

Practices and Challenges of the Oromiya Branch Ombudsman Institution in Impacting Public Sector Governance and Service Delivery

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to assess the Practices and Challenges of the Oromia branch Ombudsman Institution in Impacting Public Sector Governance and Service Delivery. The study employed qualitative approach and evaluative design. Primary Data was collected using interview and FGD. The findings of the study showed that lack of accessibility, budget and human resource shortage, lack of institutional competence, weak performance, and a very weak linkage with other public sectors and with media found to be of the major challenges. Some of the recommendations forwarded by this study are: The regions ombudsmen institutions in general and the Oromia branch ombudsman in particular should be accountable to the regional legislature; the Oromia branch ombudsman institution should improve its professionalism in order to conduct its activities more effectively as the success of any ombudsman is mainly determined by the personality of the representative/commissioner. Moreover, the Oromia branch ombudsman should ensure its independence at any cost so as to secure public confidence; it should maintain continuous dialogue or awareness raising forums with government officials, private groups and civil society groups so that it is possible to make its roles known; and should use the media to educate and promote public awareness of its mandate or roles so that it can reach the wider mass.

Key words: Practices; challenges; Oromia branch Ombudsman; 109.199.124.137impact; public sector governance; service delivery;

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The governing bodies of the public sector are accountable by law to service users and other authorized bodies. To ensure meaningful accountability in the public service delivery it requires the synergy among all the relevant bodies (as cited in OPM and CIPFA 2004). One of the bodies responsible to impact public service delivery is the ombudsman institution. As established literature notes (see for instance, Hajdari 2014; Roosbroek and Walle-e 2008; OECD 2018) this institution is responsible for handling complaints submitted to it or by its initiatives regarding grievances and violation of rights on public service.

The genesis of the ombudsman institution traced back to 3000 BC, when officials in China and India had received complaints from individuals and had provided solutions to the complaints (Satyanand 1999 cited in Beqiraj, Garahan and Shuttleworth 2018). The modern notion of the Ombudsman institution was first introduced in Sweden in 1809 to defend citizens' rights against the autocratic government. Since the 1960s, the institution has expanded throughout the world (Roosbroek and Walle-e 2008; Beqiraj, Garahan and Shuttleworth 2018). According to Stuhmcke (2009), the institution is an autonomous and objective institution that strives to enhance service delivery in the public administration, attempts to redress administrative malpractices which affects service users and intervenes to take remedial actions.

Roosbroek and Walle referring Reif discussed that the institution does not have the power to make an enforcing decision against any institution but can indicate the prevailing problems with the concerned organization and influence organizations to respect its recommendations (Reif 1999 as cited in Roosbroek and Walle-e 2008). In other words, the institution is expected to handle grievances against governmental agencies, officials and employees. It should be politically independent and serve as an external critic. It should act outside the bureaucratic chain of command and does not have responsibility for formulating, executing or defending the policies and personnel of any agency (Tibbles 1970).

Chief Justice Milvain statement in Re Ombudsman Act (1970) stated that: 'The basic purpose of an Ombudsman is provision of a "watchdog" designed to look into the entire workings of administrative cases. ... [He] can bring the lamp of scrutiny to otherwise dark places even over the resistance of those who would draw the blinds. If [his] scrutiny and reservations are well founded, corrective measure can be taken in due democratic process, if not no harm can be done in looking at that which is good' (as cited in Stuhmck 2009).

Therefore, the institution as repeatedly mentioned involves taking remedial actions when individual complaints received so as to address administrative malpractices and to provide suggestions for the improvements of procedures and policy that can enhance the performance of the concerned public institution.

The institution has no right to reverse or ban an administrator's decision and has no direct control over the administration instead is to make suggestions which pose improvements in administration (Tibbles 1970) as its objective is to fight against administrative injustice and to produce sound public policy that ensure better governance. In nutshell, the institution is a device to promote good governance in the public administration (Marin and Jones 2011).

Study shows that the ombudsman institution's function at local government level has contributed to the improvement of public administration (Siemiatycki 2015). In Ethiopia, the ombudsman institution emerged to respond to administrative mal-practices and irresponsiveness and its objective is to ensure effective public administration founded on the rule of law and ensure the rights of individual persons are respected in the administrative process. The institution when presented its ten months performance report to the House of People's Representatives revealed that the problem of ill administration in the public sectors at large were related to the distribution of subsidized food items to the poor section of the society; housing and construction, compensation and land management issues among others (The Reporter News on June 18, 2016).

According to the report, in four regions namely the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's, Amhara, Oromia and Gambella regional states and in Addis Ababa city administration most of the complaints received were regarding the distribution of government subsidized food items to the people. Moreover, in Addis Ababa surroundings parts of Oromia region

the big problem is the delay in the compensation service to development evicted farmers.

The report also revealed that in Amhara, Gambella, and Benishangul Gumuz regions there was problem of public service delivery related schooling service to students. Over all, the report indicated that 82% of those complaints submitted to the institution were addressed (The Reporter News on June 18, 2016).

Thus, this study has assessed the impact of the institution on public sector governance and service delivery focusing on the Oromia regional ombudsman branch institution and various public sector institutions at Oromia region headquarter.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Globally stating, there is little empirical research on the ombudsman (Roosbroek and Walle-e 2008). The main objective of this study is to investigate the practices and challenges of the Oromia branch ombudsman's institution impact on the public sector governance and service delivery in the Oromia region of Ethiopia.

Public administration of a developmental state requires a high standard of professional ethics, transparency, impartiality, fairness, and equitability based service provision (Fakir 2007 as cited in Adebabay 2011). The public sector has a responsibility to provide service to users to the desired level through the bureaucratic channel of the civil service institution (World Development Report 2004).

To enhance fairness and transparency in the public sector service provision, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) introduced the institution of the Ombudsman by proclamation no. 211/2000 as FDRE constitution article 55 (15) states the HPR "it shall establish the institution of the ombudsman and select and appoint its members".

