

Comment

Making Rural Services Work for Women and the Poor: An Institutional Analysis of Five Districts in Ethiopia

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I. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture dominates economic life in Ethiopia, accounting for eighty-five percent of employment, eighty percent of exports, and forty-four percent of the gross domestic product. About forty-five percent of rural Ethiopians live in poverty, and most farmers cultivate less than one hectare. Much of the agricultural production is on a subsistence or semi-subsistence basis.¹ The quality of public services such as support for agriculture and education, health care, water, and sanitation in rural areas is thus a pressing matter.

In most parts of the country, women are intimately involved in all aspects of agricultural production, marketing, food procurement, and household nutrition. Nevertheless, the view is widely held that women do

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1. See Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia, Agriculture and Natural Resources Statistics Department, <http://www.csa.gov.et/Agriculture%20and%20Natural%20Resources%20Statistics%20Department.htm> (last visited Apr. 5, 2010); see also CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html> (last visited Apr. 5, 2010); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Ethiopia Country Brief," <http://www.fao.org/countries/55528/en/eth/> (last visited Apr. 8, 2010); International Fund for Agricultural Development, Rural Poverty in Ethiopia, <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/ethiopia> (last visited Apr. 8, 2010).

not farm.² This cultural perception remains strong, even though numerous agricultural tasks are deemed “women’s work,” including weeding, harvesting, preparing storage containers, managing home gardens and poultry raising, transporting farm inputs to the field, and procuring water for household use and some on-farm uses.³

Since 1991, two major shifts in governance have attempted to improve the quality of services and the status of women. The government has made provision of services, such as agricultural extension and drinking water, the responsibility of district-level governments, bringing it closer to the people.⁴ In addition, a number of laws and policies have attempted to ensure gender equality.⁵ These shifts stemmed in part from the ideology of the ruling Ethiopian People’s Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPRDF), which stressed a federalist system of government, and also from the interest of aid donors in promoting decentralization and gender equality.⁶

In this Comment, we explore how decentralized rural service delivery has affected the quantity and quality of services and whether it has led to more gender equitable service provision. We focus on agricultural extension and drinking water services, drawing on our 2007-2008 research in five districts: Ofla in the Tigray Region; Dejen and Sekota in Amhara; Yaso in Beneshangul-Gumuz; and Ibantu in Oromiya.

In the next Part, we provide some background on politics, public administration, and gender equality in Ethiopia, both in general and in relation to rural services. Then, we present our findings on gender equality and accountability in service provision; we find that accountability tends to be upward, and that while women are represented in governance structures and programs at all levels, they are not often in leadership positions, so representation does not necessarily lead to empowerment. We also look at the role of representative government institutions in ensuring access to services. The final Part concludes by noting that service provision is not as demand-driven as it might be, and that perception biases about women’s roles in agriculture continue to shape their ability to access rural services.

2. See ETHIOPIAN ECON. ASS’N (EEA)/ETHIOPIAN ECON. POL’Y RES. INSTITUTE (EEPRI), EVALUATION OF THE ETHIOPIAN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON THE PARTICIPATORY DEMONSTRATION AND TRAINING EXTENSION SYSTEM (PADETES) 229-231 (2006) (noting that women continue to be marginalized culturally despite filling numerous and essential roles in the farming process).

3. *Id.* at 229.

4. See Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher & Kassahun Berhanu, *A Literature Review of Decentralization in Ethiopia*, in *DECENTRALIZATION IN ETHIOPIA* 9-68 (Taye Assefa & Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher eds., 2007).

5. See, e.g., Women in Ethiopia, National Policy on Ethiopian Women, <http://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/fact%20file/a-z/women-1.htm> (last visited Apr. 8, 2010).

6. On EPRDF ideology, see SARAH VAUGHAN & KJETIL TRONVOLL, *SIDA STUDIES, THE CULTURE OF POWER IN CONTEMPORARY ETHIOPIAN POLITICAL LIFE* (2003). On donor initiatives on decentralization and gender, see THE WORLD BANK AND INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, *GENDER AND GOVERNANCE IN RURAL SERVICES: INSIGHTS FROM INDIA, GHANA, AND ETHIOPIA* (2010).

