

Innovations

Mural of Participation: Artistic Expressions of Ethiopian Localized Governance System

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Abstract: *This study examines the role of community participation in fostering good governance within Bale Robe's local administration in Ethiopia's Oromia region, focusing on four kebeles with a total population of 26,130. Using stratified random sampling, 394 respondents were selected and mixed methods data collection—including structured questionnaires (administered to both residents and kebele employees) and interviews—was employed to assess governance dimensions such as participation, transparency, accountability, responsiveness, integrity, and ethical conduct. Findings indicate weak community engagement, poor bureaucratic responsiveness, and deficiencies in transparency and accountability. The study recommends institutional reforms, capacitybuilding training for employees, and structural adjustments to enhance inclusivity and governance effectiveness.*

Keywords: *Accountability Community Participation, Ethical Conduct, Good Governance, Integrity, Kebele, Responsiveness and Transparency.*

1. Introduction

Governance encompasses the strategies, mechanisms, and institutions through which governments and societal organizations interact with citizens, mediate differences, and make collective decisions in an increasingly complex world. It involves a network of formal and informal institutions public, private, and civil that collectively manage societal affairs. Good governance, a multidimensional concept, pertains to the effective, transparent, and accountable exercise of authority in resource management and policy

implementation. It emphasizes participatory decisionmaking, institutional accountability, and equitable service delivery (SAID, 2005). According to the Asian Development Bank (2001), good governance translates societal needs into actionable policies, ensuring power is not concentrated among elites but distributed inclusively.

Ethiopia, like many African nations, faces significant challenges in democratization and governance reform. Despite constitutional commitments to decentralization and participatory governance, systemic issues such as weak institutional capacity, limited transparency, and bureaucratic inefficiencies persist (ECA, 2005). Strengthening governance requires a multisectoral approach, prioritizing decentralization, anticorruption measures, and civic engagement to foster accountability and equitable development.

Community participation (CP) is both a democratic imperative and a catalyst for sustainable development (Stiglitz, 1997). As an essential pillar of good governance, CP empowers citizens to shape policies that affect their livelihoods, ensuring inclusivity and legitimacy (M. Thodaro, 1996). However, in Ethiopia, empirical research on CP's role in local governance remains scarce, particularly in urban administrative contexts like Bale Robe.

In this regard, the study explored research problems in which good governance is underpinned by principles such as accountability, transparency, rule of law, and civic engagement (M. David, 1997). While Ethiopia has instituted reforms to promote participatory governance, implementation gaps persist. The Economic Commission for Africa (2004) notes that Ethiopia lags behind regional governance benchmarks, with limited studies examining grassroots participation in administrative processes. Existing research focuses on sectors like education and rural development, leaving a critical gap in understanding community engagement in urban governance. This study addresses this gap by investigating the extent, challenges, and implications of CP in Bale Robe's local administration. Hence Objective of the study identifies systemic constraints hindering community participation in governance practices.

Therefore we;

- Examine the role of CP in enhancing governance efficacy.
- Assess the current level of CP in Bale Robe's administrative processes.
- Analyze the consequences of inadequate CP on governance outcomes.

Mere of fact scope of the study focuses on Bale Robe's local administration, evaluating governance dynamics across four kebeles. It integrates quantitative and qualitative data to provide a holistic assessment of CP's impact on transparency, accountability, and service delivery.

Given the extensive scope of the subject and resource constraints, this study focuses specifically on the Bale Robe local administration, comprising five kebeles with a total population of 26,130 (13,125 male and 13,005 female). The research centers on

community participation in good governance, incorporating insights from a select group of government officials. Due to the impracticality of surveying the entire constituency, the study concentrates on Bale Robe's administrative framework, with findings generalized to represent broader population dynamics.

Moreover, Significance of the Study stated, Good governance is underpinned by core principles such as transparency, accountability, rule of law, responsiveness, equity, and integrity. Community participation serves as a critical catalyst for effective governance by fostering inclusive decisionmaking processes. This study holds significant value for policymakers and implementers, offering insights to strengthen participatory mechanisms and enhance civic engagement in governance frameworks. By examining these dynamics in Bale Robe Town, the research contributes to broader discourses on democratic governance and institutional reform.

Besides, the study encountered several constraints, including limited resources and logistical challenges. Data collection was hindered by low community responsiveness, as participants were often reluctant to provide primary data or complete questionnaires in a timely manner. Additionally, securing cooperation from toplevel administrative officials proved difficult, restricting access to certain institutional perspectives. These limitations, while notable, do not undermine the study's findings but highlight areas for methodological refinement in future research.

