

Challenges and Opportunities of the National Election Board of Ethiopia Reform

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Abstract

This work is about Challenges and Opportunities of the National election Board of Ethiopian reform with critically pointing out the needs of the reform. Institutionalization, as part of the democratizing country with federal arrangement; as well as taking challenges and opportunities with the way critically point out the needs of the Reform as the central theme of this paper. In doing so, the article has addressed issues of challenges and opportunities of the reform. The writer has come to the conclusion that the reorganization of the board is lawfully referred to as an independent institution; in that it makes use of election process impartially, free, fair, periodic and universally accepted norms to implement in the full manner. Accordingly, to reach such a conclusion, the author has discussed some issues to reach the conclusion institutional reform is expected as time change. Among these; challenges, opportunities and the needs of the reform on the National Election Board of Ethiopia were well assessed. In order to achieve the objectives of this work desk review research approach was used for its appropriateness of managing and narrating facts, as well as investigating phenomena to reach to sound and constructive conclusion.

Keywords: Challenges, Opportunities, Needs of Reform, Election Board of Ethiopia

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1. INTRODUCTION

Parliamentary election has begun since the period of Emperor Haile Selassie I and was tried during the military regime; however in both regime the elections were not inclusive as well the formation and even power and function of the election body is not well addressed [19]. After centuries of monarchical and autocratic rule in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which is a coalition of four groups, took power in 1991 [14].

First in 1992 the Board was established in the transitional Government Charter; and next under Chapter Eleven Miscellaneous Provisions of the FDRE constitution of 1995, *Article 102*(1 & 2) confirmed establishment of the *Election Board* as independent institution [33]. Also, the members of the Board shall be appointed by the House of Peoples' Representatives upon recommendation of the Prime Minister determining particulars by law [22 & 25].

The direction and arrangement of government addressed in the 1995 constitution article 54(2) and the proclamation no. 532/2007 that promote plural party system repeatedly challenged by scholars and oppositions groups stating the 1992 election for the formation of TG at regional and district level as well as the 1994 election for electing the members of constitutional assembly was taken as best example [19].

2. General Overview of the National Election Board of Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one of the oldest nations in Africa now officially known as the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), having a civilization that dates back to thousands of years. The first parliamentary election with bicameral was introduced through the 1931 constitution under Chapter IV the Deliberative Chambers of the Empire Art.30 and Art.31 [20]. The revised constitution of the imperial regime of Haile Selassie; confirmed and recognized too [21]. From 1955, until the overthrow of the Emperor by a military coup in 1974, five parliamentary elections were held.

With the constitution of 1987 after the fall of the Emperor, the Dreg was elaborated the National Shengo (a name given to the then National Assembly) with the highest power of the country was to be elected by the people. The workers' party was as the only and legally operating and appointing to the Shengo [22]. In this regard, the constitution of the 1987, advocate single party system of single cameral parliamentary election. In both, the Emperor and the Dreg régime the formation and establishment of the national election body were not subject to any written justifications in the constitutions of their time.

Following the overthrow of the Dreg, the EPRDF (the collision of four ethnic groups) called to different groups to discuss on the future of the country in a complete contrast way. A conference arranged from July 1 to 5, 1991 deliberated and corrected the charter laying down the rules governing the then Transitional Government of Ethiopia. The various political organizations and all invited concerned bodies agreed on the charter to serve until

the new constitution drafted and ratified and elected government came to power.

The newly December 8, 1994 ratified constitution was the result of the four years of transitional gov't was the founding cornerstone to the existence of the NEBE today [1]. The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia was first established in 1992. Since then, the NEBE held six general elections, two local elections, and six referenda. Finally, in June 2019, NEBE was re-established with proclamation no.1133/2019 as an independent institution accountable to the HoPR [2]. The constitution entered into force in the 21st day of August, 1995 stated federal form of gov't with multi-party system through independently established election managing body addressing on its Art. 102 [26].

Ethiopia has a parliamentary system of government with the federal House of Peoples' Representative and regional State Councils as the highest legislative organs. It used, on the basis of universal suffrage, direct and secret ballots for the first-past-the-post electoral system [2]. Since its establishment, the Board has organized different branch offices at both the federal and regional levels including the two administrative cities [15].

The 2018, significant political shifts made in the country, which smooth the way to the reform, have recently been prepared as virtual event for panelists discuss preparations for the polls, and to test whether the federal government will be able to keep the promise of securing election and prioritizing issues likely election campaign. They also reflect the long-term Ethiopia's trajectory democratic transition [24].

In order to restore the confidence of the public in the democratic election and electoral system, many almost all political parties, individuals governmental and non-governmental organization and including civic societies living in the country and outside the country have been asking and recommending the reform on the board for a continuous time from the second national election of the 1994 [17].