II. BACKGROUND ON GOVERNANCE AND GENDER IN ETHIOPIA

A. Political System

Ethiopia is a federal republic, with five administrative tiers: federal, regional, zonal, district, and *kebele*, which is a multi-village cluster. At each level, governance institutions take a parliamentary form, with citizens electing councils that formally appoint executive and judicial bodies. There is ostensible multi-party competition, but, in practice, the ruling EPRDF thoroughly dominates political life and policy-making at all levels.⁷ Many civil society organizations, such as associations for women, youth, elders, and veterans, are basically party “mass organizations.”⁸ Even farmer cooperatives, which are supposedly organized to advance farmers’ interests, are usually led by members of EPRDF parties, and frequently are more responsive to the government and donors than to members.⁹

B. Two Waves of Decentralization

Since the EPRDF took power in 1991, governance and rural service provision have undergone two significant waves of decentralization, first to the regions and then, in 2002, to the districts in the four most populous regions (home to eighty-six percent of Ethiopians).¹⁰ However, districts and regions remain dependent on the federal government for finances, and this limits their actual exercise of discretion.¹¹

The second wave of decentralization has brought governance closer to citizens and expanded voice and participation in decision-making. The

7. LOVISE AALEN, CHR. MICHELSEN INSTITUTE, ETHNIC FEDERALISM IN A DOMINANT PARTY STATE: THE ETHIOPIA EXPERIENCE 1991-2000 (2002), available at <http://bora.cmi.no/dspace/bitstream/10202/186/1/Report%202002-2.pdf>; ETHIOPIA SINCE THE DERG: A DECADE OF DEMOCRATIC PRETENSION AND PERFORMANCE (Siegfried Pausewang et al. eds., 2002); VAUGHAN & TRONVOLL, *supra* note 6; Lovise Aalen & Kjetil Tronvoll, *The 2008 Ethiopian Local Elections: The Return of Electoral Authoritarianism*, 108 AFRICAN AFFAIRS 111, 111-115 (2008); Gebre-Egziabher & Berhanu, *supra* note 4, at 37.

8. VAUGHAN & TRONVOLL, *supra* note 7, at 16.

9. GIAN NICOLA FRANCESCONI, COOPERATION FOR COMPETITION: LINKING ETHIOPIAN FARMERS TO MARKETS 21 (2009).

10. WORLD BANK COUNTRY OFFICE, COUNTRY DEPARTMENT 6, AFRICA REGION, ETHIOPIA WEREDA STUDIES, VOLUME I: THE MAIN PHASE (2001), available at <http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/5687/Ethiopia%20Woreda%20Studies,%20W.B.htm>; Gebre-Egziabher & Berhanu, *supra* note 4, at 25-26; see also C. Dom & M. Mussa, Review of Implementation of the Decentralization Policy: A Sample Survey in Four Sentinel Weredas of Tigray Region, Report for the Embassy of Ireland and Regional Government of Tigray, Oxford, UK (2006) (on file with authors) [hereinafter Dom & Mussa, Tigray study]; C. Dom & M. Mussa, Review of Implementation of the Decentralisation Policy: A Sample Survey in Six Weredas of Amhara Region, Report for the Embassy of Sweden and Amhara National Regional State, Oxford, UK (2006) (on file with authors) [hereinafter Dom & Mussa, Amhara study]; Both studies by Dom & Mussa are available from Mokoro Limited, <http://www.mokoro.co.uk>.

11. *Id.*

process has sought to make the district governments nodes in which bottom-up and top-down planning and accountability meet and are harmonized. However, the combination of budget ceilings and strong planning guidance from above tends to trump 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.¹²

An important aspect of service provision throughout the country is mobilization of rural citizens to provide unpaid labor on communal assets, such as soil and water conservation structures, roads, and woodlots. These labor contributions play an essential role in construction and maintenance of soil and water conservation works, roads, and drinking water systems, as well as in reforestation efforts.¹³ Too often, participatory rural development programs involve what we call “stone-carrying participation.”

