Key messages on local government

- Ethiopia's local government systems have been an important driver of socio-economic change which have improved the lives of many community members across WIDE sites over 24 years. WIDE3 documented evidence of these changes as experienced in 2010-13.

- Local governance is now weaker and less focused than seemed the case in WIDE3 5-7 years ago. Local administration is less present, less effective, and less certain in all sites.

  ➢ *With changing demography and aspirations, a simple reinvigoration of the existing model seems unlikely to succeed, although there may be scope for this in some communities or groups. Appropriate reforms will be important for development.*

- False and exaggerated reporting were mentioned as problems in all sites: so was the reluctance to report problems; as well as the regular lack of action when issues *were* raised.

  ➢ *Creative approaches will be needed to the problem of data inflation in order to meet targets; policymakers might consider drawing on processes, and commending experiences in those instances where reporting has been considered more accurate.*

  ➢ *Stakeholders should consider ways to encourage "negative" feedback, that challenges dominant development discourses; and to improve understanding and analysis on the basis of it. Federal and regional parliamentary standing committees could explore ways of improving evidence collection, including direct public hearings, to feed reflection.*

- Good local government officers at kebele level make a huge difference to community relations, but many are overworked, and kebele cabinet members are working voluntarily.

  ➢ *Stakeholders should consider reviewing the balance of paid and unpaid roles and labour in* kebele *administration: the ability to take on voluntary roles may well be gendered, and may discriminate against the inclusion of poorer groups as well as against women.*

  ➢ *Policymakers should consider substantive reforms in local government structures, to streamline responsibilities, professionalise recruitment, and remunerate essential roles. The workloads and incentive structures of the* kebele *manager role should be revisited.*

  ➢ *High staff turnover and vacancy rates, particularly in emerging municipalities may be undermining the management of complex processes of change, and need attention.*

  ➢ *The system of models, and the motivation of HEWs and DAs should be revisited; in particular, realistic guidance should be developed for frontline civil servants' travel out of the* kebele *centre to support activities across* got *and sub-kebele structures.*

- Popular fatigue with lengthy meetings and mobilisation mechanisms is widespread.

  ➢ *The utility, length and location of meetings in popular mobilisation and government training strategies could be reviewed, to assess whether efficiencies or alternative strategies could be introduced to improve the effectiveness of the approach.*

- ➢ *Stakeholders should develop pragmatic mobilisation mechanisms, piloting and adopting a diverse range of new strategies that resonate with local priorities and needs; and that can gain traction in different localities and with different demographic groups.*

- ➢ *Comparative cost-benefit and inclusivity analysis of different models of participation, including the function and practice of diverse associations, could be a useful reform tool.*

- Many respondents across the sites, but especially young men, are disaffected or frustrated.

  - ➢ *Consideration should be given to the appeal, sustainability and long-term impact of youth interventions, including the Revolving Fund which has raised local expectations.*

  - ➢ *Communities are increasingly resisting government initiatives where there is inadequate consultation: this undermines relations and is a problem exacerbated by weak reporting.*

- Technological change (new IT systems), and administrative shifts (towns moving out of weredas) sometimes result in friction or miscommunication between levels of government.

  - ➢ *Policymakers might consider reviewing practices of communication, reporting and accountability between the* kebele *and the* wereda*, especially as the economy diversifies, and as systems and structures become more complex.*

- Data from all sites reaffirmed the very significant public trust in local religious leaders and elders, and the importance of the institution of *iddir* in community management:

  - ➢ *All three are key assets in patterns of local social capital, with great development potential, and policymakers and their partners could do well to explore or exploit this.*

- Complaints about tax, land administration, and CBHI mobilisation were common to all sites.

  - ➢ *A less stringent taxation regime could be explored for nascent businesses, or in new towns, in order to support small businesses – and small towns – whilst they emerge.*

  - ➢ *Government should revisit very low current levels of land taxation; also the timing of collection; and the principle of combining different kinds of payment at one time.*

  - ➢ *Policymakers should also consider formally recording the full range of local "community contributions" (in cash or in kind, as labour or materials) as part of the local tax take.*

  - ➢ *The potential for conflict between quota-based mobilisation and the voluntary rationale of the CBHI should be reviewed, and alternative approaches explored as necessary.*

- Access to justice is increasingly important to members of communities, which are also increasingly preoccupied by the problems or risks of corruption in local government.

  - ➢ *Government should revisit the problem of an over-dominant executive, and of the separation of powers at the micro level; and should explore means of strengthening judicial and representative functions at* wereda *and* kebele *levels.*

  - ➢ *Tackling the causes of community concern about corruption in land administration, in contracting for construction, and in distribution of resources, should be a high priority.*

  - ➢ *Policymakers should consider establishing a "governance laboratory"- a think tank or research unit devoted to studying and experimenting with different models of community governance and practice, designed to inform practical planning of reform.*

The central role of local government in promoting socio-economic change

WIDE research over 24 years has documented the significant role that local government actors and systems have played in driving the socio-economic transformation of rural Ethiopia. Over this period Ethiopia's local government structures were systematically built and capacitated, in a series of ambitious reforms which established new regional governments under federalism in the 1990s; pushed forward a process of decentralisation of services to wereda level in 2001; and equipped and trained wereda and kebele capability over a decade of consolidation. Civil servant numbers at local levels increased from 153,000 in 2004/5 to over 363,000 in 2009/10, alongside strong annual growth in real and *per capita* local spending over the period 2001-2010.[2]

Local experiences of government at the micro level, which WIDE documented in 1994, 2003, and 2010-13, were complex and often challenging. Older data illuminate just how much innovation and change drew on the resourcefulness of individuals and their families, independent of the state (cf. DBI:05 Models and realities of transformation; Vaughan 2018). Few would dispute the determination with which Ethiopia's local government structures promoted and facilitated many of these processes of change: delivering remarkable national progress, for instance, towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015. The last round of research (conducted between 2010 and 2013) was undertaken during a period which, in retrospect, arguably marked the zenith of the activity and cohesion of an interventionist and broadly effective local state. WIDE 3 data documented the extraordinary range of 103 development interventions pursued by the state locally: the relatively well co-ordinated, and intensively pursued activities associated with them; and the perspectives of a range of individuals across the twenty communities experiencing or involved in them – for good or ill.

That vigorous picture seems significantly different to the one emerging from data made in the first quarter of 2018, a difficult period which culminated in the resignation of the then-Prime Minister. The visible decline of the efficacy, capacity, discipline, probity and (above all) energy of local government since the four sites were last visited under WIDE3 between 5 and 7 years ago is striking. It shapes almost all aspects of the governance story of the WIDE Bridge phase, and presents a range of challenges to policymakers which are explored in this Discussion Brief. Whilst much has changed at the macro level, under a new PM since April 2018, the local governance picture that emerges from WIDE Bridge data sets the scene for many of the problems which have persisted at the micro level. These issues continue to challenge government: whether in terms of delivery and efficacy, participation and engagement, probity and discipline, or the risks and dynamics of potential conflict.

