

Challenges and Prospects for the Amhara and Oromo Political Elite Cooperation towards Democratization Process in Ethiopia

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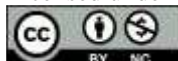
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Abstract: This study assesses the challenges and prospects for a cooperative move between the Amhara and Oromo political elites towards the democratization process in Ethiopia. To this end, the study used a qualitative research approach with a case study research design. The data was collected from key informants through semi-structured interviews and from relevant published and unpublished materials. Accordingly, the findings of the study reveal that the ethnicization of conflicts, the menace that comes from the former dominant groups, the failure in setting a common vision, the inability to compromise contradicting interests, the absence of a feasible roadmap, and the presence of zealotries from both sides as the impasses for the cooperative move between the Amhara and Oromo political elites towards democratization process in Ethiopia. And the study showed that building consensus on the historical trajectories, widening the scope of cooperation, working to promote people-to-people relations, opening independent Amhara and Oromo media, teaching the language of one another in both regions, addressing ethnicization of conflicts, compromising differences and working with the academicians as indispensable way outs for solid cooperation between the political elites of the two regions which is a sine qua non for Ethiopia's move towards democratization. And the researchers recommend that having commitment and willingness blended with good will is of indisputable role for the political elite to ride off the country from the persisting gridlock.

Keywords: Cooperation; Democratization; Ethnicization of conflicts; Political elite

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1. Introduction

Elites can be defined as persons who, by virtue of their strategic locations in large or otherwise, pivotal organizations and movements, are able to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially (Burton, Gunther and Higley, 1992). The political definition of elite is confined to persons who are at the top of the pyramids of political, economic, and social power. Political scientists pay a lot of attention to elites and their key roles in democratic transitions and breakdowns, revolutions, political regimes of all kinds, mass movements, democratic politics, and many other political phenomena (Ajagbe, 2016). Likewise, most scholars of democratization believe that different segments of elites and the considerable cooperation among elites is a necessary condition of a successful transition to democracy and the relationship between elites, whether they are cooperating or disuniting determines the presence or absence of democratic institutions (Ajagbe, 2016).

In the same vein, Nwokeke (2019) argued that the commitment to democracy and cooperation of the political elites determines the phases and outcomes of democratization. Moreover, many other scholars argue about the necessity of elite cooperation and consensus for the democratization process. They all argue for the importance of elite bargaining, cooperation, and consensus in the move toward democracy. According to them, in many of the democratization processes, like in Eastern Europe and Africa, elite bargaining and cooperation have remained key strategies for democratic transitions.

Being specific to the cases in Africa, the African states were affected by the obvious challenges to the authority of the majority of the world and the case of the door of democratization in African countries in the 1990s. The continent is known as the continent of autocrats, dictators, military governments, and one-party states where the economic situation is in decline and changes are made in government through coups, conflicts, or other forms of violence (Bratton and de Walle, 1992). Africa's move towards democratization has a *competitive authoritarian regimes*¹ (Levitsky and Way 2010; Mohamed, Eshetie and Assefa, 2018).

Nevertheless, in a few cases during the 1990s, post-independence ruling elites have responded positively in an attempt to providing democratic values and consolidation and achieved successful transitions (Whitfield, 2009). For instance, the praise Ghana's and Nigeria's democracy success has enjoyed may be due to the desire of the political elites to allow the democratic system to work and their exhibition of attitudes conducive to give credence to the existence of the democratic features that would made transformation and consolidation possible (Nwokeke, 2019). Despite the success of some African countries in democratic transition, democratization has been still persisted to be a huge problem confronting the political elites (Nwokeke, 2019). The obstacles facing democracy in Africa, which has resulted in the division and disunity between the political elites in different states where most of them are running along ethnic identities and contradicting path which is likely to make political elites cooperation very difficult, are the declining commitment of the elites to the democratizing task, disintegration of the political elites, the policy of divide and rule, the presence of ethnic politicization and inter-and intra-elites competition in Africa (Whitfield, 2009).

Likewise, the problems of Africa's democratization also comes true in the context of Ethiopia's trajectories of democratization process and the contradictory perspectives among and between the competing political elites having multiple competing interests, contradictory visions, clashing dreams, the ethnic polarization and manipulation and the crises of national consensus manifested primarily among intra elites division has affected the desire to democratize the Ethiopian state and persisted to be a road block to democratization in Ethiopia (Hassen, 2018; Iyasu, 2011; Gudina, 2003; Mesfin, 1993, as cited in Gudina, 2004). In Ethiopia, just as many African countries the issue of democratization has remained critical problem (Gudina, 2004).

¹ Competitive authoritarian regimes are regimes in which democratic institutions exist on paper, but are subverted by incumbents, regular elections take place in all competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way, 2010).

In Ethiopia, since imperial days, the people frequently waged struggles to find release from authoritarian rule (Mohamed, Eshetie and Assefa, 2018). Under both the imperial government of Haile Selassie and the Derg regime, the ruling elites closely managed politics despite the efforts by students and grassroots movements to bring about meaningful social, political and economic reforms (Shahen, 1997). The political change driven by the masses movement or popular revolution which toppled the monarchy ended up with the coming to power of the Derg regime.

