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**Capacity Building for Local Development: A Comparative Study of
“Formal” and “Informal” Organizations in Gondar, Northern Ethiopia**

by

Getachew Mequanent, B.A., M.E.S.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Geography
Carleton University
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May 1998

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Capacity Building for Local Development: A Study of “Formal” and “Informal” Organizations in
Gondar, Northern Ethiopia

Submitted by Getachew Mequanent, B.A., M.E.S.
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of philosophy

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Date May 19, 1998

Abstract

This thesis explores the conceptual and methodological questions of local capacity building. The issue of capacity building has to do with enhancing the role of local organizations in the development process. It has been argued that strong organizations would create the social and material basis of support for development initiatives, including the structures demanded by decentralized power, institutions, and resources. But, too often there has been little done to assess the range of organizational capabilities which are the determining factors for the effectiveness and efficiency of their performance functions. On the basis of the case study of “formal” and “informal” organizations in Gondar, Northern Ethiopia, this thesis argues that local organizations are created and sustained by dynamic processes of socio-economic, cultural and political interactions, which, in turn, require individuals to engage in a systematic mode of interaction to frame and reframe relationships among themselves and with outsider agencies. The case study examines the roles, structures and functions of these organizations to understand how they actually work and also how the environment that is external and internal to organizations can increase or limit the range of their capabilities as social agencies of change in local society. The study also develops a framework to assess the importance of existing and potential organizational capacities to initiate and coordinate development work. In doing so, it attempts to identify both “capacity utilization” problems and “capacity building” needs. The problem of utilizing existing capacities emanates from the top-down, technocratic practices which rarely take account the vital role of local organizations in the development process. The capacity building issue draws attention to the need for developing local knowledge-base and technical skills that match people’s expectations in the development process. The study concludes by proposing a regional planning approach that helps to define areas of responsibility for local organizations, so as to complement their roles with programme and project initiatives.

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Acronyms

ADA	Amhara Development Association
CIMMYT	Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maíz y Trigo
CODEF	Coalition of Democratic Forces
CPAR	Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief
DoA	Department of Agriculture
DPED	Department of Planning and Economic Development
EDU	Ethiopian Democratic Union
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HYVs	High yield varieties
IES	Institute of Ethiopian Studies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRRI	International Rice Research Institute
IITA	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture
KAs	Kebele Administrations
LID	local institutional development
MEDHIN	MEDHIN Democratic Party
NGZ	North Gondar Administrative Zone
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
OECD	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
PADEP	Peasant Agriculture Development Extension Programme
PAs	Peasant Associations
RDC	Rural Development Committee
SCs	Service Cooperatives
UNCRD	United Nations Center for Regional Development
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
VDC	Village Development Committee
WATT	Woreda Advisory and Technical Team
WME	Water Mineral and Energy

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In the past two decades, there has been increasing concern about involving local organizations in the development process. This is evident in the wide spread adoption of concepts such as “local institutions”, “grassroots organizations”, “community organizations” “popular organizations”, “people-centered organizations”, and so forth, in the academic literature and the policy rhetoric of donor agencies, multilateral organizations, national governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). All share the same concern of utilizing the potential of local organizations to serve as a medium of communication between insiders (people) and outsiders (development agencies), to identify appropriate programme or project targets and to create the social and material basis of support for development initiatives to ensure long-term sustainability . The emergence of the “civil society” discourse in the 1990s has further led to the popularity of local organizations, not only because of their instrumentality to create strategies of survival for the African population (Taylor and MacKenzie, 1992) but also because of their expanding influence beyond the community/local realm to affect macro level processes of change (Hyden and Bratton, 1992; Harbeson *et al*, 1994; and Sandbrook and Halfani, 1993).

But many attempts to enhance the role of local organizations in the development process have not produced satisfactory results, in large part because little has been done to examine the social, economic, cultural, political and physical environments within which these organizations exist and how such environments limit (or increase) the range of their capabilities as social agencies of change. Instead, the “organizational question” of

development has continued to be focused on the managerial issues of mainstream institutions (Brinkerhoff, 1991; Hage and Finsterbusch, 1987; Jedlicka; 1977, 1987). Even when the “local organization” issue had been considered, it was often assumed that communities only needed simple “organizational solutions”, without realizing that decision-making in the household, community or local arena is as complex as in any other small or large organization. Hence, because there is little understanding of local organizations’ form of existence and how they *actually* work, designing participatory structures within programme or project frameworks has not been an easy task.

Central to the strategy of deploying local organizations for development work is therefore an examination of the environment within which they exist. A better understanding of the ways in which such organizations function can help to allocate tasks and responsibilities in ways that match organizations’ capability to address problems of varying degree and magnitude. It can also be possible to identify enabling and constraining factors inherent in social and institutional structures and state-society relationships. The following hypotheses can then be formulated: The role of local organizations in the development process has been limited because either 1) old structures cannot match new expectations, 2) outside agencies allocate roles which cannot be made compatible with their functional performance, or 3) mainstream policies and practices do not create a favourable environment for popular participation.

This dissertation will test these hypotheses by utilizing the case study of local organizations in Lay Armachiho Woreda of Gondar, Northern Ethiopia. The study will examine the roles, structures and functions of “formal” and “informal” organizations in order

to assess their existing and potential capacities to promote rural development work. In the examination and discussion of the above hypotheses, attempts are made to direct attention to four broad areas of concern. First, there is a need to understand the ways in which “formal” and “informal” organizations actually work, that is, how they are created and sustained and how individual relationships are structured within organizations. Second, the role of local organizations in local society needs to be assessed, so as to identify strengths and weaknesses and to determine the extent to which it is possible to re-orient their roles to rural development work. Third, it is important to pay attention to the external environment in order to understand the ways in which it imposes enabling or constraining conditions on the performance of organizations. Finally, an attempt should be made to explore the conceptual and methodological questions of local capacity building, so as to suggest ways and means of enhancing the participation of local organizations in the development process.

The role of local organizations in the development process cannot be disputed. They can, for example, mobilize community spirit to support development work, resolve conflicts, create mutual support systems, link communities with outside agencies, promote institutional plurality and ensure programme or project sustainability. But, as pointed out above, there has been little effort to assess the range of their capabilities to determine what can and what cannot be done by particular local organizations. For example, women, the youth and poor people might not be able to participate in the decision-making process; or some tasks (those which require more capital inputs and finance) require external agencies to take more responsibilities; or some programmes require a strong legal/political authority to implement them (asset re-distribution, for example). Second, too often there is a failure to recognize

organizational diversity with respect to, among other things, size, capacity, identity and legal/political mandate. Peasant organizations, women's groups, youth associations, professional associations, workers unions, cooperatives, farm work groups, religious associations, and so forth, are perceived by outsiders as "one kind of entity" that all strive to achieve the same thing. This says nothing about, for example, the different purposes of individual organization's existence, the varying degrees of external control, membership criteria, values and decision-making structures.

Furthermore, there are many other factors which affect the performance of local organizations. For instance, the ideology of "national integration" often conflicts with the goal of local autonomy. So, governments expand party and bureaucratic structures in order to control the population and to legitimate top-down, authoritarian rule. In many cases, the development of local organizations has been encouraged only if it served the purpose of sustaining patronage politics and state control. Moreover, as James Ferguson (1994) argues, development is conceived and executed by the "conceptual apparatus" of outsider agencies. Robert Chambers (1994) also says that the "development profession" has increasingly come to constitute a powerful and "conservative" interest group that perpetuates unequal relationships of material, organizational and geographical power. As a result, creating a participatory environment in the "development field" has continued to be a major problem. Finally, "development" has its own set of values. The goal of agencies has been to modernize "traditional" societies. This has in turn required the application of "modern systems" of planning, administration, communication, knowledge production, and so on. Accordingly, everything "traditional" has not been utilized effectively. For instance, we know that rural

people gather under trees, on church grounds, “market” places and anywhere in the locality, to manage local affairs. But this is rarely valued, since often anything done outside of the “official” development platform is seen as useless or even “problematic”. Instead, national governments, donor agencies, NGOs and multilateral organizations set about to construct “modern organizations”. Modern organizations have always been viewed as cultural models of “development” which create stability and order out of the anarchy and chaos that characterize “traditional” societies. Community-based organizations are often viewed as an “envelope” of fragmented social relations that inhibit any effort to promote social change.

This all makes the issue of capacity building many sided. For one thing, the issue has to do with inducing organizational changes in order to make decision-making structures more participatory, to improve their performance functions or to expand the range of organizations’ activities. Capacity building also has to do with building people’s ability to acquire the knowledge and skills needed, for example, to negotiate with government authorities, to bargain with local traders, to create external linkages in ways that bring about social and economic benefits, including the possession of adequate technological capabilities and institutional support systems to increase the productive capacity of local resources. Second, capacity building demands changes from above. It demands changes in the institutions, political systems and the discourse of planning and administration in ways that create a favourable environment for popular participation. Yet, as I have repeatedly pointed out, the range of capabilities of local organizations ought to be carefully assessed. How much can they do to plan and coordinate rural development work, mobilize resources, resolve conflicts, create external linkages, provide services, or ensure participation and equity? Many

have gone too far when they argue in favour of “state withdrawal” without questioning the limits on the functional performance of local organizations. Chapter 7 will present a framework for assessing existing and potential organizational capacities and a regional planning approach that defines different areas of responsibility which correspond with the capacity of each agency (local, regional and central, for example).

Ethiopia provides a good case study for the “capacity building” question. For one thing, the country is faced with chronic problems of rural and urban poverty, high unemployment rate, rising inequalities of income, accelerated environmental degradation, famine, land scarcity and sluggish economic growth. Government and non-government agencies are attempting to promote programmes and projects that will work towards changing the present conditions of existence for the majority of Ethiopians. In the face of such a challenge, development agencies must strive to make better use of local organizations to improve the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of programmes and projects. In addition, Ethiopia is undergoing dramatic economic and political changes in the 1990s. The rebel forces of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) overthrew the socialist-military government of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991 and set up a Transitional Government that immediately introduced drastic measures to liberalize the centrally planned economy, including currency devaluation, reduction of import taxes and privatization of state-owned business organizations. In 1995 the EPRDF government inaugurated a federal system of government, based on nine ethnically defined regional states. The current political leaders articulate the idea of promoting regional autonomy to encourage decentralized decision-making and popular participation.

However, unlike the 1974 urban based upheaval (which resulted in the downfall of the ancient monarchy), the changes in the 1990s were greeted by many Ethiopians with mixed feelings of pessimism and optimism. There is no doubt that both political decentralization and market liberalization were necessary measures to revive the country's shattered economy. But for a country that just emerged from decades of civil war, structural adjustment has meant increasing economic hardship for millions of Ethiopians, particularly those who live in urban areas. Moreover, even though regionalisation provides a good opportunity for more decentralized decision-making, the ethnic definition of Regional States could create fertile soil for the growth of centrifugal forces that undermine "national unity" and that could create serious problems for population redistribution and allocation of skilled manpower. In this instance, EPRDF's critics may have a good case. However, in a country where the majority of people live in chronic conditions of poverty, attention should first be directed at the needs of poor men, women and young people whose daily struggle is one of survival. What is the best strategy to improve the quality of life of Ethiopians? Questions like this draw attention to how the government should work, not what the government is. Here, I am not downplaying the danger posed by the continuous political articulation of "ethnicity". I am pointing out that poverty alleviation should be identified as the top priority. For poor people the nation state makes little sense, unless the Ethiopian government demonstrates its capacity to alleviate the persistent conditions of poverty. Members of the "opposition" groups who live in comfortable exile in the West, and the urban middle class in Ethiopia, often find it hard to accept this fact.

I now define the terms used in this dissertation thesis before outlining the Chapters. “Formal” organizations refer to rural Kebele administration units (KAs) and service cooperatives (SCs). The KAs are the politico-administrative arm of the Ethiopian government. The SCs, though created to meet multiple objectives, have so far only been able to manage grinding mills and distribute small amounts of agricultural inputs during the ploughing season. Both KAs and SCs were formed by the radical military government in the 1970s with the idea of creating conditions of empowerment for local self-administration and market control. But the government soon began using these social agencies to export its policies to rural areas and to exploit agricultural producers. At the time of the government’s downfall (in 1991), KAs and SCs had completely alienated the rural population. The present EPRDF ruling party has chosen to retain the structure of KAs and SCs while making minor changes which, not surprisingly, reflect its policy vis-a-vis rural society.

“Informal” organizations refer to *mahabers* (religious associations) and *debait*s (farm work groups). *Mahaber* membership ranges from ten to thirty households. Members come together each month to honour the Saint for whom the association is named. The gathering is used to promote spiritual and social values (especially mutual assistance) and to resolve disputes in the community. A *debait* group consists of three to twenty or more individuals, depending on the amount of work demanded in farm fields in a given time. Group members work on each other’s farm on a rotating basis. Such arrangements are more common in the harvesting season, when farmers are very likely to experience shortages of labor. *Mahabers* and *debait*s exist outside of the politico-administrative structures; they represent a domain between the government-dominated “public” and the household “space”.

The formal-informal dichotomy is often used to distinguish “modern” organizations from “traditional” organizations. For economists, in particular, this dualism always implies the “difference” between labor intensive (traditional) and capital intensive (modern) industries. But, as H. Myint (1985) argues, dualism exists both in the economy and the administrative/fiscal machinery of the state. And dualism is not the co-existence of modern and traditional sectors, but it can also exist at the same industry and the same scale of economic and administrative activity. Here, I use the formal-informal dichotomy only to make a distinction between those organizations directly connected with the Ethiopian government (KAs and SCs) and those that exist outside of the politico-administrative structure (*mahabers* and *debaitis*).

Too often confusion also compounds the difference between “organizations” and “institutions”. Norman Uphoff (1986) has attempted to solve this problem by putting forward three categories: “a) organizations that are not institutions (‘a new firm of lawyers’, for example), b) institutions that are not organizations (‘the law’), and c) organizations that are institutions (or vice versa, institutions that are organizations (‘the court’ [p. 8]))”. Uphoff considers “local organizations that are institutions”. Here, I will use the term “local organizations” to mean both permanent entities and action-oriented social processes or movements aimed at accomplishing short or medium term objectives. For example, farm work groups in Ethiopia, which flourish during the harvesting and weeding season, are temporary organizations (processes or movements). But, people can once again re-organize themselves whenever needs prevail. One can compare these groups with KAs and SCs (“formal” organizations) which can be altered or dismantled any time by government

legislation. The point here is that individuals' conceptions of an "organization" will be a critical factor in defining the conditions under which organizations are formed and sustained.

An organization's role is here understood as the range of its capability to affect local life in one or more ways. This range of capability is determined by the human factor (participation), the artefacts of the organization (structure), material resources and the normative element (legitimacy) (see Figure 1). An organization's structure determines how roles and responsibilities are delegated to leaders, the kind of communication channel created and the extent of members' ability to participate in the decision-making process. Participation in turn incorporates shared values in the goals of the organization. It increases members' contributions, builds a cooperative spirit and ensures accountability. The resources of the people, combined with their intellect and talents, ensure the satisfactory performance of the organization. The realization of benefits creates the social basis of legitimacy which in turn enables the organization to achieve a consensus among its members, regarding what should be done and how it should be done. However, the external environment also shapes the role of organizations in the society. For instance, the policies of bilateral and multilateral agencies influence the policies and practices of national governments, which, in turn, define the mode and intent of people's involvement in the decision-making process. The top-down, technocratic practice of the governmental bureaucracy provides little room for beneficiary groups to participate in the planning and management of programmes or projects. The availability of natural resources, cultural patterns, geographical location, access to markets, and so on, are all important factors that inhibit or enhance local organizations' roles in society. The internal and external factors combined will determine the purposes of the

organizations' existence, the ways in which action strategies are devised, the pattern of the authority system, the organization's resource capacity and the degree of agreements/and consensus among stakeholders. With this in mind, "local capacity" is here defined as the enlargement of the range of organizations' capabilities by changing or augmenting existing structures and functions. The scope of this definition can be expanded to direct attention to four issues: 1) enhanced capability of overcoming the three constraints of agricultural production: land, labor, and technology; 2) enhanced capability of directing and monitoring *opportunity generating*, *opportunity constraining* and *opportunity enabling* processes in the society; 3) self-administration of local affairs; and 4) increased participation in the national development process.

In the Ethiopian context, the "local" is taken to mean an administrative jurisdiction constituted by the rural Kebele area which, theoretically, has a population of about 2000 (see Figure 2). The Kebele thus represents a planning "focal point" to identify needs and priorities of rural development. It has an administrative infrastructure well suited to the mobilization of local social and economic resources to support policy initiatives. The EPRDF government has also divided the Kebeles into *ketas* or *gotes* (sub-Kebeles). *Ketas* or *gotes* consist of at least three *menders* (villages) and their boundaries are defined on the basis of the proximity of those *menders* to each other. The *ketana* can perhaps be viewed as a "community".

S = Structure
 Leadership
 Communication
 Occupation
 Participation
 Incentive
 External Linkages
 Motivation

P= Participation
 Shared Vision
 Accountability
 Mobilization
 Cooperation
 Incentive

R = Resources
 Labour
 Skills
 Knowledge
 Experience
 External Support

L= Legitimacy
 Representation
 Agreement
 Consensus
 Cooperation
 Rules

Figure 1. Elements of Local Organization

The everyday usage of the term “local development” often connotes that it is an alternative approach to top-down development. In contrast to the trickle-down theory of “growth pole” or “unbalanced growth” strategies (see Hansen, 1981), the “local” approach promotes participatory and equitable development. Advocates of this approach argue that small-scale projects can be easily managed and monitored to produce effective and sustainable results. These projects would first be replicated in the local area and then on a larger scale, through another phase of replication. Theoretically, local-level planning takes technocrats closer to the reality of life and leads them to identify better programme or project strategies. This all is easier said than done. For one thing, the small-scale approach differs little in reality from the conventional strategy. We have “wealthy islands” (small project areas) at the local level, and “growth pole” centres at the regional level--all existing in the world of poverty. For another thing, small-scale projects are planned, as if local development can take place separately from national development. One argument to be pursued here, therefore, is that local-based initiatives should supplement or complement national policy strategies. Local development should not be seen as an end in itself. It should rather be viewed as one strategy to overcome part of the “organizational” problem of rural development. Or, it should be considered as one method that helps development agencies to organize local efforts by inducing popular participation and by matching programme or project purposes with local needs and priorities.

Chapter 2 attempts to broadly examine the various intellectual theories of “development”, beginning from the modernization debate in the early decade of development to the state and market decentralization issue of the 1980s and 1990s. Chapter 3 looks at the

current economic and political changes in Ethiopia. Chapter 4 discusses the case studies of “formal” organizations. It first presents a brief ethnography of the Kemants (the inhabitants of the research area) and summarizes the socio-economic conditions in Lay Armachiho Woreda. This is followed by an extensive discussion of the roles, structures and functions of KA and SC organizations. Chapter 5 turns to “informal” organizations to examine the roles, structures and functions of *mahabers* and *debaitis*. Chapter 6 analyzes the findings of the case studies by comparing and contrasting the functional performance of “formal” and “informal” organizations. Chapter 7 constructs a general framework for understanding the issues of capacity building and capacity building strategies. The Chapter also proposes a planning approach that could help to utilize the existing and potential capacities of local organizations. The last Chapter makes some final conclusions.

Methodology

The field research was carried out in the three Kebele administrative areas of Lay Armachiho Woreda, Gondar, Northern Ethiopia, between September 1996 and August 1997 (see Map1). The objective was to examine the roles, structures and functions of “formal” and “informal” organizations. “Formal” organizations refer to rural Kebele administration units (KAs) and service cooperatives (SCs). “Informal” organizations refer to *mahabers* (religious associations) and *debaitis* (farm work groups). The fieldwork was intended to do the following: 1) understand the roles and functions of these organizations in relation to, among other things, a) mutual assistance/safety net b) the organization of local labor in the

production process c) dispute resolution, and d) participation in the political process; 2) examine decision-making structures, membership (age, class, gender, etc.), participation and leadership; 3) assess the potential of organizations to promote rural development work; 4) compare and contrast “formal” and “informal” organizations in terms of their performance functions and 5) explore ways of complementing or supplementing the effort of one kind of organization with another. Attention was also paid to the ways in which macro policies affect the role, structure and functions of local organizations and their implications for capacity building strategies.

Research questions were defined for each type of organizations. The main concerns with KAs and SCs were to find out about issues that pertain to the extent and level of popular participation, the local population’s perception of the role of such organizations, the ways in which the leadership exercises its power (the tendency of the leaders to use organizations for self-centred interests and their ability to execute government directives effectively, for example). With regard to *debait* organizations, attention was paid to the process of group formation, membership size, the kinds of arrangements made to work together, the relationship between members (i.e., whether they come from an extended family or, whether they are individuals who come together for purely economic reasons), and the life-span of the group. Similarly, the issues pertaining to *mahaber* organizations focused on processes of group formation, membership composition (age, gender, social status, etc.), decision-making structures, participation, and leadership roles and responsibilities.

We students are often pressured by our supervisors and advisors to develop a field work method that falls in line with commonly accepted concepts and practices. Today’s

“participatory research” provides a good example. But, whether one carries out a rural appraisal (Chambers, 1992), participatory rural appraisal (Chambers, 1994), action research (Nelly, 1984) or actor-oriented research (Long, 1992), the field environment will ultimately dictate what is to be done and how it is done. The best research methodology is one which is situationally appropriate and one which allows the researcher to maneuver through the complex field work environment. Hence, in my case, data were gathered through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, archive research, informal communication methods and the use of personal relationships to get access to information. Although Lay Armachiho is my birth place (I have lived 14 years outside of Ethiopia), I still had to face the realities of the field environment, realities which led me to realize that I could only meet my research objective if there was flexibility in field work methods. The following pages describe my experience (see Appendix II for the calendar of field activities).

Getting Started: After arriving in Addis Ababa (the capital) I went to see the Director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) at Addis Ababa University. My intention was to get some advice on how to proceed with the field work and also to ask the IES’s assistance to get a work permit. But my meeting with the Director turned out to be a disappointing one. The Director became angry with me for two reasons. First, he said that I did not follow proper procedures to apply for affiliation with the University. This was in fact true. And I was not aware of it. Second, he was angry because the Ethiopian Ambassador to Canada had written him to ask the IES to assist me in the course of my research in Ethiopia. The Director then said “how dare you, as a student, go to the Ambassador to get a letter of support?”. I

tried to explain to him that I was not a political appointee but a “poor” student who was trying to find ways of getting as much support as I could to carry out field work. He was not convinced. In fact, he denounced the Ambassador for intervening in IES’s affairs and my study supervisor at Carleton University for not doing “enough supervision”.¹ Nevertheless, the Director promised me that he would refer my proposal to other departments in the University but he also said that it would be a long time before I got the approval for affiliation. Only after my affiliation with the University was confirmed would IES help me to get a work permit.

I did not want to stay in Addis Ababa waiting for the IES’s response. I had to begin the field work. So, I left for Gondar (the research area). After visiting my family I went to speak to the Chairman of the Zonal (sub-regional) Administration. I talked to him about the work permit. He said to me that since I was a native of Gondar, I did not need any work permit, except that I should go to the immigration office to renew the visa. He also wrote me a support letter, asking any governmental department to assist me in the course of my research. This support letter became a passport for me. Wherever I went, I presented it to government officials, including Kebele (rural) officials.

The next task was to find ways of integrating myself back into the local society. Things have changed a lot in the past thirteen years. Many of the old have died and many of the young have set up their own households. Villages have increased twice or more in size, due to population growth. I had also changed. I left the country young. I had been exposed

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But one former academic, and another who is currently on the faculty of the University, said that the Ambassador did nothing wrong. In fact, they thought that he should be praised for writing the letter of support.

to two cultures (Sudanese and Canadian). So, I knew that I should not pretend to be a member of the society. In fact, I sensed that people were looking at me as a stranger. Wherever I went, they said to me “are you Mequanent’s son”, or “are you Fitawrari Asmare’s grandson?” (Fitawrari literally means a higher military rank, which was used before the creation of a regular army). From the people’s point of view, I can only claim to be a “native” as long as I identified myself with my family.

This said, my first task was to assess the situation in Lay Armachiho Woreda. I then contacted extension workers and Woreda officials. I had no problem of arranging a meeting with them, since they are stationed at Tikil Dingay (where I lived). My first meeting with officials was conducted in some more conventional ways and lasted for no more than forty minutes. I would ask a list of questions. They wrote down each question on a pad of paper and answered them. But I also caught some of them after office hours (in the evening). Such an informal setting was very useful. It gave me the privilege of taking as much time as I needed to engage in a conversation. We begin the discussion by talking about family, work, or my experience in Canada. If I met people with whom I grew up, we talked about our childhood experience. I would then tell them what I intended to do and ask them to make suggestions as to how I should carry out the field work. Later I asked them direct questions related to politics, society and economy.

Next, I traveled to the countryside to meet officials of the Kebele administration and service cooperatives. I would simply get up early in the morning and arrive at individual homes, meeting places and church gatherings. I also used “market” days to contact them. By this time, I had learned to introduce myself as “Mequanent’s son” or “Asmare’s grandson”.

I also presented the letter of support from the government. However, my interaction with ordinary people took a different form. Everywhere I went, people were interested in asking questions about my health, smoking habit, marriage, life in Sudan and Canada, the cost of the air ticket (from Canada to Ethiopia), the price of my shoes and clothes and even my religion (whether or not I had been converted to a non-Coptic Orthodox religion). I soon realized that I could not do anything until their interrogation was over.

In the first three weeks security was another concern. Many people advised me not to travel in the countryside alone. I was told that there were bandits who were robbing (city) people. I also had a family problem. Shortly after my arrival in Lay Armachiho my cousin was murdered by her own husband. Two of my cousins hunted down and executed the man on the following day. The families of the deceased man were threatening to retaliate because 1) there was no evidence that their brother had murdered his wife, and 2) the “blood” of the man and woman was not equal. Even though this never deterred me from traveling to the countryside, I became afraid to travel after sunset. Nevertheless, the people at the Department of Agriculture also assured me that I should not worry as long as I was not a politician.

Getting Along with the Crowd: The most important lesson I learned within the first few weeks of my life in Lay Armachiho was that, in order to understand “life situations” one must get along with the crowd. I mean that one should be interested in what people are talking about and why they are mostly preoccupied with the subject matter. For instance, between September and December people were preoccupied with the issue of agriculture, particularly, assessing the impact of new crop varieties and fertilizer. By December the

government introduced a land reform law. Again, people's attention shifted to the issue of land ownership and redistribution. Getting along with the crowd was not as difficult as the "introduction" task. I wore the traditional cotton garment in order to create the image of a "native". Later I even got used to wearing this garment in the city. I also enjoyed drinking *tela* (local beer) with the people. Unlike educated elites, rural people are very proud. They always insisted that we buy each other a drink. Now, I had a list of research questions established in my mind (see above). Since I had got used to talking about the research questions, remembering them was never a problem. But I had to be strategic in making use of gathering occasions in *tela bet* (a beverage house), "market" days and other places. I had to let people speak about their own affairs as long it took and then raise my own agenda when the right moment came. I would first engage in conversation about agricultural production or land reform, wedding, festivals, then gradually shift the topic to my research issues. On a few occasions, people even decided to let me speak about my "agenda". It was in such settings that I obtained the most valuable information for my research, particularly information about shared perspectives on certain issues (popular perceptions of local organizations and government policy, for example).

Of course, getting along with the crowd was sometimes embarrassing. On two occasions I became drunk. On one Sunday afternoon I visited all seven *mahaber* gatherings in one church ground. My intention was to record the number of people attending those gatherings. But whenever I entered a *mahaber*, I was offered a drink. And I had to finish the drink before I could leave the place. So, by the time I entered the seventh *mahaber* I was so drunk that I could not even speak clearly.

When I attended public meetings, I sat with the crowd facing the authorities. This helped me to avoid being identified with government officials. It also did much to build my credibility among the people. During the opening ceremony of the clinic in Gind-metaya (Kerker Kebele), people even told me to sit with the priests and older people to eat lunch, instead of with the officials.

In spite of this, I also kept a close contact with government officials. In fact, I always briefed the Woreda Council Chairman and the Director of the Department of Agriculture on what I had done and what I intended to do next. I also circulated my progress reports to government offices. This way, I let them know that I had no hidden agenda. In fact, the Secretary of the Woreda Council once said to me that the Chairman trusted me like “a party member”. However, the same Chairman was not willing to give me the land reform document, because it was regarded as a very sensitive political issue. Nor was I encouraged to attend public meetings during the land reform process. In fact, Kebele land reform officials were not comfortable when I approached them. Decisions were being made in secret meetings (see Chapter 4).

“Touring” the Countryside: Perhaps my best experience was walking to and from the countryside. True, walking to the countryside consumed a lot of my time. There is only one all-weather road (from Tikil Dingay to Gondar). People from the Department of Agriculture gave me a ride three or four times (they only have one vehicle). Other than this I always used public transportation. I then got off at a certain place and walked on foot. For the first four weeks I asked people to show me the direction of villages or individuals’ homes. However,

there were times when I returned to Tikil Dingay (where I lived) without doing anything. Two times I was not able to locate the meeting place. I had taken either the wrong direction, or my informants had given me the wrong address. Some times the individuals (my contacts) were not available. I would then leave a message saying that I would either come back another time or they could come and meet me in the city. But my worst frustration was spending between two and three hours waiting for a mini-bus. Sometimes the mini-bus was full, so I would be forced to walk back on foot. Other times I would just walk back home on foot, instead of waiting for a car. The Woreda Chairman had once suggested that he could help me by asking “informants” to come and meet me in Tikil Dingay. I declined this offer, since this had the risk of being identified with government officials.

Yet, my frequent travel allowed me to have a close physical contact with the countryside and to better understand the physical, social and economic environment. I also became more known in the communities. I met people on the way. We either walked together or stopped to sit down under a tree to engage in a brief conversation. Many of the people whom I met in the countryside would greet me when they came to the “market” in Tikil Dingay. This relationship allowed me to have access to information about the events taking place in the rural areas.

Data Gathering: Documenting “formal” organizations was much easier than “informal” organizations, since there were records of Kebele administrations and service cooperatives in Tikil Dingay government offices. Documenting “informal” organizations required going around the countryside to inquire about their existence. It is commonly known that

mahabers and *debaitis* are widespread phenomena but difficulties arose when I sought to find out where they were hosted and who were involved in the organizations.

Let me begin with *mahabers*. It would not be an easy task to go around to every village or community to ask whether or not there were *mahabers* in the area. People advised me that it would be better if I contacted church priests, since every *mahaber* has a priest who serves as a spiritual leader. I was able to meet priests after the church service and on *mahaber* gatherings. I also went to their house. But, I was not successful in contacting the priests in Lomeye/Shumara Kebele. I once traveled to the church when there was a funeral service, but no priest was present (the funeral was for a two-year old girl). I looked for Kebele militia to send a message for one of the priests. The militia sneaked out of the crowd and ran away. The reason was that they thought I was a government official who had come to give them orders. November was the harvesting season, the time when Kebele officials are often heard complaining loudly about being overburdened with public responsibilities (not having enough time to work on their farm fields). This said, within the three KA areas (for which data were successfully gathered), there were 119 *mahabers*. Yet the informants knew the number of people in only a very few *mahabers*, so attempts were made to record membership size by attending a few *mahaber* gatherings. One man had warned me not to stand up and count people “as if they are cattle”, so I always asked the *dagnas* (chairpersons) to count the number of people in the *mahabers*. This allowed the number of people in 23 *mahabers* to be recorded.

The fact that no one had ever done a study about *mahabers* made everyone curious about my intentions. I told some people that I was interested in knowing about how *mahaber*

organizations work and to assess how useful they are for the local society. Yet, a few priests were not comfortable when I talked to them about *mahabers*. In fact, two priests told me that they still were not clear about my intentions. I first thought that this response had to do with my own approach, in that, I had made the question too personal. But I later found out that a large part of their suspicion had to do with the intrusion of external influence. Ethiopian society had been bombarded with socialist ideology for two decades. There was also a Pentecostal church group which had been expanding its influence in the society, particularly since many relief agencies entered the country in the 1980s. Local priests then had a good reason to be suspicious of my activities around *mahabers*, specially given the fact that elites have been the agents of outside influence, particularly, for the Pentecostal groups (all of the Pentecostals are educated people).

Recording and observing *debait*s proved even more difficult. *Debait* is a normal routine of rural life in Ethiopia. It would be an exceptional case to find a farmer who does not engage in *debait* activities, precisely because he/she needs the help of others to plough, weed or harvest the crop. The organizational process is simple: two, three, four, up to thirty people get together and work on individuals' farm fields. A person will return the labor equal to what he/she owes to others. But people only decide to work together when they experience shortages of labor. So, information about when and where people plan to organize *debait* activities could not be easily obtained. For example, a *debait* can be organized after a *mahaber* gathering by making use of the left-over drink, by making arrangements during "market" days or by going around the house of others to ask for help. Another problem was that there would be a lot of intensive *debait* activity in one week, and none in the next. All

the work had been done (harvesting, for example). I still remember how surprised I was to see all the crops in the highland areas harvested in a matter of two weeks. This happened in the month of November when I was preoccupied with recording and documenting *mahaber* activities. Even so, attempts were made to observe and record nine *debait* activities.

Yet, my “participation” in *debait* activities was not satisfactory. I did physical work during the crop harvest, but failed to perform well. One old man told me to get out of there (from the line of work). One day I worked for about two hours and had a backache for the whole week. Another day I was talking to people during their break (the *debait* belonged to my younger brother). My father told me that I should either stop talking or leave the place-- he thought that I was disturbing the work. Still, during another ploughing *debait* day (in April), one of the men asked me not to get closer to his oxen (or, for that matter, anybody’s oxen) because they did not like the “odor of *ketemegan* (urban people)”. He was right. The oxen got tense. So, I could only sit down under the tree shade while others worked.

I always carried a note book and pen with me. Except in formal settings, I did not take out my pen to record a conversation. The reason was that I thought people would feel uncomfortable with formal interviews. I might have an exaggerated view of people’s sensitivity to the formality of interaction, but I found it difficult to take out a note book and record a conversation in *tela bets*, “market”, at the side of the road, after church services, *mahaber* or *debait* occasions. In my experience, people were more direct and honest when speaking in informal settings than would have been the case in formal settings. Indeed, the local elders I interviewed (in a more formal way) were more concerned with the choice of words and more selective in the expression of their views. For this reason, I generally wrote

down the information after the conversation was over. But I was worrying a lot, since I was aware of the danger of misquoting individuals or misinterpreting information, not to mention losing important points of the conversation.

However, the interviews with KA and SC committee members were conducted in a more formal manner. All the interviews went well. But all the committee members were present only during two of my interviews: once with the Ambezo/Chira Cooperative managing committee and another time with the Kerker Kebele administration committee. Otherwise, I succeeded in interviewing Kebele and Cooperative officials either individually or with only two members present. The most common reason was that “he or they cannot make it to the meeting”.

Very brief semi-structured interviews were also conducted with Woreda officials of Dembia, Chilga, Tach Armachiho and Wegera. These Woredas border Lay Armachiho. The Heads of Chilga and Tach Armachiho’s Department of Agriculture declined to meet me unless I had a letter of introduction from the Woreda District Council (I had a letter of the Zonal Administration but they said that it was not enough). I discussed with officials issues related to socio-economic problems in the region, public participation, capacity building and government policy

I spent one week with Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief (CPAR) in Lay Gayint Woreda, Southern Gondar Administrative Zone, touring project areas. I visited project sites and talked to local officials and CPAR’s project officers about “project participation”, capacity building and similar issues. Although I once met a crowd of fifty people, only a few of them spoke, and I had no doubt that these were Kebele officials.

Finally, I spent many hours at the Department of Agriculture, Department of Planning and Economic Development and the Zonal Administration office reading various project documents, evaluation reports and auditors reports. I also spent time at Addis Ababa University, International Livestock Research Institute and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) reading relevant literature.

Intervention?: Throughout my stay in Lay Armachiho, many people approached me to seek advice and support in dealing with the justice system and government officials. Two such people were frustrated cooperative officials who had difficulty of communicating with the Woreda official. At first, people thought that I was a local authority. Later they felt that I should at least have some information that could help them to solve their problems. For instance, on the eve of the land redistribution period, I was expected to know about the government's land policy, while in fact I never obtained a copy of the reform declaration. The policy document was secretly circulated among party members. I asked the Woreda office to give me a copy but I was told that there were no more copies available. I then went to the Zonal office, only to be told that the document could not be released to the public. I only managed to get the draft copy at a later date from the Institute of Development Research at Addis Ababa University. Under such a circumstance, I could only say that I knew nothing about the land reform. On the other hand, I was also careful not to get involved in local affairs, since this could have drawn me into conflict with the government and endangered my field work. However, I did venture to intervene on two occasions. One involved the

sexual abuse of female students by high school teachers. Nearly everyone, including government officials, knew about the sexual abuse but they were doing nothing. One of the teachers was always heard saying that he had taken the virginity of more than fifty school girls and that he also had sex with every woman in the town. I was very shocked. When I attended the same school, the relationship between teachers and students was like a children-parent relationship. But I got very frustrated when I heard that school girls had been punished by their own parents. When parents went to the school to complain about the abuse, the Director told them that their daughters were whores. This made me very angry. I wrote a letter to the Woreda Chairman, asking him to investigate the matter and to take appropriate action against those teachers. The Woreda office did not have objection to my action, except to criticize me for copying the letter to the Zonal Administration and Department of Education without the knowledge of Woreda officials. But my letter caused an uproar among the teachers. They claimed that their reputation had been tarnished by a “foreigner”. In fact, about a dozen of them went to the Woreda Department of Education demanding that the Department should do something about the “false accusation”. Unfortunately, the Acting Director wrote to the school to let them know that the Department had received a copy of the “accusations” and that he was looking into the matter. Some teachers went around to complain about my action. My wife was so worried about my safety that she asked her father to warn “those teachers” of the unpleasant consequences if they were thinking about doing any harm to me. My informants later told me that many teachers (who were not involved in the scandal) were happy with what I had done. By the time I left Lay Armachiho, the Woreda Council was still talking about creating a “discipline committee” to investigate the matter.

Another case involved police beating. An old man was accused of threatening local land reform officials. The Woreda police went to his house and asked him to hand over his automatic hand gun. The man denied that he owned a gun. The police searched his house and found the gun hidden beneath the wheat storage. They then beat the man and brought him to Tikil Dingay police station. My informants told me that the man was injured and was not getting any medical help. Again, I became angry and asked one of the policemen to tell me the whole story (I knew the old man). He said to me that the man had been beaten and that those policemen who did this were wrong. But, as my interest in the matter became known, the police began covering up the story. One police man approached me a few days later to tell me that the man was never beaten. When I talked to the Woreda Secretary about this matter, he could only say that this was a serious violation of human rights. The man was released from detention after three months. But to my knowledge, no action was taken to discipline the policemen.

However, these “intervention” attempts on my part led Woreda officials to change their attitude towards me. They probably concluded that I was no longer to be trusted, since I could expose any wrongdoing to the outside world. In fact, the Woreda Chairman criticized me for copying the letter to the Zonal offices and added “You know how to get access to information more than I do. This (antagonistic) relationship (with teachers) can limit your access to information from many departments”. It is therefore not surprising that when I tried to get the family size and landholding survey from the Woreda office, I was always told that the document was still in the hands of the Kebele administration (in fact it was handed over to Woreda officials). Later the Department of Education got the document for me.

In conclusion, the best research methodology is one which is situationally appropriate to allow the researcher to maneuver through the complex field work environment. In my case, the fieldwork method enabled me to meet the research objectives, except that the household survey was not done. By the time I was planning to do the survey, the government began implementing the land redistribution policy. This put the rural environment in turmoil (see Chapter 4). There should be no doubt that “indigenous researchers” can be involved in participatory research² but my experience also suggests that being “indigenous” does not help much to reduce the social, cultural, political and institutional problems often encountered by researchers. These problems give rise to the need to develop flexible and adaptable methods of field work. As Pieter de Vries (1992) points out, a research methodology evolves out of negotiation and accommodation in field situations.

It is obvious that my own familiarity with the local environment was very useful. But there were also some problems. For instance, the culture of “revenge” worried me for some time (see above). Local people saw me not only as a stranger, but also as an educated elite whom they could not trust to share confidential matters, since they have had many “bad” experiences with Ethiopian elites. In this respect, no one should be surprised if I say that outsider (non-Ethiopian) researchers may be more trusted! Second, “getting along with the crowd” helps one to learn about “public opinion” in the local society, but the researcher may be too close to the “subjects”, such that he/she becomes subjective in his/her understanding of social reality. I am not advocating the notion of the pure objectivity of positive science.

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Personal communication with D.R. Fraser Taylor, Department of Geography, Carleton University, February, 1998.

I am simply pointing out the need to try to maintain a middle-ground position. Finally, “informal” methods may not be efficient in terms of the time spent to obtain the information. Particularly, as I pointed out above, very useful information can be lost if the researcher is unable to record conversations immediately. All this said, a research methodology is not only a means of gathering and analyzing data, but it should also be used to understand “real life situations” (Long, 1992). This research is one such example.

CHAPTER TWO

The Theory and Practice of Rural Development

Introduction

Around 5:00 a.m. taxis begin roaring in the streets of Gondar city in Northern Ethiopia. By 6:00 a.m. cafeterias and coffee shops at the city's center open for business. Soon workers of various government departments arrive to eat breakfast. Exactly at 8:00 a.m. government service vehicles arrive. Workers line up and board those vehicles. The day's work begins. And this daily routine of work involves information generation and processing, proposal and strategy development to combat rural poverty. Government departments take their mandate very seriously, assuming that there would be no "development" without their intervention in the rural society. But these efforts are not always effective. One young farmer from Lay Armachiho Woreda, who had just established his own household, said "Everybody comes to tell us what to do. We are cooked like *injera*". *Injera* is the traditional Ethiopian food. It is a soft bread, cooked by mixing flour and water, fermented for a day or two and then baked on clay-made pancake.

Two phrases are of interest to us in this young Ethiopian farmer's statement: "*injera* cooking" and "cooked-like-*injera*". The information generation and processing, strategy formulating and appraising business of government departments is much like cooking an *injera*. It demands a mixture of ideas, methods, strategies and resources to plan and implement programmes and projects. Moreover, the "*injera* cooking" exemplifies the mixture of ideas, methods, strategies and resources which reproduces a rural development

discourse, a form of structure of knowledge to present the “realities” of rural society in ways that achieve a “fit” with a given development paradigm.

The “cooked-like-*injera*” phrase has this direct connotation: Rural society always presents a “problem”. Appropriate specialists must identify the root causes and must propose solutions. Each “solution” first attracts a lot of attention, followed by disenchantment about its relevance or even maybe outright rejection. There is then another search for both “root causes” and “solutions”. Furthermore, “cooked-like- *injera*” implies that rural development is planned and executed, not necessarily because people desired it, but also because outsiders believe in it. According to Uphoff (1988), the idea of assaulting rural poverty “smacks of paternalism--as does that unfortunate term ‘target group’. It suggests doing *for* the poor or *to* them, rather than *with* them (p. 48, emphasis in original)”. This paternalistic approach also suggests that rural people live in a “simple” environment making “simple” decisions, which appears to simplify the task of manipulating programme or project components, and the task of strategy formulation by transforming complex social and economic issues into the so-called technical problems. Yet too often such plans fail. And when they fail, “conservatism or traditionalism on the part of peasants or peasant societies are common scapegoats (Heyer, *et al*, 1981, p 11)”. However, failure “does not mean doing nothing; it means doing something else, and that something else always has *its own logic* (Ferguson, 1994, p. 276, emphasis mine)”. That “logic” is embedded, in part, in the conventional (blueprint) approaches of conceiving and planning “development” which projects how things ought to work in a complex environment that produces unpredictable outcomes.

The purpose in this chapter is to examine the theory and practice of rural development. Writing at the end of 1990s, it is impossible to read and analyze all the literature produced in the past fifty years. One can only choose the subject areas that appear to be most relevant to the argument in question. With this in mind, the literature review in this chapter has merely sought to understand the main successive stages in the intellectual debate about development, in order to create a framework for the discussion and analysis in this dissertation research. To outline, the chapter will focus on 1) the theory of modernization, 2) the green revolution, 3) rural development, 4) decentralization, and 5) community development. The brief discussion of each of these topics is intended to trace the evolution of development theory and practice, in order to provide the dissertation with an appropriate theoretical context.