This Discussion Brief documents selected aspects of the situation in March 2018, presenting a range of popular perspectives on – and critiques of - local government (notably inflated or "false" reporting and an over-reliance on labour-intensive voluntarism); looking at patterns and weaknesses of community engagement (re women and young people and the roles of key local government officials); exploring community management beyond the state, as well as areas of local government policymaking which the data suggest are particularly problematic (taxation, land administration, and a *zemecha* campaign associated with CBHI); and concluding with observations about corruption, the balance of power at the micro level, and the management of risks and dynamics going forward.

The picture which emerges is mixed, but the overall trajectory is not a positive one. Local government in Ethiopia in early 2018 seems to be at a turning point: somehow less than the sum of its parts, and dogged by uncertainties and lack of direction. None of this is to deny the hard work and commitment of the many local administrators, school directors and teachers, kebele managers, development agents, and health extension workers and many others whom the WIDE team met, and whose determined efforts continue to improve lives in the communities they serve. An erosion of confidence and leadership, however, was in the first quarter of 2018 making their professional and personal lives more challenging and frustrating.

> ➢ *On the face of it, with changing demography and aspirations, a simple reinvigoration of the existing model seems unlikely, although there may be scope for this in some communities, or amongst some demographic groups. As the country transitions, these findings are presented to support policymakers with micro-level evidence, as they review future directions of local governance in Ethiopia's rural, and urbanising, communities.*

Popular perceptions of the decline of local government

> *"Our government is dead since long years. Everywhere there is corruption and cheaters are rewarded. Truth has been buried somewhere and is nowhere to be found." (older woman, Harresaw, northeastern Tigray)*

In all of the four sites, WIDE data indicate that our respondents saw local government as less capable, and less effective than in the past at least in some, and often in many, respects. There are a number of important differences in this picture. Respondents were particularly critical in the Amhara site, Yetmen in East Gojjam, and in the Tigray site, Harresaw in northeastern Tigray: apparently more so than seems to be the case from data produced in the Oromia site, Ude near Bishoftu, and (to some extent also) the SNNP site, Aze Debo, in Kambata zone.[3] Each site has its own preoccupations and micro-level patterns of frustration. In Yetmen, Gojjame farmers were strongly opposed to a process of urbanisation which they saw as undermining their interests, an impasse which had left many local government services in a state of limbo (cf. also DBIII:01 Land and urbanisation); in Harresaw, in Tigray, residents were angered by an attempt to manipulate the location of a new urban centre on the part of a kebele official, but also by what many saw as a more general decline in probity and commitment; in Ude in the Oromia development corridor south of Addis Ababa, local government complicity in the illicit allocation of increasingly valuable land deeply preoccupied the community (cf. DBIII:01 Land and urbanisation); and in the Kambata site, our data document concerns about nepotism and distortion in the allocation of resources, whether investment land or PSNP, through non-transparent familial or political networks (cf. DBIII:05 Modernisation and inequalities). The data also suggest a differentiation between the perceptions of older and of younger people, with the latter emerging as much less tolerant, accepting or indeed aware of the activities of local government (cf. also DBIII:04 Young people's economic experiences; DBIII:05 Modernisation and inequalities).

Data inflation, and false or partial reporting

> *Everyone in the government layer is working on false reports with harmony in order to get praise and promotion. (Aze Debo)*

False reporting has been a focus of public political rhetoric at least since the EPRDF congress of 2013, when it was identified as a serious problem hampering the country's transformation. It is not surprising, then, that it emerged as an important focus of frustration and popular anger in all of the sites, and one widely seen as inherent in the system:

> *False reports are very common because of the very essence of EPRDF politics. Rather than the real results on the ground a high and bloomy report is appreciated. Sub-kebele zones having small land want to compete with highly productive ones having wider farm land per household, so they push weredas to bring false and exaggerated reports as much as possible. (Aze Debo)*

Perverse incentives amongst individuals were regarded as responsible for a pervasive problem:

> *If a DA takes a real but small figure in their report, they will be denied promotion, education opportunity or will even be relocated to a distant rural place away from their family. To avoid this, sending satisfactory reports has become the trend, rather than working satisfactorily. (Aze Debo)*

There is evidence that people felt cheated in all sites because of false reports, and the issue was particularly clearly discussed in the Tigray site, where people appreciated the new kebele manager not least "*because he doesn't make false reports like his predecessor.*" In the Amhara site,

meanwhile, a HEW was disliked partly because "*she lies and gives false reports*." Respondents in Harresaw kebele administration reported that the issue had been raised repeatedly, asking the wereda to bring it to the attention of the zone "*but we know that the* wereda *don't do it.*" False reporting around CBHI by other kebeles, for instance, was seen as a particular problem, because inflation on the part of neighbouring kebeles of the number of households who were paying meant that Harresaw's performance was unjustly evaluated as weak (cf. also DBIII:06 Social protection).

False reporting complaints also focused on inadequate water supply in two sites: Harresaw and Aze Debo. In Tigray it had allegedly resulted in regional politicians reporting irrigation coverage at seven times the actual figure. In Aze Debo respondents suggested that the positive impact of PSNP was exaggerated by officials.[4] Respondents in the Kambata site also reported that false reporting had been discussed during "deep renewal" and that it had declined as a consequence. Many blamed pressure from wereda officials to reach targets for the extent of the problem (Aze Debo/Kambata); others that the lack of follow up at wereda level despite increasingly irregular reporting from the kebele was also contributing (Yetmen/East Gojjam). Oversight and inspection processes designed to preclude data inflation do not seem to have been effective in curbing this problem.

> ➢ *Creative approaches to monitoring the problem of data inflation in order to meet targets will be required going forward, and policymakers might consider drawing on processes and commending experiences where reporting has been considered more accurate.*

False reporting is not only an issue of data inflation: omissions are also an element of the problem. An implication of the data is that a number of more fundamental or structural issues of concern to local community members may be inadequately represented in the reports of local officials unwilling to "tell truth unto power" in ways that might challenge the dominant development narrative. Examples would include: the depth of rural Yetmen farmers' opposition to municipalisation of their settlement; the very great economic importance of migration in the Tigray and Kambata cases; the scope of land sales in the Oromia site; and the anxiety about potential land loss to a possible industrial zone in Kambata. Each of these sets of messages has important policy implications: re managing rural experiences of municipalisation better; re preparing and protecting citizens better for migration, and equipping them to harness sustainable benefits; and re forging consensus around controversial land use changes. The scope for learning policy lessons and potential policy adaptation is lost if problems are not reported – be they problems of principle or of implementation.