C. Agricultural Extension

The Ethiopian government officially calls its national development strategy “Agriculture Development Led Industrialization,” meaning that agriculture is supposed to be the basis for all economic development. The federal government has sought to disseminate agricultural packages to farmers. These include fertilizer, improved seeds, credit, and the provision of extension services. The federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD) sets policy, which is then carried out by regional and district offices of agriculture. The government is the main provider of extension services.

Until 2006, each *kebele* had access to the services of a single extension agent based in the district, which also has more highly trained specialists who can provide services as needed. Agricultural extension agents and technical experts provide advice to farmers on crop technology packages, animal health, and natural resource management. Since then, the federal government has required districts in the four largest regions to expand the extension service dramatically, posting a team of at least three agents in every *kebele*. The agents rotate to new communities every few years, and remain accountable to the district government. They report to supervisors who are likewise deployed to a *kebele* and take responsibility for teams in three-to-four surrounding *kebeles*. The *kebele* extension team leader serves as

12. Gebre-Egziabher & Berhanu, *supra* note 4, at 48-49.

13. Marc Cohen & Mamusha Lemma, Field Notes (Dec. 2007, Nov. 2008, & Dec. 2008) (on file with authors); Dom & Mussa, Amhara Study, *supra* note 10 at 79-80 (describing the “social contract” that partners enter into in the Amhara).

the agriculture portfolio holder in the *kebele* cabinet. The rapid expansion of the extension service has increased the number of agents who hold post-secondary diplomas and has opened up opportunities for women agents. Previously, women accounted for only twenty-eight percent of agents, and almost all women engaged in extension focused on “home economics,” i.e., advice on budgeting, food preparation, and nutrition, rather than agricultural production and natural resource management.¹⁴

Studies of extension in Ethiopia emphasize its top-down approach.¹⁵ Agents receive relatively hard quotas for enrolling farmers in technology packages, and supervisors evaluate their performance against these quotas. Extension also works through model or “progressive” farmers, who tend to be better off and male. These farmers are selected based on their success in agriculture, receive a higher level of extension service, and are expected to pass on advice to other farmers in their community. Extension communication is mostly one-way, with agents transferring knowledge to farmers; there is little effort to marry new agricultural research and development to farmers’ own knowledge, or to learn what kinds of services farmers would like to receive.¹⁶

D. Drinking Water Supply

Only forty-two percent of Ethiopians have access to an improved source of drinking water, i.e., one that is protected from contamination.¹⁷ In the absence of such access, it is usually women and their children who walk to the nearest river, lake, or stream to fetch water.

The federal Ministry of Water Resources formulates national policies, which are then implemented by regions and districts. Until recently, district drinking water services were the responsibility of a “desk” within the district agriculture office, i.e., a sub-cabinet agency that had to compete with others for resources, personnel, and policy attention. Now, districts have a separate office of water resources to provide drinking water and hygiene education services.¹⁸

District governments’ limited capital budgets constrain their ability to fund construction of new drinking water systems. We found in our interviews with district officials and *kebele* residents that this often leads to a breakdown in communities’ trust in the district government, as promised systems do not get built.¹⁹

In contrast to extension agents, drinking water technicians work at

14. EEA/EEPRI, *supra* note 2, at 234.

15. See *id.* at 17, 253; MAMUSHA LEMMA & VOLKER HOFFMAN, THE AGRICULTURAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM IN ETHIOPIA: INSIGHT FROM A STUDY IN THE TIGRAY REGION 34 (2007).

16. EEA/EEPRI, *supra* note 2, at 252-58; LEMMA & HOFFMAN, *supra* note 15, at 36; Marlene Buchy & Felekech Basaznew, *The Case of Awasa Bureau of Agriculture in Southern Ethiopia*, 9 GENDER, TECH. & DEV. 235, 12-13 (2005).

17. THE WORLD BANK GROUP, ETHIOPIA AT A GLANCE (2009), available at http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/eth_aag.pdf.