Subsequently, the political transition that took place in 1991 by the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) turned into an authoritarian regime and ruled the country with suffocated political and economic praxis. Hence, in reality none of the political elites under each regime led Ethiopia towards the establishment of all-inclusive and accommodative system of ruling that laid down the foundation for setting up democracy (Gudina, 2011; Abbink, 2015). However, the social protest that began in the Oromia region in 2014 and spread to other regions, leads the EPRDF to usher political reform in order to respond to intensifying antigovernment protests (Lyons, 2019; Gabisa, 2018; Bandwaza, 2018). The government, even deploying draconian measure to shut off the sporadic protests, was unable to dampen the protests simmering from the Oromia and Amhara regional states which are followed by the gesture of cooperation among the ruling elites in the spirit of solidarity and collaboration with side kick of the protestor's demand to democracy. Consequently, as of the end of February, 2017, the authoritarian control of the government in Ethiopia has begun to disintegrate due to the collaborative efforts of the ruling elites from the two regions at odd.

Thus, within the ruling coalition, the elites of Oromo and Amhara can be considered as the main actors who played the utmost share for the opening of the sweeping democratic reforms which received widespread international acclaim and immense media coverage (Ahimed and Abel, 2019). The EPRDF announced that it would take comprehensive reform measures, of the reforms, to a more open and freer political space, among them: the release of imprisoned journalists and leaders of the political opposition, a relaxation of restrictions on public expression, lifting of terrorism charges and the terrorism classification of several individuals and political organizations like; Ginbot7(G7) and the Oromo People's Liberation Front (OLF) (Latif, 2018; Salih, Eshetie and Assefa, 2018; Lyons, 2019; Dhaba, 2018). Hence, the gesture of cooperation between the political elites ruling the two most populous regions had contributed to the sweeping reforms unfolding in Ethiopia, and it is a show off for the elites potentials to change the political sprite of the country through cooperation as being perceived in their move towards kneeling the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Cognizant of this, the researchers believed that the challenges and prospects for the cooperative move between the political elites have to be researched and identified so as to enhance the cooperative move between the ruling elites of the country's populous regions which are of a national significance. Accordingly, the researchers are instigated to study the case under investigation focusing on the Political elites of the two regions mainly for the following reasons:

First, for a long time, the political elites representing the two populous and resourceful regions, were blamed for being puppet and dominated in the ruling coalition as they had long been shut out by the Tigray minorities that dominated the ruling coalition (Hassen, 2018; Frazer, 2018). However as seen from the year 2018 onwards, they united their efforts to bring an end to the TPLF's domination of the ruling coalition which has changed the course of the game. Second, there are still suspicions and mistrusts on the trajectories of their cooperation and on whether the promised democratic transformation be delivered, or will they remain a mirage (Ararsa, 2017). Thus, the researchers are instigated to identify the challenges and prospects of the cooperation which is of indisputable significance for the democratization process of Ethiopia.

Third, given the socio economic, political and historical significance of the regions in case, the researchers believe as the cooperation between the ruling elites of these regions are of the utmost significance for the democratization and peace of the country. Fourth, given the proposition of Samuel's third wave of democratization, the interaction between key political actors and the choice they make and their political will and commitment is critical, if not sufficient, for democratization

process which drives the researchers interest to identify the potential challenges which may hamper the cooperation between the key political elites and indicate the future prospects of the cooperation between the ruling elites of the two regions.

Therefore, taking the gesture of cooperative move between the elites on one hand and the unfolding democratic reforms observed in the country on the other hand, the need to provide a body of knowledge on the challenges that may dampen the initial jubilation of the cooperation and on the prospects that tranquillize the cooperative move forward is of indisputable significance for the democratic move of the country. Given this empirical assumption, and absence of, as far as the researchers' knowledge is concerned, studies carried out being specific on the same domain necessitate the issue to be researched. Hence, the study was aimed at exploring the challenges and prospects for the cooperation between the political elites of the two regions. This study will strongly help the political elites and other stake holders to understand the challenges and give insights on how to address the existing challenges so as to enhance the cooperative move between the Oromo and Amhara Political elites which is indispensable for Ethiopia's move towards democratization. Accordingly, this study addressed the following research questions.

- 1) What are the Challenges for the Cooperative move between the Political Elites of the two regions?
- 2) What are the opportunities for tranquillizing the challenges and enhancing the cooperative move between the political elites of the two regions?

Accordingly, this research is based on the assumption of the agent based theoretical approach which state 'regime transitions could be shaped by the willful strategic choices of principal political agents. The researchers argue that democratic transition and consolidation of democracy is possible when political elites shun their differences and embrace an attitude that would help democracy flourish. Besides, elite commitment to democracy and elite unity are considered to be the pivot of the theoretical framework through which democratization is possible, especially in emerging democracies in Africa (Nwokeke, 2019).

2. Research Methods

2.1. Research Design

Of the basic qualitative research designs (Phenomenology, Ethnography, Grounded theory, Case study and Narrative), qualitative case study design is found to be an appropriate design for this study due to the fact that in case study design the case(s) are bounded by time, place and activity, (Kothari, 2004). Accordingly, the objective of assessing the challenges and prospects of Oromo-Amhara elites cooperation for democratic reform of the country requires the case study design due to the reason that the cooperative move is bounded in time and activities taking place in the country. Added to this, the researchers have employed case study design to look at the realities which may challenge the Amhara and Oromo elites cooperation and the future prospects within the context of the democratic reform in the country. Besides, the national significance of the topic at hand evidently qualifies case study as the most appropriate design and the importance of the issue for the democratization process of the country is of a greater cost that it is deserved to be studied as a case.

2.2. Research Approach

For adequately addressing the objectives of this study, the study has used a qualitative research approach. This approach, which is concerned with offering specialized analytical techniques for obtaining in-depth response about what people think, do and feel (Kothari, 2004), is preferred by the researchers to assess what the informants think, do and feel about the challenges and prospects for Amhara and Oromo Elites cooperation. Moreover, this approach is preferred due to the fact that the issue under study is emphasizing on words and meanings rather than quantity, and it is a best approach for exploring and understanding the meaning ascribed to a social problem (Creswell, 2014).