> ➢ *Stakeholders should consider ways to encourage "negative" feedback that challenges dominant development discourses, and to improve analysis and policy on the basis of it. Federal and regional parliamentary standing committees could explore ways to improve evidence collection, perhaps through direct public hearings, to feed policy reflection.*

The limitations of voluntarism underpinning local governance

Ethiopia employs relatively large numbers of civil servants in its local government structures, but the system is also dependent on the voluntary activities of unpaid kebele-level committee members.[5] The sustainability of this strategy was already questioned during the last round of data making in 2010-13 (DBI:5 Models and realities of transformation).[6] The problem has grown more acute, and many respondents state that local government should now be staffed by paid professionals. The responsibilities involved have clearly become more complex, and more onerous, with many volunteers serving for long periods.[7] It is particularly difficult to attract good women leaders into voluntary roles.[8] Unpaid kebele chairs and committee members were direct in their views. In the Gojjam site, for instance, the acting kebele chair insisted that

> "*unless some form of incentive is introduced to compensate the leaders' time spent on* kebele *work activities everybody will resign and there will be no one volunteering to be elected.*"[9]

Similar views were repeated across the sites. A social court chairperson also "*doubted that with his workload he could continue with the job.*" In principle, in Harresaw social court judges were supposed to be paid 50 birr for each case, but in practice this was not working.

> ➢ *Government should consider reviewing the balance of paid and unpaid roles and labour in* kebele *administration, not least because the ability to take on voluntary roles may be gendered; it may discriminate against the inclusion of poorer groups as well as women;*

> ➢ *Policymakers should consider substantive reforms in local government structures, to streamline responsibilities, professionalise recruitment, and remunerate essential roles.*

Evidence of wider resistance to "popular participation"

Unpopularity of time spent in meetings

The unwillingness of respondents – both kebele officials and the wider population - to spend time in meetings was a clear theme of the data made in all of the four sites: "*people didn't want to go to meetings for the last 5 years*" was a common refrain.[10] In the Gojjam site a respondent complained that the wereda officials were "*torturing the* kebele *people making them sit in meetings.*" One relatively successful strategy had been the establishment by a woman development team leader in the Tigray site of a new model of *mahaber*-combined-with-*eqqub*, which encouraged people to come to relatively short meetings, held close to home, with convenience, and a practical focus. Attendance at meetings is evidently less compulsory or strictly enforced than previously, even in Tigray, although one woman said that absenteeism from meetings "*had an effect later on*" as she felt she was not selected "*whenever there are benefits in the* kebele*.*" Even the kebele leader in Harresaw recognized community "*fatigue*" with meetings, attributing this to a failure of officials to work effectively.

> ➢ *Government should review the use, length and location of meetings in its popular mobilisation and government training strategies, and consider whether efficiencies or alternative strategies could be introduced to improve the effectiveness of the approach.*

Erosion of the one-to-five mobilisation mechanism?

Respondents are also unenthusiastic about the "one-to-five" (1-5) mobilisation mechanism in all sites. The 1-5s were described as "*less effective than they used to be*" in Ude where even a development team leader reported that he did not think that 1-5 networks were working at all, or that they would improve because people were

> *highly resistant to their functioning and implementation. Maybe if there is going to be punishment people may accept these structures as before; otherwise, they have already stopped working with their network [and there is] resistance from the community to accept orders from their respective 1-5 network leaders and development leaders.*

Other residents remarked on the change which had taken place in public attitudes, and confirmed that it would not be possible to resurrect the 1-5 structures, and that "*they themselves were refusing to listen to them,*" "*as were other members of the community.*" In the Tigray site development teams were still considered a reasonably effective way of passing messages, even if not as active as before, and it is conceivable they might be reanimated to useful effect.

> ➢ *Stakeholders should consider giving attention to pragmatic mobilisation mechanisms, piloting and adopting a range of diverse new strategies: that resonate with local priorities and practical needs; and that can gain traction in different localities and demographic groups, drawing on locally preferred sources of authority.*

> ➢ *Comparative cost-benefit and inclusivity analysis of different models – including for instance the activities and practices of varied associations - might usefully be conducted.*

Policing and security seemed to be one of the few areas where the system of 1-5s was still functional in some of the sites. In Yetmen, weaknesses in local security around the Nile gorge in previous years meant that the community had agreed to recruit and pay additional guards, to watch the road and the crops.[11] The community policing coordinator for the surrounding kebeles complained he was assigned double responsibilities[12] reportedly due to a critical shortage of police personnel in the wereda.[13] In Harresaw, security and militia seemed to be working reasonably well, despite some complaints that they were not able to tackle

> *the group of drinking and gambling youth regularly disturbing the centre of the* kebele*. The militia recently arrested two young men disturbing the peace and security and bearing knives: but it is difficult for the militia to catch young men red-handed in gambling as they do this in hiding.*

Youth and women's associations

In all four sites, members of the community make regular financial contributions for the functioning of women's and youth associations, but there is little activity to show for this. Women's associations are extremely weak, where they are visible at all, and there is considerable pressure on the very few effective women leaders at local level. Few people knew anything about involvement in the women's associations, leagues or federation; and the youth associations, youth league and youth federation are all "*not functional*" in Yetmen, with "*no one involved except a very few party members.*" Most respondents agreed that there was "*very little incentive for young people to get involved.*"

In Harresaw, although there is an active women's association, it suffers from lack of resources. Its leader suggested that what she finds difficult, as well as the lack of resources, is the fact that neither wereda nor kebele leaders are willing to consider the root causes of problems. She commented that

> *people in upper positions should come to us and discuss to solve the problems at the grassroots rather than ordering us as an association to do this and that. (Harresaw, women's leader)*

The Youth Association was poorly considered across all the sites, and there was significant evidence of disaffection, particularly amongst young men. The only examples of positive engagement between local government and young people all had to do with the distribution of resources: credit, land, sheds, premises and loans for cooperatives or micro and small enterprises, and so on. In the Amhara and Oromia sites in particular, increased government activity with respect to youth job creation was perceived in positive terms (cf. DBIII:04 Young people's economic experiences).