According to the United Nation Development Program (UNDP) Ethiopia 2012 report, democratic institutions in Ethiopia are showing progress, mentioning 2.6 million people are aware of the ombudsman institution in Ethiopia. The said report; however, failed to indicate the level of users' satisfaction with the institution's performance.

In recent years there has been a noticeable degree of service users' dissatisfaction in Ethiopia in general, in Oromia region in particular. This is shown by the different waves of mass protests in most parts of Ethiopia and especially, in Oromia region since 2014. The general public has

expressed its grievances with regard to lack of good governance regarding of public service provision.

According to the federal ombudsman institution's report which was presented to the House of People's Representative (HPR) regarding how to ensure good governance and performance of federal and regional governments in the execution of their mandates, there is a serious problem regarding good governance in the public sector (The Reporter English news dated July 08, 2017

[/https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/content/ombudsman-issues-scathing-report](https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/content/ombudsman-issues-scathing-report) retrieved on 10-1-2018).

The recent federal ombudsman report shows that the institution's performance is low and there is a lack of sufficient studies regarding why that. There is also a scarcity of study regarding the Oromia region.

Previous studies conducted by Abdi (2014) discussed the role of the Ethiopian ombudsman institution from ensuring good governance mainly from a doctrinal perspective; and Dessie (2018) studied the ombudsman's role for good governances by assessing the awareness and perceptions of civil servants from the South Wollo Zone.

This particular study is unique from a geographical and conceptual aspect as it assessed the Oromia branch ombudsman institution's impact on public sector governance and service delivery in Oromia region of Ethiopia. Thus, it will attempt to fill partially the aforementioned gap undertaking this study empirically. It will subsequently also produce evidence based research that will serve as a reference for further study, input for policy making and to improve the practices of the institution.

1.3. Basic Research Questions

- How far has the ombudsman's institution influenced public service delivery in the Oromia region?
- What relation does the ombudsman institution have with public sectors, legislature and the media?
- How far the ombudsman institution's investigation has impacted on reducing administrative mal practices in public service delivery?
- How to assess the complaint handling mechanisms?
- What are the challenges of the ombudsman institution in the region?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

1.4.1. General Objective

The major objective of the study is to assess the impact of the Ombudsman institution on public service governance and service delivery

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

- To explain the ombudsman institution influence on effective public service delivery in the region
- To assess relationships between the ombudsman institution, public sectors, legislature and media
- To describe the Ombudsman institution investigations impact on reducing administrative mal practices in the public service delivery
- To describe the complaint handling mechanisms of the institution (number of complaints received, response to complaints, number of cases resolved annually, bi-annually, etc)
- To identify the challenges of the Ombudsman institution in the region

1.5. Scope of the Study

This particular research examined the impact of the Ombudsman institution on Public Sector Governance and Service Delivery. It is limited geographically to the Oromia region Ombudsman branch office, and some Oromia regional public sectors or bureaus, such as: the Oromia Revenues and Customs Authority, Public Service and Human Resource Development Bureau, and Urban Land Development and Management Agency. Conceptually, the work is confined to assessing the mandate, accessibility, cooperation and accountability of the Ombudsman's institution.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

The subject of this study is somehow challenging particularly with regard to obtaining data from service users. As we requested the institution, they helped us in providing service users telephone numbers to contact them for telephone interview. Accordingly, we have contacted five research respondents using the telephone interview. It would have generated more data if we have got more people. The other limitation was we were interested to visit displaced people due to squatter settlement in LagaTafo for case narration; however, we could not get permission as they told us the case has some "politics" behind it. By the time the Federal

Ombudsman Institution denounced the action of the town administration in displacing or clearing “the squatter occupants” who have been living there for about ten years legally receiving public services and paying tax to the government. In this regard, the position of the regional branch ombudsman office is different from the federal ombudsman as they told us during our field visit; noted us there is conflict of interests in the matter.

The regional branch ombudsman office noted us they are studying the matter. The mentioned limitations in fact did not affect our study as we tried in our best to secure relevant and adequate data in the other data collection methods to answer the study objectives.

1.7. Significance of the Study

The above-mentioned proposed research project will be written for academic discourse and evidence-based policy input with the hope that an enthusiastic quest for the truth will serve as a basis for teaching-learning processes and, also generate dependable knowledge in the areas of governance studies regarding the country in general, the Oromia region in particular. The findings of this study will hopefully contribute to the theoretical body of knowledge regarding the Ombudsman institution so as to improve service delivery in the public sector of the Oromia region. It will identify gaps and make suggestions for future research.

The findings will also be published in a relevant reputable journal and presented at annual research conferences. The research report will also be available for public use both in printed copy and electronically, and to people who have special interest to the academia and other interested individuals /bodies.

1.8. Conceptual Frameworks

There is a common understanding at the heart of policy producers that inputs and outputs alone cannot sufficiently measure how public service delivery practices in reality (World Bank 2012). According to the World Bank (2003), *Governance and Service Delivery: A Conceptual Framework, the accountability framework of the 2004 World Development Report*, making service access to the poor, public institutions accountability is influenced by three key players: policy makers and politicians, service providers, and citizens or service users (cited in World Bank 2012). This means that in order to enhance accountability, the presence of the institutions and their synergy

(policy makers and politicians, service providers, and citizens or service users) is vital.

In order to assess the ombudsman branch office influence on the public service sector governance and service delivery, three variables were identified: (i) accessibility (ii) cooperation and (iii) accountability. Accessibility refers to the degree to which ombudsman office service is available to individuals and groups who complaining and particularly, to the poor section of society.

Cooperation deals with the capacity of the institution to cooperate with public administrative bodies in dealing with individual and group complaint(s) and accountability refers to the extent to which the ombudsman institution makes the service providing institution answerable to service users. Therefore, this study has attempted to study, the accessibility of the institution to service users and its level of commitment to redress public and/ or individual grievances submitted to it by cooperating with the concerned public institution or by publicizing those who refuse to do so and make them accountable by submitting and presented the findings of its report to the public at large through submitting its report to the legislature and media.

