



# Brief Assessment of Higher Education Governance in Ethiopia: Reflection on the Leap of the Decade

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## Abstract

The article attempts to explore the overall patterns of governance of higher education institutions in Ethiopia in the recent past that witnessed the massification of higher education institutions, and to investigate and display the change and continuity that have been observed in the governance of these institutions. It tries to offer some insight concerning the governance aspect in the ever-expanding and the most pressing issue of the Ethiopian higher education system. The paper presents a snapshot of the contemporary higher education development in the past two decades and associated features in Ethiopia by identifying the central issues related to principally governance, the legal framework and the political context. As the boom of higher education in the country became prevalent the governance bottleneck is one evident issue that vehemently impacts the missions of the institutions. The indispensable governance issues did not equally accompany the expansion of the higher education institutions in the last decade, and structure and other resultant issues that need to be adopted and made plain. In addition, the vivid demarcation between the institutions and the interested political groups at various levels, and the roles and relationships among them need close observation and appraisal so that the much-needed quality education and the contribution of research and community service will be significantly realised.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, governance, development, Ethiopia.

## Résumé

Le présent article tente d'explorer les tendances générales de la gouvernance des institutions de l'enseignement supérieur en Ethiopie dans un passé

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récent qui a vu la massification des institutions de l'enseignement supérieur. Il cherche aussi à examiner et à présenter les changements et la continuité qui ont été observés dans la gouvernance de ces institutions. L'article tente d'offrir un aperçu concernant l'aspect de la gouvernance dans la question sans cesse croissante et la plus pressante du système de l'enseignement supérieur éthiopien. L'article présente un bref aperçu et les caractéristiques propres du développement de l'enseignement supérieur éthiopien contemporain au cours des deux dernières décennies, en identifiant les questions centrales liées principalement à la gouvernance, au cadre juridique et au contexte politique. Avec la prévalence du boom de l'enseignement supérieur dans le pays, le goulot d'étranglement de la gouvernance est l'une des questions évidentes qui impacte de façon violente les missions des institutions. Les questions indispensables de gouvernance n'ont pas également accompagné l'expansion des établissements d'enseignement supérieur au cours de la dernière décennie, ni structuré les autres questions qui en résultent et qui ont besoin d'être adoptées et clarifiées. De plus, la vive démarcation entre les institutions et les groupes politiques intéressés à différents niveaux, les rôles et les relations entre eux requiert une étroite observation et une évaluation afin que l'éducation de qualité et la contribution à la recherche et au service de la communauté soit réalisées de façon significative.

**Mots clés :** enseignement supérieur, gouvernance, développement, Ethiopie.

## **Introduction**

Governance denotes the structures, relationships and process of decision making concerning issues significant for external and internal stakeholders and in this regard governance in higher education institutions indicates the formal and informal arrangements that permit them to make decisions and perform actions combining both internal and external governance (Yirdaw 2015).

Governance comprises a complex web including the legislative framework, and the resultant characteristics of the institutions and how they relate to the whole system, how money is allocated to institutions and how administrators are held accountable for the way resources are utilised. Governance in the context of higher education in Africa is viewed as a response to the vital missions of the institutions in effectively discharging their basic mandates. An equally overwhelming but urgent concern should be the governance aspect if they are meant to execute their tasks properly for the national development.

Moreover, it is related to less formal structures and relationships which steer and influence the behaviour of individuals and groups within institutions. Governance is often interlinked with politics, which is defined as 'who gets what, when, how', and if we apply this proposition to higher education, it is clear that higher education is highly political (Bostock 2002:19).

In relation to this the study basically presupposes the idea of higher education that elucidates the most commonly accepted definition and pertaining issues. In the World Declaration on Higher Education, higher education was defined as ‘all types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher education by the competent state authorities’ (The Africa Competitiveness Report 2011:41). UNESCO, the World Bank, UNDP and others apply this same basic definition.

More importantly, the intricate web of higher education is revealed as follows: even as higher education has been based on a Western ‘university model’, it has developed in a way that is deeply rooted in the societies of which it is a part. However, the environment surrounding higher education is changing rapidly. The recent rise of a knowledge-based society; social, economic and information globalisation; increased demand for higher education; and changes in the political and social environment of developing countries are all deeply connected and have a significant influence on higher education (Overview of Higher Education<sup>3</sup>). This is increasingly becoming a trend in Africa as is testified in the higher education development in many parts of the continent including Ethiopia.