According to Arturo Escobar (1995), the history of development can be seen as the "evolution of theories and ideas, or as the succession of more or less effective interventions (p. 154)". Each theory or idea constructs its own "social and cultural model" which reproduces and formalizes "social relations, divisions of labor, and cultural forms (p. 105)". Hence, for example, in the 1950s and 1960s the modernizers argued that social, economic and political modernization was a precondition for economic development. The "green revolution" marked a shift of thinking from industrialization to agricultural development. Next, the anti-poverty doctrine of the 1970s shifted the focus of the debate away from heavy investment in agriculture and industry to "basic needs" issues. Finally, the 1980s and 1990s saw an increasing call for the decentralization of states in many countries. The impetus for this reform of the states was many-sided. First, the decade of the 1980s was dominated by

an ideology of market economics which advocated less state intervention in societies and economies. Second, there was an emerging discourse of “civil society” which applauded the increasing role of local organizations in society, and which suggested that they can achieve more if power, resources and institutions are more efficiently decentralized. Finally, it was claimed that the states had failed to promote development and that structural changes were needed to improve their performance. This issue of community development continues to be a popular topic, even though it has failed to produce effective results.

But the problem is that what academics write and what “development” practitioners practice has often little relationship with what is actually happening on the ground. Jonathan Crush (1995) writes:

It is just that what it (development) says it is doing, and what we believe it to be doing, are simply not what is actually happening. And if this is so, then perhaps we need to understand not only why the language of development can be so evasive, even misleading, but also why so many people in so many parts of the world seem to need to believe it and have done for so long (p. 4).

The 1960s and the following decades saw what Shiv Visvanathan (1987) calls an “experimental development” executed by the “laboratory state”; ill-conceived policies aborted social and economic processes of change and in some cases made societies more “underdeveloped”. New agricultural technologies created structural dependency on outside inputs and led small farmers in some regions of the world to languish in conditions of poverty. The rural development approach only made a “few amendments” to top-down, technocratic planning practices. It did little to tackle the structural (organizational, political, social, economic) problems in society. Nor are present decentralization strategies producing

the anticipated outcomes. This is so because “official” policies did not go far enough in tackling the problems inherent both in the institutional structures of the state and the “civil society”.

Generally speaking, development thinking has evolved over the past five decades. Each new “solution” or “proposal” has often called for a radical break with the past. On the other hand, scholars and practitioners have often failed to realize that what does not seem to work in theory could possibly have worked well on the ground and vice versa. For instance, today one can probably appreciate the writings of the 1950s and 1960s more than would have been the case in the 1970s. The modernizers envisaged a modern society driven by a capitalist market economy. Today there is a closer integration of market economies than ever before, so export markets come to be considered as a vital source of the foreign exchange needed to make transactions in this international trading regime. Even developing country governments are competing to attract multinationals to invest in their countries, because of their presumed role in transferring advanced technology. There is a tremendous effort on the part of individuals, groups and communities to achieve a higher standard of material life. The main point here is that we have a lot to learn from past experiences. We should even reconsider the methods and tools of the past if/and when they appear to be relevant for dealing with the problems of today’s society.

Modernization

A lot of debates do not begin or end without emphasizing the importance of the modernization theory. One reason for this is that the theory emerged at time when, in the 1950s and 1960s, the newly independent nations were struggling to formulate national development strategies. The economies of many of these countries were “underdeveloped”, planning and administrative institutions were weak and political systems often unstable. The new nation-states generally did not possess adequate capacity to meet the expectations of “national liberation”: employment, basic social services and public participation. Modernization theory thus emerged at this critical period of history. And its protagonists argued that fulfilling the social, political and material aspirations of post-independence societies would require a transformation of the old order and the creation of a new one, to be achieved through social, economic and political modernization strategies.

Social modernization: Social modernization theory can be traced from the two main streams of Western sociology (Randal and Thoebald, 1985). The first, which was much influenced by Emile Durkeim’s structural functionalism, saw social development as a “process of social differentiation as a result of which societies become structurally more complex (p. 15)”. The second, which was derived from Max Weber’s psycho-cultural model of change, argued that changes in cultural and psychological perceptions were prerequisites for the creation of modern society and market economy. Here, the “traditional man” was seen as remaining tied to social relations and customary obligations. Old loyalties (of family, kinship, ethnicity and religious affiliation) bring about uncertainty in individual actions and encourage passivity

to change. Economic development, therefore, was a function of the development of “appropriate values, attitudes and personal traits” which encourage individual autonomy, a strong aspiration towards maximum self-fulfilment and a willingness to engage in contractual relationships:

Modern man is adaptable, independent, efficient, oriented to long-term planning, sees the world as amenable to change and, above all, is confident of the ability to bring changes about. For this latter reason modern man is actively interested and eager to participate in politics. The counterpart, traditional man....is anxious, suspicious, lacking ambition, oriented towards immediate needs, fatalistic, conservative and clings to well-established procedures even when they are no longer appropriate (p. 18).

Others argued that new market structures and modern education must be expanded to generate values more suited to the creation of the “rational individual”. For instance, J. Colman (1960) saw urbanization, commercialization, wage employment and a new class of educated people as forces of change to break the old order and to create a new social and political order. For W.A. Lewis (1955), the following changes were the necessary conditions to pave the way for economic growth: 1) a legal-political order that frees the individual from communal obligations, such that he/she acts as a mobile social agent; 2) property relations that encourage the individual to maximize the use of resources; 3) institutional structures that enhance specialization and central coordination; and 4) social and legal frameworks that give individuals more freedom of choice (pp. 57-163). In sum, the modernization impulse was to destroy old structures and to create new relationships organized around material interests. Everything “traditional” represented backwardness, ignorance and an obstacle to development. And “development” plans often called for the destruction of the “old”, as a precondition for achieving desired goals.

Economic Modernization: The economic discourse of modernization paid attention to the task of formulating policies to expand the capitalist market in developing countries. Some economists argued that since developing countries did not have adequate resources to make huge industrial capital investment, governments had to concentrate their efforts on a few dynamic sectors that could generate forward- and backward-linkages in the economy. Others called for more diversified strategies that would spread investment priorities to different sectors, so that the growth of each sector would generate demand for other industries, leading to inter-sectoral integration (see Hansen, 1981). For the sake of narrowing the scope of our discussion here, I will only be concerned with Lewis' (1954) two-sector model and T.W. Shultz's (1964) theory of agricultural transformation.

Lewis' two-sector model implies an organized market in which a "modern" industrial sector is closely linked to a "backward" sector consisting of an unorganized agricultural and rural sectors. The agricultural sector has surplus labor, in that, there are too many people doing things the same way, so that there is no extra income accruing from additional work done. If a new industry opens in such an area, it will begin to hire people, paying slightly higher than rural wages. Consequently, the excess labor can be transferred to industry without any losses in agricultural output. The reason is simple: as surplus labor is absorbed by industry, the marginal productivity of labor in agriculture will rise. Thus, if landholding averages 1 hectare/household prior to rural-urban migration, this may gradually rise to 2 hectares/household, which means that people are now able to work more, produce more and even possibly increase their income. As the industry continues to hire labor by paying wages better than agricultural incentives, it is able to make extra profit and invest in

the economy. Profits decline only when the “unlimited” labor supply decreases (i.e., the surplus labor in rural areas is absorbed) and wages must rise. At this stage the rate of both investment and capital accumulation would slow down, meanwhile, rapid growth would have been achieved both in the agricultural and industrial sectors.

Lewis’s model has been criticized on many grounds.¹ Today there are more unemployed people in the cities than the rural areas. And the marginal productivity of labor is greater in the harvesting and ploughing season, even if there is surplus labor. Population growth is a very important factor. Industries are often capital intensive and require much less labor than what Lewis assumes. Finally, government distortions and corruption do not allow the working of such an idealized market model. I would also say that no rural man or woman will completely give up his/her land title when he/she migrates to an urban center. The emotional attachment to land is too strong (as Taylor and MacKenzie [1992, p. 241] note), so that rural-urban migration may not increase the household/landholding ratio. Even educated elites find it difficult to break their ties with rural society, as evidenced by the popularity of “hometown” associations in Africa.

The concept of dualism in the analysis of economic development has continued to generate much debate. For instance, the mode of production debate in Africa has contended that colonial policies created a “dual” agrarian economy, in which large export sectors existed side by side with a small-scale food production sector. This later led Goran Hyden (1983) to argue that the African peasant stands with one foot in the modern economy and

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For these and other criticisms see Ghatak Suberata and Ken Ingersent (1984). *Agriculture and Economic Development*. Harvester Press, Sussex.

the other in the informal economy, thereby weakening the state and arresting capitalist economic growth. But, according to Myint (1985), dualism is a price differential for the same product, or factor of production due to market imperfections or distortions. For example, expensive goods produced in the modern sector by unskilled workers are not far superior to those produced by their counterparts in the countryside. What determines product quality is technology, not knowledge. Secondly, consumer prices at village level are high because of high transportation costs. Village producers' prices are low because of the high cost of collecting and transporting products to the markets. Therefore, contrary to Hyden's argument, people's reluctance to enter the market is "the result of applying the ordinary maximizing behavior to their local economic circumstances (p. 30)".

In the modernization debate, there was little attention paid to the issue of formulating favorable policies for the agricultural sector. Modernizers simply argued that economic "backwardness" was attributed to the static nature of the agricultural sector, because of 1) peasants' failure to allocate resources (land and labor) efficiently and 2) their lack of effort to save and invest in the economy. But Schultz (1964) argued that the peasant is an "economic man", who is able to make rational decisions and to respond to emerging opportunities. Agricultural production has "a natural endowment component" and "a capital structure component". This means that, while peasants are able to make an efficient allocation of natural resources, the capital component remains stagnant and constitutes a constraining factor for production growth. Accordingly, agricultural development is an "investment problem (p.5)". Schultz rejected non-economic factors as playing any role in rural "backwardness", arguing that people's low motivation to work harder and longer is due

to the low marginal productivity of labor. Moreover, there is little incentive to save because returns are low. And innovation is also absent because the cost of technologies is high and supply sources are not reliable. If farmers are given incentives, they “will turn sand into gold (p. 5)”. He went on to say that there would be no growth unless there is investment in the material and human capital of agriculture, such as roads, communications, extension organizations and research facilities. These would eventually change “the state of the art” technology which had produced zero marginal labor productivity (i.e., whether or not one works longer and harder, labor productivity is the same) in agriculture. How far Schultz’s ideas influenced agricultural policy making is hard to know but the 1960s green revolution reflects some of his arguments.

Political Modernization: This area of the debate was concerned with the “developmental state”. Such a state was seen both as a byproduct of modernization and as an agent of social, economic and political development. First, modernization was thought to require a political system that was based on a new set of relations that would evolve out of the social processes induced by the material forces in the society. Modernization also assigned a new set of relations structured around party politics. These two conditions would create the “rational individual” who would owe loyalty to the nation-state. Furthermore, macroeconomic planning was centered on the idea of promoting the “public interest”. The absence of a strong superstructure can result in a “tug-of war situation” (Hyden, 1983), as different interest groups compete to get access to scarce resources. A strong state would then be needed to promote “secularism, nationalism, a modern work ethic . . . and a strong respect for politically neutral technical skills (Sanyal, 1994, p. 11)”. Be that as it may, the state was

not supposed to “get involved in income or asset redistribution”, but in the promotion of “the growth of national economy” by building the physical and social infrastructure and by providing support for industries to meet their capital requirements. In addition, according to Bishwapriya Sanyal, the state should promote economic nationalism to “help the penetration of market relationships to all corners of the national territory, without any disruption from territorially based clans, tribes or ethnic groups. Nationalism was to perform the role of a homogenizing and integrative force that would facilitate the emergence of a national market by ensuring complete mobility of capital, labor and commodities (p. 8)”.

The modernizers were persistent in their assertion of how the market economy and democracy had helped to drive social, economic and political development in the Western countries. They contended that, under proper conditions, there was no reason why the same thing could not be achieved in the newly emerging nations. The problem seemed to be that these countries were not able to initiate a process that Walter Rostow (1960) called an economic “take off”. Thus, Sanyal writes:

The logic underlying this belief was that western experience had proved that capitalism and democracy went hand in hand, that the expansion of one also required the expansion of the other. Capitalism, through the expansion of the market and exchange relationships, generated new types of social groups, based not on tribal loyalties but on material interests; and democracy allows individual and groups to exercise their preference, which is the primary driving force in the functioning of markets. This had been the history of western nations--in particular the United States, where the marriage between democracy and capitalist development had been a happy one, without any disruption. And this would be the course, the political scientist thought, for the newly independent countries as well (pp.7- 8).

The reality was different in many developing countries. The 1960s saw many state coups masterminded by internal or external interest groups. As ethnicity and clientelism

came to be more and more widely used by political elites to build the social bases of their political power, “rational” resource allocation mechanisms were destroyed. National integration demanded the curtailment of popular participation. Rapid “mass mobilization” was seen as a threat to the nation-state, because it would generate public demands which political leaders were not well prepared to accommodate (Huntington, 1965). People were evicted from their land to pave the way for large-scale agricultural schemes. They were displaced from their homes to be resettled in villages, or to engage in collective agriculture. Speaking against public policy was met with repression, imprisonment and torture. Popular dissatisfaction often led to resistance and even to prolonged civil wars in many countries. In the words of Visvanathan (1987), the “laboratory” state espoused “vivisection” and “triage” in the course of achieving its misguided policy goals. The only beneficiaries were state and political elites. Instead of saving and investing in the economy (contrary to the modernizers’ belief), these groups adopted western lifestyles and became the major consumers of industrial (imported and local) products, the prices of which were often subsidized by reduced import taxes and low producer prices.

Of course, making such generalizations about the behavior of “Third World” states can be misleading. True, there were states that destroyed their national economy. But there were also others which have done a good job in promoting economic development. And we have also “weak” states that have done little to improve their economies but nevertheless managed to survive amid the collapse of many “strong” states. What makes some states perform better than others? This issue has continued to generate a lot of debate. Some stress the role of external influences, others the political economy (factors internal to the state and

society) and still others the weakness of state institutions. But no one has disregarded the state's role in development, not, at least, until the 1980s and 1990s--the problem was how to make it work better.

The Green Revolution

The modernization debate was concerned with the issue of achieving fast economic growth. Agriculture's role was largely limited to supporting industrial development through the production of raw materials, reproducing the labor force and generating hard currency (from the sale of cash crops). In the 1960s, however, attention shifted to the food production sector whose performance was poor. Generally, the poor performance of this sector was attributed to the "underdevelopment" of the productive forces in agriculture. Accordingly, the widespread adoption of improved seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation techniques came to be regarded as the main means to achieve faster growth in agricultural production. Donor countries established three research institutions which would research and diffuse these agricultural technologies: the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), the Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maíz y Trigo (CIMMYT) and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA). These institutions did succeed in improving the yields of three of the world's major food crops (maize, rice and wheat) through plant breeding. Mechanical technologies (tractors) were not always seen as suitable to the needs of many countries, since their operation and maintenance were difficult and spare parts had to be bought with scarce hard currency. But high-yield varieties (HYVs) spread very quickly.

Production increased 3.4% per annum for all developing countries between 1950 and 1975 (Conway and Barbier, 1990). In many countries of Asia, this helped to overcome food deficits. Some countries were able to export the surplus. In Africa, the use of new crop varieties and chemical inputs resulted in a significant improvement in the production of export crops such as coffee, tobacco and oil palms, even though this was also due to government support of cash crop sectors. Meanwhile, food crops were adopted at slower rates. Even so, according to Seth La-Anyane (1985), improved varieties of maize were adopted in East and Central Africa, rice in West Africa and wheat in a few highland areas of Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania. By 1980, maize covered 15 million hectares, rice 4.5 million, and wheat 2 million hectares of the total area cultivated in Africa.

In spite of the success of the new agricultural technologies in improving the performance of agriculture in some regions of the world, many argue that they did not lead to an agricultural revolution but merely served to speed up the demise of peasant agriculture and the incorporation of the rural economy into global markets (Griffin, 1979). Moreover, the new technologies created “generational problems”, such as income inequity, an erosion of genetic diversity, environmental degradation and a growing structural dependence on outside sources for inputs, finance and technical support. The green revolution only achieved a transformation from “seeds of plenty to seeds of scarcity (Lakshman, 1993, p. 270)”. Long-term sustainability now requires continuing expensive research, the cost of which is often transferred directly to producers. The industrial monopoly of seed reproduction ensures the existence of a demand structure that generates supply scarcity and higher input prices. Finally, these new technologies created the problem of instability in agricultural

production (Conway and Barbier, 1990). And intensive monocropping has often degraded the land and made agriculture more susceptible to “environmental stress and shock”.

The interplay of these diverse political and institutional pressures on farming people to adopt new methods has resulted in a decline in their confidence to reproduce local agricultural knowledge. In fact, farmers possess the capability to conserve genetic diversity and to assess changes in vegetation, soil, climate and moisture conditions, including the application of such efficient farming methods as crop rotation and intercropping. Thus, writing on India, Michael Lipton (1982) argues that peasant decisions are generally made in a manner that enables farmers to efficiently utilize land and labor resources as well as to spread risks. This logic has been embedded in the farmers’ conception of “survival algorithm”, which is “a group of practices, a group of decisions about allocating farm resources, which allows him [sic] just tolerable levels of profit, security and status. This survival algorithm allows him to muddle through in good years and bad alike (p. 266)”. And to change this he/she must compare it “with an ideal that cannot be created overnight (p. 267)”. Similarly, my former colleague at Carleton University, Awegechew Teshome (1996), has argued that Ethiopian farmers know best about pest control and preserving genetic diversity. Awegechew compared the scientific methods with his field data of farmers’ knowledge to reach this conclusion. T. Scoons and J. Thompson (1993) note that farmers’ performances are determined by “particular agroecological and sociocultural contexts which give rise to a plethora of changing conditions to which the farmers must make a series of rolling adjustments (p. 6)”. But the “scientific” view still continues to undermine such invaluable knowledge (Chambers, 1993; Trupp, 1988). According to Ann Lori Trupp,

outsiders have always viewed local farm systems as “‘backward’, conservative, inferior and based on ‘ignorance’ or myth (p. 14)”. This “backward” stigma has been created by “an academic representation of the other; an intellectual construction of what actually reflects the values of the sociologists immersed in the dominant world view of capitalist culture (Lakshman, 1993, p. 265)”. The upsurge of research interest in “traditional agriculture” has been nothing more than trying to adapt local knowledge to the “scientific logic” of agricultural technology development (as Trupp points out).

While all this is a legitimate criticism, any call for the conservation of traditional agricultural systems should be based on sound and realistic argument, since we are dealing with people’s livelihoods. To what extent can “traditional” farming systems help to solve today’s problems of declining land productivity, increased unemployment and rural-urban migration? The indigenous knowledge debate might help to change the attitude of agricultural “experts” but it may also divert “attention from the myriad of things that they (farmers) do not know about markets, politics and the machination of the world beyond the farm gate (Bebbington, 1993, p. 277)”. According to Anthony Bebbington, at the time when farmers have increasingly been integrated into wider socio-economic and political relationships, survival depends on how they are able to negotiate that integration and an “appropriate technical response” (traditional or modern) may be a necessary condition. Instead of an outright rejection of “modernization”, people can be helped to “pursue local and grassroots controlled modernization” to accumulate capital and to master the know-how of new technologies. These are essential needs for farmers to be able to control markets and to participate in the decision-making processes.

Others would argue that the green revolution technologies must be credited for eliminating hunger and malnutrition in many developing countries, particularly in the highly populated regions of Asia (such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia). They contend that the new technologies are “scale neutral” and that they have been adopted both by large and small farmers. According to Peter B.R. Hazell and C. Ramasamy (1991), criticisms were generally based on studies that were done soon after the introduction of the green revolution (before the trickle-down effect was seen), and as such, they failed to see that small farmers were following large farmers in adopting the new technologies. And, while income gaps have widened over the decades, small farmers are better off now than they were decades ago. Moreover, low prices of staple food have enabled the poor to have better nutrition. In fact, the effects of the green revolution on the “nonfarm rural economy” were never adequately considered: wage employment for example. Finally, the critics did not see the role of population growth, export markets, agricultural policies and other factors that constrained the expansion and the distributive effects of the green revolution.

In Africa, agricultural transformation was set in motion by the colonial policies to promote cash crop sectors. For instance, “In 15 of the 22 political entities (in the 1950s) for which foreign trade statistics were reported to the United Nations, agricultural exports made up 75% or more of the total (Lofchie, 1980, p. 23)”. Post-independence governments inherited economies closely tied to export markets. Some countries were dependent on a single cash crop: Chad (cotton), Ghana (cocoa) and Gambia (groundnuts), for example. Although their policies and practices were not different from the colonial period, governments’ intervention in agriculture dramatically increased, through such policies as

creating market agencies, imposing price controls, building infrastructure and initiating research and extension programmes. These measures were aimed at modernizing agriculture and increasing its contribution to industrialization rather than creating employment and other income earning opportunities for the rural population. As Robert Bates (1981) argues, politicians, bureaucrats, local and “big” industrialists and the urban work force have all stood together to extract resources from the peasantry, using the state as an instrument of control and exploitation. The peasant masses were located too far away from centers of power and markets to influence policies.

Be that as it may, African agriculture still remains dominated by family-based small-scale subsistence agriculture. Although fallow farming might have been abandoned in many areas of Africa long ago (due to land scarcity), crop rotation still remains a major practice. Meanwhile, the problem of achieving food self-sufficiency has been aggravated by declining land productivity and crop yields. In fact, since the late 1970s many countries have been experiencing food shortages and famine. Could there have been less famine if new agricultural technologies had been successfully adopted? The answer is yes, if one takes the experience of the Asian countries into consideration. However, by the end of the 1980s the euphoria that accompanied the development of the green revolution technologies had faded. There was instead more talk about promoting sustainable agriculture. Yet many African countries remain preoccupied with feeding a growing population, which gives rise to the need to promote fertilizer use and improved varieties. The case study of Gondar region in Chapter 3 will show how the Ethiopian government is trying to promote the use of green revolution technologies in the country’s subsistence agriculture.

Rural Development

The idea of rural development emerged in the 1970s. And its theoretical rhetoric was mainly concerned with assaulting rural poverty. It emphasized the need to devise policy strategies that adopt an integrative approach to solve multiple problems of poverty. Rural development planning first espoused the idea of designing large-scale integrated projects, but then shifted to small-scale, local-based planning, as those “mega projects” failed to make an impact on the lives of the people. This section briefly assesses the effectiveness of the rural development approach, both as a concept and as a method of inducing change in society. I will first look at the principles and strategies of “basic needs” and then proceed to assess the viability of the small-scale project strategy.

Basic Needs Approach: In the 1970s, earlier approaches came increasingly under attack for their tendency to reinforce the existing social, economic and political order at household, local, regional and national levels (Lee, 1988; Lewis, 1988; Uphoff, 1988; Rondinelli, 1993; Donaldson, 1991). Rising urban and rural poverty in many developing countries demonstrated that the “trickle-down” approach was not working. National governments, donor agencies and intergovernmental organizations thus began to articulate a “basic needs” development strategy. This approach emphasized access to shelter, food, clothing, clean water, sanitation, education, health and other social services. It called for a move away from promoting single-purpose capital intensive projects and towards initiating multipurpose, low-cost and replicable social and economic projects in rural areas, where the majority of the population had hitherto been disadvantaged by unfavorable rural-urban terms of trade and

by political exclusion. It also emphasized a move away from the provision of subsidies and welfare-type services to the building up of the productive capacity of the “poor”, so that they could help themselves. This included the development of local organizations and other political structures that could allow rural people to articulate their interests and aspirations. Governments were urged to modify the investment criteria (according to the principles of “basic needs”) and to formulate policies that would correct the growing inequalities of resource ownership.

This was easier said than done. The basic needs strategy required the formulation of multipurpose projects to provide various production- and consumption-oriented services in “an integrated fashion (Donaldson, 1991, p. 166)”. Donor agencies would simply deploy material, organizational and professional resources to execute such projects. But the results were not satisfactory. John P. Lewis (1988), who was with the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee at the time, points to four major problems (p. 7): 1) individual and area-specific projects could not be replicated easily; 2) there were operational difficulties, arising from attempting to do too many things at once (too many priorities and needs); 3) reliance on expatriate staff to run many of the projects increased dependency; and 4) project organizations were often established separately from national administrative structures, because agencies were trying to “escape the weakness of indigenous administration”. Moreover, change in these development strategies were not accompanied by commensurate changes in central, technocratic planning practices. The new strategy consisted of “no more than a few amendments to planning criteria that, once done, this would ensure fulfillment of basic needs within the existing economic structure (Lee, pp. 118-19)”. And, according to

Uphoff (1988), “The impulses mainly come, or were articulated from, the top, the center. But the determination was to reach the poor, *all the way down*, to the poorest of the poor in the villages. Such was to be the role not just of new-style indigenous developers, but also expatriate intervenors who, working at or close to the grassroots, themselves proposed to engage in hands-on, localized development promotions (p. 6, emphasis in original)”. Finally, the whole rhetoric of assaulting rural poverty concealed the political issues of “redistribution with growth”. The focus on the provision of better services for “poor people” tended to reduce structural and political problems to “managerial issues” (Bienefeld, 1997).

There are many more critiques of the “rural development” approach. For instance, Ferguson (1994) argued that project structures were often being used to extend central power to the rural society, and that the “project” has depoliticized the development process by transforming political issues into technical problems. Lloyd Timberlake (1985) went so far as to comment that Africans would perhaps have been better off without the intervention of donor agencies or governments. He suggested that an “integrated ignorance” (conventional practices) had led African governments and expatriates to think that they knew the “problems” and had feasible “solutions”. Dennis Rondinelli (1993) contends that despite the growing awareness of the incompatibility of conventional planning approaches, donor agencies, international assistance organizations and governments made efforts to re-define goal-achievement strategies and re-direct resources to new priority areas, but neglected to develop methods and tools that deal with the increasing complexity of project environments.

David Korten (1980) writes:

The blue print approach has an appealing sense of order, specialization, and recognition of the superordinate role of the intellectual which makes it easily defensible in budget decisions. Indeed, its emphasis on well-planned and clearly defined projects with discrete and visible outcomes is well suited to the construction of a large scale physical infrastructure where the task *is* defined, the outcomes terminal, the environment stable, and the cost predictable. However, in rural development objectives are more often multiple, ill-defined and subject to negotiated change, task requirements unclear, outcomes unbound by time, environments unstable, and costs unpredictable (emphasis in original, p. 8).

Going Small-Scale: By the 1980s, donor agencies had realized that rural development cannot be managed from above and that participatory, small-scale initiatives may be more suitable to promote rural development. The “small-scale” strategy was perceived to have the following advantages: 1) its bottom-up planning strategy helps planners to identify target groups and their appropriate needs; 2) it encourages people to participate in the process and gradually enables communities to take ownership of programmes or projects; and 3) it taps into community social and economic resources to reduce costs. The rural development process “takes off” at the smaller scale (project) level. The small projects then stimulate innovation first in the local area and then over larger areas through another phase of replication. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were viewed as suitable social agencies capable of “muddling through” the unstable environment, because of the presumed flexibility and adaptability of such organizations. In addition, as Sanyal (1994) points out, “because of their disassociation from the state and market institutions, NGOs are neither coercive nor profit seeking. Rather, they are genuinely interested in raising the political consciousness and in improving the economic well-being of the people (pp. 38-39)”. But, again, this was all easier said than done. The impact of local development strategies has been

insignificant and many NGOs have become increasingly technocratic and paternalistic. They have tried to determine people's future, instead of creating enabling situations in which people could define their own course of development.

Let us consider the following hypothetical example to illustrate the planning process of small-scale projects. An NGO intends to help a "poor community" cope with famine and enduring poverty. The first task is to identify the cause of problems: 1) lack of food, 2) illiteracy, 3) soil erosion, 4) population growth, 5) deforestation, 6) lack of awareness, ...and so on. The next task is to propose solutions: 1) an agricultural project, 2) a literacy project, 3) a conservation project, 4) a fertility control project, 5) a reforestation project, 6) an awareness raising project,...and so on. In this way, projects appear as organizational responses to pre-determined problems. On this basis, national governments are asked for permission to open a project in the country (if this is a foreign NGO). Once field personnel ("specialists") are hired to administer activities we have a "development project" in a community. Ideally some agencies first carry out baseline surveys or needs assessment, but in most cases needs and priorities are assessed on the basis of information obtained from research documents and official sources.

This method of planning shows us no significant change from conventional hierarchical practices, except that the process is undertaken one hierarchy down from the "top". What we have instead are expensive projects managed by international NGOs through a remote control mechanism. Although there are a few success stories, most of these projects fail to produce a significant impact. According to Sanyal (1994), with few exceptions, NGO projects "have provided neither employment and income-earning

opportunities to a large number of people, nor have they been able to increase significantly the income of those fortunate few who were given easy loans (p. 39)". Nor has the idea of project replication worked. Instead of gradually being transformed into large-scale schemes of innovation, small-scale projects have too often become "wealthy islands" in the world of poverty (as Clark [1991] points out). S. Annis (1987) writes:

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are so frequently lost in self-admiration that they fail to see that the strengths for which they are acclaimed can also be a serious weakness:

- in the face of pervasive poverty, for example "small-scale" can merely mean "insignificant";
- "politically independent" can mean "powerlessness" or "disconnected";
- "low cost" can mean "under-financed" or "poor quality";
- And "innovative" can mean simply "temporary" or "unsustainable".

Sanyal also writes:

Most of the proponents of development from below . . . never took into account this connection between overall economic performance of the country and the bottom-up projects, in part because they assumed that the economy at "the top" was not connected to the economy at the "bottom". And the few who did believe that such a connection exists argued that it exploited the small producers at the bottom, and hence, should not be encouraged (p. 40).

The so-called "solidarity groups" that have been promoted by NGOs "mainly served as social pressure groups to ensure repayment of loans by the group members (Sanyal, 1994, p. 4)", instead of confronting the critical issue of political exclusion and marginalization in the decision-making process. Compare this with self-financed urban and rural organizations that challenge the dominant economic and political interests in the society. For instance, writing on Tanzania and Uganda, Aili Mari Tripp (1994) argues that women's urban associations, which were created to deal with the "unprecedented hardship", are struggling

to achieve women's "inclusiveness" in the political arena. And Fraser Taylor and Fiona Mackenzie (1992) have argued that multiple forms of grassroots organizations have emerged in the recent decades to create an effective means of survival mechanisms for poor people and this can suggest that there is "development from within", parallel to, or separate from, the "official" development.

In the final analysis, it seems that the "small-scale" approach, which focuses on activities initiated and carried out at the "local" level, is not an alternative to the top-down approach. Indeed, the ongoing debate about top-down vs. bottom-up planning clearly reflects what Uphoff (1988) calls the "two fallacies" of the argument:

The first is the *paternalistic fallacy*: the belief that planners, technicians and experts possess all of the knowledge, wisdom and virtues needed to achieve development, and that the poor should be responsive and grateful beneficiaries. Similarly mistaken is the *populist fallacy* that the poor themselves possess all that is needed for their own advancement--that they can do entirely without 'bureaucrats' and 'technocrats'. While there are some impressive self-help examples and enclaves, those regional and national programs that benefit the poor on a significant scale have been concurrent mutual endeavors from above and bottom (p. 48)".

Robert Chambers (1983) also writes:

In trying to see what to do, non-rural outsiders are trapped by core-periphery perception and thinking. Looking outwards and downwards towards the remote and powerless, their vision is blurred. They see most clearly what is close by; they see action starting from where they are. The very words reflect the problem: 'remote' means remote from urban and administrative centres, from where most of the outsiders are; and 'what to do' implies initiatives taken by them in the centres of power. However much the rhetoric changes to 'participation', 'participatory research', 'community involvement' and the like, at the end of the day there is still an outsider seeking to change things. Marxist, socialist, capitalist, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, humanist, male, female, young, old, national, foreigners, black, brown, white-who the outsider is may change but the relationship is the same. A stronger person wants to change things for a person who is weaker (p. 141).

Many have gone beyond the technical and managerial issues of development to address other structural problems that perpetuate imbalances in the geographical, material, political, economic and organizational relationships of power. Decentralization is one of the most radical solutions proposed to correct these problems. I now turn to this issue.

Decentralization

The argument for decentralization centers around two commonly accepted claims. The first is a managerial issue. Decentralization is intended to correct inefficiencies in the public sector by transferring management responsibilities and resources to the lower levels of the state hierarchy. This is supposed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of planning and budgeting decisions as well as the implementation of programmes or projects, so that 1) planners are better able to identify proper strategies of policy formulation and implementation; 2) cutting bureaucratic red-tape increases the speed of budgeting and resource allocation decisions and; 3) the presence of institutional support mechanisms and adequate resources will increase the responsive capacity of local level agencies for contingency problems (errors can be detected and corrected more easily, for example).

The second issue is political. The decentralization of institutions creates the conditions that lead to the development of linkages between the state and society. In doing so, it enables people to assert a greater degree of influence over the budgeting and resource allocation processes. Similarly, the devolution of central power enhances local autonomy and promotes political pluralism. It would provide an immense opportunity to build

participatory structures through which people are able to influence public policy making.

But why are decentralization policies not implemented effectively? Is this because there has not been enough “decentralization”, or because decentralized power, resources and institutions are not being used to serve the purposes of local autonomy and popular participation? What are the conditions of decentralization? Can the so-called “civil society” provide the structures required by a successful decentralization policy? I aim to answer these questions by examining the inherent structural problems “from above” and “from below”.

The Problem from Above: P. de Valk and K.H. Wekwete’s (1990) comprehensive study of the experience of decentralization in five African countries (Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Botswana and Zimbabwe) identifies a number of factors. We will consider three of them here. First, decentralization was intended to improve administrative efficiency, instead of transferring resources and decision making powers to local level agencies. In a sense, it simply has meant expanding the state apparatus by creating many new organizational layers and multiple reporting relationships in the state system, which, subsequently, impeded rather than facilitated popular participation. Local level decisions were simply “confined to a limited functional area and a limited part of the decision making process (p. 257)”. Policy choices and financial decision were still made at the center. Second, decentralization initiatives did not generally focus on people’s real needs, such as access to resources, public services and asset building. The deployment of state structures to the local society has tended to increase “legitimation and control”. Thus, although “participation” was more intense in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe than in Kenya and Botswana, this had much to do with

enhancing the state's control of society through local level party branches. Botswana did better, because of the greater involvement of local bodies, more adequate resources (material, manpower and organizational) and "strong political commitment". Third, local bodies have different capacities to meet the tasks demanded by a decentralized system. For instance, local authorities must deal with rigid expenditure rules and regulations from above. They must also create attractive incentives that will induce local participation and encourage the emergence of a consensus. Based on the experience of four countries (Sudan, Tanzania, Nigeria and Zambia), Dele Olowu (1989) draws similar conclusions. The outward expansion of state structures has often created difficulties for coordinating development activities, mainly because resources and institutional support mechanisms were not sufficient. Second, the lack of local capacity has often led to the transfer of tasks to central agencies, which has subsequently reinforced the supremacy of state agencies. Third, central bureaucrats have been reluctant to relinquish power, since the "political and administrative offices at the local level as well as contracts and other public organizational resources constitute veritable sources of spoils to sustain the regime (p. 219)". Last, but not least, the persistence of elitist values and practices have been embedded within the state structure, a situation where "development was perceived by central officials very much in the mould of their colonial predecessors as the application of 'modern' knowledge and techniques to traditional societies. Given such a mind-set, local people especially in rural areas are presumed to be ignorant (p. 220)".

African governments have reformed the state in one way or another to suit post-colonial policy objectives. In many cases, this involved creating new local level structures,

such as councils, associations and cooperatives but the motive behind such a structuring process was to extend the power of authoritarian rule to the society, not to create a broader arena of citizens' participation. Richard Sandbrook (1985) has argued that African states are "one-man states", built on personalized networks "stretching down from the capital to the most distant places (p. 93)". Leaders control the resources, the bureaucratic apparatus and the coercive force of the state to hold a tight grip on the social, economic and political activity in the society. Be that as it may, the centralization of power did not strengthen the states. Indeed, Hyden's (1983) notion of the "soft-state" derives from the inability of the African states' to create conditions of "good" economic and political governance. Hyden argues that the lack of a "rational bureaucracy" has made states more vulnerable to the penetration of "the economy of affection". This has led to the institutionalization of clan-based authoritarian politics and a gradual process of state decay. African states, according to Ferguson (1994), simply became "multiplying, and coordinating power relations, a kind of knotting or congealing of power (p. 273)". But,

The expansion of bureaucratic power . . . does not necessarily mean that "the masses" can be centrally coordinated or ordered around any more efficiently; it only means that more power relations are referred through state channels--most immediately, that more people must stand in line and await rubber stamps to get what they want. What is expanded is not the magnitude of the capabilities of "the state", but the extent and reaches of a particular kind of exercise of power (p. 274).

African states were generally used by ruling elites and foreign interests to exploit and to repress the masses of the people. As people "disengaged" from the state, the social and economic base of political power declined and this was followed by institutional decay. As a result, revenue sources dried up and recurrent costs rose. Corruption

destroyed the vital functions of the state. Abuse of public authority alienated the larger section of the population and the state was often quick to respond with repressive measures. The increasing reliance on a small circle of military and civil bureaucrats to impose order detached leaders from reality. It also instigated antagonism within the state structures. This way, the state was often pushed to the edge of total collapse. William Zartman (1995) writes:

Hard or soft, evil or merely incapable, the collapsing state contracts, isolates itself, retreats. As it explodes, it saps the vital functions of the society. State collapse involves the breakdown not only of the government superstructure, but also that of the societal infrastructure (p. 7)

As the collapsing state “contracts”, the forces of destabilization are replaced. Society may not fill the “social void”, since prolonged state control has destroyed its regulative and regenerative capacity. According to Zartman:

The maimed pieces into which the contracting regime has cut society do not come back together under a common identity, working together, sharing resources. The whole cannot be reassembled and instead the components of society oppose the center and fend for themselves onto the local level. Organizations, participation, security, and allocation fall into the hands of those who will fight for it--war lords and gang leaders, often using the ethnic principles as a source of identity and control in the absence of anything else (p.7).

Thus,

State collapse is a situation where the structure, authority (legitimate power), law and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new. On the other hand, it is not necessarily anarchy. Nor is it simply a byproduct of the rise of ethnic nationalism: it is the collapse of old orders, notably the state, that brings about the retreat to ethnic nationalism as residual, viable identity. Indeed, one hypothesis to be pursued is that when the states collapse, order and power (but not always legitimacy) falls down to local groups or are up for grabs (p. 10)

Zartman's book was written in the wake of the crises in Somalia, Ethiopia, Zaire and Rwanda, so that words like "war lords" and "gang leaders" are understandable. But the argument tends to make broad generalizations about the negative consequences of state collapse for society. What is true in the case of Somalia or Rwanda may not be true everywhere. For instance, the long civil war in Ethiopia was fought in the North, but there were no situations of anarchy, even when the government forces, defeated by rebels, withdrew from the region. When the central state collapsed in 1991, the only reported incident was the dismantling of cooperatives by peasants (Dessalegn, 1993), which has to do with people's experience with these organizations as agents of exploitation and repression. Second, in many cases the state's link with society can be weak, so that the society does not depend heavily on state institutions for goods and services. Therefore, state collapse might not necessarily sap "the vital functions of society". However, Zartman makes two valid points. First, the role of local organizations can be problematic. The leaders' appeal to localism and ethnic identity may further aggravate a crisis by making antagonistic claims in the process of "state reconstruction". Second, in spite of the growing emphasis on the construction of civil society, the role of the state remains crucial in economic development (p. 267). "State functions cannot be left to even a well-functioning society, any more than society can abdicate its activities to the state (p. 17)".

The Problem from Below: The impetus to decentralize the state has in part been driven by a widespread belief that development work at the "bottom" is more efficient and effective. This is thought to arise from the comparative advantage of agencies which

operate at the local level, namely NGOs. They are more participatory, cost-efficient, mobile and adaptable to changing operational situations. In the 1990s, many also began to argue that local organizations have expanded the range of their influence to induce changes at the macro level by helping to produce a popular discourse of overt and covert resistance. One is here referring to “civil society”, which, according to Sheelagh Stewart (1997) is “all that is not government” and that which consists of entities that are widespread, disorganized, and uncoordinated, yet dynamic and increasingly controlling much of the social interaction and economic activity in the society. John W. Harbeson et al (1994) would like to refer to this as the characteristic of “resurgence societies” that give birth to organizations of enormous diversity with a capacity to defend and change society. It is often argued that civil society would provide the organizational infrastructure demanded by decentralization of power, resources and institutions. Finally, there is another, even more important force for decentralization. The policy discourse has been dominated by the ideology of market economics which advocates less state intervention in the economy and society. Indeed, the World Bank and IMF induced structural adjustment policies have become the focus of a heated debate about the impact of external intervention to shape national and regional policies. Here, I aim to answer the following questions: Will civil society create a broader arena of citizen participation? Also, to what extent will civil society provide the social and organizational infrastructures needed to promote the goals of decentralization policies?

The weakness of the “civil society” concept lies in its tendency to lump all organizations together, ignoring their diversity in relation to history, resource endowment,

external control, ideology and space. Thus, elite-dominated NGOs, rich farmers' organizations, public service unions, workers' unions, mutual help associations, farm work groups, women's groups and even what James Scott (1995) refers to as mediums of the "hidden transcript", all become part and parcel of civil society. The concept says nothing about the multiple forms of existence, cooperation, competition, accommodation and negotiation at intra- and inter-organizational levels. Therefore, it is right to be concerned about the fact that "civil society" can be dominated by powerful social groups who may not articulate citizens' real needs and aspirations. Stewart (1997) says "The space where the state, market and civil society operate is characterized by crosscutting, shifting and blurred alliances, few of which benefit the disempowered (p. 17)". Writing on Kenya, Stephen Ndegwa (1996) points out that many of the leaders in the "civil society" have been "docile political actors" who are "most identifiable with the opposition movement, whereas the organizations themselves provide resourceful platforms to propel a diverse political agenda (p.112)". Similarly, writing on Nigeria, Joel D. Barkan *et al* (1991) say that local organizations have become an arena for "party squabbles". John Lucas (1994) also points out that although Nigerian "associations" have helped to transform regionalism into a force of "collective development", state elites are also "interested in establishing and elaborating their own identity and bases of power, distinct from the state (p. 38)". On the Ivory Coast, Wayne Woods (1994) contends that "the horizontal integration of elites at the national level entailed the vertical integration of their respective ethnic communities into the political system (p. 479)"-- "hometown associations" provided the formal and informal links between the ruling class and society. Writing on Francophone

Africa, Ce'lestin Mong (1995) makes it clear that leaders of local organizations have become "frustrated politicians" who are using "communal anger" to gain legitimacy:

The multiplication of parties has not increased the civil rights of ordinary citizens. Public discourse is still uni-dimensional because too many leaders are content to proclaim slogans and pledges of faith during the meetings to which people flock in the hope of learning real solutions to their daily lives (p. 365).

And, Mong contends that civil society is formed "by those who are able to manage and steer communal anger (p. 363)". This fact then raises a "series of worrying questions":

Are they centrifugal forces which will stimulate and enhance the construction of the state, or will they be swept away into the centralizing tendency and simply squabble over the remains of the ruined state? Are they aiming to embody the earnest proclamation of democracy, or to establish alternative spiritual values and impose radically different modes of social exclusion and violence? In addition, one must ask if their tendency to refer to "tradition" has any substance (p. 361).

I would argue that the presumed capacity of "popular organizations" to challenge power structures within and beyond the community does not certify their viability as a development agent. Each organization exists in a different "space" and aims to achieve a purpose which might or might not promote collective goals in society. We must also question the sustainability of even the most powerful and active social agents in the civil society sector. For instance, most elite-led NGOs are dependent on foreign aid resources for their existence. And Barkan *et al* (1991) are right to question the sustainability of "hometown associations". They are created by the "sons and daughters of the soil" who live in urban areas but whose next generation may feel no emotional and cultural attachment to the rural society. I would therefore argue that 'civil society' should be seen as an organizational process which reflects different responses by different actors and interest groups in adjusting to changing societal environments. This said, civil society can promote

organizational diversity, political plurality, and a broader arena of participation for local people. But, if this is to be so, we must be concerned with the following three issues: 1) building the capacity of people-controlled organizations, so as to enhance the bargaining power of ordinary citizens; 2) reframing relationships between civil society and ordinary citizens; and 3) finding ways and means of facilitating the coordination of efforts in every sector of the civil society.