1.9. Theoretical Issues

The main purpose of a theoretical framework in social science studies is to identify a relevant theory that can define and support the issue to be studied (Abend 2008). This study has identified three theories related to this research issue: utilitarian, system and structural functional theories.

1.9.1. Utilitarian Ethical Theory

This theory was advocated by English thinkers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. According to this theory, an action is labeled as right if it yields the highest happiness for the utmost number of people that means for instance government actions should satisfy the majority of the people to be viewed as a right decision (Wrenn 2019). In this respect, the utilitarianism view will help to assess the Ombudsman's role in responding to the complaints of grieved persons. This theory does not well suit to the concern of the issue of the research.

1.9.2. System Theory

David Easton in his works of Political system model Analysis discussed that a political system is essential unit of study. His notion of a system refers to values, culture, authority, governance, participation and so forth. A system has its own boundary, in which inputs or demands are processed and outputs come out of it (Easton 1957). Therefore, system analysis regarding the Ombudsman will help to assess how the ombudsman institution functional in reference to authority, participation and governance systems but this issue is not the direct concern of our study.

1.9.3. Structural-Functionalism Theory

The structural functionalists as advocated by American sociologist Talcott Parsons who stated that how structures function in a system matters meant that structure alone is not enough but their roles is vital for a system. According to this theory, individual people's or parts of a structure or units, institutions and their functions influence the role of a social system that means there is functional interdependence among units of structure to achieve an intended end (Garner 2019).

This study is established on the structural functionalist approach as this theory helps us to comprehend structural issues and their functions with regard to the Ombudsman's performance, its relations with other governance structures (public sectors, media, legislature) and challenges associated with structural matters that can define the effectiveness of the institution.

2. Study Methodology

2.1. Materials and Methods

2.1.1. Qualitative Approach

Basically, the selection of the study approach depends on the nature of research problem and question as Creswell (2014) discussed. According to him, one means to opt a qualitative approach is when a concept or phenomenon needs to be explained and understood because of little study has been done on it. Qualitative approach helps to acquire data on the perceptions and lived experiences of research participants through interview and focus group discussion methods.

Thus, this study has chosen qualitative approach because of the aforementioned justifications that the topic of study is not much researched. Moreover, this approach helps researchers to collect as much data as possible in their own words (Kalof et al 2008). It also qualifies researchers to comprehend and capture the meaning of a given social problem (Creswell 2014).

2.2. Design of the Study

Selection of a research design is based on the research questions that the study will examine. Hence it is vital to understand the research issues understand so it helps to collect and analyze research data (King et al 1994). This study used a case study evaluative design as this helps to assess “when the question being posed requires an investigation of a real life intervention in detail, where the focus is on how and why the intervention succeeds or fails, where the general context will influence the outcome” (Keen and Packwood 1995: 1).

Evaluative design was opted for this study to evaluate the performance of the Oromia branch ombudsman institution with regard to influencing public sector governance and public service delivery in the region. In this regard, what efforts have been done by the institution so far to address administrative mal practices in service delivery in the region since its establishment? And what are achieved, and constraints that impede the performance of the institution? Thus, the evaluative design helps to adequately address the problem under this study.

2.3. Sampling Technique

The study used purposive sampling to select research target groups. This method allows researchers to use their discretion or special knowledge about the institution(s) under study that means study participants are selected agreeing to the needs of the study objective.

In this regard, the Oromia branch ombudsman institution and some bureaus at the region from those complaints mostly received as repeatedly mentioned in this study were purposively selected for this reason and contacted for data collection.

2.3.1. Snowballing Method

According to Patton (1990) snowball method helps to select people from people on the basis of richness of information for the study. This method is a non-probability sampling technique that can be used by researchers so as to identify potential study participants where it is difficult to access research subjects, hence, using a snowballing method; people who have got service from the ombudsman institution by the information that was obtained from the Oromia branch ombudsman were contacted for interview. That means this method was opted for this study as potential study participants were not physically accessible meant that they were in different parts of the region. Hence, their names and contact numbers of those whose cases were believed to be resolved were taken from the institution's records. Accordingly, the required data was obtained from them via telephone interview. In this study, a total of 5 (five) persons were participated in the telephone interview.

2.4. Methods of Data Collections

This study employed various tools to collect the necessary data, including a review of professional Ombudsman literature, interviews with the institution staff and concerned service providing public sectors.

2.4.1. Semi-structured Interviews

The study used the semi-structured interview method because it allows the researchers to guide study participants to talk thoroughly about the topic under research (Given 2008). In this regard, the study used predetermined, but open-ended questions to collect data on the study matter. This reveals the individual person's perceptions and practices in detail. The interview was held with key informants of the regional branch ombudsman institution officers. Using this method 8(eight) informants from the ombudsman institution were contacted for interview.

2.4.2. Schedule Interview

Schedule interview enables the researcher to clarify research participants on question(s) that may cause confusion (see also Kothari 2004). A schedule interview is mainly be used to gather the perceptions from concerned bodies from purposively selected public sector institutions at regional level and individuals who came to the ombudsman institution service. The schedule interview is developed on the basis of the objective of the study.

The schedule interview covered: (i) general awareness of the Ombudsman function; (ii) personal experience of a workplace related issue; (iii) experience as the respondent of a contact from the Ombudsman; and (iv) perceptions of the ombudsman function.

2.4.3. Telephone interview

Telephone interview as one can understand useful to contact individual people who are at distance places and not easily accessible physically. This method was employed to access Oromia branch ombudsman institution service users whose cases are settled and live in different areas of the region. Using this method five research respondents were contacted for interview.