18. Marc Cohen & Mamusha Lemma, Field Interviews with Ministry Officials (Nov. 2008 & Dec. 2008) (on file with authors).

19. *Id.*

district capitals, and focus on training *kebele* residents who serve on local water committees. These committees are expected to organize users to operate and maintain systems, carry out health and hygiene education, establish fee schedules and collection, and hire guards for the security of the water system. District water office staff focus on more difficult repairs and access to spare parts. In practice, the district offices often have limited access to vehicles, do not maintain regular contact with the local committees, and do not evaluate their performance. Water committees' training is technically focused, with members expected to figure out community mobilization, encouraging payment of fees, and promoting maintenance more or less on their own.²⁰

E. Role of Women in Agriculture

The gender division of agricultural activities has constrained women's access to extension services. Home gardens and poultry were until recently considered a part of "home economics," leaving women excluded from other kinds of extension advice, training, and credit.²¹

The federal constitution and regional land proclamations guarantee women equal access to land rights. However, in actual practice, there are important gender asymmetries in access to land.²² Even where women formally receive usufruct rights, their land tenure security remains precarious.²³ Moreover, female household heads who do have secure access to land frequently lack other productive resources such as labor, oxen, and credit. As a result, they most frequently sharecrop out their land, usually from a weak bargaining position, heightening their vulnerability to food insecurity.²⁴

1. Strategies to Promote Gender Equality

Gebre-Egziabher and Berhanu find that culture and religion (conservative interpretations of Sunni Islam and Orthodox Christianity, to which the vast majority of Ethiopians adhere) contribute to women's social marginalization and limited access to resources, services, and political power.²⁵ Social norms discourage women from participating in public

20. *Id.* For more information on local water committees and their relationship to the district government, see PLAN, A STUDY OF WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION SERVICES IN SHEBEDINO WEREDA OF SIDAMA ZONE: CASE OF MIDRE-GENET (2006), available at <http://plan-international.org/files/Africa/RESA/ethiopia/shebedinareport.pdf>.

21. See EEA/EEPRL, *supra* note 2, at 235.

22. See Marcel Fafchamps & Agnes R. Quisumbing, *Marriage, Bequest, and Assortative Matching in Rural Ethiopia*, 53 ECON. DEV. & CULTURAL CHANGE 347, 366-67, 376-77 (2005) (discussing how gender differences in rights of inheritance obstruct women's access to land).

23. Wibke Crewett et al., *Land Tenure in Ethiopia: Continuity and Change, Shifting Rulers, and the Quest for State Control* 18 (Collective Action and Property Rights (CAPRI), Working Paper No. 91, 2008), available at <http://www.capri.cgiar.org/wp/capriwp91.asp>.

24. Marc Cohen & Mamusha Lemma, Field Notes (Dec. 2007) (on file with authors); Marc Cohen & Mamusha Lemma, Field Notes (Nov. 2008) (on file with authors).

25. Gebre-Egziabher & Berhanu, *supra* note 4, at 49.

forums, and decentralized governance has not improved the situation.

The federal government has implemented a range of strategies to promote gender equality. In 1993, it introduced the National Policy on Women (NPW)²⁶ and enshrined equality in the 1995 constitution.²⁷ NPW mandates legal equality and access to services. National Action Plans on gender, adopted in 2000 and 2006,²⁸ include steps to enhance rural women's access to and control over land, credit, and extension services.

The government has established "gender machinery" at all levels. Specifically, there are women's affairs ministries and offices in the executive branch, while legislative bodies usually have a women's affairs committee that oversees these agencies. In addition, sectoral ministries and offices have desks or individual "focal points" focusing on gender issues.²⁹ However, according to Gebre-Egziabher and Berhanu, the gender machinery and the election of women to office have not challenged systemic gender bias.³⁰

Buchy and Basaznew found critical shortcomings both in the gender sensitivity of extension provision, as well as in the way gender and women's affairs were situated within the agriculture bureaucracy in Awasa, southern Ethiopia.³¹ The zonal office of agriculture had no gender policy, guidelines, or procedures.³² Its gender desk was marginalized, had only female staff, was heavily specialized in home economics and nutrition, had little capacity for project planning and preparation, and had no mandate to monitor the office's gender related performance.³³