2. Review of Literature

Conceptualizing Governance

Local governance encompasses the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority to manage subnational affairs (Miller, 2000). In contrast to ineffective governance—marked by corruption, inefficiency, and rights violations—good governance adheres to rulebased systems, bureaucratic accountability, and inclusive decisionmaking (Sileshi, 2001). It bridges statesociety divides by emphasizing transparency, equity, and participatory frameworks (Barten et al., 2002; UNDP, 2005).

Dimensions of Good Governance

Scholars universally recognize that effective governance transcends Western democratic models; it prioritizes efficient resource management and responsiveness to societal needs (Abdellatif, 2003). The Australian National Audit Office (2003) defines governance as processes ensuring organizational accountability, while the UN underscores its role in sustainable development (UNDP, 2008). Key principles include:

- Accountability and Transparency: Critical for public trust (Institute of Internal Auditors, 2006).
- Participation: Empowers marginalized groups but faces challenges like political exclusion (Mmfengzu, 2006).
- Social Capital: Trust and norms facilitate collective action (Graddy & Wang, 2009).

Community Participation: Barriers and Potentials

While community engagement is touted as a governance panacea, structural barriers persist. Studies highlight constraints such as poverty, lack of awareness, and institutional resistance (Rahmato et al., 2008; Habtesilasie, 2014). For instance, Waheduzzaman's (2010) research in Bangladesh revealed ineffective participation mechanisms despite policy mandates. Similarly, in Ethiopia, studies on school governance identified socioeconomic and institutional hurdles (Habtesilasie, 2014). However, these works predominantly focus on rural or sectorspecific contexts, neglecting urban governance dynamics.

Research Gap

Existing literature fails to adequately address community participation in urban governance systems, particularly in Ethiopian municipalities like Bale Robe Town. This study fills that gap by evaluating participatory practices in an urban administrative setting, offering localized insights to complement broader governance theories.

3. Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive research design to systematically investigate community participation in good governance within Bale Robe Town. This approach facilitates factfinding with precise interpretation, enabling an indepth analysis of governance dynamics across four kebeles (out of five) in the town's central commercial districts.

Sampling Strategy

A stratified random sampling technique was adopted to ensure proportional representation from each kebele. The sample size was determined using Israel's (1992) formula for finite populations:

To select sample respondent from the total population by developing the sample size this is drawn by Israel, 1992 as follows:

$$n = N / 1 + N(e)^2$$

Where: n : sample size, N : population size,

e : levels of error or precision by using this formula at 95% confidence level and 5% level of precision the sample size is obtained as follows:

$$n = 26130 / 1 + 26130(0.05)^2 = 394$$

Where:

$n_i = n * N_i / N$, Where: n_i : sample size for each kebele, N_i : the total number of population in each kebele, N : population

Table 1: At a 95% confidence level, this yielded a sample of 394 respondents, distributed proportionally across kebeles as follows:

Kebele	Total Population	Male	Female	Proportion (%)	Sample Size (n)
01	9,685	4,902	4,783	37%	146
02	11,092	5,326	5,767	42%	167
03	2,081	1,130	950	8%	32
04	3,272	1,767	1,505	13%	49
Total	26,130	13,125	13,005	100%	394

(Source: Bale Robe Administration, 2024)

Data Collection

Primary Data: Collected via structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions, administered to 374 community members and 20 government officials. Secondary Data: Supplemented by annual reports, scholarly journals, and institutional documents to contextualize findings.

Data Validity and Reliability

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values exceeding 0.7 for all constructs, confirming reliability:

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Constraints to community participation	6	0.789
Role of community participation	6	0.992
Extent of community participation	5	0.875
Effects of absent participation	6	0.923
Overall Reliability	23	0.823

(Source: Primary Survey Data, 2023)

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data: Analyzed using SPSS, with Likert scale responses tabulated for trends.
 Demographic Variables: Age, sex, occupation, marital status, and education were examined to contextualize respondent profiles.