2.4.4. Focus Group Discussion

A focus group discussion (FGD) is an instrument of collecting data from people who share similar backgrounds or experiences. It is a form of qualitative research method whereby questions are asked about their perceptions attitudes, beliefs, opinion or ideas on the subject of the study. A focus group discussion method allows research participants to express their views and experiences on the topic for discussion. This method helps to obtain data from research participants' knowledge and experiences regarding the issue under study (Kitzinger 1995).

In this study, the purpose of focus group discussion is to explore ideas that may not be obtained through interviews and other instruments. Thus, we used data collected through focus group discussion in order to make corroboration with interview data, and secondary sources. The researchers facilitated and guided groups of study participants on topics pertinent to the objectives of the study. A focus group discussion was carried out with the staff of the Oromia branch ombudsman institution regarding modus of function and challenges encountering the course of ensuring better governance in the public sector and public service delivery.

2.5. Document Analysis

Documents obtained from the institutions that are official utilized to triangulate the interview and focus group discussion data. Analysis of secondary data involved reviewing both theoretical and empirical literature that are published in the form of journal, article, books, and documents that exist in the form of official records submitted to the concerned bodies and

annual reports of the institution were thematically analyzed to strengthen the primary data.

2.6. Data Sources

Data was collected from: Oromia branch Ombudsman institution, Oromia Revenues and Customs Authority, Public Service and Human Resource Development Bureau, and Urban Land Development and Management Agency, and some service users' were contacted using snowballing sampling method.

2.7. Data Analysis

Qualitative data was analyzed using words and statements. Such data analysis enables to generate and organize themes and categories. Data obtained from different sources were triangulated and discussed.

2.8. Validity and Reliability

The issue of validity and reliability of data collection methods is common for quantitative studies but now qualitative researches are also required to use validity and reliability factors despite difficult to test for qualitative instruments (Golafshani 2003). In this regard, validity and reliability issue was taken into account to come up with quality data for quality study (Golafshani 2003). Thus, careful attention was given in the course of data collection, coding and narration by controlling own personal biases, by triangulating the research data, by carefully record keeping of respondents response and presenting the major summary of responses to the respondents themselves at the end of every interview and Focus Group Discussion to check if there any misrepresentation of ideas.

2.9. Ethical Issues

This study strictly followed the ethical considerations of social science research. After collecting a letter of cooperation from the College of Law and Governance Postgraduate Research Coordinating office for field work we have contacted the public institutions under study; we have informed them that the findings of the study will only serve for academic purposes. Thus, research respondents from the respected public institutions and individual persons were arranged for data collection based on their full consent that means research participants were communicated and allowed to decline before and during interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Findings on the Practices of the Oromia Branch Ombudsman Institution

This study assessed the impact of the ombudsman institution on public sector governance and public service delivery in Oromia region and, more specifically, assessed the organizational context of the Oromia Ombudsman branch office, the nature of complaint the institution receives, its complaint handling mechanisms and its relations with public sector bodies in the region. Generally, it is agreed that complaints-handling and resolving is widely accepted as one of the core functions of an ombudsman institution. The Oromia branch ombudsman institution covered in this study performs complaints investigating function, addressing complaints arising from public service users, employees and citizens at large.

The Oromia branch Ombudsman institution receives complaints by fax, the post, telephone and from people who appear in person. The institution has not fulfilled its role to the desired level due to many factors. Data obtained from the institution's official reports shows that recorded data exist from 2004 to 2011 of the Ethiopian calendar although the institution was in fact established three years earlier.

In the year 2004/2012, the institution received 38 complaints from 807 people. Of these, 20 complaints were offered recommendations while 18 were accepted for further investigation. In the year 2005/2013, 289 complaints were received from 2025 people 167 of which were provided with recommendations while the remaining 121 cases were considered for further investigation.

In 2006/2014, 287 complaints were received, of which 165 were given recommendations; while 122 were adopted for further investigation. In 2007/2015, 216 complaints were received, of that 120 cases were recommended while 96 cases were adopted for further investigation.

In 2008/2016, 210 complaints were received, of that 126 cases were given recommendations; while 84 cases were adopted for further consideration. In 2009/2017, 207 complaints received, of that 133 complaints were provided recommendations and 74 cases were adopted for adoption. In 2010/2018, 207 cases were received, of that 133 were given recommendations; while 74 were considered for further investigation. In 2011/2019, 297 cases were received, of that 210 cases were provided with recommendations; while 87 cases were adopted for further investigation.

This shows that, this year the Oromia branch ombudsman has received relatively the highest number of complaints from service users. This shows that, this year the Oromia branch ombudsman has received a relatively high number of complaints from service users. A question was posed to the Director of the regional branch Ombuds investigation department, how far the institution’s recommendation is considered? In the interview, he replied that “our institution has suffered from failure of enforcing its recommendations or to get timely response from the institution against which comply is raised”.

Table 3.1: Table Showing Complaints Received 2004-2011

Year	Complaints received	Complaints provided recommendations	Complaints adopted
2004/2012	38	20	18
2005/2013	289	167	122
2006/2014	287	165	122
2007/2015	216	120	96
2008/2016	210	126	84
2009/2017	207	133	74
2010/2018	207	133	74
2011/2019	297	210	87

Source: Official Report of the Oromia Branch Ombudsman Office, 2011/2019

Number of Complaints (in persons)

Table 3.2: Table Showing Number of People from Whom Complaints were received 2004-2011

Year	Complaints received	Complaints provided recommendations	Complaints adopted
2004/2012	807	758	49
2005/2013	2025	1082	943
2006/2014	3775	938	2837
2007/2015	3586	588	2998
2008/2016	1985	1702	245
2009/2017	-	-	-
2010/2018	-	3236	1219
2011/2019	3959	-	-

Source: Official Report of the Oromia Branch Ombudsman Office, 2011/19

As can be seen from the above table, there are missed data of the year 2009/2017, 2010/2018 and 2011/2019 which shows the poor record keeping of the institution and failure to use digital technology for data storage and sharing which has an implication on complaint handling management.

