one where the regional government retains responsibility. In the case of the Amhara D-2-Tigray D pairing, both district governments have responsibility for service provision, but Amhara D-2 is part of a special zone that is home to the Agaw ethnic group. The zone has elected legislative and executive bodies, to which the district government reports. In some ways, governance in Amhara D-2 is akin to the arrangements in less decentralized districts such as BG D. In all five districts, we conducted key informant interviews and focus group discussions in the district capital town and one kebele,<sup>1</sup> based on interview guides that we prepared in advance. Altogether, we interviewed 105 informants, 45 in district capitals and 60 in the kebeles. Table 3.1 also provides some background on the agroecology and degree of decentralized service delivery in each of the study districts. In the district capitals in the four main study districts, we interviewed the chief administrator and the district government officials responsible for finance and budget, agricultural extension, drinking water, and women's affairs; the speaker of the district council; and leaders of the district women's association, the cooperative union, and the governing party. In the kebeles, we interviewed agricultural extension agents; the kebele manager; the speaker of the kebele council; the kebele chairperson; members of the kebele cabinet responsible for agriculture, drinking water, and women's affairs; leaders of the agricultural cooperative, the women's association, and the governing party; members of the water and sanitation committee; and focus groups of male and female farmers.

**Table 3.1. Study areas, number and type of interviews, agricultural livelihoods, and degree of decentralization**

<i>Kebele</i>	District	Agroecological Zone	Main livelihood pattern	Responsibility for service provision	District capital interviews	<i>Kebele</i> interviews
Amhara K-1	Amhara D-1 Amhara Region (west)	Highland	Mixed crops and livestock	District	2	12
Amhara K-2	Amhara D-2 Amhara Region (north)	Midland	Mixed crops and livestock, honey production, goat rearing	District	16	11
Tigray K	Tigray D Tigray Region	Highland	Mixed crops and livestock, horticultural products	District	15	24
BG K	BG D Benishangul-Gumuz Region	Lowland	Forest, cash crops, livestock, hunting	Region	4	6
Oromia K	Oromia D Oromia Region	Midland	Mixed crops and livestock, cash crops, coffee	District	8	7
Total					45	60

Source: Authors.

<sup>1</sup> A *kebele* (or *tabia* in the Tigray region) is a multivillage cluster, sometimes called a peasant association, or PA, in English. It is the lowest level administrative unit in Ethiopia. There are over 15,000 *kebeles* altogether, with an average population of 1,500 people (Legesse 2009).

In addition to carrying out key informant interviews and focus group discussions, the research team engaged in daily reflections on what we learned in order to identify patterns. The team also engaged in participant observation and interpretation of expressed attitudes, body language, and vocal tones employed by informants. We carefully reviewed all field notes to draw out patterns of institutional design and development, processes used by local government, and approaches to service delivery. We also drew on our own previous experience carrying out research on agricultural extension in Ethiopia and triangulated our findings with secondary data drawn from the literature on decentralization and service delivery in Ethiopia. Unless otherwise noted, Sections 4–6 are based on our interviews, observations, and reflections.

The qualitative social science research methods that we employed are the ones most commonly used in institutional analysis of policymaking and program implementation (Mathauer 2004), and such methods provide nuance and depth (Patton 1990) to complement the quantitative community- and household-level survey research that the Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute (EEPRI) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) carried out in the study districts (other than Amhara D-1) and in four additional districts. Our case studies were the only component of the EEPRI–IFPRI research that focused on district-level institutions.

We adopt North’s definition of institutions: “formal and informal rules, enforcement characteristics of rules, and norms of behavior that structure repeated human interaction through constraints, incentives, and enhancement” (1990, 131). As Mathauer points out, these “rules of the game” are not themselves organizations, but the human interactions that they shape “occur between individuals, within organizations, and between organizations” (2004, 8).

## **4. Context**

### **4.1. Political system**

Ethiopia is a federal republic, with five administrative tiers: federal, regional, zonal, district, and kebele. At the federal, regional, district, and kebele levels, and in some zones, governance institutions take a parliamentary form, with citizens electing councils that formally appoint executive and judicial bodies. Ostensibly, there is multiparty competition to fill all legislative seats. In practice, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has dominated political life since taking power in 1991 following a civil war. EPRDF affiliates, led by the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), whose chair is the country’s current prime minister, are organized along Leninist lines,<sup>2</sup> although EPRDF policy advocates a mixed economy with a substantial role for both the state and market forces (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003).

The EPRDF government has organized political and administrative affairs according to a system of “ethnic federalism,” with the regions and certain zones constituting “national homelands” for particular ethnic groups. The current political system emerged in 1995 with the adoption of the constitution. The administrative structure consists of nine regions and two city administrations. There are EPRDF-affiliated parties in the four largest regions (Oromia, Amhara, Tigray, and the Southern Nations’, Nationalities’, and People’s Region), with allied parties that are not considered full-fledged EPRDF members in the five smaller regions. Following disputed elections at the federal and regional levels in 2005, and a period of

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<sup>2</sup> According to its statute, the EPRDF and its affiliated parties follow the principle of democratic centralism (EPRDF 2006, section II.7, article 7e). This principle was first outlined by Lenin (1902). Party members and structures must adhere strictly to decisions the party has made. Members are subject to sanctions (including expulsion) if they break discipline.

suppression of dissent, the EPRDF won nearly all of the 3.6 million council seats in countrywide district and kebele council elections in 2008 after electoral officials disqualified many opposition party and independent candidates (Aalen and Tronvoll 2008).

The EPRDF is pervasive in all policy matters, including agricultural development, and at all levels of governance (Aalen 2002; Pausewang, Tronvoll, and Aalen 2003; Gebre-Egziabher and Berhanu 2007). Civil society organizations, such as associations for women, youth, elders, and veterans, are basically party mass organizations (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). This is true even of farmer cooperatives: Members of EPRDF parties routinely fill cooperative leadership positions (Spielman, Cohen, and Mogue 2009).

Thus, despite the existence of some opposition parties and the periodic holding of elections, in practice, the EPRDF has enjoyed uninterrupted control of the federal government since 1991, and through its affiliated and associated parties has similarly controlled all regional governments. Likewise, it has dominated nearly all local government councils throughout this period (Pausewang, Tronvoll, and Aalen 2003; World Bank 2004; US Department of State 2009; Aalen and Tronvoll 2008). The country has received a low ranking for voice and accountability on the World Bank's governance indicators, and the ranking declined from 1998 to 2007 (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2007, 2008).

#### **4.1.1. Administrative units**

The kebele is the lowest formal unit of administration, but kebeles typically consist of four to seven villages. Villages are often a relevant unit for government initiatives and programs— notably agricultural extension and community mobilization. A yet smaller unit is the *lemati budin*, or development team.<sup>3</sup> *Lemati budin* are collections of approximately 30 households, drawn on (through the team leaders) for the implementation of a range of government activities, including mobilizing household labor for community projects. They also have political functions, such as mobilizing votes for the ruling party. DAs often work closely with *lemati budin*.

#### **4.1.2. Two waves of decentralization**

Historically, governance in Ethiopia has featured a unitary state and tight centralization. Decisions were made in the capital, Addis Ababa, and local officials served as mere implementing agents for the central authorities (Gebre-Egziabher and Berhanu 2007).

The EPRDF has broken significantly with this governance tradition, engineering two significant waves of decentralization. In 1992, the EPRDF-dominated transitional government devolved significant administrative responsibilities to the regions. The federal and parallel regional constitutions firmly establish popular sovereignty, whereby leading governmental bodies at all administrative levels are subject to periodic elections, and provide citizens with access to services, the right to censure elected officials, and the right to participate in planning and budgeting decisions. This round of decentralization kept development of policy frameworks in the federal government's hands but made the regions responsible for policy implementation, with substantial discretionary authority. Nevertheless, the first decentralization wave was characterized by ongoing fiscal dependence on the federal government. In practice, this limited regional governments' actual exercise of discretion (Gebre-Egziabher and Berhanu 2007; World Bank 2001).