In the Amhara region, Dom and Mussa found that women had little or no representation on district legislatures' committees on economic affairs, budget and finance, or legal and administrative affairs.³⁴ However, only women served on women's affairs committees. The same pattern is common in the executive arm of district governments, with a single woman serving in the cabinet as Head of the Office of Women's Affairs.³⁵

Civil society women's associations exist at all administrative levels. Their role and effectiveness vary by region. While in the Tigray region women's associations tend to be quite effective, in Amhara, their strength, effectiveness, and thus, credibility, are constrained by limited resources to

26. See *supra*, note 5.

27. ETHIOPIAN CONST., art. 35, available at http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/Ethiopian_Constitution.html (last visited Apr. 13, 2010).

28. ETHIOPIAN MINISTRY OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS, NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR GENDER EQUALITY 2006-2010 (2006); GOV'T OF ETHIOPIA, ETHIOPIA NATIONAL ACTION PLAN (Women Watch 2000), available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/country/national/ethiopia.htm>.

29. AFRICAN DEV. BANK, ETHIOPIA: MULTI-SECTOR COUNTRY GENDER PROFILE 9 (2004), available at <http://www.afdb.org/en/documents/project-operations/country-gender-profiles>.

30. Gebre-Egziabher & Berhanu, *supra* note 4, at 50.

31. Buchy & Basaznew, *supra* note 16, at 239-242.

32. *Id.* at 242.

33. *Id.* at 240-41.

34. Dom & Mussa, Amhara study, *supra* note 10, at 36.

35. Marc Cohen & Mamusha Lemma, Field Notes (Nov. 2008 & Dec. 2008) (on file with authors).

initiate activities and provide services to their members.³⁶ The size and vigor of membership is also likely to be compromised by a perception that, despite their formally non-governmental status, the associations are an appendage of the government and EPRDF.³⁷

While there is a stark discrepancy between formal procedures for local level development planning under decentralization on the one hand, and actual processes on the other,³⁸ the participation of women in community planning and decision making is often negligible. A 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 where they did attend.³⁹ A fear of violent reprisal from husbands, feelings of insecurity about public speaking, a sense that their opinions would not be listened to, and time pressures all combined to keep both attendance and expression of voice low. Yet, perhaps due to donor or higher-tier governments' pressure to create more gender balance, it was found that women were sometimes "ordered" to attend local government planning meetings.⁴⁰

III. ACCOUNTABILITY AND GENDER EQUALITY IN SERVICE PROVISION

This Part and Part IV are based on our field research, carried out in December 2007 and November and December 2008. We conducted key informant interviews and focus group discussions with local government officials at the district and *kebele* level, and with male and female farmers. In total, we interviewed over one hundred people in our five study districts.

A. Agricultural extension services

The deployment of extension agents to *kebeles* does seem to contribute to making services a bit less top-down. From our discussions with extension agents, we concluded that they have a good understanding of local conditions, and often seem to develop good rapport with the farmers whom they serve. For example, we met a female extension agent who came from an urban background, but who had adopted the conservative dress of the Muslim community she served, and who was extremely well-regarded by local farmers (both men and women).⁴¹

However, it is important to note that the post-secondary extension

36. Marc Cohen & Mamusha Lemma, Field Notes (December 2007 & November 2008) (on file with authors).

37. ANN MUIR, INT'L NGO TRAINING & RES. CTR., BUILDING CAPACITY IN ETHIOPIA TO STRENGTHEN THE PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS' ASSOCIATIONS IN DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS OF CITIZENS 28-29 (2004).

38. Dom & Mussa, Amhara Study, *supra* note 10, at 50-51.

39. WORLD BANK COUNTRY OFFICE, *supra* note 10, box 7.03.

40. *Id.*

41. Marc Cohen & Mamusha Lemma, Field Notes (Nov. 2008 & Dec. 2008) (on file with authors).

training curriculum focuses heavily on technical agricultural topics, without much attention to gender analysis, community organizing, or integration of modern agricultural science and traditional knowledge. We observed that agents learn the latter topics on the job and experientially. At two sites, agents reported receiving formal in-service training on gender issues.