From the above table as can be seen there is increase in the number of complaints from 2012-2015. And the reduction in the number of complaints in 2016 and again the rise in number of complaints in 2019 need explanation.

According to Professor Stuhmcke there is controversy whether the reduction in complaints to the ombudsman institution is a sign of success or not (Stuhmcke 2012). In this respect, in the Oromia branch Ombudsman, the number of cases seem rising may show that increase in the awareness of service users from this finding seem consistent with the report of the UN 2012 that utters the demand to get service from democratic institutions is rising. On the other hand, one can argue that yet this figure seems low in such big region where also complaint of good governance in public service delivery is tremendous.

As our research informants from the different public institutions in the interview noted us in the region, public servants do not have the awareness regarding the ombudsman's role thus public servants whenever they face administrative abuse they file their complaints to the region's Civil

Personnel Administration (CPA) than to submit to the Ombudsman's office.

In contrast, the Director of the regional branch Ombudsman investigator in the research interview stated that the awareness of citizens is increasing from time to time. For instance, he mentioned that "more than 200 development evicted farmers from *Giner Woreda, Bale Zone* and more than 700 farmers from *Jeldu, West showa Zone* of the region filed their complaints to our institution demanding for fair compensation and now the investigation is underway". This shows that the awareness of citizens on the institution's service is rising.

3.2. Findings on Awareness Creation and Accountability Framework

Despite the rise in the number of people who are aware of the institution's service as discussed earlier, the aforementioned table also indicates that the institution is not well known in the region. Given the population size of the Oromia, where more than 40 million people believed to live, which also covers a larger geographical land mass, so the existence of the institution in one area alone is a big challenge to undertake its roles. In the interview with the Director of the regional Ombuds investigation department, accessibility is a major challenge to accomplish the task of the institution. In addition, he stated that "we do not have relations with the Media to disseminate or report our findings except to submit to the Federal Ombudsman institution". So in the absence of access to Media, the institution cannot be effective in raising the awareness of the people in the region. Because using the Media in different languages spoken in the region it is possible to aware people what to comply with the institution (matters that fall under its jurisdiction), to advise also matters that do not fall under its jurisdiction to direct to the relevant public organization; and how to make a complaint to the institution.

Research findings from Mauritius show that the ombudsman institution has made itself known to the citizens through the media, public service magazines and annual reporting regarding awareness creation and reinforcement of public confidence. Moreover, the annual reports are widely disseminated to all stakeholders including public organizations (Kenya Monetary School Studies Report, 2013).

The Oromia branch ombudsman institution now is accountable to the federal ombudsman institution which has hampered its duties according to research participants in the interview and focus group discussion. And

discussed that it should be independent and its accountability should be to the regional council. Furthermore, noted that it should have more branches to enhance its accessibility, and its accountability to the federal institution is not fair. Having more branches allows the institution to raise the awareness of the wider community. This would enable the institution to be more effective in handling complaints; and can contribute its utmost effort to ensure accountability, transparency and responsiveness in the public administration of the region.

3.3. Findings on the Challenges of the Ombudsman Institution in the Region

3.3.1. Challenges of Accessibility

For the successful functioning of the ombudsman institution, the institution should be accessible to service users. Research respondents in the interview and focus group discussion (FGD) stated that lack of accessibility in the region is a big problem. The institution has only one office located in the capital of the region meant that it cannot perform its role to the desired level as discussed earlier. Even if the institution is not accessible to the general public to fill this gap, research participants said that one person in every district is assigned to receive complaints from people. After receiving complaints, “what we do is to filter whether the submitted cases fall under the jurisdiction of the institution or not”.

Studies show that the accessibility of the ombudsman is a base for its effectiveness to deal with complaints and raise the awareness of the public. Hossu, and Dragos (2013) citing the experience of the Romanian ombudsman institution discussed that that the ombudsman offices receive a higher number of complaints in areas where they are decentralized. Beqiraj, Garahan and Shuttleworth (2018) also noted that for ombudsman institution to be effective or successful ensuring access is very important. People from different socio-economic backgrounds should aware of it, and happy to get its service to the desired level. Meaning, using all possible means or channels should be available to service users.

3.3.2. Challenges of Budget and Human Resource

Adequate budget and trained staff is base for the success of the ombudsman institution. Research participants in the focus group discussion (FGD) stated that budget shortage is a hurdle to do their job in

Oromia region which covers 20 zones, according our research respondents in the FGD; the institution does not have enough human resources to handle its affairs, given the fact that the regional branch ombudsman office has 38 employees and 5 investigators it is not possible to ensure accessibility to the 20 zones of the Oromia region. The executive also influences the ombudsman institution.

Moreover the lack of a democratic culture has its own impact and there is limited institutional capacity to follow up cases. Consistent with this finding a study by Husain (2010) showed that budget constraint is an impediment for the proper functioning of the ombudsman institution in Pakistan. Similarly, in other Africa countries, a study by Hatchard (1986) showed that the Zimbabwean ombudsman has suffered from inadequate staffing and budget shortages which together have that deterred its development. The International Framework of the Ombudsman Institution report also indicated budgetary autonomy is fundamental to the effectiveness of the ombudsman institution (International Framework of the Ombudsman Institution report 2016).

3.3.3. Challenges of Institutional Competence

Pertinent to the above explanation, the overall institutional competence is a vital factor regarding the effectiveness of the institution. In this regard, the Oromia branch of the Ombudsman institution is particularly weak.

Problems of institutional competence are related to the autonomy of the institution. According to research participants in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), the institution lacks skilled and competent human power to challenge the wrong doings of the region's executive and similar matters that fall under its jurisdictions. In the interview with the Director of the region's Ombuds branch investigation department; there is reluctance from the side of the government authorities in offering timely response to the complaints submitted against them moreover there is failure to consider our recommendations without justification.