In an increasingly interdependent and globalised world, countries that are able to compete and effectively take part in the global economy are those with large and rapidly expanding stocks of human capital. The significance of education, particularly higher education, for Africa’s economic development has been highlighted by the recent World Bank publication, ‘Accelerating Catch Up: Tertiary Education for Growth in Africa’ (World Bank 2009).

With a few exceptions, modern university education in Africa is a phenomenon of the last half-century. Higher education institutions were founded either immediately before or within a decade after political independence in most African countries. Since then, both the number of universities and enrolment have expanded rapidly and continuously across the continent. The coverage of university education, nevertheless, remains insufficient for the demands of the knowledge society (Sawyer 2004).

On top of this several tertiary education reform efforts have been carried out insub-Saharan Africa in recent years, but their impact has been limited. The reforms focused on governance issues including institutional autonomy, academic freedom and the increasing role of universities in development to mention some of them. To extract the potential of the region’s institutions to contribute more significantly to economic and social development in their countries and in the region as a whole higher education institutions will

need to consciously and persistently transform themselves into a different type of educational enterprise: networked, differentiated and responsive institutions focused on the production of strategically needed human skills and applied problem-solving research. If realised, this would comprise a twenty-first century version of the African 'Development University' (World Bank 2008:15). In the recent history of higher education in Ethiopia, the most important development related to the expansion is the increase in enrolment and in the recent past 3 per cent of the age cohort in Ethiopia is enrolled in higher education, according to UNESCO data. Although far short of international levels, Ethiopia has achieved a rapid 300 per cent rise in enrolment and the government has even gone on to push for an additional increment as one can witness in the massive expansion of higher education institutions with the plan of establishing some eleven universities in the coming five years in the Second Growth and Transformational Plan(2016–2020) (Reisberg and Rumbley 2012; Yirdaw 2015).

The question is primarily whether the universities respond to enrolment gains with relevant resources and personnel and basically the most pressing governance aspect and related management and leadership arenas in juxtaposition with the needed merits and readiness for the greater assignment of higher education institutions. Additional legal frameworks, other than the Proclamation, are needed for the effective and efficient leadership at various levels of the higher education sector. Together with the equity relevance and quality issues that should be met, the governance aspect has much to do with these basic directions. The enrolment trend seems relatively remarkable in the passage of the two decades as is testified in the literature. The total enrolment in all higher education institutions in 2011 was 46,843 which was around 35,000 in 1996 (Yirdaw 2015).

Unfortunately, it is stated that very little work has been carried out to study Africa's tertiary education sector – including elements such as enrolment trends, relevance, efficiency, adequacy, management and financing in general (Brempong 2011).

In this case, the overall status of higher education institutions in Ethiopia is not exceptional and this article could be looked upon as a response to this demand and purports to shed light on the issue at our disposal, and the findings may corroborate the practical implications witnessed in the higher education institutions of Ethiopia, particularly the governance aspect. As there have been impediments in the current public higher education institutions and growing concerns in the area of governance that impact the missions of the institutions, the findings contend to offer some insight for further investigation on the topic.

More importantly the pertinent points could be summed up in the following manner.

What were the basic developments in terms of change and continuity concerning the governance aspect of higher education in Ethiopia in the recent past? What are the remaining tasks to reinvigorate the governance apparatus? Who are the actors? Which bodies are involved in governance at the institutional level? What are their main responsibilities? What forms of accountability and information sharing are practised by HEIs, governmental bodies and external stakeholders?

In a nutshell, this study provides a historical analysis of Ethiopia's recent higher education development that observed the boom of higher education institutions in the last decade, and a governance trajectory. The research used government publications of primary materials and other written materials using a chronological and thematic approach. In addition, the research was designed as a qualitative study using documentary sources (relevant national policies, publications and reports) to generate data.