> ➢ *Particular consideration should be given to the appeal, sustainability and long-term impact of youth interventions, including the YRF, which has raised expectations locally.*

Local civil servants and decision-makers

The system of DAs, HEWs, models and model farmers

A 2014 discussion brief drawing on WIDE3 data suggested that the government's development approach based on models of various kinds was not working effectively or as hoped (DBI:05 Models and realities of transformation). The scale and scope of the problems with the approach are much clearer now. Health Extension Workers (HEWs) in the Tigray and SNNP sites were better appreciated than Development Agents (DAs), but model households in health seemed to have been quietly abandoned. In Yetmen the involvement of model farmers in demonstrating activities had stopped[14] – not least because there were no longer DAs assigned in what had become regarded as an "urban" location. However, the model farmer system was also no longer functional in the rural Tigray site. Model farmers themselves suggested that the only benefit they were bringing was to their own households. In Harresaw, DAs were poorly considered, but the strongest criticism focused on the mismatch between what the DAs were promoting and the reality on the ground, especially with regard to crop production.[15] However, several respondents also highlighted a lack of commitment and proactive initiative, which was seen as a more general problem in the administration as a whole:

> *the* wereda *head of agriculture never came to see [a particular site]. Even DAs do not come, they sit in the* kebele *and write reports. They are like pregnant women who do not move away from their home. (Harresaw)*

> ➢ *The system of models, and the motivation of HEWs and DAs should be revisited; in particular, realistic guidance should be developed for frontline civil servants' travel out of the* kebele *centre to support activities across got and sub-*kebele *units.*

Patterns of weak accountability

The data include a number of instances of top-down decision making that bypassed the kebele, or kebele decision-making that was not consultative. For instance, in Kambata the surveying of a proposed 160 hectare industrial park site in Aze Debo kebele had gone ahead without the local kebele being involved or consulted: something the kebele chair regarded as

> *a black stain on the way that the government has been dealing with us.*

In Ude, near Bishoftu, the town expansion had involved only limited or weak consultations with different communities, who were also upset about plans to build on land from which the school had been earning revenues. In the Gojjam site at Yetmen, the widely opposed municipalisation plan was considered "*imposed by the* wereda *on the* kebele *instead of supporting development*." In Yetmen

> *all the* kebele *officials sided with the people against the municipalisation; even the militia leader was disarmed and demoted for participating in the community resistance. He received a warning letter from the* wereda*, accusing him of working with anti-development elements.*

In practice, the work of the Yetmen kebele is greatly hampered, and the establishment of the town effectively suspended because of resistance on this issue. Similarly, lack of consultation was a complaint in the Tigray site, where kebele civil servants objected to wereda programmes "*stepping down*" on them. In relation to the contested issue of the location of the Harresaw kebele centre, those who spoke about local government consultation (mostly women) highlighted the top-down nature of the planning and implementation of government programmes and the lack of consultation by the kebele administration; and that the community was "*just told what to do.*" A woman farmer head of office noted that in previous years the kebele had held general meetings to consult community members about what to do in the kebele and about government activities, but that currently she and others did not hear about that. Another woman (a development army group leader living in the kebele centre) commented that the conflict about the town development sketch plan could have been avoided if kebele leaders had consulted the community.

> ➢ *Inadequate consultation about government initiatives is increasingly resisted, and undermines relations with communities: weak reporting exacerbates the problem. If government wishes to retain an interventionist local state, both should be improved.*

Relations with weredas, zones, and the regions

Relations between kebeles and weredas were difficult in a number of places. In the Tigray case, wereda respondents had a rather negative view of Harresaw, suggesting this was mostly a leadership issue.[16] The Enemay authorities at Bichena described Yetmen as "difficult" and "recalcitrant,"[17] and the data suggest that municipalisation may have contributed to a distancing of relations between Yetmen and the higher bodies at wereda level, since a "*ne'us mazegaja*"[18] centre no longer reports straightforwardly to the wereda as the rural kebele would have done before.

In a number of cases, technological improvements (including GIS mapping of land, and surveying areas using a drone) may be exacerbating the distance between kebeles (who have no access to such technology) and weredas or higher authorities. Similarly, data on the education sector indicate that a two-tier education system was beginning to open up, with schools who have access to the electricity grid able to engage with modern pedagogy and resources in a way that others could not.

> *Policymakers might consider reviewing practices of communication, reporting and accountability between* kebele*s and* wereda*s, especially as the economy diversifies, and as systems and structures become more complex, and more reliant on IT.*

The role of key kebele and municipality officials

In line with the general pattern of erosion of local government capacity since 2010-2013 (WIDE3), even at the level of key kebele and municipal managers and cabinet decision makers, commitment seemed to have declined over the last few years.[19] As in the case of WIDE 3, the data demonstrate the very positive impact on the wider community of having good kebele managers: and the very negative community impact of the opposite. The lack of a kebele manager in Yetmen, in combination with the presence of a widely disliked local official,[20] and the fact that "*there is no DA, no social worker, and the HEW just sits in her office*" negatively affected the overall relations with government in the site. A high proportion of vacancies further undermined capacity in the Yetmen municipality;[21] likewise, high vacancy rates in Harresaw and in Ude seemed to have been exacerbated by ongoing "Job Evaluation and Grading" reform processes – which may improve the situation in the longer-term, but for the time being had simply frozen all promotions and transfers.

In Harresaw, meanwhile, although the kebele manager was widely liked, he is married to the only HEW in the kebele, (they have a young baby) and the issue of work burden is a challenge: CBHI collection and the responsibilities of vital events registration (VERA) have very greatly added to their workload. Other civil servants confirmed that the reform and monitoring support processes for civil servants were weak (Yetmen). As with kebele managers, however, outstanding experts (for instance the two widely liked, energetic and committed young female land administration and job creation experts in Yetmen) could make a marked difference to the lives of community members.

> *Good local civil servants make a huge difference in government/community relations: the workloads and incentive structures of* kebele *managers could usefully be revisited.*

> *High staff turnover and vacancy rates, particularly in new or emerging municipalities may be undermining the management of complex processes of urbanisation and change, and need attention.*

The importance of "non-governmental governance:" elders, eqqub *and* iddir

Churches important in all sites

Three areas of wider social life emerge from the data as playing particularly important roles in community management, and local governance: religious structures, elders, and *iddir* (as well as *eqqub* and *mehaber* in some places). In three of the sites the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is dominant, whilst Protestant churches are strong and multiple in the Kambata site. In the Tigray site the EOC is described as supportive of government development work, and involved in passing development messages – albeit as an independent organisation, without allowing government people or politicians to mobilise directly. In all three EOC sites, the population makes significant contributions to church coffers. In Yetmen, church leaders had reportedly been involved in conflict resolution; elsewhere, in campaigning against so-called harmful traditional practices.[22]

Elders involved in conflict and dispute resolution

In all of the sites, elders (mainly but not exclusively male) played very important roles in local conflict resolution, and these institutions are used by government. There may be a risk of co-optation, such that some important community institutions may lose their legitimacy. Most were from historically wealthy or influential families. In Ude for instance, they had been involved in resolving a dispute between a group of young labourers and a teacher who had caused damage and refused to pay for

services in a local hotel: elders resolved the case effectively so that it was withdrawn from the courts. In Yetmen (as similarly in Harresaw),

> *the government established new kinds of community elders through the* kebele *structure but people tend to use the informal community elders through customary social networks for their cases. Currently elders are assigned by* kebele *councils, but this not functional. Religious or other community elders are involved in dispute resolution out of individual interest. It means that different people may prefer different elders who might be able to involve on the case.*

Several people mentioned that although there were a number of more formal structures (*Ye-giliggil shimagile*, arbitration elders; *gichit asweggaj*, conflict prevention/resolution committees),

> *Nevertheless, most people were resolving their disputes through ye-zemed dagna [judgements made within the family]. Because they know each other and know the cases as well and have respect among them[selves]." (Yetmen)*

Such arrangements were preferred "*even for serious cases including* dem adraqi" (literally "blood dryer" cases, i.e. murder cases).

