



**MEDIA AS PUBLIC FORUM: AN INVESTIGATION OF
MESTAWET PROGRAM PRODUCED BY AMHARA
TELEVISION.**

DEREJE MOGES

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND
COMMUNICATION**

**PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN JOURNALISM AND
COMMUNICATION**

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

JUNE, 2012

Addis Ababa University
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Dereje Moges entitled: Media as Public Forum: An Investigation of *Mestawet* program produced by the *Amhara* Television and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in journalism and communication complies with the regulations of the university and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the examining committee

Examiner_____sig._____Date_____

—

Examiner_____sig._____Date_____

Advisor_____sig._____Date_____

Chair of department or Graduate Coordinator

Media as Public Forum: An Investigation of *Mestawet* program produced by the Amhara Television.

Dereje Moges

Addis Ababa University, 2012

Abstract

This study was concerned with investigating the nature of discourse and the way of public participation in the *mestawet* program. This was through an extensive study of relevant literature and the implementation of specific research methodology. The latter was carried out through a qualitative study using individual in-depth interviews with the manager, editors and forum moderators, Focus Group Discussion with journalists, and Analysis of Sample Broadcasts. This research produced a number of key findings. The study found that *mestawet* is an example of how broadcast media such as Television can be a forum of citizen engagement. A range of public issues were discussed in the program, from civil service process of government sectors, corrupt practice, lack of adequate urban infrastructure and inadequacy of staff in the municipality. The study also shows that *mestawet* has a power of mediating the public and the officials. However, it was found that there were a lot of factors that affect the flow of diversified views during the discussion. This study also revealed that the continuity and follow up activity of *mestawet* program is not addressed well.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the support of many people. I wish to express my gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Negeri Lencho, who was abundantly helpful and offered invaluable assistance, support and guidance as well as understanding and patience throughout my research work.

I would like to express my love and gratitude to my beloved families for their understanding and endless love, through the duration of the studies.

Special thanks also go to all my graduate friends, especially Berket, Deressa, Muez, Tilahun and Wellelaw for sharing literature and invaluable assistance.

Table of Contents

Contents	Page
List of Acronyms	v
Definition of terms -	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	3
1.3 Objectives of the Study.....	7
1.3.1 General Objective	7
1.3.2 Specific objectives	7
1.4. Research Questions.....	7
1.5. Significance of the Study	8
1.6 Scope of the Study	8
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1 The Concept of Public Forum.....	9
2.2. Media and Good Governance	15
2.3 Theoretical Framework.....	18
2.3.1. Deliberative Democracy Theory.....	18
2.3.2 Public Sphere Theory.....	27
2.3.3 Participatory Communication Theory.....	31
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	
3.1. The Research Design	34

3.2. Data Collection Methods and Sampling	34
3.2.1. Data collection tools	35
3.2.2. Secondary Source of Data	37
3.3. Analyzing the Data	37

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

4.1. An overview of <i>mestawet</i> program	39
4.1.1. Pre-event planning	40
4.1.2. During the forum.....	43
4.1.3. Post forum.....	46
4.2. Effectiveness of the <i>mestawet</i> program	48
4.2.1. Inclusiveness	48
4.2.2. Deliberation.....	53
4.2.3. Influence	59

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion	61
5.2 Recommendations	64

References

Appendix A, Interview questions for Manager and Editors.

Appendix B, Questions for journalists (Focus Group Discussion)

Appendix C, Questions for forum moderators

Appendix D, Parameters for the content analysis of sample broadcasts.

Appendix E, pictures from the discussion forum

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation.
AMMA	Amhara Mass Media Agency
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
DFID	Department for International Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GFMD	Global Forum for Media Development
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Definition of Local terms

Amhara Region	Amhara (Amharic: ‘አማራ’) is one of the nine regions of Ethiopia, containing the homeland of the Amhara people. Previously known as Region 3, its capital is Bahir Dar.
Bahir Dar	Amharic: ባሕር ዳር "sea shore"- is a city in north western Ethiopia. It is the capital of the Amhara Region.
Gondar	Gondar (Ge'ez: ጎንደር <i>Gōnder</i> , older ጎንደር <i>G^wandar</i> , modern pronunciation <i>G^wender</i>) is a city and separate woreda in Ethiopia, which was once the old imperial capital and capital of the historic Begemder Province. Located in the Semien Gondar Zone of the Amhara Region, Gondar is north of Tana Lake on the Lesser Angereb River and southwest of the Simien Mountains.
Mestawet- produced by meaning of state	Mestwet is the name of public discussion program which is Amhara Television. It is an Amharic word which has equivalent the word 'mirror' in English. It implies the aim of the program that the role of media for transparency and good governance.

Weldiya

Weldiya (also spelled Woldia or Woldiya) is a hillside market town, capital of the Semien Wollo Zone, and woreda in northern Ethiopia.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The idea of public discourse as a cornerstone of democracy is as old as the idea of democracy itself. In the fourth century BC, the orator and statesman Pericles recognized discussion amongst the citizens of the polis as an “indispensable preliminary” to political action (Thucydides in Ravich and Thernstrom 1992, p.3). Other political thinkers, like Socrates, Aristotle, Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, amongst many others, have shared and advocated similar understandings. Central in elaborations on civic discourse and democracy are typically notions like “informed and legitimate decision-making”, cultivation of a “deliberative political culture”, “consensus building”, “free speech” and “Enlightenment” (Ibid.).

In this regard, media have universally positive effects on the development of participatory democracy and good governance. This is also a key factor for the assurance of sustainable development in a country. As stated by UNESCO (2005, p.12), a World Bank study for the 1996-2002 period revealed that “a very high correlation between good governance and key development outcomes.” Furthermore, Transparency International’s annual corruption index affirms the perception that honest government has a beneficial effect on national wealth.

Since mass media are a major force for the improvement of the quality of government, citizen participation through media with the concept of “public sphere” is also essential. It gives a discussion and mediation arena for the public in reaching out and monitoring decisions. UNESCO (2005,p.7) manual clearly noted that “Independent, free and pluralistic media have a crucial role to play in the good governance of democratic societies, by ensuring transparency and accountability, promoting participation and the rule of law, and contributing to the fight against poverty.’’

Thus, active citizenship has an advantage of making good the legitimacy gap affecting the traditional political elites and leads to participatory democracy. It also encourages the engagement of citizen in the holistic developmental activity of a nation.

Ethiopia is currently following a road to developmental state. The country is committed to achieve her vision by eradicating poverty. In this regard, the development of democracy with public participation is an engine for enforcing the development processes through transparency and accountability. As country’s National policy of democracy building (1994) clearly states, to develop the democratic participation of citizens the role of media is vital. In this regard, media organizations must facilitate discussion forums in which the public can debate on different issues.

Nowadays in different countries, the media are actively involved in the process of convening and encouraging deliberative forums. The Cincinnati Enquirer, for example, has helped sponsor “Neighbor to Neighbor” forums in Cincinnati, Ohio, and the surrounding area to discuss racial tensions. It also has published in the newspaper a summary of each neighborhood’s discussion. PBS sponsors the annual television

program “A Public Voice,” which integrates recordings of actual forums with discussion and commentary by journalists, officeholders, and other prominent public figures. In this case, the deliberation is both mediated and face-to-face. The primary deliberation happens among citizens meeting together, but the program plays a central role in bringing a larger public into contact with the actual deliberative forums. In the process, aspects of the forum are reported on, edited, or adapted to fit media constraints such as space and time limitations (Davidson 2002).

Similarly, in the broadest sense, the media convey the information and opinions the public uses to make informed choices. Martin Linsky (1998, p.65) says “the press is the vehicle for much of the discussion that now takes place around public issues”.

While stressing the role of media in the building of public forum for citizen participation, it is important asking the role of Ethiopian media in facilitating public sphere for the face-to face discussion among the public and authority.

In this regard, this study investigated a weekly TV program, *Mestawot*, produced by Amhara Television. This program mainly focuses on town hall discussion among the people and government officials.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Citizens have the right to know the policies and activities of their government. In a well-functioning democracy, the government provides reliable and timely information to the public. If the citizenry is to play a role in democracy, then, it needs access to an

institutionally guaranteed forum in which to express their opinions and to question established power (OECD, 1996).

Effective communication between the government and the public is especially important in countries in transition, where major changes in state institutions - indeed in all aspects of life - have left the citizenry uncertain about the new roles of the government and public administration, and how to convey their views to representatives of the state (Ibid.).

To reach large numbers of the population, governments everywhere rely heavily on radio, television, magazines and newspapers. The media filters and analyses information from authorities to the citizens, and thus governments must take into account this "intermediary role" of the media when they seek to communicate with the population. Media have a great power to mediate the public and the government officials. "Freedom is when the people can speak. Democracy is when the government listens. The media is the messenger" (Howard 2005, p.5).

Gerard (1998, p. 58) describes public forum as a "discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment." In relation with mass media, it has the capacity to serve as public forum by giving space and forum for public discussion. As Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) state, one of the basic role of journalism is providing a forum for public criticism and comment.

Thus, creating an arena for public discussion through media has great importance by mediating face to face discussion among the citizens and the authority. It also helps the

government to hear the citizens' critical, suggestive and constrictive voice, which are essential to build democracy and good governance.

Article 29 of the 1994 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia guarantees right of thought, opinion, and freedom of expression. Article 29/ 4 also confirms that the flow of diversified views is basic for the nourishing of democracy, by saying that "In the interest of free flow of information, ideas and opinions which are essential to the functioning of a democratic order, the press shall, as an institution, enjoy legal protection to ensure its operational independence and its capacity to entertain diverse opinions."'. Additionally, article 29/ 5 also strengthens the role of government media for the forum of diversified view by noting that "any media financed or controlled by the government shall be operated in a manner suitable for the accommodation of differences of opinion."

However, there have been great public concerns about the lack of public arena in the media landscape of Ethiopia. Some research has been undertaken on the effectiveness of Ethiopian mass media land escape in entertaining different public views. As Frederic-Ebert-Stiftung observed:

The fear of speaking openly depends on the kind of issues raised. People are generally afraid to express their political opinions freely for fear of repercussions. On other topics people tend to feel free to express their views, for example in radio talk show, as the likelihood of repercussion afterwards is minimal. Criticism of government is not welcome even if there are no apparent negative sequences (Frederic-Ebert-Stiftung, 2010, p.12).

Although, in the case of Ethiopian television the number of broadcast talk shows on social and cultural issues are becoming popular and it seems there is a growth in

popular participation in these programs, government elite get privilege access to express their ideas on Ethiopian Television (Gebremedhin, 2006). This kind of unfair room for the elite didn't give accesses for the participation and expression of views of "ordinary" people to be heard. And space for citizen voices in mass media will serve as a bridge between the public and the government.

Therefore, it is believed that the Ethiopian media should play valuable role in mediating the public and the government. Organizing and engaging the citizens in mass media public discussion forum program will have great importance to monitor the implementation of policies and strategies in a country. This kind of media practice will help the building of democracy and good governance in a nation.

Generally speaking, even if mass media have basic capacity for public participation and deliberation, in the case of Ethiopian Media landscape it seems that there is a lack of participatory program formats for the public discussion and engagements.