My personal experience, observation and participation in the system of higher education augment the discussion, and some informal discussion with various stakeholders and knowledgeable informants supplement the findings of the study as well. The paper is structured into the following sections. The introduction explains the overall picture of the higher education sector, on the one hand, and the rationale of conducting a study of the governance aspect of public higher education institutions in Ethiopia in the recent past, on the other. In the next part, a conceptual framework and nature of higher education with some discussions in African context are given. In the last section, discussion and analysis are directed on change and continuity of the development of governance aspects of public higher education institutions in Ethiopia and their associated facets of prospects and challenges for these government institutions in the last two decades, with concluding remarks.

### **Conceptual Framework of Governance of Higher Education Institutions**

Higher education institutions – most prominently universities – have three major functions. These are training, research and community services. The research and training functions are two sides of a coin; research makes a higher level of education possible and education, in turn, develops the human resources to carry out research. Recently, contributions to society have increasingly been expected from higher education institutions as the role of universities has been stressed by policy makers and scholars, and their

establishments have been geared towards achieving these missions. This means, higher education institutions need to have activities to guarantee that accumulated knowledge is circulated directly back to the society.

In fulfilling the above and increasing the productivity of the tertiary educational sector, its efficiency and the quality of its output as well as the relevance of its curricula are intimately related to the sector's governance structure. Governance provides the institutional environment within which the educational enterprise functions. Efficiency in both system governance and institutional governance is essential for the educational system to generate the desired results. This requires accountability and transparency, neither of which can be possible without the autonomy of higher educational institutions. Autonomy implies freedom to make management decisions, such as allocating resources among programmes and determining the optimal input combination. The autonomy and the good governance issues and the resultant outcomes emanate from the governance structure installed and exercised accordingly.

In the same fashion, higher education governance can be categorised at two levels – institutional/internal and system/external governance. System governance encompasses the vast array of macro-level structures and relationships through which the regulatory framework and policies for tertiary education are developed, how money is allocated to institutions and how they are accountable for the way it is spent, as well as less formal structures and relationships which steer and influence behaviour across the system. Whereas institutional governance refers to the structures and processes within individual institutions that establish responsibilities and authority, system governance determines relationships between positions and thereby define the ways through which all parties in a university setting relate to each other (Aschalew 2011:32). Basically, this paper tries to emphasise the system/external governance which in turn significantly affects the internal governance structure and the vested missions of these public institutions.

The governance structure of tertiary institutions that emerges in any country is the upshot of a balance between these contrasting forces. While some countries set up structures that permit the central government's direct control of structures, others establish buffers between the political administration and the governance system (Brempong 2011). On the other hand, the requirement for academic freedom, the freedom to innovate both in teaching and research, to attain efficiency generally and the ability to respond to changing environments suggest that these institutions should be free from political control as much as possible if they are to succeed.

Apart from these approaches, there are models of governance that redistribute responsibility, accountability and decision-making power among the respective external and internal stakeholders. Furthermore, there are several principal mechanisms of co-ordination or control relevant to these new structures of governance in the higher education sector (Eurydice 2008:25):

- External regulation: deals with the authority of the state or region to lay down the rules of operation for HEIs.
- External guidance: refers to the steering power and co-ordination by external stakeholders as members of university boards (e.g. boards of governors or trustees), to which the relevant government authorities (e.g. ministries) have delegated certain responsibilities.
- Managerial self-governance: implies to senior leadership and management staff (president, deans) who set goals and take decisions on the direction, behaviour, and activities of the institution.
- Academic self-governance: connate governance through consensus within and among the academic communities of an HEI.

### ***Governance in African Higher Education Systems***

Research evidence indicates that knowledge has been the single most important engine of growth and the driving force of economic performance in emerging economies and the developed world over the past decades. Therefore, it is recognised now, more than ever before, that the universities and research organisations influence the economic competitiveness of individual economies in the context of globalisation. The countries which have an expanded system of higher education with higher levels of investment in research and development activities have a higher potential to grow faster in a globalised knowledge economy (Otieno n.d.:12).

In supporting this idea and to produce qualified graduates, enrolments in tertiary educational institutions in the African countries over the last two decades have increased rapidly – by an average of more than 200 percent – with Ethiopia recording a much faster rate of expansion than the others. This was faster than the enrolment growth rate in any other region of the world (Brempong 2011). This development by itself has created a good many challenges including the concern of quality education and the governance issue among others.