A question was posed to the Director and Focus Group Discussants that why you do not use the media to expose the wrong acts by the concerned public authorities? The Director's response as mentioned earlier was lack of access to the media to his knowledge. The Focus Group Discussants responded that the practice of media shame for those who failed to comply with the recommendations of the institution without reasons is not common because of fear reprisal. Likewise, in the interview research

participants from different public sectors offices noted that “the institution is not working to its mandate and has not promoted itself or created civil servants’ awareness and /or to the region in general”. In contrast, research participants from the Ombudsman institution argue that mentioning lack of democratic culture, the executive wing is negligent to deal with the ombudsman recommendations or to reject them with reason.

In short, for the question, to what extent does the Oromiya branch ombudsman institution has influenced public administration in the Oromiya region? It is poor. Due to the aforementioned various constraints such as: (i) institutional competence (ii) budget and (iii) institutional accountability or the legal framework the institution functions.

Empirical studies show that the performance of the ombudsman institution in democratic and non-democratic states is not the same because democratic states have established democracies and institutions that create conducive environment for the operation of the ombudsman institution. Despite this, even, in emerging democratic states, like Russia, research findings show that the institution challenges the executive wing. According to Finkel (2012), the growth in staff and financial independence enabled the Russian ombudsman institution to deal with sensitive issues fearlessly. The challenge of the institution in emerging democracies is very tough.

In his study, Finkel found that personality differences matters i.e. a strong ombudsman challenges the executive in light of the ombudsman institution’s jurisdiction. Comparing Russia and Poland ombudsmen as Finkel identified the Polish ombudsman has more strength, and from his study, it is possible to infer that some degree of democracy paves the way for the ombudsman to work better.

Finkel (2012) stated three factors that can strengthen the ombudsman in the course of democratizing authoritarian states, hybrid regimes and new democracies. These are: (i) the type and strength of the regime under which the institution is created; (ii) if the ombudsman challenges the national government; and (iii) the ombudsman’s ability to build coalitions with other domestic and external actors.

According to him, powerful ombudsmen are those who were established before the transition to democracy than in democratic system. Finkel (2012) discussed that having positive relations with the media and civil society is quite vital for the success of the ombudsman, mentioning, of Honduras, where the ombudsman institution accused the government of corruption, the law- making body initiated a bill that would limit the life

span of the institution and its mandate to supervise the public administration which later became void after serious protests from civil society groups.

According to research informants on Focus Group Discussion (FGD), the Oromia branch Ombudsman institution fears to cause media shame to public authorities who abuse their institutional powers. As Finkel (2012) stated an ombudsman that abstains from challenging the public sector managers can maintain their existence but will remain weak.

In contrast, the ombudsman that challenges them may face reprisal but, if the challenger is operating in a weak authoritarian government, there is a possibility of the ombudsman institution becoming strong. In this regard, the present political environment in Ethiopia in general and in Oromia region in particular is conducive to strengthen the ombudsman institution given that the institution officers are committed and able to form an alliance with civil society groups in their jurisdictions.

A lack of skilled manpower within the institution due to various factors undermined the competence of the institution. According to research informants in the focus group discussion (FGD), the autonomy of the institution is doubtful when the institution leader is appointed politically. A study by Diaw (2008) discussed that the effectiveness and independence of the ombudsman institution is highly influenced by the appointment of the chief, its legal statutes, by its institutional accountability and by its budget.

Several studies showed that the success of an ombudsman institution mainly depends on the persons assigned to work in and their working political, economic and social environment (Rai and Singh 1976). Likewise Diaw (2008) and Vangansuren (2002) observed that the effectiveness of an ombudsman is organizationally determined by three factors: the rule of law; the ombudsman's legal authority; the behaviour and political culture of state actors.

One of the constraints with the Oromia branch Ombudsman institution is the issue of accountability problem that means institutional recommendations are not appraised whether the recommendations are being accepted for implementation or not. Recommendations of the institutions are not binding. Moreover, the accountability of the institution to the federal ombudsman has its own challenge.

Moreover, failure to use media shame is widely seen according to research participants in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), for two

reasons: (1) the quality of the investigations (2) the capacity to cooperate and enforce recommendations.

3.4. Results of Interviews obtained from Selected Public Sectors

Members of the public service were asked to assess the ombudsman impact on their public sector governance and service delivery. The following public sectors were contacted for interview on the basis of complaints received from service users. They include: the Oromia Revenue Authority, the Oromia Land Management Agency, the Oromia Investment Bureau and Oromia Education Bureau.

The results of the interviews with those expertise contacted for interview show that the relations between the Ombudsman and the institution are very poor. Interviewees stated that “We do not have the view the institutions have delivered the intended outputs. Its functional existence is not even known adequately”. Continued saying that “we believe that the presence and function of the institution has paramount significance to correct us whenever there is an administrative mal practice; nevertheless, the institution is not working well. Whenever they forwarded us recommendations, we considered them”. Research participants also mentioned that the relations between the ombudsman office and other public institutions are very poor. The institution is not that much known among the wider public in general, and/ or civil servants in particular.

Thus, the institution should disseminate its findings on public grievances after investigations using various channels and, if the institution is strengthened, it can contribute to increasing and improving of the performance of public sector institutions.

Empirical evidences obtained from the developed nations show that the ombudsman institutions use different mechanisms to disseminate its decisions and recommendations that has made the institution to be known. According to OECD report, over 80% use regular reports and publication on the website. Moreover, use presentations at parliamentary sessions, traditional media, social media, newsletter, press conferences and seminars and thematic conferences (OECD 2018).

3.5. Results of Interviews with Some Selected Complaints

The study accessed complaints to participate in the study through snowball sampling method. The interviews were conducted via telephone. According to interview research participants, they are satisfied with the

service provided by the institution. Five individuals' complaints were participated in the interview; all of them stated are satisfied with service provided by the institution. Some of them have obtained what they wanted while others' cases are still in progress as the other party has appealed. In the interview with the Director of the Investigation Department of the regional Ombudsman branch, the investigation staff is working with commitment to ensure service users satisfaction by dealing with the cases submitted to it.