Besides, for it allows the researchers a kind of flexibility as the study framework and direction was revised as new information emerges; the researchers are interested to use it.

2.3. Sources of Data

The study has used both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources were collected from Opinion and Views of informants selected from the ruling elites of the two regions, the National Movement of Amhara (NaMA), the Oromo People Liberation Front (OLF), academician from Universities, videos, records, blogs, news release, banners, TV programs and recorded music clips. Secondary data are collected from published and unpublished materials as supplementary to primary sources.

2.4. Methods of Data Collection

The primary data were collected through semi-structured interview with key informants. Semi-structured interviews were generally organized around a set of established open ended questions, with other questions likely to emerge as the interview goes on. Semi-structured interview was preferred by the researchers as it helps the respondents talk about a set of questions in their own words and allow the researchers probe questions during the interview on the issues that are unclear and needs further clarifications (Matthews and Ross, 2010). More importantly, semi-structured interviews help the interviewers determine the direction of the discussion, which helps to provide reliable and comparable qualitative data.

2.5. Sampling Technique

For collecting the relevant data from the primary sources, the respondents were selected using purposive sampling due to the fact that under such technique, research participants are characteristically selected on the basis of transparent criteria, like their life experience, their role, positions, status and their knowledge in relation to the issue under investigation until data saturation. Accordingly, semi-structure interview has been done with the purposely selected key informants from the leaders of OLF, and NaMA, ruling elites of the two regions, and academicians from Addis Ababa and Bahirdar Universities. The respondents for this study were selected on the basis of their positions in government offices in the aforementioned areas, their roles, and experiences in relation to the issue under investigation have also been considered. Hence, the researchers have collected the appropriate data from the key informants, who were purposely selected until the data reaches its point of saturation.

2.6. Method and Procedures of Data Analysis

The data gathered from the primary and secondary sources are analyzed thematically through preparing and organizing text data as transcript and image data, photographs through thematically integrating and analyzing the data in line with the established objectives of the study.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Challenges for the Cooperative of the Political Elites towards the Democratization Process

Along with the argument of different scholars, this study assumes that the cooperation between the political elites of the two regions, their commitment and willingness for democracy is of significant role for the country's democratization process. However, beneath the optimism and euphoria of their cooperation for sweeping the country's future, there are brewing concerns calling for attention as a confluence of different factors would potentially threaten the cooperative move between the elites and could perhaps lead to major political and security watersheds between the two big regions which would have adverse effect on the democratization and peace of the country. Thus, with regard to the challenges that impede the cooperative move of the political elites of the two regions, the data

collected from the key informants and different writings disclose the presence of different obstacles which inhibits the cooperation of the political elites as discussed here under.

3.1.1. The challenge that comes from ethnicization of conflicts

According to Teferi (2012), the contemporary Ethiopia has developed ethnic prejudice and stereotypes that leads to generalizing that ethnic conflict arises solely from ethnic differences or ethnic antagonism and directly ties different forms of conflicts happening at different level with ethnic groups of the parties in conflict. However, based on scholarly arguments regarding the sources of ethnic conflict, one may presume this is a misconception and this misconception regarding different forms of conflicts may provide the mobilization basis for collective actions for the same deeds which is a road block for cooperation. In line with this, one of the key informants noted the following:

...most people, be it Oromo or Amhara hold the belief that almost all conflictual problems in today's Ethiopia emanates due to the mere ethnic differences. For instance, individual personal conflicts are tagged with the ethnic background of the individual and then the conflict is going to be considered ethnic based conflict and calls for group mobilization for collective measure. I think unless this attitude of attaching everything with the ethnic background of a person is changed, it would be difficult for the cooperation between the people of Oromo and Amhara which also determine the cooperative move of the leaders of the two people from above (KII-3, Bahir Dar, on 22nd of April, 2020).

Backing the above noted view of the interviewee, Ayenew (2018) argued as many of the conflicts between different groups simply appeared as ethnic based conflicts just because they happened to bear the name of participant ethnic groups while there exists different striated circumstances. Besides, Norman (2004) described about different conflicts in Africa as they make ethnicity the core of the problems even though they are initiated and aggravated by economic, political and other motives which surfaces existing ethnic differences. Teferi (2012) also posited as there exists different multifarious complex and inter related variables rather than pure ethnic hatred and antagonism that may drive conflicts between different groups in Ethiopia. Thus, the above views from both primary and secondary sources revealed the danger of perceiving all forms of conflicts in line with ethnic identity of the participant to instigate ethnic group conflicts which could adversely affect the relationship between the ruling elites of the conflicting groups. Given the above argument, this could be among the cases taken as a challenge to the cooperative move of the ruling elites of the two regions.

Assefa (2001) argued as ethnicity is totally superficial in ethnic conflicts but can be manipulated for economic, political and other motives. Ethnicity is not typically the driving force of conflicts but it is a lever used as a means to mobilize groups in pursuit of some ends. Furthermore, different writers argued for different factors responsible for the causes of conflict in between different groups in Ethiopia than pure ethnic differences. Just to point a few among the many, Ayenew (2018) argued to the feeling of relative deprivation, Clapham (1990) claimed as economic marginalization and political exclusion provides a better explanation to the incidence of conflict, Abbink (1997) posited that there is marginalization in all sphere, Teferi (2012) wrote as the principal cause of the post 1991 ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia are inequitable distribution of economic, social and political opportunities or competition for resources and political power and ethnicity is a cover for most conflicts in between groups. Thus, from the above discussion the study found that holding the belief that different conflicts happen solely due to ethnic differences between the conflicting groups and tagging every conflicts with ethnicity results in further polarization of peoples along ethnic lines and hinder the unity and cooperation of the people and invariably over whelm the effort for cooperation between the political elites and it can also consistently challenge the effort to establish democratic governments.