Moreover, it is apparent that higher education is vital to economic success and long-term development of Africa, a continent encountering several challenges of growth and development in many areas. Higher education

provides economic and social benefits, both to the individual and the public, produces qualified human capital, adapts and generates knowledge, promotes international cooperation and improves competitiveness in the global knowledge-based economy (Yizengaw 2008). On the contrary, tertiary education governance in most African countries is a complicated task. On the one hand, the need to produce skilled labour to meet development needs, the amount of public resources devoted to providing tertiary education and the political power that students in tertiary educational institutions wield may suggest the need for the government's central control of these institutions. On the other, the academic freedom that should be situated in the institutions and the lesser control of government in the affairs of their internal governance and the research and training activities of the universities demand the autonomy.

The university sector on the continent managed to regain its central role in development at the dawn of the twenty-first century and much attention is afforded to the expansion of the sector despite the financial limitations and the quality concerns. Since then, the sector has expanded tremendously in the past few years in the number and diversity of institutions, student numbers, in the emergence of new actors and the consequences of global dynamics. In recent years, the higher education sector in Africa has attracted interest from stakeholders, both internal and external, often due to this recognition of the important role of higher education in Africa's transformation. However, Africa's higher education still faces numerous challenges: funding, access, quality concerns, institutional capacities, weak research base and governance (Otienon.d.). In line with this idea

The institutionalization of developmental university idea especially among African countries since the 1960's resulted in authoritarian rule towards the governance of HE in these countries. In developing countries the state control model of HE appears to be predominant... government heavily regulates and controls HEIs even in countries, where initially state supervising model was introduced, and very often now governments appear to have instilled the state control model. (Aschalew 2011:37)

In other words, weak leadership, poor management and governance exacerbate the challenges faced by higher education institutions in Africa stemmed mainly from the external governance system. Academic leaders are rarely trained in the management of higher education institutions. Generally, leaders at all levels in higher education institutions are poor in strategic planning, market research and advocacy, research management, financial planning and management, human resource management, performance management and partnership building and networking skills (Yizengaw 2008:10).

There is a perception that these institutions are inefficient and produce relatively low-quality graduates with skills that are not very relevant for the labour market. The issue that needs to be substantiated, particularly when we talk about the obvious malady of quality education in higher education institutions, which are complicated and overlap one on the other. Although higher education in Africa has been looked upon and taken as a significant player in facilitating Africa's development process, it has, however, persistently faced several challenges, particularly with mounting societal demands. With few resources, inadequate capacity and a history of neglect, the sector has been struggling over the years to respond to these increasing demands, leading to ongoing capacity gaps. The sector has also suffered from inadequate funding, weak governance and leadership, low quality of academic programmes and stifled academic freedom. These challenges require urgent intervention if the sector is to play a meaningful role (Kabeba 2014; Otieno n.d.: 13).

In relation to higher education on the continent politics takes actual visible form and plays major roles in educational systems, in particular. Through policy formulations, education systems in Africa are the work of governments, approved and supervised by politicians rather than being informed by the works of scholars. No African educational system can escape from the political community in which it operates and seeks to serve. The education system must reflect what the political community wants it to do. To this end, it can be revealed that in Africa politics impacts on education systems. What good has emanated from the supposed symbiotic relationship between education and politics needs critical criticism. What harm has politics unleashed on African education is another issue that needs critical appraisal (Adu-Pipim 2013:202).

These issues and challenges, which are apparent in African universities, are also the manifestations of higher education institutions in Ethiopia and need urgent adjustment, particularly in providing elaborate policy direction and guidelines to effectively shape the form of governance of higher education institutions and the resultant issues which will have enduring impacts on their missions.

### **Issues and Challenges of Governance of Higher Education Institutions in Ethiopia**

After the demise of the Military Regime in Ethiopia and the shift of the political power to the current FDRE government in 1991, higher education was embraced and regarded as one of the vital contributors to the overall progress of the country (Yirdaw 2015). Higher Education in Ethiopia

includes education programmes, which are offered as undergraduate degrees for three, four or more years and specialisation degrees such as Masters and PhD programmes.

In 2016, there were thirty-three universities in the country governed by the Ministry of Education and six by other ministries, and an additional eleven universities will be established soon under the second Growth and Transformational Plan which means that the total higher education institutions will reach fifty by 2020. All these establishments were achieved within the last two decades and more than half of them were founded and started operation in the last decade.

