esid | Effective States and
Inclusive Development

identifying routes to social justice

ESID Working Paper No. 147

State infrastructural power and social transfers: The local politics of distribution and delivering 'progress' in Ethiopia

Tom Lavers [1]

July 2020

[1] Global Development Institute, The University of Manchester

Email correspondence: tom.lavers@manchester.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper examines the politics of implementing the PSNP in Ethiopia. The PSNP is a targeted food and cash-for-work programme that places a strong emphasis on its 'productive' contribution through public works, a livelihoods component and the aim of mass 'graduation' from support. The paper focuses on how local governments resolve two challenges related to the distribution of social transfers. First, is the challenge for state capacity of generating sufficient and accurate information with which to select households while limiting undue influence of powerful local actors. Second, is the recurrent tension between the programme's developmental objectives and its protective function. The paper argues that variation in state infrastructural power is vital to understanding how these challenges are resolved in different parts of Ethiopia. Drawing on two research sites in each of Afar, Oromiya and Tigray, the paper highlights the extremes of variation within Ethiopia. Implementation is shaped by the particular spatial pattern of expansion of the party-state carried out under EPRDF rule. In Tigray, strong party-state infrastructural power underpins selection processes and local state compliance with national targets. In Oromiya, state infrastructural power was underpinned by a significant degree of coercion in the face of limited legitimacy of the party-state. However, recent political events have seriously eroded this. In Afar, the state is forced to compensate for its own limitations by engaging in negotiation with clan structures.

Introduction

The Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) is a large and complex programme that provides transfers in cash and food in exchange for public works from most participants, and unconditional direct support for a minority considered unable to work. Support is targeted both geographically and to individual households. The PSNP was originally introduced in response to a major food crisis in 2002-03. However, from its launch in 2005, the government viewed the provision of support as a temporary measure. In line with the leadership's focus on rapid development and its embarrassment at recurrent food crises, the PSNP's ultimate aim was to promote mass graduation and remove the need for the programme's existence (Lavers 2019). As such, the PSNP aims to make a productive contribution through public works to build community infrastructure and linked livelihoods initiatives to raise household productivity. The assumption is that by focusing transfers on the poorest and supporting productive activity through these initiatives, most PSNP participants will be able to graduate from support.

This paper analyses the distributive aspects of PSNP implementation at local level – namely the wereda (districts) and kebele (sub-districts) – focusing on two main issues.[1] The first is how local authorities resolve what is termed here as the 'informational challenge' to state capacity faced by any targeted programme, namely how to generate sufficiently detailed information with which to select households, while limiting undue influence of powerful local actors who might otherwise capture the programme for their own benefit. For this purpose, the PSNP relies on community-based targeting, whereby basic guidelines are provided to elected community committees, which then draw on their 'local knowledge' to select those most in need. The second is the tension between the programme's productive ambitions to promote graduation consistent with the focus on delivering national development and the key role of supporting the poorest.

State capacity is analysed here through Mann's (1984: 113) concept of *state infrastructural power*, namely 'the capacity of the state actually to penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm'. Infrastructural power highlights the historically embedded and relational nature of state power. The analysis here focuses on three aspects of state infrastructural power, each of which is expected to be required for the effective distribution of a social transfer programme. First, states require financial, technical and human resources to implement programmes. Of particular importance, in terms of local-level implementation, is that sufficient and capable staff are available and have sufficient training on the objectives and provisions of the programme in question. As such, the analysis considers the staffing and implementation structures put in place to deliver the PSNP, as well as the infrastructure of roads, transport and telecommunications required to engage with local populations. However, infrastructural power, as an

---

[1] Ethiopia's administrative structures are organised as follows: federal; regional; zones; wereda (districts); kebele (or tabiya in Tigray – sub-districts); kushet (in Tigray, with other names used in other regions).

inherently relational concept, goes further. Second, state infrastructural power depends on intra-state relations, in recognition that the state is not monolithic, but a network of semi-autonomous entities, each with their own interests (Migdal 2001). State infrastructural power necessitates that national governments can ensure that lower-level officials stick to their plans, with minimal local adaptation. There are many possible ways of doing so, including rigorous performance assessments, the discursive power to shape beliefs of lower-level officials, or threats and intimidation. The subsequent analysis therefore considers which key objectives national policymakers have for the PSNP, how these are communicated to local officials and how progress towards these priorities is assessed. Third, infrastructural power depends on state–society relations. A high degree of infrastructural power either requires the state to be able to work with and through society, or to exert great control over society, imposing its will. Where state intervention is seen as legitimate, implementation is likely to be much more straightforward than when its actions are considered illegitimate, requiring coercion to impose the state's will. A key consideration therefore concerns the strength and organisation of the local state, sources of mobilisation within society and the nature of relations between these.

The research is not just concerned with state infrastructural power, but also the political processes which influence how that power is deployed (Centeno et al. 2017). Here the focus is on the interests and ideas of political actors at national and local levels, which shape the deployment of state infrastructural power. A common concern of social transfer programmes is that the involvement of political actors could lead to the politicisation of distribution that undermines the programme's poverty reduction aims. While certainly possible, the initial assumption of this study was that in Ethiopia, where the ruling party had won successive elections by landslide majorities, there would be relatively little incentive to politicise distribution in this way. Instead, the strong developmental ideology of the ruling party might be expected to contribute to relatively effective delivery.

The PSNP is targeted to particular geographic areas and households within those. Analysis has shown that *geographical targeting* excludes large numbers of poor and vulnerable people who live outside PSNP wereda (Vargas Hill and Porter 2013). Nonetheless, extensive biannual evaluations of *household targeting* underpin the conclusion that from

> 'an international perspective, the PSNP is well targeted ... the PSNP is better targeted than any of the African safety net programs reported by Coady, Grosh, and Hoddinott (2004). There is little evidence of elite capture throughout the regions where the PSNP is being operated' (Coll-Black et al. 2012: 317).[2]

---

[2] A 2010 Human Rights Watch report claimed that the PSNP and emergency relief was denied to opposition supporters through household targeting (Human Rights Watch 2010). Though plausible, the evidence presented was anecdotal. Other studies, have found no evidence of systematic manipulation of targeting.

It should be noted here that the international standard to which the PSNP is compared is not high – the targeting of social transfers in developing countries is often very poor (Coady et al. 2004). Moreover, evaluations are not uniformly positive. While household targeting in the highland regions – the historical centre of the Ethiopian state, which contributes the majority of programme participants – is relatively effective, targeting in lowland regions of Afar and Somali – the historic periphery – is problematic. One recent study compared PSNP participation with livestock ownership – important in areas in which pastoralism continues to play a significant role – concluding that the lowest two deciles were *least likely* to receive the PSNP (Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2013). This analysis underpins the federal government's acknowledgment that access 'to PSNP transfers in Afar and Somali is in effect not targeted' (MoA 2014a: 13). Within the highlands, evaluations also show variation (Berhane et al. 2015). Targeting in Tigray is more effective, with the lowest income quintile considerably more likely to participate. In Oromiya and SNNPR, while the lowest income quintile is more likely to be included in the programme, many differences between income quintiles are not statistically significant.

The existing literature on the PSNP is dominated by impact evaluations, which are useful in assessing programme effectiveness, but provide limited insights into the dynamics that shape distribution and the evident variation that exists. A few papers have considered the politics of PSNP implementation (Lavers 2013, Cochrane and Tamiru 2016), but are limited to single case studies. This paper employs a comparative research design examining six sites in three Ethiopian regions: Afar, Oromiya and Tigray. In so doing, the paper highlights two key ways in which state infrastructural power and politics shape PSNP distribution. First, the distribution process is dependent on the particular configurations of party, state and societal power relations in different sites. A key factor is the ability of the local party-state to mobilise local communities and address the information challenge through either the party-state machinery of 'development teams' or clan structures, where the party-state is lacking. Rather than political party involvement undermining effective implementation, as might be expected, effective implementation in Ethiopia is actually dependent on the infrastructural power of the fused party-state. Second, state infrastructural power is also key to understanding the resolution to the recurrent tension within the programme between its developmental ambitions and core protective function. A central political priority for government is to demonstrate progress with respect to food insecurity, through graduation and a reduction of PSNP participants at the national level (Lavers 2019). The result is that party-state infrastructural power is brought to bear to meet graduation targets, regardless of household food security, in order to fit a national narrative of 'progress'.

The variation in the infrastructural power of the state and party-society relations is therefore central to the arguments presented in the paper. As such, the paper begins by analysing the distinct historical pattern of state building in Ethiopia and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front's (EPRDF's) attempts to expand state infrastructural power. The paper then outlines the study's methodology and case selection. The case studies themselves are discussed in two main sections: the first

analyses state infrastructural power in each site and how this is embedded within state–society relations; and the second examines PSNP distribution, focusing on targeting and graduation.

Building the state and party in Ethiopia and the varying legacy for infrastructural power

State infrastructural power is defined above in terms of the resources available to the state, the relations between state agencies, and those between state and society. Consequently, infrastructural power is shaped by contemporary political processes, but also has deep historical roots. The discussion therefore begins with a brief overview of the long-run pattern of state formation in Ethiopia, before focusing on the expansion of the party-state undertaken under the EPRDF.