In some of our study sites, extension agents complained about lack of training opportunities and materials, as well as a top-down approach to supervision, whereby supervisors and technical experts from the district agriculture office enforce the promotion of packages rather than provide technical back-up and coaching to frontline agents who respond to farmers' demands. In one *kebele*, an extension agent told us that he tried his best to tailor services to local conditions and demand, but did not receive support from his superiors to do so. In one site, extension agents said that they are subject to some level of evaluation by community members and model farmers. Citizen development teams meet regularly with the *kebele* cabinet to discuss extension agents' performance. In general, however, the main lines of accountability remain upward, because training and promotion opportunities depend on pleasing supervisors and district government officials.

Extension agents work with model farmers, who are then supposed to pass extension messages on to other farmers. Selection of model farmers is often not based solely on farming skills and social capital, but may include political considerations or outright cronyism.⁴² Nevertheless this system could be effective, particularly if communication is two-way. At the study sites, however, communication was almost always one-way.

The most common form of extension provision in the districts we studied is farm visits. One local agent told us that he only visits heads of household, meaning that he advises female household heads, but not farm wives, even when providing advice on "women's" activities, such as poultry raising or home gardening. He depends on husbands to pass his advice on to their wives.

In the regions that have undergone decentralization to the district level, many *kebeles* have three resident extension agents. However, in other regions, agents remain in district capitals, and more remote *kebeles* may not receive any services. We were told that assigned agents often do not make visits, and some have basically abandoned their positions, although they continue to collect their salaries.⁴³

Extension in Ethiopia has long focused on male farmers, in keeping with the cultural perception that "women do not farm." Agents are evaluated on how many farmers they get to adopt "packages" of crop and livestock technologies and inputs, and so they prefer to work with the household decision-maker, who in a husband-wife household is male.⁴⁴ In addition, until recently, extension agents were overwhelmingly male, and

42. LEMMA & HOFFMAN, *supra* note 15, at 36.

43. Marc Cohen & Mamusha Lemma, Field Notes (Dec. 2008) (on file with authors).

44. EAA/EEPRI, *supra* note 2, at 224-236.

cultural taboos restrict their interaction with women.⁴⁵

We found considerable evidence of gender bias in the provision of extension services in our study districts. In one community, women complained about lack of access to extension services, although they hear about extension programs for women on the radio. In another, female household heads told us that the extension agent only comes by to mobilize their labor contributions.

Farmers pointed out that the gender of extension agents does not matter as long as they provide good services. Agents also share this view. However, there are cultural barriers to male extension agents interacting with married women on a one-on-one basis. In our study districts, male extension agents employed different approaches to reaching women farmers, such as contacting their husbands first, meeting women in groups (organized, for example, by the local women's association or a female cabinet member), and addressing women in public meetings.⁴⁶

We also found evidence of considerable social distance between extension agents with post-primary educations and illiterate farmers, regardless of gender. At one site, a female agent said that farmers should do what she told them, and was not willing to follow up with farmers who did not follow her extension advice.⁴⁷

We found a great deal of resistance to women's empowerment among male farmers. For example, in one community, female leaders told us that when women return home from meetings of the local women's association or the party women's league, their husbands urge them not to pay attention to the "nonsense" that they heard about gender equality. At two sites, women leaders told us that men frequently jeer them when they speak up in public meetings.⁴⁸

Recognizing that technology packages may not fit all farmers, MoARD has developed a broader variety of packages, including a "women's development package," which emphasizes poultry, small ruminants, and home gardens. Extension agents and district agricultural officials told us that agents are expected to move toward advising at least as many women farmers as men. However, in one study community, the women's affairs portfolio holder in the *kebele* cabinet told us that while extension agents will advise women if asked to do so, they do not tend to approach women on their own. Moreover, the "women's package" remains relatively fixed, whereas women in different circumstances have different needs. The same official said that it is much more difficult for female household heads to raise chickens, for example, because they spend a great deal of time providing weeding services to male farmers to earn income. The package thus might better be dubbed a "*married* women's development package."

45. *Id.*; Buchy & Basaznew, *supra* note 16, at 248.