The basic role is vested in the Ministry of Education of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), the federal institution mandated for supervision and regulatory provisions in the education sector in general. Of the many important economic and social growth initiatives of the government of Ethiopia, perhaps one that holds great promise and possibility of large-scale and sustainable returns is the effective expansion of higher education in the country. The impact of higher education encompasses not only the economic sector, but also will produce greater social impact contributing to a just, democratic, peaceful and enlightened society (Yizengaw 2003).

The paper does not touch on the governance aspect of the private higher education institutions nor the middle-level colleges mostly governed by regional governments as the crux of the study lies in the public universities that are mandated and funded by the federal government and, as the expansion went on extensively, there should be a careful and timely response of legal framework and governance structure applied in the institutions. As the public higher education institutions experienced the attention rendered by government in terms of budget and as they are expected to fulfil certain missions for the economic development of the country, the study targets these hubs of training research and community services.

Until recently the higher education sector in Ethiopia had grown by only one university for decades since the 1960s as it did not witness significant changes even when the military regime assumed political power in 1974. There had been only two universities and some colleges throughout the country until the 1990s but this scenario has altered in many respects in the recent past with the opening of a good many higher education institutions in various parts of the country, which is characterised as massification of the sector. Owing to this, for a relatively longer time, the country's higher education institutions had largely followed a closed system, which, in many cases, was out of touch with the country's socio-economic environment.

However, due to the extreme curtailment of its autonomy by the then military government, this could not persist for long. In its 1977 proclamation, the then military government established the Commission for Higher Education (CHE) through fourteen HEIs which it micro-managed. This centrally controlled system made change, innovation and responsiveness difficult for the HEIs. Consequently, until the 1990s enrolment in higher education grew modestly but it was far below acceptable levels even by sub-Saharan standards. The tertiary gross enrolment ratios showed no sign of meaningful improvement though it grew to 0.7 per cent in 1995 from 0.2 per cent in 1970 (Yizengaw 2005:02).

In brief, the expansion of the sector in this half a century period was so sluggish with Addis Ababa University and the then Alemaya Agricultural University (now Haramaya University) being the only Higher Education Institutions in the country for a relatively longer time.

The quality, relevance and meeting of standards by all higher education institutions (both public and private) are regulated by the Ministry. Public higher education institutions have boards as their highest governing body, with the senate as the highest academic body and the presidents as the top executives at institutional level (Higher Education Proclamation 2009).

The board, which is accountable to the Ministry of Education and its chairperson appointed by the Minister, is composed of seven members – four of them, including the chairperson, are appointed by the Minister and the rest are appointed by the Minister nominated by the president. The president nominated by the board is appointed by the Minister. In principle, the Proclamation states that members to be nominated shall be notable personalities, especially in teaching or research, and of integrity, or be representatives of the customers of the products and services of the institution. But in practice the nomination and appointment are not as per the Proclamation and the Proclamation itself lacks clarity and needs further elaboration. Although it is not stated in the Proclamation at all, the practice showed that the president and the majority members are from the locality where the higher education institution is located, irrespective of their merit and familiarity with the higher education institutions.

In the early 1990s, the government identified the need for strengthened, re-oriented and revitalised human resource development as a key to the success of socio-economic policies and strategies. The need was felt during the transitional period (1991–1994) when a serious shortage of a trained, able and adaptable workforce and leaders at different levels within the new government structure was encountered with the intent to develop a democratic society (Yizengaw 2003).

A December 1998 framework document on capacity building in Ethiopia was developed into a policy paper entitled 'Capacity Building Strategy and Programs' by the federal government along with other strategic documents. The strategy clearly emphasises the creation of a 'capacity for capacity building'. This focuses on beginning and reinvigorating the training, studies and research arm. In relation to higher education, it has pinpointed improvement of quality, strengthening the financial system and efficiency, and expanding equitable access as areas for policy consideration and direction. The Ethiopian Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (ESDPRP) paper has also vested clear directions and parts to higher education in Ethiopia. However, it mainly dictated the expansion of enrolment and other internal core activities of the institutions and gave almost no attention to the governance of higher education institutions.