The Ethiopian polity has a history of several thousand years, with its origins in contemporary Tigray, Amhara and neighbouring Eritrea (see Figure 1). However, much of the west, south and east of the country was only incorporated into Ethiopia through conquest in the late 19th century. A push for modernisation in the final decades of Haile Selassie's (1930-74) reign led to the gradual replacement of rule through nobility with bureaucratic structures (Zewde 1991). Moreover, under the *Derg* (1974-91), uniform state structures were established down to the village level, with peasant associations established across the highlands. The Derg initiated a 'project of *encadrement*, or incorporation into structures of control, which was

Figure 1: Ethiopia under the EPRDF with federal boundaries
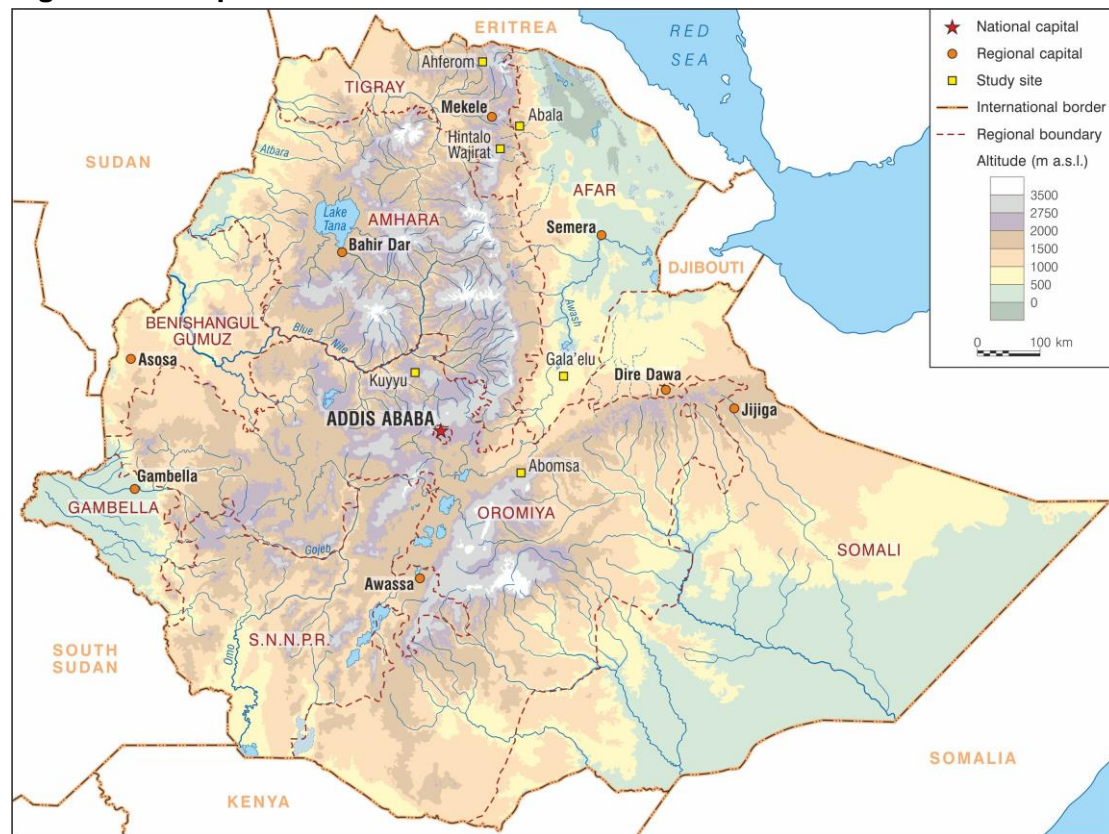
pursued with remarkable speed and ruthlessness' (Clapham 2002: 14). The Derg conducted land reform and, subsequently, resettlement, villagisation and collectivisation of agriculture, as the means to secure the '"capture" of the peasantry in a way that subjected them increasingly to state control' (Clapham 2002: 15).

In the lowland periphery, in contrast, state presence remained limited. The dominant highland perception was that these areas were economically and culturally backward, with mobile livelihoods, such as pastoralism, shifting cultivation and flood-retreat agriculture, considered inferior to settled agriculture. Even Derg era *encadrement* was only partially successful, with 'pastoralist associations' bringing the state into greater proximity, but struggling to establish direct state control (Wolde 2002). Markakis (2011) summarises Ethiopian state formation by distinguishing three parts of the country: the historic centre, the *highland core*, comprising Tigray and Amhara; the *highland periphery*, comprising much of Oromiya and northern parts of SNNPR; and the *lowland periphery*, comprising Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Somali and southern Oromiya and SNNPR.

The EPRDF, which came to power in 1991, originated in the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which mobilised the Tigrayan peasantry, based on an ethno-nationalist message. The TPLF formed the EPRDF coalition to represent Ethiopia's ethnic groups and the EPRDF consciously framed its state-building efforts in opposition to the history of northern-led state building and exploitation. The EPRDF adopted a federal system, in an attempt to provide ethnic self-determination. Significant powers were formally devolved to ethno-regional administrations, each of which is controlled by an ethnically defined member or affiliate of the EPRDF. Nonetheless, in practice, the federal government retained massive influence over regions, not least through parallel party structures. Furthermore, the EPRDF struggled to shake the perception that it was a creation of and dominated by the TPLF. Many EPRDF parties and, notably, the Oromiya People's Development Organisation (OPDO) have long been perceived by their own ethnic constituencies as artificial creations of the TPLF (Clapham 2009). Moreover, the historical marginalisation and exploitation of the lowland periphery has not been reversed by federalism. Parties running lowland regions are only affiliates, not full members, of the EPRDF and lack voting rights within the coalition. Meanwhile, the priorities of federal development strategies frequently override regional autonomy (Lavers 2012).

The EPRDF has prioritised the pursuit of rapid, state-led development above all else. This has shaped the government's approach to food security, which is framed as the 'real source of our national humiliation' (MoI 2002: 10–11), leading to the productive aspirations of the PSNP and the focus on graduation. These developmental ambitions have also resulted in the extension and intensification of *encadrement*, expanding the infrastructural power of a fused party-state. A central focus has been to extend the party-state beyond the kebele (equivalent to the Derg's peasant associations) down to the household level, with the current structure dating to 2011. This involves creation of

sub-kebele administrations or kushet[3] to oversee villages within a kebele, and the division of men, women and youth into *development teams* (sometimes referred to as development armies) of 25-30 households and *one-to-five networks* covering five to six households, each with their own leadership structure and reporting requirements to higher levels. Meanwhile, in areas populated by pastoralists and shifting cultivators, a central focus of government activity is a policy of villagisation intended to address the supposedly unsustainable livelihoods of pastoralists and bring them in line with settled farmers elsewhere in the country (MoFA 2008).

Sub-kebele structures play several roles. First, structures are used for service delivery, providing information about government initiatives and mobilising communities to contribute to national campaigns. These structures are gendered, with male teams focusing on agriculture, while women – associated with the domestic sphere – work on health and sanitation. Second, the model farmers and households who lead development teams and one-to-fives demonstrate exemplary behaviour to their teams through adherence to government initiatives. Third, model farmers and development team leaders are enrolled en masse as party members, with development teams used to disseminate party political, as well as developmental, messages. Fourth, development teams constitute an important means of generating information about the community, in a context in which the lowest formal tier of the state – the kebele – is still responsible for a large and dispersed population. This includes providing information to the kebele administration on: early identification of pregnant women, so that the health extension workers can conduct antenatal checks; monitoring and enforcing efforts to stop female genital mutilation; and monitoring school attendance. As shown below, this infrastructural power of the development teams and one-to-fives is exploited for the PSNP.

Alongside these structures of control, there has been a coherent attempt to establish mechanisms to make state officials accountable to superiors and, in principle, to the population that they serve. The system of *gim gema* – whereby officials regularly self-critique their performance in front of their superiors and those that they serve and are then subject to withering critique by others – was extended from its use by the TPLF throughout the civil war with the Derg to the entire party-state apparatus. In principle, these systems of performance evaluation apply also to the sub-kebele structures of kushet, development teams and one-to-fives. Moreover, national development targets are systematically cascaded into performance targets for officials in lower levels of the state.

The result is that the Ethiopian government has for some time possessed an unusual capacity – compared to others in Africa – to implement federal policy initiatives. As Prime Minister Meles once argued,

---

[3] Kushet is the name used in Tigray. For simplicity in this paper, the term is used across all sites, rather than the equivalent terms: zones in Oromiya or makafta in Afar.

'Unlike all previous governments our writ runs in every village. That has never happened in the history of Ethiopia. The state was distant, irrelevant … Now we have a formally structured state, there is a school in every village and clinics in every village, roads, infrastructure' (Meles, cited in Dowden 2012).