During 2001-2002, Ethiopia began an ambitious second wave of decentralization, with responsibility for many public goods and services, including agricultural extension, further devolved to district governments in the four most populous regions, in which 86 percent of Ethiopians live. This has entailed redeployment of civil servants to the districts, formal

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<sup>3</sup> Previously called *mengistawi budin*, or government teams.

empowerment of district governments to hire and fire staff, and a substantial measure of autonomy in planning and budgeting. According to the federal government's national development plan, "The devolution of power to regional states and then to the [district] is a centerpiece of Ethiopia's strategy for ending poverty by improving accountability, responsibility, and flexibility in service delivery and increasing local participation in democratic decisionmaking on factors affecting the livelihood of the grassroots population" (Ethiopia, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development 2006, 184).

However, the districts remain heavily dependent on the regional and federal governments for revenues, and total district government budget allocations are fixed according to formulas established at the higher levels. Moreover, allocations are reduced by the amount of additional revenues that districts may secure, for example, directly from donors (Dom and Mussa 2006a, 2006b). Also, while district governments in theory have discretion over the sectoral allocation of expenditures and the allocation of resources among their kebeles, they receive planning targets from regional governments that in practice are much more than indicative (Gebre-Egziabher and Berhanu 2007; Dom and Mussa 2006a, 2006b).

The second wave of decentralization has brought governance closer to citizens and expanded voice and participation in decisionmaking. The process has sought to make the district governments into nodes in which bottom-up and top-down modes of planning and accountability meet and are harmonized. However, the combination of budget ceilings and strong planning guidance from above tends to trump these downward accountability processes. Gebre-Egziabher and Berhanu observe that the omnipresence of the ruling party and its functionaries in all spheres and at all levels has made the organs to adhere to its organizational programs and preferences. In other words, the Ethiopian decentralization drive is centrally controlled in spite of the fact that it appears to be a form of political devolution. (2007, 48). As a result, they add, power is deconcentrated but not truly devolved, a point that is "corroborated by the fact that the ruling party that is prone to upward accountability dominates the entire realm of political governance at all levels" (2007, 49).

Gebre-Egziabher and Berhanu (2007) also find that decentralization alone has not altered unequal gender relations because cultural and religious factors continue to limit women's access to resources, services, and power, as well as their participation in public affairs. Some 85 percent of Ethiopians practice culturally conservative interpretations of Orthodox Christianity and Sunni Islam that reinforce these mores. Women's affairs offices at the regional, zonal, and district levels often lack formal linkages with sectoral offices (such as agricultural development offices), and the presence of women in elected bodies has not removed systematic gender bias from either society or governance structures. This requires more explicit and comprehensive efforts to achieve gender equality (2007). In addition, they write, there is as yet no "systematic study investigating improvements in women's access to services and women's involvement in decentralized structures and decisionmaking" (2007, 51).

Recently, the federal government has taken some steps that could lead to further decentralization of service provision to the kebele level. Notably, it has deployed extension agents to the kebele.

An important aspect of service provision throughout the country is mobilization of community labor and (sometimes financial) contributions. In most of the country these are treated as voluntary, although in practice they are mandatory. In the Tigray region, labor contributions are explicitly treated as compulsory. Labor contributions play an essential role in construction and maintenance of soil and water conservation works and roads, as well as in reforestation efforts (Dom and Mussa 2006a, 2006b). Too often, ostensibly participatory rural development programs in Ethiopia can be characterized as what we call stone-carrying participation.

## 4.2. Agricultural extension

Agriculture is central to the federal government's national development plan through the ADLI policy (Ethiopia, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development 2006), and indeed, development and agriculture are often used as synonyms in Ethiopia. The share of public expenditures devoted to agriculture and natural resources was 21 percent in 2005, well above the Sub-Saharan African average of 4 percent and more than double the African Union target of 10 percent (Mogues, Ayele, and Paulos 2008). Nevertheless, at present most Ethiopian farmers do not use modern agricultural technology, and the innovation system (agricultural research, extension, and education) is poorly integrated (Lemma 2007).

To implement its ADLI strategy, in the 1990s the federal government commenced a big push to disseminate agricultural technology packages to farmers. These include fertilizer, improved seeds, credit, and the provision of extension services (EEA and EEPRI 2006). Within the decentralized administrative structure, the main government institutions responsible for the planning and implementation of agricultural policies and projects are the federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD) and the corresponding regional bureaus and zonal and district offices.

The government is the major provider of extension through the *woreda* (district) offices of agriculture and rural development (WoARDS). These generally include such subsectors as agricultural development, natural resources, environmental protection and land administration, water supply and rural roads, input supply and cooperative promotion, marketing, and disaster management and food security. Agricultural extension service provision falls under the agricultural development subsector and is further subdivided into extension on crops, livestock, and natural resources management (Gebremedhin, Hoekstra, and Tegegne 2006; Cohen, Rocchigiani, and Garrett 2008).

The second wave of decentralization gave district governments in the four largest regions responsibility for providing rural services, including extension. In the case of extension, until 2006, each *kebele* had access to the services of a single DA based in the WoARD. Selected *kebeles* were able to draw on a larger extension team under specialized projects such as the MERET (Managing Environmental Resources to Enable Transitions to More Sustainable Livelihoods) soil and water conservation project supported by the World Food Programme (Cohen, Rocchigiani, and Garrett 2008). WoARDS also have more highly trained specialists who can provide services as needed to address specific problems. As part of its extensive good governance reform in the wake of the disputed 2005 elections (Dom and Mussa 2006a, 2006b), the federal government directed all districts in the four largest regions to expand extension services dramatically, posting a team of at least three extension agents, with training in crops, livestock, and natural resource management, respectively, in every *kebele*. The agents rotate to new communities every few years and remain accountable to the WoARD. In some cases there are additional extension agents, such as those who specialize in beekeeping, veterinary health, cooperatives, or other topics; where they are present they each usually serve multiple *kebeles*.

The literature on agricultural extension in Ethiopia emphasizes the top-down approach to extension service provision. DAs have received relatively hard quotas for enrolling farmers in technology packages, and their supervisors evaluate them on the basis of how well they meet these quotas. Extension also works through "model" or "progressive" farmers, who tend to be better off and male. Communication is mostly one-way, with agents transferring knowledge to farmers. There is little effort to marry new agricultural research and development with farmers' own knowledge or to learn what kind of services farmers themselves would like to receive (Buchy and Basaznew 2005; EAA and EEPRI 2006; Lemma 2007). Most agents have been men, except in the field of home economics, and have provided services mainly to heads of household, regardless of gender (Buchy and Basaznew 2005; EAA and EEPRI 2006). Historically, extension policy was made in Addis Ababa and merely implemented in the field. Changing the delivery mode can have positive

benefits: Deployment of extension teams to kebeles can facilitate communities' ability to plan and manage development activities for themselves on a sustainable basis (Cohen, Rocchigiani, and Garrett 2008). Extension services generally have positive impacts on nutrition and poverty reduction (Dercon et al. 2009).

### 4.3. Role of women in agriculture

The gender division of agricultural activities has constrained women's access to extension services. Horticultural production and the raising of poultry and small ruminants has been considered a part of home economics—the domain of women—until quite recently, leaving women excluded from other kinds of extension advice, training, and credit.

Both the federal constitution and all regional land proclamations stipulate that the existing land rights are to be granted equally to men and women. Empirical evidence, however, reveals important gender asymmetries in de facto access to and control over land, particularly via inheritance (Fafchamps and Quisumbing 2005). Even in regions where women (whether household heads or not) formally receive individual rights to use land, land tenure security continues to be precarious for women (Crewett, Bogale, and Korf 2008). In the Oromia region, for example, tenure insecurity prevails for divorced women. Some articles in Oromia's land proclamation link land rights to social status, which in effect constrains the rights of divorced women and widows. This is consistent with the finding of Fafchamps and Quisumbing (2005) that it is mostly husbands who keep the land upon dissolution of the marriage union.