3.1.2. Challenges cum the former authoritarian staffs

The process of democratization require the simultaneous destruction of an existing authoritarian groups and the construction of new path for democratic order, however, the destruction of the

authoritarian domination may not automatically leads to democratization, it can produce political chaos and it can engender a prolonged period of uncertainty due to the challenge from the authoritarian rulers who feel threatened by the pace and extent of this phase and they can work for blocking and aborting the move for change (Shahen, 1997). Thus, in line with this, the data obtained from the key informants showed as challenges are inevitable from the formerly dominant Tigrean political elites who lost their previous status and as far as the challenges on the cooperation are concerned, one of the interviewees has posited the following:

...the challenge which comes from the elites who were dominating the ruling coalition for the last 27 years may hamper the cooperation. After all, the dominant elites within the coalition were considering the Amhara and Oromo as a threat to their survival and were blocking any means of cooperative move between the peoples of the two regions and between their ruling elites too. So, I think they won't stay silent for dismantling the cooperative move and can set a serious challenge for the lasting cooperation between the ruling elites of the two regions (KII-4, Bahir Dar, on 24th of April, 2020).

Appearing to further strengthen the above-presented views, Bandawaza (2018) wrote on '*freedom House*'² as the reform will not go unchallenged due to the power struggles simmering within the EPRDF leadership and its affiliated ethnic-based parties, particularly, the TPLF, representing a minority ethnic group that has exercised outsized control over the government for decades, stands to lose influence and could be a spoiler. Thus, the above discussion revealed that the groups who were in the former authoritarian domination, specially the TPLF staffs who are not interested in the cooperative move of the two great majorities of the people of Amhara and Oromo and their ruling elites, are considered to be one of the potential challenges inhibiting the cooperative move of the political elites of the two regions and the research found it as one of the challenge for the cooperative move of the political elites ruling the two populous regions come from the former authoritarian staffs.

3.1.3. Extremists from both sides as a challenge

With regard to the challenges for the cooperation between the political elites of the two regions the data observed from the key informants revealed that the presence of extremists with narrow nationalists who do not want to see the cooperation of the peoples of the two regions due to their narrow minded views could be considered as the road blocks for the cooperative move between the ruling elites of the two regions which can be adversely influenced by the disunity of the people they are governing. Accordingly, one of the interviewees has stated the following:

...there are some extremists who depend on fabricating false history and want deter the presence of cooperation between the elites. So, this will be the problem. If extremists who say raise Amhara! Comes from one side, extremists who says raise Oromo! Amhara has done this and that on you, on the other side will come and this will weaken the cooperation (KII-6, Addis Ababa, as of 4th March, 2020).

With regard to the prevalence of extremists as a challenge for the cooperative move, the view of the respondents revealed that the presence of extremists who fabricates false propaganda and speech which adds a flame to the existing problems are considered to be a challenge for the persistence of the cooperative move between the political elites of the two regions. Surprisingly there are individuals within the ruling elites of the two regions having such extreme positions and lack of commitment to cooperation which is one of the problems for the cooperation moving forward (<https://www.youtube.com/user/waltavedio>). The extremists use social media to foment inflame to the area's contentions and a big challenge to the cooperative move. Accordingly, the research found that the presence of extremists from within and outside the ruling as a challenge for the cooperation.

² Freedom House is an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world in Washington DC

3.1.4. The impasse in setting a common vision

While politically significant, however, the solidarity between the political elites of the two regions is not based on a shared vision as much as shared grievances against the TPLF and they have been at an impasse in discussions and have not been able to build up mutual trust to confront contentious issues of historical and political significances (Kasim, 2016).

Regarding the failure of the political elites to set a common vision as a road map of their cooperative move, the data collected from the key informant shows the presence of different challenges inhibiting the cooperation. Accordingly, one of the interviewees has noted the following:

...the big problem is that, the political forces are unable to evict themselves from the narrow thinking confined to their specific localities and they fail to do well on what the whites says' aggregation of interests,' where different interests are aggregated and mutual interests are taken as a position through compromise and where one leave some of his interests for the interests of the other. They are unable to pass over the conspiracy politics and set a road map on the ground for managing their differences (KII-2, Addis Ababa, as of 3rd March, 2019).

Ethiopia's politics is complex and highly controversial with few possibilities for reasoned compromise or issue directed policies and the course of Ethiopian history can be explained largely by the political polarization and fragmentation between and among Ethiopian political elites which have persisted to be a road block for national consensus. The crisis of national consensus fueled by conspiracy, suspicion, mistrust and lack of transparency is deterring the political elites from setting a common agenda on the political trajectories of the country (Gudina, 2003). The view of one of the interviewees substantiates the view that the presence of mistrust, suspicion, conspiracy and failure to discuss issues transparently is the challenge to the cooperative move between the ruling elites of the two regions. In the same vein, the other interviewee has posited that the politics of conspiracy is common between the elites and they are unable to outs themselves from the vicious circle of the politics of tackling each other this would be one of the challenges for the cooperative move between themselves. The interviewee speaks:

...the problem is rooted in what I always say "Yebuda Politica" where each group is pitting one another like for instance, the Amhara say, those who are Oromos are trying to divide our country and the Oromo hold the position that those who are Amharas having the experience of ruling over all groups are going to divide us. So, due to this divergent position, the elites, even if they can be baptized by the holly water of democracy, are unable to cure themselves. What is on the ground is that they live with conflicting dreams, Conspiracy, and the politics of tackling one another. They are unable to make their mind free of conspiracy which is challenging the cooperation between those who are said to be the governor of the two regions (KII-2, Addis Ababa, as of 3rd March, 2020).