Table3 Age of respondent's

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent	Cumulative Per Cent
Valid	1828	150	38.1	38.1	38.1
	2941	200	50.8	50.8	88.8
	4253	40	10.2	10.2	99.0
	>54	4	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	394	100.0	100.0	
Sex of the respondents					
Valid	Male	260	66.0	66.0	66.0
	Female	134	34.0	34.0	100.0
	Total	394	100.0	100.0	
Marital status of the respondents					
Valid	Single	190	48.2	48.2	48.2
	Married	200	50.8	50.8	99.0
	Divorce	3	.8	.8	99.7
	Other	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	394	100.0	100.0	
Occupation					
Valid	Merchant	155	39.3	39.3	39.3
	Farmer	219	55.6	25.1	64.5
	Govt.Off	20	5.1	5.1	69.5
	Other	120	30.5	30.5	100.0
	Total	394	100.0	100.0	
Educational Qualifications					
Valid	Elementary School	80	20.3	20.3	20.3
	highschool	130	33.0	33.0	33.0
	Certificate	70	17.8	17.8	17.8

	Diploma	70	17.8	17.8
	Degree	38	9.6	9.6
	Master	6	1.5	1.5
	Total	394	100.0	100.0

Source: own survey,2024

The table illustrate respondent profile (N=394) revealed a predominance of workingage participants, with 50.8% (n=200) aged 29-41 years, followed by 38.1% (n=150) aged 18-28 years, while older cohorts (42-53 years and 54+) constituted 10.2% (n=40) and 1% (n=4) respectively. Gender distribution showed male predominance (66%, n=260) over female representation (34%, n=134). Marital status was nearly evenly split between single (48.2%, n=190) and married (50.8%, n=200) respondents. Educational attainment levels confirmed universal literacy, ranging from elementary (20.3%, n=80) to postgraduate qualifications (1.5%, n=4), with high school graduates forming the largest group (33%, n=130). Occupationally, merchants constituted the largest sector (39.3%, n=155), followed by farmers (25.1%, n=99), government officials (5.1%, n=20), and other professions (30.5%, n=120), with merchants' frequent kebele interactions providing particularly valuable governance insights.

Table4 Lack of awareness is the problem of community to participate in the kebele

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent
Valid	StronglyDisagree	40	12	10.2
	Disagree	100	25.	25.4
	Neutral	15	4	3.8
	Agree	210	53	53.3
	StronglyAgree	29	6	7.4
	Total	394	100.0	100.0

Source: Own Survey, 2024

The survey data reveals a spectrum of perspectives regarding civic engagement, with 12% of respondents expressing strong disagreement and 25% indicating disagreement with current participation mechanisms, while a neutral stance was adopted by 4%. Notably, 53% affirmed agreement and 6% strongly agreed with existing community involvement practices. These findings suggest a significant awareness gap persists among portions of the population concerning their role in governance development. However, the majority approval indicates governmental initiatives to foster participatory governance and encourage citizen articulation of community challenges are yielding measurable, though incomplete, success in promoting collaborative governance

structures.

Table: 5 Government's officials believe in community participation for existence of good governance

		Frequency	Percent	
Valid	StronglyDisagree	70	17.5	17.8
	Disagree	230	57.6	58.4
	Neutral	10	2.5	2.5
	Agree	54	13.5	13.7
	StronglyAgree	30	7.5	7.6
	Total	394	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	0		
Total		100.0	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, 2024

The survey data reveals significant concerns regarding institutional commitment to participatory governance, with 18% of respondents strongly disagreeing and 58% disagreeing with current engagement levels, while only 14% agreed and 7% strongly agreed, and 3% remained neutral. This overwhelming negative perception indicates a substantial deficit in kebele officials' attention to community involvement. These findings substantiate the critical thesis that authentic governance cannot be realized without meaningful civic engagement. Furthermore, the research highlights the pivotal role government officials play in facilitating development initiatives including microfinance programs, cooperative movements, infrastructure projects, and broader economic advancement underscoring how their active participation serves as a catalyst for sustainable community development and effective governance systems.

Table:5 Low level of good governance is reason for low level participation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	30	7.5	7.6
	Disagree	60	15.0	15.2
	Agree	270	67.7	68.5
	Strongly Agree	34	8.5	8.6
	Total	394	98.7	100.0
			100	

Source: Own Survey, 2024

This reveals a strong consensus (68% agree, 9% strongly agree) that deficient civic engagement significantly undermines governance quality, with only 23% expressing dissent (8% strongly disagree, 15% disagree). Respondents identified this participation deficit as both a cause and consequence of governance failures, creating a detrimental cycle that manifests in community administration tensions, stunted economic development, political volatility, and weakened legal frameworks. These results substantiate the critical interdependence between robust public participation and effective governance systems, demonstrating that neither can be sustainably achieved without the other.