Ubiquity and utility of iddiroch

The role of *iddir* as a social organisation also relevant to administration was clear, especially in the Tigray and Oromia sites, as emphatically explained by a number of rich male farmers in these sites:

> Iddir *is another very effective place to mobilize people. The* kebele *officials may use* iddir *to transfer information for the community. It is also another effective social organisation for the community and best place for* wereda *officials to deliver their messages. Apart from social support during wedding and funeral services* iddir *also plays a significant role in the economic life of the community.*

One example is in Ude on the 29th day of every month, when there is a large *iddir* gathering.

> *There is a monthly payment and if on that date the government officials need the people for communicating some information, the members of the* iddir *are not allowed to pay early and leave; rather they are made to stay without paying until the dissemination of some information or message is over. As such, the* kebele *officials communicate their agenda to the people on this gathering. Even some officials from* wereda *level come on this day to listen to the questions/needs and opinions of the* kebele *residents.*

Similar alignment between *iddir* and government structures is visible in Aze Debo. The importance of *iddir* in the Tigray site was less clear, as the institutions (like the *eqqub*) are a newer form. Where it does exist however, it is also involved in "*passing government messages.*"

In Ude, perhaps because of increasing urbanisation and commercialisation, respondents suggested that *eqqub* were becoming more important – both at smaller and larger scales.

> ➢ *The very significant public trust in religious leaders and elders and the importance of the institution of* iddir *in community management emerged clearly in all sites: all three are important assets in patterns of local social capital.*

Weaknesses in local government practice and policy implementation

There were a number of tangible initiatives at local level which respondents particularly appreciated: foremost amongst them was the "youth revolving fund," which had proved to be a significant injection of funding in most of the sites: 17milllion birr, for instance, in Enemay wereda[23] (The significant issues in relation to the creation of jobs in all sites are discussed in DBIII:04 Youth economic experiences). Nevertheless, these positive impressions of the YRF were often outweighed by frustration and irritation in other areas: taxation, land administration, and CBHI mobilisation were prominent cases.

Taxation and businesses

The data indicate concern about high levels of taxation, particularly levied on small and new businesses in urban areas (cf. DBIII:03 Non-farm livelihoods; DBIII:04 Young people's economic experiences). The research encountered significant anger about business taxation in Yetmen: "*this year three big traders left Yetmen*" had reportedly been "*moving to Addis or elsewhere*" as a result of this issue.[24] A number of other *teff* traders claimed that they had been left "in crisis" as a result of "high or unreasonable" tax demands: one for as much as 240,000 birr. A number of traders had attempted to return their licenses in protest. In Yetmen, business taxes were paid in Bichena, whilst in Ude, the municipality had begun to collect taxes, because of the scale of activity in the town.

At the other end of the economic scale, the data indicate the precariousness of micro businesses because of taxation – and because of competition from businesses in the larger nearby towns. In Ude, sellers of *tella* and *areke* and petty traders were exempted from taxation, although they were required to have a license. Meanwhile, since the 2009EC trading year, there has been a plan that sellers of traditional drinks would be taxed in Tigray, whilst some other informal businesses remained untaxed. As in the Amhara site, people complained that business taxation was "*becoming serious*". In the Tigray and Oromia sites, there were also complaints about the time involved in obtaining a business license (cf. DBIII:03 Non-farm livelihoods). Wereda sources acknowledged the iniquity of increasing taxation, whilst fundamental community problems – for instance those of electricity supply - remained unresolved.

> ➤ *a less stringent taxation regime could be explored for nascent businesses, or in new urban centres, in order to allow small businesses – and small towns - to emerge.*

Land taxes and other contributions

If business taxation seems often to be too steep, the data also suggest that land taxes may well be too low - ranging between 20, 30 and 44 birr *per annum*. Farmers in Ude object to the timing of collection (in January and February when agricultural prices are at their lowest post-harvest, forcing them to sell in a buyers' market); also to the fact that land taxes are (unexpectedly, and with little justification or explanation) lumped together with a number of other "contributions" which makes them more onerous. In Yetmen too,

> *when farmers were going to pay their land taxes, they were required to settle more than seven different types of contribution payments, and the land tax collectors were at the same time collecting all other contributions, providing receipts to each type of payment.*[25]

In Ude the premium for the recently introduced CBHI is also collected at the same time (although it is theoretically voluntary), and this is something which significantly increases the costs. Land taxes are collected separately in Tigray, with a 5% incentive (raised from 2%) for those collecting, and a 25 birr penalty for late payment.[26]

Traditionally, contributions of labour were considered part of taxation in rural Ethiopia, and many farmers still consider them in this light.[27] In the past, contributions in kind had been levied from PSNP at distribution to finance the kebele budget, a practice that had been discontinued in the Tigray site by order of the wereda, for fear of "*encouraging corruption and governance problems*." Sale of food aid sacks remains an acceptable source of kebele revenue generation, and farmers reportedly still agree to a levy for financing Farmer Training Centres (FTCs) and other services from food aid. In Harresaw, analysis of the data concludes that "*the sources, nature (voluntary or not), and uses of community contributions raised in the name of funding the* kebele *budget are a bit of a grey area.*"

> ➤ *Government should revisit very low current levels of land taxation; the timing of collection; and the principle of combining different kinds of payment at one time.*

> ➤ *Policymakers should also consider formally recording a range of local "community contributions" (in cash or in kind, as labour or materials) as part of the local tax take.*

Urban and land management

This issue is not explored in much detail here as it is discussed in DBIII:01 which focuses on land and urbanisation. It is clear that land management is an area of weakness for local government across sites. Thus for instance in Ude, near Bishoftu, an informant from Ada'a wereda confirmed land administration is among the most problematic areas in the wereda: there were many informal land leasing agreements and illegal land sales, and the compensation provided by government for the farmers was less than individuals and investors paid farmers. Municipalisation was a specific cause of wider resistance in Yetmen, and Aze Debo is likely to become a suburb of Durame in future years. Land allocation and land use planning is a specific cause of resistance in Harresaw where a kebele official had divided the community by his attempts to move the kebele urban centre to an area where his family had land: the dispute had not been resolved at the time of research.[28] The issue was clearly not well handled but in the end an evaluation process did seem to work to sanction unacceptable behaviour.