The data presented above revealed that the political elites of the two regions are in the impasse of setting common vision which is of significant role for enhancing their cooperation and for democratization of the country and the research found that the contradicting positions on the past, and on the ethnic based federalism, the politics of mistrust, suspicion and conspiracy, the game of competition than cooperation in the political realm and failure to truly deal with the issue of aggregation of their different interests through compromising as the factors inhibiting them from setting a common vision on the ground which is a serious road block for successful and true cooperation.

3.1.5. The challenge comes from the nature of the cooperation

Besides the aforementioned challenges for the cooperation, the view of the informants revealed that challenge also comes from the nature of the cooperation itself. In line with this, one of the interviewees pointed out the following:

...the gesture of the cooperation is not all-inclusive as it is confined to the ruling elites alone. It did not include all of the elites of the two regions like the political elites in the opposition groups, the academic elites, the business elites and other groups in the two regions. Therefore, the cooperation is neither inclusive of all the elites within the two regions nor inclusive of the other ethnic groups within the country. Due to this reason, the cooperation may not be seen in a positive manner in the eyes of the other groups (KII- 8, Addis Ababa, as of 29th February, 2020).

As the two regions hold the country's utmost socio, economic and political capital, there are fear from other sides that the cooperative move confined solely to these regions that exclude others can create the '*tyranny of the majority*'. The cooperation is neither inclusive nor has a defined platform on the ground. Due to this reason, the other remaining ethnic groups may develop a sense of and/or fear of being swallowed by these two majorities and these groups may no longer feel comfortable with the cooperative move unless the cooperation set a platform, which would serve as glue for bringing all the groups into cooperation with the feeling of togetherness.

As per the above data, the study found that the issue related with the nature of the cooperation itself, the existence of extremists in both sides from within and outside the ruling elites, presence of mutual suspicion, mistrust and conspiracy politics between the elites, absence of consensus on the past history of the country, inability to truly compromise their conflicting dreams through aggregations of interests, failure to transparently discuss their interests due to mutual fear and suspicion and the manipulation of ethnicity for collective measure are threat to derail reforms being a road block for the true cooperation of the elites of the two regions which is of significance for the country's democratization. Accordingly, the study argues that the presence of all the above-mentioned challenges would have adverse effect on the move towards democratization process in Ethiopia.

3.2. Prospects for Fostering the Cooperative Move of the Political Elites

With regard to the opportunities for the strengthening the cooperation between the ruling elites of the two regions, the data obtained from different written sources and the key informants reveal the following points that would be considered as the potential prospects for the enhancement of the cooperation which is imperative for the county's democratization process.

3.2.1. Readiness to create common understanding on the country's historical deeds.

Nwokeke (2019) emphasizing on Ghana's experience as discussed under the literature review of this research, argued that with ethnic divisions and disunited political elites, commitment and willingness of the elites to compromise their differences are preconditions for democratization process and Beken (2012) also argued as the achievement of unity requires not only genuine regional autonomy, it requires that the regional state be willing to cooperate in order to develop a stable Ethiopian state. Similarly, with regard to the need for willingness and commitment in creating common understanding of the past events, one of the interviewees stated the following:

...the commitment of the elites to out themselves from the politics of conspiracy, fear and suspicion and their willingness to have a common understanding on what has been done in the past than running with self-contradicting historical narratives is needed and equally important is building mutual trust through discussing on naysaying issues between them and setting a plat form to move forward is important for enhancing the mutual cooperation between them (KII-1, Addis Ababa, as of March 1, 2020).

Backing this, one of the interviewees argues as the cooperation between the elites ruling regional states in Ethiopia will be difficult in the absence of genuine dialogue and discussion and the recent fusion between the ruling elites requires a high degree of trust, which in turn promote the willingness, and commitment of working through a commonly shared vision. Stressing on the importance of handling their differences in understanding the historical trajectories of the country to enhance the cooperative move which would help the country's transition, an interviewee from Addis Ababa University posited:

...the political elites are required to discuss over their clashing historical narratives which inevitably led to divergent aspiration than convergent visions. To forge a strategic and principled partnership between them, the elites must look forward and reorient their struggle towards the creation of democratic Ethiopia through addressing their divergent historical views by discussing and focusing on the future of the country. Thus, to move forward, the animosity over the past must be handled first and it can only end if each of them rejects the temptation to classify themselves as a 'victim' and as 'perpetrator' of the past historical happenings and instead both of them should consider themselves as the bearers of the past historical deeds (KII-5, Addis Ababa, as of 5th of April, 2020).

The above data reveals as the commitment and willingness of the political elites to set a side on their conflicting views on the past historical events and create a common understanding is desirable for the enhancement of a true cooperation between the elites ruling the two regions. Furthermore, the view presented below from one of the interviewees shows the need for commitment and willingness to deal with the clashing narratives between the elites. He stated the following:

...there are contradicting views about the past events. For instance take the perception of peoples towards Emperor Menelik II and on the reset of Ethiopian rulers, some perceive him as 'cold blooded colonizer' while some others consider him as a 'hero of all time' so, it's impossible to mitigate such kinds of contradicting views unless we refrain from living by solely digging out negative historical happenings that, coming in to mutual understanding is better. If not, it is better to put down the differences and move on with the politics of 'give and take. (KII-2, Addis Ababa, as of 3rd March, 2020).