In the final analysis, we are left wondering whether or not the priority should be state decentralization or state reconstruction. One can argue that if the main concern is to create conditions of social and economic development, then we must consider the need for centralization as much as, if not more than, decentralization. Most analysts are quick to call for “state roll-back” without realizing that a weak state can be inefficient, corrupt and repressive, while a strong state can create a broader arena of participation in which policies are formulated more effectively. The present impetus for decentralization seems to be rooted in the recent anti-state economic ideology reflected in the World Bank and IMF discourse. But, according to Rondinelli (1993), the World Bank and IMF “often ignored the fact that economic and institutional reforms would have to be enacted and implemented by governments, and that governments had an important and legitimate role in creating the conditions that supported economic growth in the west and newly industrialized countries of Asia (p. 157)”. Moreover, Rondinelli goes on, “Structural adjustment policies ignored the fact that in a decentralized political system and a market-oriented economy both local governments and private enterprises need a network of institutions to support them in carrying out development activities (p. 157)”. For my part, I would argue that a strong state

is a critical need in Africa, especially, at a time when popular organizations are being encouraged to get involved in the decision-making process and that the state now, more than ever, must be a unifying force for the creation of a collective vision in the process of development. Here, I am referring to a strong state capacity, not centralization of power. The World Bank (1997) has proposed a state capacity-building strategy that demands “matching the state’s role to its capability” and raising “state capability by reinvigorating public institutions”. A strong state will have a range of capabilities which support people in their effort for self-development. The values of institutions embody the culture and traditions of the citizens. And decision-making structures induce individuals and groups to participate in the development process.

The following section will be concerned with the “community” both as a concept and method of rural development. The community is often regarded as the smallest-unit of analysis where problems are clearly visible and where programme or project action strategies can be easily adapted to real-world situations. I aim to show that complex processes of interaction often characterize the world of “community”, and that these have far-reaching implications for the conception, formulation and implementation of rural development initiatives.

“Community” and Community Development

The idea that people who are united by shared values and experiences should act collectively in the design, operation and sustenance of programmes or projects is very

attractive. However, with the exception of a few success stories, the community development strategy has failed to produce satisfactory results. There is now a large body of literature which identifies problems like the lack of popular participation, gender relations, rigid national and local structures, misguided donor policy, lack of adequate resources, administrative error, lack of training, lack of information, physical environment and weak organizational capacity. I do not intend to enter into this broad area of debate. My purpose here is to answer the following questions: 1) how does the conventional view of "community" influence community development practices?, 2) what really does happen at the ground level?

Community as a concept and method: The concept of "community" provides a framework to study a territorially-based social system (Redfield, 1955; Sanders, 1966). As such, a community is viewed as 1) a place where a small number of people who share the same sentiments and perspectives live together in harmony; 2) a spatial entity experiencing economic, cultural and political marginalization; 3) a small-scale society with a self-reliant technological, economic and moral base; and 4) a way of life, especially that kind of life which reminds us of the good old days. A community also possesses what Amos Hawley (1950) calls symbiotic and commensalistic relationships. Symbiotic relationships are entrenched in "corporate units" (the household and associations, for example) within which strong normative elements are embedded. Commensalistic relationships help to create "categoric units" (occupational groups) which are assigned specialized tasks (artisan, witchcraft, herbalist, storytellers, and so on). Together, these constitute the structure of the "community system" that serves as "... a set of limiting conditions within which the conduct

of individuals takes place. It is a system of ethical directives, a set of signposts to the good and virtuous life (Redfield, 1955, p. 46)".

The "community" as a method can be well suited to serve as a focal point of reference for the identification of programme and project targets; or, it may help planners to identify needs and priorities in a given territory. It may provide the social infrastructure needed to implement programmes or projects and the channels needed to transfer resources to territorial units.

The concept and method of "community" combined would provide a better definition of community development in four ways. First, community development is a *process*, involving a transition from one state (pre-existing social structures, polity and economy, for example) to another state. Second, community development is a *programme*, or a framework within which resources and technologies of management (for example), are combined to achieve time-bound goals. Third, community development is a *method*, which, as pointed out above, serves as a territorial focal point to make organizational or administrative arrangements in ways that facilitate the implementation of planned initiatives. Finally, community development is a *movement*, a social action and interaction process which work towards the institutionalization of change (Sanders, 1970). In sum, the community is viewed as a harmonious social unit, within which individuals act and react in the same way, all sharing similar interests and aspirations. Hence, as Stan Burkey (1993) points out, it is easy to assume that "everyone is interested in a common good. With a little training and sufficient funding, the villagers will come together, work together and everyone will benefit (p. 40)".

Life in the community is organized around a set of geographical, material, cultural, economic, social and political relationships, which, in turn, generate complex structures of participation, decision-making, social obligation and task performance criteria, resource ownership, and so on. In Africa, as Jonathan Barker (1989) points out, farming communities consist of a large variety of occupations: “farm workers, cattle herders, merchants, money-lenders, government extension agents, administrators, carpenters, masons, beauticians, smiths, leather workers, weavers, potters, equipment repairers, police, tailor, and many others (p. 40)”. Hence, for example, political/institutional/legal changes may affect the attitude and frequency of participation on the part of men, women or young people, or, they may lead to group re-alignments and the re-organization of individuals into different social and economic categories. Writing on Gambia, J. Carney and M. Watts (1990) argue that new forms of articulating labor power, resource access and control have combined to “convert the domestic arena into a terrain of explicit confrontation (p. 23)”. Taylor and MacKenzie (1992) point out that the social process of organization along class, gender and ethnic identity lines “dispels any myth of an undifferentiated community (1)”.

A. P. Cohen (1985) argues that the “community” is simply how people view the world “from within”. It is about being different from the outside world. And it matters less whether or not that “world” is 100 meters, one, two or several kilometers away from one’s physical space:

It (the community) does not clone behavior or ideas. It is a commonality of forms (ways of behaving) whose content (meanings) may vary considerably among its members. The triumph of community is to so contain this variety that its inherent discordance does not subvert the apparent coherence which is expressed by its boundaries. If the members of a community come to feel that they have less in

common with each other than they have the members of some other community then, clearly the boundaries have become anomalous and the integrity of the community they enclose has been severely impugned. The important thrust of this argument is that this relative similarity or difference is not a matter for objective assessment: it is a matter of feeling, a matter which resides in the minds of the members themselves. Thus, although they recognize important differences among themselves, they also suppose themselves to be more like each other than like the members of other communities (pp. 20-21).

In other words, Cohen argues, community is “an aggregating device”, not “an integrating mechanism”. Shared symbols among people in the community only give us an “appearance” that shows only “forms”, not “substance” or “meaning”. Thus, the distinction between “differences” and “similarities” and between “agreement” and “consensus” is always blurred. Differences in the community always lurk beneath its structure. The last thing about Cohen’s important argument is that if social change appears to be undermining the symbolic boundaries of the community, people “resort to increasingly symbolic behavior to reconstitute the boundary (p. 70)”. Social change may then have little effect on the “substance” or “meaning” of the community.

Criticism can be made of this argument. Although Cohen’s eloquent work breaks new ground in the discourse of “community”, the analysis fails to give much weight to the relationship between macro structures and local-level processes. This is to say that communities are increasingly being engaged with wider networks of institutional, economic and political relationships. Cohen does argue that communities have a mechanism to defend themselves against external forces, at the same time incorporating what they see as useful elements to reorganize life. But this may depend on the capacity of the society to defend itself, on the one hand, and the intensity and magnitude of the forces of change, on the other.

The Kemant communities in Gondar, Ethiopia, kept their identity for four centuries, then quickly dissolved into the culture of Amhara society in this century within a matter of a few decades. The reason is that legal, political and institutional structures were controlled by the ruling Amhara class and the state. One other critique: It is as difficult to draw a community's symbolic boundary as it is difficult to draw its territorial boundary. Community "A" can be bordered by Community "B", "C", "D" and "E". Then, community "A" shares many things with each of these communities, whereas each of the other communities possesses similar patterns of relationship with their respective surrounding areas. What we call a "community" should simply be viewed as a spatial unit incorporating part or all of the geographical, cultural, and material elements within an area that is larger than the community entity but smaller than the region.

This said, Cohen's work makes an important contribution to our understanding of the "community". Many recent studies have found no cases of "homogenous community". Taylor and MacKenize (1992) have argued that local level analysis must construct a framework that explains the action of different actors and interest groups in any society. Carney and Watts (1990) point out that claims of access to and control of resources "were contested on a variety of material, symbolic and ideological terrain (p. 225)". Thus, in Lay Armachiho Woreda, Gondar, Ethiopia, new land titles were interpreted in material and ideological terms. People were told to report the size of their household and landholdings. My younger brother reported seven people (his wife, four children, his niece and himself) to the government's Family and Land Registration Committee. Our elder brother, who happened to own a larger piece of land, stood up and said "he is not telling the truth. There

are only six people in his family. The niece does not belong here (she ought to go and live either with her mother or father)”. The reason was that the big brother, like the rest of the population, thought that the purpose of “counting” was to allocate land according to family size (see Chapter 4). Another example: Deldle and Hune grew up together and even today “drink” (participate) in the same *mahaber* (association). Now, Deldle had bought land from a neighbor. The government confiscated that land, because it was illegal to sell or buy land. Later the government gave Deldle’s confiscated land to Hune. Deldle asked Hune to give up the title of “his” land. Hune bitterly refused. Deldle then asked Hune to let him at least plough the land for one or two more years. Hune still refused and added that it was the Land Allocation Committee members, not Deldle, who gave him the land. Deldle accused Hune of betrayal and threatened to break their long relationship. Hune replied that he would only play by (government) rules like anybody else.

No one can deny that “traditional” communities may probably once had an egalitarian system. The argument I am developing here is that, as the case studies in Chapter 5 will show, cooperation is articulated and interpreted differently from the way in which it is portrayed in planning and management “texts”. As J. Emilio and A. Araujo (1980) point out, there can be three modes of cooperation: obligatory, imposed and associational. The first one is ethical. Individuals cooperate because it is a task or an obligation dictated by local customs. Making contributions for social and religious functions, attending funerals, sharing resources at a time of greater need, are examples. The second one is induced cooperation. Individuals participate because they fear that failing to do so will prevent them from getting access to the benefits which accrue from perceived activities. Penalties for not attending

public meetings, participating in digging water wells or terrace construction activities are examples. The last one: associational cooperation involves a mutual agreement among individuals, such as working together in farm fields, creating mutual support organizations and sharing economic benefits.

The conclusion for this argument is that “participatory development” will not work unless we understand the mode and intent of people’s participation. Indeed, Norman Long (1989) has argued that an “outcome” is produced through a process of interaction between different actors, institutions, knowledge systems and resources. Each individual is perceived as a powerful actor in the decision-making process in his/her own right. Let us consider the following: 1) a politician who attempts to control the process of participation; 2) the poor man or woman who becomes reluctant to get involved in the project; 3) a peasant who cuts wood in protected forest areas over night; 4) women who refuse to get involved in conventional (men’s) projects or men who do the same with women’s project; 5) groups who stay out of the process (nowadays the rich) who do everything in their power to sabotage such local or community projects; 6) an NGO or other agency which tries to do things its own way; and 7) an employee of a local administrative agency who is not motivated to distribute agricultural inputs on time. The extent of action and interaction on the part of all of these actors depends on the degree to which the “project” affects their interests and aspirations. Also, the action and interaction process can be influenced by collective or individual subjective experiences, or, by previous experiences of dealing with outsiders (“democracy”, benefits, for example). Long then says that “outcomes” are produced at the “social interface”, that “critical point of intersection or linkage between different social

systems, fields or levels of social order where structural discontinuities, based upon differences of normative values and social interests, are more likely to be found (p. 2)".

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show the evolution of development theories in a broader context. It began by looking at the theories of modernization which had advocated industrial-based economic development. The green revolution of the 1960s marked a shift of thinking from industrialization to agricultural development. Next, the rhetoric of "rural development" in the 1970s attempted to shift the focus of the debate away from heavy industrial investment to increasing productivity and raising production on smallholder farms by adapting local/community development strategies. Finally, the 1980s and 1990s saw an increasing call for the decentralization of the state in many countries, as reflected in the World Bank and IMF's dominant policy discourse focusing on state "roll- back" and market liberalization. I have also argued that despite the stages of evolution in intellectual thinking about development, policy, programme or project action responses have remained stranded by the difficulty of translating theories or ideas into practice. What the theories or ideas perceive as "reality" and what is actually found in the world of the "poor" society, is often quite different. Therefore, what social agencies of change claim they are doing has little relationship with what is actually happening at the ground level.

This assertion supports the “*injera*-cooking” argument made at the start of the chapter. J. Samoff’s (1990) words will illustrate it nicely:

The prevailing metaphors (of development) are medical and architectural. The Third World country is ill, presenting a familiar syndrome of symptoms. Having examined the patient, appropriate specialists identify the malady’s root cause (usually including the patient’s own negligence), pronounce their prognosis, and propose a course of treatment. From a somewhat different vantage point, the Third World country is an uncompleted building surrounded by construction debris and wobbling precariously in every breeze. Having surveyed this site, appropriate specialists locate the prime source of structural weakness (usually including builders’ negligence), assert that stability is possible, and outline a strategy for correcting the deficiencies of design. In both metaphors the current situation is characterized as abnormal, an aberration, from good health or from a solid foundation. In both metaphors it is, or ought to be, possible to identify the critical problem and by addressing it systematically and rationally, to remedy what is wrong. These metaphors bound the discourse and delimit the range of appropriate solutions. The intensification of the economic crisis in the Third World intensifies the demand for ‘solution’.

As in medicine and architecture, however, development understanding changes over time, especially as available technology improves. A once passionately defended ‘real’ cause is displaced by a new ‘real’ cause, and the old ‘correct’ solution is replaced by its successor. The failure of the previous solutions seems to carry no useful lessons for the future. Nor do they engender a sense of humility and fallibility. Even as they reject what had formerly been propounded with great assurance, the practitioners manifest an even higher level of confidence in their new analyses and recommendations. ‘We misunderstood before, but this time we know’ (p.520-521).

The 1990s has been a decade of critical reflection about “development”. It has led many to question what development is and whether we should be even talking about “development” in the first place. For decades, national governments, donor agencies and other international organizations spent vast amount of resources to develop appropriate concepts and methods for development work. Instead of benefits for the “poor”, these efforts led to the development of what Chambers (1994; 1997) calls “normal professionalism”, Ferguson (1994) “conceptual apparatus” or Crush (1995) “development machine”.

According to Crush, this “machine” now encompasses “departments and bureaucracies in colonial and post-colonial states throughout the world, Western aid agencies, multilateral organizations, the sprawling global network of NGOs, experts and private consultants, private sector organizations such as banks, and companies that marshal the rhetoric of development and a plethora of development studies programmes in institutes of learning world wide (p.6)”. And, as Chambers points out, this “apparatus” remains resistant to change, even though it is now well known that existing approaches do not serve the purpose of carrying out development work. In the final analysis, thus, we come to encounter the epistemological question of “development”: how much we know about people's real needs and priorities? Who are the “we” that carry out the task of analysis of data, planning and administering development initiatives? Is it possible to change the way things are done (i.e., top-down, technocratic and value-laden) by narrowing, following Chambers (1994), the polarized magnetic field between the “we” and “them” (the people)?

This said, Africa’s social and political history is more recent, compared to the experience of the West which took centuries of struggle among intellectuals, the economic and political class and masses of ordinary citizens to develop what is now called “Western democracy”. So, the change of development concepts in every decade should surprise no one. For another thing, social, economic and political environments change over time, along with society’s own needs; therefore, “the once defended ‘real cause’ and the ‘correct’ solution” may be little use in solving new problems. In addition, development plans take a much longer time horizon to produce results than we usually anticipate (as Hansen [1981] points out) while glaring societal realities often force us to abandon current strategies to

address prevailing needs (instead of awaiting the benefits to “trickle-down”). As a result, an “alternative” approach is proposed, which, again, does not fare better than the previous one. The problem is that there is always a linear programming of initiatives (i.e., X amount of inputs combined will produce Y amount of output). In Chapter 7, I will argue in favor of a regional planning approach that identifies different planning functions and different areas of responsibility at each level of hierarchy in the state system.

African societies inherited a colonial state that was not created to serve the interest of ordinary citizens. In the 1960s, state-building was a political slogan for those who equated political development with capitalist economic growth or those who saw capitalist development as a form of market exploitation (as Brett [1991, p. 303] points out). Political modernization implied the destruction of the old order and the creation of new structures to support and strengthen state institutions. In doing so, government policies weakened many of the vital functions of society. Today both the state and society are so weak that they have become vulnerable to the domination of powerful economic and political groups. Strong state and strong local organizations complement each other to ensure participatory and equitable development. The task only remains how to reframe state-society relationships.

CHAPTER THREE

Ethiopia in the 1990s: Society, Politics and Economy

The last Chapter focused on the global development discourse. It showed how the discourse has been extended to every nation, region, community and “poor” individual, regardless of physical space, history, identity and resource endowment. Everywhere political figures, technocrats, “civil society” leaders, academics, “field workers”, all speak the same language of “development”, poverty, programme or project “strategy”, “outcome”, sustainable development, and so on. Post-modernists would argue that the development discourse has reproduced a structure of knowledge which identifies the Western industrialized world with “development” while forcing the rest of the “globe” to see itself as “underdeveloped”. It has imposed different material culture and institutional values on the “Third World” by encouraging the widespread use of uniform technologies of knowledge production, strategy formulation, communication, labor reproduction and standard measurements of “quality of life” (Crush, 1995; Escobar, 1995).

This chapter shifts the focus to the national level of development discourse. Although discourse defines the policy “text”, the translation of it into practice is often dictated by the real world situations of a country, region, community or an individual. A reader should then observe the ways in which the articulation of “development” in Ethiopia fits into some, if not all, of the mainstream theories (Chapter 2). This and the previous chapter will, it is hoped, create the context for the discussion of the case studies in Chapters 4 and 5.

Let me now introduce the topic of this chapter. In 1991 the rebel forces of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) toppled the military-socialist government of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. Five weeks later the EPRDF set up a Transitional Government which had a mandate to govern the country until elections were held to form a “democratic” government. In June 1992, the EPRDF organized regional elections which were boycotted by many political organizations. As a result, the EPRDF and its affiliated organizations took virtual control of the center of the political stage in the country. In June 1994, there was yet another election to create a Constitutional Assembly to ratify the new national constitution. Again, many opposition groups did not participate. And the EPRDF’s claim to state power was not challenged. In August 1995, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was created, consisting of ethnically based states of Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Benshangul-Gumuz, Gambella Peoples, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples and Harari Peoples. Since its rise to power, the EPRDF-led government has also taken major steps to restructure the centrally planned economy, by removing price controls and import taxes, privatizing state enterprises and devaluing the currency. Since then there has been an improvement in the macro-economic performance of the economy (World Bank, 1996), although poverty is on the rise and millions of Ethiopians have been exposed to food shortages.

Yet, unlike the 1974 urban uprising (which led to the downfall of the ancient monarchy), the discourse of “change” in today’s Ethiopia appears to be less fervent. In fact, it has become difficult for many Ethiopians to draw the line between pessimism and optimism regarding the direction of current change. For one thing, adjustment measures

have raised the cost of living, specially for those poor people who live in urban areas. The other reason has to do with the EPRDF's own ethnic policy. The EPRDF, an ethnically based "liberation front" until 1983, vowed to address the "national question" by decentralizing the central state to ethnically defined regions. This raised widespread fears about the future of the country. In this chapter, I will briefly look at Ethiopia's political history and then at the EPRDF's economic and political reforms; and finally, at its agricultural policy with direct reference to the experience of Gondar region (the study area).

Historical Background

Ethiopia has an effective form of polity dating back some two thousand years. Axum, located in present-day Tigray, was supported by extensive internal and external trade, linked with the trading regimes of the Orient and Greece.¹ The decline of Axum as a center of economic and political power led to the southward territorial expansion of the Empire, settling first in the central highlands, then in Gondar in the 16th century.² In Gondar, local

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For a background of Ethiopian history see, among others, Richard Greenfield (1965). *Ethiopia: A New Political History*. Poll Mall Press, London. Richard Pankhurst (1990). *A Social History of Ethiopia: The Northern and Central Highlands from Early Medial Times to the Rise of Emperor Tewodros II*. Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. Frederic J. Simoons (1960). *Northwest Ethiopia: Peoples and Economy* University of Wisconsin Press, Madison. Sir E.A. Wallis Budge (1970). *A History of Ethiopia: Nuba and Abyssinia*. Anthropological Publications, Oosterhout N.B.-The Netherlands. Bahru Zewde (1991). *A History of Ethiopia: 1855-1974*. Currey, London.

²

This decline is attributed to Empress Yudit (from the Agew ethnic group, predominantly following Judaism) who overthrew the Christian monarchy and burned down Axum. The Empire has also faced many more challenges to its power. For instance, in the 15th century "Grag" Mohammed waged a crusade war and almost brought about the Empire's downfall before he was defeated by the help of the Portuguese.

conflicts and geographical barriers weakened the ability of the Imperial state to assert effective control. Regional nobilities gradually built up their own power and asserted independence, while still allowing the delivery of a small portion of the surplus extracted from the mass of the peasantry to the fragile state. The nobilities also fought among themselves and caused tremendous hardship for the population.³

In the 1850s, a young rebel leader named Kassa entered Gondar and toppled the monarchy. Kassa ascended to the throne and named himself Emperor Tewodros II. He went around the country and forced regional nobilities into submission. He also introduced some remarkable reforms that reduced the influence of the church in the state and liberated the peasant population from exploitation by the feudal landlords. But his ambition to create a united Ethiopia was continuously hampered by powerful regional nobilities and the church. Eventually, he found himself drawn in the dispute with the British, which culminated in the Maqdela war and his suicide after a defeat by the British army.⁴ Even though Tewodros failed to create a united Empire, he is regarded by many as the founder of modern Ethiopia and his military bravery has continued to be an inspiration for subsequent generations.

Emperor Yohannese followed in Tewodros' foot steps to establish effective control of the Imperial territory but with only limited success. It was his successor, Emperor Minilik

³ This internal civil war is often referred to "the era of the princes".

⁴

The cause of the dispute was that, as some historians say, Tewodrose got more interested in getting the support of British to fight the Turks, while the British were up to promoting commercial trade in the region (so they opted to maintain a good relation with the Turks). Tewodros got angry when he found out that one British diplomat in Ethiopia had a contact with the Turks. He arrested him and later about 13 British nationals. The British would organize the "Abyssinian military expedition".

II, who finally founded today's Ethiopia. He established a strong, organized state and expanded the territory southward to include what is today's Southern, South-Western and Eastern Ethiopia. Aware of the European encroachments on Africa, and the danger that this posed to Ethiopian sovereignty, Minilik bought arms from European powers and these helped him to crush the invading Italian army in 1896. His military power also ensured the supremacy of the Imperial state throughout the country.

A more effective central state was eventually established during the reign of Haile Sellasie I. Minilik had placed his loyal servicemen in the newly incorporated areas in the South to perform administrative and policing tasks, while allowing local polities to retain some degree of autonomy. Haile Sellasie, on the other hand, destroyed all regional power throughout the country, and created a centralized administrative system. He abolished all feudal forms of tribute and instead instituted a land tax and an agricultural income tax (Bahru, 1994, p. 34), which increased the central government's revenues while weakening the economic base of the regional powers. In the years that followed, Haile Sellasie expanded education to develop the manpower resources needed to run the administrative machinery of the Imperial state. The new educational institutions produced an elite group of people (intellectuals) who eventually turned out to be the agents of Western cultural imperialism. They liked to call themselves "Japanizers" by virtue of their ability to speak and write foreign languages and their intellectual discourse imported a foreign ideology into the country. Still today, from kindergarten instructors to University academics, this class of people ridicules Ethiopia's mainstream culture and traditions, using words like *balager* (peasant) to mean "backward" or "uncivilized".

Historically, Ethiopian society was organized around various land tenure systems (Markakis, 1974; Markakis and Nega, 1986; Dessalegn, 1985; Pausewang, 1983; and others). In the North, there was the *rist* system, which allowed an individual to claim land use rights by recounting his/her descent from a lineage of an ancestor who had once inhabited the area. The individual obtained only usufruct rights but had to pay tax to the state. The tax is collected by the *chicka shum* (a politico-administrative position assigned to members of the community on a rotating basis), who transferred the proceeds to the regional nobility. The nobility retained their share and transferred the rest to the state. By contrast, the society in the Southern part of the country was structured around landlord-tenant relations. When the region was incorporated into the Ethiopian imperial state in the 19th century ". . . all conquered land became state property, and its disposal rested solely in the hands of the Emperor (Markakis, 1974, p. 108)". This land was granted to loyal civil servants and military officers who in turn performed policing and administrative tasks. This politico-administrative elite would eventually evolve into a powerful land owning class that began to evict people from their land, to turn them into tenants.

The church too was a major landowner. The amount of the land held by the church prior to the 1975's land reform (see below) can be roughly estimated at 10% to 12% of the total land in the country (Dessalegn, 1985, p. 19). This land was rented out to farmers and the income was used to maintain the clergy. The exact amount of the land that was owned by the state is not known, but it is widely believed that the Emperors had often allocated some large tracts of land for themselves in different part of the country.

Haile Sellasie's rule collapsed in 1974 when deteriorating social and economic conditions culminated in an urban uprising that led to the end of the two thousand years old Solomonic dynasty. At that time "development" was heavily concentrated in the capital city, Addis Ababa, and in the resource-rich regions of the South. All training and educational institutions and most new industries were located in the capital, while the rich areas of the South provided the resources to support this "modernization" process. Other regions, such as Gondar, received little industrial investment. The mass of the peasantry was totally ignored, specially in the North where a growing population and environmental degradation required government action.

The "revolutionary" military regime that overthrew Haile Sellasie immediately took radical measures to abolish all feudal forms of production relations by nationalizing the land and distributing it to the peasants.⁵ Peasant associations were established on 800 hectare areas to help implement the reform and to perform administrative and policing tasks. Unfortunately, the benefits were short-lived, as the government increasingly sought to integrate the peasant population into the structure of a military-socialist state. In the following years, the government would create producer cooperatives, service cooperatives and agricultural marketing cooperatives, in order to "capture" the peasants and to impose a socialist ideology on rural society. The functions of the state and economy revolved around central planning agencies whose roles ranged from determining the prices of goods and

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Note that the land reform was received with little enthusiasm in the North, because tenancy was not a major problem. However, the reform attempted to re-arrange fragmented landholding and avoid long-distance farming. Since making a claim to land use rights involved recounting an ancestor, individual did this every where in the locality, resulting in fragmenting plots of land.

services to setting production quotas for agricultural production. M. Stahl (1989) writes:

The planners and party ideologues envisaged a new way of life evolving whereby peasants gradually adopt a socialist culture. The material basis of that culture would be the experience of collective work and collective services which, theoretically, are supposed to enhance productivity and welfare (p. 33).

The military-socialist government's policy supported producer cooperatives in order to induce peasants to engage in collective farming. The cooperatives received the best land, agricultural inputs and attractive prices. They came to be regarded as the agents of modernization in Ethiopian agriculture. Small-holder agriculture was not deemed worthy of support. Indeed, it was to be destroyed. The organization of rural society was to be dismantled by forcing the population to resettle in city-like villages. Such measures undermined the "logic" of peasant production and the settlement patterns of rural society.

Dessalegn Rahmato (1993) writes:

Agrarian socialism eventually came to be associated in the peasant minds with the ideology of poverty--a determination on the part of authorities to level everyone in destitution. The image of the Derge was that of a grasping overlord with voracious appetite for the resources of the poor and the lowly. If at first the ideology of poverty appeared to some of the more religious-oriented peasants a return to piety and the ethical roots of tradition, it soon became apparent that the new ideology had not renounced status and social distinction, but only redefined them, and that poverty was for the masses only (p. 247).

At the end of the 1980s Colonel Mengistu Haile Marian announced an economic programme based on a mixed economy. Mengistu promised to lift price controls and to create incentives to encourage the growth of production in the peasant sector. At the same time, he also invited the private sector to participate in the production of goods and services. But the proposed reforms "constitute not a heart-felt reversal of old policies". Instead, they were a form of "tactical retreat" from agrarian socialism to pacify growing popular

discontent and to concede to the demands of donors (Dessaiegn, 1994, p. 260). If anything, the new reform policies only created confusion and frustration within the structure of the single-party state. And, as rebel forces advanced south towards Addis Ababa (the capital), the government intensified the extraction of resources from the peasantry to finance the war effort, including the conscription of thousands of “able people” to arm them and fight the civil war.

Economic Reform

The 1997 World Development Report presents the Ethiopian “country profile” as follows: The population has grown from 38 million in 1980 to 56 million in 1995. Thirty-eight percent of the population lives on less than one dollar a day. Life expectancy in 1995 was 49 years, while the infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) declined from 155 in 1980 to 112 in 1995. In 1993, 55 percent of the population had access to health care, 27 percent to clean water, and in the period 1994-95, only 10 percent had access to sanitation facilities. Simply stated, Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the World.

In 1991 the EPRDF set about to restructure the Ethiopian economy. And in spite of a rising level of poverty, some progress has been made in improving the performance of the industrial and agricultural sectors. The World Bank’s (1996) assessment is as follows: The fiscal deficit was reduced (after grants) from an average of 9.6 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) over fiscal year 1990-92, to 5.5 percent over 1993-96. The annual inflation rate was brought down from 20 percent to 6 percent over the same period. The Birr was devalued from 2.07/\$US in 1980 to 6.3/\$US in 1996. Price controls have been lifted except

for petroleum, fertilizer and pharmaceuticals. Parastatals were dismantled. Export taxes were eliminated, leading to a 35 percent increase of exports since the reform. Foreign exchange reserves have improved. For the first time since the 1980s there is a positive real interest rate. The estimated investment to GDP ratio has increased from below 11 percent prior to the reform (1991) to 19 percent in 1996, due to the increased participation of the private sector (especially freight, banking and insurance), whose share of investment has grown from 17 percent to 60 percent. The result is that real GDP grew on average 6.6 percent per year over the fiscal year 1993-96, compared to 1.2 percent in the pre-reform period.

The Bank also says that defense expenditures have been reduced from 31 percent of the government spending prior to the reform to 7 percent in 1995, representing only 2 percent of GDP. Social spending increased from 4 percent of GDP prior to the reform, to 7 percent of GDP in 1995. Spending on education amounted to 13 percent in 1995 (an increase from 7 percent in 1989) while health spending rose to 5.8 percent of GDP (from 2.8 percent in 1989). However, the country's debt has also risen to more than five billion dollars in 1995. The ratio of debt to GNP is now 95, while its ratio to exports is 563 (World Bank, 1997, Table A1.2, p. 53 & Table A1.4, p. 56).

The Bank is pleased with the EPRDF government's performance in carrying out its structural adjustment reform. But the concentration of investment in urban areas and the rise of GDP tell us little about the benefits of the EPRDF's economic policy. In fact, as pointed out earlier, the adjustment policy has subjected millions of Ethiopians to increased poverty. In fact, the health of Ethiopia's economy ought to be measured by the performance of the agriculture sector, which accounts for 55 percent of the GDP (according to the World Bank

[1996]) and which still employs more than 80 percent of the population. Yet its natural resource-base has been dramatically declining over the years. As the Bank points out, there has been an annual deforestation of 3 percent between 1980 and 1990 and this, together with intensive cultivation, has resulted in a massive erosion estimated at an equivalent of 600,000 tonnes of foregone grain production, or 90 percent of Ethiopia's food deficit. Abebe Zegeye (1994) estimates soil losses of between 1.5 and 2 billion cubic meters a year (p. 173). The problem is concentrated in the highland areas of the North and North-West, which includes some of the oldest settlement areas and which still produces most of the nation's food grain and livestock. And it has been aggravated by population growth and land scarcity. The average national landholding size is 1.02 hectares (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1996), which means that traditional farm practices including the fallow-period have to be abandoned long ago, resulting in more intensive cropping practices and a further reduction in land productivity.

As pointed out earlier, the military-socialist government had adopted discriminatory policies towards small agricultural producers, in order to promote the socialization of Ethiopian agriculture. Now that the EPRDF has dismantled both state-owned enterprises and producer cooperatives, one might assume that small-producers would have fared better in the 1990s. Indeed, government officials often talk about achieving food self-sufficiency within five years and the government has intensified its efforts to promote the use of fertilizers and improved crop varieties in Ethiopian agriculture (see next section). Even though uncertainties remain about the long-term impacts, the population, faced with growing land scarcity and declining crop yields, has greeted the government's initiative with some optimism.

There are four expenditure categories in the government budget: Administrative and General Services includes defense, public security and such programmes as rehabilitation, statistics and mapping; Economic Services covers agriculture, industry, mining and energy, transport and communication, road construction and some research; Social Services basically covers basic services, such as education, health, urban housing, and other public services; and the last expenditure category deals with subsidies, pension payments and related expenses. And, as of 1996/97, the government's expenditure includes "regional subsidies" (Table 1). Economic Services have received the largest share in each of the past five years. However, within that budget category, agriculture's budget, which once had received the largest share, has declined from 52.6% in 1992/93 to 9.2 % in 1996/97 (see Table 2). This can be explained by new federal arrangements which have given regions greater responsibility for the planning and management of social and economic programmes. The government's budget profile also makes it clear that there is only a limited capacity to formulate and execute development programmes. In July 1997 the House of the Federal Parliament approved a budget of Birr 10.45 billion of which Birr 3752.370 million has been allocated for recurrent expenditures, Birr 3047.230 million for capital expenditure and Birr 3652.235 million for subsidies to regional states. At the current exchange rate, this amounts to a total budget of about \$US 1.56 billion, of which \$US 550 million will be allocated for recurrent expenditure, \$US 454 million for capital expenditure and \$US 545 million for regional subsidies. Foreign aid also makes an important contribution. The details of external assistance (grants and technical assistance) and external loans (counterpart funds and loans) changed in each of the five budget-years (Table 3). The average contribution of external

assistance and loans for the past five budget-years has been 20% (external assistance) and 19% (external loans) of the total budget respectively.

Table 1. Government Expenditure (recurrent plus capital) by Expenditure Category (in millions of Birr)

Category	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97
Admin. and general services	1,238	1,497	1,795	1,870	1,313
Economic services	2,704	3,512	4,012	3,471	2,564
Social services	1,152	1,866	2,236	2,296	2,726
Other expenditures	837	1,573	1,922	2,030	1,852
Regional Subsidies	0	0	0	0	3,379
Total	5,932	8,207	9,966	10,097	9,557

Table 2. Agriculture's Share as Percentage of Economic Services' Budget Category for the Period 1992/93-1996/97 (in millions of Birr)

Year	Budget	Share (%)
1996/97	235	9.2
1995/96	1,303	37.5
1994/95	1,376	34.3
1993/94	1,406	40.0
1992/93	1,423	52.6

Note: The values for the figures in the above tables have been rounded up.
Source : Negarit Gazeta, 1992/93, 1993/94, 1994/95, 1995/96, 1996/97.

Table 3. Foreign Aid Contributions as a Percentage of the Total Government Budget for the Period 192/93-1996/97 (in millions of Birr)

	1992/93	1993/94	1994/9	1995/96	1996/97
Total Budget	5,932.0	8,207.0	9,966.0	10,097.0	9,577.0
Domestic revenue as % of total budget	71.1	48.0	54.1	65.5	64.4
External assistance as % of total budget	8.5	24.5	32.9	13.3	22.5
External credit/loan as % of total budget	20.0	27.1	13.0	21.0	13.0

Note: The values have been rounded up.

Source : Negarit Gazeta, 1992/93, 1993/94, 1994/95, 1995/96, 1996/97.

Political Reform

In July 1991, the EPRDF organized a National Conference which created the Charter that asserted the right of nationalities to self-determination and which also established local and regional councils constituted along ethnic lines. The Charter was signed by 31 political groups, mostly organized under the tutelage of the EPRDF. The Transitional government was given a mandate to create conditions which would pave the way for the formation of a Federal state under a new constitution. The EPRDF won 32 of the 87 seats in the Council of Representatives of the Transitional Government and controlled the key organs of the state, such as Foreign Affairs and Defense (Keller, 1995; Lyons, 1996). There was a lot of controversy, however. Many ("nationalists") argued that the Charter could lead to the break

up of the country, while regional political groups, notably the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and even those ethnic groups which were orbiting around the EPRDF, felt that they were once again to be dominated by another “Northern” political elite. The various opposition groups in exile, particularly the Coalition of Democratic Forces (CODEF) and MEDHIN, made it clear that they will have no dealings with EPRDF unless it changes its policy of ethnic division. The OLF and other political organizations soon withdrew from the transitional government, leaving the EPRDF and its political allies to take complete control of state power. To use Terrence Lyons’ words, “What began with a noisy diversity of views among a broad array of political organizations ended quietly with clear hegemony of the EPRDF (p. 121)”.

Of all the controversies the “national question” has continued to gain importance. The critical question is: has the EPRDF addressed the “national question” by creating new ethnically defined regions or will this new federal state structure threaten the unity of Ethiopia? This question demands an answer from political scientists and historians, therefore, I will only say a few things in this context, since my main concern is to assess the extent to which the new federal system provides a framework for decentralized decision-making.

However one looks at Ethiopia today, one must admit that the “national question” has its own history in Ethiopian development. The problem was not created by the EPRDF. Indeed, John Sorenson (1994) and Adhana Haile Adhana (1994) have argued that the history of “Ethiopia” is constructed around the church, monarchy and Amharas. Domination and exploitation have long characterized the relationship between the central Ethiopian state and

many nationalities in the country. This was what had driven the radical political forces of the 1970s to rally under the slogan of “self-determination”. In the mid-1980s, at the formation of the Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the military-socialist government created new administrative areas that took into account, among other things, the character of the population (language, culture and economic activity) and their proximity to administrative centers. However, the “revolutionary” government sought to impose “a centralized state and party structure as a solution to the problem of national unity, almost regardless of regional diversities which demand, at the very least, substantial opportunities for local autonomy (Clapham, 1989, p. 18)”. And when the EPRDF came to power, it “chose to construct a political system that reflects on-going realities (Lyons, 1996, p. 124)”. One writer, (Kassahun Birhanu, 1995), says that the new constitution seeks to establish a decentralized political system that is based on a voluntary union between ethnically defined regions. He goes on: “It was thus a major departure for Africa in that it starts by recognizing different nationalities and even allows, under complicated conditions, for the right of self-determination up to and including secession (p. 129)”. As a matter of fact, the “one-man states” of Africa were constructed in the same way as the EPRDF’s federal system. What is different about the EPRDF is its advocacy of regional autonomy. On the contrary, I would also argue that EPRDF did not necessarily believe in the soundness of an ethnically based regionalism. The EPRDF leaders knew that the ethnicization of the Ethiopian state was the only way in which they could dominate the political process. The EPRDF is the only multinational organization which stretches to every corner of the country by using the structures of ethnically based political groups which orbit around it and this helps the party

to mobilize enough political support that ensures its political hegemony.

Regionalization: Proclamation No. 1/1995 created the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The constitution recognizes all languages in the country and gives Regional States the right to determine “their respective working languages”. However, Amharic would remain the national language. There shall be no state religion and no state interference in religion or vice versa. Articles 11–44 set out the fundamental principles of Universal Human Rights, such as human dignity, protection against cruelty, “rights of the arrested”, “rights of the accused”, equality before the law, respect for privacy, freedom of religion, freedom of expression of opinions and beliefs, freedom of association and movement, marriage, status of women, property rights, “right to development”, “right to environment”, and so on. Article 39 is very sensitive. It states that “Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession”. And paragraph 3 of this article also states that every Nation, Nationality and People have the right to “establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable representation in the State and Federal government”.

Articles 45–49 define the form of the Federal Government (see Figure 2). The Government is made up of ethnically based regional states: Afar, Amhara, Oromo, Tigray, Somali, Benshangul-Gumuz, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, Gambella Peoples and Harari Peoples. Moreover, Nations, Nationalities and Peoples within these States have the right to create their own state upon popular will and the approval of the Regional State. Both Federal and State governments shall have legislative, executive and judiciary power (Article 50–52). The Federal government shall be responsible for “formulating and

implementing the country's policies, strategies and plans in respect of overall social, economic and development matters (Article 51-52)", including maintaining standards for the provisions of social services. It shall formulate and execute the country's fiscal and monetary policy, enact legislation in the area of investment, the utilization of natural resources, inter-regional and foreign trade, defense, public security and immigration. The President is to play a symbolic role. And the House of Federation (Senate), elected directly or indirectly by Regional States, is responsible for interpreting laws, overseeing constitutional matters and mediating inter-state conflicts. The House of People's Representatives (with a five year term) is the highest authority in the government. The party in power shall have a majority of seats in the House of People's Representatives. The Prime Minister shall be elected from the members of this House. The Prime Minister heads the Council of Ministers (cabinet) and will be responsible for the House of People's Representatives. Finally, the State Council is the highest organ of the Regional States and is accountable to the people of the region. States shall have power "on matters falling under state jurisdiction" and "adequate power" shall be given to local level governments.

The constitution of the Amhara National Regional State (proclamation No. 2/1995) organizes the State into four administrative hierarchies: Regional, Zonal, Woreda, and Kebele (see Figure 2). The constitution gives the State legislative, executive and judicial powers. The Regional Council has the power to make laws that do not "contravene" the Federal laws, including preparing plans, administering land and natural resources, levying taxes from employees, profits, agricultural income, etc., control of the civil service, collecting fees from licenses and other services, and maintaining public security. The

Chairperson of the Executive Committee is the head of State, He/she is elected by the council of the Amhara State. The State also has a Deputy President, Secretary and Commissioners who oversee economic, social and administrative institutions.

The next level in the Regional State is the Zonal Administration. A Zonal Administration has an Executive Committee which is comprised of 11 to 17 members, including the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Secretary. Committee members are elected by the Regional Executive Committee and approved by the Regional Council. The Committees are responsible for coordinating and directing various institutions and departments in the Zone. Zones do not have Councils, except the minority ethnic groups of Himara, Awi and Oromo (Article 69-75).

Below the Zonal administration is the Woreda Administration. A Woreda has a council directly elected by the local population (for a term of two years). The Executive Committee of the Woreda (consisting of 9 to 15 members) is elected by the Woreda Council and has a Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Secretary. The organs of the Woreda include the Office of the Judiciary and Attorney, Security and Police Force and Social Development. The Executive Committee ensures the implementation of laws and directives which come from above. It is accountable to the Woreda constituencies as well as to the Regional Executive Committee, via the Zonal Administration. The Woreda Council approves social programmes and development plans, mobilizes the population for development work, levies and collects taxes, administers primary schools and junior health centers, and can issue “its own internal regulations and directives (Article 76-85)”.

At the bottom of the hierarchy is the Kebele Administration. A Kebele too has its own Council, directly elected by the local population. It has the following organs: Executive Committee, Social Court and Socio-economic and Security Bodies. The Executive Committee is accountable to the Woreda Executive Committee and Kebele Council. The duties of the Kebele Committee include outlining plans of action and mobilizing the population for development work, protection of natural resources, approving the appointment of judges, and so on (Article 86-92)

Reading these two constitutional documents, one wonders how such a legal-political framework can be put into practice. Many African governments have an excellent reputation for articulating popular participation and self-government, but none has yet made a true commitment to the achievement of these goals. The Ethiopian federal system came into effect only three years ago. It is therefore hard to tell what is and what is not working. With this noted, here are my views:

The new federal constitution has given regions “adequate powers” to govern themselves. Minority groups in the States are allowed to create their own Zonal Councils and to plan and administer certain types of programmes. The question is to what extent this arrangement contains centrifugal forces and to what extent it will lead to the development of a stable national economic, social and political order. As competition for state resources intensifies, frustrated elites are very likely to use “ethnicity” as a way of gaining legitimacy and as a source of bargaining power to secure opportunities (employment through ethnic identification, not competition, for example). Second, in the absence of a strong “civil society” to control the behavior of local elites, abuses of power and corruption will become

a growing phenomenon. Indeed, the government's own media is full of such stories in every region. For instance, in 1997 hundreds of high ranking Woreda officials in the Oromo region were dismissed for corruption, nepotism and "inappropriate behavior". A strong federal government will be needed to facilitate processes of negotiation and accommodation between the Regions and between Regional States and society. Moreover, the federal government must also ensure the equal distribution of opportunities among different social groups in the society. If the government turns its attention away from such issues, political decentralization only disempowers the already disadvantaged communities and groups in the Ethiopian society. And this will create a fertile soil for the growth of new centrifugal forces that may gradually galvanize the forces of disintegration.

Also, the question is whether or not there is an organizational capacity to carry out many functions previously performed by the central state. Zonal and Woreda offices often lack the resources, manpower and the organizational infrastructure of planning and administration. This means that the departments at the lower levels of hierarchy remain heavily dependent on the Regional and Federal agencies for guidance and technical support to formulate and execute local development initiatives.