> ➢ *The range of governance issues raised by the management of land needs attention, particularly in the context of urbanisation, at all levels (cf. DBIII:01 Land and urbanisation)*

CBHI mobilisation

Other aspects of the operation of CBHI are discussed in detail in DBIII:06 Social protection. Here the focus is only on the processes of mobilisation of households, to join the scheme and to renew premiums which had escalated significantly for certain categories of business people. CBHI mobilisation emerges from the data as "*the 2018 zemecha*." Evidence suggests the existence of heavy pressure from above, such as to counter the formally "voluntary" nature of the programme.[29] Overall responsibility is with the HEW, who in Yetmen "*faced a problem. [CBHI] participants were asking her challenging questions: about the unfair payment increase made; about poor services to CBHI members; and about why force was being used to implement CBHI.*"[30]

In Ude, although people complain that CBHI is expensive, they seem more positive about it, perhaps because of access to relatively good (and more expensive) services: kebele informants remarked that CBHI members can get services from two hospitals (Bishoftu and Adama referral hospital) and from seven health centres. Nevertheless, there was also resistance to the renewal of premiums in Ude.

> ➢ *The potential for conflict between quota-based mobilisation and the voluntary rationale of the CBHI should be reviewed, and alternative approaches explored as necessary.*

The justice sector

Given these various problems associated with governance across the communities, the efficacy of the justice sector is more important than ever. In Harresaw, there are complaints that social court judges are supposed to be paid 50 birr for each case, but that this does not happen in practice. Two women who criticised the kebele social court and land judges added that the wereda court was no better, and that "*justice is the worst service in the* kebele *and the* wereda*.*" In Ude perceptions of the justice system are divided with some saying that "*it is hard to say that there is justice in the* kebele*;*" or "*who gives land, who do people pay tax to? These things are not clear.*" Yetmen's social court had been established only a few months previously. It had three members, all male, and seemed to be involved in supporting a number of executive processes, rather than administering justice.[31] As discussed in relation to the WIDE3 findings (DBI:05 Models and realities of transformation), the separation of powers between executive and judicial structures seems to be an issue in all the sites – and this perhaps also applies to the role of the representative councils. Whilst there is not much detail in the 2018 data about the functionality of the councils, in Harresaw there is an indication that they work very closely with the executive, "*approving what the cabinet indicates*."

> *Government should revisit the issue of the dominance of the executive functions in local government, and of separation of powers at the micro level, and explore means of strengthening the independent operation of judicial and representative functions.*

Risks of corruption

A comparison of the 2018 data with data emerging from earlier rounds of WIDE suggests that respondents are more willing to speak – and complain – about corruption in local administration than in the past. In Ude, the community was preoccupied with illegal land transactions; poor and partial identification of young unemployed people was also mentioned, an issue which had been discussed during recent reforms. In Aze Debo and Harresaw concerns were raised about partiality in the allocation of PSNP resource distribution, and (in the latter) about alleged corruption and collusion in the development of water supply infrastructure. In the Amhara site at Yetmen, allegations were levelled against building contractors who had left sites unfinished at both of the two high schools in Bichena, allegedly disappearing with money mobilised from the community.

> *Tackling the causes of widespread community concerns about corruption in relation to land administration, contracting for local construction projects, and distribution of resources, is a high priority.*

Conclusions: life after "deep renewal"?

Ethiopia's local government structures are an important national asset, and one in which there has been sustained national investment over the period during which WIDE data has been collected. The most recent WIDE Bridge data suggest that in 2018 local government structures may be at a crossroads, with multiple new challenges, and many potential trajectories for possible reform. Local government everywhere requires an approach to local problem-solving which is open, adaptive and oriented to learning, with strong mechanisms for experimentation, evidence collection, feedback, analysis and learning about policy and practice at the micro level, and attention to appropriate scale up and mainstreaming.

> *Policymakers might consider establishing a think tank or research unit devoted to studying and experimenting with different models of community governance and practice: effective governance at the micro level must be an integral element of reform.*

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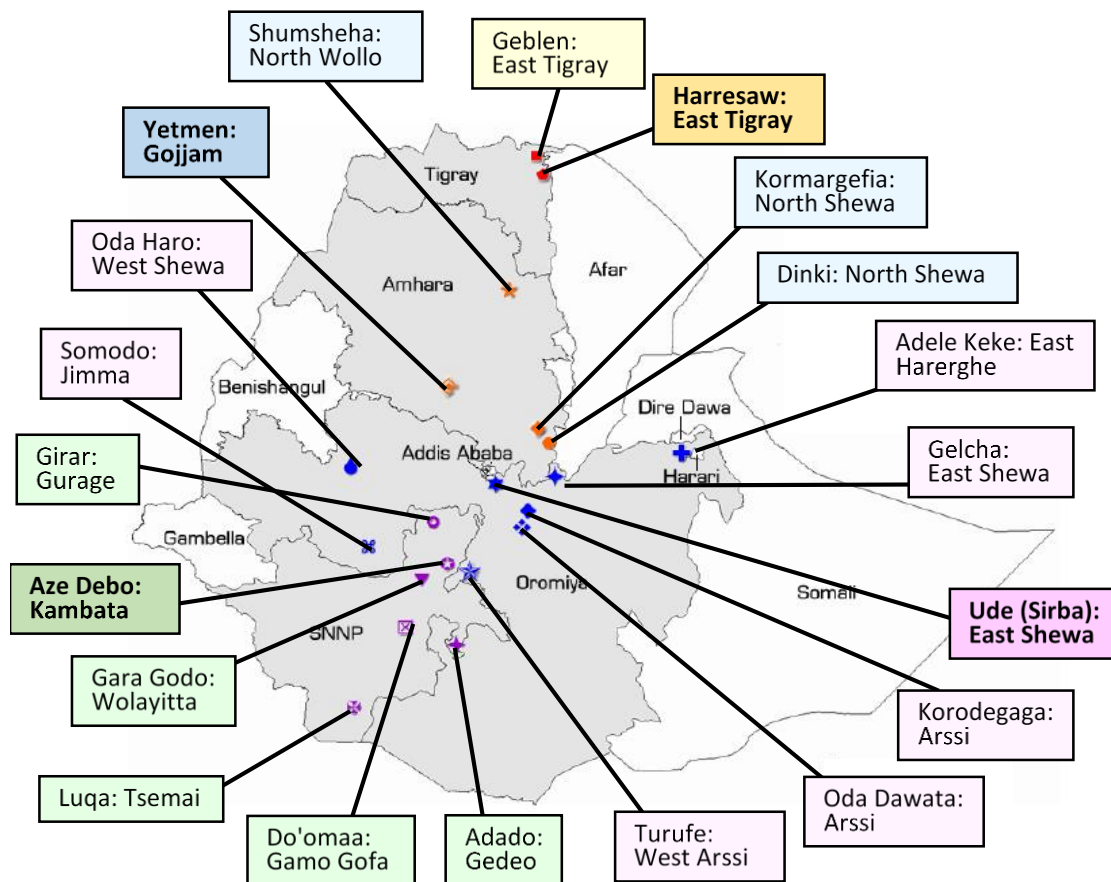
Note: Discussion Briefs from Ethiopia WIDE Research?