It is undeniable that there are historical injustices, but what is important is to acknowledge them and create political consensus and the focus should always be on the bright future. We must be able to learn from the past and acknowledge historical injustice to create a bright future (KII-6, Addis Ababa, as of 4th of March 2020).

The political elites are required to have true commitment and willingness to set aside their contradicting views and move forward through genuine dialogue, communication, and mutual trust to avoid the existing mistrust, suspicion, competition and conspiracy, and create a mutual understanding on the past. This study affirms the presence of differences in understanding the past events and along with the above presented views and the view of Samuel Huntington which says '*History does not move forward in a straight line, but when skilled and determined leaders push, it does move forward*' (Huntington, 1993, as cited in Gudina, 2004: 159), the research found that there should be a commitment and willingness on the elite's side for mutual consensus and move the historical impasses forward through discussion and dialogue.

3.2.2. Broadening the scope of cooperation and setting a feasible road map on the ground.

The study found that there are challenges emanating from the nature of the cooperation itself and the data obtained by the researchers reveals that broadening the scope of the cooperation and opening its space for inclusiveness can be done through the horizontal and vertical expansion of the cooperative movement is crucial for the democratization process in Ethiopia. In line with this, Gudina (2007) has recommended for the EPRDF coalitions initiate politics of inclusion without further delay so that we go back to the drawing board and build a common democratic home for our children as well as for posterity and the research consider this as a means of enhancing the cooperation between the elites.

3.2.3. Flaring the scope of cooperation horizontally

Broadening the cooperation to minimize the fear of being swallowed by the coalition of the two great majorities and to reduce the tension of tyranny of the majority complex. In line with this, the data collected from all interviewees show corresponding views and all of the interviewees have confirmed as the horizontal expansion of the cooperation with the people and political elites of other regional states are decisive for the enhancement of the cooperation between the elites through reducing fear and suspicion on the side of the people and the elites of the remaining regional states and Inter regional cooperation is found to be a means to reduce the fear and suspicion of the regional governments.

3.2.4. Opening the space vertically

Equally important with the horizontal integration is the vertical integration which is about the expansion of the cooperative move between the political elites in broader sense, academic elites, the business elites, and civil societies of the two regions. In line with this, one of the interviewees has this to say:

...if the cooperation is deemed to be a true cooperation, there has to be ways for engagements of the political elites of the two regions who are not in the ruling position, the academic elites from higher institutions, the business elites, civil societies and other groups in the cooperative move. For instance, it is worthwhile to create economic interdependency between the business elites through collective engagement in the economy, hosting Amhara and Oromo economic forum for collective engagement of the investors from the two regions and further strengthening the cooperative move between the ruling elites (KII-7, Bahir Dar, as of 8th of April, 2020).

Therefore, broadening the scope of the cooperative move between and among different actors from the other regional states and within two regions is imperative for enhancing the cooperation for a better future which will have a spillover effect of the democratic transition of the country. However, the respondents stated for the importance of creating a platform which will guide the cooperation on the ground being a blue print for the activities of the cooperation and there should be a responsible and independent body established with power handling the cooperation. Given the quote “*All animals are equal, but some Animals are more equal than others*” (Orwell, 1945), the research found that albeit the two regions are the great majority of the country having the potential to determine the fate of Ethiopia, there should be a ground for bringing others in to cooperation for collective engagement which is decisive for the country’s democratization and the cooperation between the political elites must serve as a glue and inspiration for mutual solidarity with other regional states.

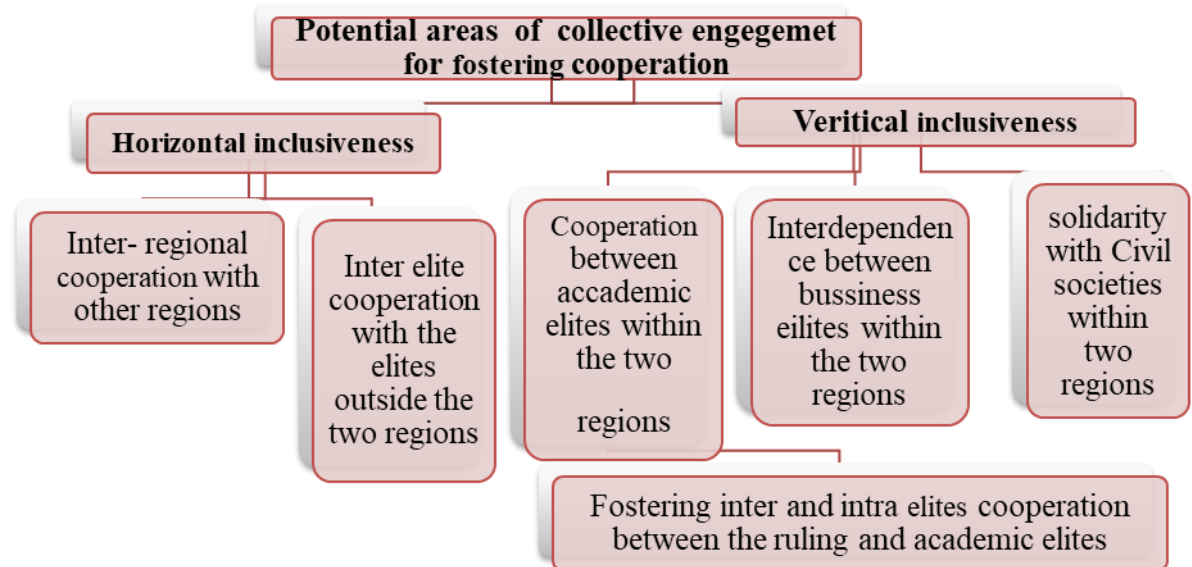


Figure1: Areas for widening the scope of cooperation (Researchers’ sketch, 9 April, 2020)