The board made many reform to increase the degree of acceptance by the political parties, civil organizations as well as to the universally accepted values implemented. Among areas of reform done by the board: the amended electoral law by proclamation no. 532/1999; registration law 573/2000; 1/2001 law of complain; 5/2001 law of finance to political parties; 662/2002 law of ethical conduct of political parties; 2/2002 law of civics education related proclamation; 3/2002 inside observers; 6/2002 mass medias; /2007; 1162/2011 NEBE foundation proclamation; and with the support of UNDP coordinated the Election Support Project (ESP), form the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), had gender as a stand-alone objective. Gender was also mainstreamed in various components of the board [18].

Finally, in January 2019, in an effort to reform NEBE, the House of Peoples' Representatives enacted a new proclamation that reduced from the nine (9) management board to five (5) members that serve full time for a period of six years. According to Proclamation no.1133/2019, the board was established again having listed powers and functions [15].

3. Research Methodology

The study was used desk review method to its suitability for managing time and searching related literature used as sources of this work and narrating facts, investigating phenomena. In order to answer the questions of the study, the writer of this work identify and take the works of individuals and institutions as source of data and related literature so as to achieve its objectives. Proper analysis was made for smoothing the truck aimed at drawing rationale analysis and conclusion to this paper acknowledging appropriately for its originality.

4. Result and Discussions

Election is at the heart of democracy by which citizens can express their will and style of political interaction through forming a form of government. Especially, country like Ethiopia, which has diversified societies with the unique form of federalism and for proper functioning of the system; for elections to be fair and representative; as well as, the Election body should be composed of all inclusive of the country [13]. This is raised because of different reason which is the question of the independence of the National Election Board of Ethiopia [10]. Consequently, the political parties, civil society associations and many different groups go on accusing the Election Board for its partiality to the ruling government and the incumbent government for not paving the way for "free and fair election" and representation [9]. Most political parties have been strongly opposing the working plurality electoral system as it does not give a chance to convert most of the votes into seats [7].

Researches are done by some researchers in relation to the needs of reforming on the board and particular to the electoral system. (23) The others show in their works the Need to Reform Electoral Law [3]. Even a researcher can see the needs of the reform in different expression and the Impact of Electoral System on Political Representation in Diversified Society as to the reach of the writer of this seminar among others [19]. Since this problem was one of the crucial issues of the study area; this paper is intended to answer questions of the national election board of Ethiopian reform in relation to handling different outlooks of diverse social clusters and to the responses of these arguments of various groups focusing on: major challenges and; opportunities of the reform as well the way the needs of the reform of the national election board of Ethiopia was critically point out.

4.1. Challenges and Opportunities of the National Election Board of Ethiopia

4.1.1. Challenges of the National Election Board of Ethiopia

The general challenges are salient particularly in the countries like Ethiopia. For instance; the available infrastructure, security, development and given magnitude of the operation as well as thinking the minimal use of technology, not at all conducive situation to use options such as online voter registration, postal voting and e-voting in the country[15]. Think of the all as not the challenges come with the reform made on the national election board of Ethiopia, lists of challenges of came with the reform are as follows:

- Administration experience, transparency and ability to provide electoral information in a timely manner of the Board members are questioned by majority of political parties;
- In ability to establish within the timeframe constituency offices uniformly this initially led to delays in fulfilling the electoral calendar;
- The training schedule is affected by the recruitment process taking longer time than planned;
- Consistent delays in the implementation of different electoral activities such as the establishment of constituency offices, candidate registration, voter registration, recruitment and training of electoral officers, and ballot printing are questioned as result of the reform of the board operational challenges;
- Sharing an up to date versions of the calendar through official and broadly followed channels to shareholders when deadlines were missed or elections were postponed.
- Among issues contributed to the postponed of election legal challenges and logistical issues are seen as main by majority political parties;
- Providing equal or similar opportunities for all Ethiopians to go to the polling stations;
- Further, the challenges of international travel to Ethiopia during the pandemic (as well as the security situation) increases the barriers for international observers and heightens the already critical role of citizen observers in safeguarding elections and providing independent non-partial information on the electoral process;
- In the absence of official data from the NEBE, unsubstantiated registration figures circulated by several media outlets, thus encouraging speculation about the actual state of voter registration;
- The gaps on electoral law of political parties' registration and operational lack of variation at national and regional levels [2].
- The questions from parties like Balderas to get permission to their accused members and timely and effectively complying with the court decision [2].
- The re-registrations of some political parties: for instance the four political parties (Gadaa System party, Oromo Liberation Unity Front, Oromo Abbo party and Oromo Democratic Alliance (ODA); needs to register more candidates and submitting documents by some parties [2 & 6].
- Decline of international support for democracy to country like Ethiopia is also among the major challenges of the reform of the Board as stated by professor Akwety on the book entitled: emerging trends and challenges of electoral democracy in Africa by International IDEA Policy dialogue, May 2016, Abuja, Nigeria [2 &5].