Table:7 Employees given quickly and timely response for the community

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	95	23.8	24.1
	Disagree	205	51.4	52.0
	Agree	64	16.0	16.2
	Strongly Agree	30	7.5	7.6
	Total	394	100.0	100.0

Source: Own Survey, 2024

The table reveals significant dissatisfaction with bureaucratic responsiveness, with 76% of respondents expressing negative perceptions (24% strongly disagreeing and 52% disagreeing with current response mechanisms), while only 24% reported positive experiences (16% agreeing and 8% strongly agreeing). These findings demonstrate a pronounced deficit in civil servants' capacity or willingness to provide timely community engagement, indicating systemic shortcomings in administrative accountability and service delivery frameworks. The overwhelming community dissatisfaction underscores the urgent need for institutional reforms to enhance governmental responsiveness and rebuild public trust in local governance structures.

Table:8 Decision made by the government officials is accountable and transparent

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPer cent	CumulativePer cent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	50	12.7	12.7	12.7
	Disagree	250	63.5	63.5	76.1
	Agree	60	15.2	15.2	91.4
	Strongly Agree	34	8.6	8.6	100.0

	Total	394	100.0	100.0	
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Source: Own Survey, 2024

The findings reveal significant concerns regarding employee transparency and accountability, with 76% of respondents (63% disagree, 13% strongly disagree) expressing dissatisfaction, while only 24% (15% agree, 9% strongly agree) affirm positive perceptions. This overwhelming disapproval highlights systemic deficiencies in governance practices. Without strict adherence to core principles of good governance, institutional credibility and community engagement remain critically undermined.

Table: 9 Communities are invited to participate in public conference to upgrade their awareness

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent
Valid	StronglyDisagree	70	17.6	17.8
	Disagree	280	70.5	71.1
	Agree	40	10.1	10.2
	StronglyAgree	4	1.0	1.0
	Total	394	100.0	100.0

Source: Own Survey, 2024

Findings reveal stark dissatisfaction with participatory inclusion, as 89% of respondents (71% disagree, 18% strongly disagree) report limited conference invitations, while only 11% (10% agree, 1% strongly agree) acknowledge opportunities. Such exclusion undermines democratic consolidation and perpetuates citizenemployee mistrust, despite participation's proven role in fostering transparency and accountability. Effective community development necessitates inclusive engagement, as it drives socioinstitutional learning, collective empowerment, and sustainable selfreliance—cornerstones of equitable governance.

Table:10 Active participation plays a great role for development of good governance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	CumulativePercent
Valid	Disagree	4	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Agree	280	71.1	71.1	72.1
	Strongly Agree	110	27.9	27.9	100.0
	Total	394	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, 2024

The data indicates strong community awareness of participatory governance, with 99% endorsing its importance (71% agree, 28% strongly agree) and only 1% dissenting. This consensus underscores the public's readiness to engage in governance processes. To harness this potential, government institutions must proactively foster inclusive participation through targeted outreach and institutional reforms..

Table:11 Employee of the kebele are interested and committed to encourage participation

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	48	12.2	12.2	12.2
	Disagree	120	30.5	30.5	42.6
	Agree	177	44.9	44.9	87.6
	strongly Agree	49	12.4	12.4	100.0
	Total	394	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, 2024

Survey data reveals mixed perceptions of kebele employees' engagement efforts: while 62% of respondents endorse their motivational commitment (50% agree, 12% strongly agree), 42% express dissatisfaction (30% disagree, 12% strongly disagree). This dichotomy suggests inconsistent implementation of participatory mechanisms across staff, despite community involvement's demonstrated value in enhancing project outcomes and stakeholder equity. To optimize governance efficacy, targeted capacity building initiatives should address these motivational disparities among civil servants.

Table12 Kebele mobilizing people to participate in different social, economic and political aspect

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disa	90	22.0	22.	22.8
	gree			8	
	Disagree	149	38.0	37.	60.7
				8	
	Agree	105	27.0	26.	87.3

				6	
	Strongly	50	13.0	12.	100.0
	Agree			7	
	Total	394	100.0	10	
				0.0	

Source: Own Survey, 2024

Survey data reveals limited success in community mobilization efforts, with 60% expressing dissatisfaction (22% strongly disagree, 38% disagree) versus 40% approval (27% agree, 13% strongly agree). While kebele initiatives demonstrate some commitment to fostering participatory culture, the majority response indicates significant room for improvement in engaging citizens across socioeconomic and political spheres.