The reality, however, is that the party-state's infrastructural power varies markedly within Ethiopia, based on the particular pattern of state formation described above and sharply contrasting relations between the ruling party and society in the different regional states. While Meles was right that the government's writ does run large across the country, it runs much larger in some places than others.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to discuss the political changes of the past five years. From 2014, a wave of unprecedented protests took place across Oromiya, sparked by the proposed Addis Ababa Masterplan, but fuelled by widespread unemployment, growing Oromo nationalism, the illegitimacy of the OPDO, the perceived dominance of the TPLF and the heavy-handed response of the military and police to initially peaceful protests (Davison 2016). The protests led to the replacement of the OPDO leadership in 2016, with the reform-minded Lemma Megersa as regional president and Abiy Ahmed as deputy. This new leadership achieved a remarkable turnaround, by aligning themselves with the protestors and occasionally against the federal government. Following Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn's resignation in early 2018, Abiy Ahmed of the resurgent OPDO was selected as the new prime minister. These events have been influential with respect to state infrastructural power, unleashing a counter-process resisting state encadrement. Centrifugal forces have been strengthened, leading to growing regional autonomy from federal control, while past systems of top-down control have been increasingly contested. However, the OPDO[4] leadership achieved newfound legitimacy in Oromiya, while a reform process of 'Deep Renewal' – originally launched under Hailemariam but seized upon by the new leadership – is attempting to revitalise the party-state structures down to the grass roots. The result is that the fieldwork period in the first half of 2018 was marked by considerable fluidity in the pattern described above, particularly in Oromiya.

Methodology

The research is guided by a process tracing methodology (George and Bennett 2004). Fieldwork traced the implementation process, involving decisions made by state officials in interpreting federal government guidelines, and actions taken by non-state actors to shape decision making. The methodology is also comparative, involving application of the same research protocols across six sites in three regions between March and July 2018. Fieldwork in each site was conducted in two phases, with workshops in between fieldwork periods used to compare and contrast findings between the sites and to identify common research themes. In each site, data

---

[4] The OPDO was subsequently re-branded the Oromo Democratic Party and then along with the other members of the EPRDF, bar the TPLF, merged to form the Prosperity Party. Since these events took place after fieldwork was completed, they are not discussed here.

generation involved approximately 25-30 key informant interviews with officials from wereda, kebele and kushet administrations, social elites and individual residents, as well as ten focus group discussions – comprising men or women – regarding people's experiences with the programme. Details of interviews and focus groups can be found in the annex to this paper. Primary data generation was supplemented with documentary sources and official statistics. Fieldwork in each region was conducted by a male and a female researcher with fluency in local languages, with the female researcher conducting interviews with women wherever possible. The exception is Afar, where two male researchers were paired, due to the difficulty of identifying a female researcher.

An important limitation is the influence of social desirability bias. Given the efforts of the dominant party-state to shape norms regarding 'good' behaviour and to enforce these, it is challenging to get respondents to talk openly about their experiences and opinions (Østebø et al. 2018). This is even more challenging when gender and class relations are overlaid on political sensitivities. Women in conservative rural communities have historically played a limited role in social and political life, and social norms mean that many women find it difficult to speak out. To a degree, we were able to address this by pairing a male and female researcher. Nonetheless, whatever reassurances are provided, the expectation is that outsiders probably have ties to party-state or donor agencies. Respondents therefore tend to report what they believe to be the official position, rather than what actually happens in practice. To a degree, such limitations can be addressed by gaining respondents' trust, spending an extended period in the community or through triangulation. However, these strategies are imperfect and, particularly, in a time-bound and resource-constrained study such as this, some limitations are inevitable.

Case selection draws on Markakis' threefold typology, selecting one region from each of his categories. Within these categories, an attempt was made to highlight the extremes of party-state building, with Tigray, home to the TPLF and origin of the EPRDF, chosen from the highland core; Oromiya, where OPDO/EPRDF legitimacy is perhaps most contested, chosen from the highland periphery; and Afar, one of the poorest regions where state-building has advanced the least, from the lowland periphery. Within regions, two wereda and two kebele were selected from different parts of the region in question. While the study cannot generalise from a mere two sites to what are very large regions, where similar findings are identified in two quite different sites, it does provide some indication that the phenomena are not limited to that specific location. The research sites are marked on Figure 1.[5] Figure 2 provides some basic data to give a sense of the scale of the PSNP in each site, which broadly reflects the regional distribution of the PSNP. Afar is the only region in which the PSNP operates in every single wereda, and also has the highest proportion of its population covered by the programme, as in the research sites.

---

[5] More detailed findings for each site are presented elsewhere (Lavers et al. forthcoming, Lavers, Haile, et al. 2020, Lavers, Mohammed, et al. 2020).

Figure 2: PSNP coverage as a percentage of kebele population
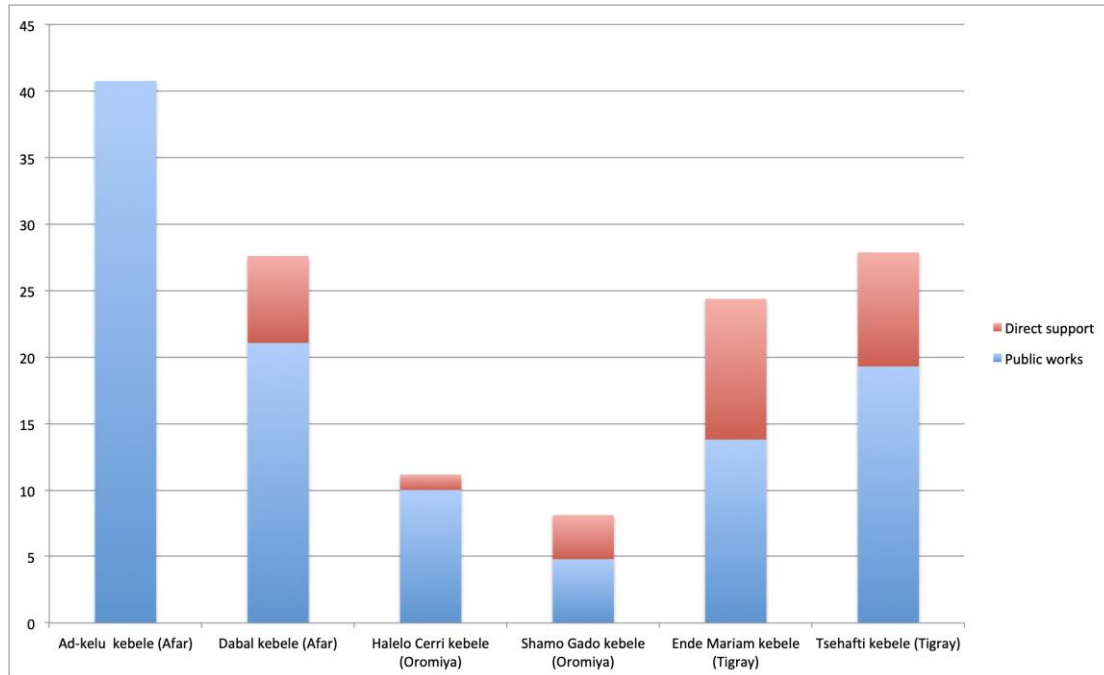
Note: all figures are for 2018.

Tigray is the highland region with the highest proportion of its population covered by the PSNP. Finally, the PSNP covers a much smaller proportion of the Oromo population in general and the research sites in question.

Finally, it should be noted that the PSNP in Afar takes a slightly different form to that in the other two regions. The PSNP in Afar involves in-kind food transfers, rather than a mixture of cash and food elsewhere. More directly relevant to the present paper, there has never been an attempt to promote graduation in Afar. This is not to say that the government has willingly accepted long-term provision of social transfers in the region. Rather, for the government, the key to regional transformation is villagisation, which is believed to offer the possibility of greater food security.

Variations in party-state infrastructural power

This section focuses on party-state infrastructural power in the six research sites, situating this within the broad pattern of variation highlighted above. The following section then examines how infrastructural power shapes PSNP distribution.

The first element of state infrastructural power is the resources available to the state. In terms of physical infrastructure within the kebele in question, the differences are not enormous (see Table 1). The Tigray and Oromiya sites undoubtedly enjoy better transport links to urban centres, where services such as grid connections, mobile coverage and internet are readily available, than those in Afar. However, within the sites themselves, there are only modest differences. One site in each of Oromiya and Tigray has electricity access in the kebele centre, though not the majority of the kebele. There is no grid connection in the other four sites. Roads within each kebele are very limited, reaching only parts of the kebele and kebele administrations lack any form of

transportation, with the partial exception of Enda Mariam kebele, where there is a broken motorbike. Mobile coverage is patchy and inconsistent everywhere.

Table 1 – Availability of basic infrastructure in the research sites

	Afar Ad-kelu	Dabala	Oromiya Halelo Cerri	Shamo Gado	Tigray Enda Mariam	Tsehafti
Electricity access	No	No	No	Limited, excludes kebele centre	No	Yes, in kebele centre
Computer	No	No	No	No	No	One in kebele office
Transport	No	No	No	No	Motorbike (broken)	No
Mobile network	Unreliable in a few spots	Unreliable service in some places	No	Yes, but unreliable	Yes, but unreliable	In two of four kushet

There are clearer differences in staffing and staff qualifications (see Table 2). Development agents are responsible for agricultural policies, including the PSNP. However, all officials sit on PSNP committees and thereby contribute to implementation. In terms of staffing and qualifications, Oromiya and Tigray are comparable, with elected officials reaching at least an intermediate level of secondary education, while employees all have post-secondary qualifications. Afar falls short, with elected officials lacking any formal education, while kebele employees are both short on numbers and inferior in qualifications compared to Oromiya and Tigray. Afar is clearly at a disadvantage in terms of the resources available to the kebele administration compared to Oromiya and Tigray. However, this resource constraint is further exacerbated by other aspects of infrastructural power, namely intra-state and state–society relations.

