



Melkam Aemiro, 31, Woreda Council member

13,350 CITIZENS ARE EMPOWERED TO DEMAND AND RECEIVE BASIC SERVICES

How capacity building of citizens has improved the delivery of basic services in Amhara region, Ethiopia

The Amhara Local Governance Project (ALGP) has trained 13,350 citizens in the Amhara region of Ethiopia. These citizens include council members, members of the executive/service providers, experts on basic services, and women council members, a group most often marginalized in local decision-making processes.

The project designed and delivered training on Integrated Community Based Participatory Planning (ICBPP) for council members and executives, who stated that it improved their understanding of their political accountability to citizens and enabled them to discharge their responsibilities. While council members report an increased ability to have their voices heard in decision-making processes, members of the executive also report an increased understanding of the council's role and a willingness to include them in these processes.

The project also gave specialized training to women council members, who reported increased confidence in public speaking and speaking up for women's issues in their communities.

The implementation of ALGP initiatives outside its project area bears witness to its efficacy and its acceptance by the community and the local government.

CONTEXT

ALGP has a strong commitment to measuring the outcomes and impact of its interventions. Like other Helvetas projects, it applies a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system with standardized performance indicators and reports on the results. Such a result-oriented M&E system is crucial for project steering, organizational learning, and showing accountability to stakeholders and donors.

This report aims to share the progress of ALGP, its impact so far, achieved results, and lessons learned to review the sustainability of the project's outcomes and the systemic changes it hopes to create.

**ALGP WORKS TO MAKE
CITIZENS AGENTS OF THEIR
OWN DEVELOPMENT**

THE AMHARA LOCAL GOVERNANCE PROJECT

Understanding the problem ALGP addresses and the need for its intervention requires understanding the Ethiopian governmental structure.

Ethiopia adopted a new federal government structure in 1995, which laid down the foundation for decentralization and the establishment of regional and local governments. The Federal system has five hierarchical levels of government: federal, regional, zonal, woreda, and kebele.

Woredas are governed by the Woreda Council, whose members are directly elected by citizens from each kebele within the woreda. These elected councils must make sure that the executive, the body responsible for direct service provision, listens to citizen's demands and provide budget oversight and approval. Woreda councils and executives must coordinate their tasks and collaborate to ensure equitable development in each kebele.

In practice, the relationship between woreda councils and executives has been almost non-existent. Woreda councils are not aware of their oversight role, and executives do not solicit their input in decision-making processes. Thus there has been a gap between citizens and their service providers because councils are supposed to be the bridge connecting the two, making sure that citizens' demands are heard by the executive and incorporated into service provision.

Since 2019, ALGP has been working on strengthening the relationship between council members and executives and capacitating both to exercise their core duties for the benefit of the citizens they represent.

Helvetas with Austrian Development Agency funds the project, which has an overall budget of 2.7 million Euro for the project cycle, 1st October 2022-31st December 2025. ALGP partners with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the Amhara Regional Council (ANRC) to reach woreda councils and executives. These partnerships aim to ensure that CSOs and the Regional Council, institutions with greater reach, not only benefit from the project intervention but also reach beyond the scope of the project to scale and replicate the intervention.

Helvetas has taken on a facilitation role while these CSOs and the Regional Council take on direct implementation in the form of capacitating their council members and executives.

The intervention carried out by ALGP takes the form of training sessions on oversight role, Integrated Community Based Participatory Budgeting and Planning (ICBPP), political accountability, and leadership.

Melkam Aemiro: From Uncertainty to Successful Governance



The training helped me to plan activities, to decide and take responsibility for decisions. Other council members who got the training also became active. We decided to report twice per week, we also improved the implementation of the decisions conducted by the council members. The training helped me to be courageous and confident. My negotiation skills have also improved.

Melkam Aemiro, 31, Woreda Council member



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Melkam Aemiro was born and grew up in Yilmana Densa Woreda, where she now works as a logistics and supplies coordinator in the Woreda Health Office. The 31-year-old won a seat in the Woreda council, where she has been representing 5000 households for her two terms of service. Melkam also serves as a chairperson for the Woreda Women’s Association.

Melkam believes in dedicated service and citizen satisfaction. Her goal is to serve as a responsible and ethical councillor and improve citizens’ access to basic-services. Like most women council members with whom ALGP works, Melkam remembers her election to the council with no training. She lacked the knowledge and skills to fulfill her responsibilities and unleash her potential. Because of these constraints, Melkam couldn’t perform her duties to her satisfaction.

Melkam describes the training provided by ALGP as an eye-opening experience during which she learned to speak confidently on issues relevant to the community she represents, especially women. Thanks to the training and support, Melkam reports, her true potential has surfaced, and her confidence, competency, and public speaking skills have improved. She has become effective, and result-oriented in her job. “Before the training, I was passive,” she says, “but now I am an active participant, I speak courageously on whatever I think is relevant for women and the community at large.”