Regional States have largely inherited the old state apparatus, even though attempts were made in 1996/97 to create *adis mewaker* (new structures). Yet the ethnic "mix" of the bureaucracy has remained largely unchanged. In fact, many professionals are being assigned to work in such peripheral regions as Afar, Somali, Benshangul-Gumuz and Gambela. This results in a situation where politicians focus only on ethnicity issues while bureaucrats are concerned mainly with technical questions and management efficiency. Possible

discriminatory practices to promote “natives” to senior positions will lead “others” to be less committed to the Regional State. The lack of collective vision (and trust) between politicians who make decisions and technocrats who execute programmes and projects may hamper the success of development initiatives.

Most departments in government are accustomed to central control and coordination. This can impede the effective transfer of power and resources to lower levels of the Ethiopian state. For instance, following the “new” structure, the Woreda Council of Lay Armachiho faced some resistance from the employees of line agencies when it tried to influence the way they were organizing their work plans. The Department employees objected to the Council’s move on the grounds that they were only accountable to the Zonal departments. I think they made a good point. For example, the Council would like to develop its own recruitment criteria (gender, participation in meetings, etc.), while the line agencies may require another set of qualifications. Similarly, the Council may demand that sector departments in the Woreda submit plans consistent with its priorities, while line agencies develop plans using another set of strategies to define their own priority areas. Woreda EPRDF officials often talk about *zuria meles ekid* (bottom-up, iterative planning) but most of the planning and budgeting decisions are still made at the Zonal level. The Woreda level agencies are only left with planning small scale initiatives such as soil conservation, designing demonstration sites and tree planting.

Lack of commitment on the part of state employees has remained the most important factor limiting the efficiency and effectiveness of the Ethiopian state. This is in part due to nepotism and political patronage. But the problem also extends to the EPRDF’s performance

evaluation system. This is called *gemgema* in Amharic. And it causes a lot of panic, even among veteran EPRDF politicians. In fact, it has now become common among Ethiopians to joke that the “EPRDF’s power does not last for 48 hours”, meaning that many politicians stay in power for only a few months. This has made employees of the state and the EPRDF’s own people hesitant to make independent decisions in order to avoid making mistakes for which they can be held accountable. Instead, they prefer to await instructions from *ye belay akal* (the top). I once saw a parade of officials in Gondar city who were going to attend a *gemgema* meeting in the Zonal office and who were visibly worried and stressed. *Gemgema* was not supposed to be like this. The idea was to encourage popular control (especially over corrupt officials), to build people’s confidence in the process of participation and come away with useful lessons from such exercises. But it no longer works this way. In fact, the process is so corrupt and so politicized that it has actually worked against the ideals of participation and accountability. As more and more people are removed from their positions, creating stable and effective organizational leadership has become difficult.

Three hypothetical examples will serve to illustrate this problem: First, a department Director warns one of his/her employees that his/her performance on the job has been poor. The employee would go around and mobilize opposition against the Director. During the *gemgema* meeting, the Director might face accusations based on false and exaggerated claims. The Director may be dismissed or demoted while the employee survives. Similarly, a project Director may be expected to complete all of the project phases within a year but he/she later finds out that the organizational structure is not there, there is insufficient manpower or that the budget was not released on time to execute the project. So, by the end

of the project year, only half of the work has been done. As a result, he/she will be demoted or fired. Finally, an ambitious politician or bureaucrat may create a group faction in the organization in order to collect “black points” against the present leader. If successful, he/she topples the man or woman at the top and rises to power.

At times *gemgema* has been instrumental in removing corrupt officials. For instance, while I was in Addis Ababa, a Kebele Chairman in my neighborhood was caught accepting a bribe and arrested, even though in this instance some people were saying that he was set up by his “enemies”. The problem of *gemgema* lies in the process. It fails to acknowledge inevitable errors made in the normal routine of work. It also fails to give people an opportunity to learn from their mistakes. Indeed, some of the *gemgema* points are ridiculous. For instance, the Chairman of the Gondar Administration Zone was demoted through *gemgema*. One of the “points” against him was that he ran away when angry peasants in Belesa Woreda fired at him during the land redistribution period. The EPRDF had expected him to make a “sacrifice” (a reflection of a guerilla mind-set among its top officials), but the Chairman had spent most of his life teaching in schools and he probably had never owned a firearm. Second, the *gemgema* process only results in a change of individuals in the organization but does little to improve the functional performance of departments. Instead *gemgema* should begin by scanning the social, economic and political environment, proceeding to examine what is and what is not working, and then evaluate how individual roles might have contributed to the problem. Finally, a *gemgema* session should be open to public participation. If the idea is to encourage democratic participation, why are the meetings secret?

Society and Economy in North Gondar

Gondar was established in 1636 as the capital of the Ethiopian Empire and became a center of culture, religion and commerce (Pankhurst, 1990) until civil war weakened the Gondar Empire, so that the balance of power gradually shifted to Central Ethiopia (leading to the emergence of Addis Ababa as the new center of political and economic power). The history of Gondar is a history of war, destitution and exploitation. Looking at the region's social and economic conditions today, it is hard to believe that Gondar had once been the center of Ethiopian civilization. The civil war in the 19th century was fought in Gondar. The Sudanese Mahdist burned down the city in the 1880s. The British bombed the city when they campaigned to drive the Italians out of Ethiopia (Italy occupied Ethiopia from 1936-1941). After the Second World War, when Ethiopia entered the age of "modernization", Haile Sellasie appointed Shewan (Central Ethiopian) feudal aristocrats who did nothing but embezzle project money and exploit the mass of the peasantry. With the 1974 revolution, the feudal aristocracy was replaced by a ruthless military dictatorship that wiped out the younger generation through torture and mass murder. Finally, during the civil war of the 1970s and 1980s, three of the armed opposition groups operated in Gondar.⁶ It is disturbing to see many crediting Eritreans and Tigrians for bearing the burden of the civil war, while little is said about the years of massive displacement and destitution in the Gondar region.

The history of Gondar also has its dark side. Since the 16th century, the Imperial state and the feudal aristocracy dominated the original inhabitants of the area, particularly

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Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and EPRDF

Kemants and Falashas (see Chapter 4 for discussion on Kemants). Particularly, in the reign of Emperor Johanne (1880s), Kemants, Falashas and Muslims were given the choice of converting to Christianity or losing their land titles. The Kemants accepted a gradual conversion, while Muslims and Falashas refused to do so and were evicted from their land. In modern day Ethiopia, most of these ethnic groups were excluded from the state. However, ethnicity in today's Gondar society is not important: many Falashas have migrated to Israel, the Kemants have assimilated into the Amhara society and Muslims traditionally engage in commerce. The main task now is how to revive the regions' shattered economy.

In the 1980s, Gondar was divided into South and North by the socialist-military government, when it created new boundaries to re-organize the administrative structure of the central state. The EPRDF did not change this administrative boundary, but it incorporated the fertile lands in the West of Gondar into Tigray region, and part of Quara Woreda (West Gondar) into the Benshangul-Gumuz region. Under the new Federal structure, North Gondar is one of 11 Administrative Zones in the Amhara National Regional State. The North Gondar Administrative Zone (NGZ) has 16 Woredas and a population of more than two million, of whom 77% live in rural areas (see also Appendix III). The Zone covers 53,168 km², most of which lies in *dega* (high) and *woynadega* (middle) altitudes.

The profile of socio-economic conditions in today's NGZ can be described as follows: Many government officials say that declining crop yields and environmental degradation are the two most important problems, particularly in *dega* and *weynadega* areas. The great majority of the population is concentrated in these areas and the land has been cultivated for centuries. Land scarcity has led to the expansion of cultivation to hillsides,

river valleys and forested areas. Deforestation and soil erosion have become chronic problems. Low land areas, particularly Dembia Woreda, frequently experience floods, which causes soil erosion, crop damage and health hazards. In the 1996 rainy season 19 Kebeles in Dembia were so affected (personal communication).

Many farmers, especially women and young people, lack the means of production (oxen and tools). In Dembia Woreda, the most productive area in the region, 40% of the population has no oxen (personal communication). In Lay Armachiho Woreda many young people go around in the community to sell their labor (working for others) in exchange for the use of oxen.

Most of the areas in NGZ are not accessible by roads. There are three all-weather roads (Gondar-Tigray, Gondar-Addis Ababa and Gondar-Humara while a new road is being constructed to link the agricultural Woreda of Metama with Gondar). A few areas are only accessible by car during the rainy season. Reaching the Woredas of Belesa, Beyeda, Janamora, Quara and Tach Armachiho/Tegedie requires walking days on foot and crossing tortuous mountains. School material, clinical equipment, grinding mills and other material and equipment is carried to these distant places by the local population; government workers regard a work assignment in one of these places as a nightmare.

Agriculture remains the main source of income for the great majority of the rural population and crop failure often makes the population vulnerable to hunger and famine. The region has the potential to produce cash crops, such as coffee, *gesho* (used to make the traditional Ethiopian beer), fruits and vegetables. However, except for Lay Armachiho Woreda, and areas around Lake Tana, cash crop production is not yet widely practiced.

The region's agriculture widely relies on fluctuating rainfall. The lack of effective irrigation methods has limited production in the dry season. Relf Collin et al (1995) say that there are 74 rivers in NGZ, but many more small and medium sized streams can be found. In fact, Lay Armachiho Woreda alone has 24 streams and rivers but intercepting water and drawing it from the steep river valleys, requires a sophisticated irrigation technology. At present the use of irrigation remains confined to garden production of fruits and vegetables in the dry season.

Extensive deforestation has caused serious fuelwood shortages. In urban areas, in particular, a significant portion of household income is now spent on fuelwood. In many rural areas women spend their time collecting and carrying firewood. In addition, households experience seasonal water shortages. Small and large streams and rivers still remain the main source of drinking water and in the dry season women spend a lot of time walking to streams and rivers to fetch water.

There are no adequate health facilities to treat sick people, to attend births, to carry out vaccination, and specially, to eradicate malaria which is expanding from lowland to highland areas. There are also no adequate school facilities to accommodate the growing number of young people who flock in each year.

Under the new Federal structure, NGZ has its own Zonal administration which guides and coordinates five sectors: 1) agriculture, 2) health, 3) education, 4) water, minerals and energy, and 5) road construction. The administration, as a sector, heads the security forces and courts (see Figure 4). There was a total budget of Birr 36 million for the year 1996/97 (Table 4). This was a fourfold increase of the Birr 8.5 million for the budget year

1994/95 (see Table 5). The NGZ has a number of projects in five sectors, of which agriculture has 13 projects, health 26, education 35, water, mineral and energy 26, and road construction 6 projects respectively, including the administration's own 3 office construction projects.

Note the community participation component, accounted for as share of project budget: 17% for agriculture, 4% water, mineral and energy, 10% education, 30.4 % health and 16.9% for administration, respectively. These inputs take the form of material and labor contributions (doing physical work and carrying material and equipment to project sites, for example). In the period 1994/95 agriculture received the largest share of the budget (28.5%). However, the NGZ Administration appears to have shifted its priorities to infrastructure building. For instance, road construction projects received 30.4% of the budget and water, mineral and energy projects 25.1%, but the agricultural sector still fares better (22.7%) compared to the social sectors (health and education). Here, I will only be concerned with the sector for which data were available: agriculture.

Agricultural Extension: The Department of Agriculture (DoA) has 13 programmes and projects that deal with the construction of field stations, cattle breeding, fishing and crop production. Of these, crop production has attracted the attention of politicians and technocrats at the DoA. The DoA's agricultural package stresses the provision of "a variety of modern inputs", expanding 0.5 hectare demonstration plots, training and field visits. I will briefly analyze these on the basis of the DoA's own most up-to-date report, *1996/97 Budget Year: Half-Year Progress Report (December, 1996)*.

Table 4. Project Budget, Community Contributions (as Percentage of Project Budget) and Sectors' Share as Percentage of NGZ Total Budget for Year 1996/97 (in millions of Birr).

Sector	Budget	No. Of Projects	Community Contributions (%)	Budget Share (%)
Agriculture	8.167	13	17.0	22.70
Water, minerals and energy	9.033	26	4.0	25.10
Education	6.354	35	10.0	17.66
Health	0.469	26	30.0	1.30
Rural Road construction	10.959	6	0	30.45
Administration	1.000	3	16.88	2.78

Source: NGZ Department of Planning and Economic Development (1996).

Table 5. NGZ Budget for Year 1993/94 (in millions of Birr)

Sector	Budget	Share (%)
Agriculture	2.400	28.46
Education	2.244	26.40
Health	1.831	21.63
Urban Development	0.947	11.18
Government & Public building	0.721	8.51
Natural resources	0.315	3.73

Source: Collin et al (1995).

Demonstration plots: Demonstration plots are designed on 0.5 hectare of farmers' land. Farmers are persuaded to try the new technologies (fertilizer and improved seeds) and promised the provision of support and advice. However, in Lay Armachiho Woreda, "model" farmers had bought their own seed and fertilizers. They only got some help from the extension workers to measure the half-hectare land and to apply the DAP-urea mix of the fertilizer.⁷ Once this is done the extension workers make only infrequent field visits.

Extension workers made no secret of the fact that the first year of the extension programme had involved making a lot of promises and even making exaggerated claims about what the new technologies could do to improve production. Yet within the past two years the number of demonstration plots in NGZ has increased, from 1,060 in 1994 to 14,430 in 1995/96. And there are plans to design another 26,000 in the 1997 production year. The Zone DoA says that it has the capacity to design and manage up to 30,000 demonstration plots but its resources have been limited. The department lacks adequate manpower and facilities to design and administer so many demonstration sites in so many areas of rural Gondar.

Input Supply: Input delivery planning puts the farming population into two categories: those farmers who are assisted on demonstration plots are called "extension"⁸ and the ordinary peasants *medebegna* (regulars). The supply/demand trend for fertilizers and

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Measuring the plot is very important, since they are told that the optimum input of fertilizer on land is 100kg/0.5 hectare.

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Extension is now an Amaharic word, one of the many English technical terms and jargon being widely adopted by technocrats in the government.

improved varieties has increased (Table 6). Fertilizer distributed to extension-farmers rose from 1,060 quintals (1 quintal = 100 kg) in 1994/95, to 14,430 quintals in 1995/96. Meanwhile, 15,427.5 quintals was distributed to *medebegna* farmers in the year 1995/96 (no data for 1994/95 period). The plans for 1996/97 aim to deliver 18,810 quintals to extension-farmers (no data for *medebegnas*). The quantity of improved varieties supplied has increased from 381.2 quintals to 4,511 quintals in the same period, while the delivery of 6,376 quintals is planned for the 1996/97 production year. About 404.51 quintals of seeds were bought from local farmers, although farmers also exchanged traditional seeds for improved varieties among themselves. The application of insecticides and herbicides shows the same trend: 9,254 liters and 12,276 kgs of insecticide in 1995/96. The same amount will also be delivered in the next production year (1997). In 1995/96 production year, the delivery of pesticides amounted to 5,291 liters and 8 kgs and the same amount will be delivered next year. Finally, the DoA is testing improved ploughing techniques such as ty-riger and broad bed maker. Both tools are tied to oxen-powered drought during ploughing to create bore-holes that increase the water retention capacity of the soil.

Loan and Credit: Loans and credits are arranged by the Ethiopian government and donor agencies. The government mostly finances loans for the purchase of inputs, while donor programmes are more geared to asset building and safety nets (see Table 7). The DoA used to manage loan programmes until the Woreda Council was made responsible for compiling loan requests from the local population. The Zone Department of Finance receives a loan request from the Woredas, and if this is approved, the Banks are authorized to release the money. The Banks do not require collateral but they have to ensure that the loan requests

come through the Woreda or Kebele administrative channels. Loans from the commercial Bank of Ethiopia in the year 1995/96 amounted to Birr 722,555, while those from the Development Bank of Ethiopia amounted to Birr 125,000 in the same period. Meanwhile, the Development Bank said that it had plans to finance the purchase of inputs worth Birr 4.5 million, in the next production year. Revolving loans and credits are geared to such asset building initiatives as cattle fattening, sheep and goat husbandry and “safety net”, including the purchase of grinding mills.

The total loans disbursed to both “regular” and “extension” farmers have dramatically increased (Table 7). There was also an increase in a repayment rate of 68% by “regulars” and 3% by “extensions” in year 1996 (Table 7).⁹ The rate of repayment for revolving funds is often understood to be lower, but there are no figures. Government officials complain about the farmers’ “dependency mentality” but I disagree. The income of most households still remains so low at the end of the harvesting season. They are left with too little income to allow them to sell produce or assets for the purpose of loan repayment. Repayments for a donor financed loans are low, precisely because these agencies apply no pressure on borrowers. During my interview with a few young “extension” farmers in Lay Armachiho Woreda, I also found out that some people in fact had the money to repay but they decided to trade *gesho* (a cash crop) until the May deadline. The reason was simple: they earn Birr 30 a week from trade, but only pay 10% interest rate a month for loans (Birr 5).

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Note the huge difference in repayment rate for “extensions” and “regulars”. I presume that “regulars” take loans from SCs that can enforce strict borrowing and repayment rules.

Table 6. Input Supply for Years 1994/95, 1995/96 and 1996/97

Input	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97 (planned)
Extension			
Fertilizer (quintal)			
DAP	530.0	7,215.0	9,405
Urea	530.0	7,215.0	9,405
Regular			
Fertilizer	n.d.	15,427.5	n.d
Improved seeds (quintal)			
Teff	66.0	1,079.0	1,404
Sorghum	2.3	88.0	80
Wheat	315.0	3,290.0	4,666
Maize	0.0	53.0	75
Barely	0.0	0.0	31
Potato	00	0.0	120
Insecticide			
Liquid (liters)	0.0	9,254.0	9,254
Powder (kg)	0.0	12,276.0	12,276
Pesticide			
Liquid (liter)	0.0	5,291.0	5,291
Powder (kg)	0.0	8.0	8
BBM*	0.0	10.0	20
Ty-riger	0.0	50.0	50

* Broad bed maker.

Source: NGZ, Department of Agriculture, 1996.

Manpower and Training: As of 1994/95, the DoA has 931 permanent employees, 30 contractors and two temporary employees. This manpower is allocated at Zone, Woreda and field stations. The reporting relationship is hierarchical: field station workers report every two weeks to the Woreda Department of Agriculture. The Woreda evaluates and sends the

report to Zonal DoA every month. The Zonal DoA again evaluates and submits a report to the Regional Bureau of Agriculture and North Gondar Department of Planning and Economic Development every three months. This system can only help to ensure central control of field-level activity and in no way represents a systematic method to appraise what is and what is not working. For instance, it is not possible to evaluate the performance of a demonstration plot, or of any other project impact within two weeks. Nor does the upward flow of information from a cluster of field agencies give a true picture of what is happening at the ground level.

Data for the distribution of the work force for each Departmental unit are not available. However, it is clear that most of the work is done by ill-trained extension workers at the field level, who spend most of their time walking from one place to another (the DoA has provided them with mules and horses but they have preferred to walk). Woreda officers often complain that the lack of field capacity to gather data and process the information has over-burdened them with work. They say that compiling raw field data and writing reports have diverted their attention away from planning and administrative work. The DoA *akem gembata* (capacity building) programme, in part assisted by PADEP (Peasant Agriculture Development Extension Programme), provides training opportunities each year for field and Woreda workers. More still needs to be done to build capacity in the area of data gathering and impact assessment. Training is also provided for selected farmers, who, presumably, are expected to go back to their communities to share ideas and knowledge. In 1995/96, 14,430 farmers were trained, and 181,810 will be trained the next year. Training sessions are often held at the Woreda administrative centers and deal with building technical knowledge in the

area of constructing water springs, irrigation and conservation of resources.

**Table 7. Loans, Revolving Credit and Repayment for year 1995 and 1996
(in millions of Birr)**

	Loan	Repayment	Percentage
Regular			
1996	4.218	2.891	68.1
1995	2.352	2.133*	90.7
Extension			
1996	3.222	0.097**	3.0
1995	0.246	0.230	93.3
Rotating loan***			
Grinding mill	0.498	0.061	12.3
Herbicide	0.330	0.024	2.5
Cattle fattening	0.199	0.007	0.37
Sheep and goat****			
husbandry	0.004	0.005	12.4
Safety net	0.860	0.022	2.6

* As of the second-quarter year.

**The total loan is Birr 4,373,755, but farmers have made a prepayment (25%) of Birr 1,151,251.

***Swiss government

****Sheep and goat husbandry and safety net programmes were jointly funded by PADEP and UNDP.

Source: NGZ Department of Agriculture, (1996).

The government says that agricultural inputs have helped to raise crop production. The DoA's own report (1997) states that 845,854 hectares of land was planned to be cultivated in the year 1996 and production was expected to amount to 7.8 million quintals. The Report says that the cultivated land area has increased by 0.44%, while production

increased by 3.54% (8.1 million quintals). Selected varieties and fertilizer were applied on 0.84% of the total cultivated land, fertilizer and indigenous varieties were used on 1.34% of the land, and 97.82% was farmed by traditional methods.

In conclusion, one cannot be sure how the current extension system can ensure agricultural sustainability. Yet in a country where millions of people face hunger and famine every year, the government is left with no choice except to deploy every available means to increase food production. There is no doubt that “generational” problems of the green revolution will emerge and government officials, as elsewhere in the world, may say “we will deal with the problems later”.

Since the government began introducing the green revolution technologies, it appears that rich farmers were the first to get involved in extension programmes, but many of them were penalized by the 1997 land reform policy (see Chapter 4). However, small and middle farmers were catching up fast.

In my view, it would appear that the farming population is enthusiastic about using fertilizer and improved seed varieties. This is not surprising, given the urgency to increase crop yields. Kassahum Gobaw, one of the “model” farmers, said that his land had been cultivated for the past 62 years, during which period output continued to decline. In 1995/96 production year, he decided to try fertilizer and the new variety of wheat on 0.5 hectare of land¹⁰. He said that these inputs would enable him to harvest 45 quintals of wheat (a nearly three fold increase). However, there are others who were disappointed with the results, either

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As far as I know each farmer has only chosen to experiment with the new technologies on 0.5 hectare of his/her land.

because they misapplied the DAP-urea mix, failed to follow the advice of extension workers or found the new technologies inappropriate to local conditions. Some farmers also felt that the new variety of *teff* was inferior to the local type.

Other concerns often expressed by farmers are the following:

- Some crop seeds are not suitable for local climate and soil conditions;
 - There is danger of becoming too heavily dependent on one or two crops.
 - The market price for the new varieties is low. I have seen 100kg of the new *teff* variety sold for Birr 120, while the traditional variety was sold for Birr 140, because consumers still prefer the traditional varieties.
 - While the production of barley is encouraged, there is no external and internal market demand for it.
 - The cost of fertilizers has been a growing concern, specially now that the government has decided to remove the subsidy. Only those who can afford to buy inputs have therefore benefited.
 - Farmers still question the suitability of fertilizer to certain soil types. They say “fertilizers burn the soil”.
 - Finally, farmers suspect that crop output may decline after the first application of fertilizer.
- The DoA people dismiss these concerns as unscientific “misconceptions” but the green revolution experiences lend some credibility to the concern of farmers.

In sum, extension work in Gondar began quite recently. The DoA has its own organizational constraints. Evaluation reports point out major problems associated with such things as slow budget release, lack of facilities (transport, for example) and inadequate

trained manpower to execute work plans. In addition, the DoA has initiated projects that deal with tree planting, soil and water conservation, energy-saving technologies (improved stoves), irrigation, and so on. All these lead the organization to stretch its resources to too many priorities and geographical areas. It is therefore fair to say that both the DoA and the farming population should learn in the process. The DoA's "farmers' day" events bring farmers and DoA staff together and create a good opportunity to discuss concerns related to crop planting, seed selection, and extension service management.

Conclusion

Although Ethiopia entered the post-independence period without a colonial heritage, the experience of "development" has differed little from other African or developing countries. The "modernization" attempt by Emperor Minilik in the late 19th century, and by Haile Sellasie in the 20th century, did little to alter the nature of ancient institutions. Radical change began only when the post-1974 socialist-military government took drastic steps to destroy the feudal mode of production and the political institutions of the ancient regime. However, the repressive nature of the military government, and its misguided policies, led the country into a deepening economic and political crises. In 1991, the rebel forces of the EPRDF toppled the government and rose to power. Since then the EPRDF has been liberalizing the economy and decentralizing the state to ethnically defined regional states.

With a per capita income of \$US 100 a year and with 52 percent of the population living below the poverty line, Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world today. In July 1997, the government's own media was even saying that about four million people had been exposed to starvation due to the shortage of rainfall. The root causes of the country's economic "underdevelopment" are many-sided: war, the structural constraints of subsistence production, the inappropriate policies of successive governments and a lack of effective natural resource management. National leaders have found it easier to blame previous government policies and practices, rather than seeking to resolve the problems themselves. Thus, the 1974 "revolutionary" government blamed Haile Sellasie's feudal rule for the country's "underdevelopment". It claimed that once feudalism was destroyed achieving economic progress would be much easier. Instead, it espoused repressive policies that led to prolonged civil war, which drove the country into deepening crisis. And today it is also the same thing. The EPRDF keeps arguing "we inherited a war-torn economy", as if the end of the civil war by itself guarantees economic development. Meanwhile, opposition groups, most of whom are living in a comfortable exile, remain preoccupied with the question of power sharing with EPRDF. Long-term development is possible only when structural problems in agriculture are removed and when there is political stability in the region.

Since the EPRDF's rise to power, "civic" organizations have flourished in the Ethiopian society. There are now many business groups, professional associations and a "free press". The EPRDF can no doubt have a credit for this. Yet organizations that the EPRDF perceives to be a threat to the new political order, are finding it difficult to operate in the country. On the economic front, the EPRDF's reform policies have been beneficial for the

mass of the Ethiopian peasantry. The prices of food and cash crops, chickens, eggs, cattle, and so on, have increased. Nowadays urban elites are heard saying “the money is in the countryside”. Moreover, the rural population relies little on state services, except for health centers and medical drug stores; hence, they suffer little when the Ethiopian state is “rolled-back”. Yet, compared to the African experience, the EPRDF’s adjustment policies did not cut social spending; in fact, public expenditure has increased. This is a sound approach, since economic re-structuring in Ethiopia demands both structural adjustment of the economy and rehabilitation of the shattered social infrastructure (see Eshetu, 1994).

EPRDF officials appeared to be aware of the need to monitor the market to make sure that it produces goods and services suited to societal needs. But, in reality, the market has gone its own way. Expensive imported electronic goods, cars and “high fashion” clothes, and so on, have flooded retail stores. Nowadays it is difficult for ordinary people to read business signs and advertisements, because they are written in English (that is, English names of companies and products written in Amharic). There is the expanding “tabloid” newspaper (one named “Madonna”, the other publishing playboy stories, for example), noisy disco clubs, strip clubs and video game facilities. These all represent the “capitalist impulse” and they do no good for the society, except weakening national values and creating social problems in the future.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Formal” Organizations: Kebele Administrations and Service Cooperatives

Introduction

This chapter discusses the case studies of “formal” organizations in Lay Armachiho Woreda, North Gondar Administrative Zone, Northern Ethiopia. “Formal” organizations refer to rural Kebele administration (KAs) and service cooperatives (SCs). The field research for this study was carried out in three Kebele areas: Ambezo/Chira, Lomeye/Shumara and Kerker Balegziabhere.¹ The number of residents in each of these Kebeles is 6,224, 4,028 and 2,839 respectively (see Map 1). These Kebele areas lie within the locally defined agroecological zones of *kola* (hot), *dega* (cool) and *weynadega* (middle). However, the mountain ecosystem often makes it difficult to define a clear boundary between these agroecological zones. For instance, Ambezo/Chira and part of the Kerker area lies within the *dega* zone, while the remaining part of Kerker and Lomeye/Shumara are *weynadega*. Part of the Lomeye/Shumara area also lies within the *kola* zone, which is more suitable to grow valuable cash crops such as coffee and bananas. In fact, in his study of the highland areas of Shewa and Wollo (Central Ethiopia), Mesfin Wolde Mariam (1990) chose to identify the following agroecological zones: high *wurch* (above 3,200m), low *wurch* (between 3000 and 3200m), *dega* (between 2600 and 3000m), *dega weynadega* (between 2200 and 2600m), *qolla-weynadega* (between 1800 and 2200), high *qolla* (between 1400 and 1800) and low

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The slash (/) indicates that the Kebele’s boundary has been redefined quite recently. This is done by bringing two Kebeles together to constitute one Kebele administrative area.

qolla (under 1400m). In this respect, this study area lies between the *dega* and *qolla-weynadega* zones

The KAs and SCs were formed by the military government in the 1970s to create conditions of empowerment for local-self administration and market control. As pointed out in Chapter 3, the benefits were short-lived, as the government soon began using these agencies to export its policies to rural areas and to exploit agricultural producers. At the time of the government's downfall (in 1991), the KAs and SCs had become the most despised social agencies. However, the idea that such organizations can be catalyst agents of change in the Ethiopian rural society is still attractive and the EPRDF government has chosen to retain their structures while making minor changes which reflect its policy objectives. Yet, as the case studies will show, the government has done little to remove structural problems that affect their performance functions. This said, the first section presents a broader picture of society, politics and economy in Lay Armachiho in a historical and contemporary context. The remaining two sections examine the roles, functions and structures of KA and SC organizations.

Society, Politics and Economy in Lay Armachiho

Lay Armachiho Woreda is one of the sixteen Woredas in North Gondar Administrative Zone (NGZ). The Woreda lies to the North-West of NGZ and has a total surface area of 4,889 km². Its estimated population is 123,000 (DPED, 1996; see also Appendix IV). The Woreda has 31 KAs, whose boundaries are defined by using the traditional boundaries of churches. Each Kebele is presumed to have 5000 residents, even though 25 of the Kebeles (80%) have a smaller population than this. Twenty-seven of the

Kebeles are exclusively inhabited by the Kemant ethnic group.

Kemant society has been little studied. Only Frederick Gamst (1969) has undertaken a comprehensive study of Kemant society from both a historical and contemporary perspective. While Gamst cites other earlier works by various Europeans, they only made scant reference to Kemant society, describing it as “secretive” and “closed”. At a time of growing ethnic divisions and the revival of social identities, many Kemants, including myself, have become increasingly aware of the need to study the social and political history of their society. However, I will be concerned only with the following four questions: First, what is the origin of the Kemants? Second, why did the Kemants choose to live in the highland areas of Gondar? Third, how were the Kemants able to retain their culture, language and religion for such a long time, given that they lived very close to Gondar, which was the center of the Ethiopian feudal and Christian Empire? And finally, what is the nature of the relationships between the Ethiopian state and Kemant society in a historical and contemporary context?. The last part of this section will highlight the state of the economy in Lay Armachiho Woreda.

The Origin of the Kemants: There are about 150,000 Kemants in the two Woredas of NGZ, Chilga and Lay Armachiho. For many centuries the Kemants lived in *dega* and *weynadega* areas of North-West Gondar, a rugged terrain that stretches from Wegera (in the North-East) to Chilga (in the South-West). Kemant elders call this North-South parallel the “migration route” but they give few details about the causes of this migration. According to local legend, Aydarki, who is the founder of the Kemant community, was being continuously chased by an “enemy”. He first remained hidden in the forested areas of Kerker, Lay

Armachiho, then moved westward to Chilga in search of a peaceful place to establish settlement (In Chilga local people have preserved a stone which bears the foot prints of Aydarki's horse). But Alequa Taye (1927), whose work relies solely on Biblical scripts, says that Ayner, the father of the Kemants, migrated from Egypt to Ethiopia around 2410 B.C., fifteen years after King Hare (of Egypt) ascended to the throne. According to this theory, Ayner left Egypt with his wife, Entela, at a time of prolonged famine. His seven brothers went their own way to other areas of Egypt and Asia. One local Christian priest told a similar story, although he did say that Kemants were forced into exile by the King as a punishment for spreading rumors and gossip. According to Alequa Taye, some Ethiopians mistakenly believed that the Kemants descended from those people who came from Israel with Minilik I (son of King Solomon and Queen Sheba) as servants.

Frederick Gamst's understanding of the Kemant's origins is different. In his view, the Kemants are part of the Agew ethnic group, and other groups in Central and Northern Ethiopia. Although I do not dismiss the Kemants' myth of a "migration from Egypt", my view falls in line with Gamst's conclusion. The Kemants are probably a section of the Agew population who retreated to the South and settled in Gondar, following the rise of Christianity in Northern Ethiopia. In the 10th century, a Falasha Queen, Yudit had overthrown the Christian Empire and ruled Ethiopia. It is therefore fundamental to assume that, following the restoration of Christianity, the imperial state might have been pursuing a section of the Agew population that continued to practice Judaism. The fact Queen Yudit is described as *gudit* (brutal) by the church clergy and some historians suggests that there was a deeply ingrained hostility towards the non-Christian Agew groups.

The Falashas adhered to strict Jewish tradition, while Kemants had incorporated pagan elements into their religious practices. However, the Kemants' view of their ancestral religion appears to be less pagan; in fact, one Christian priest said "we were the true followers of the Orit (Judaism)". However, my own observation of one similar religious festival makes the pagan elements self-evident.

The Falashas migrated to Israel in massive numbers in 1985, following "operation Moses" to airlift them from refugee camps in Sudan. The government of Israel justified the "operation" on the grounds that the Falashas were suffering from famine and civil war. Although this could have been true in Tigray Province, the Falashas who lived in Gondar were not affected by famine. Many Ethiopians still believe that Israeli secret agents infiltrated Ethiopia in order to organize the Falasha exodus, by promising to take them to Israel if they escaped to Sudan. In Lay Armachiho, all the Falasha communities were abandoned overnight as people fled by using the cover of darkness to avoid being intercepted by government forces. Only a few people sold their land. The rest of the Falasha land was simply taken over by the surrounding Kemant population. However, during the 1997 land reform, the government evicted the people from those Falasha lands, since the law did not allow people to simply take over the lands of absentee owners.

The Kemant religion has been the "boundary-maintaining mechanism" with the surrounding Amhara society, reinforced by the Kemant perception of the "other" as "unclean" and by expelling Christianized individuals, or those born of Amhara fathers or mothers. However, over the centuries the society has been threatened by systematic attempts to destroy the religion on which it is based. Gamst says that many Kemants were compelled

“to adopt Christianity during the 1880s, under a program of enforced Amharanization carried out by Emperor Johannes IV, and this broke down the boundary-maintaining mechanism supplied by the Qemant religion and spurred the eventual atrophy of Qemant society and culture (p. 30)”. The *Womber* (head of the Kemant church) in Chilga recalls that when Kemants were forcefully converted to Christianity in the 1950s, some elders died of depression. And this only stopped when local elders went to Addis Ababa and appealed to Emperor Haile Sellasie for help. Education institutions, courts and government offices ridiculed the Kemant language and forced the population to assimilate with Amhara society. Today there are very few villages in Chilga, and none in Lay Armachiho that are devoted to the ancient religion. Even the *Womber*’s two daughters have been converted to Christianity.

Forces destructive of Kemant religion have gained strength following the discovery of a *tsebel* (holy water) in Tikil Dingay, Lay Armachiho Woreda. The *tsebel* water is drawn from a local river. It was found by an illiterate Kemant Christian monk, who claims that God had told him to find the *tsebel* for sick people. People, most of whom suffer from mental and physical illness, are put in the *tsebel* water. The priests read the scripts from the bible while the monk forces every one of them to make a confession. And a lot of people go back home happily. The health officer in Tikil Dingay once said that 70% of these people got “good results”. One woman who had been pregnant for three years gave birth to what people described as a “devil”. When the information spread, the population in Tikil Dingay, even a few government workers, ran down to the river valley to see the miracle. The woman confessed that she had been pregnant for three

years, even though it was hard to know whether or not she had given birth to a “devil”. Local officials estimate the number of people who came to the *tsebel* during the 1997 off-season (February to March) between 5,000 and 10,000. They came from all over Ethiopia, and as far as Eritrea. The same monk has been trying hard to persuade people to abandon Kemant cultural and religious practices. He once led a crusade to stop one annual cultural event in Tikil Dingay.

Kemants and the State: In the 16th century the Ethiopian Empire established Gondar as its center of rule. The Kemants were pushed back to the marginal highland areas of Lay Armachiho and Chilga. Local elders say that the flat, fertile areas of Dembia Woreda, near Lake Tana, were once “their lands”-- the names of most of the places in Dembia area derive from the Kemant language. Since the Kemants were too few in number to present a threat to the power of the Monarchy, the imperial state allowed them to co-exist with the Christian Amhara society. The Kemants also provided the state with a security means to guard the city. However, competition for scarce land resources soon induced Amharas to look for land in the Kemant highland areas. Land hungry Amharas could not use forceful eviction, in part because Kemants have *rist* titles in the area (see Chapter 3), and in part because the Kemant population was heavily armed.² However, the Amharas sought to take over the churches in the Kemant area, so that they could use them to control the land and to impose taxes on the population.³ What followed was a legal battle and eventually what sometimes looked like an

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Note that it was not uncommon for powerful individuals to evict people from their land.

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One way of taking over the churches was to register them under the Amharas' ownership.

armed confrontation, as the Kemants tried to stop the Amhara encroachment in the highland areas. In one instance, an armed conflict almost broke out when Amharas tried to control the church in what is now Lomeye Kebele, Lay Armachiho Woreda. By the 1960s tensions ran high, so high that the number of innocent Kemant and Amhara victims grew. Amharas killed innocent Kemants. The Kemants retaliated by robbing and murdering Amharas who were returning from the “market” in Gondar. One group of Amharas killed seven members of one Kemant family. The only remaining brother left his job as a policeman to take revenge by hunting down and killing seven Amharas. Elsewhere, an Amhara police corporal masterminded the assassination of one powerful peasant but the murdered peasant’s brother, a policeman, shot the corporal and fled to the countryside. In this way, things almost got out of control before the 1974 revolution destroyed the feudal state.

The 1975 land reform policy nationalized all rural and urban land, and with this, ended all sorts of disputes. The radical military government created peasant associations as a way of giving the peasant population greater autonomy to govern itself. This brought significant relief to Kemant society, since it destroyed feudal rule in Kemant land. It also ended land disputes among the Kemants, which mainly arose from claims of *rist* land. Moreover, the socialist-military government’s policy put emphasis on party loyalty, instead of ethnicity, to construct the post-revolution Ethiopian state. Finally, the new government’s own repressive policies eventually created a common experience between Amhara and Kemant families. Both Kemant and Amhara youth were imprisoned, tortured and butchered during the years of “red-terror”. As a result of all these factors, the difference between Amhara and Kemant society is less significant today. In fact, there has been increase in inter-

marriage, and the development of all types of relationships. Today there are only some frustrated Kemant elites who accuse the government of denying Kemants right to create their own ethnically based self-government. I later found out that many of those elites had previously held posts in the present government, and that they had never advocated the Kemant cause when they were still in power. In my view, it would appear that the Kemant population has little interest, at present, in the idea of self-government today. They do not see how a Kemant government could bring about significant benefits to their society. But there is also another important reason. As land scarcity becomes a serious problem in the highland areas, the Kemants are trying to find ways of settling in sparsely populated lowland Amhara areas and they know that drawing a regional boundary will restrict or limit any population movement from one area to another.

The EPRDF government has created a Woreda Council, which consists of 124 locally elected members. The Council's main role is to review the Woreda's "action plans" and evaluate the performance of the administrative personnel. However, the new constitution only allows the Woreda Administration to manage "junior social programmes" and the Woreda Executive Committee remains dominated by members of educated elites (basically high school graduates, or university drop-outs and college graduates), all of whom selected on the basis of their political loyalty to the EPRDF party, and on the basis of their social status (what people say is "being a *muhur*" [intellectual]). Six of the 11 Committee members are not natives of Lay Armachiho.

The present political system provides a good opportunity for Kemant people to participate in the decision-making process. Elected Council members have been able to

remove corrupt local officials, judges and members of the police force and today people have greater confidence in speaking against government officials. Fear of authority has diminished. Bowing and addressing officials as *esewo* (your honor), which were common in feudal Ethiopia, is discouraged. Woreda officials say that people can be more confident if they have the knowledge of how the system works. But the same officials do nothing to defend human rights. For instance, the law says that it is illegal to detain a person for more than 48 hours unless there is evidence to suggest that he/she has committed a crime. Yet people are often detained for weeks, including Kebele and cooperative officials, who failed to collect taxes or loans on time.

In sum, while historically state-society relationships in Lay Armachiho were characterized by antagonistic, ethnically-based feudal relations and then by a repressive agrarian socialism in the 1970s and 1980s, today's Woreda Council has given the Kemant people some degree of control over their local affairs. Yet the case studies of KA and SC organizations in the next sections show how an unbalanced state-society relationship still keeps rural society at the margins of the decision-making process. Before I proceed briefly to highlight the economic conditions in Lay Armachiho Woreda, let me point out some of the "traditional" legal mechanisms in the society, which share commonalities with the culture and tradition of other areas in Gondar.

Shimagle. *Shimagle* is a committee of elders which is still regarded by local people as the most effective means to resolve conflicts. Age is not always a selection criterion for *shimagle*, so that young, bright and energetic people are sometimes preferred to "conservative" elder people. The selection of the members of a *shimagle*, and, even the

number of people in it, requires a common agreement among the disputants. Such committee often consists of five people, but up to twenty people may be involved in dealing with cases of murder or other difficult issues. The disputants are brought face-to-face to state “their problems”. The committee listens to each disputant and may ask each one to present witnesses if/and when necessary. However, the committee has no power to enforce its decision. It can only ask the disputants to abide by community values and traditions. Interestingly, Ethiopian formal courts do recognize *shimagle* decisions. For instance, one of the disputants can ask the court to force the other disputant to abide by a *shimagle*’s decision (paying for damages or compensation, for example).

Mahala: *Mahala* means swearing on the name of God to say “I am innocent”. The *mahala* method is used when there is no adequate evidence to prove a case against a “defendant” in a *shimagle* committee or in government courts. Assume that person “A” accuses person “B” of theft. If person “A” finds no witness he/she will ask person “B” to make a *mahala*. If person “B” refuses, person “A” would ask him/her to pay. If person “B” still refuses, person “A” goes to the Kebele or Woreda court. The court would force person “B” to pay, since refusal to make a *mahala* implies that he/she has stolen person “A’s” property. Another example: someone set fire to Fenti’s house so that his wife and six children almost burned to death. Fenti went running to the Woreda police to report the incident. He pointed out two suspects but could not present enough evidence. He could only say that two of his neighbors had threatened him with retaliation if he ploughed land which had been given to him by the government and which had previously belonged to those neighbors. So, Fenti had demanded that the suspects make a *mahala*. One might be

surprised to know that in 95% of all cases people do not agree to make *a mahala* but negotiate to pay for damages or to return stolen property—the belief system is too strong.

Afelama: *Afelama* deals with arrangements to pay compensation for crops damaged by cattle. The loss of output is usually estimated by the *shimagle* and the owner of the cattle is asked to pay the amount in kind or cash. However, people are usually reluctant to take the compensation, since they feel that any damage done by animals should not be taken seriously.

Dem: *Dem* (blood) means revenge. If person “B” is murdered by person “A”, his relatives will go around hunting person “A’s” relatives. It does not matter whether or not person “A’s” brother is working on the farm field, or his younger brother is returning from school, totally unaware of the events in question. The angry relatives of person “B” will execute person “A’s” male relatives on sight (revenge is not taken against women). During Haile Sellassie’s feudal rule, authorities were reluctant to enforce state law against such practices; in fact, the feudal aristocrats themselves often encouraged *dem* practices (as the Kemant experience shows). The socialist-military government also did little to discourage *dem* practices. However, the EPRDF government has made it clear that anyone who intends to take the law in their own hands will be punished. When my cousin and her one-year-old baby were murdered by her own husband, my relatives hunted down and executed the man on the following day. The fact that they were looking for the murderer himself, and not his relatives does show some change of attitude towards *dem* in the society. However, the Woreda police and the KA administration charged them with murder and demanded that they surrender to the police. Two of them, who had carried out the execution,

fled to the mountains. They remained hidden for a period of one-year before a *shimagle* managed to bring the two families together by proposing a peaceful solution. The agreement that was reached stipulates that 1) the deceased man's family will withdraw the case from the Woreda police, and 2) the deceased woman's family pays a compensation which amounts to Birr 5,000 (about US\$ 800). The family of the deceased man justified the need for compensation on the grounds that, first, the "blood" of a man and woman is not equal, and second, they can only ask the Woreda police to close the case if the *shimagle* provide them with a financial incentive. Assuming that this agreement is accepted on both sides, the two outlawed men will only receive minimum imprisonment or a fine.