But nowadays, Amhara Mass Media Agency is following a trend of facilitating public arena for the engagement of citizens in discussion with the authority. However, there are problems generally observed on the flow and content of the discourse and the methods of deliberation.

Thus, this study attempted to investigate the nature of discourses and the way of public deliberation in the forum. To find out, the study analyzed sample broadcast programs and interviews of respondents.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective

The main objective of this study was to explore and analyze the nature of discourse in *mestawot* program of Amhara Television and the way public participation in this program is organized.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- ❖ Assess the capacity of the forum in facilitating free discourse among the participants.
- ❖ Investigate the challenges of the forum organizing process.
- ❖ Explore journalists' opinions towards the role of the media as a public forum.

1.4. Research Questions

The basic questions guiding the study were the following:

1. To what extent does the *mestawot* program facilitate free discourse?
2. To what extent does the forum support free accesses and participation for all classes of the society?
3. What are the challenges for obtaining such dialogue?
4. What do the reporters, editors and media manager conceive “public forum” role of media?

1.5. Significance of the Study

In Ethiopia the area of mass media as public forum has not been well researched. Thus, the researcher believes that the finding of this research will have different significance in the field of study.

This study also highlighted the challenges and recommendations of Amhara television when it is used as a mediator between the public and the authority. It will also show that many measures are being taken to promote public participation in *mestawet* program.

The main benefit of this research could be for the Amhara Mass Media Agency. The organization could obtain the necessary information about the way of organizing effective public forum in Television.

In addition, this research could contribute to the growing literature on participatory communication and public deliberation in mass media. Moreover, the research can stimulate the interest of others to carry out extensive and detailed study on the area.

1.6 Scope of the Study

Amhara Telvesion currently has different types of programs which focus on education, information and entertainments. But this study did not cover all the program types of Amhara Television. This study mainly focused on the nature of public discourse and the citizen participation process of the public discussion forums (*mestawet*) produced and aired by the Amhara television. This study was limited to programs aired from September

2003 E.C - May 2003 E.C because this period marked the peak period for producing *mestawt* program continually.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the concepts of public, public forum, media and good governance as well as related ideas. In addition, this chapter discusses how to provide effective public deliberation forums with a set of facts on explanation and tables. Furthermore, the theoretical context of public deliberation as an essential element of deliberative democracy and the rationale of public sphere and participatory communication theories was discussed in detail. The rationale touches on aspects such as the role and purpose, characteristics, benefits and challenges of mediated public forum.

2.1 The Concept of Public Forum

The central concept in regards to dividing or segmenting a population into specific groups is that of a public. The term has its roots in political science and, according to Price (1992), originates from the Latin phrase *populus*, meaning “the people” (as cited in Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). Vasquez and Taylor observed that today the term usually refers to matters of common interest and concern, for example, to a mass population of individuals involved in civic affairs under all circumstances. In other cases, like in the fields of social psychology, marketing and public relations, the term may refer to a

situational collection of individuals who emerge in response to a problem – i.e., a situation.

John Dewey was one of the first to develop a theory of publics. According to Dewey (1927), a public is a group of people who face a similar problem, recognize that the problem exists, and organize to do something about the problem:

The public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically catered for. When a family connection, a church, a trade union, a business corporation, or an educational institution conducts itself so as to affect large numbers outside of itself, those who are affected form a public which endeavors to act through suitable structures, and thus to organize itself for oversight and regulation

Dewey (1927, p.35) defined a public as “those indirectly and seriously affected for good or for evil [and] form a group distinctive enough to require recognition and a name.”

Contemporary public relations theory, in most cases, defines a public in a similar way, although from a more applied angle: “A public encompasses any group of people who are tied together, however loosely, by some common bond or interest or concern and who have consequences for an organization” (Newsom, Turk, & Kruckeberg, 2004, p.90). In this study, the concept of public is similar to what Dewey and contemporary public relations theory analyzed. Especially from the view of this study, the participants of *mestawet* program and the audience of the program in the Amhara Region is considered as concerned public with common interests.

Regarding the idea of forum, the concept of town-hall meeting has been considered as an opportunity for an exchange of public views. A town hall meeting is a public forum in which a panel of people, including elected and appointed officials, subject matter experts, resource providers, and interested community members, present information on an issue relevant to the community. Careful consideration is given to the selection of panel members in order to provide a balanced, informed perspective on the issue (NCMC, 2005).

A Town Hall meeting is a large gathering of people who wish to speak about a specific issue and listen to other people's comments. Town Hall meetings vary in format from having no structure to having a fairly rigid structure with specific topics discussed. Town Hall meetings will not in and of themselves resolve issues but are a good first step toward identifying important issues. They are often used for developing a foundation for additional discussions (Ibid.).

In the history of mass media the concept of town hall meeting is highly related with discussion programs. In this regard, *America's Town hall Meeting of the Air* was popular. It is a public affairs discussion broadcast on radio from 1935 to 1956, mainly on the NBC Blue Network and its successor, ABC Radio. One of radio's first talk shows, it began as a six-week experiment, and NBC itself didn't expect much from it (John, 1998). Broadcast live from New York City's Town Hall, *America's Town Meeting of the Air* debuted on Thursday May 30, 1935, and only 18 of NBC's affiliates carried it.

In modern times, electronic town hall meetings including the new media based on new technologies are widely used. The new media, including the Internet, offer higher

opportunities for interaction with the public, and a significant potential to educate, facilitate public discourse, and enhance public participation, beyond the time and space constraints of traditional media. In addition, new media technologies easily bypass national and international boundaries, thus bringing citizens of each country into contact with diverse cultures and distant events to an extent that was not imaginable earlier—a key dimension of globalization (Simon and Sharma, 2011).

In the US, the notion of Electronic Town Meetings – or Halls – (ETM) was heavily promoted by 1992 presidential candidate Ross Perot. With ETM, direct links between voters and representatives are created at the level of local communities and ICTs allow citizens to decide on pre-selected public policy options. ETM have been the object of much criticism as they can appear as just a new version of plebiscites and push-button referenda that discourage serious consideration of the issues. (Philip 1996)

In facilitating electronics town hall meetings (Horn and Halley (1995, p.2) stress the following points as the major characteristics of the systematic process in the Electronic town hall meeting:

- ❖ Participants are selected to be representative of some defined population,
- ❖ Final decisions are made by elected officials,
- ❖ An opinion tally will be conducted, usually through a scientific sampling of residents or voters in a given area, before, during, and/or after the face-to-face discussions, to indicate the direction of consensus emerging and to provide advice to elected officials,
- ❖ Specially trained moderators aided deliberation and consensus building,
- ❖ An organization in or outside of government plans and sponsors the ETM, and

- ❖ A summary of the results of the polling and deliberations will be prepared (e.g., written or in video or other electronic form).

Public participation

According to Creighton (2005, p.7) “public participation is the process by which public concerns, needs and values are incorporated into governmental and corporate decision – making. It is two way communication and interaction, with the overall goal of better decisions that are supported by the public.”

ESCAP (2003, p.5) puts the need for public participation in a planning or policy formulation process as follows:

- Learning about people's needs, attitudes, aspirations, ability to pay, desires, priority, possible contributions and help, how they could be affected by growth or changing land use and activity patterns, etc;
- Systematically evaluating existing programs, policies, and services provided;
- Considering actions taken, services provided and projects undertaken better reflect the needs and problems of the people;
- Utilizing people's experience and community resources;
- Avoiding bias in preparing plans (especially when value judgment is involved);
- Increasing people's understanding of common problems and their effects on various groups in society and organizations in the community;

- Mobilizing citizen support for public decisions (for example, tougher measures that may affect many people and transport demand management);
- Setting development priorities;
- Keeping people better informed and enhancing a greater understanding about public actions;
- Creating a sense of belonging among all stakeholders;
- Resolving social problems between different groups in society;
- Empowering the poor and marginal groups in society;
- Bringing transparency to decision-making and thus reducing scope of corruption.

According to ESCAP (2003, p.6), public participation has a number of benefits that include:

- ❖ Improved governance;
- ❖ Increased quality of the functions performed and services provided by public agencies;
- ❖ Revitalization of democratic practice in general;
- ❖ Maintaining the stability of society. When people are directly involved in the decision-making process, they become more aware of the possible problems and are more willing to live with the consequences than they are when decisions are imposed from outside. They become more aware of problems and tend to be less towards explosive situations or conflicts;

- ❖ Guarding the public interest. To make public agencies more responsive to the needs of public and disadvantaged groups in society. Citizens can work as watchdogs of society;
- ❖ Increased community cohesion and unity and capacity to reduce alienation of the individual.

2.2. Media and Good Governance

According to UNESCAP the terms “governance” and “good governance” are recently being increasingly used in development literature. Bad governance is being increasingly regarded as one of the root causes of all evil within the societies. Major donors and international financial institutions are increasingly basing their aid and loans on the condition that reforms that ensure “good governance” are undertaken.

Good governance generally implies a number of institutions, which regulate the behavior of public bodies, stimulate citizens, participation in government and control public- private relations (Villadsen, 1999). Good governance has several major components. Those components assure the minimization of corruptions. Good governance is responsive to the present and future needs of society.

According to the UN, Good governance has eight characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society (UNESCAP, 2009).

For the effectiveness of good governance, media have a key role. Global Forum for Media Development (DFID's- *Media in governance*, 2008) has recognized that Free, independent and plural media (radio, news papers, internet etc.) provide a critical check on the state abuse of power or corruption; enable informed and inclusive public debate on issues of concerns to the people living in poverty; and give greater public recognition to the perspectives of marginalized citizens. Engaged citizens need information that allows them to exercise democratic choices.

The contribution of media for good governance is varied from society to society. DFID (2008) asserts, the media contribution to better good governance is dependent on the extent to which media in any given society is free, plural, professional and able to, or interested in facilitating public discussion. The flow of information and participation of the public through mass media is considered to be beneficial for good governance outcomes for different reasons.

According to Ali (2006), a free media creates an informed polity that is more prepared to hold their elected representatives accountable – a prerequisite for effective democracy. Hudock argues that a robust media provides people with the political and economic information they require to effectively participate in democratic decision making (2003). Therefore, this information and the participation of the public through media public forum will develop the awareness of the public. So those, the public can watch the transparency of developmental implementation closely and carefully. In addition Chandio (-, p. 17) noted that, the role of media in promoting good governance as follows:

- ❖ All aspects of good governance are facilitated by a strong and independent media-scape within a society.
- ❖ Only when journalists are free to monitor, investigate and criticize the public administration's policies and actions can good governance take hold.
- ❖ Independent media are like a beacon that should be welcomed when there is nothing to hide and much to improve.
- ❖ Indeed, this is the concrete link between the functioning of the media and good governance— the media allow for ongoing checks and assessments by the population of the activities by providing a platform for discussion.
- ❖ Instead, all too often governments devise laws and informal means of keeping their activities hidden from public view or only available to media favorable to their viewpoint.
- ❖ In recent years, many governments have tried to co-opt journalists by paying part of their salaries.
- ❖ If the media are to function in the public interest, governments have to protect the independent functioning of the media and allow various viewpoints to flourish in society.
- ❖ Greater participation is crucial for good governance in two ways: greater participation by citizens in the decision-making process allows greater transparency and can help ensure that political decisions are adapted to the needs of the people affected by them.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1. Deliberative Democracy Theory

The theory of deliberative democracy has its philosophical roots in American pragmatism. John Dewey suggests that democracy is established in discussion, practiced in social institutions and employed to structure social relations (Dewey 1916). Dewey's ideal version of democracy focuses on the “means” of political discussion and argumentation. Dewey stresses the importance of education, conceived of as an individual and collective learning process, as a transformative experience (Browne 2009).