#### 4.3.1. Strategies to promote gender equality

Table 4.1 presents gender-related indicators derived from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) database. These indicators present a mixed picture. The first four indicators all rate various levels of gender equality and sensitivity on a scale from 0 to 1, with a 0 score representing full equality or the highest level of sensitivity, and a score of 1 representing absolute discrimination or absence of sensitivity. Ethiopia has low ratings on violence against women and women's access to land, but in fact has made strides in including women in land titling programs. The freedom of movement indicator reveals that women have full freedom of movement outside of the home. The rating on women's access to bank loans represents a lending climate halfway between full possibility and impossibility for women to secure loans. With regard to national-level political participation, Ethiopia's parliament reports that women fill 22 percent of the seats, high compared to some other developing countries. The gender, institutions, and development index measures gender inequality in four areas of social institutions—family code, physical integrity, civil liberties, and ownership rights.

**Table 4.1. Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) indicators for Ethiopia**

	Measure	Ethiopia
Violence against women	Score 0–1*	0.8
Freedom of movement	Score 0–1*	0
Women's access to land	Score 0–1*	0.7
Women's access to bank loans	Score 0–1*	0.5
Women in parliament	% of total	22%
Gender, institutions, and development index	Rank (out of 117)	86

Source: OECD 2011.

Note: \* 0 represents full equality or gender sensitivity, 1 represents maximum discrimination or absence of gender sensitivity.

To address the problem of gender inequality in Ethiopian society, the federal government has implemented a range of strategies. It introduced the National Policy on Women (NPW) for Ethiopia in 1993 and enshrined gender equality in the 1995 constitution. The NPW mandates legal equality and equal access to services for rural women. It is also intended to create the appropriate structures within government offices to establish and monitor the implementation of different gender-sensitive and equitable public policies. National action plans on gender equality, adopted in 2000 and 2006 respectively (Ethiopia, Ministry of Women's Affairs 2000, 2006), include steps to enhance rural women's access to and control over productive resources such as land, credit, and extension services.

At the various tiers of government there are now ministries, bureaus, and offices of women's affairs. The federal ministry is mainly responsible for conducting and monitoring women's affairs activities at the national level and creating the environment for the implementation of the NPW in different sectors. At the regional, zonal, district, and kebele level, there are respective bureaus and offices of women's affairs (in the case of the kebele, a single cabinet officer). As in the case of other line bureaus and offices, the women's affairs bureaus and offices are formally accountable to their respective councils, many of which have a women's affairs or social affairs committee that engages in oversight.

In addition to these agencies, in several of the sector or line ministries there are departments, desks, or individual "focal points" focusing on gender issues concerning the respective sector. These exist from the federal to the district level and are mandated to investigate gender gaps and develop strategies to address inequalities in the line ministries and their subsectors respectively (AfDB 2004).

The MoARD women's affairs department acts as a gender focal point in the ministry. At regional bureaus of agriculture and rural development (BoARDs), gender focal points liaise with the respective women's affairs bureaus. In the same way, at the district level gender desks are set up in the WoARD. In such a system that is organized to penetrate the grassroots level, agricultural service provision, such as extension, is supposed to be delivered to both men and women in an equitable way.

Spring and Groelsema (2004) note that district governments are supposed to carry out gender budgeting in order to hold public spending activities accountable to principles of gender equality. However, there is no information on the ground concerning the extent to which gender budgeting in fact has been implemented. There are only some initiatives to develop sectoral gender budgeting guidelines (for example, in education and in finance and economic development). The capacity to mainstream gender budgeting at the local government levels is quite limited.

The EPRDF has incorporated within its statutes the participation of women through the formation of a women's league to work for the implementation of its strategies of development and also to serve as "an agent of struggle to free Ethiopian women from all kinds of oppressions" (EPRDF 2006).

Buchy and Basaznew (2005) found crucial shortcomings both in the gender sensitivity of extension provision and in the way gender and women's affairs were situated within the bureaucracy in the Awasa Bureau of Agriculture. While farmers in general were underserved by extension agents, women farmers made up only a small fraction of farmers receiving extension services. They seldom went to extension field visits unless these were related to home economics. Even where training by agricultural staff was in principle open to men and women farmers, the training times were selected without consideration of women's time burdens. The NPW points to the challenge inherent in the way that traditional social norms filter into bureaucracies, leading to a resistance within these bureaucracies to consider gender experts in agencies as being on par with other officials (Ethiopia, Ministry of Women's Affairs 2000). Within a given agency, the major push to foster gender awareness stems from donors. Yet Buchy and Basaznew (2005) found that the Awasa BoARD had no gender policy and therefore no gender-specific guidelines or procedures. Its unit responsible

for gender outreach had the characteristics of many similar gender desks in line ministries: All staff were women, it had a precarious position within the bureau, it was heavily specialized in home economics and nutrition, it was short on other core skills such as project planning and preparation, it operated mostly in isolation from the rest of the bureaucracy, and it had no mandate to monitor the gender-related performance of the bureau.

Unlike commonly found trends in many countries, in Ethiopia gender representation in government does not consistently decrease with the level or tier of government. For example, as of 2004, women represented 8 percent, 13 percent, 7 percent, and 14 percent of the federal, regional, district, and kebele parliaments or councils, respectively (Ethiopia, Prime Minister's Office, Women's Affairs Sub-sector 2004). This pattern, however, masks substantial regional variation in women's presence in subnational government structures, reflecting the highly disparate role of women in different regions; for example, women's share in regional councils ranged between 1 percent in Somale region and 28 percent in Tigray region in 2005 (IFAD 2005). Women representatives on councils have limited capacity to effect transformation of long-held attitudes on gender and the institutions and structures that perpetuate such attitudes.

A detailed analysis of the NPW warned that decentralization could weaken the government's ability to effectively implement the 1993 policy, in light of more limited capacity at the district and kebele levels to translate the policy into investments and programs (Ethiopia Women's Affairs Office and World Bank 1998). There are no formal quotas to ensure a degree of representation of women among the government's electoral bodies, as found in some developing and developed countries. The constitution does not mandate representation of women in political office, although there are mandates for certain ethnic minorities (Demessie, Kebede, and Shimeles 2005). At the same time, the constitution also does not bar the use of affirmative action measures to reduce gender inequality, and it has been proposed to employ such measures to strengthen women's presence in local councils, thereby beginning to overcome the absence of women's voice at least in government representative bodies (Ethiopia Women's Affairs Office and World Bank 1998).

At the local level, gender representation among elected representatives reflects the "ghettoization" of women in women's affairs units, similar to the staffing of the agricultural bureaucracy described above. As Dom and Mussa (2006a) found in a study of the Amhara region, in standing committees of the district council—which were formed around topics such as economic affairs, budget and finance, legal and administrative affairs, and the like—women were hardly represented, except on the standing committees for women's affairs, which consisted entirely of women. The district cabinet typically includes only a single woman, who heads the Office of Women's Affairs.

Aside from the local government positions focused on gender—women's affairs officials and units within the kebele and district cabinets, and women's affairs standing committees in the district councils—there are also women's associations at the community level, and these are officially considered nongovernmental entities. In fact, women's associations, along with youth associations, exist at every level of administration, from the kebele on up. Their role and effectiveness vary by region. While in Tigray, women's associations tend to be quite important and well organized, in Amhara their strength and effectiveness, and thus their credibility, are constrained, especially at the lower levels, by limited resources to initiate activities and provide services to their members (Dom and Mussa 2006a). The size and vigor of membership in women's associations is also likely to be compromised by a perception on the part of residents that despite their formally nongovernmental status, they are an appendage of the government and in particular of the ruling party, discouraging regular women farmers from greater participation in this institution (Muir 2004).

While in Ethiopia there is a stark discrepancy between formal procedures for local development planning under decentralization on the one hand and the reality and practice of the planning process on the other hand (Dom and Mussa 2006a; Yilmaz and Venugopal

2008), the participation of women in community planning and decisionmaking has been found to be nearly nonexistent. A World Bank (2001) study of decentralization and service delivery in four regions found several cultural, social, and economic barriers to women's ability to attend community meetings and to express their priorities and concerns when they did attend. A fear of violent reprisal from husbands, feelings of insecurity about public speaking, a sense that their opinions would not be listened to, and pressure on their time all combined to keep both attendance and expression of voice low. On the other hand, perhaps due to pressure from donors or higher-tier governments to create more gender balance in local meetings, it was found that for local government planning meetings, women were at times "ordered" to attend (World Bank 2001).