Was: *Was* (guarantor) is often required for people who are released on bail or during contracts and sale or exchange of goods. *Wukela* is the same as *was*. It involves representing those men, women and children who are unable to articulate their cause in courts or before *shimagle* committees. No fee payments are involved, though buying a drink is a common practice.

Lay Armachiho's Economy: Lay Armachiho has been called "a place where every thing grows" (see Appendix VI for a list of varieties). Although the area's topography is characterized by mountains, hills, steep valleys and tortuous escarpments, the *woynadaga* climate makes it possible to grow many varieties of food and cash crops, vegetables and fruits. However, agricultural production still remains dependent on ox-plough technology and crop rotation and land scarcity has led to more intensive cultivation which in turn has resulted in declining land productivity. Land plots have been redivided again and again among families to accommodate the growing number of young people, so that most people

are left with too little land for food production and cattle grazing. Today individuals can own no more than five or six head of cattle, compared to a rough average of 10-15 head two decades ago. The enclosure of traditional grazing sites by the previous government to create forests of eucalyptus trees has further contributed to the problem of available grazing land. Nevertheless, there has been a crop surplus in the Woreda for the past two years. In its attempt to achieve “food self-sufficiency”, the government has intensified its effort to promote the use of fertilizer and improved crop varieties in the area. In the year 1995/96, 100 farmers were assisted by the Woreda Department of Agriculture to try these new technologies and there were plans to assist 1,185 farmers in the 1996/97 production year.

Cash crops have become the most important source of income. Indeed, the richest farmers in the Woreda are those who grow coffee and *gesho*. Coffee is grown in *kola* areas, while *gesho* grows everywhere in the Woreda. *Gesho*, whose leaves are dried and sold, is harvested three times a year. During the scarce season *gesho* is sold for as much as Birr 3/kilo.⁴ *Gesho* is often grown in low potential lands and by the side of rivers and streams.

Another potential source of supplementary household income lies in the Woreda's water system. There are 24 small- and medium-sized streams and rivers, most of which have a year-round, though limited, water flow. Irrigation still remains largely confined to the use of traditional methods of watering household garden plots of fruits and vegetables. One officer of the Woreda Department of Agriculture claimed that in the 1997

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Between September and November *gesho* plants are dormant, hence, *gesho* becomes a scarce commodity.

dry season (December to April) 376 farmers had planted fruits and vegetables on 700 hectares of irrigated land. These farmers produced 700 quintals and each earned an estimated Birr 200-3000 (Voice of Ethiopian Radio, April 2, 1997). The senior officer at the same Department disputed this claim. Nevertheless, this shows that the Woreda can have a potential for dry season farming, if the government promotes the use of appropriate irrigation technology

Intensive cultivation, cattle grazing and deforestation have created a serious problem of soil erosion. In response, the KA administrations have begun organizing small-group activities to construct stone-terraces. Quite recently, the Amhara Development Association (ADA) has also been active on the slopes facing Gondar city to construct terraces, in order to reduce the sediment entering the Angerab dam which is expected to solve the problem of water shortage for the urban population. According to the Addis Zemen newspaper (February 24, 1997), in 1996/97, ADA has coordinated the construction of 1,855 km of terrace and initiated another 100 hectares of terrace repair and 120 hectares of tree planting, resulting in the conservation of 70,000 cubic meters of soil. In the process, the ADA administered the participation of 223,000 people. Although ADA officials stress the beneficial effects of terraces to the farming population, some government workers agree that too many trees and terraces are reducing the land available for crops. They are also not sure how far the dam can be protected from sedimentation as long as there is agricultural activity on the slopes. The ADA's own study has recommended the resettlement of the population to other areas, or the encouragement of people to shift to livestock production. However, neither of these is feasible. The area

simply cannot support large livestock herds, since there is not enough grazing land. Displacing the population from its homesteads for the sake of solving the urban problems is also out of the question. The better alternative would seem to be the ADA's own last recommendation: drawing water from Lake Tana. In fact, many officials believe that the money spent to build the dam (which is not completed) could have covered the total cost of constructing a water pipeline from Lake Tana to Gondar city.

Given the rapid disappearance of natural forests, people in Lay Armachiho have begun planting eucalyptus trees to overcome shortages of wood for firewood, construction and fences. This tree species is favored because it grows quickly and it is also adopted to the *dega* and *wognadega* environments. Some households sell the wood to supplement household income. Indeed, I met two people who hope to earn tens of thousands of Birr from the sale of eucalyptus timber.

Young people in Lay Armachiho often go in search of work in agricultural areas of Humera, though many of them either die or come back sick. Gebru is one of the young men who had gone to work as a laborer. He came back with a little money and bought a sewing machine. He now earns a meager income by working as a tailor. Many others bought assets (cattle), radios, and other electronic goods, while others simply spent the money on drinking. During the land redistribution these young people returned quickly to the countryside to register with reluctant Kebeles (see next section). The government's decree states that those who live in the city, but whose main source of income is agriculture, are eligible to receive a plot of land. This idea was scorned by Kebele officials who felt that the government had committed itself to defending the interest of those *walge*

(lazy) people. Why are they lazy? According to the “common sense” view, these young people left for cities to escape from the harsh working conditions in agriculture.

Black smithing, carpentry and other occupations, which used to be viewed as the work of “inferior people”, now provide many households with a good source of supplementary income. Many others are engaged in the production and sale of firewood and charcoal, or supplying stones for urban contractors who built houses. Still, others are involved in trade. They buy *gesho* and fruits in Lay Armachiho to sell in Gondar city generating a meager profit. People have realized that trade is one way of making money but they lack the capacity to transport and store commodities, in particular, perishable fruits and vegetables which will be spoiled unless sold immediately to consumers. It is therefore understandable that the majority of rural traders are engaged in cattle trade, but this is profitable only during holidays and festival seasons (when chickens, goats and sheep are slaughtered at individual homes).

The following two sections discuss the case studies of “formal” organizations in Lay Armachiho Woreda. The previous two Chapters attempted to examine the global and national levels of development discourse that, in one way or another, can affect our perception of the roles, structures and functions of local organizations, including the mainstream’s (negative) perception of “traditional” society, national ideology, top-down control and legitimation, institutional values, the gap between theory and reality, material poverty, lack of representation, knowledge-gap, population growth, land scarcity, and so on. The section above looked at local-level phenomena by examining the social, economic, cultural, political and physical environment in Lay Armachiho Woreda. An attempt will now

be made to show the extent to which the interaction of all these factors limits (or increases) the operation of local organizations in society.

Kebele Administrations

Ethiopian governments in the post-1974 period have intervened increasingly in rural society to alter the existing forms of social, economic and institutional interaction. The peasant associations (PAs) of the 1970s and today's Kebele administrative units (KAs) created the structures that were to transmit these policy objectives to the rural sector. The examination of KAs and PAs in actual practice thus provides us with a good opportunity to understand the role that is played by local organizations in facilitating or impeding the implementation of government policy and in shaping state-society relations. There is a large volume of literature on the peasant associations. As pointed out in Chapter 3, the structure of PAs had been used to extend the central state's administrative network more deeply into rural areas. At this point, I will only say a little about PAs solely for the purpose of identifying some similarities and differences with today's KAs. The remaining part of this section will discuss the structure and function of KAs in Lay Armachiho Woreda, and especially their role in the administration of the land redistribution policy in 1997.

In 1975 the radical military government issued a land reform policy that nationalized rural and urban lands (Proclamation No. 31/1975). This Proclamation also issued a directive for the formation of rural PAs. The PAs were formed for two purposes: first, to allocate land use rights on the basis of residence within the PA area, and second, to

provide the rural population with the organizational infrastructure to manage its local affairs. The PAs consisted of a general assembly, an executive committee and a judicial tribunal. The general assembly set the guidelines for the organization and elected and removed the leadership at will. The executive committee consisted of the chairman, treasurer and secretary and was responsible for administering the routine work of the PAs and for dealing with affairs that affect the interests of the membership. The judicial body resolved conflicts in the community (Dessalegn, 1985). At the initial stage of PA formation, older people were often elected into the leadership, which, according to Aster Akalu (1982), can be attributed to the tradition of electing leaders on the basis of age and wisdom. In Northern regions, in particular, where landlord-tenant relations were absent, people were less inclined to challenge powerful local elites.

Although the PAs were designed to shift power to the local people, the military-socialist government soon realized that the PAs were its only direct link with rural society, and this soon led the Woreda officials to intervene in the PAs, so as to ensure the selection of individuals who could be trusted to carry out the task of implementing the central government's policies. Even though the power to elect and remove leaders was "vested" in the local population, Woreda officials had "a great say in who should be elected and who removed (Dessalegn, 1985, p. 85)".⁵ Indeed, many of the PA leaders were replaced and peasant associations reformed and manipulated "until such time as they finally became

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For this reason or another, my own investigation of the former PA officials in Lay Armachiho reveals that while the elder group dominated the PAs in the 1970s, younger people had increasingly come to occupy the position of leadership beginning from the early 1980s and until the government's downfall in early 1990s.

instruments in the hands of the government (Kirsch, 1989, p. 162)". The PAs, therefore, were used "not only to facilitate the implementation of government policy, but also to discriminate against peasant small holders in an attempt to persuade them to form producers' cooperatives (Kidane, 1990, p. 143)".

In short, the PAs were initially formed to help implement the land reform and to administer local affairs. The organizational objective of the land distribution was attained (see below) but the issue of local autonomy faded away as the military government's behavior changed from populism to centralization and repression. In the process, the once popular PAs became the most despised social agency. This subjective experience has influenced the ways in which Ethiopia's peasant population is currently attempting to frame its relationships with the present ruling party. In fact, the emergence of sentiments like "EPRDF is not different from the previous WPE (Workers Party of Ethiopia)" during the land redistribution period of 1997 shows how much the rural population has come to mistrust the political elites in power. Thus, when I asked a man from Tach Armachiho area (in Gondar) whether the population was happy with the Amhara Development Association's (an NGO) plan to construct a 60 km road from Sanja (the administrative center) to Maserodenb (the heart of Tach Armachiho), he replied that army jeeps would soon roll into the area. Maserodenb is an area where hundreds of people die of malaria each year and where women who are in labor are carried for a day to the nearest clinic to get help.

Let us now turn to the detailed discussion of Kebeles. The present government did not alter the structure of the peasant associations, except renamed them "Kebele administrations" and created an elected Council that controls the organizations. In Lay

Armachiho, 44 peasant associations were reduced to 31 Kebele Administrative Units, and these KA areas were divided into *gotes* or *ketenas*. *Gotes* are composed of two or three *menders* (villages) and the boundaries are arbitrarily defined on the basis of the proximity of *menders* to each other. The *gotes* are in turn divided into *buden* (group). *Gote* and *buden* structures have little relevance for party politics, but are designed to organize and coordinate development work. These structures were instrumental in helping the KAs to carry out land and family registration during the land redistribution period (see below).

The Kebele Council is elected by the population. Kebele elections appear to have adopted a more formalized balloting system, in comparison with the PA's "general assembly" (i.e., the crowd) which elected committee members by raising hands. In today's elections, nominated candidates are assigned symbols (such as musical instruments, sickle, axe, bees, ox, and so on) and then elected by secret ballot. The question here is how the candidates are nominated. Kebele cadres and government officials claim that the selection processes are democratic, while there are people who allege that nominations are made at secret meetings of Kebele cadres. They also allege that those nomination procedures exclude former PA officials. Since there were no elections during the time of this field research, I was unable to find out where the truth lies. This said, there should be no doubt that Woreda party officials would like to see individuals who are loyal to the EPRDF standing for election. However, there are Kebele officials who have no political affiliation and I have met KA officials who had worked for the previous regime. But it is also sure that Woreda officials can still remove officials "at will". Thus, at the end of one public meeting, the Chairman of the Kerker Kebele was called before officials and asked to hand over all official documents

immediately. He was later labeled as “bureaucrat” (an official of the previous government) and evicted from much of his land.

Kebele officials are often young, some are below the age of 30. The majority can read and write. Government agencies find the younger generation more willing to accept new procedures and more serious about exercising their responsibilities. This has led to a generational conflict, as young people have come to dominate a public stage that was previously reserved for community elders. Many older people have developed a sentiment of “being ruled by *kutaras* (kids)”. They claim that the *kutaras* do not have enough experience and wisdom to manage local affairs and that they are often too obedient to the authorities, instead of actively defending local interests. One old man stood up during a public meeting and spoke about the marginalization of older people in the decision-making process, while inexperienced “kids” make decisions that affected the society in negative ways. But, then, the elders who had dominated the PAs in the 1970s and perhaps in the 1980s had not always made “good” decisions, when they implemented unpopular socialist policies, even though leaders in Kerker and Ambezo/Chira Kebeles had been tortured and imprisoned for months after they had spoken out against increased “war contributions”.

The Kebele Executive Committee is the most powerful body of the KA administration. It is elected from among the Council members on the basis of what many cadres refer to as “good personal character”. The Committee consists of nine people: a chairperson, secretary, treasurer and six members who assume some responsibility for overseeing issues in education, agriculture and health. Three members (plus one reserve) make up the Kebele *fitih* (justice) Committee. The KA also has an armed militia and cadre

units. The militia are responsible for maintaining law and order, collecting fines and taxes and organizing people for development work. The cadres represent the EPRDF party.

Administration: The administrative committee is responsible for implementing government policies and the decisions of the Kebele court (see below). It works closely with the Kebele militia and cadres to organize and lead public meetings, resolve conflicts, and plan and coordinate small scale activities. Public meetings are held on non-working days and after church services. But Committee meetings can take place at any time or anywhere, be it after the “market”, a funeral, or at the public meetings, in a *tela bet* (a beverage house), or an individual’s home. Other affairs, such as accepting applications, setting up appointments, writing reports, collecting taxes, and so on, are administered in the same setting.

The task of the administrative committee is extensive and exhausting. It must have the ability to communicate with each organ of the KA and with every resident in the area. Officials generally walk on foot from one place to another. But churches, funerals, *mahaber* gatherings and similar social events create good opportunities to make announcements or contact individuals. During one of my trips to attend a KA meeting, the Chairman of a Kebele said to me “You see, we work like this but get nothing”, while another Kebele chairman had suggested that “A poor man and a donkey are the same: they work for free”. Both these chairmen were comparing their situation with that of Woreda officials and other government employees who get paid regular salaries and who receive per diem during all of their field trips. I raised this issue a number of times with the Woreda officials. The answer was simple: the government has no money to pay for rural Kebele officials. However, some Kebele and Woreda officials were speculating that the Department of Finance was about to

table a plan to provide some financial incentives for KA personnel.

Attendance at Kebele meetings is often low. The most common excuses for not attending meetings are: 1) people have too many things to do on non-working days (erecting fences, repairing houses, visiting friends and relatives, for example); 2) people come away with nothing from those meetings; and 3) the meetings go on for too long and are boring. The KAs have also difficulty inducing elected Council members to attend meetings. During one Council meeting in Ambezo/Chira kebele, only 23 members (less than half) showed up. The meeting was canceled. Not surprisingly, there was high attendance during the land redistribution period, when people showed up in massive numbers to hear the contents of the government policy from Woreda officials. When an election date for Kebele land registration and allocation committees was set, everybody, including the elderly, women and young people, flocked to the meetings. This is not because the government had warned “no participation, no land” but because everyone had a stake in the outcome of those elections.

The Kebele Court: The Kebele justice system combines state laws and traditional arbitration mechanisms to resolve conflicts arising from land, property transfer, divorce, quarrel, division of assets, theft, vandalism, beating and murder. This intermarriage between the “modern” and “traditional” systems makes procedures more complex and court proceedings much longer. Indeed, many complain that the system keeps dragging on legal issues out for a long time and people are not obtaining proper justice. An example will illustrate this point. Two disputants agree to solve their dispute through a *shimagle* (elders) committee. They fix a *shimagle* date within two weeks. If they do not reach an agreement on that day, the *shimagle* committee may insist that it should be given another opportunity to resolve the

issue. Another date is fixed. But one of the disputants keeps insisting that the matter should go to the Kebele court. So, the court sets a hearing date for the next month, another date to hear from witnesses; and still another one three or four weeks later for the Justice Committee to pass a final decision. Moreover, even at this stage, the Kebele court can suggest that the matter be resolved through a *shimagle* committee. Upon the decision of the Kebele court, the defendant or plaintiff may want to appeal to the Woreda court and later to the Zonal court. By that time (after many months) both disputants will have realized that this affair is costing them a lot of money. It will not be exceptional if they eventually agree to go back to the *shimagle* to settle the dispute.

The Kebele justice committee members complain that the Woreda court is too slow in hearing appealed cases; and, as a result, Kebele decisions are often rendered useless. This is true. The Woreda court is always crowded. There are two judges (one of them even recently convicted and imprisoned for illegal arms sale). Moreover, one member of the justice committee in Kerker Kebele said that they had not been given “guidelines” and that they “carry out their duties by using experience”. I am not sure what kinds of guidelines are expected from the government, but I sense that the introduction of new guidelines (i.e., how to deal with divorce, division of assets, fines, for example) had been expected soon after the EPRDF government modified the structure of the Kebeles. Therefore, it seems that until now, the justice committees have been using PA guidelines developed by the previous socialist-military government. Finally, justice committee members are tired of hearing people complaining about the slowness of procedures to resolve disputes. Unaware that I was behind the tree (court sessions are held under a tree), one of the committee members shouted

“do you think I get paid for this?”. This kind of attitude is common among Kebele officials. Although no one rules out nepotism and bribery, inviting a Kebele court official for a drink is the norm rather than the exception.

Armed Militia: Armed militia play a dual role in the KA administration. First, the militias act like state police by maintaining law and order, issuing arrest warrants and collecting fines and taxes. Second, they act as a development agent, helping the KA to organize people for such activities as road construction, terrace building or assisting women and other individuals who are not able, for example, to construct their houses or look after their farm fields. Each Kebele is presumed to have 30 militia members but (as far as I know) only one militia man has been assigned to each of the *gote* (sub-Kebele) in the KA areas. Unlike the Woreda’s state police, the militia members live in their own communities. They worry a lot about the consequences of their actions (arresting a neighbor, for example). Many are quick to point out the experiences of former PA officials under the EPRDF. This said, the legitimacy enjoyed by the KA administration today has enabled the militia man to command respect among the population. Resistance to arrest is rare. Indeed, it is common to see one militia entering the Woreda police station in Tikil Dingay with five or six prisoners who are led without any handcuffs.

Cadres: Kebele cadres are members of the Woreda party branch and are mainly responsible for explaining government policies to the population and organizing development work. They also claim to be responsible for identifying problems in the KA areas, and bringing them to the attention of the Kebele and Woreda Councils. But the most important task of the cadres is gathering such intelligence on the activities of Kebele officials (even on ordinary

people). Once they have gathered intelligence, the cadres organize public meetings to expose malpractices in the KA administration. They are empowered to suspend or remove any official from office. In fact, one notorious official in Kerker Kebele, who was also the Kebele's party secretary, sent a number of people to jail, accusing them of trying to disrupt the land redistribution process. He was also viewed as an arrogant man who tried to act like a Woreda official. At the end, the cadres threw him out of power. People were delighted. Yet the local population also feels that "*mereja* (intelligence) is no good", in that, it restricts their freedom to express their views in their private lives or during group gatherings. However, one would not be surprised to learn that the cadres, like other Kebele officials, are often found gossiping about Woreda officials or spreading rumors (political crisis, for example) together with the rest of the population. I still remember some people saying that the government has changed its mind about the land reform (in other words, there would be no land redistribution). Two people said to me that they had heard this from one cadre in Kerker Kebele. The point here is that the cadres, as members of the communities, share similar perspectives with ordinary people.

The similarity between the KAs and PAs is obvious. The KAs have inherited the boundaries of PAs and most of the organizational culture. And even though the leadership positions of KAs are occupied by a younger generation, things are still done in the same old ways: meetings under the tree, reliance on informal communication, a heavy workload, a lot of role conflict, and above all, a focus on implementing government policy. The kind of relationship between Woreda and Kebele officials has depended heavily on the nature of the government policy and the extent to which the KAs impede or facilitate the implementation

of that policy (see below). But compared to the experience of PAs, it is fair to say that Woreda officials' intervention has been minimal.

Rural women have remained invisible in the KA organizational arena. There are no women on the Kebele committees. I can only recall meeting one female member of an administrative committee in Kerker Kebele and she was a high-school dropout. However, there are female cadres, all of whom are school dropouts or high school graduates, who prefer to stay with their families in the countryside. The government gives employment priorities for those who participate in Kebele activities and the student-cadres, as they are called, make it no secret that they are mainly motivated to work for the Kebeles by the hope of getting a government job. Woreda officials claim that 30% of government jobs are reserved for women. Women will soon constitute the majority of the schooled population in the future. For instance, in 1997, female students represented 69% of the total student population in the Woreda, though this figure declined to 54% at Zonal level (see Appendix V). This may increase the female work force in the public sector but does little to improve the situation of rural women. I now turn to the role of KAs in the land redistribution process.

Land Redistribution: The land redistribution in the Amhara Region took place in the areas "liberated after 1991"; that is, in those areas within which the EPRDF was not able to carry out reforms while it was still a guerrilla organization. The Regional State's justification for land redistribution is based on three arguments: First, the land reform of the 1970s had not been carried out in areas that remained outside the control of the socialist-military government. Second, the EPRDF did not agree with the way in which that reform was implemented, claiming that it only benefited rich and powerful local elites. And third, the

Regional State claimed to be responding to the growing demand for land redistribution in rural areas. In the following discussion, I will recount the events of the land redistribution process, including the conflicts and frustrations that ran high among the population. But before doing so, let us have a very brief look at the 1975 land reform.

The radical military government's land reform abolished all forms of feudal production relations and allowed each peasant household to acquire up to 10 hectares of land. Furthermore, the reform abolished the claim of land use rights on the basis of *rist* and made residence within a PA area the requirement to obtain a plot of land. The land redistribution was carried out more quickly and more successfully in Southern Ethiopia, where landlord-tenant relationships had been prevalent. By comparison, the reform was greeted with little enthusiasm in Northern regions, where there were no landlord-tenant relationships, and where litigation and land fragmentation had instead been major problems.

There were structural problems that had limited the redistributive effects of the land reform. First, although the Proclamation stated that individual peasants could acquire up to ten hectares of land, over 90% of the population owned no more than 5 hectares of land and 70% cultivated less than 1.5 hectares and there was little surplus land to be redistributed. Second, whereas in theory, the PAs were to be formed on 800 hectare areas, in practice, their boundaries were defined by using the arbitrary borders of localities or churches. This was done without taking account of differences in population density and resource endowment. Thus, areas of high population density had less land available for redistribution and the PAs whose boundaries incorporated high potential areas (productive land) benefited more than those in marginal areas. Third, individuals were not properly compensated when they lost

land as a result of new PA demarcations. In the Northern areas, in particular, where the *rist* system had allowed a person to have five or six tracts of land in different localities, an individual might end up receiving land of poorer quality, or less land than what he/she owned before. In practice, the government had provided the PAs with few directives of how to solve such problems. The PAs distributed the land using subjective and arbitrary methods, such as assessing minimum and maximum land holdings, land quality, family size and convenience (proximity of the land to homesteads).

The 1997 policy of the Amhara National Regional State set out to redistribute land for the second time in less than twenty years. In the remaining part of this section I intend to answer the following questions: 1) Did the Regional State address the issue of equity in rural land ownership?, 2) Did the implementation strategies solve the structural problems of redistribution which are inherent in rural society?, and 3) Was there organizational capacity to implement the policy?

The draft policy paper (Proclamation to Redistribute Rural Land, October 1996) declares that “land is the collective property of the Ethiopian people and government” and that “any farmer has a right to own land to be used for crop production, cattle grazing and similar purposes, including the right to invest labor and money to build property and to sell, exchange, rent and inherit that property (Article 2, para., 3)”. Eligible persons would be the following: 1) heads of households, 2) young people who had established their own households before 1996, 3) dependents within a family (such as elders), 4) agricultural laborers, 5) women engaged in petty-trading, 6) residents of urban areas whose main source of income is agriculture, 7) those who had resided in a Kebele for five years and can prove

that they do not own any land in another Kebele, and 8) people who derive a livelihood from locally based occupations such as craft-making and black-smithing. Land quality (soil fertility, slope, and so on) would be taken into account to ensure equitable distribution. Long-distance farming would be avoided by allocating land in close proximity to homesteads. Except for officials of the previous government, compensation would be granted to those who must give up property on land (such as fruit trees and cash crop plants). The implementation of the land redistribution policy would be the sole responsibility of the KAs. Thus, the Proclamation designed the following Kebele structures: 1) Land Registration Committees (9-12 members), 2) Family Size Registration Committee (6-9 members), 3) Land Allocation Committee (10-13 members), and 4) Hearing Committee (10-13 members). Each of these committees should have sub-committees that represent each *gote* (sub-Kebele) in the KA area. The committees should also have a chairperson, secretary and at least three people who can read and write.

Land redistribution activities in Lay Armachiho Woreda began at the end of December 1996 with a public meeting organized by Kebele and Woreda political cadres. The Woreda Council Chairman used this occasion to stress the critical importance of the government's policy and to appeal to the population to elect competent leaders who would properly administer the land redistribution process. He also warned those "who were agitating against the policy" to either keep silent or face unpleasant consequences. In early January the Kebeles elected the Committees. There were 745 people who made up the Registration Committees, and 725 people who were involved in Allocation Committees (no data for the Hearing Committees). Many of the elected officials were Kebele cadres and

militia. The presence of the cadres and militia was indeed necessary both to provide security and to give directions to the elected officials. Woreda officials had made it clear that they did not want officials of the previous government to be elected.

Within days, the work to train the committee members began. They were given short and intensive training sessions in Tikil Dingay. This was perhaps the most difficult task for the Woreda officials who ran exhausting marathon sessions. There were not sufficient paper or pencils for distribution to the hundreds of young people who came to attend the sessions. In one instance the Woreda office borrowed paper pads and a typewriter from the Department of Agriculture. After the day-long session the trainees were left to fend themselves for food and accommodation. Within a week they were sent back to the rural areas to start work immediately.

The first task for the KA committees was to carry out household and land registration which involved recording 1) family size, 2) head of the homestead, 3) income category, and 4) land size. Table 8 shows data for a sample of ten households in one *gote* in Lomeye/Shumra Kebele. The peasant households were divided into three classes, using both livestock and landholding as criteria: 1) rich peasants who have more than three oxen, a large tract of land and who rent out land and hire laborers; 2) middle peasants who have two oxen; and 3) poor peasants who have one or no oxen. This classification is somewhat problematic, however. For instance, there might be individuals owning four oxen but less than two hectares of land, while others might own four hectares of land but no oxen. In another example, individuals who have a large tract of land can be regarded as rich, while those who own more than two oxen but no land as poor. In the class of the “rich” there are

those “bureaucrats” (former PA officials) and “feudalists” (wealthy people) who were regarded by the government as the “class enemy” of the rural people. The reform law then stipulates that each household would be eligible to get 3 hectares of land (compared to 10 hectares allowed by the 1975 land reform act) and the land in excess of this would be expropriated. Second, the “bureaucrats” and “feudalists” would only get 1 hectare of land, irrespective of whether they own more than 4 hectares of land. Third, the poor peasants, single women, young people over the age of 20 and students of rural descent will get land (at least 0.25 hectare), depending on the availability of surplus land. Finally, land would be allocated through a lottery system. This works simply as follows: the Allocation Committee writes the location of the plot and its boundaries on the piece of paper (this is done in secret). The Committee then calls, for example, Person “A” to come forward. His lottery is then drawn in his/her presence. This goes on until each recipient of land gets his/her turn.

For an illustrative purpose, data for fifty households were randomly selected in five *gotes* within the three KA areas (Table 9). Twenty-eight households (56%) were “poor”, 10 (20%) “middle” and 12 households (24%) “rich”. Thirty-four percent of the total sampled households had female heads. Of the “poor” households, 50% were landless and 85% of these were landless women. The average family size for all *gotes* was 5.0, which breaks down according to the established categories as follows: 3.4 for the poor, 5.4 middle and 7.8 for rich households. This contradicts the conventional view that there is a correlation between large family size and poverty. In fact, many households are poor because they do not have adequate labor power to plough, weed and harvest on time.

Table 8. Family Size and Landholding for a Sample of 10 Households in Durge Gote, Lomeye/Shumara Kebele

Household #	Family Size	Household Head	Status	Size of landholding (in ha)	
				Pre-reform	Post-reform
1	6	Male	Rich	4.25	3.00
2	4	Female	Poor	0.50	1.00
3	8	Male	Poor	1.0	1.50
4	9	Male	Rich	3.0	2.00
5	7	Female	Middle	0.75	1.50
6	3	Male	Poor	0.25	1.00
7	2	Male	Poor	0.50	0.75
8	1	Female	Poor	0.25	0.50
9	3	Male	Poor	0.00	0.50
10	2	Female	Poor	0.00	0.50

Source: Lay Armachiho Woreda Office, 1997.

Table 9. Average Family Size and Landholding in Pre-and Post-reform for 50 Selected Households in Five *Gotes*

Gote	Average Family Size	Category	No. Of Household	Average Landholding (in ha)	
				Pre-reform	Post-Reform
Durge	4.5	Rich	2	3.125	2.50
		Middle	1	0.75	1.50
		Poor	7	0.36	1.30
Genbeje	5.0	Rich	3	3.91	2.17
		Middle	2	1.00	1.125
		Poor	5	0.20	0.70
Chira	5.5	Rich	3	3.60	1.08
		Middle	2	1.25	1.50
		Poor	5	0.30	0.75
Belangie	5.0	Rich	2	2.652	1.652
		Middle	2	1.125	1.625
		Poor	6	0.17	0.676
Desegn	5.0	Rich	2	5.00	2.00
		Middle	3	0.91	1.33
		Poor	5	0.10	0.60

Source: Lay Armachiho Woreda Office, 1997.

The data were obtained from a government worker who had access to documents in the Woreda office. The distribution of the samples seems somewhat politically biased in favor of the “poor”, mainly to justify the policy. For instance, for Desegn *gote* (my birth place), half of the sampled households are poor, while, in fact, the majority of them are middle peasants. Yet, these data provide a glimpse of the rural structure in Lay Armachiho Woreda, where the majority of them are single women and young people.

The next task was to allocate land. Allocation Committee members were totally isolated from the population for about four weeks, in order to make their work more confidential and to avoid malpractice. They slept in the bush and government buildings (where available) while the population provided food and drink. At the beginning Kebele officials talked about the idea of classifying the land as *meda/lem* (flat = high potential), *chinha* (sandy = low potential) and *gedel* (land lying on slopes = high or low potential). However, this method was not adopted in the end. It would appear that both overworked and exhausted Registration and Allocation Committee members simply used their subjective experience to assess the quality of individual plots. The government had instructed the Committees to use a 50 x 50m rope to measure the plots. The Committees demanded that the Woreda officials provide them with the ropes. The officials told them to make the rope themselves. The committee members refused to do so. Eventually, the officials gave them the rope but it was only used to measure the size of expropriated land and to re-divide the surplus land among the beneficiaries.

The hearing Committees did not work. The draft policy paper says that Hearing Committees should have a life span of one week after the completion of the land redistribution. All matters brought to the attention of the Committees were to be settled within this time frame. Even though there were many grievances the Committees were given no time to examine them. It seems that overworked Woreda officials just wanted to bring the land redistribution to a quick end, so that they could turn their attention to other administrative matters.

The reform officially ended with a public meeting on March 21, 1997. The Woreda Council Chairman's report indicates that the land redistribution has been successfully carried out in 27 of the 31 Kebeles. The remaining four Kebeles lie in the lowland areas, where land is relatively abundant and where fallow-period practices are crucial to sustaining subsistence production. In other words, people need more than 3 hectares of land for subsistence production, since the soil is not suitable to support intensive agriculture. A total of 4,498 hectares of land was expropriated from "bureaucrats", 3,541 hectares from rich peasants, 7,225 hectares from middle peasants and absent owners (15,264 hectares altogether). A total of 9,780 people got land, of whom 2,798 were women, and 1,470 young people. Of these (the total number of people) 7,601 had no land before the reform. About 767.5 hectares of land was enclosed to create communal grazing lands and for reforestation purposes. In NGZ as a whole, a report read by one official during the public meeting in Gondar indicated that redistribution had taken place successfully in 11 out of 16 Woredas. A total of 21,294 hectares of land was expropriated from "bureaucrats" 30,120 hectares from middle peasants (51,414 hectares altogether). Land was given to 72,180 people, including 26,645 young people and 27,000 women. At the Regional level (Amhara Region), 547,087 people got land, of which 124,682 were landless women (Addis Zemen, April 19, 1997). According to the Addis Zemen newspaper, at the regional level, 209,722 peasants were left out because there was no more surplus land for redistribution.

Evaluation: At the start of the land redistribution process, Woreda officials and political cadres went around church gatherings to explain the intended purpose of the government's land policy. People were encouraged to voice their concerns. Many did so. For instance,

during one meeting in Kerker Kebele, people told officials that the Kebele had lost land when the PA boundaries were demarcated in the 1970s and many hectares of crop lands had been enclosed for the government's afforestation programme, and for this, they demanded compensation. Concerns relating to individual compensation and land allocation procedures were expressed. But, as the pressure to resume the work grew, officials felt that people should only listen to what they had to say. In fact, many people began to feel insecure about speaking against the policy and even in informal settings. One old man from Genbera/Angerabe (a lowland Kebele area) told me that outspoken people were labeled by officials as "trouble-makers" and detained. As officials fear of resistance increased, anyone who even showed the Kebele committees an unhappy face was immediately detained. The government knew that the population in Lay Armachiho was heavily armed and that failure to resolve the conflicts ensuing from its reform policy could result in a bloodshed. Moreover, it also knew that achieving a consensus among the population on this policy agenda would take a much longer time, given people's sensitivity to the issue of land ownership. Then, officials could only employ the threat of force and detention as a means to get things done much faster. But this destroyed the government's image. People thought that the EPRDF was no different from the Socialist Workers Party which formed the previous government and some even felt that the 1975 reform was done in a less destructive way. True, EPRDF was repressive when it carried out its land reform. But part of such a sentiment has to do with the radical nature of the EPRDF's policy. One of the most experienced scholars of the Ethiopian agrarian reform, Dessalegn Rahmato suggested that what made the EPRDF's policy different from the previous one was that it created inter-generational conflict, because it favored the

younger generation by giving them the upper hand both in the decision-making process and in the allocation of land resources.⁶

In the end, the “family size” criterion was not really used at all. I presume that this idea was abandoned after Woreda officials discovered that there was not much land to be expropriated and redistributed according to the family size criteria. Thus, after the reform, one person can have six family members and own 1.3 hectares of land, while another person has 2 family members and still owns 3 hectares of land. Moreover, individuals who had previously owned one or two hectares of land got no additional land from the government, since priority was given to those households who either had no land or owned less than one hectare of land. The Secretary of the Lomeye/Shumar Kebele had said it all: the *abawora geberes* (ordinary peasants) got nothing. In fact, the EPRDF’s policy was only meant to squeeze what remained of the little surplus land in the Amhara region and allocate it to the poor, women and young people.

The problem of long distance farming has not been resolved. Since the government allocated surplus land to the poor, young and landless through a lottery system, many people got land far away from their homesteads. Woreda officials said that they were waiting for instruction from the Zonal office that would allow people to exchange land amongst themselves (by a plot close to one’s homestead).

Rural people have a strong emotional/psychological attachment to land. Indeed, elementary school students had come up with the following joke to describe the land reform:

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Personal communication, Institute of Development Research, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, July 1997.

kids meet a peasant on the road and ask “father, what time is it?” and the man replies “six *temad* (1.5 hectares)”. In other words, the man had been so deep in thought trying to figure out whether or not he would gain from the land redistribution policy. Government officials were right to be very anxious about avoiding possible conflict. An angry peasant did shoot and kill the Deputy Chairman of Chilga Woreda in his sleep (the peasant was later caught and executed); another one, in Dabat Woreda, overpowered a KA militia, took his gun and shot four Kebele officials (leaving two of them dead), before committing suicide. And there were reports of similar incidents in Dembia, Wegera, Belesa and other Woredas in NGZ. Woreda prisons everywhere were very crowded, as anyone suspected of being “a trouble-maker”, or fomenting crisis was quickly detained until the end of the land redistribution process. In Lay Armachiho, one member of the Allocation Committee in Kerker Kebele was beaten while an ordinary man was bitten by a previous land owner in Gramta Kebele.

After March 1997 (the post-redistribution period) there were still altercations and disputes pertaining to the transfer of ownership rights, rental agreements and even some underground (illegal) selling-buying of land. In one case, two poor individuals wanted to exchange land among themselves, since they had been allocated land far away from their communities. In this sense, they could avoid the problem of long-distance farming if they exchanged the land. To do so, they agreed to estimate the value of land, so as to decide whether or not compensation (based on size or quality of land) should be part of the deal. The deal worked out very well. But one of the previous owners was still angry with the government for taking away his land. So, by the time one of the individuals began to plough the land, the previous owner bitterly objected and threatened to “do something that will hurt

him”, saying that he only “knew” the individual who got the land through the lottery system. So, nobody could plough “his land” except that poor individual (to whom the government had allocated the land). Moreover, he claimed that renting or exchanging land was illegal and he added that “if this (renting or exchanging) is going to take place, the individual should either rent or sell the land to me, not to some stranger”. In a sense, the man was right, since selling or exchanging land is illegal. The people in this case were making an underground deal. But the poor individual (the man who had received the land from the government) can still go to the government and say “the powerful man tried to evict me from the land”. The KA militia might then arrest the previous owner. In fact, the individual (to whom I am referring) had gone to the Woreda office to file a complaint, while the previous owner had gathered a *shimagle* and begun lobbying for his cause. In the end, the *shimagle* persuaded the two individuals to reverse the exchange deal. This shows how local circumstances can dictate some of the terms and conditions on which government policy is applied in the rural society; in other words, the government’s capacity to enforce rules is always limited.

Another controversial issue was how to arrange compensation for cash crops (*gesho*, coffee and banana). In my observation, it appears that there was a widespread consensus that a person should not give up his/her cash crop plants. Many people (both rich and poor) thought that individual ownership of cash crops did not depend on whether one had a lot of land. For instance, *gesho* (the most profitable cash crop) grows by the side of streams and rivers, on hill sides and in other marginal areas, so that ownership of such cash crops was simply due to hard work (not land availability). People felt that the government had given

too much favor to “lazy people”, who had not made an effort to grow their own cash crop plants. The government’s proposed compensation package has not been translated into practice. In the meantime, people have been reluctant to follow the government’s rules. Thus, one poor woman’s lottery card gave her the right to get a plot of land plus many *gesho* plants which had been expropriated from a “bureaucrat”. She promised not to use the cash crop plants when the former owner sent a *shimagle* to ask her to give up the land in return for another kind of arrangement (giving her cattle or money, for example). She said that she had to live peacefully in her “grandmother’s *badma* (place of birth)” and did not want to be scorned by people in the community. I should note here that there were other people who were not hesitant to use the cash crop plants on their newly acquired land.

Still, another controversial issue was the sale and exchange of land prior to 1997. Throughout the years, particularly after Mengistu had abandoned his agrarian socialism, many people in Lay Armachiho and elsewhere had bought or exchanged land. The Regional State had said that this was illegal and had either expropriated such land or allowed the previous owners to reclaim the title. As a result, those who sold land benefited twice, while the buyers were left empty-handed. Thus, an individual could have used the money from the sale of his/her land to buy assets, construct a new house, pay debt or simply spend it on drinking. By contrast, the buyers who had sold cattle, or engaged in wage labor to earn the money to buy the land were left with nothing. They had bought the land not necessary because they wanted to get rich (as the government argues) but to improve the level of household income. One angry young man in Kerker Kebele, who had exchanged an ox for land, picked up his gun and went running to bring the ox back (which he did). But many

others were simply left to grieve for their losses. And this was the most intriguing issue for the KA officials. It is not therefore surprising that many, if not most, Kebele committees decided to ignore the government's guidelines, in that, they considered the sale and exchange of land prior to 1997 as legal. One militia man from Kerker Kebele recounted how he overheard "other" Kebele officials talking about "doing their own way" even before they left the training session in Tikil Dingay. He said that he had proposed to do the same thing, but the Kebele's party secretary (who was later thrown out of power) had rejected the idea.

There was a widespread consensus that those who were labeled as "bureaucrats" and "feudalists" were not treated fairly. Woreda officials themselves appeared to be doubtful about the wisdom of applying this policy to Ethiopian rural society. They could only say "the bureaucrats and feudalists have eaten enough". During one of the public demonstrations the Woreda Chairman said that there are "feudalists" and "bureaucrats" who own as much as 40 hectares of land. One such person was a priest in Lomeye/Shumara Kebele but the Land Registration Committee later estimated his actual holding to be only 13.5 hectares and most of that land was in the Sanja river valley, and according to one local individual, "only provided shelter for baboons". The findings of the Committees in other areas also contradicted the government's assessment of rural inequality. In fact, one committee member told me how the Woreda Chairman had once angrily said "go back and measure the land again".

Dessaiegn Rahmato suggests that EPRDF's land reform has been too politicized with the aim of penalizing rural officials of the previous government.⁷ Teshome Gobachew's experience represents one of the sad stories in Lay Armachiho. Teshome, who lives in Kerker Kebele, is best known for his hard and innovative work. He had also planted a lot of *gesho*, including 10,000 trees of eucalyptus (worth over Birr 100,000 within a few years) on the land he had bought from an absentee land owner. He was also one of the first farmers in Lay Armachiho to get involved in the government's extension programme to try the fertilizer and new seed varieties. Now, the KA officials labeled him a "bureaucrat" and took all of his property, except one hectare of land and the *gesho* plants around his house. Teshome argues that he did not hold any position in the previous government except as treasurer of a service cooperative. He blamed "those Kebele cadres" for creating artificial stories of wrongdoing in order to take revenge against him. People were not all that certain that Teshome was clean from the "dirt" of the previous government, but they shared his grief. A widowed woman had suffered the same fate after her deceased husband was labeled as a "feudalist". In Chira/Ambezo Kebele, the Allocation Committee gave 1.5 hectares of land to "bureaucrats" and "feudalists" with or without the knowledge of the Woreda officials (instead of 1 hectare as prescribed by the government).

In spite of the government's attempt to control malpractice in the land redistribution process, this did not disappear completely. I still recall one young priest who almost broke down in tears when he was telling me how one member of the Allocation Committee used

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Personal communication. See foot note 2 above

the Kebele's power to create a path on his land and then fed the wrong information to the Committee to get him penalized. In another instance, some Kebele officials were accused of failing to register all of their land, in order to avoid the loss of land in excess of 3 hectares. Woreda officials admit that such actions by Kebele officials could be responsible for the frustration of many people, but they also believe that under the EPRDF the extent of these problems was minimal. Indeed, the lottery system of land allocation had helped to avoid partiality and nepotism.

Government officials admit that there is too little surplus land available to accommodate the growing number of people. The average national land holding is 1.02 hectares/household and the regional (Amhara Region) 1.18 hectares/household. The situation in Lay Armachiho Woreda is not different. There was an average land holding of 0.22 hectare for the poor, 0.86 and 3.65 hectares for middle and rich peasants, respectively, prior to the land redistribution (Table 10). The reform leveled off these inequalities at an average holding of 1.88 hectares for the rich, 1.42 and 0.80 hectares for middle and poor households, respectively. It is clear that inequalities prior to the land redistribution are only significant if one considers land owned by rich peasants relative to that of poor peasants. The real problem seems to be that there are too many people in the area. During my tour of some areas, KA officials saw no solution with the land redistribution. At best, they felt that such a policy "made everyone poor". KA officials in the Erobit area (sub-Woreda) told me that many people have gone in search of virgin land to remote areas of Shinfa, a lowland area which lies between Quara and Chilga Woreda. They urged the government to look to resettlement as a long-term solution, and to begin facilitating migration to other areas.

**Table 10. Average Land holdings for 50 Households
in Pre-and Post Reform Period**

	Pre-reform	Post-reform
Rich	3.65	1.88
Middle	0.86	1.426
Poor	0.22	0.80
Average	1.58	1.36

Source: Lay Armachiho Woreda Office, 1997.