The operation of the sub-kebele administrative structures is unsurprisingly imperfect everywhere. However, the TPLF – building on a long history of centralised state control, the absence of significant neo-customary authorities and the legacy of close relations between the front and the peasantry during the armed struggle – comes closest to this 'ideal' in Tigray. The development team structure in Tigray provides a formidable basis for service delivery, a means of mobilising the population for developmental activities and a strong normative steer as to what it means to be a good citizen in the EPRDF's Ethiopia. The analysis therefore begins with Tigray, before turning to Oromiya and Afar to highlight marked differences.

Table 2: Qualifications of kebele officials in study sites

	Afar Ad-kelu	Dabala	Oromiya Halelo Cerri	Shamo Gado	Tigray Enda Mariam	Tsehafti
Chair	None	None	11th grade	9th grade	10th grade	7th grade
Deputy	None	None	7th grade	Diploma	N/A	N/A
Manager	10th grade	Diploma	TVET	UG degree	Studying towards UG degree	UG degree
DA1	None	Diploma	UG degree	UG degree	UG degree	TVET
DA2	N/A	Diploma	Studying towards UG degree	UG degree	UG degree	TVET
DA3	N/A	N/A	Diploma	Diploma	UG degree	TVET
DA4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	UG degree	N/A
HEW1	7th grade	Diploma	Diploma	Diploma	Diploma	TVET
HEW2	10th grade	10th grade	Diploma	N/A	Diploma	TVET
HEW3	10th grade	8th grade	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Social worker	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	UG degree	N/A

In the two Tigray sites, the system of kushet, development teams and one-to-fives was well established and working fairly effectively. Team meetings were held regularly and well attended. The one-to-fives are expected to meet weekly to discuss activities and plans, as well as messages passed down from higher levels, while the development team leaders should meet fortnightly. In principle, attendance is monitored and compulsory. While this undoubtedly varies in practice, numerous respondents in Tsehafti kebele noted that failure to participate in one-to-fives results in denial of government services and material penalties, including deductions from PSNP transfers:

> 'If members are not attending meetings and not participating in activities by development teams and networks, they will be punished by deducting from the PSNP support and emergency relief they get from the government'.[6]

---

[6] Interview respondent THF5.

Respondents nonetheless admitted that the development team structures were less effective in remote parts of the kebele, where administrative oversight was more limited. Moreover, male development teams were more effective than the female ones, with attendance and enthusiasm among women dropping over time. The main reasons noted were that women struggled to combine one-to-fives with domestic responsibilities and that the focus of women's teams on a consistent set of health extension packages over many years had resulted in a loss of interest.

Providing guidance to this party-state structure, annual performance targets are cascaded down through tiers of party-state administration for state officials and sub-kebele structures and progress is regularly evaluated through *gim gema*. Respondents emphasised that *gim gema* is taken very seriously, with criticism of an official's performance seen as a great source of embarrassment. The response of one kushet leader was typical:

> 'Being severely criticised in *gim gema* in the community is considered as disgrace or disrespecting the community who elects you. Leaders who are severely criticised must either resign or the community will dismiss them'.[7]

These evaluations are used to rank performance of administrations and officials regionally and locally, as well as to allocate promotions, training opportunities and, sometimes, modest material rewards. The result is that, in Tigray, the party-state certainly meets Mann's definition of infrastructural power in terms of the state's ability to 'penetrate civil society' (Mann 1984: 189). In the two sites, the party-state has not merely penetrated civil society, but subsumed it, with no truly independent societal organisation present.

In Oromiya, the same structures have been unable to establish the tight control and oversight evident in Tigray. Beneath the kebele, kushet administrations were established in both sites. While this is functioning in Shamo Gado, kebele officials in Halelo Cerri readily admit that the kushet only ever existed on paper.[8] Likewise, while development teams and one-to-fives have been established, their performance is highly variable and well below that in Tigray. As one official in Kuyyu wereda admitted, 'it cannot be said that it [the development team structure] is active and is doing well, it is more theoretical'.[9] Some development team leaders and members reported that they had not had any meetings for at least a year.[10] Indeed, development teams and one-to-fives are increasingly seen as voluntary,

> 'Nothing happens to anyone who does not follow the messages that come from one-to-five groups. If you like you apply it, if you don't like you can leave it. It is voluntary'.[11]

---

[7] Interview respondent THZ1.
[8] Interview respondent OKK6.
[9] Interview respondent OMW5.
[10] Interview respondents OMF1.
[11] Interview respondent OKI1.

Several respondents noted a reduction in the functioning of development teams as a result of the Oromo protests in the years prior to fieldwork.[12] However, others argue that the structures were never really effective. For example, one male focus group respondent reported that:

> 'We know we are in the one-to-five team but we never had a meeting ... the one-to-five is just there in name but not active'[13]

Oromiya state officials repeatedly highlighted the importance of development teams and the limitations presented by their current dysfunction. As the development agent in Halelo Cerri put it, 'All kebele administration related works and also community development work is done using these arrangements'.[14] Consequently, the regional government's view is that:

> 'we must rebuild them … they are essential for everything. Before we just assumed that things worked by themselves, but when these [development teams] disappear you realise how important they are'.[15]

Performance targets are cascaded down from national plans to local state officials in Oromiya also. In theory, these performance assessments are the basis for allocating promotions and training opportunities, as in Tigray. However, several respondents were sceptical about this, suggesting that personal ties were actually more influential.[16] Furthermore, kebele officials in Oromiya were unanimous that the regularity of performance evaluations and the pressure to meet performance targets had also declined. Most respondents noted that evaluation was strong up to the 2015 elections and the end of the national development plan in 2015, falling away afterwards as the protests spread.[17] Where evaluations do take place, several kebele officials feel that they are too rushed to be meaningful, 'They are just doing it to say that there has been *gim gema*' not to conduct a serious evaluation.[18] Beneath the kebele, performance assessment is more sporadic still, with dysfunctional development teams no longer assessed. At the individual level, the population has not been evaluated as model households or farmers since 2012-13.[19] The result is that party-state infrastructural power in Oromiya – in terms of the capacity to mobilise the population, disseminate information, draw on local knowledge and provide a normative model of exemplary behaviour – is severely curtailed.

---

[12] Interview respondents OMF1, OMZ1.
[13] Interview respondent OMF2.
[14] Interview respondent OMK1.
[15] Interview respondent OR1.
[16] Interview respondent OMK1.
[17] Interview respondents OMK1, OKK6.
[18] Interview respondent OMK4.
[19] Interview respondent OMK4, OKK6.

The Afar sites provide a further contrast. The kebele in each Afar site is divided into kushet.[20] However, rather than a de facto additional tier of the state, as in Tigray, the kushet is a forum in which a kushet leader engages with powerful clan leaders regarding the administration of the area. As one kushet leader noted,

> 'We don't have formal government recognised structure to administer this makafta [kushet]. We use the customary laws to lead our people and manage the resources of the land. The clan leaders are the key people who jointly govern the community with me'.[21]

The development team structure, meanwhile, only exists on paper and most respondents in the communities had never even heard of them. The party-state in Afar has never had the infrastructural power to organise the local population or to control household affairs to this degree. Efforts at establishing performance evaluations have likewise been limited. The regional food security office admitted that,

> 'Our office is a coordination office, we have no mandate to punish them [wereda officials]. We recommend, but the implementation is up to them'.[22]

Similarly, while the wereda do set targets for kebele officials, there is little meaningful evaluation and no pressure or reward to raise performance in either site.[23] As reported in Gala'elu,

> 'There are no penalties for failing to meet our target. Nobody asks about our achievement or failure. We do as much as we can perform and leave the rest of the work'.[24]

In the two Afar sites, as across the region, the clan is central to local governance. Party-state structures, established more recently than the clan, compensate for their limited capacity and legitimacy by building on the comparatively stronger and more legitimate clan. In Ad-kelu, the party-state structure is fused with the clan, with dominant clan leaders taking key positions in the local party-state. In Dabal kebele, clan leaders do not have formal kebele positions, but are widely acknowledged as the key authority figures and have party roles at zonal and regional level.[25] Moreover, kebele officials are subordinate members of the same clans and defer decision making to clan leaders in recognition of their authority in the local community. As one kebele official acknowledged,

---

[20] An existing term for a local meeting place, makafta, has been taken as the name of these sub-kebele units.
[21] Interview respondent AAZ1
[22] Interview respondent AR1.
[23] Interview respondent AAK1.
[24] Interview respondent AGK1.
[25] Interview respondent AGC1.