## **5. Quality of service provision**

In this section we discuss the efficiency, effectiveness, and client orientation of extension services in the study districts. By efficiency, we mean the extent to which resource use is optimal. Resources include time, labor, local knowledge, modern technology, money, and natural resources. Whether their use is optimal depends in part on the systems, processes, and institutions that employ the resources. Participatory development requires use of the knowledge, capacity, institutions, and power of the affected people. It must also be useful. People are not merely beneficiaries but crucial development actors. Local knowledge is the basis for community participation. Communities participate in what they know, and what they know well is their knowledge and practices. Even if a development activity achieves its overall goals, it is not efficient if it fails to utilize local and community knowledge.

Effectiveness refers to the degree to which development policies, programs, and projects meet their stated goals and objectives. Extension services are effective if they succeed in facilitating community development, rural poverty reduction, gender equality, and agricultural development that spurs growth and linkages to industrialization. The effectiveness of extension services is to be seen in the knowledge and skills of farmers in solving their own problems. Institutional pluralism and farmer participation are important conditions for effective extension services.

We characterize service provision as client oriented if the expressed desires and assessed needs of the people to whom services are provided drive the methods and processes. A client-oriented extension service is participatory when it provides farmers with information, advice, and training in a wide range of areas yet ultimate decisionmaking remains with the farmers. In addition, client-oriented extension services require that farmers be well organized and have the capacity to articulate their demands and control the system. The mind-set of respect for public service providers is deep-rooted in Ethiopian society. The administrative and political culture does not favor a client orientation or participation, transparency, and accountability. The administrative and political system is very hierarchical, characterized by command and control. As we were told by the head of the planning desk at the BG D Office of Finance and Economic Development, government officials are out to advance themselves, not to serve the people. Even when district officials are competent, as in Amhara D-2 and Oromia D, they have no commitment and incentives to advance people and reduce poverty. There is high demand for services in the kebeles, but too often the supply is not forthcoming.

## 5.1. Efficiency

Recent governance reform initiatives in Ethiopia are intended to provide an enabling environment for improving the scale, efficiency, and responsiveness of public service delivery and for empowering citizens to participate more successfully in shaping their own development. These initiatives, coupled with social accountability projects, are expected to improve the efficiency of public service provision. For this to happen, it is essential that DAs gain farmers' acceptance and confidence in their objectivity, and that farmers not perceive DAs as having conflicting interests from their own (Lemma 2007). The willingness and ability of DAs to accept ideas and criticism from farmers and respect local knowledge are vital for successful extension.

The rapid expansion of the extension service since 2005 has increased the number of DAs who hold postsecondary diplomas. In all of our study kebeles except Lugoboka we found a team of at least three DAs present, and all held diplomas. This indicates that extension services are available but does not tell us anything about service quality, which is a question of effectiveness. The ultimate test of extension services is to be found in the extent to which they have increased farmers' knowledge, skills, and innovative capacities.

In addition, the rapid scaling up of extension has opened up opportunities for women to fill positions. We interviewed female agents with specialized training in crops, livestock, and natural resource management; this is a change from the past, when the few women DAs were heavily concentrated in home economics and nutrition.

The existence of capacity-building and backstopping institutions is vital to advance agricultural development. Recently, farmer training centers (FTCs) have been established in many kebeles; DAs train farmers at these sites through the use of both classrooms and demonstration fields. The FTCs have demonstration farms where new technologies are tested and adapted and where farmers learn about the use of new improved technology packages. The government's goal is to eventually establish one FTC per kebele.

DAs and other agriculture staff, in turn, receive training through Ethiopia's 25 agricultural, technical, and vocational education and training (ATVET) colleges. However, the emphasis is on technical subjects, with inadequate focus on social issues, gender analysis, and community mobilization. Extension personnel with more advanced training tend to work in administrative and supervisory positions (Lemma 2007).

We found that kebele-based extension teams are now deploying on a watershed basis, with each member taking responsibility for all agricultural advice within her or his territory, and drawing on the technical expertise of colleagues as needed. This integrated approach to extension mirrors farmers' own sense of integration. The team meets frequently and reports to supervisors who are likewise deployed to a kebele and take responsibility for teams in a cluster of three or four surrounding kebeles. The team members work closely with contact and model farmers and lemati budin in their respective territories, and facilitate kebele-level agricultural planning. This is an efficient use of resources in that each DA works with a manageable number of farmers and can draw on help from other team members, supervisors, and district-based experts when necessary. However, the approach does not optimize the use of the DAs' technical training, since each agent becomes a generalist within her or his territory.

Tigray D offered the best-case scenario among our study districts. The district government has more than 100 university-trained staff. DAs do not have problems accessing the kebeles and have adequate mobility. There are at least three DAs per kebele, and they have received additional training from NGOs, including training on gender issues. The district has good roads and irrigation infrastructure, which provide incentives for commercial farming. Kebeles have good teamwork and relations with the district government. In Tigray K, the DAs are well trained and motivated, have in-service training opportunities, have good analytical capacity, and work closely with the lemati budin in their respective territories. The

extension team prepares weekly plans together and rotates in sections of the kebele. The commonly used extension method is individual visits to farmers or homes. The agents are very efficient and also effective. In some kebeles, there are five or more DAs, including veterinary specialists, beekeeping technicians, cooperative promotion agents, and water technicians. There are incentives for good performance from both the farmers and the district government. This shows that, at a minimum, DAs meet the expressed needs and demands of farmers, who have a means for rewarding good DAs.

However, we did note some suboptimal use of human resources in Tigray K. Two recently trained DAs were offered non-DA jobs in the kebele. A woman was employed in a lower-paid technician position although she had training as a full-fledged extension agent. A man received the position of kebele manager, the chief local civil servant. We do not have enough information to determine whether gender discrimination operated in deciding who received which post, and based on our observations and interviews, both of the people in question seemed capable and well regarded in the community.

In Amhara D-2, Oromia D, and BG D, the efficiency of agricultural service provision is reduced due to ecological, technical, and social factors. In both Amhara D-2 and Oromia D, DAs complain about the lack of opportunities for in-service training, even via distance learning. In Amhara D-2, the administrative culture is a barrier to development. Kebele-based DAs understand the problems and needs of farmers, but they lack discretion and adequate technical support from district experts, whose relationship with them is merely one of control. In Amhara K-2, the DA team leader is well trained and has a very good sense of local social and political issues as well as the agroecology of the kebele. But he commented on the lack of follow-up from supervisors, who have no greater technical knowledge than the members of the extension team (one DA said that “they are no better than us” technically). Supervisors perform only control functions, such as making sure that DAs meet their quotas for enrolling farmers into extension packages.

In Amhara K-2, we heard of a woman who had recently received DA training and became the kebele manager, but quit after a short time. In this situation, it seemed that difficult working conditions due to the agroecology as well as having to work with long-tenured male local elected officials may have been factors in her departure. We observed some of the planning tools she had tried to develop before leaving, including a map and census of the community.

In Oromia K, there is an FTC, but it is not utilized for extension work. It lacks proper fencing and is used as a goat shed. The kebele has a resident extension team, but supervisors do not visit them regularly. There are only five model farmers in the kebele, and they receive inadequate extension support. As a result, there are few demonstration effects to induce other farmers to adopt the same improved practices.

In BG D, extension services are somewhere between inefficient and nonexistent. Decentralization has not yet taken place; the district government engages in some planning but mostly implements initiatives coming from the region. The district also lacks adequate human resources; zonal experts provide technical support in planning and budget functions. None of the district government staff has completed secondary school. There is also a mobility problem due to lack of vehicles and motorcycles. Only two kebeles have development centers with FTCs, and these are completely nonfunctional. In BG K the center provides only basic veterinary service, but the facility does not have refrigeration for animal medications. DAs are concentrated in the district capital and kebeles have limited access to their services. At best, the agents visit kebeles every two or three weeks. There are no kebele-based extension teams and supervisors. The DAs lack both technical agricultural and social mobilization skills. There are high rates of absenteeism and turnover due to the difficult working conditions in the district. Only 1 of 30 district agricultural experts specializes in natural resource management, despite the importance of forest-based livelihoods in the district. The district also does not provide credit to help farmers adopt technology packages.