3.6. Findings on the Impact of the Ombudsman Investigation on the Regional Public Administration

The ombudsman institution has a significant influence on the public administration performance even if there are variations with regard to the institution's performance in different countries, as the institution's objective is to promote good governance in order to encourage accountability, efficiency and transparency in the public administration (Batalli 2015).

The Oromia branch ombudsman achieved a very high level of satisfaction from the complaints who filed their cases to the institution. Almost all of our research respondents who participated in the telephone interview mentioned that they were satisfied with the institution's handling of their cases. This does not mean, however, that the institution is very popular among the public as discussed before. Even the regional public sectors who participated in the interview as repeatedly mentioned the institution is not known among public sector employees at large.

The ombudsman institution by effectively undertaking its activities can influence public sector governance and service delivery in particular, and national democratization process in general. Meaning, as part of its activities it can enable public sector officials to feel and to be accountable via complaints submitted to the institution or monitoring of the public sector activities by its own initiation. As enshrined in the proclamation establishing of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Ombudsman institution, which reads as "The objective of the Institution shall be to see to bringing about good governance that is of high quality, efficient and transparent, and are based on the rule of law, by way of ensuring that citizens' rights and benefits provided for by law are respected by organs of the executive" as stipulated in Article 5 of Proclamation no. 2011/2000. This implies the institution is mandated to influence public

sector governance by effectively redressing administrative injustice that falls under its jurisdiction.

Research informants in the Focus Group Discussion extended that the institution is crucial and very necessary in countries, like Ethiopia where maladministration is deeply rooted. Moreover, the lack of supremacy of the law is a challenge to the work of the Ombudsman institution.

Literature states that the ombudsman institution works better in democratic states than in non-democratic ones. Wong and Yuen (2016) outlined how soft authoritarianism or weak authoritarianism contributed for the work of the ombudsman institution in Hong Kong.

According to research participants in the Focus Group Discussion, in Ethiopia in general, in Oromia region in particular, due to the lack of a democratic culture and system, the institution has not been run by qualified and impartial person but rather by appointed political person.

The ethics, qualifications and the competence are not up to the desired level and it is apparent that the institution is not autonomous. Democratic institutions in general do not have the power to influence the executive. The executive body is not ready to accept the ombudsman institution's recommendations because they are not binding. Mandate wise analysis stating, the institution should be accountable to the regional council than to the federal ombudsman for effective handling of public grievances. The institution has no enforcing mechanism.

The institution is not politically independent. Shortage of budget and logistic problems is a major challenge for the Oromia branch ombudsman institution to undertake its mandate as previously discussed. Research informants in the focus group discussion stated that there is uniform budget allocation to all regional branches ombudsman. This is unfair when we consider the Oromia branch ombudsman that is expected to serve this large population. Due to budget constraints, the institution is not able to have decentralized services or more branches.

Focus Group Discussants stated that public protests and grievances are due to lack of good governance in public service delivery. The institution should be capacitated to enhance its impact on the public service delivery and public sector governance. "We are the eye as institution to influence the public administration".

Focus Group Discussants further stated that political influence or government interference is a hurdle to the institutional activities. The government has not given adequate attention to the institution and "even

the institution's employees are suffering from the institution lack of good governance".

Moreover, from the public sectors view point, the performance of the institution is very low. The Oromia branch ombudsman as our research participant in the interview stated the institution has no established relations with the regional legislature and other public sector organizations this has influenced its activities or not to cause impact on the regional public administration. Findings from the Kenyan ombudsman institution show that an Ombudsman institution that closely works with other public sectors have better performance in complaint handling mechanism (Kenya School of Monetary Study report 2013).

3.6.1. Achievements of the Institution

A question was forwarded to research participants regarding any achievements of the office. Both in the interview and in the focus group discussion research participants stated that the institution has no success story even though they replied that they are successful in dealing with complaints submitted to them in timely manner. Regarding relations with the public sectors concerned, the institution does not have an established relationship with other institutions but said there have been some improvements since undertaking serious discussion with bureau heads as of last year.

In contrast, research participants in the interview from other public sectors for this study answered that the institution has a very weak linkage with them. Even its very existence is not well-recognized. Bergman (2014) argued that for the effectiveness of the ombudsman institution, the public must be aware of the ombudsman and its roles. Moreover, the institution so as to cause impact on public administration or to be effective in its endeavor should establish synergy with the civil society organizations (World Bank n.d).

Hatchard et al discussed that the presence of strong synergy between the public sectors and ombudsman institution is very vital to its success. As the presence of synergy enables complaints to be effectively handled; moreover, for effective investigations, responsiveness and implementation of its recommendations requires high degree of cooperation. In the absence of such cooperation, the ombudsman cannot effectively undertake its mandate (as cited in Kabillah2014). So the success of the ombudsman

institution is highly dependent on the degree of its cooperation with concerned public authorities (Kabillah 2014).

Kabillah, in his study showed how lack of cooperation has affected the performance of the ombudsman institution in Uganda, Ghana and Kenya. He mentioned that in Uganda, the attempt to bring a disobedient institution and individuals has been discouraged by the president.

In Kenya, similarly, the executive, legislative and judiciary have obscured the ombudsmen institution not to accomplish its tasks. This asserts that lack of democratic political systems as a challenge to the functioning of the ombudsman institution in Africa.

Research participants in the focus group discussion (FGD) noted that the Oromia branch ombudsman institution as a matter of the proclamation establishing the federal ombudsman and its branches does not have enforcement powers as per the proclamation and unable to ensure the compliance of its recommendations are bottlenecks to its functioning to achieve its objective. The revised proclamation (proclamation no.1142/2019) in this regard has considered this challenge and stated that the ombudsman institution should provide its report and orders to any investigated public institution(s) to comply with its direction. This may require a serious follow by the ombudsman or establishing joint forum to review that and other related activities.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusion and Implications of the Study

The third wave of democratization has influenced the expansion of ombudsman institutions across developing democracies or states. With the expansion of public administration and public service delivery, unavoidably there are concerns of fair, quality and speedy public service delivery to service users.