In sum, the Kebele administration units in Ethiopia would appear to represent an effective form of local self-government. There is an organizational infrastructure capable of resolving conflicts and carrying out the administrative tasks demanded by government. However, since the KAs are linked to the politico-administrative structure, their ability both to defend community interests and to implement government policy has depended on the nature of the political environment. Government authorities' attitude toward rural people and their organizations seems to have changed very little. Even today, it is common for even the most junior Woreda political cadre to give orders to KA committees. KA officials are often threatened and intimidated by the authorities if they fail to do what they are told by Woreda offices. I remember one Kebele Secretary saying "can you save me from arrest by paying your taxes". That is right. Woreda officials can detain and arrest Kebele officials if they fail to collect taxes on time. Moreover, KA organizations remain poor, since there are no

resources coming from the state, except tools handed out by the Woreda agencies for terrace and road construction. Yet the KAs remain the most popular organizations, in part because they enable the local society to manage its affairs and in part because the KA organizations create room to maneuver government policy to the advantage of local people.

The KAs played a decisive role in the land redistribution process. They mobilized local resources to carry out the policy within a matter of 90 days. There were problems, however. The government's blueprint policy created frustration and conflict. The diversity of soil types within the mountainous ecosystem made measuring land quality an impossible task. The family size criterion was ignored due to the shortage of available land. These problems aside, the Lay Armachiho society now perceives land as "the property of God"; in other words, land is a collective property. Many people say that there is nothing wrong with sharing land with the poor and landless people. Frustrations were caused by 1) the lack of adequate land to be redistributed, 2) the loss of precious investment in land, and 3) the government's policy that made everyone poor.

The land reform has significantly undermined the old order. Society has yet to emerge from the resulting crisis. This can happen only when individuals stop labeling one another as "bad guys" (who have violated community ethics) and "good guys". The new order that has been set in motion by the government will change its characteristics, as people enter into unofficial deals to sell, exchange and transfer land. In many cases, even the Kebele officials facilitate this "illegal" business, which violates the laws which they are supposed to be enforcing. In fact, shortly after the end of the land redistribution, the market for land was booming. Woreda officials knew this but there was nothing they could do to stop it.

Service Cooperatives

Service Cooperatives (SCs) have been considered as one alternative channel to transfer resources to rural areas. Ideally, cooperatives would provide rural consumers with goods and services at prices less than or equal to market prices. And the close proximity of cooperative shops to rural communities makes goods and services easily accessible to the population. Ideally too, the profits of the organization would be reinvested in rural sectors in the form of financing agricultural development projects, infrastructure building or creating social service centers. Furthermore, cooperatives can provide easy access to credit facilities, since they require no collateral. It is therefore understandable why governments, NGOs and donor agencies consider them as a means to deliver resources to the rural society. But, more often than not, service cooperatives suffer from problems of mismanagement, corruption and top-down control, the combination of which has reduced the significance of their role in rural development.

SCs in Ethiopia were among the “mass organizations” created by the military-socialist government in the 1970s. The SCs, like the PAs, had an executive committee responsible for running the organization, including hired bookkeepers, cashiers and ward and other casual laborers who worked on a temporary basis. Membership was drawn from at least three PAs. Although the policy concept emphasized voluntary membership, Woreda and PA officials often pressured rural households to register with these organizations.

The government initially propagated the idea of forming SCs as a way of rural market empowerment. The SCs would help peasants market agricultural produce. They would also

obtain basic consumer goods (such as sugar, salt, tea, blankets, soap and agricultural tools and inputs) from the Ministry of Domestic Trade and sell them to the rural population at reasonable prices. However, the SC organizations operated under a political environment that soon transformed them into instruments of the state to extract resources from rural society. They became part of the state administrative network which was deployed to enforce grain delivery quotas to the government's own Agricultural Market Cooperatives at low prices. By the end of 1980s, the SCs had become the most despised social organizations in the country.

The EPRDF government is still attempting to re-organize the SCs, under what is called the *mahaberat* (associations) sector. Its policy rhetoric is not different from the previous one, but the Agricultural Cooperative Societies Proclamation (No.85/1994) emphasizes the transformation of cooperatives into shareholder organizations, a sort of membership-controlled enterprise directed by a board of directors. The new guidelines also allow members a free exit from the cooperatives (with one's share plus the profit). At the time of this field research the cooperatives were brought under the control of the Woreda Council (they were previously administered by the Ministry of Agriculture). The Amhara Regional State was working towards creating a Commission responsible for re-organizing the cooperative sector and creating the necessary support system.

Map 2. Area Coverage of Cooperatives

At the time of this field research two out of five SCs in Lay Armachiho Woreda were functioning. These SCs are located in Kerker and Ambezo/Chira Kebeles and provide limited services, mainly operating grinding mills and distributing agricultural inputs in the cultivating season. They draw their membership from four other surrounding Kebeles: the Ginde-metaya SC covers Kerker Balezgabhere, Kerker Medahnialem and Anchew Michael Kebeles while that of Ambezo covers Gramta and Ambezo/Chira kebeles (see Map 2 above).

The SCs are managed by a popularly elected committee, consisting of a chairman, secretary, treasurer and two other members. Under this Committee are a loan committee (3 members), purchasing committee (2 members), and control committee (3 members). Both SCs have also employees whose contract is renewed every 85 days: a mill operator, cashier, ward, and an accountant (for Ambezo cooperative).

Data are only available for Shumara, Gind-metaya and Ambezo cooperatives for year 1996/97 (Table 11), and as mentioned above, only two of the SCs (Gind-metaya and Ambezo) were functioning. The three SCs have 2,044 members and appeared to have incorporated almost all of the households within their respective Kebele areas in the 1980s. Women-headed households make up less than 10 percent of the membership. The SCs have total assets valued at Birr 183, 104. Loans (which amount to Birr 124,874) are from the Ministry of Agriculture and were used to finance the purchase of consumer goods, agricultural tools and inputs, and a grinding mill. The grinding mill of the Ambezo cooperative was purchased with a loan from the Norwegian government. Capital is the net value of assets minus loans. Income is represented by an accumulated profit over the years from the sale of consumption goods, and quite recently, income generated by grinding mills.

Shortages indicate money owed by individuals who had either borrowed money or made purchase through credit arrangements and money stolen by cooperative and Woreda officials. As of 1996/97 the Gind-metaya cooperative has Birr 9,246 missing, Shumara Birr 12,125 and Ambezo Birr 10,000. One member of the Shumara cooperative's managing committee alone took Birr 6,040 and one officer of the Ministry of Agriculture sold fertilizer worth Birr 2,137 and took the money himself. This same officer had also borrowed money from the Gind-metaya cooperative but did not pay it back. Rural cooperative officials speculate that he used the money to build a house in Tikil Dingay. As Woreda officials appropriated cooperative resources, rural officials too began practicing the same thing. The cash was not deposited in bank accounts, so committee members simply divided the money among themselves and used it for self-serving purposes. It has been the same story in Gondar Zone and Amhara Region. One report of the Amhara Regional State (January 1994) pointed out that 100 of the 150 cooperatives that were audited had money missing. Another auditor's report (January 1996) says that Birr 354,508 from 85 cooperatives in the Amhara Region was missing and only Birr 91,535 has so far been recovered. Currently auditing is done twice a year. EPRDF Woreda officials also claim to hold high ethical standards towards laundering public money. Corruption seems less evident.

The Woreda Council expects the current managing committees to recover the lost money. The Ambezo leadership once set up a *gebre-haile* (task force) composed of local elders, Kebele officials and an employee of the Ministry of Agriculture to find ways of recovering the money. There was little success. SC officials argue that putting former officials on trial should be the responsibility of the Woreda officer who oversees the

cooperative sector. Indeed, the Woreda office has better means to recover the money. In my view, government officials are not willing to engage in the legal battle with former officials. One Shumara official accused of embezzling money was arrested for six months before the Zonal court acquitted him for lack of evidence. The man argued that he was only being held accountable for the money laundered by previous government officials. He claimed that since no auditing was done (the first ever auditing took place under the EPRDF) such practices went unnoticed. The Woreda official responsible for the cooperative sector told me that individuals accused of embezzling money are detained at Woreda police station “as long as it takes to force them to pay”. For one thing, the government does not want to send the cases to a court. The Woreda office has insufficient evidence. For another thing, officials are afraid that the court will, upon sufficient evidence, rule that those accused individuals return the money by paying a small amount each year. If this is so, it will take a number of years to recover all the money. The use of social pressure and scare-tactics seems to be a better means to induce former officials to repay the money.

For an illustrative purpose, the financial history of the Gind-metaya cooperative is presented (Table 12). This SC began its operation with an initial capital of Birr 3,965 from membership contributions. It could probably have obtained goods from the Ministry of Domestic Trade and sold at small profit, which amounted to an accumulated profit of Birr 21,685 between 1979/80 and 1991/92. There was a loss of income between 1992 and 1995. This improved in the period 1995-96 (with a profit of Birr 4,659) due to the income generated by the grinding mill. However, problems of corruption and mismanagement have rendered the cooperative useless. Between the period 1979/80 and 1991/92, Birr 17,256 was

embezzled by committee members and Woreda officials. According to the 1994/95 auditor's report, two individuals alone took Birr 9,986. There has been a slight decline in the amount of the shortfall from Birr 17,256 in the period 1979/80-1991/92 to Birr 9,246 in 1996, which should be attributed to the efforts of newly elected committees to recover the money.

Table 11. Financial Standing of Three Cooperatives as of 1996/97 (in Birr)

Cooperative	Ginde-Metaya	Shumara	Ambezo	Total
Membership	647	511	886	2,044
Male	591	464	796	1,851
Female	56	47	90	193
Capital (in Birr)	20,617	19,237	18,655*	58,509
-Accumulated profit	12,263	15,333	N/A	27,596
-Current profit	4,659	278	N/A	4,937
-Membership contribution	3,695	3,626	N/A	7,321
Shortage	9,246	12,125	10,000	21,371
Loan	77,700	19,747	27,427	124,874
Total Loan & Capital	98,317	38,984	46,082	183,383

Source: Auditor's Report, NGZ Economic Development Sector, Oct. 1996.

*This can possibly be the sum of profits and membership contributions.

Table 12. Financial History of the Gind-metaya Service Cooperative (1979/80-1996)

Cooperative	1995-96	1993/94-1994/95	1992/93-193/94	1979/80-1991/92
Capital (in Birr)	20,617	16,282	25,251	25,316
-Accumulated profit	12,263	12,587	21,555	21,685
-Current profit	4,659	-1,472	-129	
Membership contribution	3,695	3,695	3,695	3,695
Shortage	9,246	11,450	15,811	17,256
Loan	77,700	88,700	80,000	0
Total Loan & Capital	98,317	104,982	104,251	25,316

Source: Various auditor's reports (1992-1996), NGZ Economic Development Sector.

The two functioning SCs in Lay Armachiho, Gind-metaya and Ambezo, have been unable to service their loans, let alone generate income that makes a contribution to finance development projects. The Gind-metaya cooperative has only paid Birr 5,000 of its Birr 80,000 loan to set up a grinding mill, while the Ambezo cooperative has not even made a single repayment. Teshager, the outgoing Treasurer of the Gind-metaya cooperative, pointed out that the grinding mill was bought at a price of Birr 75,000 (compared to today's price of Birr 30,000). By the time the cooperative finishes repaying the remaining loan, the machine will be worn out. This means that the SC will no longer generate income to support local

development projects. The most realistic assumption is to continue providing the service to the community; especially, grinding mills reduce the household workload of rural women. Dejene Aredo and Shiferaw Abebe's (1991) study of 22 service cooperatives in Dire Dawa (Eastern Ethiopia), Wollega, Keffa and Illubabur (Southern) and Shewa (Central Ethiopia) indicates that grinding mills save up to 373 hours per household per year.

The local population has not been satisfied with the SCs' ability to provide services. For one thing, the cooperatives are not physically accessible to all communities in the area (see Map 2). For instance, people who live in the lower part of Kerker Kebele never use the grinding mill in Gind-metaya. They go to Tikil Dingay city which is much closer to where they live. Part of the Chira/Ambazo population goes to either Gind-metaya, Shembekit (a sub-Woreda administrative center) or Arbaya (a small rural city), instead of making use of the mill at Ambezo cooperative. Also, Ginde-metaya is too far away for people in Anchew Kebele, so they go to the large city of Gondar (which is at their door-step). There is also another important reason: SCs are located far away from "market" places where people sell, buy and exchange goods. Hence, for example, an individual sells *gesho* or coffee in the "market" and buys sugar, salt and other basic items there, instead of traveling several kilometers to buy consumer goods in cooperative shops (assuming that the goods are available). Second, services are very poor. The grinding mill in Ambezo did not operate for two weeks. It had some mechanical problem which could have been fixed by someone in the locality. But, the management committee told the mill operator not to do anything until "someone from above" comes to see it. Either the committee might have felt that repairs are the responsibility of the government or officials could have instructed the committee to

inform the government prior to doing such a thing. I presume both are important factors.

The Gind-metaya SC's story is rather frustrating. I was there when the Woreda official arrived with a Toyota and took the scale for repair (the scale is used to weigh the ground flour and charge user fees). As the mill operator and two other people were loading the scale into the vehicle, people were also arriving with a donkey-load of wheat, barley and *teff* to the grinding mill. Instead of turning them away the mill operator decided to grind the flour and keep it in the storage until the scale is brought back (so as to weigh the flour and charge a fee). People left for home. And the operator did the same thing in the following days. The ground flour piled up in the storage. But the official had disappeared with the scale for two weeks. People continued to come back for their flour only to be told that they could not take without paying the user fee. A lot of them began to complain loudly, which made the managing committee members and employees very nervous. Many people took another donkey-load of grain to grinding mills in Gondar, Tikil Dingay and other places where mills are available while others waited patiently until the scale was brought back. What even made the managing committee members more frustrated later was that the Woreda official gave them a bill of Birr 320, whereas the repair cost could have been no more than Birr 100. They demanded an explanation. The official wrote a memorandum instantly, signed and threw it in front of them and left.

Membership participation in SCs is at a very low level. The managing committees have difficulty in organizing general membership meetings to elect the leadership, let alone for getting any suggestions or feedback that is much needed to make management decisions. The cooperative leadership has neither the resources nor the organizational capacity to

communicate and organize a large number of people who are scattered within a large geographical area, often separated by tortuous topography. There is not even a close collaboration between the KA administration and SC officials to overcome communication and organizational problems. At the time of this research an election for the Gind-metaya SC management committee took place. The outgoing committee members tried to organize a membership meeting twice, but no more than 10 or 20 people showed up. Later they came up with an idea. They announced that November 27 (in the Ethiopian Calendar) would be the date to divide the profits and urged every member to be present to know his/her share. They made it clear that anyone who failed to show up would get nothing. The result was that hundreds of people showed up, including a 92-year-old man whom I met while he was struggling to walk up the steep Gind-metaya hill (he said that he had joined the organization in 1980 only to avoid being seen as “reactionary” by Woreda officials of the previous government). This way, the Woreda official and outgoing committee members succeeded in electing a new management committee. Even then, the election process took many hours, as one nominee after another declined to be elected for the leadership. The cashier of the cooperative even stood up and shouted at the crowd “leave him alone” when her father’s name was called during the nomination.

Members of the SC committees seemed less motivated to work. During one of my meetings with the committee in Ambezo, every member agreed that elected leaders did not “translate their responsibilities into practice”. Rarely did all committee members get together to discuss matters affecting the organization. Auditor’s reports point out that responsible committee members have been unable to keep records of the income and

expenses of the organization. Members did not act together, and therefore, they failed to share the burden of responsibility among themselves. However, most of the problems are beyond the ability of individual committee members to tackle. Individual members were not given training on record keeping, purchasing, price allocation and market feasibility assessment methods and so on. The government has simply given them too much responsibility without the adequate means to meet the challenges of running an organization. As Teshager, the outgoing treasurer of the Gind-metaya cooperative, pointed out, “the task of SC management is not easy for the farmer”. For instance, Teshager received all the money from the cashier and kept it in his home. Every month he would spend many hours to count all the pennies and Birr notes and then go to Gondar to deposit the money in the bank account. Other tasks include overseeing the operation of the grinding mill, paying employees’ salaries, collecting loans, reporting to Woreda offices, purchasing and distributing consumer goods and organizing meetings. Ethiopian governments have continued to expect individual committee members to perform all these and other tasks without providing the necessary material and technical support. In my field diary, I wrote “the peasant controlled committees have done their part of the job. Government negligence appears to be a crucial factor contributing to the poor performance of the cooperatives”.

The government is trying to re-organize the SCs under a new sector called *mahaberat*. Woreda officials believe that cooperatives can be best managed if members are allowed to control both the decision-making process and the functions of the organizations. In reality, the Woreda officials dictate what should be done and how it should be done. Indeed, waiting for official instructions continues to be the most important factor that

prevents the committees from taking independent action. On the other hand, SC management committees know the limits of their capability to run a SC organization; therefore, they feel that the government should closely supervise the activities of the cooperatives. In doing so, Woreda officials will be able to evaluate the work done and solve emergent problems. This does not happen. The official only makes rare visits to cooperatives and does not attend committee meetings. When SC officials go all the way to Tikil Dingay to speak to him, he is nowhere to be found. I once met a frustrated Ambezo official who had come twice, only to find that the officer was not there. The man had walked four hours through the mountainous terrain to come to Tikil Dingay and he would have to walk up the hills another five or more hours to get home. If something goes wrong, officials can always blame the “peasants”. And an official’s report is more credible than what peasant management committee members say. The combination of these factors makes getting involved in the SC committees less attractive. In fact, this work is seen as a more difficult job than the administrative tasks in KAs.

Committee members argue that cooperatives need full-time paid staff devoted to planning and administration. This argument has little to do with the issue of getting some kind of incentive from the government. They sincerely believe that unlike the KAs, SC administration involves running a sort of commercial organization which demands a daily routine of transaction and recording keeping. More important, SCs require management committees to engage in day-to-day activities of the organization, not a remote control mechanism (by elected committees). With the exception of the treasurer, most individual committee members rarely pay a visit to cooperative shops, therefore, they remain detached

from the realities within the organization.

In sum, the cooperative leaders have a good vision of their organizations. They argue that the *agelglot mahabat* (service organizations) have a potential to create a good link between the Ethiopian state and rural society. As one official in Dembia Woreda argued, there is a “cooperative culture” in the Ethiopian society. The existing state of SCs has nothing to do with “the level of popular perception” about the benefits of SC organizations. The problems are related to managerial and leadership issues (personal communication). Historically, the formation of SCs was driven by the military-socialist government’s ideology to promote agrarian socialism. Popular participation was unknown. Nor was the share of membership responsibilities clearly defined. SC members were simply seen as consumers of goods and services, not central actors who could share the tasks of operation and maintenance of the organizations. Second, cooperatives were not physically accessible to all households in the area. Unless there were benefits, “membership” by itself did not induce people to participate in the organization. In the absence of popular control, Woreda and cooperative officials looted the resources and destroyed SCs’ potential to serve rural communities.

Cooperatives have missed many market opportunities. For instance, Lay Armachiho is a surplus area. The SCs could have a comparative advantage to buy grain during the harvesting season and sell it during the food shortage season at much cheaper price than on the open market to help poor people in the area. They could also transport fruits and vegetables to profitable markets outside of the Woreda. The profit can be used to support social and economic projects or to make subsidies for the general membership for basic

consumption items and agricultural inputs. This leads to another point. SCs must be competitive. When prices are equal to the market prices, cooperatives enjoy a comparative advantage by virtue of their location in close proximity to many rural households. When there is competition with the private sector, prices should be lower than the market price or the SCs must produce a superior quality of goods and services. If the present dissatisfaction continues, the population will turn to the private sector. Cooperative officials often argue that they need to have market monopoly in order to generate income and pay the loan. In one instance, a man was about to set up a grinding mill in Gind-metaya when cooperative officials lobbied the Woreda office to stop him. That man will probably succeed in getting a permit from the government. I would argue that “monopoly of the local market” can be an illegitimate claim amid persistent inefficiency and popular dissatisfaction, to the point that people sometimes would rather see the cooperatives dismantled immediately.

The SCs are suited to the provision of essential goods and services that cannot be obtained on an individual basis or through the market structure. An example is the provision of credit and loans to help individuals build assets and to encourage group or individual entrepreneurial initiatives. Medical drugs, construction materials, agricultural tools and inputs could be sold for rural consumers at reasonable prices, provided that the government helps to avoid some overhead costs by facilitating the delivery of goods. But to do so requires an effective management organ in the organizations. The government has given the current committees too many responsibilities without the proper means to cope with the challenge of running an organization. At the Woreda level, there is not adequate manpower and facilities to create a support system. Woreda offices can play such crucial roles as

exploring market opportunities, providing technical assistance and facilitating auditing processes. At present, officials only perform their traditional job of spreading the government's propaganda about "the role of cooperatives in rural development".

In line with its free market economic policy, the EPRDF government is trying to re-organize the cooperative sector in the form of shareholder enterprises. The new policy emphasizes membership control of the organizations and more autonomy from governmental agencies. Yet Woreda officials still show no respect for the authority of the SC managing committees. In theory, they talk about the government's role as being one of responding to the requests of those committees. In practice, they are found giving instruction on what should be done and how it should be done. At the end, the crucial factor for improving the functional performance of SC organizations turns out to be a political commitment at all levels, to empower the leadership of the rural society in Lay Armachiho and elsewhere in Ethiopia.

Conclusion

This chapter started by briefly looking at the socio-economic and political circumstances in Lay Armachiho society in a historical and contemporary context. It then proceeded to discuss the role, structure and functions of KA and SC organizations. The KAs and SCs were created by the military government in the 1970s, as part of its national programme to introduce radical changes in the organization of rural society. The government soon began using these organizations to export its socialist ideology to the rural areas. As a

result, instead of promoting local autonomy and market empowerment, the KAs and SCs implemented unpopular government policies, and by the 1980s, they had become the most despised social organizations. The present EPRDF government is re-directing these organizations in line with its national policy of “rural development”. Today’s leaders have realized that a resource-poor country such as Ethiopia must rely on the talent and intellect of its people to mobilize resources and achieve the goals of development programmes. However, the case studies of KA and SC organizations make it clear that the government’s top-down control, coupled with inadequate organizational capacity, has limited the significance of their role in rural development. It remains to be seen how far national and regional leaders will go beyond policy rhetoric to adopt favorable policies and practices that promote the organizational empowerment of rural society.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Informal” Organizations: *Mahabers* (Religious Associations) and *Debait* (Farm Work Groups)

Introduction

This chapter examines the roles, structures and functions of “informal” organizations in Lay Armachiho Woreda. “Informal” organizations refer to *mahabers* (religious associations) and *debait* (farm work groups). They exist outside of the politico-administrative structures and consist of people who share common sentiments and perspectives. Emile Durkeim (1933) called these types of social organizations an “organic solidarity” which is formed on the basis of the willingness of “similar” individuals to engage in a spirit of cooperation. Hyden (1985) called them “invisible” organizations which have three main “functional purposes”: 1) a welfare function which is useful in times of social crisis and economic hardship (sharing resources, for example); 2) a social function which plays an instrumental role in the organization of social ceremonies and religious rites; and 3) a developmental function which fosters a cooperative spirit among people to create self-financed development initiatives. Such organizations have gained increasing importance in the local society as World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes expose people to a tremendous economic hardship (Taylor and MacKenzie, 1992).

The following two sections then discuss the case studies of *mahaber* and *debait* organizations. In doing so, an attempt will be made to show three things: 1) the structures and functions of *mahabers* and *debait* reflect the culture and traditions of the Ethiopian rural

society; 2) people have a tendency to “cling” to “traditions” (as the modernizers had argued, [see Chapter 2]), precisely because their own organizations perform better than “formal” organizations of governments and other development agencies to manage many aspects of local life; and 3) individual choices of when and how to engage or disengage with such organizations sustain a continuous and dynamic process of framing and reframing socio-economic relationships and this makes “informal” organizations innovative, not static, entities.

Mahabers (Religious Associations)

A *mahaber* literally means an association. Thus, there are religious *mahabers* devoted to honoring a Saint for whom the group is named. *Meredaja mahabers* (“hometown associations”) are formed by people who live far away from their birth place to create relationships among themselves that substitute for broken family ties or they can be formed to mobilize support for project initiatives in the “home country”. *Idirs* (mutual support associations) involve the contribution of money to a common fund which is then used to assist members in times of death of a family member or relative as well as to help members in case of accident, theft or damage of property. *Iqubs* (credit associations) are similar to the Vietnamese *ho*, the Indian *chit fund*, the Southern African *Motshelo* or *setonkafela* and other ROSCAS (rotating savings and credit associations) in many developing countries (see Curtis, 1991, pp. 37-44). *Iqubs* require members to contribute money each week or month, then use an *ita* (lottery) system to allocate the sum amount of the money to each member on rotating

basis. They are popular among commercial and petty traders and enable them to pull financial resources together and pay a debt, purchase capital, or, simply to save daily cash earnings. Dejene Aredo (1993) estimates the proportion of household income contributed to *iqubs* to be 0.96% while that deposited in the bank is 2.04%. Each of these organizations has a different process of formation and structuring but they all provide the majority of Ethiopians with a means to create self-financing social and economic safety-nets.¹ Religious *mahabers* are rural phenomena, particularly in Northern Ethiopia, while the rest are found in urban areas. Donald Levine (1965) refers to urban *mahabers* as “formal associations” of indigenous “inspiration” (pp. 277-83). I presume he saw such *mahabers* as “formal” because they are secular organizations that draw membership from different social and economic backgrounds and also because the size of their membership is large, as many as 300 people in case of *idirs*. He therefore saw the adoption of the *mahaber* tradition in the urban setting as a process of “formalization” (i.e., modernization), compared to the “local” nature of rural *mahabers*.

The study of *mahabers* here will be confined to rural areas in Lay Armachiho Woreda. Although elements of Christian religion began penetrating the Kemant society in the 16th century, the expansion of churches in Lay Armachiho and other Kemant areas occurred only in this century (See Chapter 4, Section 1). Yet religious *mahabers* are very popular today, mainly because they help communities to resolve conflicts, create mutual

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For a study of *iqubs*, *idirs* and *mahabers* in the Ethiopian community in North America, see Getachew Mequanent (1996). The Role of Informal Organizations in Refugee/Immigrant Adjustment Process: The Case Study of *Mahabers*, *Idirs* and *Iqubs* in the Ethiopian Community in Toronto, *Refuge*, York Lane Press, Center for Refugee Studies, York University, North York, Ont. Canada, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 30-38.

support systems and promote social and spiritual values. Be this as it may, *mahabers*, as social organizations, must deal with the problem of sustaining a system that involves a systematic arrangement of individual relationships. What will be of interest to us is then to know the ways in which these organizations function as much as their role in the local society.

In the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church, there are about 11 religious holidays each month, some of which overlap with Saturdays and Sundays (Table 13). Many people honor at least five or six of these monthly holidays. This demands that they restrain themselves from ploughing, weeding or harvesting agricultural land, even cutting a leaf from a tree. Instead, people will spend the day by constructing fences, making repairs, visiting friends and relatives, going to the “market” and attending public functions. More important, people “drink” *mahabers*. This implies two things: 1) people eat, drink and have a good time during an event devoted to honoring a Saint, and 2) they are also associates of a social group that consists of like-minded individuals.

Mahaber gatherings are held either at individual homes or a church ground. People may travel up to 10 kilometers to attend such occasions, depending on the proximity of the “meeting places” to one’s homestead. They arrive around mid-day at the *mahaber* gathering and depart at sunset. Although *mahaber* ceremonies are opened by mass prayers (led by the priest), members devote most of their time to dealing with the “agenda” of conflict resolution, agricultural production, politics, administration, and so on.² The “agenda”

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Interestingly, “agenda” is now an Amharic term, probably borrowed from educated elites’ political language.

discussion begins in small circle conversations, followed by an open discussion under the chairmanship of two *dagnas* (chairmen). However, this is confined to the internal affairs of the *mahaber*. Issues related to government policy remain limited to informal interactions among small circles of people. I presume people are afraid of government authorities.

The process of *mahaber* formation can be described as follows: one, two, or three individuals get together to discuss the idea of forming a *mahaber* group. They can either give a name to the group (St. Mary *mahaber*, for example), or wait until they go around to find enough people who would join them. Usually a person from the first group of people who initiated the idea will volunteer to host the first gathering, and he/she prepares food and drink. After that a man or woman will stand up during the gathering occasion to say "I will host the next *mahaber*". All members take turns in this way until the first round is finished. Once such arrangements are routinized members will be obliged to know their turns and host the event. For instance, if there are 12 members and if a member hosts the event on November 21, he/she would be expected to do the same next year on the same date. Cancellation of an event is not common, except in the winter season, when household resources dry up.

There are five churches in three Kebele study areas: Kerker Balebziabhere, Chira Teklehaimanot, Ambezo Bata, Shumara Mariam and Lomeye Michael. Attempts were made to record the number of *mahabers* in four of the church areas. St. Michael's church area (Lomeye/Shumara Kebele) was not covered because of communication problems. There were then 119 *mahabers* in those four church vicinities (Table 13). Of these 14 were Tsgie *mahabers*, 1 Sellassie, 48 St. Mary, 28 Abou, 15 Senbetie, 4 St. Michael, 2 Kidanemeheret,

3 Bata, 4 St. George, and 1 Medahnialem *mahabers* respectively. Tsegie *mahabers* are held between September and October while the rest are hosted year-round. The most popular *mahaber* is St. Mary *mahaber* which must be attributed to the popularity of St. Mary among women who have a lot of say in the choice of which *mahabers* to “drink”. Note also that *mahabers* share the same name. For example, there are 15 “senbetie *mahabers*” which all have a different size of membership and are hosted at different locations.

Membership in *mahabers* depends on household resources. Rich households can “drink” up to three *mahabers*, middle income households two *mahabers*, while poor households limit their engagement only to one *mahaber*. The decision to engage in the type of *mahaber* group is a personal one. Women favor St. Mary *mahaber*, because they believe that She is a helper in times of giving birth to a child and household related problems. Abou *mahaber* ranks second. Many people “drink” this *mahaber* because they believe that Abou was an Ethiopian farmer. Engagement in senbetie *mahabers* is defined by age, it requires one to be over the age of forty. Upon the death of a member, senbetie membership (called *womber*) is transferred to the oldest son in the family.

It was only possible to record the membership size of 23 *mahabers* (see Table 14). These *mahabers* have 775 people of which 385 (49.6%) are women. *Mahaber* membership consists of household units. For instance, if a *mahaber* has 26 members, there are equal number of men and women (52 people). In this light, the 23 *mahabers* consist of 387 households, at an average of 16.8 households per *mahaber*. Unless there are circumstances beyond their control (a sickness or household workload) both husbands and wives are required to attend the gatherings. Single women, not single men, can participate in the

mahabers, for the simple reason that men cannot cook the food and make *tela* (drink). An exception is made for older men who can always use the help of family members or hire someone to make preparations for them.

Table 13. Monthly Religious Holidays and *Mahabers* found in the Area

Calendar Days	Holidays	No. of <i>Mahabers</i>
3	Bata	3
5	Abou	28
7	Sellasie	1
12	St. Michael	4
16	Kidanemeheret	2
19	St. Gabriel	0
21	St. Mary	48
23	St. George	4
24	Teklehaimanot	0
27	Medahniale	1
29	Balegziabher	0
	Tsgie	14
	Senbetie ³	15

Source: Author's field notes.

³Senbeties *mahabers* are hosted once a month on Sundays.

Table 14. Membership Profile for Selected *Mahabers*

Name of <i>Mahaber</i>	Number of members	Male	Female	Total
Tsgie	9	178	173	351
St. Mary	8	103	101	204
Abou	4	60	62	122
St. George	1	23	23	46
Senbetie	1	26	26	52
Total	23	390	385	775

Source: Author's field notes.

The *mahabers* have an *afe-lique* (a priest) and two *dagnas* (chairmen). The *afe-lique* leads mass prayers during the opening ceremony of the *mahaber* gathering. He is also concerned with religious education and ensuring that the *mahaber* follows “appropriate” ethical principles. Unlike the Kebele officials, the *dagnas* do not have power, except keeping the noisy crowd in order during open discussions, preparing “agendas”, recording *mahaber* decisions and fining members who break rules. *Mahaber* decisions-making first involves conversation in small-groups, followed by an open discussion that is often characterized by a lot of shouting, with everyone trying to speak at the same time. There will be more shouting when the *dagnas* announce a decision, as one segment of the crowd applauds and

the other segment demands some changes. Individuals who are experienced with speaking in public often influence the process and outcome of decisions.

Age and gender in part define members' role and expectations. The older people get served food and drink first. Everyone stands up to show respect when elders go outside and re-enter the *mahaber* place (at individual homes or church grounds). Members are also expected to be tolerant of older people's behavior (when an elder shouts at someone "you stupid bastard", for example). Yet an age criterion seems to have little role in the selection of the *dagnas*. The *dagnas* I knew were between the ages of 40 and 60. Women rarely stand up to speak, let alone be elected into the *mahaber* leadership; however, women in urban areas often form their own *mahabers* and this gives them the freedom to elect their own (woman) *dagna*. An exception would be angry older women who would stand up to denounce everybody if they were dissatisfied with what is happening in the *mahaber*. Otherwise women, like everyone else, approve or disapprove the decisions by shouting out loud.

There are penalties for violating the *mahaber*'s standards and rules. A member who does not conduct himself/herself properly (disturbing the group or insulting other members, for example) will be fined two or three times, then he/she would be asked to leave the *mahaber*. One former priest was fined for arriving late during the *mahaber* gathering which he was hosting on the church ground. His wife managed to present the drink and food but the *dagnas* felt that he had shown disrespect for other members by failing to arrive on time. Another case involves my own 84 year-old father. Three years ago I sent him some money to help prepare one of his *mahabers* in the month of August, the time when household resources are very scarce. So, the old man had tried to show off by preparing more drink and

food than required. The *dagnas* fined him for preparing “an extravagant event”. This way, the *mahabers* discourage competition among individuals over expending more resources to host an event only with the intent to earn a good name.

People of different social and economic background “drink” the *mahaber* together: priests, younger people, elders, women, Kebele officials, even educated elites (if there are any). Sons and daughters, friends and relatives of the individuals who host the event are often invited to the *mahaber* occasion. However, new members are carefully screened before they are allowed to enter the *mahabers*. An individual who wishes to join the *mahaber* would usually show up at one of those *mahaber* gatherings to apply for membership. Or, the individual can informally speak to certain *mahaber* members about his/her interest in joining their *mahaber*. Following this, the *dagnas* ask the *mahaber* members to do two things: 1) study the background of the would-be member, and 2) ask if anyone in the *mahaber* have had any “bad” experiences with him/her. Since the individual (a would-be member) lives within the same locality, everyone knows about his/her background. As such, this is only meant to ensure the continuity of *mahaber* rules. The second condition is rather problematic. Assume that Person “A” is interested in joining the *mahaber*. What will happen if he/she has taken *afelama* from one of the people in the *mahaber* (*afelama* means compensation paid for crop damage by cattle)? That member can then demand that Person “A” return the *afelama* before entering the *mahaber*. Then, if Person “A” refuses to repay the *afelama*, should the *mahaber* turn down his/her request for membership? Usually the *dagnas* recommend that a *shimagle* (elders) committee be set up to look into the matter. The achievement of a compromise will depend on the personality of the disputants (an attitude of “forgive and forget”, for

example). But most of the time a *mahaber* member wins the case, since he/she would threaten to withdraw from the *mahaber* if Person “A” is allowed to enter without his/her consent.

When an individual decides to leave the *mahaber*, other members often try hard to persuade him/her to stay. A person might be allowed to leave the group much more easily if the reason has to do with his/her inability to continue to expend scarce household resources for *mahaber* functions. But members do not approve one’s membership withdrawal based on such reasons as dissatisfaction with the social environment, dispute with a fellow-member, or that the *mahaber* has passed decisions which affected his/her interests. For example, Deldle threatened to withdraw from the *mahaber* because Hume (the fellow-member) has acquired a new title to his land, which had been expropriated by the government. Mandefro’s wife once swore that she would no longer engage in any *mahaber*. The reason was that she was always being embarrassed by her own husband who “acted foolish” after drinking a lot of *tela* (local beer). Many men and women tried to persuade her to change her mind. She refused. Today Mandefro is an isolated man who cannot even participate in agricultural work groups (see next section). He only goes to the city to buy and drink by himself or with his friends.

The “agenda” period during the *mahaber* gatherings looks like a formal court session, in spite of the shouting of the crowd. Soon after the drink and food have been served, the *dagnas* clap their hand and ask “those who have an agenda to come forward”. People then stand up in line and begin to talk about their problems. Note that “those people with problems” can be *mahaber* members or non-members who have come to request the

mahaber for assistance. Two examples would illustrate the importance of *mahabers* as a conflict resolution mechanism. A *mahaber* member or non-member says that person “A’s” cattle have destroyed his/her crop. The value of the *afelama* (compensation) had been estimated by the *shimagle*. And person “A” has refused to pay the *afelama*. The *dagnas* ask the two individuals (the “plaintiff” and “defendant”) to select the *shimagles* who would look into the matter. Once the *shimagle* is selected, the *dagnas* will ask them to report the results within a month (at the next *mahaber* gathering). If the *shimagle*’s effort turns out to be less successful in resolving the dispute, the *dagnas* may ask the two individuals to try the arbitration method one more time, otherwise they will end up standing in front of the Kebele court. Another example: a non-member or member of *mahaber* may stand up and say that someone has hit and killed his/her cattle, set fire on his/her house or stole his/her agricultural tools. Since this individual has been unable to identify the criminal or find a witness, he/she asks the *mahaber* to make prayers to God, in order to condemn the criminal to misery in life and death. In this instance, the *dagnas* do two things: 1) they will ask this individual to identify his/her suspects, and 2) they will also ask him/her to appoint a *mermari* (an investigator) who would go around the neighborhood or community to talk to those suspects. The *mermari* is given one month to report his findings to the *mahaber*. Now, if the suspects admit their guilt, the matter will be referred to the *shimagle*. Otherwise, they would be asked to make a *mahala*. Should they refuse to do so the individual will go directly to the Kebele court. In the event of achieving a compromise between disputants, the individual demands that those suspects call a *wase* (guarantor), who would be accountable if they fail to abide by the *shimagle*’s decision. The *wase* will not necessarily be held responsible but he/she will

be a credible witness when the “plaintiff” goes to Kebele or Woreda courts to force them to abide by the *shimagle*’s decision. The court will rule in his/her favor.

The causes for some of the disputes might surprise many scholars who espouse the idea of an “egalitarian community”. Once an old man stood up and asked the *mahaber* to “help restrain his (male) children from stealing (picking) his coffee overnight”. He said “I have given enough land for everybody. I am only left with those coffee plants. What more do they want from me? If they do not care for me, I do not care for them. So, I ask the *mahaber* to send a *mermari* (investigator). If they do not admit stealing my coffee, they ought to make a *mahala*”. Another old man’s case is similar. The man was walking to his house carrying a piece of firewood when an ox which belongs to his own son pushed him. The old man fell to ground but managed to get up and slowly walk home. However, he realized that he had dropped a sickle when he fell down. By the time the old man went back to the site the sickle was no longer there. So, he claimed that his own grandson who was looking after the cattle took it. The *mahaber dagnas* sent *mermaries*, who indeed found out that the boy had picked up the sickle but he lost it again to other children in the neighborhood. The *shimagle* decided that the old man should get his sickle back. But the boy’s father (the old man’s son) argued that the sickle was in someone else’s hand. And the *dagnas* could not force him to return the sickle to the owner. The old man first talked about going to the Kebele court but he realized that the cost of litigation (time and resources spent) outweighed the price of a sickle, and decided to ignore it. In spite of this, the *dagnas* are very careful not to make harsh decisions. *Mahala* (see Chapter 4, Section 1) is suspended for two or three months, with the hope that there will be a new development. The members in

the *mahaber* have also a lot of say in the final decisions. In one *mahaber* older people refused to “condemn” an old man, who, according to them, was in the final years of his life. The man was accused of “doing something bad” to one of their fellow-members.

In sum, *mahabers* are very popular organizations in Lay Armachiho and other rural areas of Ethiopia. Members get together each month to engage in social interactions and resolve conflicts. They also visit each other in times of birth, sickness and the death of a family member or relative. Moreover, *mahaber* members work together on farm fields to assist each other as well as to assist those elders and women members who are unable to plough, weed and harvest in time. Leadership roles, decision-making structures, communication patterns and social control mechanisms are compatible with the social and occupational requirements and cultural settings. What we learn from *mahabers* is that the principles of organization are crucial factors for achieving effectiveness in the organization. The role of women in the *mahaber* shows that the control of resources can be a crucial factor which determines individuals’ capacity to influence the choice of alternatives and consequent outcomes. If the Ethiopian government encourages open debate on public policy, *mahaber* settings can provide a medium of discussion and analysis of many issues affecting the local society.

Debais (Farm Work Groups)

Ethiopia has many forms of farm work groups which play an instrumental role in the organization of labor in the rural society. David Korten (1972) has called them “labor sharing institutions”, individually known as *debo*, *gege*, *dado*, *webera*, *gebo*, *goname*, *refdo*, *galgale* and *mesoit* (pp. 87-94). These groups help to create structures for “pooling the labor of a number of people from an area to assist one or more individuals with building a house, cultivating a large piece of land, harvesting crops, clearing forests for ploughing, and similar tasks (pp. 87-88)”. Korten further divided the work groups into 1) those involving work for the privilege of participating in a feast, and 2) those intended to help one another through a rotating formula of working on each other’s farm fields. *Debo* is an example of the first group. In *Debo* “there is no specific obligation to return the labor in kind (p. 88)”, except participating in the feast after the work has been done. The individual who is in need of agricultural labor (called *aba debo*) “may ask the local elders to invite the other farmers to come to the *dabo* or he may invite them himself. The number of people varies from 20 to 100, depending on the work to be done and the wealth of the *aba dabo* (p. 89)”. The *aba debo* gives the sole responsibility of coordinating the work to an elected group leader. The leader in turn selects one individual from each group who “keeps the spirit of the group and leads the group song” during the work period (p. 88). The group leader is also responsible for ensuring the quality of feast preparations. Workers would often be given noon and evening meals. Dissatisfaction with the quality of feast preparation could instigate an action against the *aba debo*, such as intimidation and even social exclusion. If the group leader

happens to share the blame, he too would be ridiculed, and even demoted from his position. The second group, called *dado*, requires “repayment in work”; that is, people work together to help one another in turns. Such a group consists of no more than five or six people, in order to make the duration of rotation shorter (to allow everyone to get his turn sooner). Late comers during the work period are required to work “while others are resting”. Interruption of the work by rain and other incidents is compensated by arranging another time to work for the individual. But in the *kukubbe* system of “repayment in work”, the individual (who hosts the group work) can sell his turn to another individual who is in need of labor. The group work will be overseen by an elected supervisor, while the individual who buys the “group work” provides lunch and pays the workers cash.

Donald Donham (1979) has also extensively studied *halma* and *mol?o* work groups in Southern Ethiopia. *Halmas* are rotating work groups which consist of a small number of people. They are created by adult men and women, including young people who contribute an immense amount of labor to the family-based agricultural production. Usually the members of the group will work for half a day and then on their individual plots in the afternoon, or they can work the whole day if drink is provided. *Mol?l* evolves out of *halma*. It draws a large number of people, and thus, requires some kind of group structure to coordinate the work: There is a king who oversees conflicts and disputes. The policeman schedules the work and enforces work rules. The chief and queen (=man) provide the group with entertainment.

Debaitis in Lay Armachiho are one such agricultural work group in rural Ethiopia, which involve the exchange of labor among individuals to help plough, weed and harvest

farm fields. A look at the farming system in the area will help us to better understand how this system works effectively.

Seasonal Cycle: Agricultural work begins in early March, usually involving cutting and burning bush to clear the land (see Table 15). Farmers also plough farm fields to prepare the soil-bed. In April, *Kola* (a low altitude) and *woynadega* (a middle altitude) farmers plant millet and sorghum. They would then anxiously wait for the light rainfall around mid-April, before planting more crops such as maize and *belga* (a variety of barley). Between May and June *kola* farmers plant maize, *woynadaga* farmers plant maize, *belga* and garden potatoes, while those *dega* (a high altitude) farmers plant wheat, barley, beans and many other varieties such as *telba* and potato. In *kola* and *woynadaga* areas the weeding of maize and *belga* would have already begun. For all three agroecological zones the months from July to September become the most critical period to weed crops. In the meantime, farmers also plough and plant *teff*, the most popular staple food in the country. Harvesting crops begins in October and ends in December. These three months also represent the most critical period in the seasonal cycle of crop production. In *dega* areas, in particular, wheat, barley, beans, *teff* and many other varieties ought to be harvested within a matter of 15-30 days. Given household labor shortage and monthly religious holidays (see section 1) farmers only manage to harvest crops by working very long hours. The period between January and February is a festival and wedding season and the beginning of the long fasting period in the Ethiopian church tradition. The most common task in this period is house repairs and construction, erection of stone-fences, cutting and burning bushes. Ploughing is year-round work.