'The two systems are complementary to each other. To make a state run
without customary laws is like to ask a person walk with only one foot'.[26]

Clan leaders themselves went further:

'I don't think the state will be able to function on its own without our support.
We have supported them in a lot of ways as the community has much trust
in us and want to be served by us too'.[27]

In sum, it is clear that the three regions present sharply contrasting relations between
party, state and society, with important implications for party-state infrastructural
power. Moreover, strong similarities between the two research sites in each of the
three regions suggest that these patterns go beyond the isolated experience of any
one kebele. In Tigray, the party-state has effectively penetrated society, establishing
close control down to the household level and embedding performance evaluation that
provides top-down control and a strong normative steer as to desired behaviour of
community residents. The result is a comparatively high degree of party-state
infrastructural power. The same strategy has been pursued in the Oromo sites, with
some success. However, party-state infrastructural power was more limited, even prior
to the last few years, with many acquiescing to the initiatives of a coercive state,
despite the illegitimacy of the local party-state. The unrest of recent years has meant
a collapse in this infrastructural power. Finally, the Afar sites represent a quite different
configuration, with a weak party-state founded on and working through clan structures.
Here, party-state infrastructural power is severely constrained, and forced to depend
upon clan authorities to achieve developmental and political objectives.

State infrastructural power and the local politics of distributing the PSNP

The analysis now examines how this variation in party-state infrastructural
power influences PSNP distribution, through household targeting and
graduation. The discussion begins by examining variation in the configuration
of actors involved in PSNP implementation across the research sites. The
section then goes on to highlight two main findings. First, that variation in party-
state infrastructural power shapes how the state addresses the informational
challenge presented by targeting. Second, party-state infrastructural power, in
the form of performance evaluations, is used to impose graduation from the
PSNP in line with the national focus on demonstrating developmental progress,
but ignoring the reality of local food insecurity.

Party-state infrastructural power and PSNP administration

PSNP implementation at the kebele level, according to programme guidelines, is to be
carried out by three committees, with the development agents taking particular
responsibility, and overseen by the kebele cabinet. The Kebele Food Security

---

[26] Interview respondent AGK1.
[27] Interview respondent AGC1.

Taskforce is responsible for the overall operation of the programme and should comprise the kebele chair and manager, the development agents, health extension workers, school teacher and representatives of women's and youth association (MoA 2014b: 18-8). The Community Food Security Taskforce operates at the kushet level and is responsible for household targeting, identification of graduates from the programme and general monitoring of implementation. This Community Taskforce is expected to have broad representation from the community, including elected representatives of women, men, youth and elderly, as well as a representative of the kebele taskforce, a development agent and health extension worker (MoA 2014b: 18-6). Finally, the Kebele Appeals Committee is responsible for hearing and adjudicating complaints about programme implementation. The appeals committee is required to have no overlap in membership with the other committees and should comprise a member of the kebele council, a development agent, health extension worker and male and female elders (MoA 2014b: 18-9).

The rationale underpinning this structure is to ensure breadth of participation, to ensure that all community groups can feed into selection, and to divide responsibilities between committees to limit the possibility of any one group manipulating the programme to their own advantage. Nonetheless, programme guidelines ignore the power relations between the party-state and society, and pay only limited attention to gender relations, limiting their scope to ensuring that women are represented on committees.

PSNP committees in the research sites adhere to programme guidelines to varying degrees (Table 3). In every committee there is some female representation, albeit less than 50 percent of committee members. For the most part, the committees in Tigray are properly constituted, while there are more significant problems in the two Oromo cases and, to a degree, those in Afar. In Oromiya, committees operate, if at all, at the beginning of a PSNP phase, rather than playing a continuous role in programme administration. According to the chair of the Shamo Gado kebele, the kebele food security taskforce's role is 'nominal. Their work is covered by DAs'.[28] Meanwhile, a selection committee comprising the kebele cabinet and women's league representative is formed every five years to conduct selection and then disbanded afterwards. In Halelo Cerri, there has never been a Community Food Security Taskforce, with the Kebele Food Security Taskforce conducting selection instead.[29] Moreover, the membership of the kebele appeals committee in Halelo Cerri is a subset of the membership of the kebele taskforce, preventing any possibility of independent appeals, as envisaged in programme guidelines. Overlap between committee membership and independence of the appeals process also arises as an issue in the Afar sites. However, here the problem may not be so much a failure to follow guidelines, but the shortage of kebele staff. Each committee requires the membership of development agents and health extension workers. Where the kebele

---

[28] Interview respondent OMK3.
[29] Interview respondents OKK3, OKK6.

Table 3: Constitution of PSNP committees and access to PSNP training in the study sites

| | Afar | | Oromiya | | Tigray | |
	Ad-kelu	Dabala	Halelo Cerri	Shamo Gado	Enda Mariam	Tsehafti
KFSTF	Mostly correct, but no elders' representative and no HEW.	Correct	Mostly correct, but no DA or elders' representative.	Mostly correct when it was operational, but no HEW. Dysfunctional for last four years.	Correct	Correct
CFSTF	Mostly correct, but no DA or HEW.	Mostly correct, but no DA.	Incorrect: No CFSTF has been formed.	Incorrect: Only operated briefly at beginning of programme.	Mostly correct, but no HEW.	Mostly correct, but no DA or HEW.
KAC	Mostly correct, but missing a DA.	Incorrect: two individuals overlap with KFSTF and missing a DA.	Incorrect: Complete overlap with KFSTF.	Correct	Mostly correct, but missing a HEW.	Mostly correct, but missing a DA and HEW.
Training	None	Chair once	Annual training	Annual training	Annual training	Annual training

is understaffed, those who are in place have to fill in across multiple committees, undermining the independence of the committees.

The capacity of these structures to administer the PSNP is also shaped by the training that staff receive, on what is a large and complex programme. Here again, there is a clear difference between the two highland regions – where the kebele chair, manager and development agents receive annual trainings – and Afar, where the chair of Dabal kebele is the only official across two sites who has ever received PSNP training.

These committees are by no means the only actors involved in distributing the PSNP, however. PSNP distribution is adapted to local contexts and the specific configuration of party-state–society relations discussed above. Depending on the region, party structures, development teams, one-to-five networks and clans, all entirely absent from implementation guidelines, actually constitute key actors in implementation.

As noted above, the state is fused with party structures, with the result that the party inevitably plays a role in implementation also. Across the sites, the vast majority of the members of the kebele food security taskforce – not just the kebele chair and deputy, but also the headteacher and extension agents – are local party leaders. Moreover, the positions of women and youth representatives on the taskforce are routinely allocated to the heads of the party-affiliated women's and youth leagues in all the research sites. The role of the development teams – also party political structures – varies between sites, depending on their effectiveness. In Tigray, development teams are centrally involved in all aspects of the programme, from targeting to graduation to organisation of public works. This is not just limited to the particular kebele studied by the project, but respondents at federal, regional and wereda level all acknowledged the importance of the development teams. As noted by the Tigray regional food security office, the development teams are,

> '… not only for the PSNP but for any development activity ... [development teams] are in every wereda, every kushet, both women and men'.[30]

In Tigray, elected community representatives for men, women and youth required in the community taskforce are, in practice, leaders of development teams, who are included in the committee 'by default'.[31] As a result, the size of the taskforce varies, depending on the number of development teams in the kushet. While the programme guidelines aim to ensure breadth of participation in the PSNP committees, the reality in Tigray is that virtually all committee positions are taken by individuals incorporated in various ways into hierarchical party-state structures.

In Oromiya, development teams have also been central to PSNP implementation, playing a key role in targeting, graduation and organisation of public works. However, development team leaders were never integrated into what are dysfunctional

---

[30] Interview respondent TR1.
[31] Interview respondents THZ1, THZ2.

community taskforces in Oromiya, as in Tigray, but were expected to work with these committees. The marked deterioration of the development teams in Oromiya raises questions about their future role in the programme.

In Afar, development teams have never been functional and consequently play no role in the PSNP, highlighting an important gap in the infrastructural power of the party-state. To fill the gap, the party-state draws on the clan for PSNP implementation, replicating the general approach to governance described above. Clan and lineage leaders are called on to play key roles in the selection of participants and managing appeals, in particular.

Mobilising state infrastructural power to target the PSNP

Variation in the party-state and its relationship with society emerges as a central source of variation in the selection of households for inclusion in the PSNP. On receiving a quota of PSNP places from the federal government, wereda then allocate PSNP places to the kebele under their authority, based on past experience of food insecurity and recent needs. The Kebele Food Security Taskforce in turn distributes PSNP places to the Community Food Security Taskforces at the kushet level. The Community Food Security Taskforce then selects households for inclusion in the programme, based on the programme guidelines, which establish basic criteria. Households should be community members that have faced food shortages of at least three months every year for three years or who have faced a severe recent loss of productive assets (MoA 2014b: 3-7). Preference is given to vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households, those with chronic illness, elderly caring for orphans and poor pregnant and lactating women. These criteria are, however, only a guide, with wereda food security offices able to adapt criteria to local settings.

The task facing the community food security taskforce is significant. In the 1990s, community-based targeting of food aid was conducted at the kebele level. However, following reviews of procedures, new targeting guidelines concluded that kebele were, 'too large to carry out identification of beneficiaries', and so 'smaller community groups such as Kushet … are best placed to select beneficiaries', due to the close social ties between members of these communities (DPPC 2000: 37). While numbers are more manageable at kushet level, a taskforce of about 10-12 people is still expected to classify the income and assets of the entire population of their kushet, which in the study sites varies between 1,000 and 3,000 people. As such, these committees still face a significant challenge in generating information with which to make the selection.