## 5.2. Effectiveness

Extension service is a key instrument to achieve the goals of agricultural development policies and programs. In some places, it is more effective than in others. Tigray D has high potential, adequate human capacity, good infrastructure, market integration, and good moisture and soil fertility. Extension performs well and helps residents to realize the potential that is available. In the district, institutional arrangements and people's participation in making agriculture advance are both fairly mature. Farmers understand change and cooperate with DAs and administrators to enhance their livelihoods. They are receptive to outside information and are supported and encouraged to develop their own knowledge systems and practices. Farmers are open and entrepreneurial, and they take advantage of opportunities and a good enabling environment. A critical mass of model farmers engages in irrigated commercial agriculture and enjoys good links to markets, including those in urban centers such as Mekele, Maichew, Alamata, and Korem, which are accessible via all-weather, paved roads. As a result, these farmers see their socioeconomic status improve. Opportunities are open to women as well as men. The DA team supports these farmers' market-oriented activities. At all levels, there is strong commitment to change, and service providers effectively meet demand for services. There is also healthy competition among different kebeles as an incentive for good performance by DAs, their supervisors, and the kebele administrations. The district organizes experience-sharing programs among various kebeles to facilitate learning about good practices. DAs respect farmers' own knowledge; selected farmer practices are now included in the extension package and are being promoted in similar contexts.

BG D offers a sharp contrast. DAs are very ineffective in meeting the needs of farmers. They lack motivation to provide high-quality services. The veterinary service agent is not well trained and has no social interaction or open discussions with farmers about the constraints that they face. She fails to make sure that farmers carry out the full course of treatment for cattle. This constrains the effectiveness of her advice. People will not pay for medicine and do not use veterinary services even when livestock diseases break out, because the agent has failed to persuade them of the value of the treatment. The agent's lack of follow-up and dialogue with the farmers reduces the demonstration effect of the farmers who do use the treatment. Ineffective training leads to ineffective service.

Oromia D is similar to BG D in topography. A lack of roads and transportation facilities makes extension supervision difficult, so DAs do not receive much guidance on working with farmers. Farmers' demand for services is high, however. In Oromia K, women hear about development programs elsewhere on the radio and then seek similar services in their community. As in Tigray D, the DAs know the local situation well, but they do not get the same support from district technical experts. Farmers are willing to innovate and commercialize their enterprises, but input delivery is not timely and adequate. Also, the cost of inputs was rising at the time of the research. The potential for coffee production is high, and farmers are willing to grow it, but cultivation was just getting underway. Budget limitations constrain provision of support services that could facilitate coffee expansion. In addition, there is no budget for roads, and this limits both marketing and input delivery. Farmers use donkeys to transport supplies from the district town. The district cooperatives have to rent storage space in the district capital.

In Amhara K-2, the agroecological situation is a bottleneck to agricultural diversification. There is virtually no possibility to engage in high-input, irrigated agriculture. There is good potential for livestock, especially goats and bees, but this is poorly exploited. Farmers are not well organized into specialized livestock and honey cooperatives. DAs only sporadically provide relevant services to farmers, such as modern beehives and advice on honey extraction. Farmers also face difficulty marketing honey due to poor roads. Uncertain conditions make farmers reluctant to innovate; they cannot take risks with high-input technologies since they have no insurance. The district government is not tailoring

development packages to realize the potential of Amhara D-2. Instead, its development approach is top-down and based on practices more appropriate to higher-potential areas such as neighboring Tigray D. As a result, residents do not enjoy sustainable livelihoods. As a DA puts it, “Only the Safety Net Program,” a government program providing cash and food to poor people, “keeps people here.”

The Amhara D-2 government does not provide added technical value to DAs and does not empower them to help farmers by building on local knowledge, even though the DAs know how to promote rural development and support farmers. There is not much backing from the kebele cabinet either. Planning is top-down and does not reflect local conditions and potential; there are no links to the nearby agricultural research station, and FTCs are dysfunctional. The point of extension is to facilitate people’s ability to build their capacity to solve their own problems. Because they are based in the kebele, the DAs have gained an understanding of local problems and socioeconomic and cultural realities, and could help farmers with problem solving. The problem is the attitude of district experts and supervisors, whose priority is quota-based package promotion. But the recruitment of young people, including women, into the ranks of the DAs may shake the system up a little.

### **5.3. Client orientation**

Recently, the extension system has shown improvements in meeting the expressed needs of farmers. DAs are better trained, and their deployment to the kebeles is an important institutional innovation that has given them understanding of local realities. The job of a DA is almost exclusively technical in orientation, with little or no emphasis on social mobilization, developing relationships with service users, facilitating farmer empowerment, or gender analysis. But by being posted in kebeles, DAs do gain some on-the-job training in these areas. In Tigray D, Amhara D-2, and Oromia D, DAs have good rapport with farmers and understand their needs and concerns. In Amhara K-2, a DA told us that he understood local farmers’ constraints and had the capacity to help them overcome problems, but the top-down nature of the district’s extension approach precluded him from providing tailored services.

In Tigray D, both male and female farmers are satisfied with DA services. The DAs interact closely with farmers. Farmers appreciate the excellent services and hard work of the female beekeeping technician in Tigray K and allow her to stay in their homes. We observed that the DAs in Tigray K wear the same clothing as the local farmers even though some of them have urban backgrounds, and the female DAs in this Muslim community cover their heads as the local women do. The DAs hold open discussions with the community and enjoy the trust of the farmers whom they serve.

BG D is the polar opposite of Tigray D with regard to farmer satisfaction. DAs do not seek farmers out to develop relationships based on trust and rapport. Farmers seldom receive services and are dissatisfied. But since the DAs seldom visit and do not solicit farmers’ views, there is no outlet for expressing demands.

## **6. Gender equity in service provision**

Gender equity refers to fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits—including agricultural extension services—and responsibilities between women and men. The concept recognizes that women and men have different needs and power and that these differences should be identified and addressed with different approaches to produce outcomes that are equitable. Equity involves fairness in representation, participation, and benefits afforded to women and men. Whereas gender equality is an outcome—in which males and females have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities—gender equity encompasses the processes used to achieve that outcome.

We found two main efforts to ensure gender equity in extension service provision: efforts to target women as extension users and the existence of gender machinery in the district and kebele administrations, that is, the creation of special institutions aimed at achieving a fair distribution of benefits.

### **6.1. Targeting services to women**

We observed substantial institutional barriers to women farmers in obtaining access to extension services. In Amhara K-1, where we carried out our initial scoping study, a male DA told us that he only provides advice to heads of household; in husband–wife households, the husband is invariably considered the head. In advising such households, he said, he provides advice to the husband, even on women’s activities such as home gardening and poultry raising. He relies on the husband to then pass the advice on to his wife. This DA also told us that he provides direct advice to women who are heads of household. However, a female household head in Amhara K-1 told us that the local DAs only come to see her when it is time for her to contribute labor to maintenance of community soil and water conservation works.

Elsewhere, DAs face cultural barriers in advising women farmers, since local customs may prevent married women from interacting with men other than their husbands. To circumvent this barrier, male DAs employ various approaches such as getting a husband’s permission to talk to his wife, working with local women’s organizations to arrange group extension meetings of women, and meeting with women during coffee ceremonies and other community gatherings. In both Amhara D-2 and Oromia D, DAs rarely hold extension meetings with women. In Amhara K-2, DAs work with women through village-level women’s groups and the kebele women’s association to get women enrolled in newer extension packages specifically targeted to women farmers. Women’s organization leaders in Amhara K-2 told us that DAs do not proactively approach women but will provide advice to women if asked to do so. However, throughout the country, DAs are under pressure from their supervisors to enroll women in tailored extension packages, so contact with female farmers is likely to increase.