Table 15. The Seasonal Cycle of Tasks in Farm Production

March - April	May - June	July - September	October - December	January February
Land preparation	Ploughing	Ploughing		Festival activity
Ploughing	Planting	Planting	Harvesting	Wedding activity
Planting	Weeding	Weeding		House construction
				Land preparation

Source: Author's field notes.

Production Constraint: Table 16 shows the harvesting, weeding and ploughing period for Lay Armachiho's seven major food crops at various time during the year (see Appendix VI for list of crop varieties grown in the area). In addition, various crops are grown in different agroecological areas. Hence, wheat, barley and beans are grown in highland areas, whereas millet, sorghum and maize grow in *kola* areas. The *woynadega* areas might be suitable to grow all of these crops, though most of the time farmers prefer to grow wheat, *teff*, millet, sorghum and maize and other varieties. Some *dega* farmers grow *teff* but this crop is more suited to grow in *kola* and *woynadega* areas. All of the weeding is done in the Ethiopian rainy season (June - August). Crops in *dega* areas are harvested in November, while harvesting in *woynadega* and *kola* areas is spread throughout the months of October, November and December.

Table 16. Ploughing, Harvesting and Weeding Periods by Crop Type

Crop Type	Planted	Weeded	Harvested
<i>Teff</i>	July	August - September	December
Millet	March/April	June - September	November/December
Sorghum	March/April	June - September	November/December
Maize	May	June-September	October
Wheat	May	June - August	November
Barley	May	June August	November
Beans	May/June	July - August	November

Source: Author's field notes.

There are no specific criteria of choosing which crops to plant in a given year. Individual choices are constrained by, among other things, land availability and the labor demand for a certain crop. Farmers overcome land constraints by using a crop rotation system. For instance, on millet *kerm* (land on which millet has just been harvested), a farmer can plant *teff* in the first year, sorghum the second year, millet again the third year, sorghum or *teff* the fourth year, or leave the land as *debla* (fallow) to enable the soil to regenerate itself (see Table 17). The crop rotation system allows the soil to regain its nutrient retention capacity. The residues of sorghum and noug (oil seed) and the roots of beans are well known for their role as suppliers of organic inputs (according to farmers). Resource constraints can

also influence individual choices. For instance, poor households often prefer to plant sorghum and millet crops, since planting these crops requires no ox-power. Similarly, sorghum requires less labor than, for example, millet and *teff*. In his “village study” of Northern Shewa (central Ethiopia), Dejene (1993) makes the same point: the type of crops planted varies according to household income, with poor households growing fewer crops than high-income households due to constraints of available labor and land. Yet regardless of income, farmers in Lay Armachiho face both labor and land constraints.

Table 17. Possible Crop Rotation Methods

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Millet	Sorghum	Teff	Noug (oil seed)
teff	Sorghum	Millet	Sorghum
Teff	Millet	Teff	<i>Debla</i> (Fallow)
Wheat	Barley	Beans	Wheat

Source: Author’s field notes.

The natural ecology of Lay Armachiho enables an individual farmer to diversify crop production. The area lies within *dega*, *kola* and *woynadega* agroecological zones. The mountain ecosystem creates different soil types within a range of 500 meters. Hence, land quality is assessed by the following criteria: *lem/meda* (fertile/flat), *chinha* (sandy), *gedel* (sloped) and *tef* (unusable). Traditionally, individual plots were evenly distributed along

lem/meda, *chinchá*, *gedel* and *tef* lands. Why? The answer lies in the system of land use rights. The *rist* system allowed the individual to claim use rights anywhere in the locality on the basis of proving that he or his wife is a descendant of a family which once had inhabited the area. A simple example will illustrate this. If person “A” feels that he has been disadvantaged by owning *chinchá* (sandy) land, he will contest to take a portion of person “B’s” *lem/meda* (fertile/flat) land. This works simply as follows. In early morning hours, person “A” appears with his oxen on person “B’s” land and makes *filmia* (marking) by oxen-powered drought. Usually relatives and friends would accompany person “A” to guard him, in case person “B” notices what is happening on his land and comes running with his gun or stick. Indeed, during my childhood I witnessed two bloody group fights (one occasion involving my own relatives) as the owner of the land tried to drive away the men who had just made the *filmia*. This case (violence) is a recent phenomenon, mainly due to increasing land scarcity. Otherwise, in ancient times *shimagale* would intervene in person “A” and “B’s” dispute. The first task would be to recount the ancestral roots to make sure that person “A’s” claim is right. The *shimagale* would then allocate a piece of the land to him. However, rarely did poor and powerless people claim the land use rights in this way. And rarely could anyone challenge powerful people who not only would refuse to share their land with others but they might even force the new claimant out of the area by using force.

The 1975 reform adopted the *akerab* (proximity to homestead) approach to allocate land to some individuals who were in need of a plot for garden crops and cattle grazing. Otherwise, authorities were simply concerned with ensuring that no one retained more than 10 hectares, and that the historical fragmented landholding system remained intact. EPRDF’s

redistribution policies also did little to change this, except reducing the maximum individual land holding from 10 hectares to 3 hectares. Both governments tried to apply the textbook version of land reform policy to Lay Armachiho society. The reality was that few people owned land up to ten hectares in 1970s and perhaps not many people owned more than 3 hectares in the 1990s. More important, the traditional system of land tenure enables farmers to plant variety of crops which grew on a different soil types and helped them to spread the risks across crops. The discussion below will show how the farming system described above shapes the ways in which people make *debait* arrangements.

Debait Arrangements: *Debait*s involve the participation of people in group work, whose number ranges from two to twenty or more, depending on the amount of work demanded in a farm field. For instance, if person “A” works on person “B’s” farm on Monday, he/she ought to work for person “A” next week, next month or some other time. In the same manner, if person “A” organizes 10 people to work on his/her farm, this means that he/she had worked for some of them before (each owes him/her one labor-day), or that he/she is promising to work for each one of them next time. The other feature of *debait* is that they are temporary organizations, people come to work together only if they encounter labor shortages. As such, if there were 10 people on one *debait*, there is no guarantee that all of them will come to work together again. The individual who hosted the group work will simply go around to work for each of the 10 people to return an equal amount of labor.

The advantage of *debait* is often viewed in terms of improved labor productivity. If Person “A” spends between 12 and 15 days to weed or harvest a sorghum field, he/she can do it in one day with the help of 10 people (10 days). The social and psychological

environments within the *debait* setting create more energy for people to work harder and longer, compared to an individual working lonely and long hours. First of all, drink is provided every two hours or so, during which people take a break to talk about many things about community life. Secondly, some *debait*s, particularly *teff* harvest, have a man who plays a musical instrument (called *mesenko*) and sings a song. All this encourages individuals to work harder. But the *debait* organization has another logic. Some crops, such as wheat, barley and *teff* require *debait* work more than others. Wheat and barley, which are grown in highland areas, are harvested in November, while the time of *teff* harvest is spread out from November to December, depending on the topography of the area; that is, areas which get less sunlight during a day (due to mountains' shade) lag behind the harvest time, whereas crop fields in the other areas can be ready earlier (from mid-November and on). Failure to harvest crops in time creates a problem. The stems dry and become difficult to manage when people try to cut them with a sickle (the stems break). This can lead to a significant loss of output. Now, assume that person "A" plans to harvest sorghum, *teff* and millet in a given year. He then must assess the labor requirements of each crop field; for instance, he can allocate family labor for sorghum and millet harvesting and use the *debait* to harvest the *teff* field. He would then go around to help others with, say, the harvest of millet, sorghum and other crops while women and young people work on sorghum and millet fields. In another case, perhaps person "A's" crop fields did not require much weeding in the winter season, so he and his family could have helped others in this season. By the time his *teff* is ready for harvest, person "A" simply goes around to tell the *debait* date for all those people who owed him labor as well as those who are willing to help him in lieu of

returning an equal amount of “labor” some other time. The wife prepares the drink and noon or evening meal.

Table 18 shows the estimated value of *debait* in terms of work hours per day. Data were gathered by observation in mid-October and in March and April (ploughing) and the six other harvest groups in the harvesting season in Kerker kebele. The number of people in the *debait*s ranged from 3 to 22. Group members did not arrive to work at the same time: some arrived early, others a bit late. During the harvesting season, the individual hosting the event expects everyone to be working by 10:00 a.m. and then work till 7:00 p.m., though they can go on working until 10:00 p.m if there is moon light. A ploughing *debait* begins around 10:00 a.m. and ends no later than 5:30 p.m. Latecomers are not penalized, except perhaps facing retaliation when one’s own turn comes. Interruption of the work by a certain incident (rain, for example) does not require another arrangement to compensate the individual (contrary to Korten’s *dado*). The 10:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. period for harvesting and 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. for ploughing is here considered as the normal routine of working hours. Hence, an individual will work for 8.5 hours during harvest group work and 7.5 hours for ploughing. This is an immense contribution (a labor supply worth from 22.5 to 187 hours per day), given that households run against time to collect a “one-time one-year salary” (net income after harvest [as one Kebele official put it]).

A *debait* has an *afe-lique* (a sort of spokesman) appointed by the person who hosts the event. The *afe-lique* can only suggest the best way of organizing the work. However, he may be ignored if people feel that he is incompetent to lead the group. Rather, it is the owner who goes here and there to give instructions. There are elder people too, who sit under a

shaded tree and shout "you bastard, get up and work!" and enjoy intimidating individuals whom they do not like. I was also intimidated by one old man when he told me to "get out of there (line of work)". The elders only leave the shaded area when they want to stand up behind the younger people and give moral support.

Table 18. *Debait* Work Days and Estimated Labor Input

Kind of Work	No. of People	Labor Hours
Ploughing	7	52.5
Harvesting	14	119.0
Harvesting	22	187.0
Harvesting	13	110.5
Harvesting	9	76.6
Harvesting	11	93.5
Harvesting	3	25.5
Ploughing	5	37.5
Ploughing	3	22.5

Source: Author's field notes.

There are not many conflicts in the *debait* organizations. If two individuals are in dispute with each other they do not work together until they settle the matter through the usual shimagle's arbitrary means (note that individuals who settle their disputes in Kebele

or Woreda courts are brought back to the *shimagle* 's to say "I forgive and forget", without affecting any of the courts' decisions). In another case, some *debait* organizers get frustrated when people come late for work. My own younger brother once said to me that the time of arrival for each *debait* team member depends "whether or not one is *kefatagna* (greedy)". He was angry that one of the men who owed him a "labor" had failed to show up until 11:00 a.m during his *teff* harvest. Another *debait* organizer was very smart. He knew that one *debait* team member was *kefatagna*, so he went all the way to that individual's house to bring the oxen and handed them over to his brother-in-law. By the time the *kefatagna* individual arrived the oxen were working. He was furious. The *debait* people ridiculed and laughed at him. In a similar case, a *debait* team member owned four oxen. He instructed his son to take the two oxen and to plough the family farm, while bringing the other oxen to the *debait*. The problem was that one of the oxen was a bull and could not be managed. The bull even threw one of the *debait* team members to the ground, as he tried to help the owner put the wooden-draught on its shoulder. It took almost thirty minutes to get that bull working. The man hosting the *debait* swore "not to work with this man ever again". Also, I once met a nervous young man who was going around to call people for work. Friends and relatives had promised him to help plough his piece of land. He then told his wife to prepare a drink. But nobody showed up on the *debait* date.

In sum, *debait*s do not simply involve an arrangement which sounds like "you work for me now, so that I can work for you another time". Instead, *debait* activities require a serious calculation of labor needs which are weighed against the risk of crop failure. This exchange system also enables people to make better use of labor resources. It is like a *kenga*

system, which enables two individuals, each owning an ox, to combine the two oxen and plough their land on rotating basis. Simply stated, *debais* are labor exchange deals “among equals”. Be it as it may, this “rational” way of “labor sharing” has worked to the disadvantage of poor households. Community ethics of “helping others” has no imperative in *debait* settings. Households who do not possess labor and material resources are unable to obtain the help of families, friends and relatives, when they need it most. Relatives and friends help poor families after they have finished all of their work. In my experience, it is the farm field of the young, women or older people which is ploughed and harvested last, and therefore, it is the least productive (since ploughing, weeding and harvesting are not done in time). Some weeding and harvesting can be done by women and older people themselves. However, ploughing demands physical work, and above all, oxen and tools. And *debais* do little to help resource-poor households.

Conclusion

The modernization theory had argued that “traditional” organizations were an obstacle to the promotion of social and economic changes (Chapter 2). Even today, development strategists in NGOs, governments and multilateral and bilateral organizations often downplay the role of such organizations in programme or project processes, on the grounds that 1) they have no capacity that meets the task requirements of development work, and 2) past efforts to involve “local organizations” did not produce effective results. But the foregoing discussion of *mahabers* and *debais* has demonstrated that “informal”

organizations have a potential to organize the local population. The participatory organizational environment, coupled with a face-to-face interaction, enables people to achieve a consensus on even the most controversial issues. Part of the failure of “participatory development” should rather be attributed to the lack of knowledge about the roles, structures and functions of “informal” organizations. The effective utilization of their potential demands an understanding of the set of rules (customary or legislated) that are used to select members, to control the behavior of individuals and to administer the organization. We also need to find out the circumstances that give rise to the creation of organizational initiatives, including the life span of the organization, the decision-making process and the level and meaning of participation.

CHAPTER SIX

“Formal” and “Informal” Organizations: A Comparative Analysis

The case studies in the previous two Chapters have examined the roles, structures and functions of “formal” and “informal” organizations. This chapter will be concerned with comparing these sets of organization to identify similarities and differences in their functional performance, including the limiting factors of efficiency and effectiveness. Issues pertaining to local development are dealt with in Chapter 7.

To begin with, there has always been a distinction between “formal” and “informal” organizations (see Table 19). “Informal” organizations are viewed as “backward”, static and rigid social structures which restrict individual mobility and discourage the efficient use of resources. By contrast, “formal” organizations are associated with the values and norms of modernity, whose specialized division of labor and top-down command structure allow the efficient allocation of roles and responsibilities, to increase productivity and ensure equal access to opportunities. The evidence of this study suggests quite the opposite. The case studies on *mahabers* and *debaitis* have shown that “informal” organizations are effective and efficient. And this is attributed to their unique organizational features: A small group of people is brought together in face-to-face interaction to make decisions in the event setting; roles and expectations are defined by customary rules (which means that there is always agreement/and consensus among members); members see each other as equals; and leaders exercise responsibility, not power. By comparison, the rules of “formal” organizations are

imposed by the government to define the power of organizational actors and the functions of different structural units in the organization; decision making becomes highly centralized; participation is a matter of perceived remuneration; organizations are often integrated into the political structure (thus, they serve the interest of dominant groups); in many cases powerful social elites dominate the leadership, and so forth.

Table 19. Profiles and Characteristics of “Formal” and “Informal” Organizations

Profiles and Principles	“Formal”	“Informal”
Rules	Bylaws, Charter Standard	Values, norms Area-specific
Structure of authority	Hierarchical	Horizontal
Nature of authority	Exercising power	Exercising responsibility
Incentive	Perceived rewards	Social obligation Perceived rewards
Participation	Knowledge, resource, class	Knowledge, resource
Control	Men	Men

Source: Compiled by the author.

Efficiency and effectiveness in “informal” organizations are achieved not because anything done is “simple” (as the mainstream view suggests) but because people have the capability to maneuver through different relationships which impose constraints and provide opportunities. In Lay Armachiho context, such relationships were manipulated and

patterned until they achieved a “fit” with individuals’ interests and aspirations. In Chapter 5, we saw how *mahabers* and *debait*s were formed by people’s own self-initiatives. Now, academics and many practitioners might assume that community values (egalitarianism, for example) play a role in galvanizing such efforts. The evidence suggests quite the opposite. To my knowledge, it was exceptional for family members or individuals within the same community to participate in the same *mahaber* or *debait* organizations. Rather, these initiatives were created by individuals who do not necessarily live in the same village or community but who perceive themselves as a group of people that have a lot in common. In other words, individuals have the freedom to create different relationships for different reasons or purposes. In another example, reciprocal labor exchange arrangements are dictated by ecological conditions as much as by the desire to work together. Crops in location X are ready for harvest earlier than in location Y (due to differences in topography). In this case, person “A” in location Y helps person “B” (whose crop is ready for harvest) in location X. Person “B” in turn helps person “A” next time.

Customary rules are often viewed as a principle of organization for “informal” social organizations. True as this may be, these rules should be seen as a normative order of society which represent change and continuity in the routine of people’s lives, not as some static elements that arrest social change. Customary rules are recognized as long as they prove instrumental to cope with the existing social reality. For instance, we do not expect people to retain existing social relations if the government changes the land tenure system. The situation in Lay Armachiho during the land redistribution process has provided good evidence. The break down of the old social order led to high tensions: husband vs. wife,

father or mother vs. son or daughter, neighbor vs. neighbor, sisters vs. brother, brother vs. brother, etc. Everyone was rushing to defend his/her own interests, not community values. In fact, the work of the Family Size and Land Registration Committees (see Chapter 4) was facilitated by many informants in the community, informants who were willing to help the Committees gather accurate information. The reason is simple. There were people who would lose and those who would gain from the land redistribution. For example, person "A" would like to inform the Committee that he/she has three hectares while in fact he/she owns four hectares (land in excess of three hectares will be expropriated). In this case, this man or woman (who has given false information to the Committees) will be exposed by another individual or individuals in the community. The motive here is clear. Unless the government expropriates the surplus land, the poor and landless get nothing. In another case, informants ought to ensure that person "B" does not receive a larger plot of land than what he/she deserves by claiming "there are too many people in my family" (initially government officials talked about land redistribution according to family size). I have also heard some people complaining that "certain individuals" who were motivated to take revenge were feeding the wrong information to the government to get them punished. People refer to this as the biblical notion of "year eight-thousand", the time when "every man is against every man". The whole point here is that individuals were acting not as a member of the community but as a citizen of the Ethiopian state which owned the land and as citizens of the Ethiopian state which articulated the ideology of "individualized relationships".

On the other hand, having been organized along belief systems, customary rules can legitimize social structures that restrict the social mobility of and limit economic

opportunities for women and some members of the society. And change in structures of such nature can be induced by an outside intervention. In Ethiopia, post-1975 governments have advocated the role of women's participation in the development process. Although this has increased women's employment opportunities in the government sector, its impact on rural women has been less significant. Both household responsibilities and cultural elements remain the major barriers. Women in *mahabers* no doubt have a lot of say in the choice of which *mahaber* to "drink" (to participate) and in the preparation of social events. At the same time, they can be ridiculed by men if they try to assume the *degna's* (chairperson's) position. But note that there are women's exclusive *mahabers* in urban areas, they can elect their own *dagna*.

The case studies have also demonstrated that the difference between "formal" and "informal" organizations is blurred. SCs and KAs look more like "traditional" rather than "modern" organizations. The lifestyle of KA and SC leaders is not different from the rest of the peasant population. Informal interactions and customary rules are frequently used to carry out administrative tasks rather than the government's own guidelines. In addition, all organizations share the same experience of domination and repression by state elites. In light of these, I would argue that KA, SC, *mahaber* and *debait* organizations represent different points on the continuum, which is a function of, among other things, their membership size, organizational resources, legal/political authority, participation and so on (see Figure 3). The performance criteria in Figure 3 are based on the evidence presented in the case studies. Let us refer to the "effectiveness" criteria at this point. KAs, with their immense legal/political authority and huge administrative infrastructure, are highly effective in resolving disputes

and implementing government directives, while their ability to induce popular participation is limited. SCs, with their strong authority and adequate material resource, have done poorly in providing efficient services to the surrounding communities and participation is also low. *Mahabers* and *debait*s, on the other hand, have no legal authority and strong organizational infrastructure, but they appeared to be most effective in inducing popular participation, including conflict resolution and creating other support systems.

There should be an explanation for this difference. The boundaries of KAs and SCs were arbitrarily defined. This, added with the tortuous geography, creates enormous difficulty of communication. KA and SC officials walk on foot around the areas to communicate with the population. This is time consuming and frustrating. It also makes the administrative work less efficient. It is common for *mahaber* or *debait* people to go around the area (or, send a message) to inform other members about an upcoming event. This works well, members show up to attend social gatherings or work together. But a KA or SC official who uses this same method will have little success. People will use the “I did not hear” excuse to not attend meetings or perform duties as required by the KA administration or SC managing committees. Nor would a *mahaber* or *debait* leader complain about being overloaded with too many responsibilities. He believes in the “*mahaber*”. He also gets social recognition. For his counterpart, a KA or SC official, the story is different. He is always intimidated by government officials. People make a lot of complaints about his decisions, even to the extent of threatening him with retaliation. The “I get nothing for my work” mentality of KA and SC officials has in part restrained the performance of these organizations.

Furthermore, the KAs and SCs have a large membership. We cannot expect the *mahaber* -or *debait*-type structure to administer a large area or territory. A strong, centralized organization is needed to administer many people whose interests and aspirations submerge

in the organizational arena. The land redistribution provides us with a good lesson. Documenting the size of families and individual land holdings, redistributing land, maintaining law and order and other challenging tasks were carried out by popularly elected committees. Most of the decisions, particularly land allocation, were done secretly. The KA administration used its legal authority and armed militia to restore law and order. Even then, tensions were running high, so high that people were threatening to shoot at each other and at KA and government officials. In fact, there were cases of KA and government officials being attacked. For rural people land is an emotional issue as much as an economic one. No one should expect a consensus on how to redistribute the land.

Finally, the Ethiopian government defines the form and intent of participation in KA and SC organizations. For instance, during the land redistribution process Woreda officials did not allow the participation of "feudalists" and "bureaucrats" in the Kebele committees. Nor did they encourage the expression of views that either criticized or opposed the policy. In fact, those who were suspected as trouble-makers were immediately detained at police stations. However, the involvement of women was emphasized. Many women did show up to the meetings (partly to get a plot of land). Yet, household responsibilities seemed to create an obstacle. A member of the government's team in Kerker Kebele told me how he tried to prevent women from being elected to the committees. The committee work is very hard. It required going around to every plot of land to measure individual holdings and total isolation from one's own family for weeks. The decision of this administrative person might not have been right, but he understood women's problems. Who could have taken care of the family in women's absence, given the fact that men would not even cook to feed the children? This

also shows that women's participation can be constrained by heavy social responsibilities as much as, or even perhaps more than by cultural elements in the society. This said, what is worth stressing is that KAs and SCs are the extension of the Ethiopian state. They not only represent the Ethiopian government's cultural model and politico-administrative agency in rural society, but the modern artefact of "organization" itself generates patterns and structures that encourage hierarchal command structure and central coordination. This makes people less committed to the organizations. It increases the burden for KA and SC officials, as membership contributions are either less than what is required or totally absent. As the experience of SCs showed, lack of popular control can also encourage widespread corruption. By contrast, *mahabers* and *debaites* are able to induce participation because of small membership and flexible structures. Uncontested legitimacy and popular control encourage members to make the expected contributions, which reduces the burden of responsibility for their leaders (note that *debaites'* leadership is only symbolic. It does not exercise any authority).

Thus, it will be unrealistic to expect "participation" in KAs and SCs in the same ways which take place in *debaites* and *mahabers* settings. In "informal" organizational settings, people more or less share the same perspectives and sentiments. We recall that *mahaber* membership criteria emphasized "good character", which means that person "A" may be suitable to group "B", but not necessarily to group "C". In *debaites*, too, relationships are based on reciprocal labor arrangements. But larger organizations bring together different people with different interests and aspirations. Issues become more complex, interactions more intense and decision making more complicated. I am not saying that KAs and SCs will

never create a conducive environment for participation. The point here is that as long as the government's agenda dominates rural issues and as long as top-down and ill-conceived goals continue to be imposed from above, people can only compete and negotiate among themselves within or outside of the public arena on similar or different material, ideological and symbolic "terrains". And, as long as this is so, a social agency is needed which has a strong legal authority to mediate between competing interests and aspirations that submerge into the local organizational arena.

As we saw in the case studies (Chapters 4 and 5), leadership selection is based on age and gender criteria. The younger generation has come to dominate the KA leadership, even though this is less so in SC management committees. In my experience, *mahaber* leaders at least appear to represent both the younger and elder age groups. In *debaitis* individual experience and skill to organize work, not wisdom or age, are important factors. In KAs, political cadres have a lot of say in what should be done and how it should be done. The same is true for SCs--officials decide every thing. In *mahabers*, people (rich or poor) who are well experienced in public speech are most likely to influence decisions. In all cases, class-based social power is not a factor. The conventional argument says that radical land reform policies by post-1975 governments have destroyed the material and social basis of the rural class in Ethiopia. But I doubt the social dynamism of "class" as a factor in the structure of the Ethiopian rural society. In a society whose cultural rituals are devoted to honoring war heroes, material wealth has little significance for attaining social status. Status is determined by a "good name". To earn this, an individual ought to do two things: 1) demonstrate his bravery in the battle field, or 2) be a *shifta* (rebel) who can challenge

regional or local nobilities. Military bravery and rebellion are neither derived from wealth nor ascribed by cultural values. These are personal adventures that test one's abilities. To make a long story short, although Marxists have been good at talking about the "feudal class" in rural Ethiopia, they failed to understand that "class" had little role to play in shaping rural structures. There was of course the *chika shum* (tax collector) whose role was limited to delivering taxes to the state and performing some administrative duties on behalf of the imperial state. He had no say, for example, in how land ought to be allocated or how *mahabers* or *debait*s should be organized.

The gender dimension is reflected in different ways. Women are more involved in *mahaber* and *debait* decisions than in KA or SC organizations. The reason is that women totally take the responsibility of preparing the food and drink. Single women, but not single men, can participate in *mahabers*--men cannot cook the food and prepare the drink. Men often talk more in *mahaber* gatherings, but there is nothing that can be done without women's consent. The government is eager to see women participating outside of the home, yet the same government did nothing for women who had fought years of guerrilla war. Only men control the ruling EPRDF party and the Ethiopian state.

The members of KAs, SCs, *mahabers* and *debait*s all share the same experience of material poverty. They eke out a subsistence livelihood from the rapidly deteriorating environment. None of these organizations gets preferential treatment by government officials. They all are viewed as "backward" and "inferior". Government officials lack any confidence in the KAs and SCs, which often leads them to pass down instructions and supervise the activity of rural officials. Nor do these organizations represent the "economy

of affection”, which penetrate the state and paralyze the functions of its institutions (Hyden, 1983). The KA and SC organizations are part of the politico-administrative network through which the government delivers its policy output to rural areas and through which it is attempting to re-organize the society. *Mahabers* and *debais* remain “closed” to any outside interference, and as such, maintain their own patterns of action and interaction.

In conclusion, the case studies in the previous two Chapters have drawn attention to the complex issues involved in assessing the role of local organization in the society. Although the organizations studied operate within the same geographical, political, social, material and cultural ‘interface’, they function at different scales defined by a spatial and politico-administrative boundary. To cope with a multiple set of problems, rural societies must have a “bundle” of organizations. Economists argue that individuals attain maximum utility (level of satisfaction) from a bundle of goods which are presented to him/her by firms that compete freely in the market. He/she is then able to choose among a variety of different goods, in quality and quantity. In the same way, rural people need a wide array of organizations that provide them with opportunities and alternative choices to make individual and group decisions. It is unrealistic to expect a few selected organizations to play all roles in rural society. Nor is it possible to see one type of organization as compatible with all spatial, social and politico-administrative structures in the local society. Each organization has its own range of capabilities to achieve a “fit” with a given scale of socio-economic activity (at household, village, community or local levels). Centralization and decentralization can work together within proper settings which allow the coordination of different activities in order to complement the efforts of one organization with another. This

study has attempted to increase our understanding of the complex set of relationships that define the mode and intent of participation and decision making in the local arena in Ethiopia. The challenge remains how to equip such organizations with necessary capacities to enlarge the range of their capabilities in ways that promotes rural development. This issue is discussed in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Capacity Building for Local Development

Introduction

This study has been concerned with local organizations in Lay Armachiho Woreda, Gondar, Northern Ethiopia. It focused on rural Kebele administration units (KAs), service cooperatives (SCs), *mahabers* (religious associations) and *debaitis* (farm work groups). These are organizations that have no office “space”, material resources or the “modern” technology of planning and management. KA and SC officials gather in farm fields, church grounds, “markets” or any “meeting place” in the locality, to carry out the same administrative tasks otherwise performed by “professionals” in governments and NGOs working in comfortable office environments. *Mahabers* and *debaitis* provide the social framework for the creation of mutual support systems and for the resolution of conflicts in the communities. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 have argued that the functional performance of these organizations is the result of effective structures and complex processes of interaction. The main findings can be summarized as follows:

- 1) KAs and SCs operate at the social and politico-administrative interface, where the state and rural society “engage” each other. By contrast, *mahabers* and *debaitis* are community-based organizations, even though they often draw their membership from different communities (in other words, members do not necessarily live in the same community).

- 2) The differences in the functional performances of KA, SC, *mahaber* and *debait* organizations were due to factors such as scale, membership size, structure, resource endowment, leadership and government mandate;
- 3) KAs and SCs require stronger leadership than *mahabers* and *debait*s in order to perform effectively, since they administer local affairs, deliver services and implement government directives;
- 4) KAs and SCs have greater needs of structures, such as committees and sub-committees, than *mahabers* and *debait*s, since they must divide areas of responsibility in the organization and create mechanisms for hierarchical control;
- 5) Incentives are important for inducing popular participation and motivating the organization's leadership to exercise responsibility effectively;
- 6) In order to attract the interest of the population in participating in the organizations, benefits must be demonstrated.
- 7) Devolving too much responsibility to the local level is counterproductive, since an increasing burden on the local organizations and their leaders may mean that administrative work becomes less effective;
- 8) Organizations are better managed if the tasks are compatible with the social and occupational requirements of the leadership;
- 9) The legitimacy of an organization is a function of the vitality of its role in local society;
- 10) There can be a marriage between new (government) rules and existing (traditional) ones; and
- 11) New roles can complement existing ones, as evidenced by the "dual personality" of the

KA administration and the SC management system.

This chapter will be concerned with two things. The first section will assess existing local organizational capacities to promote rural development. It will also present a framework for understanding the kind of strategies that are required to develop the capacity of these local organizations in order to increase their role in the development process. But “capacity development” will do little to improve the functional performance of local organizations unless there are proper settings to involve them in the decision-making process. Ultimately, it is the national policies and the wider political system that are the determining factors in creating the conditions for effective “participation”. Yet, it is also possible to identify areas of activity that are best suited to the functions of local organizations. The second section addresses this issue, by proposing a regional planning approach. In the Ethiopian context, the Zonal Administration is considered a “region” and the Woreda a basic unit of planning (see Figure 4). Regional planning has its own history of theoretical debate (Stohr and Taylor, 1981), which I do not intend to pursue. My aim is to explore the ways in which various planning functions and different areas of responsibility can be identified at each level of hierarchy in the Ethiopian government (Federal, Regional, Zonal, Woreda and Kebele levels). Making Woreda a basic unit of planning is thus a viable strategy, because it is an area larger than the “local” and smaller than the “region”, as such, it represents the micro-macro social, organizational and political interfaces. Regional planning can be instrumental in helping to reduce implementation problems as much as facilitating planning processes. Planning is an easy task. Planners produce and structure the knowledge of a social phenomenon, conceptualize action strategies, present plan documents

in eloquent ways, debate short -and long-term impacts and use their professional power to ensure that the blueprints are followed in the course of implementation. But more often plans either are not implemented as written, they are implemented in different ways, or they end up producing completely different results, for better or worse. The reason for this is simple: plans pass through an “implementation terrain” or through the social, institutional and political/ideological interfaces at every level of hierarchy in the large and small organizations. This “problematic” nature of plan implementation has rarely received adequate attention in the development planning debate.

Capacity Building

The origins of the current capacity building debate can be traced back to the 1960s discussion of building the state which focused on the strengthening of national institutions to increase government’s role in planning, resource distribution and industrial development (see Chapter 2). The issue soon attracted the attention of multilateral and bilateral organizations, which were becoming involved in the provision of technical and material assistance to the developing countries. Yet decades later, the institutional capacity of many countries is still too weak to sustain governments’ role in the economy and society (World Bank, 1991, 1997; Bossuyt *et al*, 1995). By the 1980s and 1990s, in particular, it became obvious that many countries “did not have the management skills and organizational resources to adjust to dislocating shifts in the global economy. The role of many public sector organizations also changed during the 1980s in response to financial retrenchment,

organizational decline, de-regulation and privatization. The organizational ‘map’ of countries had to be broadened to include a wider range of actors such as NGOs and private sector firms, many of whom began to be involved in the private delivery of public services (OECD, 1995, p. 12)”. Since then, the “capacity building” argument has given “more priority for training, with particular emphasis on strengthening local institutions. The use of expatriate personnel solely for project construction and implementation was to be discouraged, and greater efforts devoted to eliciting local ownership of programmes (Ohiorhenuan and Wunker, 1995, p. 4)”.

Even though the current definition of “capacity building” appears to vary depending on the ideology of bilateral and multilateral agencies, all would agree with the goal of developing the human and material resources of local and national organizations and the institutionalization of effective planning and management systems within public sectors. The World Bank’s (1993a) *Handbook on Technical Assistance* identifies five factors as determinants of “capacity”: a) the ability to set goals, evaluate options and create effective leadership, b) the ability to create inter-institutional linkages, c) the “effective use of human and financial resources to meet client needs”, d) the ability to mobilize popular support, and e) the capacity to create learning and adaptive responses to changing societal environments. (cited in Ohiorhenuan and Wunker, 1995, p. 5). Based on a study of local governments in Colombia, the Bank (1995) has outlined three conditions “that make possible for local governments to perform in an effective way”: “(1) *Labor*: the quality of its staff, which depends on both their skills and the way they are utilized within the bureaucratic structure; (2) *Capital*: the equipment, material and buildings required in public sector activities,

without which quality labor could become ineffective; (3) *Technology*: the government's internal organization and management style, planning and execution of functions (Box 3.1, p18)". Moreover, in its *1997 World Development Report: The State in a Changing World*, the Bank contends that the normative and behavioral patterns of institutions are part of the problem of building "state capability". For example, it suggests that nepotism, corruption and patronage are major causes of "weak central capacity" and "poor delivery of services" of many developing country states. The Bank attributes this problem to the failure of previous institutional reforms to devise merit-based recruitment, promotion and compensation systems within the states' structures (pp. 79-98).

The United Nations Center for Regional Development (UNCRD, 1996) argues that the quality of "governance" should be used to measure and assess the "commitment and capacity" of local governments. On the basis of its study of local governments in Asia and Latin America, it identifies six "indicators" for effective local government: 1) a legal mandate that "matches" local organizational and resource capacity; 2) institutional structures that enhance local autonomy (in terms of organizational capacity and decision making); 3) a flexible "managerial approach" which induces local governments to "faithfully carry out" policy or programme initiatives (defining clear areas of responsibility between central and local agencies, for example); 4) the acquisition of "managerial, planning, and technical skills, knowledge, and experience for programme planning and implementation"; 5) the ability to finance local economic development initiatives by generating revenues locally and tapping external resources; and 6) the ability to manage the local economy and initiate development activities within the framework of national policy goals (pp. 6-18). The UNCRD

emphasizes that, in order to facilitate local economic development, there should be shared responsibility between central and local governments, and a collaborative working relationship between the central bureaucracy and political/administrative apparatus at the local level.

Writing for *Global Environment Facility*, John F. E. Ohiorhenuan and Stephen M. Wunker (1995) point out the need to approach capacity building issues both from a narrow and a broader perspectives¹:

Capacity building in a narrow sense refers to the process of enhancing individual skills, or strengthening the competence of a particular organization or set of organizations (for example, the civil service). In the broader sense, it refers to the process of nurturing stable patterns of social relations (as in the notion of the market as an economic institution). The present-continuous tense of the term emphasizes the underlying belief that institutional change can be induced. The accent of development cooperation support for capacity building is on nurturing human and organizational capabilities with a view to achieving a permanent transfer of skills and know-how. To do this properly requires that, in addition to strengthening individual skills and organizational competence, attention be paid to the normative framework within which individuals and organizations function (such as conventions, laws, regulations, policies, and social pressure in general [pp.3-4]).

The OECD (1995) defines “environmental capacity” as “the ability of individuals, groups, organizations and institutions to devise and implement solutions to environmental issues as part of a wider effort to achieve sustainable development (p. 7)”. Thus, “capacity development” demands a “system thinking”, an interdisciplinary approach to planning and analysis, reframing relationships among institutional and social actors, strategic planning,

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The Global Environment Facility is jointly administered by the United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank.

and learning and adapting to ‘organizational, cultural and political dynamics’:

Certainly, the development of capacity should be seen as a complex response to social, political, cultural and economic factors that operate in the societies. It does not always result from the careful implementation of deliberate strategies but is more likely to be the outcome of power struggles amongst groups in the country that have vested interests at stake in the management of public policy questions. The processes by which societies create capacity are only partly controllable and comprehensible and there are limits to the ability of governments and people to deliberately create and induce institutional change (p.13)”.

In the first Chapter, “capacity building” was defined as the enlargement of an organization’s range of capabilities by changing or augmenting existing structures and functions. This definition was expanded to include the following: 1) enhanced capability of overcoming the three constraints of agricultural production: land, labor, and technology; 2) enhanced capability of monitoring and directing *opportunity generating*, *opportunity constraining* and *opportunity enabling* processes in the society; 3) self-administration of local affairs; and 4) increased participation in the national development process. Let us take the hypothetical example of a farming technology that increases labor productivity. This frees the farmer to engage in other income earning activities, such as off-farm employment or petty trading. However, to do so, he/she must look for employment elsewhere or he/she must have adequate capital and market information to engage in trading activities. The first possibility (finding employment) may depend on regional or national policies, since investment priorities and job creation strategies may determine the extent to which he/she is able to find an off-farm employment. The second possibility (self-employment) is likely to be more closely related to internal organizational processes (such as who influences the decisions and who controls the resources) as much as to the nature of government policies.

For instance, he/she should be able to get a credit or financial loan from the local cooperative or government agency in order to meet the capital requirements of petty-trading. Then, the issue becomes not whether or not there are financial organizations in the local society but how individuals are able to get access to credit and loan opportunities.

Then, how do we enlarge the range of existing organizational capabilities?

Uphoff (1986) argues that local institutional development (LID) strategies can be properly measured and assessed by identifying existing capabilities and sources of “initiatives for change”:

(1) Where there are functioning local institutions such as local governments, private enterprises, or cooperatives able to identify needs and problems, to develop plans for dealing with these, and to determine what outside aid would be helpful, the mode for LID can be one of ASSISTANCE.

(2) In some situations local institutions will be less extensive or less experienced and thus less able to initiate, at least at the outset. In such cases a larger role for outside agencies may be appropriate to help create greater local capacity at the same time as particular needs and problems are addressed. In such a case the LID mode can be one of FACILITATION.

(3) In still other circumstances, there may be some urgent problem or need that an outside agency wishes to deal with, but local institutions are underdeveloped, at least with regard to that activity area. The approach may then be to reorient and strengthen existing institutions to further program objectives or to develop entirely new local capacities to further these goals. This LID mode is characterized as PROMOTION (P. 189).

Uphoff's “modes of support” should be viewed as one perspective of “what outsiders should do” to help build local capacity (this is in fact his intention). One can argue that this simple notion of “assistance”, “facilitation” and “promotion” fails to recognize the initial functions of internal organizational processes as the determining factor that shape and

reshape the kinds of outcomes that are produced by social and economic changes (as I have argued in Chapters 4, 5 and 6). Nevertheless, the following example from the work of the Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief (CPAR) in Lay Gayint Woreda, Gondar, supports Uphoff's argument. Lay Gayint has been experiencing periodic drought and famine. CPAR entered the area in 1985 simply to distribute relief, then gradually shifted its attention to the promotion of long term development in the area of natural resource management, health and water supply. One morning, a CPAR project officer and I waited anxiously for the field personnel to come and take us to the project areas. The officer (who was waiting with me) said that he did not know the location of many project sites. His explanation for this was very simple: CPAR project staff no longer supervised many of the project activities. The local people had been given "100% responsibility" to coordinate the projects' work. When we arrived at one site, we found more than forty people digging along contours and carrying stones to build terraces. CPAR contends that its strategy to use local structures and "those (traditional) rules" has worked well to organize project activities and to create the social base of support that is needed to ensure project sustainability. CPAR's claim is backed by the following achievements:

- 1) People have been trained as community health workers, traditional birth attendants and in the maintenance and repair of water springs and other facilities;
- 2) Project beneficiaries have devised their own system of water user fees. There are also fines for failure to maintain terraces and to clean up springs and other facilities after use. Maintaining terraces is very important. If the terraces collapse during the rainy season, they send water down the steep hills that causes extensive soil

erosion and crop damage. CPAR envisages that the income generated from the user fees and fines can cover part of the salary or bonus expenses for trained community health workers and maintenance and repair people.

3) People have organized themselves into *kuteba* groups (savings associations). Each group consists of 24 people, who contribute Birr 2 every month and the money is deposited in the Bank account. The idea is to start income generating activity once the fund matures. This is similar to traditional savings associations, or *iqubs*. In *iqubs*, members make weekly or monthly contributions and then allocate the money to individual members on a rotating basis through a lottery system. The difference here is that CPAR encourages collective planning to achieve common goals.

4) The most powerful social agencies in the project areas are the Village Development Committee (VDC) and the KA administration. The VDC is composed of local elders and KA officials. Both agencies are responsible for needs assessment, site selection and the organization of development work. The KA administration recruits people who work in the projects (usually poor people) and who receive wheat or other incentive for their work.

The Project officers claim that CPAR's role has been limited to writing project plans, fund raising, delivering resources to project areas and providing technical assistance. On these grounds, CPAR argues that "local capacity" should be assessed on the following basis:

- 1) responsive capacity, the ability to make preparations for overcoming predictable or unpredictable events;
- 2) the ability to plan and take action;
- 3) the possession of adequate

resources; and 4) the ability to increase the productivity of resources and generate adequate income.

The large turnout of people to meetings will impress any visitor to the project areas in Lay Gayint. It shows that CPAR and the local agencies have successfully built up their legitimacy in the local society. When I went to one Kebele to talk to the VDC, I found more than fifty people gathered at one site. In another case, the project officer had met KA officials at the Woreda administration office in Nefas Mewucha, the administrative center of Lay Gayint. When he told them that I had been touring the project sites, 16 of them came all the way to CPAR's compound to talk to me. When I compare all of this with my experience in Lay Armachiho, where people used many excuses not to attend meetings, it was that the population in Lay Gayint showed a much greater interest in public participation and in interacting with outsiders. However, the power of local agencies can also be an important factor. The KAs and VDCs are responsible for recruiting project participants (i.e., those who are involved in "food-for work") and that attendance of public meetings might be one of the eligibility criteria. This said, I raised the issue of sustainability on many occasions; for instance, what will happen if and when CPAR leaves the area? The KA and VDC officials replied that they would carry on the operation of projects. People did praise CPAR for its tremendous achievement, a sort of public relation exercise which is obvious to anyone. But, CPAR has made a positive contribution to build local capacity and its effort to maintain a smooth relationship with the Ethiopian government is in itself an asset that helps to ensure the sustainability of projects.

In Lay Armachiho, the Woreda Department of Agriculture and the KA administration organized people to construct contour terraces and to build gully terraces in highland areas. The Department of Agriculture recruited one man from each *gote* (sub-kebele area) and provided some training on the techniques of designing terrace construction. The KA administration organized people into groups which would work on a rotating basis on each other's land to build terraces. I had seen such soil conservation activities in one area of Kerker Kebele and although the quality of the terraces was not bad, there were two problems. First, one group leader alleged that the extension worker in the area always preferred construction sites by the side of the main Gondar-Tikil Dingay road. She was interested in showing to the authorities what was being done rather than directing the groups' activities to "other areas" where soil erosion had been a major problem. Second, some people were reluctant to participate in the group activities. At one site I found three children who were simply playing around, instead of carrying stones or digging the contour. When I spoke to the fathers of these children, it appeared that they owned no land in *gedel* (sloped) areas, and their farm lands did not experience erosion problems. Hence, they saw little reason to get involved in such group activities. Those children were sent to the work site only to avoid fines (the KA administration fines those who do not show up for work).