In this way democracy is more than just a political idea or regime, it is understood as a social practice and method for inquiry. By means of public discussion and participation, democracy is able to overcome differences and prejudice by bringing individuals into contact with alternate customs .Democracy is a method for overcoming problems faced by individuals and collectives and it is imbued with the type of discussion that requires participants to consider their actions, which are based on beliefs, vis-à-vis with the views of others (Dewey1916).

Page (1996,p.1) describes the importance of public deliberation by saying that, “ public deliberation is essential to democracy, in order to ensure that the public's policy

preferences-upon which democratic decisions are based- are informed, enlightened, and authentic''. As page mentions, one of the core ideas of democracy is that governments ought to do what their citizen want them to do. So that, governments ought to pay attention to public opinion, ought to respond to the policy preferences of the people. Therefore, deliberation is essential for democracy.

Mass media public discussions construct a role for the ordinary person who participates in them, a role which affects our understanding of the public—as citizen, consumer, and client, social problem, individual or mass (Livingston, Sonia and Peter, 1994).

Public participation forum enables the citizen to discuss freely in group with the officials. Thus, ‘‘Deliberation enables groups of citizens to come together in a non-coercive environment to learn about, discuss, and ultimately render their recommendations for action to public officials(A Manager’s Guide to Citizen Engagement ,2006,p.20).

According to Carolyn (2006, p.21-3), there are essentially five rationales for citizen deliberation in democratic governance:

- ✚ Citizen participation in policy formulation and decision making can reduce conflict.
- ✚ Citizen involvement in decision making is also something governments should do.
- ✚ Deliberation builds citizen competence.

- ✚ Deliberative citizen participation can lead to better, longer lasting, and wiser policy choices.

- ✚ Citizen participation cultivates mutual understanding; builds bonds of trust among citizens, decision makers, and governing institutions; and can effect changes in political attitudes and behavior.

Participation of the citizens through media will give space for their voice to be heard. Norris (2004,p.5) points out the importance of public participation as “Equally vital, in their civic forum role, the free press can strengthen the public sphere, by mediating between citizens and the state, facilitating debate about the major issues of the day, and informing the public about their leaders.”

In order to have healthy and effective democratic system, the participation of different citizens on varied national issues has great value and importance. UNESCO (2009) recognized that a good test of democracy is citizen participation. This concept also strengthens by Ramakhula (2009). He described that, the more people believe that they can make a difference the more likely they are to participate in government. Almond and Verba (in Ramarkhula, 2009) reflect the concept that for the fostering of deliberative democracy the media become sensitive to and take into consideration the opinion of the citizens.

In the case of Ethiopia’s current political situation, the country is following revolutionary democracy. Even though this ideology is differing from the ideology of deliberative democracy principle, there are some common democratic elements in the

concept of public participation and deliberation in the democratic process of the nation. The political program of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front/EPRDF/ article 3 states the following points:

3. To build a democratic order rooted in free, active popular participation.

3.1. To ensure that special attention is given to active, free and democratic participation of the peasantry and the urban public through effective exercise of their rights in the democratic order, upholding the human and democratic rights of all.

3.2. To ensure that citizens are freely organized in trade and civic associations and also to ensure that these associations are democratic, and to enable citizens to advance their entitlements and interests.

3.3. To ensure that conditions are created whereby citizens directly and through their civic associations can freely and fully participate in the government's programs of economic and social development.

3.4. To ensure that organs of government- particularly, districts (woreda) and neighborhood associations (kebele) -- that allow wide and popular participation are granted broader, legally conferred authority, which provides room for active participation through trade, civic, self-help and community associations.

3.5. To put in place arrangements whereby elected representatives at all levels are accountable to the electorate, and, in case of dissatisfaction on the part of the latter it can exercise the right of recall and elect new representatives.

3.6. To ensure that organs of government, at all levels, discharge their responsibilities with transparency and accountability; to ensure active popular participation so that citizens can be the guarantor and beneficiary of governmental transparency and accountability.

3.7. To ensure that the people can make effective use of their rights through universal elementary education, this creates democratic consciousness and a sense of loyalty to the Constitution.

3.8. To ensure that policies and plans proposed by the EPRDF are subject to popular deliberation, criticism, commentary and recommendations in ways that enhance a democratic public culture.

3.9. To ensure that the bureaucracy at all levels has a sense of public duty, and the human, organizational and professional capability to fully understand, and implement, effectively, policies of the government.

Similarly by considering the importance of the public participation in promoting of democracy and good governance, the Ethiopia government structured different systems for the public to deliver their grievance and compliant. To succeed this role, the Ethiopian Institution of the Ombudsman (EIO) has the power to receive complaints and probe into citizen's complaints against executive organs and recommend remedies to the abuses that matter most and that face citizens at the daily basis: rectifying administrative abuses arbitrarily committed against citizen. (EIO, 2011)

Additionally in order to hear complains and to receive information on the wrong doings of the authority in government sectors and other related organization, from federal up to

county level, ombudsmen are appointed to investigate complaints against the public sectors and organizations. In this regard media have a capacity of hosting public participation as a forum for discussion between the citizens and the authority.

Media and Deliberation

Deliberation is a word frequently used to describe the process used by councils, legislatures and other groups that make decisions after a period of reasoned discussion. There are two major perspectives on public deliberation - one envisions public deliberation as mediated by television, radio, and mass circulated publications. This view holds that "In modern societies public deliberation is (and probably must be) largely mediated, with professional communicators rather than ordinary citizens talking to each other and to the public through mass media" (Page 1996, p.5). A second perspective emphasizes face-to-face public deliberation which scholars consider relatively rare (Gastil, 2008,); though deliberative democracy and deliberative polling have become important features of what Benjamin Barber (2003) designated as strong democracy. Over the years, many have tried to bridge the gap between these two perspectives.

Page (1996) states public deliberation in today's society must be largely mediated. As explained by Gastil (2008) mediated deliberation is a form of deliberation that is achieved through the media which acts as a mediator between the mass public and elected officials. The communication professionals of the media relay information, values, and diverse points of view to the public in order for effective public deliberation to occur. Benjamin Page (1996) proposes mediated deliberation be a "division of labor" with the idea of using the media to deliver information between the elected officials and

the public because modern problems make it impossible to rely on the elected officials to deliberate for the public. The role of the media is to encourage discussion amongst the citizens to keep them engaged with their elected officials.

Gastil (2008:43-76) suggests that the following functions should be fulfilled in order for the ideal, mediated deliberation to occur.

Analytic process	<i>Media Producers</i>	<i>Media Users</i>
Create a solid information base.	Present media users with a broad base of background information by reporting extensively on important issues.	Seek out opportunities to learn of others' experiences and relevant expert analysis.
Prioritize the key values at stake.	Explore the underlying public concerns behind the surface facts and events that define an issue.	Consider the diverse concerns underlying issues and how others prioritize issues differently.
Identify a broad range of solutions.	Present the broadest possible range of solutions to problems, including nongovernmental and unpopular ones.	Learn about how people like or unlike yourself think about addressing a problem.
Weigh the pros, cons, and trade-offs among solutions.	Report different viewpoints but do more than juxtapose them; subject them to careful scrutiny.	Reassess your biases favoring or opposing different solutions by seeing how others weigh pros and cons.
Make the best decision possible.	Make recommendations but keep editorial content distinct from news; leave the decision to the media user.	Take responsibility for making up your own mind after listening to the advice of experts, partisans, and others.
Adequately Distribute Speaking Opportunities.	Use diverse sourcing, invite diverse guests with different ways of speaking, and reach beyond conventional debates.	Make time to listen to sources with views different from your own. Add your own voice when appropriate.

Ensure mutual comprehension.	Make news and information understandable for readers; prose should be accessible to the audience.	When you cannot understand an issue or argument, seek clarification from others.
Consider other ideas and experiences.	Take arguments from all perspectives seriously.	When hearing different views, avoid tuning out or ruminating on counter arguments before considering what is said.
Respect other participants.	Model respect for different views; treat readers with respect by making news serious but engaging	Give the benefit of the doubt to sources but demand better behavior from those who violate your trust

To conduct effective deliberative process Gastil (1993,p.123) explain, in a history of adapting, inventing, and combining different deliberative processes mixed designs have the essential elements/tenets of an effective deliberative process. These can be thought of as three criteria for a fully democratic deliberative process:

1. **Influence:** The process should have the ability to influence policy and decision making. ‘Influence’ requires a reversion back to democratic basics –heeding the informed will of the people, particularly when their ideas have been tested out against others, in an environment that seeks to discover aggregate, communitarian viewpoints.

2. **Inclusion:** The process should be representative of the population and inclusive of diverse viewpoints and values, providing equal opportunity for all to participate. ‘Representation’ and ‘Inclusion’, as in Athenian times, the opportunity exists for a representative group of ordinary citizens, of the population, to come together to deliberate on issues important to society. However, this time those deliberations need to include citizens regardless of

gender, age, wealth, education race and religion. Random sampling is still the best known method of inclusion.

As Gastil (1993) explains, People who are significantly affected by the decisions of demos ought to have full and equal decision-making power within it. Inclusion can also mean considering the views and concerns of people not physically present.

In addition Dahl argues that demos "must include all adult members of the association except transients and persons proved to be mentally defective." Under exceptional circumstances a demos can exclude people even if their legitimate material interest are profoundly and directly affected by group decisions. These exceptions include infants and (in some cases) young children, persons who are just passing through the group's jurisdiction, and people, such as those with severe mental disabilities, who are utterly incapable of making sound decisions on their own behalf or as members of a group.(Gastil 1993)

3. ***Deliberation:*** The process should provide open dialogue, access information, respect, space to understand and reframe issues, and movement toward consensus. Disparate people have the opportunity to engage in egalitarian discourse on a public issue, taking into account multiple views and comprehensive, balanced information. The hope is that through respectful dialogue, participants will solve problems creatively and find common ground that reflects the common good.

Healthy relationships provide an appropriate setting for open and constructive deliberation: discussion that involves judicious argument, critical listening, and earnest decision making. A deliberative process includes a careful examination of a problem or issue, the identification of possible solutions, the establishment or reaffirmation of evaluative criteria, and the use of these criteria in identifying an optimal solution. (Gastil 1993)

According to Gastil (2008), all consultation methods attempt to meet these three criteria, though to varying degrees, and we believe that performance on these three criteria indicates a method's success as a democratic process. Each is a necessary criterion for success, and only the combination of all three is sufficient for an event to be fully democratic.

Further, these three criteria are interdependent and interrelated. For example, without an evident pathway from consultation to *influence*, it is difficult to attract a highly *inclusive* sample to engage in *deliberation*. Without a very *inclusive* sample, the process will lack credibility amongst those who should be *influenced*, and so on.