This brief is part of a series of seven discussion briefs produced by the Ethiopia WIDE team on the topics of land, farming systems, non-farming systems, youth economic experiences, social protection, inequalities and governance, based on research carried out in four communities in the first quarter of 2018.

Ethiopia WIDE is a rigorous independent longitudinal study of 20 rural communities in Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, and Tigray regions, selected in 1994 by researchers from Addis Ababa and Oxford Universities, as exemplars of different types of rural communities in Ethiopia. They represent wide variations in a range of key parameters notably livelihoods (including surplus producing, drought prone, cash-crop and agro-pastoralist sites), remoteness or ease of access, cultural institutions, and religious and ethnic composition. The team has recently published a book entitled *Changing Rural Ethiopia: Community Transformations,* as well as a compilation of an earlier series of discussion briefs under the title: *Twenty Rural Communities in Ethiopia: Selected discussion briefs on change and transformation.* Further reports and data are available on the website www.ethiopiawide.net.

In the current Bridge Phase, 4 sites were selected one from each of the 4 regions for a fourth round of research. (In the map below, the names of the four sites are in bold print, and darker colours have been used for the boxes). Links have been established with 4 universities: Ambo University, Bahir Dar University, Hawassa University, and Mekele University. We anticipate that these institutions will take on an increasing role in continuing to track change in communities across the country.

Map of the 20 WIDE communities (with Bridge sites shaded)

Shumsheha: North Wollo

Geblen: East Tigray

Harresaw: East Tigray

Yetmen: Gojjam

Kormargefia: North Shewa

Oda Haro: West Shewa

Dinki: North Shewa

Adele Keke: East Harerghe

Somodo: Jimma

Gelcha: East Shewa

Girar: Gurage

Aze Debo: Kambata

Ude (Sirba): East Shewa

Gara Godo: Wolayitta

Korodegaga: Arssi

Luqa: Tsemai

Oda Dawata: Arssi

Do'omaa: Gamo Gofa

Adado: Gedeo

Turufe: West Arssi

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[1] This discussion brief has been written by Sarah Vaughan. It draws on the work of the research officers in each of the four sites, and on analysis and interpretation of this data made by Catherine Dom, Agata Frankowska, Mulugeta Debalke, Shalom Ali, and Shiferew Neda. I am also grateful for inputs from other team members: Agazi Tiumelissan, Pip Bevan and Alula Pankhurst. I am particularly grateful to Alemu Asfaw of Bahr Dar University, and the Yetmen research officers Damtew Yirgu and Aster Shibeshi, for their patience in helping me understand complex governance-related dynamics in East Gojjam. None of these people is responsible for the conclusions I have reached and recommendations I have made.

[2] Vaughan (2012), citing Dom & Lister (2010); see also Aalen & Muriaas 2017

[3] This may reflect real differences in experience: it may for instance reflect the fact that local government capacity in the Tigray and Amhara sites was on a somewhat different (earlier?) trajectory, with local capacity built several years earlier, expectations higher, and comparative local disillusion now all the greater. It may also reflect differences in the cultural drivers of respondents' willingness to speak openly in different places, during what was a particularly difficult research period; or indeed differences in the approaches across the WIDE team to data making and analysis. Firm conclusions cannot be drawn without additional research and triangulation.

[4] Delays to distribution were a particular complaint, albeit longer in the Tigray site than in the SNNP case.

[5] The long list of unpaid local government positions, in this case in the Tigray site includes the following: more than 10 cabinet members; in principle, 5 LAC members at each level, 6 land justice committee members, 5 social court members; and all the militia members. Only social court and land justice judges receive financial incentives. This list does not include:

The leaders of the development team (DT) (more commonly called development army group in Harresaw) and 1-5 network leaders

The leaders and other unpaid management positions in the irrigation, multi-service, credit and savings cooperatives

The water user committee leaders – There are water user committees for each water point, deciding on the water user fee (though this seems to be a kebele level decision), following up on any disfunction and maintenance required, cleaning the water point etc.

The leaders of the women, youth, farmers' associations, leagues and federations – at kebele and *kushet* levels

The members of the 'recognised' *kushet* and kebele elders' committees.

[6] Many of the issues identified in that discussion brief remain relevant and have become only more pressing.

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[7] A number of militia members commented that their responsibilities and roles were harming household activities and commitments. In the Tigray site, the irrigation users' association head, the multi-service cooperative head, and the RUSACCO head were all long-term volunteers (between 4 and 8 years) and all wanted to quit these positions. This was a common pattern across sites.

[8] A well-regarded woman leader in the Amhara site reported that although she had dropped out of education at grade 8, she had participated as a women's association leader (*sebsabi*) for 6 years. She came to the position through selection and has many roles in the kebele and is busy with various duties. For instance, she is a facilitator for peer education with prostitutes locally, the member of a mothers' support group at the health centre, a wereda council member, and a cabinet member and also has some other roles in addition to these. She does not have farm land and feels unhappy with kebele administrators, as a result of which she doesn't want to stay in her position. However, the community apparently couldn't find another active and strong woman like her so she has been persuaded to continue with her work.

[9] He further confirmed that he had repeatedly been expressing his desire to resign but this had been refused by the wereda. He thought he had served the community "*more than enough*" and wished to concentrate on his business and improve his life. His position was endorsed by several other respondents, including an urban resident who expressed the view that it would be better if the kebele cabinets had a salary "*because they were leaving the* kebele *job at the office and going to manage their own business - and their office is always empty*" whereas he thought that "*if they had a salary this wouldn't be the case*." The Yetmen case is further complicated by the fact that the kebele chairman is in fact a deputy who has been acting in the position for several years; and also by the fact that the position should by now have been taken over by a new Municipal Mayor, but since that person had not been appointed, the existing acting kebele chair struggled on as best he could – without a kebele manager, or any of the other civil servants (DAs, a land administration expert, etc.) normally available in a rural kebele; but alongside a deeply unpopular municipal Manager with whom he did not work directly, and did not have a clear oversight relationship.