In Tigray, this informational challenge is resolved by mobilising the infrastructural power of the party-state, with the development teams and one-to-fives centrally involved in targeting.[32] The development teams are used, since 'they know each

---

[32] The claim that people know the wealth of their neighbours is open to question. The issue is resolved, in the sense that it provides a mechanism by which the programme can function and the approach enjoys considerable local legitimacy.

other's livelihood condition'.[33] The size of kushet makes it very difficult for a community taskforce to assess the assets and relative poverty of every household. The development teams therefore offer the advantage of mobilising local knowledge for household selection. In some instances, development team leaders provide the committee with a list of those most in need from their teams and the taskforce reconciles these lists. In some cases in both sites, however, taskforce members and development team leaders reported that the quota allocated to the kushet is further sub-divided between development teams and even one-to-fives with PSNP places allocated between members of these groups.[34] One taskforce member reported,

> 'After the responsibilities and quotas are distributed to development teams by kushet clusters, the quotas are again disseminated to [one-to-five] network leaders for targeting the poorest in their networks'.[35]

In Tigray, male and female development teams are involved in selection, producing separate lists that are combined by the committee. However, some respondents admit that, '… women development teams are passive. It is the males who most often participate in this process'.[36]

Respondents in Oromiya at all levels, from the region to wereda and kebele, similarly emphasised the importance of the development teams for targeting. As noted by the Merti wereda agriculture officer,

> 'the process of beneficiary selection starts at the one-to-five team level ... they [development teams] are the sources for the beneficiary section process'.[37]

The stated rationale is that these structures provide detailed local knowledge, to which the formal structures of the state do not have access. According to the development agent in Halelo Cerri, 'as we cannot differentiate the poor from the rich, the process of screening has been conducted by them [development teams]'.[38] As in Tigray, exact practices vary between kushet. In some cases, development team leaders provide recommendations to the taskforce,[39] while in others a quota is allocated to each development team and one-to-five.[40] The collapse of development teams in Oromiya therefore raises questions about PSNP implementation going forward. It is unclear whether it would be possible at present to mobilise development teams to conduct another wealth ranking exercise, given their current dysfunction.

---

[33] Interview respondent TAW3
[34] Interview respondents TAZ4, THZ6.
[35] Interview respondent TAZ4.
[36] Interview respondent THZ6.
[37] Interview respondent OMW4.
[38] Interview respondent OKK4.
[39] Interview respondents OKK3, OKZ1.
[40] Interview respondent OKK4.

Selection in Oromiya is also gendered. In Tigray, male and female development teams should be involved in the selection process, although, as noted, male teams are more active. In Oromiya, however, selection is conducted by male teams alone.[41] This may be partly related to the gendered nature of the agricultural extension system, with agricultural activities – including the PSNP – falling within the remit of male development teams. In theory, in Oromiya, female-headed households should be included in the men's (agriculture-focused), as well as women's (health-focused), development teams. Consequently, even if the selection process is dominated by men, the development teams would include all households, whether female- or male-headed. However, in reality, participation of female-headed households in male teams is very limited, not least as a result of the burden or productive and reproductive responsibilities that they face:

> 'They [women] are caught up by domestic chores and most of them are not that interested so the selection is done by the male development team'.[42]

The challenge regarding how to generate sufficiently detailed (and ideally accurate) information with which to select participants is therefore addressed in Tigray and Oromiya by mobilising party-state infrastructural power through development teams and one-to-fives. In Afar, this option is not available and the informational challenge is tackled by working with the clan structure. In Dabal kebele, PSNP quotas are allocated to kushet, based on negotiation between state officials and clan leaders.[43] Moreover, the kushet leaders use the clan structures to substitute for the absence of development teams. Of particular importance is the *dhalla* (literally a compound in Afar-Af), a lineage-based group that live together and trace their origins back three to five generations. The leader is known as the *Dhalla Aba*. These dhalla are used to replicate the role of the one-to-fives in PSNP distribution, with wereda officials even referring to these as 'traditional one-to-fives', albeit that they lie outside the authority of the party-state:

> 'The only one-to-fives we use in implementation of PSNP are the traditional ones [*dhalla*] … So, in PSNP, we use the *dhalla* leaders to communicate with the beneficiaries living in one *dhalla* and the leaders are very helpful in this regard'.[44]

A local clan leader highlighted the importance of these dhalla in mobilising knowledge of the economic status of individuals and their role in allocating PSNP support:

> '*Dhalla aba* are the key players to provide specific information and economic status of each community member living in their makhafta … PSNP quotas within the *dhalla* are distributed by the *dhalla aba*'.[45]

---

[41] Interview respondents OMK1, OKK4, OKK6.
[42] Interview respondent OKZ1.
[43] Interview respondent AGC1.
[44] Interview respondent AGW2.
[45] Interview respondent AGC1.

In Ad-kelu, the kebele leadership are also leaders of the main clans in the area. Despite being conducted by a mixture of state and clan leaders, the targeting process and outcome is markedly different. Here, selection takes place through consultation between the kushet leader and other clan leaders.[46] Moreover, the wereda and kebele leadership claim to have completely misunderstood the rationale of the PSNP, with the result that they only selected able-bodied individuals capable of carrying out labour-intensive public works and there is no direct support in the wereda (see Figure 2), excluding many of the most vulnerable people. In the absence of oversight of programme implementation or pressure for performance from above, there has as yet been no attempt to correct this. The kebele administration insisted that they followed the instruction they received from the wereda and their belief that this is the design of the PSNP nationwide.[47] Yet, other kebele officials are well aware that this selection process was incorrect, with the health extension worker particularly vociferous in his criticism of the kebele administration.[48] While the original error might plausibly have been made out of ignorance, no action has been taken to address it, despite acknowledgement of the problem.

The Afar cases illustrate not only the limits of party-state infrastructural power in the region, but also the dangers of devolving responsibility to clan structures, over which the state has little control. In Gala'elu, where clan leaders distribute PSNP places through the dhalla, focus groups and individual interviews suggest that both PSNP participants and those excluded have high regard for clan leaders and consider the process to be fair, given the limited resources available.[49] In contrast, the process was opaque in Ab'ala, conducted by kebele/clan and kushet leaders, with little public involvement. Indeed, respondents were largely unaware what the selection process was and why they were included or not. [50]

In summary, then, the case studies highlight sharply contrasting ways in which the local state has sought to address the informational challenge associated with targeting, depending on the particular history of party-state expansion and infrastructural power in that location. Where the EPRDF's project of encadrement has proceeded furthest – in Tigray – the development team and one-to-five networks are mobilised to this end. The aim of the local state has been to create a similar system in Oromiya. The party-state has never been entirely successful here, however, and the collapse of party-state infrastructural power raises important questions for implementation of the PSNP and other services going forward. In Afar, in contrast, the local state must rely on the clan structure and its greater territorial reach to identify recipients of support. In doing so, the lack of state oversight of the clan structures brings particular risks.

---

[46] Interview respondent AAZ1.
[47] Interview respondent AAK2.
[48] Interview respondent AAK1.
[49] Interview respondents AGF2, AGF3, AGF4, AGF5.
[50] Interview respondents AAF1, AAF2, AAF3, AAF4.

Delivering 'progress' through graduation

In line with ruling party ideology and its focus on national development, the government has always conceived the PSNP as a means of promoting self-reliance as well as providing support. As such, mass graduation and the reduction of the number of food-insecure people requiring PSNP support has long been a key political objective (Lavers 2019). Party-state infrastructural power is also an important factor shaping graduation in practice. Of particular importance here is the relationship between levels of the state and the system of performance evaluations. This section focuses on Tigray and Oromiya, since concerns over programme implementation and the relevance of the livelihoods programme to pastoralist settings has meant that graduation has not yet been attempted in Afar, where the main priority for livelihoods is the ongoing villagisation programme (see Lavers, Mohammed et al. 2020).

In principle, graduation should be a bottom-up, evidence-based process using similar systems to that for targeting. According to programme guidelines,

> 'A household has graduated when, in the absence of receiving PSNP transfers, it can meet its food needs for all 12 months and is able to withstand modest shocks' (MoARD 2010: 21).

The community food security taskforce is expected to compare a number of proxy indicators, including livestock holdings, landholdings and education status to asset benchmarks 'to determine food security status' (MoARD 2010: 21). The federal government made large-scale graduation a central PSNP priority since its adoption in 2005. Progress with graduation was modest in the early phases of the programme, but a national target to graduate 80 percent of PSNP participants by 2015 focused attention on graduation (Lavers 2019). The result was the mobilisation of party-state infrastructural power in the pursuit of graduation, with federal graduation targets cascaded down as performance targets for state officials, as acknowledged by officials at all levels. A Tigray regional government respondent noted,

> 'They [local state officials] have the responsibility to support graduation. I am assessed also. It is the same for all regional, tabiya [kebele] and kushet staff'.[51]

The result was that leaders of kebele, kushet, development teams and even sometimes one-to-fives are set graduation targets and expected to produce annual lists of graduates.[52] Rather than an evidence-based assessment, the reality was a top-down process imposed through quotas, with officials held accountable for failure to meet graduation targets.