2.3.2 Public Sphere Theory

The public sphere is an area in social life where people can get together and freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action. In his definition of public sphere, Habermas (1996, p. 398) writes:

By the "public sphere" we mean first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Accesses to the public forum are open to all citizens. A portion of public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public. When the public is large, this kind of

communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence: today, newspapers and periodicals, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. We speak of a political public sphere when the public discussions concern objects connected with the practice of state.

Moreover, Gerard (1998,8) describe public forum as a “discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment.” The public sphere mediates between the "private sphere" and the "Sphere of Public Authority".

The theory of public sphere has its own belief. According to Seyla (1992), the basic belief in public sphere theory is that political action is steered by the public sphere, and that the only legitimate governments are those that listen to the public sphere. The public sphere has also great democratic values. "Democratic governance rests on the capacity of and opportunity for citizens to engage in enlightened debate” (Hauser 1998, p. 83).

Ramakhula (2009) described the origin of public sphere in that, theorists such as Curran (1991) draw on the theory of the “Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere” by Habermas (1989) as the starting point for theorizing the media and in its role in democracy and political life. The public sphere in this context is defined as a space where interest groups interact with one another to discuss issues concerning society as a whole (Habermas, 1989). For facilitating and implementation of governance public sphere has its own value. Mcloughlin and Scott (2010,p.9) also noted the value of public sphere as ‘‘the public sphere is important in governance not only because it can facilitate civic action and public participation in decision making, but critically because it is also the space where public opinion is formed and articulated.’’

In his later work, *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas improved his notion of the public sphere to include and reflect the working of contemporary democracies. His contemporary public sphere is no longer made up of private privileged individuals gathering in public places. Rather, it acknowledges that a public sphere is comprised of a network for communicating information and viewpoints that link the public to the political system (Habermas, 1996).

Unlike in his earlier works, Habermas's contemporary public sphere is organized and made up of public interest groups and professionals who identify and interpret social problems and propose solutions. These groups, according to Habermas (1996), are protectors of the society because they identify neglected subjects and produce counter arguments on behalf of the disadvantaged groups. He further argues that 'ideally' the press aids these groups with interventions that are likely to lead to critical public debate.

Habermas's updated notion of the public sphere implies that audiences have the power to stir up critical debate and that the media have the ability to be the vehicle of that debate. Habermas's conception of the public sphere (and the role of the media in contemporary democracies) suggests that the public sphere is an impartial space in society and free from both state and corporate control. Within this 'impartial' space the media should make information affecting the public good available and facilitate a free, open and reasoned public dialogue that guides the public to influence the political direction (Curran, 2000).

The concept of a pluralistic public sphere is increasingly used to denote how the media should be structured in order for them to perform the types of function that the

eighteenth-century public sphere performed. As such, the media is expected to be organized in such a way that it :(Banda 2009, p.17).

- Can be open to all people, regardless of their standing or position in society. As such, the media must be accommodating to women as well.
- Must encourage voluntary participation of those who want to participate in the formation of public opinion.
- Must be open to all shades of opinion.
- Must facilitate discussion of matters of state policy and action.
- Must allow for the criticism of the way state power is organized, or whatever else may be criticized.

Although it remains important in academic discourse and in the analysis of the role of the media in democracies, the public sphere approach has been under criticism from those who advocate critical political economy of the media. The latter accuse the public sphere approach for failing to take into account the structures of modern democracy and for viewing public debate as a colloquium conducted through socially responsible media. They argue that the public sphere approach fails to reflect on how the media should be structured to best serve the requirements of democracy (Curran, 2000).

The premise upon which Habermas's public sphere approach is based is that readers play a significant role in determining content of the media because as a public sphere, the media publish what the public want and express their views and interests (Curran, 2000). Studies in the political economy of the media (Curran, 2000) indicate that various socio-economic and political forces are at play in the production and framing of the

media content and that some of these forces weaken the public influence. Curran (2000) further argues that even in a case where a limited public sphere is possible, structural factors such as advertising limit it to those audiences with money as “advertising funding ...exerts a gravitational pull towards upscale, profitable audiences”. The public sphere approach also fails to explain how issues such as economic and political status, race, gender geographical location, etc., help to privilege certain opinions as ‘public opinion’ and suppress opposing views.

2.3.2 Participatory Communication Theory

When the promise of modernization paradigm failed to materialize, and its methods came increasingly under fire, and the dependency theorists failed to provide a successful alternative model, a different approach focusing on people’s participation began to emerge. (Mefalopulos, 2003). This participatory model is less oriented to the political-economic dimension and more rooted in the cultural realities of development.

Participatory communication is fundamentally different from the mass media and multi-step flow theories of modernization and dependency, as —*Dialogue is at the heart of communication for social change*-(Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, p.xiv) in this paradigm. Everett Rogers, who originally was known for his work within the two-step flow models, distanced himself from the mass media approach , arguing that “development is a widely participatory process of social change in a society[...] through their (the people) gaining greater control over their environment”. This means, communication control was put into the hands of citizens, making it a bottom-up approach that encouraged two-way communication, which in turn encouraged the diversification of opinions. (Rogers; 124, p. 43)

The participatory/ Multiplicity paradigm has a central idea. Servaes (1999, p. 85) explained the central idea of participatory/ Multiplicity paradigm by saying that “ the central idea here is that there is no universal development model. Each society must delineate its own strategy to development. This implies that the development problem is a relative one and that no one nation can contend that it is “developed in every respect.”

The participatory/ Multiplicity paradigm is the recent phenomena. The participatory / multiplicity paradigm stresses the importance of cultural identity of local communities and democratization and participation at all level. Here the engagement of the public at international, national, local and individual level is the central point of the paradigm.

Servaes (1999, p.85) synthesized the participatory approach in which ordinary people where taken as the main agents of change or participants for development. According to Servae’s synthesis in participatory development approach, the emphasis is on:

- People as the nucleus of development.
- The local community rather than the nation state.
- The strengthening of democratic processes and institutions at the community level and the redistribution of power.

Thus, the participatory approach/ Multiplicity paradigm gives a chance to the citizen for the engagement of development activity. This shifts the emphasis from information dissemination to situation analysis, from persuasion to participation (Mefalopulos, 2003).

As stated by Servaes (1999) practical participatory communication can take various forms, but it is clear that both access to information and communication tools and participation in communication are necessary.

According to Maflopulos and Tufte (2009) accesses to spaces of communication and dialogue is crucial. While some diffusion-oriented, monologic models of communication focus on national mass media's key roles in communication innervations, the more participatory strategies emphasizes media that allows more dialogue. For this reason, participatory communication is also about visibility and voice in the mediated public sphere.

Therefore, within this approach, participatory communication becomes the essential tool, as it offers a way to tap into the knowledge of citizens and participants in change processes

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. The Research Design

This research is descriptive. The research method chosen for this study is motivated by the statement of the problem and the nature of data intended to be analyzed.

The selected methodology for this study is qualitative. It is a combination of focus group discussion, individual in-depth interviews and analysis of sample broadcast programs. This enables the researcher to triangulate the findings. Thus, it provide more reliable data for a better understanding of the process of *mestawot* program and public deliberation in the discussion forum.

3.2. Data Collection Methods and Sampling

There are various methods of data collection. In these study qualitative methods of data collection has been used. Qualitative research approaches usually involve direct interaction with individuals on a one to one basis or group setting.

Based on the frame work of qualitative research design, this study used focus group discussion, in-depth interviews and analysis of sample broadcast as a tool to explore and analyze the nature of the discourse in relation to the characteristic of forum mediation among the deliberated public and the authority.

All the samples in this research are selected by purposive sampling. Purposive Sample or purposeful sampling “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998,61).

Based on their direct experience on organizing and moderating the public forum the researcher selected the interviewees.

Then the researcher conducted individual in depth interviews with manager and two experienced editors (editor-in-chief and program editors). Beside, two forum moderators were interviewed deeply. Focus group discussion with eight journalists was also conducted. The goal is to explore the participation process and the nature of discourse in the discussion forums. Besides, the views of professional journalists about the role of media as public forum were examined.

Next, six sample broadcast programs were selected by purposive sampling and they were analyzed based on parameters which are derived from the concept of public deliberation process. And the three basic criteria for a fully democratic deliberative process: Influence, Inclusion, Deliberation (Gastil 2008) was the core concepts for the construction of parameter.

3.2.1. Data Collection Tools

The primary data is very vital to answer the research questions. The primary data were collected by using different data collection tools. Thus individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussion were selected as the most appropriate qualitative data which are the foundation of this research. These two techniques are discussed in the following ways.

Individual In-depth Interviews

The in depth interview with editors, journalists and moderators of the public discussion forum was an important tool to produce relevant data for the issue of the study. In

addition to the main question, the researcher forwarded a follow up question to dig out relevant information from the interviewee. The interview questions were based on issues raised in the review of related concepts, theoretical frameworks observations, and the thesis' problem definition.

The interviewees of this research were selected purposively from medium level managers, editors and discussion forum moderators. Thus one middle level manager, two program editors and two discussion forum moderators will be selected purposively based on their experience, participation and roles in the organizing and implementing of the discussion forums.

Focus Group Discussion

According to Wimmer and Dominic (1993) the focus group technique involves interviewing two or more people simultaneously with a moderator or facilitator leading the respondents in a relatively free discussion about the topic under consideration. Focus Group Discussion can be useful to obtain certain types of information or when circumstances would make it difficult to collect information using other methods of data collection (Kreuger, 1994).

Although focus group discussion is not free from complications it is important to collect preliminary information about a topic or a phenomenon. The responses of focus groups are often more complete and less inhibited those of individuals.

Therefore focus group discussion was selected as one of research technique in this study. Focus group discussion with eight journalists was hold at the Amhara Mass Media Agency reception hall. The researcher selected eight journalists, who are working as news reporter and program producers in the discussion form at different time and spaces

with purposive sampling. The researcher invited these journalists to discuss the nature of public participation and the characteristics of discourse in the forum. It also include discussion question which reflects the understandings of participants attitudes about the role of media as public forum.

The researcher opened the discussion and conduct debated very cautiously staying away from value judgment and avoiding suggestive questions.

3.2.2. Secondary Source of Data

Analysis of Sample Broadcasts

To analyze the content of the program in line with the theoretical framework, the researcher was purposively selected six sample broadcast program. These programs were selected based on the area where the forums were organized. This helps the researcher to analyze different discussion forums with a variety of contextual issues.

To analyze the sample broadcast the parameters which are originated from the theoretical frame work of the study will give a scope and range for the process of analyzing and discussion.

3.3. Analyzing the Data

As mentioned earlier, this study was carried out by using qualitative method. Individual in-depth interviews, focus group discussion and analyzing sample broadcast were used as data collection tools.

The data analysis work was based on Gastil (2008, p.123) basic concepts of effective public deliberation in discussion forums. These can be thought of as three criteria for a fully democratic deliberative process:

1. **Influence:** The process should have the ability to influence policy and decision making.
2. **Inclusion:** The process should be representative of the population and inclusive of diverse viewpoints and values, providing equal opportunity for all to participate.
3. **Deliberation:** The process should provide open dialogue, access to information, respect, space to understand and reframe issues, and movement toward consensus.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents major research findings in view of the basic research questions and literature discussed in the previous chapters of this study. It offers an analysis and interpretation of the researcher based on interviews, focus group discussion and analyzing of sample broadcast.