The ombudsman institution promotes democracy by ensuring that government defends citizen rights, pursues the public good, and ensures public officers are accountable and act within the constitutional frameworks and supporting laws.

Ombudsman institution above all is influenced by political development of a nation. The current change in Ethiopian politics is an opportunity if utilized can strengthen the ombudsman institution. Strengthening the institution of the ombudsman enables to promote good governance in

public sector governance and service delivery. Meaning, as the literature states the process of complaint handling allows citizens to participate in the governance of public institutions, enhancing the accountability of public institutions and promoting good governance in public administration

A well-established and functional ombudsman institution contributes for democratic accountability and good governance in public sector. This study has attempted to assess the impact of Oromia branch ombudsman institution on public sector governance and service delivery. The study found that the impact is weak due to various factors such as accessibility problem, lack budget, lack of institutional competence, and lack of synergy between the institution, public sector and civil society groups among others. Moreover, the Oromia branch ombudsman institution lacks recognition from authorities and no-way of checking whether recommendations of the ombudsman are implemented or not. Including, absence of forum for joint discussion with the concerned public authorities has undermined its job.

Apart from that the institutions' mechanism of complaint handling system is not strong. For the effective and successful handling of complaints the institution should have a yardstick to act against. For instance, the experience of the ombudsman of Western Australia shows that, has developed eleven (11) governing principles for effective handling of complaints that the Oromia branch ombudsman institution in particular should take that into account or adopt best practices like that for effective handling of complaints, these are:

- (i) Establishing effective complaint handling mechanisms' and values feedback through complaints
- (ii) Disseminating information about how and where to complain to customers, staff and other concerned bodies
- (iii) Adopting easy process for making a complaint and investigating in away accessible and understandable
- (iv) Complaints should get prompt feedback and informed about their cases throughout process
- (v) Treating complaints fairly in an equitable, objective and unbiased way
- (vi) Private information of complaints should be kept confidential
- (vii) Supporting complaints in the course handling complaint

- (viii) There are opportunities for internal and external review and/or appeal about the organization's response to the complaint, and the complainants are informed about these avenues.
- (ix) accountabilities for complaint handling should be clearly established, and complaints and responses to them should be monitored and reported to management and other stakeholders, and
- (x) Taking complaints as a source of improvement for organizations.

The ongoing political reforms in Ethiopia is hoped to strengthen democratic institutions in general, the ombudsman institution in particular. In this regard, the newly revised Ethiopian institution of the ombudsman proclamation established by proclamation no.1142/2019 has come up with some amendments like incorporated the rights of foreign nationals to present their complaints on administrative related issues or violations of rights.

It also empowered the institution that government should be cooperative to the institution on matters related to evidence, information and other cooperation both during and after investigations periods where the office provides its report and orders any investigated institutions to comply with its order (The Reporter English news, 27 April 2019 <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/house-rejects-proposed-immunity-ombudsmeninvestigators> accessed 9.14.2019). If supported by political commitment of the incumbent government this amendments will have some impact though cannot solve the institution problem at large as the revision has not considered the centralization structural problem of the institution.

This study argues that the centralization structure of the institution has inhibited the smooth functioning of the institution. If ombudsman institution required yielding better results structural issue should be considered meant that if the accountability of the regional ombudsmen is to regional legislatures can do lots of activities in terms of impacting regional public administration so long as their mandate is restricted to their respective regional affairs. Moreover, the issue of budget shortage, lack of competent human resources and access to media can be addressed accordingly.

Apart from that, it will create a venue for the institutions' (Ombudsmen) to present their findings in the regional legislature where bureau heads avail themselves that can help to cause influence on public sectors that

have serious problems of good governance in service delivery. So that the regional Ombudsman institution can decentralize its activities to local level with adequate staff and budget as the majority of the people obviously do live at the local level, yet there is question of good governance in public service delivery there, so as to influence the behavior of local government bodies, decentralizing such institution has paramount importance so that can contribute its part in promoting good governance in the public administration and democratization process of the nation at large.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are stated:

- Establishing a joint forum between ombudsman institution, representative of the private sector group, public sector authorities and civil society groups. In this regard, the joint forum should meet at least twice in a year. This helps all concerned bodies to work in collaboration. And this will help to evaluate the ombudsman institution's recommendations whether taken positively for implementation by the concerned public sector or not.
- The regional branch ombudsmen institutions in general and the Oromia branch ombudsman in particular should be accountable to the regional legislature. This needs a revision of mandate through proclamation that requires regional ombudsmen to be accountable to their regional legislature and cooperate with the federal ombudsman so that the question of budget, hiring human resources and other facilities could be addressed.
- The Oromia branch ombudsman institution should use the regional Medias, such as OBN, OBS, OMN etc. to disseminate its findings and to cause media shame upon those authorities who abuse their institutional powers.
- The Oromia branch ombudsman should be able to act impartially and make public administration more sensitive to public opinion and more responsive to demands for fairness and justice.
- The Oromia branch ombudsman institution must strive with the cooperation of public sector authorities to redress administrative grievances and impact them with better administration.
- The Oromia branch ombudsman institution should improve its professionalism in order to conduct its activities more effectively. The

success of any ombudsman is mainly determined by the personality of the representative/commissioner and its staff.

- The Oromia branch ombudsman should ensure its independence at any cost so as to secure public trust.
- The Oromia branch ombudsman should maintain continuous dialogue or awareness raising forums with government officials, private groups and civil society groups so that it is possible to make its roles known and this enhances its visibility.
- The Oromia branch ombudsman should use all available medias (both traditional and modern) to educate and promote public awareness of its mandate or roles which can also contribute for its accessibility to the public.

For Further research

- Citizens right to information in public service delivery

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