3.2.5. Promoting people to people relation

There are bulks of writings affirming the evil deeds done by the Tigrean ruling elites in polarizing the people of the two regions through fabricated narratives, hate propaganda and pitting them against each another. In line with this, Ayenew (2018) confirmed on the 3rd Oromo-Amhara intellectual conference held in December, 2018 at Wollo University, Dessie, Ethiopia, “that a lot of things have been done for the last 27 years to polarize the people of the two regions than bringing them in to cooperation and working to deconstruct what has been constructed is crucial for promoting the people-to-people relation”³. Likewise, hate Propaganda and Myth have a great deal of contributions in fomenting violent conflict which is a road block for cooperation (Nwokeke, 2019). Added to these, the collected data reveals the need to promote people to people relationship among the two regions for the enhancement of cooperation as it has spillover effect on the relation between the ruling elites. Accordingly, the data reveal that hosting authoritative forum for people-to-people relation through empowering responsible body, Teaching Amharic language in Oromia region and Oromo language in

³ Taken from researchers note book as one of us were the participants of the conference through invitation by one of the organizing member of the conference.

Amhara region are decisive to enhance people to people relation that contribute to enhancing cooperation among the political elites.

3.2.6. Hosting authoritative forum for fostering the people-to-people relation

With regard to this, all of the interviewees that the researcher has interviewed confirmed the need to promote people to people relation through authoritatively hosting different forums for people-to-people relation, exchanging cultural aspirations, what they have in common, through scheduled forum authoritatively hosted in both regions. In this regard, one of the interviewees said the following:

... hosting forums regularly in both regions and working to enhance their relations through promoting their mutual values, cultures, historical roles and through emphasizing on the values holding them together rather than on what divides is crucial for improving their relations and for the country's course of changes for a better future (KII-6, Addis Ababa, as of 4th of March 2020).

The data presented above reveals the need to enhance the people-to-people relation through hosting different forums through well-established road map that govern the cooperative move and authorizing a fully responsible body in charge of issues related with the people to people relation is found to be crucial for the enhancement of the cooperation between the political elites which is essential for the country's democratization process.

3.2.7. Opening independent media airtime confined in discharging issues related to the enhancement of the cooperation

With regard to the role of the media, the data obtained from the interviewees from office of the regional and party's communication affairs of the two regions reveal that no attempt has been done to the media outlets with specific emphasize to the Oromo and Amhara cooperation. Just as any other program, there are reports and program dissemination whenever there is forum or any other programs related to the issue, but there is nothing done with utmost and specific emphasize on the case of Amhara and Oromo Cooperation. In line with this, one of the interviewees said the following:

...there are no special programs done being specific to the promotion of Oromo and Amhara cooperation, but, as the media has a greater role in promoting the cooperation through disseminating different programs on the common values of the people of the two regions, exposing the wrong information which could be disseminated about the two people on other irresponsible media outlets helps to deconstruct the wrongly constructed views. There has to be special programs solely confined to discharging issues related to the enhancement of the cooperation between the two people who are polarized due to the fabricated historical narratives (KII-6, Addis Ababa, as of 4th March, 2020).

Teaching Oromiffa language to the Amharas and Amharic language to the Oromos is important to bring them closer to each other. Hence, the data showed that the need for the establishment of independent media confined to facilitate the issue solely related to the common values of the people of the two regions and teaching Amharic language in Oromia and vice versa has to be done to enhance the cooperation of the people which has spillover effect on the relationship of the ruling elites of the two regions. Accordingly, the study confirms that doing so is significant for the cooperative move of the people and the elites of the two regions and the utmost emphasize should be given on the opening of independent media with authoritative source of information regarding the issue of the two regions helps to foster unity.

3.2.8. Aggregation of interests and reducing the politics of mistrust, suspicion, and conspiracy

A consensus between ongoing and upcoming political elites on basic values and decision-making procedures helps to facilitate trust building and the capacity to compromise which in turn guarantee the survival of democracy. The responsibility of the political elites for achieving consensus and unity is necessary for the establishment and consolidation of democracy (Higley and Gunther, 1992). Given this, the data collected from the sources reveals the need for the political elites to handle their, what Professor Gudina⁴ calls, 'Clashing Dreams' through compromising their interest with the sense of

⁴ Professor Merera Gudina is one of the iconic politicians and academicians of the country and he is currently a professor in

responsibility for the good of the people at large and the country's democratization a head. Accordingly, one of the interviewees posited the following:

...the political elites must have the commitment to graduate from routinely holding clashing dreams and their narrow thinking confined to their specific localities and must move forward through 'aggregation of their interests and setting a road map on the ground and clarity of vision for the way forward is decisive for the cooperation of the two regions at large (KII-2, Addis Ababa, as of 3rd March, 2020).

The willingness and commitment of the political elites to mutual consensus through bargaining and discussion over different issues is crucial in the democratization process. According to Nwokeke (2019), cooperation between various opposing political elites is required to maintain the stability of democratic societies, since their integration in the sense of mutual communication and cooperation regarding strategic decisions enables the shaping of a consensus concerning fundamental social principles and without at least basic agreement among elites on the key strategic goals of society and consistent policy-making processes, democracy can hardly take place. Added to this, Whitfield (2009) noted that for a coherent and effective policy-making process to take place, consensus in terms of agreement within the political elite regarding the main societal goals and policy orientations is necessary. Therefore, as the above data show, the research confirms the decisiveness of commitment, sense of responsiveness and willingness for aggregation of the clashing dreams between the political elites as a means of outlet to strategic cooperation for the democratization process of the country.