The chapter is divided in to two major parts. The first section deals with the over view and the process of *mestwet* program from the beginning up to the post forum evaluation period. The next one deals with the effectiveness of *mestawet* program based on the three basic criteria for a fully democratic deliberative process: Inclusion, Deliberation and Influence which was discussed in chapter two of this study.

4.1. An overview of *mestawet* program

Mestwet is one of the 18 programs which are currently broadcast in *Amhara* Television.

As the general manager of AMMA explains in one-on-one interview, *mestawet*, as the public forum TV program, allow citizens to voice their opinions regarding different issues. This participatory mechanism is serving as a meaningful bridge among citizens and decision-makers. The AMMA initiated the action to engage the public in governance through discussions of the main regional city's strategic plan and implementations of their development activities.

According to the manager of AMMA, the mission of the Agency is “to ensure that publics have a voice in setting and participating development activities of their cities, region and nation.” And based on this fact, with reporters, editors and chief editors, the

Agency produced draft manual that explains the way of organizing public discussion forum. Different journalists discussed on the draft manual and they give their feedbacks on the document. Finally, by fostering the document with the inputs and the comments of the journalists, the public forum discussion program was launched.

The general manager of AMMA explains that the forum allowed people to not only gain a sense as to the most pressing issues facing the city, but also “what issues are the most important”. He also adds “To be more effective, while holding a public forum, we keep in mind the cultural sensitivities of the local area because successful forums will focus on meeting the needs and interests of the community.”

4.1.1. Pre-event planning

The key to a successful public forum is planning and preparation. In the first phase of pre event planning, the AMMA- TV editorial team assembles to determine how the forum should be organized and assign responsibilities to members of the forum organizing team which is lead by head of TV department.

At the beginning of the editorial meeting ,the team research and discuss any legal requirements, such as groups or individuals that must, by law, be notified of the forum, any procedures that have to be followed, or any requirements concerning the content of notices announcing the forum that must be followed. During the pre event planning, it was jointly decided that there is the need to conduct public forum.

The participants of the editorial team jointly decide the objective of the forum. The forums are organized to understand and address the different aspects of the public issues. The team also analyzes the importance of conducting the forum in different locations of the town having people from different parts of the society regarding their sex, age, social

status and political interests. In addition, they clear the day and time of the event. Mostly they decide to organize the public forum at the weekend to ensure maximum participation of the community.

After their discussion, they proceed to the next step. Based on the agreement of the team, the general manager of AMMA and the process owner of the TV station, start to communicate with stakeholders of the forums. Usually mayor of the town, municipality manager, zonal and town administrators are considered as forum stake holders.

To enhance the effectiveness of the forum, a group of people appointed as organizing committee. The organizing committee of the forum consists of the following people: coordinator (TV program head), discussion moderators, two reporters (news and program producers), technique department head, and finance department head. Their roles are as follows:

The Coordinator (TV program head) – The coordinator is a person of high enough authority to enjoy public respect and attention. He/ She is responsible for the organizing and effectiveness of the forum. He or she is also responsible for finding a location for the forum, distributing necessary notices and advertisements in advance of the forum, and other equipment that may be necessary for the presentations or discussions, and managing the registration of speakers, among other tasks. This person will also prepare follow-up plans.

The discussion moderators- They have a task to make sure that the forum is conducted in a civil and orderly fashion. This includes making sure that everyone has a chance to ask questions and, that all questions are answered. Besides, they make sure that discussion stays on subject. Most importantly, he and she should help the participants and

officials to reach in a consensus. They also have responsibilities to create an environment that is open and invites people to express their views. They also expected to clarify comments made at the meeting. So that everybody understands what is being said. In addition, they must be neutral, helping to solicit different opinions and motivating participants to find consensus where possible.

The Reporters - They have a duty to produce news and program from the event. They also have an obligation to help other members of the organizing committee through the whole process of forum conducting. Besides they are expected to enrich their reports with written document materials and post forum interviews.

Head of technique department- The head or representative of technique department is responsible for the delivery and operation of audio-visual materials in the forum. These are the people who make sure that all electronic equipments in the meeting hall are in proper working order. They are also responsible for the maintenance of temporarily problems in the sound and electrical systems

Head of finance department – The finance department is one of the most important components of the forum organizing committee. He/She facilitates and controls the flow of the money through the entire forum organizing process. In addition, every transport and logistical activity should be arranged by this person.

Even though in AMMA no comprehensive structure and guide line has been developed as a viable model for organizing the public forum, various activities are evolved in the pre event planning of forum organization.

4.1.2. During the forum

The beginning of the forum establishes the tone for the entire event. A punctual start demonstrates respect for the citizens who have taken the time to attend the forum.

In starting the event of *mestwet* program, as public discussion forum, the hall hold with invited officials and the ‘ordinary’ people who are ready to discuss about the topic. Two journalists were also in the hall to moderate the discussion. The officials (most of the time, the mayor and manager of the municipality) seat together on the stage in front of the public. The two moderators are also seat in the other side of the stage. Representative of government sectors have a front place in the hall in which the audiences seats (auditorium).

On the back of the stage and behind the moderators, there is a banner across the wall with a slogan and theme which convey the purpose of the forum. The name of the AMMA also prominently displayed on the banner. This provides an opportunity for press photographers and cameraman’s to capture the event, often generating more publicity for the cause.

In the introductory part of the forum, in addition to greeting the audience, the moderators introduce themselves and other important public officials who are present at the event specially the mayor and the manager of the municipality. Moreover, the moderators explain the purpose of the forum, the background information about the participants, the procedure of the forum, the intended outcomes of the forum and the important topics of the forum. They also indicate the organizer of the forum.

At the end of the introduction, in order to participate actively in the forum, the moderators remind the people to hear the report of the city administrators attentively. Then the moderators invite the officials to present their report. Most of the times the officials report focus on the socioeconomic and political activity of the municipality during the specific fiscal year. The report is also enriched with statistical data.

Next, the moderators invite the audience to ask questions, comments and suggestions based on the report of the officials. Here, a range of opinions and experiences are discussed, together with the expression of strong and varied emotions.

Then, questions, comments, appeals, suggestions...are raised by the participants. They also express their opinion, opposes, offer and suggest ways and means. During the spot, the moderators make great effort for participants to stick to the agenda. They keep the agenda moving and making sure the discussion stays focused. In most discussion forums, the voices of the participants focus on problems and issues related to urban governance.

The municipalities are responsible to provide basic urban services and desirable to the citizens. However, in most of the voices of the public on the discussion forums, by any standard the services supposed to be provided by the municipalities are either absent or of unacceptably low quality.

The public voices on the discussion slants to the grievances that they are not provided with basic services and most municipalities remain largely unresponsive. The participants claim that the services are irrespective of their irregularity, unreliability and low quality.

In addition to problems related to services such as: water, sanitation and health, other problems like the lack of infrastructures (road, telecommunications, electric power...) rose in the forum repeatedly.

Generally, several issues have been identified as prominent subject in the process of the discussions forums. The main issues are:

- ❖ Expensive, time consuming, complicated and user-unfriendly nature of the civil service process of the government sectors;
- ❖ Inadequacy of staff in the municipality;
- ❖ Lack of adequate infrastructures in the cities.
- ❖ Non-availability of the higher officials causing further delay in public service;
- ❖ Corrupt practices;
- ❖ Frequent transfer of senior officials. / High turn over/

After the period of participants' voices, the moderators' start to summaries, categorize and repeat the question for the benefit of the audience. If an audience member asks a question, the moderators repeat the question to ensure that everyone has heard the inquiry. This is necessary because often the people at the front of the hall are the only ones who can hear the initial question. If the moderators do not do this, the speaker repeats the question before answering it. Recognizing this principle, the public forum can be given an opportunity to respond with brief statements before concluding or adopting a resolution.

In conclusion, the mayor of the city delivers the closing remarks. He or she summarizes the ideas by giving more elaboration on the next action that will be taken to solve the public problems with effective civil service principles.

Finally, the moderator gives a chance for the participants to express their impression about the forum. In most forums appreciation for the organizing of the forum is observed. Additionally, others participants forwarded their concerns about the continuity of the forum. Then, the moderators conclude his or her closing remarks by thanking every one again for attending the forum.

4.1.3. Post forum

Reporting on public forums furthers the deliberative process in several ways. It enables the forum organizers to be accountable to the forum participants by sharing with them a summary of their deliberations. It engages people who did not attend the forums to join their fellow citizens in talking about the public agenda. Reporting public forums informs policymakers about how the public views the issue and the trade-offs they are and are not willing to accept (Juie,2000).

The contributions of reporting public forums go beyond the particular issue. A forum report can illustrate the nature and benefits of public deliberation as a way for citizens to work together on a wide variety of public problems in their communities, states and nation.

In the case of AMMA, to evaluate the performance and the activities in of specific public forum, regular group meetings were conducted after the forum was held. Reporters, editors, facilitators involved in conducting the forum and the manager of the AMMA participate on this post forum evaluation. These post forum evaluation meetings provides

an opportunity to discuss various issues that affect the day-to-day activities of organizing and conducting the forum effectively.

From analyzing of the discussion, it was observed that the public are interested by organizing such forums. But they have great concern on the continuity and follow up activity of the media house after the forum was conducted. Further the forum participants have a feeling of uncertainty on the response of the decisions makers to solve the problems which are rose by the participants during the discussions.

Throughout these post forum evaluation meetings conducted by the media house, the journalists and coordinators review and evaluate the effectiveness of the forum. They also discuss on their practical success and challenges from their experience of conducting of the forum.

According to the participants of in-depth interviews and focuses group discussion there are some constraints which are identified as problems of conducting such forums. Some of them are;

- Lack of interest in some officials in supporting and participation in the forums.
- There is lack of technical materials (like audio materials- microphones, amplifiers, generators...)
- Coordination problem among the facilitators and journalists.

After their evaluation and discussion, the post evaluation team produces a summary report of the forum and distributes copies to all relevant decision makers and the management team of AMMA.

Generally, assessing the effectiveness of the forum after the final discussions have been completed offers a number of advantages such as:

- avoiding costly mistakes,
- evaluating alternative strategies and
- Increasing the effectiveness of the forum in general.

4.2. Effectiveness of the *mestawet* program

4.2.1. Inclusiveness

Citizens are inevitably made up of different groups and interests. Public discussion forums include different groups and interests of the societies rather than giving an occasional voice. As weeks (2000) states theorists and practitioners have argued that to be inclusive, participation needs to be large scale and representative of the population. The forums ensure a wide diversity of voices and views from different parts of the society, such as women and youth, disabilities.

Witschge (2008) also noted that, the concept of openness is similar to the creation of inclusion and equality in rational deliberative democracy. Here, according to Witschge (2008), equality means that everyone has the right to raise issues, open up debates, provide information, and questioning others. Participatory process wide the frame of discussion by including parts of societies who are powerful actors from different groups. The rationale for engagement would be primarily the inclusion of diverse perspectives in processes capable of generating useful, integral results that benefit the community, usually involving collective intelligence or transformational potential

However, in the case of *Mestawet* program there is some problem in the inclusion of the participants. One of the problems in the inclusion of the public in *mestawet* program is that the dominance of some special interests groups in the discussion forum to sale their personal or group interest. This kind of problem is observed in some parts of forums conducted by AMMA. The forum tends to favor people who are especially articulate and have the time to participate.