Respondents in wereda and kebele across the Tigray and Oromiya sites readily admitted that in the period 2010-15 people were forced to graduate, regardless of their

---

[51] Interview respondent TR1.
[52] Interview respondents TR1, THK3, THW2, TAK4, TAZ4, OKK4, OKZ1, OMF8.

readiness to do so. In Tigray, the regional quota was reduced to roughly half between 2010 and 2015, before being slightly increased in 2016, with a new phase of the PSNP. The result was that many participants were graduated in order to meet performance targets, but were subsequently brought back into the programme after 2015, given their inability to support themselves or were instead shifted to receipt of emergency assistance.[53] As one official in Ahferom wereda admitted,

> 'Whether participants reach the minimum requirements for graduation or not, it is a must to graduate from the programme in its fifth year, since that is the end of the programme … There are even others who were part of PSNP3 [2010-15] and currently not part of PSNP4 [2015-20], though they are still chronically food insecure'.[54]

Similar pressures were evident in Oromiya. While Oromiya made little progress with graduation in the early years, from 2014 the regional administration came under strong pressure from the federal government. As one regional official highlighted, 'We frequently get questions from the federal level – where is your progress on graduation?'[55] The result was that large-scale graduation was enforced through quotas issued to lower-level officials. As the development agent in Shamo Gado kebele noted,

> 'Every year we are asked to make targets of graduation. Even though we know that people are less likely to improve and graduate out of the support, we give the wereda agriculture bureau a certain number because it is a must to make targets'.[56]

Pressure for graduation was particularly intense in Merti wereda. For reasons that are not entirely clear, the federal government sharply reduced the wereda's PSNP allocation. The response of the wereda agricultural bureau was typical of many:

> 'We graduated 60 percent of the beneficiaries by 2006 [Ethiopian Calendar, 2014 in Gregorian Calendar], because the government and higher officials of the programme forced us … we just selected 60 per-cent of our beneficiaries without considering their status … most of the graduates were not self-sufficient'.[57]

Kebele officials in Merti wereda were well aware that large-scale, arbitrary graduation posed significant risks to vulnerable households. Consequently, rather than remove households from the programme entirely, the decision was made to reduce the transfers provided to each household, ensuring that most households continued to get something. According to the development agent,

---

[53] Interview respondent TAK4, THW2, THK3, THZ2.
[54] Interview respondent TAW3.
[55] Interview respondent OR1.
[56] Interview respondent OMK1.
[57] Interview respondent OMW4.

'rather than excluding households, we used a strategy of reducing the number of beneficiary individuals from each household … If we exclude a household, they will be in danger. So, we managed the number in such a way'.[58]

The result is that the imposition of graduation targets not only creates an inaccurate perception of progress, but also undermines the narrowly targeted rationale of the programme. Narrow targeting is the result of government's concerns about the dangers of welfare dependency and the donor focus on poverty reduction (Lavers 2019). However, focusing resources on the poorest is also a key requirement of the PSNP's graduation model. The result was mass graduation driven primarily by a federal target, intended to maintain the perception of progress towards food security and national development. It is impossible to say for sure how many people were truly self-sufficient at this time, but respondents suggest that it was a relatively small proportion of graduates. In most cases, in both Oromiya and Tigray, graduation was staged to meet performance targets.

PSNP4 (2015-20) brought about a change in approach. Rather than ending the PSNP through mass graduation, the PSNP is expected to maintain a steady caseload of 8-10 million people, with new participants enrolled as others graduate out. This does not, however, mean that pressure for graduation has disappeared. The federal government has again set a target of 80 percent graduation as a contingency, should there be insufficient funding to continue the PSNP for a fifth phase and with a view to demonstrate progress in tackling food insecurity. The initial years of PSNP4 coincided with a particularly severe El Niño and food crisis that prevented graduation. Nonetheless, in 2018, pressure for graduation re-emerged. This is only likely to increase at the end of the five-year national development plan in 2020 and the government is keen to demonstrate its developmental performance.

Importantly, however, the political context has changed significantly since 2015, when the federal government was able to impose large-scale graduation through party-state infrastructural power. Political fragmentation since 2015 has resulted in greater regional autonomy, erosion of performance evaluation and, with it, decline in infrastructural power. As a result, many local governments are increasingly resistant to new demands. As an Oromiya regional government official highlighted,

'This year we have been set a target of 11,140 households for graduation, but there is no tangible progress … There is resistance from the wereda level. They say that the people are not ready, they need more time and we don't want to insist'.[59]

---

[58] Interview respondent OMK1.
[59] Interview respondent OR1.

A similar reaction was evident in Tigray, where respondents reported that they have been set annual targets of 10 percent graduation during PSNP4. In 2017-18, these targets were met in Enda Mariam kebele, though in Tsehafti, the kebele considered that no one had made sufficient progress to graduate and missed the target.

The arbitrary graduation of PSNP participants to create the perception of progress is perhaps the most problematic illustration of the tensions between the PSNP's protective role and its developmental ambitions. This graduation process depends on strong party-state infrastructural power and, particularly, the system of performance evaluation, which by which federal and regional government direct lower-level officials. The erosion of this system of performance evaluation in Oromiya, and growing regional autonomy across the country, raises questions as to whether the federal government will continue to be able to impose targets in such a way.

Conclusions

This paper examined the ways in which party politics and state infrastructural power shapes the distribution of social transfers in Ethiopia. The paper highlights several main findings. First, that long-run histories of state formation and more recent political party mobilisation have given rise to sharp variations in the infrastructural power of the fused party-state in different parts of Ethiopia, and this has important implications for service delivery, including PSNP distribution. In Tigray, where evaluations suggest that the programme is relatively effectively delivered (Berhane et al. 2015), party-state encadrement has subsumed civil society, exerting close control of the local population and using party-state structures to mobilise the population for the purposes of targeting. Comparison with other regions highlights the importance of these structures. In Oromiya, the long-run weakness and recent collapse of development teams and the party-state infrastructural power that they underpin raises questions about delivery of the PSNP and other services in the future. Meanwhile, in Afar, a severely limited party-state works through powerful clan structures, deferring significant authority over selection to clan leaders. Past evaluations in Afar show that targeting has been highly problematic as a result (Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2013). A common concern in the targeting literature is that involvement of political parties may lead to politicisation of distribution and the use of social transfers to secure party support. However, in Ethiopia, in a context in which the ruling party dominates formal politics and has been easily able to organise electoral victories, there is very little evidence of any such practices. Rather, relatively effective implementation actually relies upon the infrastructural power provided by a fused-party state. Moreover, when the ruling party is weak – as is the case in Oromiya in the midst of a political crisis – the collapse of party-state infrastructural power presents significant challenges for future implementation.

Second, the strength of party-state infrastructural power – in Oromiya up to 2015 and in Tigray to the present – has been used to impose federal targets for graduation through the system of performance evaluation. This pursuit of graduation has been used to maintain a narrative of 'progress', frequently disregarding the actual

circumstances of food-insecure households in the process. This highlights the more problematic side of high levels of party-state infrastructural power in Ethiopia and the top-down system of accountability on which it rests. As such, the study also raises questions about performance evaluation and how political leaders might best direct the activity of lower-level officials. The case study showed that, even where infrastructural power is high, the system of target setting and evaluation does not always lead to good outcomes. Yuen Yuen Ang (2016) draws a useful distinction here between the ability to *influence* the priorities of local officials and attempts to *control* their activities. In her work, she argues that governments should aim to influence priorities, since their lack of information and the need to be adaptive to local contexts mean that attempts at control are frequently counterproductive. The Ethiopian government's attempts to promote graduation can be seen as an attempt at control that has backfired. While the objective of improving food security is laudable, the attempt to assess this through graduation rates inevitably led to a narrow focus on the target rather than the outcome and, ultimately, contributed to the forced graduation of many food-insecure households.

These findings have potentially important implications for the study of the politics of social transfers in Africa. The first concerns the issue of targeting. There are many ethical and practical reasons why targeting of social transfers is problematic. However, the importance of state capacity is rarely considered in detail. This paper shows that targeting requires certain forms of state infrastructural power. Even in a country such as Ethiopia, which is widely considered to have high levels of state capacity and territorial reach, and where the PSNP is frequently praised for effective implementation, this study has shown that state infrastructural power varies markedly within the country, with important implications for PSNP distribution. Whether or not targeting is desirable or necessary, these findings raise important questions regarding the levels of state capacity required for effective implementation.

Second, recent years have seen growing in interest in research and policy circles in the idea of graduation (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux 2013). While the desire to raise household income and build self-sufficiency is positive, the Ethiopian case studies highlight the dangers of viewing graduation as an end in itself. In the government's push for national development, the persistence of food insecurity has become an inconvenient anomaly to the narrative of progress that must be addressed, through suppression if necessary. While specific in certain respects to the Ethiopian case, these challenges related to graduation highlight the limitations of the residualist approach to social protection that dominates current policy debates. The focus of many new social transfer programmes in Africa is limited to targeting the extreme poor, focusing on poverty reduction in order to *graduate from social protection*. This narrow conception of social protection is a far cry from a more expansive approach to social protection, which would seek to provide protection against risks and contingencies faced throughout the lifecycle. From such a perspective, the imperative of graduation loses meaning.

References

Ang, Y. Y. (2016). *How China Escaped the Poverty Trap*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Berhane, G., Hirvonen, K., Hoddinott, J., Kumar, N., Seyoum Taffesse, A., Yohannes, Y., Sabates-Wheeler, R., Strickland, A., Lind, J., Tefera, M. and Nishan, B. (2015). *The Implementation of the Productive Safety Nets Programme in the Ethiopian Highlands, 2014: Program Performance Report*. Washington, DC: IFPRI.