We heard complaints that extension approaches do not differentiate between married women on the one hand and single female household heads on the other. At several study sites, we heard that even when female household heads have access to land, they frequently lack other productive resources such as labor, oxen, and credit, making it difficult to work the land themselves and obtain inputs. As a result, they frequently must sharecrop out their land and usually do so from a weak bargaining position that results in unfavorable arrangements. Extension advice generally does not address these obstacles.

In addition, the Women’s Development and Change extension package emphasizes extension advice on traditional women’s activities such as home gardens and poultry. However, as a women’s association leader in Amhara K-2 told us, it is quite difficult for many female household heads to raise poultry because they spend a lot of their time trying to earn

income through providing weeding services to other farmers. Typically, only those female household heads with older children have the time and labor to devote to chickens. In addition to the perception bias that women do not farm, there is thus a bias that all women can garden and tend chickens.

The offices of women's affairs and district women's associations in Tigray D and Amhara D-2 provide support to women's organizations and the cabinet women's affairs directors in the kebeles. The programs aim at enhancing rural women's voice and economic empowerment. Among other things, the district programs help local institutions provide access to credit, vegetable seeds, and income-generation programs. The WoARDs in these districts also help women gain access to credit through the federal Productive Safety Net Program. In Oromia D, the WoARD supports women's home gardening and microenterprise activities. The BG D government does not have any initiatives targeted toward women.

## **6.2. Gender machinery**

The governments of all of our study districts have an office of women's affairs. These agencies seek to ensure gender equity in district budgets, plans, and programs, and they work closely with staff assigned as gender focal points or gender desk officers in sectoral offices. Parallel to this system, our study kebeles all had a cabinet member responsible for women's affairs. Usually this official was the only woman sitting on the cabinet. In district and kebele cabinets, women tend to be pigeonholed into women's positions such as women's affairs, health, and education rather than security, finance, and agriculture.

### **6.2.1. District institutions**

We found the district-level gender machinery to be of varying degrees of effectiveness. In Tigray D, the Office of Women's Affairs has highly trained and competent staff. The deputy head of the office told us that gender is mainstreamed in district sectoral planning, program implementation, and evaluation. The office monitors sectoral plans and reports through a gender lens, and works closely with the district women's association. The office also trains sectoral senior managers in gender mainstreaming. The district women's association has collaborated with ActionAid on gender awareness training for civil servants, including those deployed to the kebeles. In our view, the district administration is a model for gender-sensitive approaches to development.

In contrast, the district government in Amhara D-2 makes at best half-hearted use of its gender machinery. Clearly, the district administration was told that such machinery needed to exist, but it does not seem to function. There are gender focal points in all the sectoral offices, but these are staff who have taken on this responsibility on top of other duties. When we met with two of them, they could not explain their duties to us and told us that they received no training on how to carry those duties out. Invariably, gender focal points are women, since senior government executives assume that gender equals women.

In Oromia D, the situation is even worse. The Office of Women's Affairs has a staff composed of school teachers whom the district has transferred into gender jobs because they are women. They receive no training beyond their teacher training, and the office has only a minimal budget. There are no focal points in sectoral offices, except for education (because the Women's Affairs officials all come from the education sector). In theory, the office develops checklists to mainstream gender issues into sectoral planning, but it is difficult to see how it gets sectoral offices to use these lists in the absence of a formal liaison system and in light of open gender bias among the district government leadership. The district party leader has criticized the administration for its poor performance on gender equity.

The BG D government had only recently established its Office of Women's Affairs at the time of the research. It had no staff, budget, or programs.

### **6.2.2. Kebele institutions**

In both Tigray K and Amhara K-2, we found charismatic women serving in the position of cabinet director of women's affairs. These officials worked closely with the local women's association and the party women's organization, and sought to expand the space available for women to meet, discuss issues, and work together.

In general, however, we found that kebele administrations had little awareness of gender issues and did not provide support for women's economic or political empowerment. Kebele leaders simply reported statistics on the number of women in political positions when asked about these issues. They could not speak to the quality of women's participation or capacity development. In Oromia K, the local women's affairs cabinet position was clearly considered a token one: The incumbent did not speak the local language or attend meetings, but she received the job because she is the only educated woman in the kebele and is married to the chairperson.

The DAs themselves form part of the kebele gender machinery to the extent that they seek to achieve gender equity. We specifically asked female farmers and leaders of women's organizations if they preferred to work with female DAs. In all study sites, we were told that the gender of the DA is less important than whether he or she pays attention to gender issues when providing services. In Tigray K, the women's affairs director of the kebele cabinet singled out both male and female DAs as giving good advice to women farmers.

Likewise, male farmers did not express any unwillingness to seek advice from female DAs. Both women and men farmers had high regard for the two women members of the extension team in Tigray K; we were told that both these women worked extremely hard and provided outstanding services. In BG K, although farmers complained about the ineffective advice that the female DA provided, their complaints did not involve her gender. Generally, we found BG D to have the least patriarchal attitudes of our study sites, as the local Gumuz culture is more gender-equitable and open.

## **7. Voice accountability in service provision**

The literature on decentralization in Ethiopia indicates that placing responsibility for service delivery closer to the users has not substantially changed the traditional emphasis on upward accountability in public administration. This is due to both the federal government's disinclination to couple administrative decentralization with fiscal decentralization and the pervasiveness of the EPRDF at all levels of governance (Gebre-Egziabher and Berhanu 2007). Our findings in the study districts and communities are very much consistent with this view.

The governments in these districts remain completely dependent on the regions and especially the federal government for revenues, which are provided through formula-driven block grants that do not take local problems or concerns into account. Moreover, while districts do develop plans that have some influence on how those revenues get spent, regional bodies evaluate the district governments on their performance vis-à-vis the planning targets that they receive from the regions. In the case of BG D, decentralization to the district level has not occurred, so the district simply implements plans received from the region without any discretion.

For their part, the kebele administrations have no role in developing budgets, and their planning processes tend to be symbolic. In the decentralized regions, district governments are supposed to serve as a hub that harmonizes bottom-up planning conducted at the community level with directives received from the higher levels of government. In practice, however, kebele efforts to identify priorities too often get lost in the shuffle to aggregate district plans and harmonize them with regional and federal guidance. While representatives of a particular kebele in the district council can argue for more resources, the district executive has a fixed budget pie, and so there is a zero-sum quality to how it sizes the slices.

The pervasive influence of the EPRDF is evident in all the study districts. In Oromia D, the district cabinet is a mixed party and government body, without any pretense at separation. In Amhara D-2, we saw party manuals on display in both district and zone government offices. Everywhere, government planning and program implementation conform with party directives, and civil servants invariably are party members. Even when party leaders are well attuned to local development issues, the system does not allow them to address local needs outside the parameters of party policy. The party evaluates civil servants and elected officials at all levels of government as to how well they carry out party directives.

We encountered the top-down character of EPRDF governance even in the language employed. In Amhara D-2, the party public affairs director told us, “The party is the father of the community.” In other words, the role of the party is to be a parent and lead; the role of the people and community is that of children who need to be led.

All of this impinges significantly on extension service provision at the kebele level. With the move to post DAs in the kebeles, agents have indeed become more accountable and responsive to their clients. Moreover, there is now an element of formal accountability in that kebele cabinets and councils are involved in the evaluation of DA performance. This is reinforced by informal mechanisms: Given the increased level of contact between farmers and DAs, word is likely to get back to the WoARD rather quickly if a DA underperforms.

However, this system is embedded in EPRDF political dominance. Front affiliate parties controlled most kebele administrations even before the 2008 elections, and now they hold almost all of them. Kebele cabinets, and especially the chairpersons, view themselves as the local representatives of the government and their job as that of implementing government orders and policy directives. In Amhara K-2, for example, the local administration concerns itself mainly with political, legal, and security matters, leaving agricultural development on the back burner. All around the country, there is a tendency for local administrations to evaluate DAs not in terms of their technical capacity but rather on the basis of their political commitment. Higher levels of government reinforce this, and kebeles have found that their access to agricultural inputs depends on delivering a credible EPRDF majority vote (Pausewang, Tronvoll, and Aalen 2003).