Prior to 1994, little but critically scrutinised academic autonomy was practised by higher education institutions. Administrative and financial autonomies were given to institutions only with the Higher Education Law of 2003. The 2003 Higher Education Proclamation elucidates in its various articles (Yizengaw 2003).

Historically, the Education and Training Policy of 1994, which is the first of its kind after the demise of the military regime in 1991, has been the basic tool for reform and transformation, although it needs adjustment and updates to conform with the current political, economic and social conditions of the country. The policy emphasised issues of quality and relevance in educational programmes; quality of teaching staff and facilities; improvement of the learning process towards a focus on students; improvement of management and leadership; introduction of financial diversification; and improvement in the system of evaluation, monitoring, autonomy and accountability (The programme of ESDP 2010).

Likewise, with the ratification of the HE Proclamation in 2003, the governance framework within which universities operate was fundamentally reformed. In Ethiopia, the 2003 statutory promulgation of the Higher Education Proclamation of 2003 (No.351/2003) laid down the legal framework in which the country's universities are offered substantial autonomy (Aschalew 2011). Autonomy is provided in the administration of personnel, finances, internal organisation and in establishing linkages with internal and international organisations. These developments have been reinvigorated with the revised Higher Education Proclamation of 2009 (Higher Education Proclamations of 2003 and 2009). In actual fact, the proclamations have observed consultation from the academicians but it is difficult to substantiate the incorporation of the inputs as there are

growing demands to adjust and to work on additional aspects of the higher education legal basis including the Proclamation of 2009.

Whereas before 2003, all higher education institutions, except Addis Ababa University and Haramaya (the then Alamaya) University, were accountable directly to a department in the Ministry of Education (MOE). Currently each university has its own board established by the government proclamation making it autonomous from the direct control of the MOE in principle at least. This is basically a good departure and step towards the refined and necessary governance aspect in the history of the higher education sector concerning internal governance. However, as has been indicated there is no precise procedure and practical implementation for the selection of board members and executive members of university management except for the little provision stated in the Proclamation. This is one assignment for the government to state clearly the procedures, models and other legal frameworks for this highly expanding sector of development in the country.

Even though it is hardly possible to classify higher education development in the country till recent times as the expansion goes on vigorously and makes it cumbersome to trace the stage, the Ethiopian higher education reform process has passed at least three essential phases: a stage of policy and strategy adoption ultimately aimed at redefining the legal framework, a phase of rehabilitation and expansion of the facilities and a stage of improvement and revitalisation of the system. The initial part consisted of the issuance of the Education and Training Policy and other relevant white papers of the government. The second and third stages basically refer to the actual expansion of the sector and the reform issues pertinent to maintain quality and relevance within the expanding higher education system. However, the expansion of higher education institutions in Ethiopia in the last two decades still posed serious challenges for the governance of these institutions as they demanded the involvement of various stakeholders to fulfil the missions of the institutions.

On the other hand, the rapid quantitative growth of higher education in Ethiopia has triggered considerable concern about quality. Tesfaye discusses why expanding the higher education subsector took precedence over quality against the backdrop of the current Ethiopian political discourse. The growing public demand due to globalisation and the changed local realities, the ideology of social inclusion and distributive justice and poverty reduction rationales are the main forces driving the unprecedented growth (Semela 2011). In short, the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia formulated reform policies strategies cognizant with the social and economic maladies of the country. The reform issue that was initiated by the government in 1994

was geared towards revisiting the mission and vision of the higher education sector, improving quality and relevance, expanding diversity and ensuring and improving the efficiency of the system as well as enhancing leadership and management. This phase was attended by the promulgation of the Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003 which was later superseded by the Higher Education Proclamation of 2009, No. 650/2009.

It is quite visible that the recent two decades witnessed what was an exciting era for Ethiopia's higher education system, in relation to accommodating numerous youths in the higher education system and in addressing the relevance and equity issues but 'growing pains' are evident and will continue, given such rapid expansion. At this critical stage, where much has already been accomplished, quality assurance and a commitment to appropriate and sustained infrastructure and, more importantly, the key issue of the governance aspect with all the legal framework and resultant structures must rise to the top of the national agenda (Liz Reisberg 2010).