46. Marc Cohen & Mamusha Lemma, Field Notes (Nov. 2008 & Dec 2008) (on file with authors).

47. Marc Cohen & Mamusha Lemma, Field Notes (Dec. 2008) (on file with authors).

48. Marc Cohen & Mamusha Lemma, Field Notes (Dec. 2007 & Nov. 2008) (on file with authors).

B. Drinking Water Supply

Kebele water committees are comprised of users of a community-based water facility. They are meant to have direct contact with the rest of the users of the facility, and to ensure that everyone follows the rules regarding paying fees, labor contributions for maintenance and small repairs, etc. However, despite these responsibilities, water committees do not receive training in community organizing or public speaking and persuasion, and so often have difficulty convincing their peers as to the advantages of protected water systems and paying fees to support them. Local water committees are chosen by the district government, sometimes with recommendations from the local community. Aside from their involvement in the formation of water committees, we found that district governments also undertook efforts to change cultural norms about the gender distribution of the burden of fetching water. In one district, we observed posters in government offices exhorting men to share in the burden of procuring water for their families.

In principle, local water committees are expected to collect fees from registered users in order to support operations, maintenance, and staffing (mainly guards to prevent damage and use by unregistered users). Water committee members at all study sites informed us that community members object to paying even very minimal fees. In two of our five study districts, fees generally go uncollected.

Communities are expected to contribute labor toward the construction of water systems. In one site, the district government also asked for financial contributions, due to the lack of adequate capital budget resources. Farmers objected to this demand as unfair, since district officials had not asked other villages within the *kebele* to contribute money as well as labor toward construction of water systems.

We found that the interaction of local water committees with the communities they serve is highly problematic. In the communities we visited in Sekota, Yaso, and Ibantu Districts, the water committees were dysfunctional. They were unable to persuade residents to properly maintain systems or pay fees. The water systems eventually collapsed, as did the committees. Water users often simply voted with their feet when they had grievances over drinking water governance: they continued to fetch water from traditional sources, even if doing so had negative health consequences. At these sites, the committees received little support from the district water offices.

The situation was somewhat better in our site in the Tigray region, where we observed that there were mechanisms available to users to hold water committees accountable. The head of the local women's association, who is also a member of the regional legislature, was very active in raising questions about water service provision. As is customary in Tigray, water committees and users frequently engage in the process of criticism and self-criticism (*gimgimma*).⁴⁹ The dialog between the committee and users led to

49. See AALEN, *supra* note 7, at 34 (discussing the practice of *gimgimma*).

a sense of community buy-in. But even at this site, there were many conflicts about water fees and labor and financial contributions.

In most of our study districts, men dominated water committee leadership positions, although all committees had female members. Because women are primarily responsible for household water supplies, female leadership might make it easier to organize and persuade users to maintain the system and pay fees. Perhaps for this reason, in one district, women chair local water committees as a matter of regional policy.

IV. REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT AND SERVICE QUALITY

In principle, elected representatives at all levels of government should help citizens gain access to quality services. But district and *kebele* administrations remain heavily dependent on the regional and federal governments for revenues, so the latter exert tremendous influence over service provision. While district governments are able to exercise some discretion over the sectoral and territorial allocation of funds, they cannot affect the total.⁵⁰ In all study districts, district finance, planning, and budget offices play a major role in aggregating sectoral plans and budgets and taking *kebele* priorities into account in devising overall district plans and budgets. In Yaso and Ibantu districts, it was clear that local priorities too often fell through the cracks in this aggregation process. In one of these, the scarcity of capital project funds put especially severe constraints on service provision, and these resulted in great dissatisfaction with the district government in our study community. In all study districts, recurrent expenses, mainly in the form of staff salaries and benefits, account for the vast bulk of expenditures.

Within federal policy parameters, the regional government offers planning guidance to the districts. In all study districts, officials told us that on the one hand, this is strictly indicative, but on the other hand, the regional government evaluates senior district government officials on whether they meet these targets. In one district, officials complained that regional targets make no reference to *kebele* needs and priorities, and that the region does not provide the budgetary resources necessary to meet regional targets.