Regardless of improvements in downward accountability, DAs continue to have extremely strong lines of upward accountability. The evaluations of supervisors and district-based subject matter specialists determine their access to advanced training opportunities and promotions. Those evaluations continue to focus primarily on success in meeting quotas for getting farmers to adopt technology packages, including the women’s development package. Meeting farmers’ demands for advice outside of this framework does not garner favorable marks. Living and working with farmers on a daily basis has clearly increased DAs’ awareness of farmers’ constraints, needs, aspirations, and knowledge; this was the case for the DAs whom we interviewed in Tigray K, Amhara K-2, and Oromia K. Yet they acknowledged that they could work with farmers to address those needs only if they met their package quotas.

## **7.1. Accountability mechanisms**

Following the disputed 2005 elections, the federal government and EPRDF leadership admitted that they had lost the trust of many citizens. In rural areas, this was due in part to forcing farmers to adopt unwanted technology packages and imposing fines on those who failed to attend public meetings, even if they viewed such participation as useless. Following a series of public consultations in 2006, the government announced a set of “good governance” reforms aimed at regaining citizens’ trust (Dom and Mussa 2006b).

These reforms created a number of mechanisms to enhance citizen voice and government accountability. In particular, the federal government expanded the number of seats on the kebele councils in order to improve the representation of women and youth. In addition, the creation of the new post of kebele manager was intended to provide citizens with a place to take grievances and demands for services. These institutional arrangements and approaches have real potential to improve service delivery. However, new local council members have not received training to help them become effective local leaders. In Tigray K, the council chair acknowledged that participation has a value but complained about a tradeoff between enhancing voice and getting things done. The risk is that participation becomes tokenistic and ritualized in the absence of capacity to be effective.

In all study districts, civil society organizations are constrained in their ability to hold government officials—at all levels—to account. Most mass organizations in rural areas are closely tied to EPRDF parties. For example, since 2005, the government has encouraged farmers to join cooperatives, and membership has in fact increased, due in part to the availability of fertilizer and credit through these organizations. However, research has shown that EPRDF party members tend to dominate leadership positions (see review in Spielman, Cohen, and Moguees 2009). We found this to be true in the study sites; for example, in Amhara K-2, the head of the local co-op is also head of the local party youth group and a member of the kebele party leadership (as well as an Orthodox Christian priest). Likewise, the head of the Tigray D cooperative union (the umbrella association of district cooperatives) is a veteran TPLF leader. Even though our interviews suggested that these leaders are well attuned to local farmers’ demands, the need for loyal party members to hew to the party line trumps downward accountability to co-op members.

## **7.2. Local governance reforms**

### ***7.2.1. Deployment of civil servants to kebeles***

Deployment of civil servants from the district capitals to the kebeles was a centerpiece of the good governance program. In addition to the extension team, health extension workers, finance officers, and land administration officials all reside and work in the kebeles they serve in the regions where district decentralization has occurred, such as Tigray D, Amhara D-2, and Oromia D. Kebele deployment puts DAs and other officials in touch with their clients on a regular basis and facilitates on-the-job learning about local problems and concerns. It also makes civil servants available to citizens on a regular basis, boosting citizens’ confidence in these public service providers.

The new post of kebele manager has two main purposes. First, it offers residents a one-stop shop to which they can bring concerns, grievances, and requests for action. It is then the job of the manager to ensure that the right local civil servant or citizen committee takes up the issue. Second, the manager serves as the chief deployed civil servant, so she or he does have some supervisory functions vis-à-vis DAs and others, although all deployed civil servants remain accountable to their respective supervisors and district offices (the manager reports to the district office of capacity building).

The deployed civil servants are also subject to several levels of citizen oversight. The expanded kebele councils now include standing committees concerned with various sectors, which oversee the relevant civil servants. At the time of our research, these committees were quite new, and there was no information as to their effectiveness. In addition, the kebele cabinet has some supervisory and evaluation functions vis-à-vis the deployed officials. The chairperson directly supervises the kebele manager, although we found some evidence of jockeying for position between chairpersons and managers, as seen in power struggles over who would hold the kebele seal that gets applied to all official documents. Likewise, in theory, the kebele cabinet member responsible for agriculture has oversight over the extension team.

We found, however, that parallel to the deployment of DAs, federal policy is that the senior DA sits on the kebele cabinet as the local director of agriculture. Similarly, the school director is the cabinet education official and a health extension worker is the cabinet official responsible for health. On the one hand, this arrangement means that the local administration has ready access to technical advice. But on the other hand, this purchases technical competence with clear lines of authority. For agriculture, the lead DA is accountable to the kebele manager, but the manager in turn is accountable to the chairperson, who represents the cabinet and council. Yet the cabinet also includes officials who report to the manager. Furthermore, while the cabinet is responsible for evaluating the deployed civil servants' work plans, this means that the process becomes one of self-evaluation rather than citizen oversight through the cabinet, which is in effect the executive committee of the council. In practical terms, the presence of the civil servants on the cabinet eviscerates the council's power to appoint the cabinet and strongly reinforces upward accountability, since nearly half the cabinet positions are filled by civil servants, who remain accountable to the district government.

We also found instances in which citizens regarded government officials not as accountable civil servants but as overlords. In both Amhara D-2 and Oromia D, citizens and local civil servants alike were reluctant to speak freely to us when district officials were present, but they became more forthcoming and even willing to voice complaints once these officials left.

### ***7.2.2. Stone-carrying participation versus empowerment***

The good governance reforms also stressed citizen participation in public affairs, as well as the freedom not to participate. Citizens are no longer subject to fines if they do not show up at meetings, yet the expansion of kebele councils to include more female and younger members seeks to engage those previously excluded. However, we observed that participation tends to be less about empowerment—citizen engagement in decisionmaking and managing development—and more about receiving information and contributing labor and money to public works activities. Thus, we were able to observe a general assembly in Amhara K-2 at which the kebele development plan was supposedly discussed. The meeting consisted simply of the kebele chairperson and council speaker reading the plan to the 15 or so people who attended. As far as labor contributions go, in Tigray region there is a formal system of *corvée* that dates to the civil war era, whereas this type of labor is supposedly voluntary elsewhere in the country. We observed that labor contributions—which we call “stone-carrying” participation—are in practice mandatory in all the study districts.

In Oromia K, residents told us that representative bodies in the kebele and district capital did not offer an effective channel for improving the quality of service delivery. They complained about a lack of transparency and accountability on the part of the district administration.

We did find instances in which participating in meetings and local institutions made a difference. In Tigray K, the kebele council monitors the performance of local representatives to the district council and ensures that they raise local concerns. In Tigray D at least, representative government does have some bearing on service delivery.

### **7.2.3. Voting with feet**

We were told repeatedly that participation in public life is voluntary, but we did not find much willingness on the part of kebele or district officials whom we interviewed to investigate why people do not attend meetings. It seems logical that people will not attend meetings if they do not find them useful or beneficial and there are no sanctions for non-attendance.

Participation has a cost; people's time and labor is not free. Attending a meeting to hear the reading of a precooked plan may not have much benefit to low-income farmers, especially during harvest time. And even at other times, farmers have many more important things to do than hear local leaders read a plan, such as meeting with neighbors, doing craft work, advising one another, and trading seeds.

On the same day that the general assembly took place in Amhara K-2, we observed more than 100 people attending a celebration of the feast of St. Michael at a local church, where they received food for both the soul and the belly, so to speak. The local politicians who attended the general assembly also went to the church along with the local citizens. Amhara K-2's citizens view the church as important in their lives; public meetings do not seem to offer anything.

People in Oromia D similarly failed to attend public meetings, voicing like explanations about not finding the gatherings useful. This leads to a vicious circle: Citizens do not go to meetings, so they do not have a voice and do not receive quality services.

In Tigray D, in contrast, we witnessed a number of public meetings where most households in the kebeles appeared to be represented; women and men participated equally. In Tigray K, as elsewhere in Tigray, meetings have a purpose – people criticize, speak, discuss, and evaluate. The local tradition of public participation appears to be institutionalized.