As participant 2 in focus group discussion explains, in the forum held at *Bahirdar* town, special interested group try to dominate the forum and the flow of the discussion by their influence. With this regard, participant 2 said:

During that time, the hot issue in *Bahirdar* town is about the controversies of market place ownership. There was a great disagreement among the traders about the use of the market place for further development. And some traders form their own group. After this organization they are in quarrel by the ownership of the place. Besides, they were in great disagreement with the municipality of the town. In the discussion forum, they were organized to blame the officials. On the forum they are rumoring when some body speaks with different views. Besides they are trying to accuse the officials with out any evidence. This group of opponents is determined to disrupt a forum and coordinate their tactics, they succeed.

In the continuation of the efforts of enhancing citizen participation in the public forum discussion, the AMMA has a joint activity with the local citizen leader, local councilor, and municipality's officials to discuss the process and the effectiveness of the forum. But some journalists, who participated in the focus group discussion do not support this kind of collaboration. They argue that the cooperation of organizing *mestawet* program, as public forum, with local government officials will bring uncertainty on the neutrality and fairness of the forum. According to the journalists, the local officials can use this opportunity to hide their weak performance from explaining it in the front of the public.

Besides, they either create obstacles on the organization of the forum or they abuse the discussion forum by sending their supporters, friends, families... to be dominant in the forum.

Similarly in conducting such forums, some authors argue that participation in forums created by state increase the rise of being dominated by the state actors. The motives behind the invitation to participate, they argue, may be to create an illusion of legitimacy or representatives.

As stated by *interviewee ii*, the forum which was conducted at *Gondor* town has passed through this kind of situation. This interviewee indicated that rather than questions and comments, the discussion was dominated by expression of gratitude to the officials. As he noted, in this forum, it seems that the whole flow of the discussion was flooded by positive opinions in which the participants forward their appreciation in more friendly feeling by ignoring the socio economic problems of the town.

This respondent stressed that, the main cause of such problem is the way of inviting forum participants. The interviewee criticized the method of informing the public to participate in the forum.

The announcing for the public to participate in the forum is taken place by both the media and the host town. The communication office of the town is also delegate as a local activist to hire a hall. And they have a role to announce the event for the public to participate. This kind of relation between the media house and the town officials will cause harm to the independence of the media and its loyalty to the public. Specially, the officials can get a chance to organize their supporters and deploy them in the forum. This kind of situation can create difficulties on the flow and balance of the discussion and discourse-like the forum that was conducted at the town of *Gondor*.

Research suggests that increased citizen participation decreases the gap between citizens and government (Berman: 1997). Looking into the composition of public forums participants, the forums must have a fair representation of gender, class and age groups, to make it representative of the community. And a group of members-youth, business people, women, disables, religious leaders must be represented in all forums.

As public forums were acting as discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest to reach a common judgment, the *mestawet* program must be more inclusive in their character. Further, in most of the discussion forums the participants are included active members from the existing women groups, youth groups and citizen leaders.

In this regard, to insure the diversified view of the community in *mestawet* program, the AMMA has an experience to invite representative of different political parties. But in most discussion forums the representatives of political parties didn't have an interest to participate on the forum due to the suspicion and fear that reflects the bias of the media house to the leading party. However, the Agency leader considers the accusation of such parties as pretext. Rather they confirm that the media house opens its door for all political parties to entertain pluralistic views including in the *mestwet* program.

In many traditional societies, women and youth and ethnic and linguistic minorities are virtually ignored in community affairs. But no community can change and develop equitably and satisfactorily without the active and informed participation of its women, youth and minority groups. In addition, the inclusion of "weaker" sections of the societies (females, disables...) in governance will strengthen their confidence as citizen (Berman: 1997).

From the analyzing of sample *mestawet* broadcasts, the “weaker” sections of the societies are physically represented in the forum in good way. However in the analyzing of *mestawet* program the researcher found that most of the discussion was dominated by the voice of men from youth, adult and elders side. The voices of females and disables are not heard well in the forum. Even though, the discussion moderators repeatedly encourage women and disables to raise their opinion openly, they are not active participant. As one of the focus group discussion participants describes, “This kind of fear on discussion is caused by the social stigmatization of women and disables in the society. It is an obstacle on the development of pluralistic and inclusiveness’ nature of such public forums.”

Understanding the concept of “public meeting” enhance the organization of effective public meeting. Rayadov (98, p. 154) defines a public meeting as “a meeting is said to be public when an admission to the meeting is open to all. Under this, there will be an open invitation to the public at large. Any member of the public who is interested in the subject matter for which such meeting is called can participate and contribute his own matters”

This shows that to insure the effectiveness of the public invitation in the meeting, the way of announcing the event to the public is crucial. In publicizing the event, the notices should be easily understandable. In addition to stating where and when the forum will be held, notices should list the topics to be discussed and advise the public of their role at the forum, explain the purpose or intended result of the forum, and outline how people can participate in the forum. The notice should also tell people who they could call with questions. Regarding *mestawet* program different methods of announcing were implemented. In the words of AMMA general manager:

To enhance the diversity of the participants the AMMA go further. We offer the public to participate by announcing through *Amhara* radio, *Amhara* television and *Bekur* news paper. More over, we announce in the town by loudspeaker. In addition, we have received questions, comments and opinions from individuals who are not physically present by phone to wide the inclusiveness' of the discussion forum. Moreover, the AMMA send letter of invitation for different institution and associations like universities, religious institutions and others to represent at the forum. And the invitation is followed by phone calls to confirm whether or not the representatives will participate. We must ultimately work to identify and implement mechanisms that allow citizens to participate in the public discussion forum that makes a broader contribution toward achieving good governance and democratic leader ship. (General manager-personal interview)

The vast majority of those interviewed and invited in focus group discussion indicated that the public form discussion is broadly inclusive, which is to suggest that the forum furthered a diverse platform of ideas. Participant 3 described the forum as “inclusive in terms of the views expressed,” while participant1 thought that the forums were “useful in the sense of the diversity of the public. However, with some government officials, there is misunderstanding about citizen participation. They perceived citizen participation as time consuming, costly, and burdensome...but in my view it was useful to hear the different voices of the citizens.”

4.2.2. Deliberation

Public deliberations are the foundation of a representative democracy. In order to ensure that citizens participate in the functioning of the democracy, they have to be aware of the rights that are available to them. One basic right is the ‘right to participate’. In a democracy, individuals are granted the right to deliberate and discuss in different issues, who then become part of the governing institutions.

According to Gastil (1993), one of the basic principles in democratic discussion is exchanging views in respected manner. Gastil (1993) states healthy relationships provide an appropriate setting for open and constructive deliberation: discussion that involves judicious argument, critical listening and earnest decision making. A deliberative process includes a careful examination of a problem or issue, the identification of possible solutions, the establishment or reaffirmation of evaluative criteria, and the use of these criteria in identifying an optimal solution.

Similarly, Witschge (2008) states with in the public sphere, there must be a tolerance for a wide diversity of opinion and point of views. Public discussion allows, through fostering understanding and appreciation of other's convictions, concerns, and needs for different groups to transcend the awkwardness, fear, and hostility that might exist, and let the people appreciate the plausibility of seeing the world from different perspectives.

In this regard, from analyzing of sample broadcast program, *Mestawet* exposed its participants to a wide range of perspectives. It further underscored the inherent value of bringing together a group of people. In relation to the nature of discourses and dialogue conveyed in the discussion forum, most of the respondents are sharing the idea that *mestawet* program is mainly based on respectful manner. But in some cases, as one of the participants in FGD observes some disrespectful manner of the participants during the discussions.

Similarly, participant 5 stated: "I think most people, in the discussion forums, did really listen to other people. Most of the participants are in a variety of ages and they are from different economic levels, religions and so on. And most of their dialogues were forwarded in good and respectful manner. I think this kind of inclusion will help to

develop the pluralistic and varieties of view of people.” On the other hand, participant 4 stated: “It was good to hear perspectives from other sides of the people. And all participants must permit other people in attendance to have their say... but in some forums there were people who had self interests. There was an attempt from members of the participants to disrupt the forum or destabilize the proceedings. These disruptions came from individuals or part of a coordinated group. They try to be dominant in the meeting. Their interruption is backed by mumbling and hand clapping/applause/, when someone speaks.”

Rational argument is one of the cornerstones of deliberative and political theory. Many of the studies that analyze political deliberation reference the Habermasian public sphere (1989), which requires arguments supported by reasons in order for public opinion to form and to serve as a check on government. Rational argument requires individuals to advance positions that can be defended against critique. In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas (1984) argues that an expression is rational if the claim provides evidence that can be observably confirmed or empirically denied or appeals to a shared normative ground. Thus, in a deliberative context, a reasoned argument would be one in which assertions are grounded in empirically verifiable evidence or in shared understanding of moral or normative behavior.

In the case of *mestawet* program, although a majority of respondents maintained that the forum served as a means by which people could voice their questions, opinions, and appeals, there was some defamation by the participants. As participant 6 stated that even if clear and honest communication is essential for effective decision making, blaming all officials on the stage as corrupted people without any evidence is one of the problems in

the atmosphere of the forum. They try to harm the reputation of the officials. This implies that, an open forum provides a platform for opponents to attack or criticize the organizer, and can be easily disrupted by a dedicated minority.

Highlighting this point, forum moderator 1 stated, “I would say that there is some defamation that occurred during the discussion. With out any evidence some participant tried to blame the officials as corrupted persons. When we come across such cases we (moderators) immediately stopped the person and gave the chance of speaking to other participant. On the other hand, there are some officials who frustrate the participant when some one asks question and comments against them. Some of the officials reflect their emotions by calling the name of the participant and categorizing him/ her as anti-development and democracy rather than taking the comment in a constructive way. Beside, most of the time the officials reflections are not short and precise conferrable. ”

Concerning the process of deliberation, Gastil (2008) states the process should provide open dialogue, access to information, respect, space to understand and reframe issues, and movements towards consensus.

In particular to *mestawet* program, the majority of respondents indicated the forum did foster deliberation. But some participants suggested that the forum was dominated by the speech of the officials. One event that participant 8 remembers as “Even though, moderators give five minutes for the presentation of introductory report by the representative of the municipality about the socio economic activity of the cities, most of the times they took up to fifteen minutes. Some officials have the tendency to speak without regard to their allotted time. The moderators are in fear to stop this time consuming event.”

A relatively significant number of those interviewed believed that average participants of the forum, as opposed to government, drove the discourse. Underscoring this point, moderator 2 remarked that the meeting and its ground rules are mostly lead by thumb of rule not by written rule. But the rules did a pretty good job of creating a process whereby interested groups and other officials don't dominate. The ground rules include the following basic ones:

- ❖ Tolerance and appreciations of others' points of view.
- ❖ Focus on issues, not personalize.
- ❖ Stay on topic.
- ❖ No interrupting
- ❖ Minimize distractions-silence cell phones and no side conversations.

A small number of respondents, however, were seemingly skeptical of the public deliberation process. In particular, some believed that the forum was manipulative insofar as it served to pacify the citizenry and reduce opposition to the officials and their vision.