Centeno, M., Kohli, A. and Yashar, D. J. (2017). 'Unpacking states in the developing world: Capacity, performance and politics'. In: M. Centeno, A. Kohli and D. J. Yashar (eds.), *States in the Developing World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 363-379.

Clapham, C. (2002). 'Controlling space in Ethiopia'. In: W. James, D. L. Donham, E. Kurimoto and A. Triulzi (eds.), *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After*. London: James Currey, 9-32.

Clapham, C. (2009). 'Post-war Ethiopia: The trajectories of crisis'. *Review of African Political Economy*, 36: 181-192.

Coady, D., Grosh, M. and Hoddinott, J. (2004). *Targeting of Transfers in Developing Countries: Review of Lessons and Experience*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Cochrane, L. and Tamiru, Y. (2016). 'Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program: Power, Politics and Practice'. *Journal of International Development*, 28(5): 649-665.

Coll-Black, S., Gilligan, D. O., Hoddinott, J., Kumar, N., Taffesse, A. S. and Wiseman, W. (2012). 'Targeting food security interventions in Ethiopia: The Productive Safety Net Programme'. In: P. Dorosh and S. Rashid (eds.), *Food and Agriculture in Ethiopia: Progress and Policy Challenges*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Davison, W. (2016). 'In Ethiopia, anger over corruption and farmland development runs deep'. *The Guardian*, 18 January.

Dowden, R. (2012). 'Meles Zenawi interview excerpts: "Unlike all previous governments our writ runs in every village"' *African Arguments*. Available online from: http://africanarguments.org/2012/05/25/%E2%80%9Cunlike-all-previous-governments-our-writ-runs-in-every-village%E2%80%9D-excerpts-from-an-interview-with-meles-zenawi-%E2%80%93-by-richard-dowden/ (accessed 3 November 2014).

DPPC (2000). *National Food Aid Targeting Guidelines*. Addis Ababa: Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Commission.

George, A. L. and Bennett, A. (2004). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: London: MIT.

Human Rights Watch (2010). *"One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure": Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

Lavers, T. (2012). '"Land grab" as development strategy? The political economy of agricultural investment in Ethiopia'. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 39(1): 105-132.

Lavers, T. (2013). 'Food security and social protection in highland Ethiopia: Linking the Productive Safety Net to the land question'. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 51(3): 459-485.

Lavers, T. (2019). 'Social protection in an aspiring "developmental state": The political drivers of Ethiopia's PSNP'. *African Affairs*, 118(473): 646-671.

Lavers, T., Abrha, S. and Belay, M. (Forthcoming). 'The politics of distributing social transfers in Tigray, Ethiopia: Peak encadrement and party-state dominance'. ESID Working Paper. Manchester: Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre, The University of Manchester.

Lavers, T., Haile, D. and Mesfin, Y. (2020). 'The politics of distributing social transfers in Oromiya, Ethiopia: Encadrement, disengagement and the fluctuation of state infrastructural power'. ESID Working Paper 142. Manchester: Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre, The University of Manchester.

Lavers, T., Mohammed, D., and Wolde Selassie, B. (2020). 'The politics of distributing social transfers in Afar, Ethiopia: The intertwining of party, state and clan in the periphery'. ESID Working Paper 141. Manchester: Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre, The University of Manchester.

Mann, M. (1984). 'The autonomous power of the state: Its origins, mechanisms and results'. *European Journal of Sociology*, 25(02): 185-213.

Markakis, J. (2011). *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*. Oxford: James Currey.

Migdal, J. S. (2001). *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MoA (2014a). *Productive Safety Net Programme 4: Design Document*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Agriculture.

MoA (2014b). *Productive Safety Net Programme Phase IV: Programme Implementation Manual*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Agriculture.

MoARD (2010). *Productive Safety Net Programme: Programme Implementation Manual (Revised)*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD).

MoFA (2008). *Draft Policy Statement for the Sustainable Development of Pastoral and Agro Pastoral Areas of Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Federal Affairs.

MoI (2002). *Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Information.

Østebø, M. T., Cogburn, M. D. and Mandani, A. S. (2018). 'The silencing of political context in health research in Ethiopia: Why it should be a concern'. *Health Policy and Planning*, 33(2): 258-270.

Sabates-Wheeler, R. and Devereux, S. (2013). 'Sustainable graduation from social protection programmes'. *Development and Change*, 44(4): 911-938.

Sabates-Wheeler, R., Lind, J. and Hoddinott, J. (2013). 'Implementing social protection in agro-pastoralist and ptoralist areas: How local distribution structures moderate PSNP outcomes in Ethiopia'. *World Development*, 50: 1-12.

Vargas Hill, R. and Porter, C. (2013). 'PSNP/HABP formulation process: Vulnerability study to assist with assessment of potential caseload for next generation of PSNP & HABP'. Mimeo.

Wolde, T. (2002). 'Evading the revolutionary state: The Hor under the Derg'. In: W. James, D. L. Donham, E. Kurimoto, and A. Triulzi (eds.), *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After*. London: James Currey, 37-59.

Zewde, B. (1991). *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974*. London: James Currey.

Annex: List of respondents

Regional governments

AR1, Expert, Afar Disaster Prevention and Food Security Programme Coordination Office, Semera, 10July 2018

OR1, Head of PSNP, Bureau of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 31 January 2018, 11 June 2018, 6 June 2019

TR1, Food security team leader, Bureau of Agriculture, Mekele, 25 April 2018

Kuyyu wereda, Oromiya

OKK3, Female Kebele Food Security Taskforce member, Halelo Cerri kebele, 28 March 2018

OKK4, Development agent, Halelo Cerri kebele, 27 March and July 2018

OKK6, Manager, Halelo Cerri kebele, July 2018

OKZ1, Development team leader, Halelo Cerri kebele, 6 July 2018

OKI1, Male resident, Halelo Cerri kebele, 6 July 2018

Merti wereda, Oromiya

OMW4, Food security desk, Merti wereda, Abomsa, May 2018

OMW5, Health extension coordinator, Merti wereda, Abomsa, May 2018

OMK1, Development agent, Shamo Gado kebele, 9 May and 26 June 2018

OMK3, Chair and manager, Shamo Gado kebele, May 2018

OMK4, HEWs, Shamo Gado kebele, May and 20 June 2018

OMZ1, Male development team leaders, Shamo Gado kebele, 9 May 2018

OMF1, Focus group with male residents, Shamo Gado kebele, May 2018

OMF2, Focus group with male residents, Shamo Gado kebele, May 2018

OMF8, Focus group with male PSNP non-participants, Shamo Gado kebele, 10 May 2018

Ab'ala wereda, Afar

AAK1, Health Extension Worker, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018

AAK2, Kebele chairman and manager, Ad-Kelu kebele, May and June 2018

AAZ1, Makafta leader, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018

AAF1, Focus group discussion with female PSNP participants, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018

AAF2, Focus group discussion with male PSNP participants, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018

AAF3, Focus group discussion with male PSNP non-participants, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018

AAF4, fFocus group discussion with female PSNP non-participants, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018

Gala'elu wereda, Afar

AGW2, Expert, food security desk, Gala'elu wereda, March 2018

AGK1, Kebele chair and manager, Dabal kebele, March and June 2018

AGC1, Customary leaders, Dabal kebele, March and June 2018

AGF2, Focus group discussion with male PSNP participants, Dabal kebele, March 2018

AGF3, Focus group discussion with male PSNP non-participants, Dabal kebele, March 2018

AGF4, Focus group discussion with female PSNP participants, Dabal kebele, March 2018

AGF5, Focus group discussion with female PSNP non-participants, Dabal kebele, March 2018

Hintalo Wajirat wereda, Tigray

THW2, Food security coordinator, Hintalo Wajirat wereda, 4 May 2018

THK3, Development agents, Tsehafti kebele, 26 April 2018, 15 June 2018

THZ1, Kushet leader, Tsehafti kebele, 28 April 2018

THZ2, Female Community Food Security Taskforce member, Tsehafti kebele, 28 April 2018

THZ6, Male Community Food Security Taskforce member, Tsehafti kebele, 16 June 2018

THF5, Focus group with male PSNP non-participants, Tsehafti kebele, 27 April 2018

Ahferom wereda, Tigray

TAW3, Food security coordinator, Ahferom wereda, 19 March 2018

TAK4, Development agents, Ende Mariam kebele, 21 March 2018, 12 June 2018

TAZ4, Female Community Food Security Taskforce member, Ende Mariam kebele, 21 March 2018, 13 June 2018

The Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre

The Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre (ESID) aims to improve the use of governance research evidence in decision-making. Our key focus is on the role of state effectiveness and elite commitment in achieving inclusive development and social justice.

ESID is a partnership of highly reputed research and policy institutes based in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. The lead institution is the University of Manchester.

The other institutional partners are:

•   BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, BRAC University, Dhaka

•   Center for Democratic Development, Accra

•   Center for International Development, Harvard University, Boston

•   Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Malawi, Zomba

•   Graduate School of Development, Policy & Practice, Cape Town University

•   Institute for Economic Growth, Delhi

In addition to its institutional partners, ESID has established a network of leading research collaborators and policy/uptake experts.