Basically, the emerging higher institutions need a good many qualified and experienced board members and presidents. This leadership requires familiarity with and adaptability of the higher education system and the leaders need to be more acclimatised to the research training and community service that the institutions are expected to play in the country's development, for the lack of which they are highly criticised in the history modern education, particularly higher education. As there is shortage of human power in higher education leadership combined with experience and the theoretical arenas of higher education leadership, it is felt that the overall dynamic leadership in the higher education system in most cases needs further criticism. In addition, the limited number of qualified academicians in the country in general and the concentration of the experienced academicians in the few older universities exacerbated the governance predicament in the higher education institutions particularly the new HEIs.

Leading higher education institutions in developing countries like Ethiopia with diversified condition, a huge expectation of training, research and community services, meagre financial capacity and poor networking require exceptional knowledge, experience and dedication for the attainment of the missions of the higher education institutions. It is apparent that higher education institutions are complex hubs to lead and to bring about the desired changes to ignite the much-needed reforms, and this entails competent and efficient leaders at all levels appointed mainly on a merit basis.

In line with the vigorous expansion of higher education institutions, serious and rigorous attention should be given to the governance aspect of higher education institutions if they are really meant to respond to the demand

for human capital needed to serve society and industry. There should be a continuous effort to update the legal grounds that govern higher education affairs and explicit legal measures should be enacted to correct the gap and, in turn, to maximise the potential of higher education institutions. The selection and appointment of the board members and leaders of higher education institutions have been principally made on a mere belief that their connection to the region where the higher education is situated facilitated the smooth administrative activity of the institution and the mission of community service that the institutions have been assuming in the last decade.

On the contrary, at least in principle, the proclamation stated the necessary qualifications that should be maintained in the selection and appointment of the leadership of universities. However, a balance should be struck between the demand for their physical connection to the locality and their academic background and familiarity with the governance of higher education institutions. This is because academic background and versatility are fathomable in regard to the governance of higher education institutions, as the highest body in the governance structure needs to be more dynamic, visionary, experienced and accustomed to the nature and missions of higher education institutions.

Furthermore, the establishment of higher education institutions in various areas has been erroneously considered as mere opportunity for the job creation in the local community that the higher officials stress while laying the cornerstone or at the inauguration ceremony of the higher education institutions potentially affects the activities of the institutions and there is a tendency and expectations of the local people to merely stand in line for employment by the institutions. It is also reported that one basic challenge in the current higher education institutions is the problem of employment both in the academic and administration staff and they are increasingly becoming the battleground for the local political group to get the upper hand in the leadership of the institution. In these institutions in the various parts of the country, one significant aspect was that the elders of various localities usually appealed to the higher officials responsible for the establishment of the institutions to correlate the employment opportunities created following the subsequent foundation of the institutions, which means that basically the opening of the institutions have become highly associated with local politics and apparently become the politics of identity and, in turn, the localisation of the universities. It is obvious that their establishment brings all these illustrated benefits but they are secondary and should not occur at the expense of these institutions' grand missions intended to serve the peoples of the country.

The autonomy issue of the management of the higher education institutions, at least in the legal framework, has been well addressed in the context of the Ethiopian higher education system but other matters pertaining to the governance structure need further attention. In short, the institutional governance issue, in principle, has been well addressed in the last two decades; what is left is the macro-level structures and related affairs concerning the roles and relations of the political organs and the institutions. Following the Proclamation of 2009 the higher education institutions demonstrated the autonomy to a lesser degree within the internal affairs of the institutions but there are still gaps in assigning or appointing members of the governing boards and executive bodies of these institutions. These need further clarification which should be supported by detailed legal frameworks that will consolidate the provisions of the Proclamation.

It is clearly indicated in the Proclamation on higher education that the profile of the staff shall resemble and accommodate the diversity of the country but currently there is a move of staff, particularly academic, to their local areas due to family responsibilities; they want to support their families in the nearest possible place and the subsequent associated and perceived benefits that spring from appointments in academic positions in their local regions are attractive.

The governance aspects of higher education institutions are becoming more linked to local politics, particularly in the new public HEIs in regional governments, since it is evident that the increasing pressure on the federal governments concerning the opening of higher education institutions is associated partly with the above premise.