In our other study districts, there is much less emphasis on debate and discussion. Rather, the administrative culture is top-down, command and control oriented. Local leaders do not see the value of engaging members of the community in discussion or in planning, managing, and owning development. Instead, they focus on fulfilling directives from higher levels of administration. They hold meetings as directed and then check off a box, whether or not anyone attends or speaks.

### **7.3. Women's participation and representation**

These general observations about voice and accountability also apply to women's participation and representation in public affairs. The good governance reforms called for women to constitute 50 percent of all committees at all levels, so in local governance this has become yet another quota to fill. Local officials point to the presence of women on council committees or in cooperative leadership bodies but readily acknowledge that these representatives receive little training on how to fulfill their duties. They are too often installed as tokens at best or set up to fail at worst.

Patriarchal culture reinforces by-the-numbers administration in undermining women's effective participation. Men often refuse to listen to women in public meetings, and leaders of local women's associations in Amhara K-1 and Amhara K-2 told us that when they try to participate in discussions, men will laugh or jeer at them. Traditionally, women are not given leadership roles, so in Oromia D, women are not taken seriously as decisionmakers. Local male leaders do not tend to press for women's empowerment and participation in leadership, and many civil servants share the traditional gender bias. Moreover, many rural women are illiterate and unused to expressing ideas publicly in a male-dominated society. Most of the female leaders at the kebele level whom we interviewed were single (widowed, divorced, or never married), meaning that they headed their households and thus were used to being

somewhat more assertive than many married women. Husbands often discourage their wives from participating in public meetings.

The traditional culture is somewhat contradictory on the role of women. Women's sphere is the home, yet women are expected to leave the home and spend long hours fetching water and fuel, weeding fields, carrying stones, and planting trees. At the same time, they are not supposed to participate in public affairs, and their productive contributions often go unacknowledged.

These patterns were particularly evident in Amhara K-2 and Oromia K. In BG D, the local Gumuz culture is more gender equitable, but we still found no women in the district leadership.

In Tigray, the civil war experience modified ingrained male dominance somewhat, with women holding important political and military leadership positions during the war. The younger generation of women is less willing to go back to the old way of doing things. Thus, in Tigray K, the women's affairs director of the kebele cabinet shunned the local tradition of early marriage after finishing high school and instead used her modest savings to rent land and become a successful commercial farmer, breaking out of the confines of traditional culture. Similarly, the women's association in Tigray K has strongly advocated for credit for women, even though that goes against the grain of the community's Islamic traditions. The local revolutionary legacy has helped women to become cultural innovators.

Even in Amhara K-2 and Oromia K, we got a sense from our interviews with local leaders—both male and female—that increased representation did translate into enhanced voice for women and even possibly a greater sense involvement in, and ownership of, the development process. In Oromia K, enhanced female representation has led to a noticeable increase in discussion of women's issues in the council.

We also found that local women's organizations offered women an important vehicle for gaining access to services and resources. While these organizations are no less party affiliated than the cooperatives, in some of our study sites they have proved effective in giving women voice and effective representation. In addition, EPRDF-affiliated parties have established women's leagues at the kebele level in conjunction with expanded female representation on the councils. In both Tigray K and Amhara K-2, the party organization, the civil society (but party-affiliated) women's association, and the cabinet women's affairs director have worked together to create spaces where women can meet and discuss issues and have also facilitated women's access to credit and extension services. International and national NGOs have also supported women's empowerment. Our impression from interviews with women in these two kebeles is that they trusted these various institutions and viewed them as working in their interest.

As already noted, in Amhara K-2, the women's association is an important vehicle for working around cultural biases to get women access to extension services. Because many husbands tell their wives not to pay attention to what they learn at association meetings, the organization has held meetings with groups of husbands and wives to educate men about how enhancing their wives' access to resources and knowledge will benefit the whole family. One association member told us that as a result, she and her husband now share responsibility for household economic decisions more equally.

In contrast, we found that women's organizations were largely missing in Oromia D and BG D. In Oromia D, the women's association was largely discredited during the civil war because of its close association with the former military dictatorship. It was merged with the district Office of Women's Affairs, and no independent association currently exists at either the district or kebele level. In BG D, there are similarly no independent women's organizations.

## 8. Conclusions and recommendation

In our study sites, the approach to service delivery remains top-down, with accountability mainly flowing upward. Quota-based thinking remains pervasive among government officials charged with providing services. Thus, “empowerment” is measured by the number of farmers and women who sit on local committees and in district councils, not whether these representatives of the people receive resources, adequate capacity to carry out their responsibilities, and effective organizations within which they can work. The obligations of citizens—particularly community labor contributions to natural resource management—continue to receive emphasis over the state’s obligations to respect, protect, and promote the rights of its citizens. We frequently found examples of this attitude among officials during the course of our research.

Recent institutional changes, such as the posting of DAs to kebeles, the creation of a local focal point for citizen contact with government through the kebele manager, and the expansion of local councils, all have great potential to enhance voice and accountability, improve the quality of services, and support sustainable development. But governance continues to have a top-down character, reinforced by the lack of separation between politics and administration. The point is not to eliminate lines of upward accountability but rather to link them to downward accountability to local citizens. Effective agricultural development requires, in effect, the sound of two hands clapping, not just one.

Related to this, lines of authority and accountability at all levels of government need to be clear. DAs should advise kebele cabinets but should not sit on them; otherwise, they become judges in their own cases, so to speak. Local residents should serve on local cabinets, with the support of local civil servants.

The lines between the governing political party and the public administration also need to be clear, recognizing that the EPRDF sets government policy. Service provision should be according to transparent and nonpolitical criteria, so government agricultural offices should not have party pamphlets on display. In Tigray D, there is no question that the TPLF is the governing party, but party materials are displayed in party offices, not government agencies. Other districts and regions should follow this pattern.

To inject more downward accountability, programs need to have social as well as technical content and to focus on quality, not just quantity. District agriculture offices need to encourage extension agents to listen to farmers and collaborate with them on problem solving, rather than simply pushing one-size-fits-all technology packages that may not fit local conditions or the circumstances of single women. Service quality is not a matter of centralization or decentralization, but rather client orientation, empowerment of service users to make demands, and ensuring that service providers have the capability to respond effectively. As in Tigray D, districts need to give DAs incentives for client-oriented performance. Extension supervisors should play a supportive role in ensuring such service provision rather than enforcing command and control.

Similarly, women’s empowerment is not just a matter of counting the number of women on a committee or the existence of token “gender focal points.” Female leaders and members of the gender machinery need the tools to engage effectively in their responsibilities. Also, there are two genders, not one; gender equality in access to agricultural resources benefits men as well as women through increasing agricultural productivity.

In Tigray D, as elsewhere in the Tigray region, the civil war legacy has institutionalized an environment that permits citizens to articulate their demands, engage in negotiation with officials, and take initiative. Other regions need to adopt such an approach. This means loosening the reins on local organizations such as cooperatives and women’s associations so that they can effectively represent their members rather than simply conforming to party guidance.

In Tigray D, the extension service supports local learning and problem solving through cross-learning among WoARDs and DAs and through the demonstration effects of progressive or model farmers. The extension service needs to be looked at with regard to poverty reduction and food security from a livelihoods perspective within a wider, poverty-focused policy environment. The recent trend of scaling up good practices and tested technologies has the potential to promote participatory and bottom-up approaches to extension rather than focusing on promotion of fixed technology packages.

Many of the institutional arrangements we studied have the potential to advance sustainable development and poverty reduction as well as gender equality. We see some progress, especially in Tigray D, but also on gender matters in Amhara D-2. In general, the DAs in Tigray D, Amhara D-2, and Oromia D have a very good sense of what the problems in their areas are and, if given the right incentives and support, could help farmers improve their situation. What is most important is to make the bottom-up activities that exist on paper a reality, particularly local planning and management of development, with appropriate voice, accountability, and recourse mechanisms that actually function. This would fulfill the promise of the two waves of decentralization and help make the district governments the node in the network that harmonizes top-down and bottom-up development.

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