Table13 Civil servants are properly implementing policies and strategies of the government

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	StronglyDis agree	90	22.8	22.8	22.8
	Disagree	201	51.0	51.0	73.9
	Agree	94	23.9	23.9	97.7
	Strongly Agree	9	2.3	2.3	100.0
	Total	394	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, 2024

Effective policy implementation is crucial for Kebele success, yet 74% of respondents (51% disagree, 23% strongly disagree) report deficiencies, with only 26% approval (24% agree, 2% strongly agree). These operational shortcomings in executing government strategies fuel community dissatisfaction, necessitating comprehensive training programs to enhance employee capacity and ensure proper policy application.

Table14 Current level of community participation is better than previous years in the kebele

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	40	10.2	10.2	10.2
	Disagree	130	33.0	33.0	43.1
	Agree	154	39.1	39.1	82.2
	Strongly Agree	70	17.8	17.8	100.0
	Total	394	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, 2024

Survey results show mixed perceptions of community engagement: 43% express dissatisfaction (33% disagree, 10% strongly disagree) versus 57% approval (39% agree, 18% strongly agree). While Ethiopia prioritizes participatory governance as fundamental to democratic development, it faces persistent challenges common across African nations in institutionalizing effective governance frameworks.

Table15 Absence of good governance is bringing low level of participation in our kebele

		Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	26	6.6	6.6	6.6
	Disagree	98	24.9	24.9	31.5
	Agree	180	45.7	45.7	77.2
	Strongly Agree	90	22.8	22.8	100.0
	Total	394	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, 2024

Survey data reveals 68% consensus (46% agree, 22% strongly agree) linking governance deficiencies to limited community participation, while only 32% dissent (25% disagree, 7% strongly disagree). Effective governance remains critical for equitable globalization benefits, requiring collaborative efforts among government, civil society, and private sectors to strengthen institutional frameworks and participatory development.

Table 16 community raises questions on good governance

		Frequency	Percent		Cumulative Percent
	StronglyDis	15	5.0		3.8
	agree				
	Disagree	87	22	22.0	25.
					9
Valid	Agree	199	50.	50.	76.
					4
	Strongly	93	23.	23.	100
	Agree				.0
	Total	394	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, 2024

Survey data indicates 73% support (50% agree, 23% strongly agree) for community engagement in governance, despite some dissent (22% disagree, 15% strongly disagree). Active civic participation remains crucial for achieving development goals and sustaining peace, as it enables accountability and responsive governance.

4. Analysis of Structured Interview Findings

The interview data from 20 administrative employees unanimously affirmed a positive correlation between institutional good governance and community participation. A significant majority (75%) acknowledged moderate success in fostering civic engagement, with the administration actively encouraging participatory decisionmaking processes. While employees demonstrated strong theoretical understanding of governance principles (transparency, accountability, rule of law), implementation gaps persist due to variable commitment levels, despite most staff possessing diploma/degree qualifications.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study reveals significant gaps in participatory governance within Bale Robe's kebele administration. While modest progress is evident compared to previous years, community engagement remains suboptimal due to systemic challenges.

Key findings indicate:

- ❖ Persistent low civic awareness limits meaningful participation, despite some officials' efforts to promote inclusive decision making.
- ❖ Bureaucratic responsiveness, though improved, fails to fully address community expectations, creating a trust deficit.

- ❖ Structural constraints including inadequate employee training, weak performance evaluation mechanisms, and resource limitations hinder effective policy implementation. The research identifies a paradoxical situation where administrative staff demonstrate theoretical understanding of governance principles (transparency, accountability) but struggle with practical application, exacerbated by motivational challenges linked to compensation and capacity gaps.

Strategic recommendations emphasize multilevel interventions:

- ❖ Institutional reforms should prioritize capacitybuilding programs for officials, incorporating both technical skills and ethical governance training.
- ❖ Enhanced community outreach through regular policy dialogues and civic education initiatives could bridge awareness gaps.
- ❖ Operational improvements require implementing robust performance metrics tied to participatory outcomes, alongside budget allocations specifically for governance strengthening programs.
- ❖ Crucially, the study underscores that sustainable governance transformation depends on synchronizing topdown policy frameworks with bottomup community empowerment neither can succeed in isolation.
- ❖ Future interventions must therefore adopt an integrated approach that addresses both administrative capabilities and civic engagement simultaneously.

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