Above all, the expansion and establishment of universities in the recent past need some critical consideration as they have been wrongly regarded as the sole property or identification of the regional governments or local administration, which in turn are becoming the symbols of identity (ethnic regional or even at the very small social organisational level). In this regard, the elders of various regions put pressure on government bodies to establish universities in their own specific localities with the demand increasing in the course of time for the last decade. This trend has been highly manifested in the public discussions conducted with higher governmental officials in various regions since 2005.

It is accepted that by evaluating and reorganising the administrative structures and developing capacity of leaders and managers, invigorating the governance and thereby improving efficiency with a result-oriented delivery system, higher education institutions can do more with the resources at their disposal (Yizengaw 2003).

Similarly, the appointment and selection of board members and leaders of the university and other managerial and academic positions need to be considered or revisited (particularly the combination of academic and political figures should be applied in the managing board of universities with a greater inclination towards the academic bodies) because they usually tend to dwell on the political aspects of higher education and the general policy direction and, of course, this is their vital concern. But increasing attention should be accorded to academic matters by academic personalities. Most of the public federal higher education institutions smell local politics but this should be balanced, as there is also a need to create political conscious citizens of their country and equally free thinkers in the free academic institutions to tackle the deeply rooted problems of their country. More than other things,

this, therefore, requires creative, visionary and committed leadership; transparency in the working system; and ability to upgrade skills of managers and leaders, as well as the whole work force to bring it into a process of renewal and transformation. It is urgent to gear the system towards result-oriented delivering abilities and accountability. The generally poor leadership and management of our higher education system, and the institutions in particular, have resulted in disappointing performances. These are attributed, among others, to poor resource mobilization, to high unit costs, poor supervision, misuse of personnel, inappropriate resource utilization, and the absence of an information system and organized management (Yizengaw 2003:12).

Much more importantly, there is no clear guideline or procedure about the appointment of university leaders and it is believed that their political stand and their connection to the local region have been considered for the appointment where the institution is located. Often their familiarity with higher education institutions is not taken into consideration but the political appointment usually does not satisfy the needs of higher education as these vital institutions demand dynamic and competent leaders who impart their expertise in moulding the specific institution and impact the development of the country.

For this purpose, in Ethiopian higher education institutions this requirement for the selection of the board members and the leaders of the universities is not noticeable and further adjustment needs to be carried out and worked out concerning the appointment of the board members and leaders of universities based on clear criteria whether it is from the political community with best academic qualifications acquainted with the academic environment or academic community. The experience and the academic background and the leadership role matter a lot when we consider the governance of the institutions that respond to the demand for human capital of the country.

In the emerging economies and developing countries one does not dare to pinpoint the entire withdrawal of government from the higher education system but the actors at various levels need to keep the equilibrium as there is a need for responding wittingly to the plea for development of numerous social sectors and academic freedom together with the internal autonomy and relaxed spirit needed in the academic environment.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The expansion of higher education institutions in Ethiopia, particularly in the last two decades presented serious challenges of governance as it is evident that the number of universities increased dramatically in the past decade and complicated the governance aspect of higher education institutions, and the absence of clear guidelines concerning the appointment and selection of board members and leaders of the universities, except for the Higher Education Proclamation, necessitate urgent action by the concerned body particularly the Ministry. The uniform application of appointment and the selection of board members across all HEIs need to be reconsidered to fit into the political and academic contexts in the country.

In addition, the attachment of higher education institutions with local politics needs some reconsideration and their great mission should be briefly inculcated in the awareness of the masses and the political actors of the various organs. As the number of higher education institutions increased dramatically in the past decade, the concerned ministry and other bodies should investigate the governance structure and look for additional alternatives for the efficient leadership and management of higher education institutions so that they can contribute to the development of the country. The governance structure and the subsequent elements in the system should clearly be worked out to reduce the impact of local politics on the governance of these institutions. The main actors identified in the higher education system should be made clear and their roles and relationships should be listed as well.

The autonomy given to the institutions following the Proclamation on higher education is a landmark in the history of higher education governance in the past decade but other things must be done and models of university governance, for instance, should be adopted and implemented in the context of Ethiopian higher education institutions. Uniform application of the selection and appointment of academic bodies should be introduced or some kinds of mechanisms or additional guidelines need to be prepared for the betterment of the governance of institutions. In a promulgated proclamation or another guideline, the relation of the actors and their delineated roles should precisely be elucidated.

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