[10] Even development team leaders reported that they had heard about meetings, but not participated in them.

[11] Close to the Nile valley, "*Yetmen was known for highway robbery and other security problems, but this has been improving since police were assigned, and paid community guards started watching the main road and crops.*" Community field crop watchers were paid 400 birr/month from money contributed by the community.

[12] This is because he has to do the job of Yetmen kebele police officer, in addition to his responsibility as a cluster (*ketena*) coordinator.

[13] The wereda security expert said Yetmen is the centre of community policing coordination for 5 surrounding kebeles. There is one policeman assigned in each of the four kebeles, but Yetmen had no assigned policeman. Rather, the coordinating officer who happened to be stationed there was given responsibility for Yetmen community policing activities. Reportedly there was a high turnover so that eight kebeles were without police.

[14] "*DAs used to invite us to meetings to talk to farmers about how they could acquire modern farming techniques and become wealthy, but we are no longer involved in such things;*" "*when the DAs were there, they used to involve the 1-5s and discuss about planting time harvesting time – but no longer.*"

[15] This seems to arise partly from tension between wereda priorities or targets and realistic outcomes.

[16] They talk about lack of good governance, lack of commitment, and inattention to agreed plans.

[17] Some dismiss what was clearly a widespread objection to muncipalisation as "*the result of agitation by a few disgruntled elites.*"

[18] Denotes the third smallest of four categories of formally designated urban centre.

[19] In the Tigray site at Harresaw *"*kebele *cabinet members are involved in deciding programmes and implementation in the community and following up* kebele *officials' and employees' performance. However, currently they are not as much involved in those activities as in past times. They only gather for infrequent meetings. It is difficult to find them in office. Community members struggle too much to meet them. They are not available and not committed to serve the community."*

[20] Yetmen residents complained bitterly about particularly local officials, and most of whom they thought many official came from "*outside Yetmen,*" whilst local people were "*only working as guards;*" others complained that "*all the [local officials] are weak like their boss;*" "*the [local official] should be changed'*" "*[he] is a dictator, he is rigid; he is mean; he doesn't listen to others' opinions and he mistreats clients;*" "*farmers don't like him because they think he will remove their land;*" "*they think he should be replaced;*" "*he is not accepted by the community because of his arrogant behaviours;*" "*he doesn't have contact with the rural people but the urban people hate him: they think of him as a dictator – and very corrupted;*" "*he has managed to complete the land auction process well, but the weakness is lack of electricity, and there are no internal roads and piped water into the rural Yetmen;*" "*he was assigned by the* wereda*: he does not have much knowledge or skill to manage;*" "*he was badly treating people and both the farmers and urban dwellers didn't like him, complaining that when they went to [him] he was verbally abusing, embarrassing/humiliating them, before they could even start presenting their problems;*" "*the community has been demanding the removal [of the local official], but the* wereda *dumped or suppressed their petitions: there can be improvement only if [he] is changed.*"

[21] Of 32 positions in the municipality structure, 21 were reportedly unfilled.

[22] So-called "harmful traditional practices" in one site were reported to have been "*stopped before 10/12 years through intensive education, training and some actions which had been taken to enforce the law. For example, 7 years before a man involved in cutting uvula and pulling out milk teeth had been arrested twice; he was detained for 3 and 6 months, and then finally the religious leaders had made him promised (megezet) not back to the practice. Then he had handed over his tools to the priest.*"

[23] The YRF had not been accessed in Harresaw; it did operate in Atsbi Wemberta at wereda level but was underspent – in both cases this was said to be due to the complexity of meeting eligibility criteria.

[24] Respondents seem to assume the relative ease of evading taxation in a larger city.

[25] ALMA (Amhara Development Association), 150 birr; sports, 20 birr; Red Cross, 20 birr; Community Care Coalition, 20 birr; remuneration for road/crop watchers, 10 birr etc.

[26] Contributions in Tigray, unlike other regions, are paid separately from the land tax, at the beginning of the Ethiopian new year in September: paying all at once in advance of harvest can be an issue for poorer families. Contributions include:

> Tigray Development Association: 24 birr *per annum* (another respondent said 20 birr)
> Women Association: 10 birr *per annum* (a couple of women said 11 birr)
> Youth Association: 10 birr *per annum*
> Farmers' Association: 24 birr, raised from 10 birr *per annum* in 2010 EC
> Party membership: 24 birr *per annum*, raised from 12 birr *per annum* in 2008 EC
> Community Care Coalition (CCC: new in the last couple of years): 24 birr *per annum.*

[27] In Ude resident households were collecting 2kgs of grain (or 10 birr) to contribute for women delivering at the Dhenkaka health centre - a strategy considered "*very effective.*" Labour plus 100 birr per household were contributed to construct part of a local road, with a plans to do the same in Sirba and Kumbursa villages. Labour contribution requirements reportedly encourage young people to migrate from the Tigray site.

[28] "*(The man) was very biased, thinking only at the sub*-kebele *level instead of giving priority to the whole* kebele*'s benefit. The main goal in his leadership tenure was moving the site of the* kebele *center to his sub*-kebele *so as to benefit himself, his parents and relatives as well as people from his kushet. He was even saying officially that he would never regret if he left his position after moving the* kebele *center to his sub*-kebele*. People from his sub*-kebele *are also on his side so that there was conflict among young people. So, it was only fair to remove him from the position before he could implement his bad plan.*" "*I am happy that [the* kebele *official] was excluded from his position by the recent gemgema.*"

[29] In Yetmen, for instance, if the number of beneficiaries reduced to less than 50% of the target population, kebele respondents had been told that the program would be cancelled, so the wereda "*highly insisted*" that the kebele officials should meet their quota.

[30] One of the *got* militiamen responsible for payments enforcement "*argued with the HEW that she should ask her bosses at the* wereda *why they were lying to the people by telling them first that they could join CBHI only voluntarily and then starting to implement it by force. As a member of the community he knew it was said to be voluntary and now the officials ordered him to force people: so why was this? He challenged the HEW to tell the people straight whether CBHI was voluntary or a must - and why. She was confused and tried to talk about the advantages they could get out of it, but they rejected her idea, saying they already knew its importance very well, but didn't want to pay that much contribution.*" (Yetmen data)

[31] For instance, it was performing tasks such as: certifying that those applying for IDs lived locally; checking out the credentials of those applying for business licenses; ensuring that business premises were allowed to be allocated for what was proposed, in accordance with local plans and regulations; and checking that business people had informed the bureau of revenue of their activities. They are also involved in vital events registration, and in the identification of exemptions for CBHI: "*so they are very busy and don't have time for anything.*"