3.2.9. Avoiding the ethnicization of conflicts

People hold the belief that most of the conflictual problems in Ethiopia emanates due to ethnic differences and avoiding the ethnicization of conflicts through identifying the real nature, root causes and actors of different conflicts is vital for fostering cooperation. Abebaw (2013) argued as almost all of the conflictual problems of the post 1991 as inter-ethnic problems caused by the ethnicized state administrative structure adopted since then. Ayenew (2018) and Teferi (2012) consider the conflicts between different ethnic groups are due to comparison of a group with others in terms of economic, social and political positions, and the feeling of relative deprivation. Thus, affirming the presence of the problem, the views of all of the respondent shows that de ethnicization of conflict through identifying the cause, motive, participant and the nature of conflicts happening among different actors related to the people of the two regions is decisive for reducing group mobilization for evil deeds in the name of ethnicity.

3.2.10. Engaging Academicians as troubleshooters

Chomsky (1967) argued that educated academicians hold a special place in society because they have a duty to tell the truth and expose lies, functioning as a sort of quality control, filter, or manipulator of historical events, news, and major ideas. In line with, one of the interviewees said the following:

...the academicians of the two regions are expected to engage in and show the way for the enhancement of the people-to-people relation and the relation between the political elites, they should play a role in deconstructing what has been constructed to divide the people of the two regions is needed to improve and enhance the cooperation of the two regions (KII-5, Bahirdar, as of 5th April, 2020).

Likewise, Areda (2014), in his Amharic Book "*Mihuru*" argued that albeit the complex nature of the role expected from intellectuals, the intellectuals, via using their knowledge, skills and their good will, are required to outs the society from the impasse of wrong beliefs and attitudes and are expected to show the pass way that helps the society not only to take a lesson from the past but also to live a better present with the bright hope of the future. Thus, the study, taking the experience of Ghana, argues the academic elites of the two regions should have the possibilities of coming together through heart felt commitment, willingness and tolerance which is significant to challenges none academic and

unscientific writings, for says, and fabricated historical narrations as doing so would contribute to the enhancement of the cooperation for the bright future of the country.

The above result reveals that the commitment and willingness to create common understanding on the country's past historical deeds, broadening the scope of the cooperation and opening its space for inclusiveness through feasible road map on the ground which guide the vertical and horizontal inclusiveness with a sense of solidarity, Promoting People to People Relation, hosting Authoritative forum for People to People relation with authoritative body empowered in discharge of issues related with the cooperation, opening independent media air time confined in discharging issues related with the enhancement of the cooperation, aggregation of interests and graduation from the state of contradiction, mistrust, suspicion, and conspiracy politics, conflict identification and avoiding the ethnicization of conflicts and the academicians role as troubleshooters are the discern areas which are found to be a road way for strategic cooperation between the elites which is a sine qua non for the country's course of democratization.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusions

This study explored the challenges and prospects of Amhara and Oromo political Elites Cooperation for democratic process in Ethiopia. Accordingly, despite the existing debates among scholars on what facilitate democracy and democratic transition, the main argument of the study aligns with a range of scholarly works which favored the argument that the elites play important roles in society and for government to function properly. On this backdrop, this study argues that the cooperation, commitment and willingness of the political elites to bring changes through collaboration is imperative for democratization process and the study, has posited the following conclusions.

The interaction and cooperation between key political elites and their will and commitment to democracy is critical, if not sufficient, for democratization process. However, the issue related to the nature of the cooperation itself, the existence of extremists in the both sides, the presence of suspicion, mistrust and conspiracy politics between the elites themselves, absence of consensus in understanding the past history of the country, inability to truly compromise their conflicting dreams through aggregations of interests, failure to transparently discuss their interests due to mutual fear and suspicion and the manipulation of ethnicity are threaten to derail reforms being a road block for the true cooperation of the elites of the two regions which is significant for the country's democratization.

The study reveals that the commitment and willingness to create common understanding on the country's past historical deeds, broadening the scope of the cooperation and opening its space for inclusiveness through feasible road map on the ground, Promoting People to People Relation, hosting authoritative forum for People to People relation with authoritative body empowered in discharge of issues related with the cooperation, opening independent media air time confined to discharging issues related with the enhancement of the cooperation, aggregation of interests and graduation from the state of contradiction, mistrust, suspicion, and conspiracy politics, avoiding the ethnicization of conflicts and engaging the academicians as troubleshooters are the discern areas which are found to be a road way for strategic cooperation between the elites which is indispensable for the country's course of democratization.

4.2. Recommendations

The researchers recommends opening independent Oromo-Amhara media for programs that will help foster unity, independent and media in discharge of issues related to the issue of fostering cooperation between the people and the elites of the two regions, and such media would plays a role in disproving fake news release which breed conflicts, disseminating information, news, programs, documentary films about the people of the two regions, follows what is said about the people of the two regions on the social media discourses. Furthermore, this media would serve as an arena where debates, discussions, and different programs with the community, academicians, politicians, business men and

civil societies from the two regions would be hosted and this is indispensable. Establishing and financing the Oro-Amhara Academic studies centers for studying historical happening, challenging unscientific works, propaganda, and fabricated historical narrations. Learning lessons from the experience of different countries like Ghana, South Africa, Nigeria and Botswana as the political elite's commitment and willingness to democracy and to tolerance and cooperation is deemed required in the process of democratization.

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