Melkam says that she now tries her best to bring women on board. Things have also changed at the Woreda level; women are in positions of leadership, which would have been unthinkable before the training. The current Woreda Deputy Head is a woman, which Melkam sees as a promising start to the increased participation of women in political spheres.

HOW DOES INTEGRATED COMMUNITY BASED PARTICIPATORY PLANNING (ICBPP) WORK?

ALGP aims to strengthen the relationship between councils, executives, and citizens, which, while sound, in theory, has not worked in practice.

The project wants to make sure that:

- Councils are aware of their oversight role and act as a bridge between citizens and executives,
- Executives listen to citizens' demands and priorities by involving councils in decision-making processes, and,
- Citizens are empowered to formulate their needs and priorities.

In short, ALGP aims to subvert the top-down way of working in local governments and encourage all citizens to participate in a bottom-up and demand-driven process of governance.

ICBPP is a principal tool that ALGP uses to bring these different groups of citizens together and teach them how to make decisions in a collaborative and participatory manner.

Since 2019, ALGP Plus organized training on ICBPP for council members, executives, local government officials, and grassroots community representatives. Following the training, the project established a citizen forum consisting of 5 working groups in each kebele, with the working-groups organized around the five pro-poor sectors – healthcare, agriculture, water, road, and education. Per ALGP's pro-poor, pro-marginalized, gender-sensitive, and disability-inclusive principles, each working group was inclusive of youth, children, people with disabilities, women, men, and the elderly.

These working groups set the priorities of their community concerning basic-service delivery and started with immediate problems that they could organize around.

After settling on an immediate need, they then started thinking about possible solutions and what resources they already had or needed to implement them.

The groups then produced a community-level plan that includes the list of activities needed to implement the plan, names of community members responsible for implementation, a schedule of activities, the resources necessary to carry out the activities, and the outputs expected from each activity.

This hands-on training on ICBPP had an impact on several levels:

- The local community, who are the building blocks of local government, became sensitized to the fact that their demands can affect decision-making at the kebele and woreda level
- Actively participating in the planning process gave the community an insight into what existing resources they already had and what they needed from external sources
- Disadvantaged/marginalized groups were able to make specialized demands as community members
- Kebele level executives and councils were able to hear the demands of citizens through the citizen forum and address them accordingly

The outcomes of ICBPP training sessions in the project reaffirm ALGP's working hypothesis, which posits that if the local population is empowered by their elected representatives to participate in local government planning and priority setting, and if the local government integrates such community demands into their development plans, then existing development issues at the local level will be addressed more effectively.

BETTER SERVICE DELIVERY FOR ALL

The results presented in this section are primarily based on the biannual report of the project developed in 2023.

Developing demand-based community plans

In the year since its start, ALGP has facilitated the creation of 277 citizen forums, each of which consists of 5 citizen groups organized around the pro-poor sectors. These 13,350 citizen groups consisted of 6,700 men and 6,650 women. In addition to ensuring the equal participation of women, the groups were also inclusive of youth, people with disabilities, people living with HIV, the elderly, and other marginalized segments of society.

All citizen groups discuss the demands and priorities of their communities and prepare service delivery plans based on the ICBPP approach.

Addet Zuria Kebele: Determination in action

Before being able to participate in their development, communities in Felassie village in Addet Zuria kebele relied on shallow and open dug wells, ponds, and streams for water. Apart from being contaminated, these sources of water were drying up because of the increased number of users. Fortunately, after the training on ICBPP, trained facilitators organized the establishment of citizen groups within a citizen forum. The citizen group organized around the water sector identified the construction of a hand-dug well as a top priority of Felassie village and presented it to the citizen forum. The kebele level citizen forum further prioritized the concerns of the water working group- the hand-dug well construction - as a top priority for the whole kebele.

The kebele thus incorporated the construction of the well into the local development plan. In the plan, the water working group stated that the community would provide their labor and local materials such as sand and stone. They also indicated what they needed from the government - technical expertise, cement, water pipes, and so on.

Because the community felt ownership of the project, the construction took less than a month.

The community's confidence in managing and implementing their priorities and more importantly, for making the government allocate resources for their self-determined priorities, grew immensely because of their experience with ICBPP.

“ 45 villagers contributed 400 ETB per household to construct this hand-dug well. The community also volunteered their labor for the construction, carrying stones, sands, cement. The government supported us by providing cement, metal, water pumps, and technical support. Since all villagers were enthusiastic about building the well, it was ready for use within one month. I am very happy to see my fellow villagers drinking clean water. It feels like a rebirth for me.