These above are among some challenges come with the reform made on the National Election Board of Ethiopia following the 2015 public protest that born the highly committed groups of the now Prime Minister of the Federal Republic Government of Ethiopia of the 2018 significant political shift [5 & 6].

4.2.1. Opportunities of the Reform of National Election Board of Ethiopia

The reform as it comes with some more challenging issues; it also contribute to the creation of some more opportunities. Some as the reach of the writer of this paper are as follows:

- ❖ The new laws are relatively better closer including international and regional standards as well as to its implementations. Also the laws are coming between improved communications and practical implementations [2, 5, & 6].
- ❖ The Board was working as consultative body with significant changes of the name that has as partisan before the reform;
- ❖ Create high independency confidence, more accountable and judicial review of administrative action to the Board enjoying significant public confidence at federal level that motivated the political parties concerning varying local levels of cooperation from state, including questions in full control of subnational structures as well as the degree of impartiality of the Board.
- ❖ Job opportunities large number of new staff with acceptable criteria of recruitment included academic qualifications, past experience, and impartiality as well as ensuring and adjusting better women's participation requirements and gender balance in the election officers [8].
- ❖ Deploying of 144 the Coalition Civic Society Organization for Election observers across the country witnessed the 1,192 polling stations voter registration to address the positive and negatives they observe independently with no influence of the ruling party [15].

4.3. Ways of Pointing out the needs of the reform on the NEBE

The needs of the reform were not the questions of the political parties, civic society organization, the governing body, but also the Election Board too. Even the Election Board was tried to make modifications/reforms on the major functions of it. In this regards, many writers were critically trying to point out how much a reform was important for a particular exercise of democratization process in the country Ethiopia to better functioning of the system ethnic federalism [4 & 3].

Writers' in their work, much more tried to address the needs of a reform on the board were critically point out with appropriate evidences. In relation to this, many writers, authors of different disciplines and Global and regional civic society organizations were used the arguments of political parties, impartiality of the board to the governing body, the uninviting political culture of the country, the failure of the electoral system to representing all interests of different groups equally in the parliament, and lack of the legal and procedural election processes in fulfillments of international and regional standards [4 & 3]

Conclusion

In general, the study was contributed to the institutional reform in the way responding of different counter arguments of nation, nationalities, and people of the country through adopting the challenges and opportunities as future potential. Taking the significant political shifts of the 2018, which have recently been compounded by the twin shocks of the pandemic and a shocking locust invasion of the war by Tigrian Terrorist Group and the COVID-19.

This work has four parts: the introduction part of this seminar consists the historical development of parliamentary election in Ethiopia; the feature of election in both the Emperor Haile Selassie I and the Dreg as were not inclusive; as well as the formation of election managing body was not addressed in the constitutions of the 1931 and the amended constitution of 1955 of the Emperor time, and the 1987 constitution of the military junta called the Dreg. The second discussed the General Overview of the National Election Board of Ethiopia; the third part of this seminar discussed the research approach used and the final part discussed the result and discussion that consists the main body of this work.

The seminars go through the general overview of the Election Board establishment; the challenges and opportunities with the ways of pointing out of the needs of the reform of the National Election Board of Ethiopia. The thrown of the Dreg by the EPRDF which was the coalition of four political parties that took power in 1991. The coming power of the EPRDF lead to the formation of Transitional Government and Transitional Charter which came with the establishment of the board for the first time in the year 1992. The 1992 election for the region and district level which smooth the truck to the 1994 election for constitutional assembly that draft and ratified the 1995 constitution of the FDRE government with addressing the establishment of the board again in its article 102.

Since its establishment, the board was made tried many times a reform through legal procedures proclaimed in different times for disfigured acceptance by almost all political parties, Civic Society organizations, and authors of different disciplines. Following this, the Board tried to change the acceptance degree by many made the reform taking the 2018 significant political shift occurred in the country.

The seminar addressed the challenges and opportunities of the reform of the National Election Board of Ethiopia with the way critically pointing out the needs of the reform through using desktop research method for its appropriate of managing times, investigating phenomenon that facilitate ways to sound conclusion.

Generally, more of the challenges of the Board were salient in country like Ethiopia and the opportunities were expected of any institutional reforms and as the needs for the reform were point out not only by external boy to the Board but by the Board too.

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