Kebele representatives on district councils can attempt to win additional resources for their communities.⁵¹ However, since budget ceilings are fixed above the district level, any effort to bolster one's own allocation means a zero-sum game with neighboring *kebeles*. District budget officials told us that they do try to develop spending plans that allocate resources fairly across *kebeles*, particularly with regard to scarce capital spending projects. In one district, officials also said that they regularly lobby the regional government for additional resources.

In one of our study *kebeles*, residents complained about the lack of

50. Marc Cohen & Mamusha Lemma, Field Notes (Nov. 2008) (on file with authors).

51. Marc Cohen & Mamusha Lemma, Field Notes (Nov. 2008 & Dec. 2008) (on file with authors).

services received from the district government. Local representatives on the district council were not able to get the district government to pay greater attention to the community. District officials told us that their hands were tied by regional priority setting and budget limitations, but *kebele* leaders and residents said that they saw a breach of social contract. They pointed out that residents had contributed labor to improve the roads between the district capital and their community, but still did not receive requested services.

In our Amhara and Tigray study districts, the district government had gender focal points within sectoral offices. This provides the district office of women's affairs with a point of contact and also is supposed to guarantee that the sectoral office will review budgets, plans, and operations through a gendered lens. In looking at the implementation of this system across the study districts, we found considerable variation in its effectiveness. There seems to be an assumption that gender is a women's concern. All the staff in sectoral offices assigned to monitor the impact of plans and budgets on gender were women, in some instances rather junior staff members (there were male professional staff in some district offices of women's affairs, however). In one district, we found that sectoral office gender focal points could not explain their duties. In two districts, the gender machinery did not exist.

V. CONCLUSION

Even in a one-party system, the authorities will respond to citizens' grievances when their discontent might threaten the party's hold on power. The extensive "good governance" reforms following Ethiopia's disputed 2005 elections illustrate this.⁵² Efforts to expand representation in *kebele* councils, support given to these councils by the district council speaker's office, and the establishment of additional oversight committees at the *kebele* level are all efforts to enhance accountability mechanisms. But the strong lines of accountability remain those that lead upward. Top-down modes of decision-making and political reliance on democratic centralism cause downward accountability to be quite weak. This means that local demands, desires, and problem definitions are not sufficiently considered in agriculture and rural development policy making. This raises questions about both the effectiveness of policy and its responsiveness to the affected citizens.

These important and powerful forces of upward accountability determine the nature and quality of service delivery. One has to acknowledge that upward accountability has some advantages. The fact that the extension providers in Ethiopia reach a large share of farmers, both male and female, may be due not only to the favorable extension agent-to-farmer ratio, but also to the strong discipline among the extension agents that induces them to meet their package targets, in combination with a high priority placed by the national political leadership on this service. The

52. Dom & Mussa, Amhara Study, *supra* note 10, at 38.

standardized system reduces the challenge of supervising and monitoring extension agents. But Ethiopian agriculture is characterized by a pronounced agro-ecological diversity, and one can find different agro-ecologies within a single district, so technologies do not “travel far.” Hence, standardized packages do not perform very well, and a demand-driven approach that provides extension agents with adequate discretion is essential to develop agriculture, beyond other instrumental or intrinsic reasons to favor participatory approaches to agricultural and rural development.

A major challenge of providing drinking water is creating awareness about the advantages of safe drinking water, and encouraging communities to work collectively and invest time and resources in the maintenance of drinking water facilities. While this task is less challenging than providing agricultural extension, it still requires that the facilitators have discretion, and a top-down approach will not lead to a sense of community ownership of the water systems. Clean drinking water is not a political priority, which may well be related to the weak accountability linkages between the various service provision actors in the system and users of water systems.

With regard to gender, we found that “perception bias” about the actual role of women in agriculture remains strong. This can contribute to a low priority being assigned to providing better services to women. Women are not considered to be farmers in Ethiopia, in spite of their many farming tasks. Innovative strategies seem to be needed to address this perception bias. Also, since the overwhelming majority of the users of water systems are women, it would make sense to put women in charge of water system governance as a matter of policy.