According to Garnham (1986) a forum is truly public debate, which includes "as many of the existing views in a society on the relevant issues as possible"

From this perspective, for the plurality of views and points of views, most of the time, AMMA identifies potential supporters and opponents of the proposed program or issue to be discussed, including any community organizations that are interested in or affected by the topic and invite them to participate in the *mestawet* program. But from analysis of sample broadcasts, in most forums the voices of opposition parties were not heard. Even if they are invited by the Agency they are not interested to attend the meeting.

In general, it is a function of media to provide an independent platform for interactive discussion about matters and decisions of importance to the public. To accomplish this role the journalist or forum moderator should be independent and neutral from any bias. The moderator plays a critical role in ensuring that the forum proceeds according to the agenda and those individuals can participate without prejudice. So that, in the production of forum discussions, the norms and moderation of the forums need to be taken in to account, as well as the intentions of participants in the discussion(Gastil:1983).

In the case of *Amhara TV mestwet* program, moderator 2 remembers the case in which the participants are in doubt on the neutrality of the moderators. She states “in a forum conducted at *woldeya* town, most of the participants are in doubt on the neutrality of the journalists, they have a threat that the AMMA will slant to the officials. But to avoid this misunderstanding, we repeatedly orient the public about the aim of the forum. To me, this indicates the public is new for such forums and they are trust for Media’s platform.”

For the overall process of public deliberation in *mestawet* program most of the respondents’ stress that there is no written public forum organizing guides/ manual in AMMA. Moderator 1 and 2 criticize the way of forum organizing in that “most of the time all the establishing principles and rules of forum organizing in *mestawet* program are orally derived from the pre event planning discussion. Even if they are valuable for the success of the forum, organizing and developing suitable guides is vital. They determine how the discussion will be conducted.”

Concerning to AMMA, even though there is no written public forum guideline, from the analyzing of sample programs of *mestawet*, it was observed that, the moderators announce the ground rules of the discussion repeatedly. The rules allow for a fair

distribution of the limited time available. According to the rules, one or two citizens, a group of citizens, or a city official should not be permitted to dominate the discussion;

In general, the ground rules of *mestawet* program are flexible enough to accommodate the concerns and needs of the people attending in the forum. The ground rules are not intended to rigidly determine how participants should behave. They focused on what is not allowed, and how participants should not behave. But from the analyzing of sample broadcast, it observed that, the rules are often poorly defined and the way the moderators enforce them is unclear.

4.2.3. Influence

Engaging citizens in the deliberative process is essential to overcoming participatory apathy, cynicism toward government, and the apparent disconnect between citizens and decision-makers. The political meaning is inevitably linked to the relationship between the citizens and the decisions makers. So that for the great advantage of the public and national development the points raised in public forum should get attention and response (Weeks, 2000).

In this regard beyond the officials of the host town, who are responsible to hear and give response to the public concerns, the Amhara Mass Media Agency facilitates higher regional officials to observe the forum directly. One official representative from the regional bureau of urban and development, other from regional council of public grievance hearing department observe the meeting.

These persons are responsible to take note of valuable questions, suggestions and opinion of the public which needs the concern of the regional government. At the end of the forum, the representatives announce follow-up activities and how results of the forum will be incorporated into the government's decisions on the issues in question.

In addition to the report of these representatives, the AMMA manger reports the main concern of the public issues and problems to the concerned officials and concerned bodies to solve the problems. It also included in the quarterly report of the media house to the regional council.

Since, the forum serves as a means of reconnecting citizens and government, it may help to reduce cynicism toward government and reaffirm the importance of citizen participation as a uniting communal experience.

But, according to the participants in the focus group discussions, even though there is a channel of addressed feedback to the decisions makers of the region the response given to alleviate those problems raised by the public in the discussion forum is too less. As the participants stated, to follow the responses of the decisions makers to the public problems the agency did not give media coverage after the public discussion forums.

Since one of the main roles of the media is to monitor the implementation of Scio-economical activity of the elected bodies, delaying a decision has its own impact on the credibility and public trust of the mass media agency. Besides the problems of organizing the forum in the region continuously limits the voices of the public to deliver for the decision makers.

The manager of AMMA echoed similar sentiments, as the media organizations lacks follow ups on the issues and problems raised by the public in the forum. Moreover, due to lack of resources and vast coverage of current issues, presently the program is in on –off – on situation. As AMMA manager confirms, they plan to produce the forum continuously and to do follow up programs on the concerns of common goods discussed on the meetings.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In the previous chapter the research data and interpretation were discussed. In the final chapter of the thesis the discussions focuses on the conclusion and recommendation of this research.

5.1 Conclusion

The core democratic process is the ability of people to hear and make themselves heard. Mass media provides the forum for that happen. Specially creating an arena for public discussion through media has great importance by mediating face to face discussion among the citizens and the authority. It also helps the government to hear the citizens' critical, suggestive and constrictive voice, which are essential to build democracy and good governance.

The purpose of this research was to examine the extent to which the *mestawet* program process enhances the prospect for public forum.

Concerning *mestawet* program, AMMA encourages participation by providing a platform for discussion and exchange of ideas. In this regard the mechanisms of public engagement for the discussion have a power to invite different parts of the society. But interrupting the flow of discussions with some group or personal interest has a negative effect on the effectiveness of the public deliberation with respectful manner. Moreover, *mestawet* program facilitate an interaction public forum for exchanging of a wide range of ideas. The journalist did indicate that *mestwet* program has a power to mediate the public and officials. They attached great value for the role media for public forum. They consider mass media to be spaces where diversity of opinions can be waved. However

few disrespectful ways of communication was observed in some forums. On the other hand to increase the influential power of the program, AMMA has implemented ways and channels of reporting key public concerns to the decisions makers of the region. On the contrary, the reply of the decision makers for those public concerns are not active satisfactory. Besides the AMMA didn't conduct and carried out follow up program on the concerns and problems of the public which are identified by the participants during the public forum discussions.

Based on the analysis of this research, the researcher found that AMMA has created a space for debate and the meeting of minds among different social, political, and economic groups with different visions and interests, thus strengthening the democratic process locally. The forum is serving as one way for the people to have a say in decisions that affect their lives. And it gives an opportunity for the public to hold decision-makers accountable.

Mestawet program has confidently directed its efforts towards the empowerment of citizens in the exercise of citizenship and democracy. But concerning the respect for diversity of opinion and the guarantee of the right of all citizens to express their views and to present their ideas, proposals and suggestions, few respondents examined a lot of factors that affects the flow of diversified opinion.

On the other hand, the majority of the respondents agree that the program is true instrument of dialogue among the citizens and the local authorities. In addition it is contributing to developing a more pro-active stance and the affirmation of youth and women and disabilities in decision-making within their communities.

And *mestawet* deliver important policy information to raise consciousness and mobilize the population with respect to sustainable development and democracy on the local level and in the fight against poverty. Nearly all interviewees agreed that, the forum increases the breadth of citizen engagement and enriches the depth of citizen participation, serving as a direct mechanism for citizens to interact with government and possibly influence the public policy process.

The lessons from this analysis suggest that strengthening the channels of communication is vital for good governance and building of democratic government. The interview data support the premise that *mestawot* enhances the prospect for media's role as public forum, insofar as it cultivates a broadly inclusive dialogue. The forum fostered an egalitarian and inclusive environment, whereby people could engage in a discourse that was without manipulation or threats from the power elite.

According to the responses of FDG participants, the continuity and follow up activity of *mestawet* program is not addressed well. This means that although the inclusion of public participation in one area succeeds, on the other there are other parts of society who didn't have a chance to engage on the forum to discuss on their local issues.

In the concept of Medias' role of public forum, Amhara television *mestawet* program have proved to be a powerful instrument. *Mesatwet* represents an alternate means of public deliberation, one that serves as a forum for discussing public issues.

Having the above mentioned factors and problems that affect the effectiveness of public deliberation with fruitful influence on decision making process, the trend of organizing *mestawet* program has some elements of dewey's and habermasian's ideal version of democracy.

Generally, the forums typically address problem or issues of the public. They also provide an opportunity for citizens to build coalitions and networks. They promote two-way communication between citizens, elected representatives, and government officials, which can help people understand competing perspectives on an issue. Even though, the practice of organizing public forum in AMMA is inadequate, its format is a stimulant to other media organization to adopt and implement such program.

5.2 Recommendations

As discussed in the previous chapters, media have great significance in creating public forum. In this regard, *mestawet* program has its own significance in creating space in which public can participate and deliberate.

But, there are problems on the program concerning the trends in organizing effective public discussion forum in AMMA as a whole. The problems are mainly of planning, organizing and producing effective public forum. There could be different approaches to these problems.

So, in order to solve these problems, based on the findings of the study, the researcher suggests the following recommendations:

- The AMMA should give more attention to the development of professional skills and resources on organizing effective public forum .The development of professional skills and resources fosters the ability of the media to research, interpret and communicate about public issues in an objective , reliable and accurate manner. In addition it provides an enhanced understanding of the media's role and inherent responsibilities as public forum.

- The AMMA should have research department to begin research works to find out the effects of *mestawet* program.
- The AMMA should have meeting forum organizing manual, which includes the whole process of organizing public forum.
- The AMMA should strengthen its effort on the Government to genuinely listen and give response for the public voices.
- The AMMA should establish continues forum organizing mechanisms to ensure the inclusiveness of the citizen on public issues.
- All the staff, especially station managers, editors and reporters, should be given some form of training on media's role of public forum.
- The public should develop tolerance of listening diversified view

References

- Abrahamsen, R. (2000). *Disciplining Democracy: Development Discourse and good governance in Africa*, St Marin's Press, New York.
- Ali, S. (2006). *Governance and the Media*: University Department of Economics and Social Science, Oxford.
- Anderson, B. (1996). *Media and Democracy*, department of media and communication, University of OSLO, strandberg og Nilson.
- Banda, F. (2009). *UNESCO Series on Journalism Education, Civic Education for Media Professionals: A Training Manual*, Published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Communication and Information Sector, Paris, France
- Barber, B. (2003). *Strong Democracy; Participatory Politics for a new age*. Berkley, CA, regents of the university of California.
- Benhabib, Seyla (1992). *Models of Public Space, Habermas, and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge Mass.: MIT press.
- Berman, E. (1997). *Dealing with cynical citizens*. Public Administration Review, 57(2): 105-112.

- Browne, C (2009), “*Democracy, Religion and Revolution*” in *Thesis Eleven*, Number 99, Sage Publications pp 43-58
- Burkhalter, S. , Gastil, J., & Kelshaw, T. (2002). *The self-reinforcing model of public deliberation*, *Communication Theory*, 12, 398-422.
- Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer. (2006). *Public Deliberation: A Manager’s Guide to Citizen Engagement*, IBM Center for The Business of Government.
- Catherin, Hakim. (2000). *Research Design Successful Design For Economic and Social Research*, Routledge, UK
- Clandio, J. (n.d.). *Handbook for Reporting on Democracy and Good governance*; beyond Headlines and sound-bites, center for civic education, Pakistan.
- Creighton, L. (2005). “*The Public Participation Handbook*”. New York, Wiley.
- Curran, James. (1991). “*Rethinking the media as a public sphere.*” Pp. 28-57 in *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere in the New Media Age*, edited by P. Dahlgren and C. Sparks. London: Routledge.
- Curran, James. (2000). “*Rethinking Media and Democracy.*” In Curran, James and Gurevitch, Michael (Ed) *Mass Media and Society*, London ; Arnold.
- Davidson Brett. (2002). *Radio and public deliberation*, Dayton, Ohio.