Mulat Durso, 38, Chairperson
of the village Water Committee



Mulat Durso, 38, Chairperson of the village water committee, stands next to the hand-dug well

Making local governments responsive to community plans

Since 2019, ALGP trained a total of 1584 (1,123 male and 461 female) council members on ICBPP and their roles as overseers of the executive. They were able to oversee the planning sessions to ensure participation of the citizen groups, follow the implementation of activities, dialogue with the executive for the allocation of budget, and supervise the quality of work done. If the quality of work is not in line with the planned activity or if the community is dissatisfied, the councils were able to hold the executive accountable.



Machakel Woreda Standing Committee

Machakel Woreda Standing Committee: From passive acceptance to accountability

Standing Committees have the power to supervise the performance of administrative bodies and can scrutinize the budget proposals of different organs of government. They also have the authority to ensure the effective implementation of the approved budget by executive agencies, preventing public resources from abuse.

In this way, the Standing Committees act as the eyes and ears of the council, enabling it to oversee the activities and performance of executive bodies.

In reality, Standing Committees have been little more than ceremonial bodies.

After the training given by Helvetas, the Standing Committees became familiar with their constitutional role properly and started exercising it with courage and vigor. One standing committee member commented, "We used to think about what we needed to contribute to the community, but we couldn't get past being nominal representatives. We regret the time we held our seats without making meaningful contributions. It would have been great if Helvetas trained us as soon as we were elected."

Yilmana Densa Woreda Standing Committee: Crusaders for justice



Yilmana Densa Woreda Standing Committee heads meet with the Woreda Council Speaker and Deputy Speaker

Even though follow-up and supervision are among the core duties of the SC, before the ALGP training, the Yilmana Densa SC reported they had no courage to hold the executive accountable for its actions.

Now, that has changed. Geremew also mentioned that the SC found that 840,000 ETB allocated for a farmers' training center was missing. The SC did what would have been unthinkable in the past and decided to investigate, often at their peril. Those in the Agriculture Office were uncooperative, thinking that the SC had no authority to ask budgetary questions.

As Geremew reports, "Finally, we decided to take the issue to the regional anti-corruption office and managed to find out from the Agriculture Office that the money was at Amhara Credit and Saving Association (ACSI). ACSI was not willing to answer our questions. They said, 'Who are you to ask?' and discouraged us. But when they saw our commitment to finding out what had happened to the money, they started investigating as well. Some of the money is with them, but half is still missing. We won't stop here."

These victories have given the SC even more energy. They now know they have the power to hold the executive accountable and confidently practice their authority.

Following the training by ALGP, the Yilmana Densa Woreda Standing Committee (SC) worked on tracking public expenditure to ensure transparency and accountability.

They intentionally started keeping track of the audit findings and enforced repayment of money lost through fraud and mismanagement. The budget and finance standing committee head, Geremew Admasu, reported, "After formally investigating the fraudulent allocation of 1.09 million ETB for veterinary drug purchase, we were able to enforce the repayment of 1.6 million ETB."



Geremew Admasu, Head of the Budget and Finance Standing Committee

Organizing learning platforms to cascade impact

Helvetas' focus on systemic change means that ALGP actively works to make sure the project activities and results do not remain within the implementation area but that the government adopts and implements them on a large scale.

In its commitment to promote inclusive local governance, ALGP has initiated diverse knowledge-sharing platforms for scaling up, engaging a total of 1,089 participants, including 289 females and 800 males.

It has also organized an experts' forum for experience sharing with governmental institutions and presented its work to the GO-NGO forum. The forum, which brings together government institutions, other NGOs, CSOs, and other working in the governance sector, was a great platform on which ALGP shared its approaches and learnings to open the path for a large scale adoption of participatory governance in other regions.

LESSONS LEARNED

Integrated Community Based Participatory Planning

The ICBPP process is a very powerful and effective tool for identifying the community demand, existing opportunities, reaching different community segments, and initiating actions under the leadership of the community and local government leaders.

Placing the citizens in the driver's seat through tools like ICBPP increases their ownership of the development agenda. Citizens' participation in the planning process increased ownership as well as trust among stakeholders, partners, and community members.

Council members are also more active and motivated to discharge their responsibility when they are refreshed with such inclusive and proactive approaches.

Therefore, there is a need to develop a legal framework for the government to introduce the use of the ICBPPB approach for all sectors.

Inclusiveness

Training and activation of groups of marginalized members of the community – youth, women, the elderly, people with disabilities, and people living with HIV - is the best approach to improve their role in planning and priority setting.

Learning and experience sharing

Involvement of government experts in training facilitation, review reflection, and event coordination has increased community members' and implementing partners' confidence level while simultaneously creating situations in which the government truly listens to the demands of its citizens and increase joint effort for responsive action.