Dewey, J. (1927). *The Public and its Problems*. New York: Holt.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: WLC Books.

Domnic R. (2005). *The Dynamics of Mass Communications*. McGraw-hill, New York.

Dunning, John.(1998). *On Air: the encyclopedia of old-time radio*. Oxford university press.

EIO.(2011).*the ombudsman*. Volume I issue 4, may 2011.

Estlund D. (2002). *Democracy*. Black well publishers Ltd, UK.

EPRDF- *The political program of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front/EPRDF/* - Available at

http://www.eprdf.org.et/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=29202&folderId=47054&name=DLFE-1701.pdf [Accessed on Feb 26, 2012]

ESCAP. (2003). *A Guide to the Application of Public Participation in Planning and Policy Formulation towards Sustainable Transport Development* .United Nations, New York.

Ethiopian Ministry of Information. (1994). *Building Democracy in Ethiopia*. Ministry of information press and audio visual division, Addis Ababa ,Available at <http://www.mfa.gov.et/policies/policies.pdf> [Accessed on Feb. 6, 2012]

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (1994). *Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa: Government Printers.

Friedrich –Ebert-Stiftung (2010). *African Media Barometer; The First home grown analysis of the media land scape in Africa*. Windhoek, Namibia.

Garnham, N (1986). ‘*The media and public sphere*’ in Golding, P, Murdock, G. and Schlesinger P. (eds) *communicating politics; mass communications and the political process*. Leicester university press.

Gastil, J. (1993). *Democracy in Small Groups: Participation, Decision Making, and Communication*. Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers.

Gastil, J.(2008). *Political Communication and Deliberation*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications,

Gastil, J., Deess, E. P., & Weiser, P. (2002). *Civic awakening in the jury room: A test of the connection between jury deliberation and political participation*. Journal of Politics, 64, 585-595.

Gebremedhin S. (2006). “*Ethiopia. Research findings and conclusion*”. In: African Media Development Initiative. BBC World Service Trust. Available at [http://www.downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/PDF ...](http://www.downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/PDF...) [Accessed on Nov. 13, 2012]

Global forum for media development. (2008). *Media in governance* –ADFID, Practice paper., available at

<http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/innovations-in-accountability/IA5.pdf> [Accessed

on Jan. 29, 2012]

Gumucio-Dagron, A., & T. Tufte (2006) *Communication for Social Change Anthology: Historical and Contemporary Readings*. New Jersey: The Communication for Social Change Consortium.

Habermas, J. (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 1. Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (T. McCarthy, trans.). Boston: Beacon Press.

Habermas, J. (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Thomas Burger, Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press,

Habermas, J. (1996). *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press¹²³.

Haider, H., Mcloughlin, C., & Scott, Z. (2011). *Topic guide on communication and governance*. Birmingham, UK: Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC) & Communication for Governance and Accountability Program (CommGAP).

Hauser, Gerard. (1998). "Vernacular Dialogue and the Rhetorically of Public Opinion",
Communication Monographs 65 (2): 83–107 Page. 86.

Horn, R. E. and Halley, Alexis A. (1995). *Electronic Town Meetings*. Washington, D.C.
National Academy of Public Administration, Information Cooperative Project,
Alliance for Redesigning Government.

Hudock, A. (2003), *'Hearing the Voices of the Poor: Encouraging Good Governance
and Poverty Reduction through Media Sector Support'*. Washington D. C.:
World Learning.

Hyden G, Leslie M, Ogundium F. (2002). *Media and Democracy In Africa*, Transaction
Publishers. New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Krueger, R. A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. London:
Sage.

Kovach, B., & Rosenstein, T. (2007). *The elements of journalism*. New York, NY: Three
Rivers Press.

Linsky, Martin. (1988). "The Media and Public Deliberation." In *The Power of Public
Ideas*, edited by Robert B. Reich. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Livingstone, Sonia, & Lunt, Peter. (1994). *Talk on television: Audience participation and*

public debate . London: Routledge.

Lukensmeuer J. and Torres H. (2006). *Public Deliberation: A Manager's Guide to Citizen Engagement*. IBM Center for the Business of Government Albert.

Mefalopulos, P.(2003). *Development communication source book: broadening the boundaries of communication*. Communication in economic development. World Bank.

McCloughlin and Scott.(2010). *Communication and Governance*. Produced in collaboration with the Communication for Governance and Accountability Program (CommGAP), International Development Department University of Birmingham. Available at;
<http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/CommGAP1.pdf> [Accessed on Jan. 1, 2012]

Merriam. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in Education*. Sanfransisco; Jossey- Bass.

NCMC. (2005).*How to plan a town hall meeting*. Department of justice,US.

Newsom, D., Turk, J. V., & Kruckeberg, D. (2004). *This is PR: The realities of public relations* . Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Norris p. (2004). *Giving voice to voiceless good governance*. Human development and mass communications, Shorenstein , Harvard university Cambridge.

- Norris p. (2006). *the role of the free press in promoting Democratization, good governance, and human development*, Cambridge, MA 02138 New York.
- OECD. (1996). “*Effective Communications Between the Public Service and the Media*”. Sigma Papers, No. 9, OECD Publishing. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5kml6g6m8zjl-en> [Accessed on Jan. 30, 2012]
- Page, I. (1996). *Mass Media in Modern Democracy*. The University of Chicago press, Ltd., London.
- Paolo, M. (2003). *Theory and Practice of Participatory communication*. The World Bank publication.
- Phillips, J. (1996). Defending the Boundaries: Identifying and Countering Threats in a Usenet Newsgroup. *The Information Society* 12:39-62.
- Pratt, J (2000). *Capturing Public Thinking: Authentic Reporting on Public Forums*. west Virginia, center for civic life.
- Radudu C, (1998). *Media and communication management*. Girgon , Numbi.
- Ramakhla R. (2009). *The role of the private radio station in promoting participatory democracy in Lesotho*, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
- Ravich , D. and Thernstrom, A. (1992). *The Peloponnesian War* .Excerpted in The

Democracy Reader .NY: Harper Collins.

Robert E. Horn and Alexies A. (1995). the Meridian International Institute for Information Cooperative Project Alliance for Redesigning Government National Academy of Public Administration Washington, D.C. Available at <http://www.stanford.edu/~rhorn/a/policy/ElectronicDemocracyGovernance/artclETMSurvey.html> [Accessed on Feb. 30, 2012]

Rogers, E. (1976). *Communication and Development: The Passing of the Dominant Paradigm. Communication and Development – Critical Perspectives*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Rose Haward. (n.d.). *Media and election an election reporting hand book*. Institution for media, policy and civil society, IMPACS.

Serveas, J.(1999). *Communication for development*. One world multiple cultures, NJ, Hampton press, Inc.

Simon and sharma. (2011). *A guide to public finical management literature: for practitioners in developing countries*. Westminster Bride Road, London UK.

UNESCAP. (2009). *what is Good Governance?* United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Available at <http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.pdf> [Accessed on Feb. 30, 2012]

UNESCO. (2005). *“Media and Good governance”*. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Communication and Information Sector, France.

UNESCO. (2009). *Series on Journalism Education: Civic Education for Media Professionals: A Training Manual* Published by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization Communication and Information Sector, France.

Vasquez, G., Taylor, M. (2004). *Research perspectives on “the public.”* In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of public relations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Villadsen, S. (1999), *Good Governance and Decentralization Public Sector Reforms in Developing Countries*. Nordic Consulting Group; Denmark.

Weeks, E. (2000). *The practice of deliberative democracy: Results from four large-scale trials*. Public Administration Review, 60(4), 360-372.

Wimmer, R. and Dominick, J. (2006). *Mass Media Research: An Introduction*. United States of America: Thompson Wadsworth. Wright, D. K.

Witschge, T. (2008). *Examining online public discourse in context: A mixed method approach*. Javnost—the Public, 15(2), 75-92.

World Bank. (1998). *The World Bank Participation Source Book*. The World Bank, Washington DC.

Appendix A

Graduate School of Journalism and Communications

Addis Ababa University

Interview Questions for the Chief-Editors and Program Editors

1. Why does your organization conduct public forum?
2. Who takes the ultimate responsibility in organizing the discussion forum?
3. In what way the public forum is advertised?
4. How far the forum is participatory?
5. Are the participants are drawn from the whole population (gender, age, education, ethnicity, political interest etc)?
6. What kind of feedback do you receive from the participants?
7. What kinds of follow-up activities will likely result from the forum?
8. Do you evaluate and revisit your performance in the public discussion forum? How?
9. Do you have any guide to organizing public forums?
10. What are the main challenges in conducting such forum?
11. How do you address the challenges mentioned above to insure effective public discussion forum?

Appendix B
Graduate School of Journalism and Communications
Addis Ababa University

Focus Group Discussions Guides

1. What do you think about the function of media as public forum?
2. What is the value of the forum/*mestawet* program/ in promoting two way communications?
3. How this discussion forum/*mestawet* program/ can promote diverse viewpoints?
4. Do you think that the process of this forum have the ability to influence policy and decision making? How?
5. How do you evaluate the public interest to participate in discussion affecting their lives?
6. Have you had special training in the area of public participation or other relevant issues (Such as public relation, media, and civic education)?
7. What are the challenges experienced in terms of conducting public forum and the pre-and post-discussion forum?
8. How do you think one could address the challenges mentioned above to in sure effective public discussion forum?

Appendix C
Graduate School of Journalism and Communications
Addis Ababa University

Questions for the forum Moderators

- 1 . What does your practical work normally consist of?
2. What rules / guidelines must the participants of the forum follow to be allowed to participate?
3. If those rules or guidelines are broken by a participant, what sanctions can he / she expect? Are there different levels of sanctions for different types of rule breaking?
4. At what level the public express their opinion clearly?
5. What participation techniques might be appropriate?
6. What specific questions can be asked to stimulate and guide the discussion?
7. How do you reframe the issues in the discussion and move towards consensus?

Appendix D

Graduate School of Journalism and Communications Addis Ababa University

Parameters for the Content Analysis of Sample Broadcasts

1. Are there diverse viewpoints expressed?
2. Is there any evidence of ‘View dominance – that an apparent homogeneity of views has excluded other opposing perspectives? E.g. are some perspectives raised briefly and then silenced by the majority?
3. Is any one group under- or overrepresented? (gender, age, education, ethnicity, political interest)
4. To what extent do participants use different types of evidence to justify their contributions?
5. To what extent and how do participants express common good sentiments?
6. To what extent are participants engaged in respectful discussion with one another?
7. Is there effective moderating?
8. Are there signs that people are genuinely listening to each other and considering each other’s points of view?
9. Where do tensions emerge, and how do people talk about them?

Note: some of the points and ideas [of the parameters] are adapted from the book by Page, I. (1996). *WHO DELIBERATES? Mass Media in Modern Democracy*. London: The University of Chicago Press.

Appendix E

Photos from the discussion forum



=====--*mestwet* program logo



-The two moderators on the stage



-Active women participant



Officials on the stage- taking notes from the participants views



Participants in the hall-listening the discussion attentively