Local organizations in Lay Armachiho are not less efficient or less effective than those of CPAR's project area in Lay Gayint Woreda. However, if one comes to appreciate any difference (between the organizations in the two areas), it is important to consider two things. First, Lay Gayint has been experiencing drought and famine for many years. Governmental and non-governmental agencies have intervened to help rehabilitate the

natural and human environment. As a result, there could have been tremendous pressure on the local people “to get organized”, as agencies sought to create resource delivery channels. Second, CPAR has given ownership of projects to local agencies and this has helped to legitimize the purposes of projects and galvanize support among the population. Bearing in mind these points, the lesson we can learn from both Lay Armachiho and Lay Gayint is that when we talk about “capacity building” we must deal with the challenge of utilizing existing human and organizational capacities. Development agencies must understand the role of local organizations, how they are structured and the ways in which they function.

In order to utilize existing capacities, programmes or projects should therefore achieve a “fit” with the existing role and functions of local organizations. And this will be easier if, instead of creating a project-induced demand, development agencies respond to local requests. This will allow: 1) programme or project goals to achieve a better “fit” with people’s needs and priorities; 2) community spirit to be galvanized, thereby, increasing the flow of local resources to the programme or project organizations; and 3) the impact of external intervention (“promotion”, “facilitation” or “assistance”) to be more effective. Looking at Box 1, one may get a sense of the kinds of activities that are more likely to achieve such a “fit” with the capacity of local organizations:

1) Activities that can be carried out by small community-based groups. The task of organizing such activities is less complex and requires little external input. For instance, In Lay Armachiho, the Woreda Department of Agriculture had to provide only tools for soil conservation activities. Water conservation, tree planting, and so forth, are more compatible with community-based activities.

Some *mahabers* in Lay Armachiho have introduced monthly contributions to help any member who encounters financial hardship, or who is faced with the death of family member or relative. However, this money remains in the hands of leaders or an elected treasurer, and as such, it is not used for productive purposes. The alternative will be to lend the money (at a low interest rate) to a *mahaber* member or an individual in the community to help him/her to buy assets, or to pay debt. Kebele agencies (such as cooperatives) and Woreda credit and loan facilities can provide matching grants for individuals who need financial assistance.

2) Activities that can be organized and coordinated by local agencies. KAs and Scs possess an immense potential to organize and administer development

Box 1.

A development “goal” and “objective” may mean different things to different people. Yet this does not prevent one from identifying some commonly perceived programme or project goals and objectives.

Agriculture: Improved productivity of land, labor and farm methods

Objectives: Identify constraints, equip farmers with necessary knowledge, skills and technologies

Education: Help young people find employment in private and public sectors, enable people to accumulate knowledge and master the know-how needed to monitor the impact of change

Objectives: Build schools, design appropriate training and education programmes, promote literacy education

Health: Eradicate seasonal and chronic disease, reduce infant mortality, reduce fertility, improve life expectancy

Objective: Construct health facilities, sanitation facilities, promote family planning methods, promote nutrition, and so on.

Water: “Safe and clean” drinking water on sustainable basis

Objectives: Digging water well, spring-development, promote water conservation techniques

Enterprise: Diversify income sources, encourage local-based industrial development, self-employment

Objectives: Provision of capital, equipment, training and education, credit, create market opportunities and means of market accessibility

Road Construction: Physical accessibility

Objectives: Organize road construction, provide engineering assistance, provide maintenance and repair training

Resource management: Maintain stable natural resource base

Objectives: Promotion of sustainable farm practices, conservation strategies, alternative sources of energy, create protection agencies (government and local-based)

activities on a scale larger than the community. They can mobilize labor and material for the construction of schools, health facilities, small-dams and rural roads. The KAs and SCs can also organize planning meetings, experience exchange and training sessions as well as administer the delivery of services. However, all these initiatives must be supported by external assistance, since they have no resources to equip facilities with physical resources (finance, skilled staff, equipment, and so on). For instance, I have seen the construction of road paths in a few villages which can be washed away by flood. People lacked basic engineering skills.

3) Activities that are planned and administered by government agencies. There are many areas of activity accorded to the role of governments. Research centers can develop appropriate agricultural technologies and facilitate widespread adoption among farmers in ways that reduce uncertainty and in ways that supplement existing farm practices. Government policy instruments are needed to reform the land tenure system, protect forests, provide credit, create market infrastructures, design training programmes, and so forth.

Let us now turn our attention to the issue of capacity building. The foregoing discussions shed some light on the need to overcome capacity utilization problems. But we are also aware that old structures may not always be compatible with new social, economic or even technological realities. And in that case, capacity building demands organizational change, change that alters the values and structures of the existing organization in ways that re-direct their functional performance to participatory and equitable development. But such

organizational change cannot be achieved by outsiders simply prescribing an “appropriate model” of organizations, without taking into account people’s current perceptions of status, roles, divisions of responsibilities, social obligations, and so on. The case study of KA, SC, *mahaber* and *debit* organizations in Chapters 4 and 5 have illustrated this. However, we can enable people to strengthen their technological, organizational and economic capacities. To do so, we can facilitate social processes that re-arrange relationships and that shuffle and reshuffle organizational structures until they achieve a better “fit” with the existing realities. Three central components of “capacity building” may be identified, viz, social, economic and organizational resources. Economic resources are land, water, oxen, agricultural tools, cash crops, natural resources, including crop genetic diversity, all of which are crucial for achieving food security. Social resources are those entities that provide a medium of expression, conflict management and communication, creating external linkage and resource exchange networks. Examples are “markets”, churches, occupational groups (herbalists, blacksmiths, carpenters, for example), *mahabers*, *debaitis*, KAs and SCs. Organizational resources are those inputs which help to improve functional performance, such as administrative and technical skills, financial resources and leadership. Assume that person “A” has adequate land, oxen and tools. He/she produces just enough to feed his/her family. Then, he/she becomes enabled to use an irrigation technology that draws water from the nearby river. This helps the farmer to grow bananas or vegetables in the dry season. The sale from this produce supplements household income. He/she can now afford to buy basic essential needs, such as medicine, cloth, radio, bicycle, school material for children and so forth. Person “A” also increases his/her contribution to churches, KAs and SCs as well as

attends *mahaber* and *debait* occasions. If income continues to rise he/she might be interested in starting a small enterprise, such as a grinding mill or retail shop. If he is elected as a KA or SC official (women rarely get elected), he will no longer worry about feeding his family. He becomes more committed to the work of the organization. He may not even demand a financial incentive, as long as he earns a “good name” in the community. The second example: Person B is a craftsman or builder. He/she is provided with training to build local facilities and then given the responsibility to maintain and repair these in the long run. Finally, person “C” is a petty-trader who can be provided with training and financial assistance to resume entrepreneurial activity. The whole point of the argument here is that we are dealing with the issue of building the capacity of individuals (ordinary men, women, young people, priests, petty-traders, KA or SC officials, *mahaber* or *debait* members) who come together to act and interact in the local organizational arena. Too often we become concerned with the artefacts of the organization (the conception, design and structuring task of “organizational development”). We often ignore the fact that an “organization” is created by a web of individual relations as well as those relationships framed by the external networks of politics and economy. We then overlook the fact that change means “changing” individual capacities. We should think of a farmer who attends *mahabers* on Sunday, works in *debait* on Tuesday and chairs a KA or SC meeting on Thursday. The capacity of this individual and others will determine the range of capabilities of any local organization.

Table 20. Components of Local Capacity Building

Economic Resources	Social Resources	Organizational Resources
Land	Local Knowledge	Skills
Forests	Administrative Organizations	-Record Keeping
River Waters	Mutual Support Groups	-Service delivery
Genetic diversity	Service Cooperatives	-Report writing
Cash crop	Health and Education Centers	-Information processing
Oxen	Churches	-Creating external linkage
Tools	“Markets”	-Planning
	Extension service & resource conservation agencies	-Repair and maintenance
		Leadership
		Finance
		Facilities & Equipment

Source: Compiled by the author.

With the exception of women’s exclusion in the decision-making process, no fundamental problems in the local organization of Lay Armachiho Woreda were discovered. The problems that were identified in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 were related to such things as scale, membership size, lack of resources and government policy vis-a-vis rural society. The removal of such structural problems requires incremental changes, in the capacity of the organization and in the wider economic and political environment. This said, it would be a mistake to suggest that the KAs and SCs should be radically transformed into “modern” organizations. Nor is it correct to say that they currently suffer from “weak” administrative or technical skills. In fact, these organizations work better the way they are. So, why are we

concerned with technical and administrative capacity building? As pointed out above, we want to utilize the existing capacities of organizations more efficiently to promote rural development-oriented activities. For this reason, KA and SC organizations should be equipped with technical and administrative skills to enable them to process information, assess the feasibility of local action strategies, plan and coordinate activities with community groups and outside agencies, and keep better records and to build an effective organizational memory. We should, however, realize that these technical and administrative “problems” are caused by external intervention. Outside agencies often go to rural areas with their own organizational values. Political elites and department personnel are trained in Western educational systems. Rural officials are then expected to act and interact in the same way. Writing reports requires rural people to learn the language of mainstream institutions. For rural officials the task of reading and interpreting policy texts (which are often written in a difficult technical language) remains the most frustrating experience. Capacity building strategies must then address the issue of re-orientating values that shape the policy and practices of mainstream development agencies. Removing institutional barriers will be as important as building technical and administrative capacities.

Towards Regional Planning

The development planning debate has been dominated by what Uphoff (1989) calls the fallacies of top-down and bottom-up planning. The top-down notion often reduces people’s needs to the “mere consumption” of programme or project services, while the

bottom-up alternative exaggerates local's/community's capacity to find "real solutions" for its problems. The resolution of this stalemate resides in the fact of recognizing that sustainable results are produced by initiatives that combine both top-down and bottom-up strategies (Sanyal, 1994). The substance of the top-down vs. bottom-up "difference" has much to do with the respective agencies' behavior of territoriality, which is largely conditioned by their perceived need to defend institutional interests (Sanyal, 1991). Thus, governments are given the role of formulating and planning social and economic policies, and in doing so, they use the material and organizational powers of the state to influence the direction of societal change. By comparison, NGOs (the presumed grassroots agents) espouse the bottom-up planning ideology but their planning and implementation practices are not often different from those of governments. NGOs only want to maintain an organizational autonomy that enables them to do what they want. This "to do what they want" sentiment has grown to the extent of leading some to label the NGO community as an "unregulated industry". What has not been realized in all of this is that the multiplicity of development problems demands that all agencies in the "development" field must combine their energy and resources to work towards the achievement of desired goals.

Regional planning may create a "middle ground" between these two contesting approaches. It calls for the promotion of self-reliant and equitable development through "selective spatial closure" (Stohr and Taylor, 1981). According to Lee (in the same volume), the main emphasis is "doing as many as possible of the things necessary to meet a region's needs within the area itself, and taking whatever political measures are necessary and feasible to see that this is accomplished (p. 94). This approach emphasizes regional control of

resources, decentralized planning, the application of appropriate technology, utilizing local skills, redirecting investment priorities to basic needs and taking strategic advantages of trade. In this regard, regional planning becomes an ideology as well as a planning method. As pointed out above, the notion of “selective spatial closure” advocates equitable and self-reliant economic development. Methodologically, the “region” serves both as a “planning function” and a “planning area”. As a planning function, the “region” may facilitate the development of basic needs-oriented investment criteria, encourage participatory decision-making and build the “local” spirit to mobilize social and economic resources. As a planning “area”, it helps planners to recognize the region’s distinctive social, economic, spatial, political and cultural identity, and thus, to formulate regional specific programmes or projects that strive to produce benefits consistent with the needs and aspirations of the population. However, development planning and implementation involve maneuvering through a web of decision structures, a web of task referrals and a web of organizational power relationships. As noted earlier, plans generally deal with abstract ideas and action strategies that provide us only with a conceptual framework for deciding what to do and how to do it, whereas policy, programme or project implementation deals with the “actual” reality; the social, personnel, institutional and political/ideological dimensions of “doing things”. Thus, for example, in the course of plan implementation, there will be social pressures to do, or not to do, things as they are stipulated in the plans. In Chapter 4, we saw how rural Kebele officials decided to ignore some of the government’s land redistribution guidelines, partly because those officials felt that the guidelines did not reflect local realities and partly because of the fact that officials cannot mediate local conflicts effectively if the

population comes to regard the KAs as mere agents of the Ethiopian government, designed only to enforce its policies on society. But the effectiveness of plans also depends on the degree to which social or institutional actors are devoted to the plan's implementation, which, in turn, depends on their perception of the social, organizational and political environment, including perceived remuneration (social and material), the fear of authority, job security, shared values, participation and so forth. Moreover, the values of the organization (participation, for example) and its technical and material resources will also determine its capacity to execute the plan. And ideology and politics are the most important factors in the implementation process. Ideology shapes the policy discourse, politics defines the priority areas. Together, they create and re-create the "social", "personal" and "organizational" environment within which plans are implemented. However, the nature of this interface differs along the top-down continuum. Thus, the "social" is likely to be more important at the Kebele level, but less so at the Zonal, Regional or Federal levels; political struggle among elites is more intense at the center than at the local level; and competition over access to organizational resources will be more intense in Zonal, Regional, and Federal departments than in the Woreda or Kebele organizations, mainly because the latter dispose of a few resources. Simply stated, from the time of planning and budgeting decisions taken in the central departments of the regional or federal government agencies to the stage of the execution at the local level, any planning package will be subjected to continuous processes of appraisal and reappraisal, as each level of implementing hierarchy attempts to determine the following: 1) whether the plan calls for the expansion of existing activities or it proposes new projects; 2) whether expenditure rules and regulations are consistent; and 3) whether the

plan benefits the organization (in terms of rewards and incentives). The point is that plans do not pass down through the structural terrain of the implementing organizations unchanged. There is an additional point to this assertion. The implementation process begins at the hierarchy next to, say, the regional office. For instance, when the Director of the Zonal Department begins to allocate financial budgets and technical personnel to different Woreda Departments, he/she is indeed performing the implementation tasks stipulated in the plan of the Regional Department. So, as a plan passes through the state's organizational terrain, it becomes more and more adapted to the institutional/organizational reality of each department. What is written in the plan document and what is actually happening at the ground level then gradually become two different things. This is why the bottom-up approach is often proposed as a better alternative to overcome the organizational/institutional problems of plan implementation. But protagonists of this approach often fail to see that so long as financial and organizational resources are concentrated at the "top", bottom-up plans must still pass through the same structures in order to get the necessary support.

The complexity of decision making-processes, task referrals and power relationships suggests that we need a strategic approach that facilitates the application of flexible and adaptable method of planning and implementation. I suggest the assignment of planning functions to the Federal, Regional, Zonal and Woreda levels of the Ethiopian government hierarchy (see Figure 2). However, since our main concern is the issue of local development, attention will be focused only on Zonal level planning with the Woreda as a basic planning unit. In other words, the Zone becomes a "regional planning area" while the Woreda serves a "regional planning function". As pointed out above, the Woreda is an area larger than the

Kebele area and smaller than the “region”, so that it represents the interface between rural society and the state. Moreover, given the country’s scarce technical, financial and organizational resources, Ethiopia cannot afford the luxury of creating and supporting a planning apparatus in each rural Kebele area. I do not intend to outline a step-by-step method of defining planning functions and implementation responsibilities. Instead, I will develop a framework that will help us understand the kind of methodology needed to generate a common vision of policy, programme or project goals, or to frame and reframe issues and test decisions against the actual organizational capacity of each agency at Zonal, Woreda and Kebele levels. The emphasis here is on the need to create participatory structures that bring an array of interest groups together to develop a common perspective on the nature of problems, and to share ideas on the best ways to design effective strategies of action. In this way, development agencies must tap the talent and intellect of ordinary citizens who can bring invaluable information to the planning, implementation and evaluation processes and who have the capacity to play important mediating roles when citizens confront each other or when competing interests generate conflict.

The present Ethiopian federal system has transferred a range of responsibilities to the Regional States (see Chapter 3). The Regions are in turn organized into four hierarchies: Regional State, Zone, Woreda and Kebele Administrations (see also Chapter 3). The new federal constitution envisages a strong Regional State at the Center and autonomous Woreda administrative organizations, with Zones playing an intermediary role to facilitate planning and budgeting decisions and the flow of resources from federal and regional agencies to the Woreda level agencies. Moreover, the EPRDF has a planning ideology that emphasizes

zuria melese (iterative) planning. In fact, EPDF officials like to illustrate their vision of the planning method in the following way: Programme or project initiatives are identified at the Kebele level through participatory needs assessment exercises. The information is then taken to the Woreda administration. The Woreda assesses “feasibility” by 1) weighing the cost of the project, for example, against available financial resources and skilled manpower, 2) determining the extent to which community or local resources can support the project, and 3) determining how much (resources) are expected from the government. The proposal is then sent back to the Kebele Council. Upon approval by this Council the plan is presented to the Woreda Rural Development Committee (RDC) which further reviews and sends it to the Zonal administration for financial funding and technical assistance. The Zonal Executive Committee does another review of the plan for the purpose of budgeting decisions and to ensure that the proposal falls within the government’s policy priority areas.

The North Gondar Administrative Zone (NGZ) plans and administers six sectors: agriculture, health, education, road construction, water, mining and energy, and finance (Figure 4). The various departments submit their plan to the Zone administration, whose Executive Committee reviews the plans in accordance with the overall policy framework of the Amhara National Regional State. Upon approval, each Department would send a *merha geber* (an action plan) to the Department of Planning and Economic Development (DPED), which is supposed to monitor and evaluate the progress of programme or project activities. Agriculture, education, health and finance are directly represented at the Woreda level by their respective field agencies. All departments are expected to discuss their project plans and to assess work strategies in the Woreda’s Rural Development Committee (RDC).

This is all easier said than done. The Woredas' role has been limited to implementing plans formulated by the Zonal departments. Planners at the Zonal offices basically decide what is to be done, and how it should be done. There is nothing that can be done without the prior knowledge and approval of the Zonal political elites, or department bureaucrats. Even though any Zonal department plan calls for "other sectoral ministries to get involved", matters like the selection of project sites and the provision of technical support, the issue of "involvement" has never been defined within a clear institutional/organizational context (i.e., who does what and how much assistance is expected from another sectoral department). Although the DPED claims to facilitate the sharing and coordination of resources among the various departments, its activities are largely limited to touring project areas in order to monitor the progress of projects. And one must question its effectiveness, given the weak organizational capacity and the inadequate professional staff of the organization.

EPRDF officials are quick to say that "it takes time to make it [their planning ideology] more practical" and to some extent this is a legitimate argument. There is little planning capacity at the local and Woreda levels. The government's *akem gembata* (capacity building) programme has enabled many department personnel and political authorities to attend training sessions in the regional capital, Bahir Dar, for two to three months. But it will be a long time before the Woreda departments achieve an adequate technical capacity that deals with multiple task assignments. Resources are not also available. Ethiopia feels the devastating impact of a civil war that destroyed the social and economic infrastructure in the society.

WME = Water, Mineral and Energy
 DPED = Department of Planning and Economic Planning
 RDC = Rural Development Committee

Figure 4. Zonal Hierarchy

To make the matter worse, the country is faced with an erosion of stable organizational resources following the EPRDF's dismantling of many institutions in its desire to control the bureaucratic apparatus. Third, in spite of EPRDF's attempt to install the *adis mewakir* (new structure) in the state system, the bureaucracy still remains the most powerful resister to organizational change. Even worse, some of what Ethiopians like to label as *del melese* officials (post-victory officials = those who rose to power after EPRDF's take-over of the state) have become the most notorious bureaucrats who impede public participation and who have instead become experts in laundering project money. Fourth, there are no clearly defined areas of responsibility to coordinate the various departmental activities. For instance, the Woreda's RDC is supposed to review and approve any plan but has no mandate to influence the direction of departmental activities. In fact, if the Director of the agriculture department accepts the RDC's advice to change the plan, he/she can face criticisms by bureaucrats at the Zone's Department of Agriculture. Frustrated EPRDF officials accused the department "professionals" of elitism and ignorance. The Department personnel in turn complain that they are dealing with illiterate politicians who have no idea of "how things work" in the government. Such antagonistic relations can be the major factors affecting performance of the government's programme initiatives.

In the first section of this chapter, I attempted to identify three areas of responsibility that correspond to different levels of organizational capacity, namely 1) activities that can be carried out by community-based groups, such as soil and water conservation, or tree planting, including mobilizing community financial resources; 2) activities that can be organized and coordinated by KAs and SCs, such as mobilizing labor and material for the

construction of schools, health facilities, building small-dams and rural roads, the organization of planning meetings, experience exchange and training sessions and the administration of service delivery;

and 3) activities that are planned and administered by government agencies, such as R&D, land reform, environmental protection, financial and technical assistance, infrastructure building, exploring market opportunities, training and so forth. We can further simplify the task of identifying areas of responsibilities by putting the set of activities into a “policy”, “programme” and “project” framework (see Figure 5 and Box 2). A policy is a broad statement of goals that strives to achieve some end value in society. As such, a policy can only tell us about the vision of change and the direction of resource flows. Programmes have more-narrowly-focused, space and time bound objectives (a Five-Year Plan, for example), while projects are those “programme activities” that are geared to accomplishing certain objectives within specific time and resource parameters.

Let us consider the following hypothetical example: The Ethiopian government proclaims that “food security” is its top *policy* priority. The Ministry of Agriculture then develops an extension service and management *programme* that facilitates the widespread adoption of fertilizers and improved seeds. The Minister states that crop production will be raised by X percent within the next five years. *Projects* would then be the activities components of this extension *programme*. Hence, for example, the goal of achieving food security within five years (by raising production by X percent) demands 1) input provision, 2) adequate organizational infrastructure, 3) training extension workers, 4) devising credit and loan schemes, 5) designing “demonstration sites”, 6) annual evaluation of results, and

so forth. Each project has its own set of activities. For example, designing demonstration sites will involve 1) site selection, 2) site design, 3) recruiting “model farmers”, 4) defining time frames for technical advice, 5) monitoring and evaluation, and so on.

All the programme and project structures create a web of decision-making points, task referrals and power relationships, and together they come to constitute what was referred to above as the “implementation terrain”. Although it is possible to identify areas of responsibility that are consistent with the capacities of organizations operating at different level of hierarchy, this all depends on the particular nature of the policy, programme or project. However, some general statements are possible. We can say that the federal and regional governments must play an important role in policy formulation where policies deal with society-wide concerns. Zonal and Woreda administration must plan and manage medium and long term programmes and projects. But responsibilities are not clear when we are dealing with what Rondinelli (1993) calls “experimental projects” which are “generally small-scale, highly exploratory, risky ventures that do not always provide immediate or direct economic returns or yield quick and visible results (p. 119)”. Running such experimental projects must then be the responsibility of both federal and regional authorities, since they often involve large

Box 2.

Depending on the scope of the intended purpose, four levels of responsibility for planning and managing policies, programmes and projects can be identified in the following way. Note, however, that programmes can have both medium and long term objectives. For instance, credit and loan programmes have a medium term objectives, since the intended purpose is to help people create assets. Compare this with other essential social service programmes (education and health, for example) which should be supported on continual basis.

Policy: Federal and Regional governments

Long-term programmes: Federal and Regional governments, Zonal Administration

Medium-term Programmes: Zonal and Woreda Administration

Projects: Woreda and Kebele Administration

Source: Compiled by the author.

expenditures and know-how. In another instance, both the federal and regional governments may be involved in some Zonal or Woreda programmes to ensure that medium or long term objectives meet national standards. But, in general, we can say that the federal and regional governments can provide leadership, capital investment and management of long-term programmes, while Zonal and Woreda level agencies can be responsible for short and medium term programmes or projects. The KA administrations and community-based organizations can play a supplementary or complementary role to support these government efforts in the local area. Yet, one should not place high expectations on “local participation”. Rural people are farmers, they are not planners or administrators. They pay taxes to finance government expenditures and it should be up to the government to provide them with services.

Let us now turn to local development planning. With the Woreda as a basic unit of planning, what is needed is a Woreda Advisory and Technical Team (WATT) which plays a dual role of planning programme and project activity and mediating between the various departments (see Figure 6). WATT also creates a direct link with the Kebele level organizations to initiate planning processes and to help define their area of responsibilities. The central issue in such an approach is creating a cooperative spirit. Cooperation means sharing ideas and experience on such issues as task and resource allocation, strategy formulation, monitoring and evaluation. It also means increasing the knowledge of what each agency is doing in the field, so that they can complement each other's activities. WATT will then do the following:

- Assist departments to set their own priorities in a manner that integrates their plans within

the Woreda and regional planning framework and national development strategy;

- Link with community/local level agencies to initiate planning processes;

- Provide technical assistance in the area of formulating work plans, evaluation and monitoring results:

- Assess the organizational capacities of each department and facilitate arrangements for resource sharing and temporary resource transfers (borrowing supplies, placing the technical staff of one agency with another, for example);

- Identify sources of technical and material assistance and help agencies with relevant resource networks;

- Carry out participatory monitoring and evaluation on an ongoing basis, to assess the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms;

- Undertake continuous research to help departments define issues and courses of action more accurately, thereby enabling them to adjust their strategies to changing socio-economic and political circumstances in the local environment.

WATT can evolve out of the decentralized unit of the Zone's DPED, or it can consist of representatives from the various Woreda departments and Kebeles. But developing the criteria to select these individuals may be very problematic, since the interference of Woreda politicians in the process is inevitable. As a result, government politics, rather than public participation, shapes the nature of the Woreda's planning agency. In order to bring an array of interest groups together in planning processes, WATT should be independent of the politico-administrative apparatus and be concerned with planning, coordination and monitoring. Moreover, WATT needs a clearly defined mandate. Although the new federal

constitution has given certain decision-making powers to the Woredas, this will help little to define WATT's power. The government should, in accordance with its bottom-up planning ideology (see above), then pass legislation that defines the role and responsibilities of a Woreda level planning team.

Figure 5. Policy-Programme-Project Hierarchy

WME = Water, Mineral and Energy
 DPED = Department of Planning and Economic Planning
 RDC = Rural Development Committee
 WTAT = Woreda Technical and Advisory Team

Figure 6. Woreda Level Planning

In the end, the purpose of this chapter appears to be to suggest another “technical fix” for the problem of decentralized planning model. But one can only go as far as this to be realistic, instead of suggesting solutions that only work in a hypothesized world. On the other hand, one central part of my argument has been to suggest that an effort must be made to determine *what can be*, and *what cannot be, decentralized* to local level agencies. Decentralization strategies have little relevance for a country’s development needs unless adequate planning and management capacity exists at the local level. Institutional changes, devolution of power, transfer of resources, and so on, can only help local agencies to maneuver through the web of decision-making structures, but it cannot overcome the complexities and uncertainties generated by rapidly changing social, economic and political environments.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

Since the 1970s the issue of “participation” has emerged as a dominant policy agenda. Participation has been viewed not only as a citizen’s right to influence the policy process and its outcomes but also as an important way to generate knowledge about real development needs and priorities and as a mechanism for mobilising society’s own resources to support programme or project initiatives. The general view is that greater participation requires overcoming structural problems inherent in state structures and induces better organizational development at the local level. The first task directs attention to the issue of institutional reform and decentralized decision making, the second emphasizes the need for local capacity building.

This thesis has attempted to address the issue of local capacity building within a broader context of rural development theory and practice. Chapter 2 examined the different discursive regimes of “development”. It argued that there is a difference between what “development” says it is doing and what is actually happening at the ground level (Crush, 1995). This has resulted in what Watts (1989) calls the “general crisis” of theory and practice. And this means three things. First, widely accepted concepts, such as “rural development”, “economic development”, “agricultural development”, “community development”, “empowerment”, “popular participation”, “civil society”, and so forth, are not helping us to understand social reality. Second, widely practised methods of formulating and implementing development initiatives are not providing us with appropriate frameworks and

tools for carrying out development work. As a result, what is planned does not often produce effective results; in fact, it can produce outcomes that bring about a negative impact on society. Finally, generally speaking, “development” is taking place not because of the effective contribution of external aid or the effective performance of development agencies but because it is being initiated “from within” (as Taylor and MacKenzie [1992] argue). People pull their social and economic resources together to cope with enduring conditions of poverty as well as to create more or less effective strategies which help to make an adjustment to the rapidly changing societal environments. Yet such initiatives are often undermined by the modernization impulse of macro economic planners, rural development strategists, the so-called grassroots development agencies (NGOs), and above all, national leaders.

The discourse of “development” is a homogenizing global force. It imposes uniform ways of knowledge generation, policy analysis, planning and management, regardless of the differences in history, culture, resource endowment, institutional capacity and legal-political systems of countries, regions or communities. As we saw in Chapter 3, in spite of Ethiopia’s unique history and social, cultural and political circumstances, rural development policies and practices reflect the mainstream “development” policies and practices. There is no doubt that the EPRDF government remains committed to bringing about changes in rural society. I always saw political cadres and extension workers going to rural areas to “promote development”. National leaders have also been good at talking about decentralization and bottom-up planning. However, decentralizing the Ethiopia state to ethnically defined regions may pose a danger to the unity of the country, especially if the new federal structure fails

to work towards meeting the political and material aspirations of the people. Yet EPRDF's decentralization policy provides an opportunity to promote regional autonomy and local self-administration. It has created structures that allow regions and lower levels of the state hierarchy to make certain decisions. However, the problem remains how to make the system work. Political and institutional structures must be created to enable people to have a say in the decision making-process and to manage local affairs. I have noted that the "intellectual" criterion in electing the Woreda Executive Committee members has created a barrier for rural people (Chapter 4), and this prevents them from participating in the decision-making process. The oppression of peasant leaders by Woreda political elites and bureaucracy remains a major problem. Police beating, intimidation and discrimination by bureaucrats, bribery, nepotism, the list goes on, all work to the disadvantage of the peasant population. Decentralization and popular participation are possible if political leaders make more commitments to encourage people to articulate their needs and aspirations. And one way of promoting this goal is to build the organizational capacity of local society.

Assessing the role of local organizations in Northern Ethiopian society has been the central theme of the discussion and analysis in this thesis. The vitality of local organization's role has never been disputed. Many scholars and practitioners have often argued that "grassroots" organizations "are" or "can" be effective social agencies to promote self-administration of local affairs. However, although reference is often made to the "empowerment" rhetoric of many elites and the story of "mass movements", little has been done to examine in depth the "what", "how", and "why" questions which pertain to the roles, structures and functions of local organizations. How are relationships within

organizations created and sustained? What are the intents and meaning of participation? Why do organizations have different capacities?

The case studies of “formal” and “informal” organizations in Lay Armachiho Woreda of Gondar, Northern Ethiopia have attempted to answer these and other similar questions. “Formal” organizations are rural Kebele administrative units (KAs) and service cooperatives (SCs), while “informal” organizations are *mahaber* (religious association) and *debait* (farm work groups). The study has sought to make a contribution to an understanding of the organizational question of local development by examining the mechanical/operational functions of organizations and the socio-economic, cultural, political and physical/environmental settings within which they operate in a particular area of Ethiopia. In doing so, the study found that decision-making, participation and legitimacy in local organizations do not simply involve a higgling-haggling among “community people” (Chapters 4 and 5). It demands an engagement in a systematic mode of interaction to frame relationships based on individual choices, not necessarily “community” values. This challenges the mainstream view which assumes that community values always serve as a thread that holds individuals together and enables them to engage in a spirit of unity (shared perspectives), cooperation (collective action) and egalitarianism (resource sharing). But unity, cooperation and egalitarianism can be perceived on different “material”, “ideological” and “symbolic” grounds (as Carney and Watts [1990] argue). In our context, the “material” means one’s ability to get access to productive resources and to influence production decisions. The “ideological” implies the source of legitimacy for one’s relative claim on resource use rights and the source of legitimacy for the structuration of individual

relationships within the organizations. The “symbolic” refers to the “world view” that helps individuals to rationalize social phenomena, such as accepting or rejecting ascribed roles, obligations and divisions of responsibility. The “material”, “ideological” and “symbolic” aspects of the local society then create “social equilibrium” which benefits some individuals and marginalizes others. This in turn generates processes of action and interaction within the context of individual or collective resistance, confrontation, negotiation, accommodation, withdrawal, acceptance, and so on.

The evidence from the case studies supports this argument. Individual relationships within KA and SC organizations were defined on “ideological” terms (Chapter 4). Membership criteria, decision making structures, leadership roles, participation, and so forth, were defined by government legislation (note that national/political ideology is automatically translated into rules and regulations through legislation). As such, people’s actions and interactions within KAs and SCs were mediated by government policy, not by community values. The tensions and conflicts that characterized the land reform period demonstrate that people were using the Ethiopian state’s ideology of “land ownership” to compete and negotiate among themselves in order to get access to land resources. In other words, since “rules” were defined on ideological terms (that is, the state has defined the conditions of access and control of land), community values were of little value as means of conflict resolution, negotiation and accommodation. By contrast, relationships within *mahaber* organizations reflect the symbolic “terms” of social organization (Chapter 5). Although individual choices influence how one decides to associate himself/herself with a *mahaber*, spiritual and social values still remained the guiding principles of the organization. However,

the absence of women in the *mahaber* leadership demonstrates the significance of the “symbolic” element in the structuration of individual relationships. Even though women continued to play a major role in the function of *mahabers*, religious and cultural values still dictated that men were elected into the leadership. Finally, the case study of *debait* organizations has shown that labor exchange arrangements were dictated by individual choices (also Chapter 5). The notion of “working together” should not disguise the economic “meaning” of *debait*s.

The thesis also assessed the existing and potential capacity of local organizations, and whether or not it is possible to re-orient their functional performance to initiate and support rural development activities (Chapter 7). KAs, SCs, *mahabers* and *debait*s provide different organizational arenas at a different scale of interaction in local society. And this arises from, among other things, the legal/political mandate, organizational capacity, resource endowment, membership size, and above all, “purpose” of the organization’s existence (Chapter 6). Hence, for example, SCs cover three KA areas, therefore, they were designed to incorporate a larger number of people. KAs, with their strong administrative infrastructure and government mandate, are the most powerful social agencies. *Mahabers* and *debait*s can be simply viewed as community-based safety-net organizations. As such, they consist of a small number of like-minded individuals, all of whom may or may not live in the same community. For these reasons, *mahabers* and *debait*s are more participatory than KAs and SCs, precisely because the latter are large and hierarchical organizations and also because the Ethiopian government defines the intent and mode of participation in their domains.

Leaders, committee members and the general membership of these organizations gather under a tree, on church grounds, “market places” or anywhere in the local area, to talk about important issues and to pass decisions that affect local life. Although the government defines participation in its own “public” arena (in KA and SC meetings), the policy implementation task is carried out by rural KA and SC officials who sometimes ignore, consciously or unconsciously, the blueprint guidelines. In Chapter 7, we looked at how an NGO called Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief was attempting to utilize the structure of local organizations. We also looked at how attempts were being made by government agencies in Lay Armachiho Woreda to organize people into *debaitis* for the purpose of promoting conservation activities. In both cases, we observed that organizations work effectively the way they are. In addition, we tried to identify different scales of activity suited to the capacity of each set of organizations in local society. For instance, it was shown that *mahabers* and *debaitis* can be more suited to initiate and coordinate community-based, small-scale activities, while KAs and SCs have the organizational means to mobilise human and material resources to initiate and support activities at a scale larger than the community. We are then left to answer the following question: why do development agencies often fail to make use of the potential of local organizations? The political issue has already been pointed out above. What is worthy of emphasizing here is that there is a “modern is better” mentality among politicians, planners, administrators and scholars. Everything rural is always viewed as unproductive, “backward” and “inferior”. I was amazed many times to hear even elementary school students calling each other as *balager* (peasant), meaning a person who does not conduct himself/herself in an appropriate manner. Such negative

perceptions and attitudes towards rural society lead to the imposition of *zemenawi siraat* (modern system) from above that creates barriers which prevent people from participating in programmes or projects. In fact, in the past efforts were always geared at constructing “appropriate organizations” that were mainly intended to help agencies induce people’s participation in project settings. But when programme or project activities are phased out, agencies abandon “project organizations” without adequate social and physical infrastructures needed to operate and maintain them. Officials then put the blame on the local people for their reluctance to take over responsibilities. But people are rarely involved in the project processes, nor are local leaders invited to participate in planning and budgeting decisions. Many agencies do not even allow people (=beneficiaries) to enter their highly guarded office compounds.

I have also attempted to address the conceptual and methodological issue of local capacity building (Chapter 7). Capacity building was viewed as acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to enhance people’s ability to initiate and administer local development projects. Capacity building also has to do with the possession of adequate capital and know-how required to generate wealth. In this “modern era”, economic power gives way to social power. To remain poor means to become increasingly vulnerable to oppression and exploitation by the powerful political and economic interest groups. Second, capacity building demands structural changes in the organizations. Local organizations create both enabling and constraining conditions. Both old and new structures might not achieve a “fit” with some of the needs which prevail in the present socio-economic order. For example, people need equal access to, and control of, natural resources, organizational resources and

other opportunity generating processes. Finally, as I repeatedly pointed out, there must be changes in government politics and state institutions. Available “local capacity” can be of little use as long as mainstream institutions continue to exclude local level social agencies from the decision making process.

As noted above, it is important to define roles and areas of responsibility for local organizations in ways that match their organizational and resource capacities. There are those who strongly argue in favour of “state withdrawal”, as if the services of local organizations can be a substitute for state functions. But rural people are agricultural producers, not planners, administrators or technicians. We can expect, for example, self-help groups or peasant associations to collaborate with outside agencies in carrying out conservation activities but we cannot turn them into “project organizations”. This does not deny people a role in the development process. My argument is that we need to consider *what can, and what cannot be, decentralized*. Decentralization should be viewed as a planning process to determine what can be done better by governments and what can be done better by local level agencies. The notions of “devolution”, “delegation”, “deconcentration”, and so on, tend to imply that political elites and the leaders of “civil society” should divide everything equally (the power, institution and resources). Then, we find that there is not adequate local capacity to administer the function of institutions, to direct the state’s resources towards productive investment and to exercise power effectively in ways that promote local autonomy. Another element in my argument, therefore, is that the existence of local capacity may be a precondition for the successful execution of decentralization strategies.

This argument should not imply that decentralization must await the development of local capacity. Decentralization policies can be transformed from a blueprint text to a flexible and adaptive strategy that enables both government and society to be involved in process of learning and experience accumulation (as Rondinelli [1993] argues). I have proposed one such framework, namely regional planning (Chapter 7), wherein planning and implementation involve maneuvering through a web of decision structures, task referrals and organizational power relationships. It is possible to reduce the difficulties of planning and implementation by identifying different levels of planning functions and by defining different areas of responsibility that correspond with the capacity of each agency (local, regional and central, for example). In the Ethiopian context, the regional planning approach took the Zonal Administration as a “planning area” and the Woreda Administration as a “planning function” (see figure 1). The Zone as “planning area” helps planners to recognize the region’s distinctive social, economic, spatial, political and cultural identity and to formulate regional-specific programmes or projects that strive to produce benefits consistent with the particular needs and aspirations of the local population. The Woreda Administration represents a scale larger than the KA area and smaller than the Zonal Administration. As a “planning function”, the Woreda helps to develop local needs-oriented investment criteria, to encourage participatory decision making and to build the local spirit to mobilize social and economic resources in the society.

A mountain of material has been written on various theories and methods of policy, programme or project planning and analysis. And the “once defended real cause” is always “displaced” by another cause and the old solution is replaced by a new one (Samoff, 1990).

But too often there is little effort to develop ideas, concepts or methods that allow flexibility and adaptability in a rapidly changing environment that produces unpredictable outcomes. Development agencies can “muddle through “ in the “development field” if they recognize the high level of uncertainty caused by rapidly changing societal environments. However, recognizing that uncertainty is endemic does not imply that there should be another blueprint formula to “work through uncertainty” but that we should be able to acquire knowledge of what is happening at the ground level and take incremental steps to experiment projects that allow us to learn from their results (Rondinelli, 1993). We should also abandon the (traditional) tendency to make a category of “those things” that are good or bad in general. Instead, we should appreciate that unexpected outcomes are the inevitable result of policy, programme or project processes and that almost all policies can be “good” or “bad”, depending on the circumstances in which they are implemented.

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Note: Ethiopian names start with the first name.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Glossary

- Abawora gebere:*** ordinary farmer
Adis mewaker: new structure
Afelama: compensation paid for crop damage by cattle
Afe-lique: leader
Agelgelot mahaber: service organization
Akem gembata: capacity building
Akrab: proximity to homestead
Badma: place of birth
Balager: peasant
Buden: group
Chincha: sandy, low potential land
Chika shum: tax collector
Dagna: chairman
Debait: farm work group
Debla: fallow-period
Dega: high altitude
Del melese: literally means those individuals who decided to join the EPRDF after it took over the Ethiopian state.
Dem: revenge
Filmia: the traditional way (pre-1975) of contesting for land claim by making bore-holes land by oxen-powered drought
Fitawrari: a higher military rank, used before the creation of a regular army
Fitih: justice
Gebre Haile: task force
Gedel: land laying on a higher slope
Gemgema: performance evaluation
Gote: sub-Kebele
Idir: mutual assistance organization
IDR: Institute of Development Research
Iqub: saving cooperative
Injera: soft bread
Kebele: a rural administrative unit
Kefategna: greedy

.....continued

- Kenga:*** an arrangement made among two individuals, each owning an ox, to use the two oxen on a rotating basis
- Kerm:*** barren land after harvest
- Ketemegna:*** urban people
- Ketena:*** sub-Kebele
- Kola:*** low altitude
- Kutaba:*** savings group
- Kutara:*** kid
- Lem:*** fertile land
- Mahaber:*** religious association
- Mahala:*** Swearing in the name of God to prove one's innocence
- Medebegna:*** "regular" farmer = a farmer who is not assisted by an extension programme
- Mender:*** village
- Mereja:*** intelligence
- Merha gebre:*** action plan
- Mermari:*** investigator
- Muhur:*** intellectual
- Rist:*** a system of claiming land use right on the basis of recounting one's ancestor who once had inhabited the area
- Shifta:*** rebel
- Shimagle:*** elders committee
- Tela:*** local beer
- Tsebele:*** holy (medicinal) water
- Timad:*** hectare
- Walge:*** lazy
- Wase:*** guarantor
- Womber:*** head of the Kemant church
- Woreda:*** district
- Woynadega:*** middle altitude
- Wukela:*** representing someone in court or elders committee
- Wurch:*** cold
- Yebelay Akal:*** higher authority
- Zemenawi siraat:*** modern system
- Zuria meles ikid:*** iterative planning

Appendix II

Calendar of Field Work Activities

September - October 1996

- Contacted the following institutions and officials
- Addis Ababa University
- North Gondar Zone Administration Office
- Lay Armachiho Woreda Council
- Lay Armachiho Department of Agriculture
- North Gondar Department of Agriculture
- Kerker, Shumara/Lomeye, Ambezo/Chira Kebele officials
- Cooperative officials
- Attended two *mahaber* gatherings
- Attended one *debait*
- Contacted 18 individuals in the communities of Kerker, Shumara/Lomeye and Ambezo/Chira Kebeles

November 1996

- Went around to Chira/Ambezo and Kerker Kebeles to attend and observe 17 *mahabers*. I did intensive observation on three of the *mahabers* while I recorded the number of people in the rest of the groups.
- Met six leaders of *mahabers*
- Attended two events organized by the Department of Agriculture
- Met government officials

December 1996

- Attended and observed six *debait*s
- Wrote a progress report
- Attended three public meetings
- Talked to 21 individuals in the communities.

January 1997

- Attended a training session
- Interviewed 3 Kebele officials, 2 political cadres and 2 militia
- Interviewed Cooperative Managing Committee in Ambezo/Chira Kebele
- Interviewed the Treasurer of Gind-metaya cooperative
- Talked to the Secretary of the Woreda Council.
- Talked to 16 individuals in the communities
- Attended three religious festivals

February 1997

- Met the Secretary, Woreda Council member and political cadre of Lomeye/Shumra Kebele
- Met an officer of the Department of Planning and Economic Development (Gondar)
- Met the Director of the Department of Agriculture.
- Read project documents from the Departments of Planning and Economic Development and Department of Agriculture (Gondar).
- Went to Erobit (Sub-Woreda of Lay Armachiho) and did as much as I could to contact the officials of two Kebeles in the area.
- Attended three *mahaber* gathering and made observations.
- Interviewed four local elders about local political and cultural history (Kerker Kebele)
- Met the government official responsible for Cooperatives
- Interviewed two peasant "bureaucrats" (see Chapter 4)
- Talked to 32 individuals in the communities
- A very brief communication with three Land Allocation Committees

March 1997

- Traveled to Lay Gayint Woreda to see CPAR's projects. I met sixteen Kebele officials and project officers.
- Traveled to Woredas Chilga, Sanja, Dembia and Wegera and had a meeting with the Chairs of the Woreda Councils, cooperative officials (Wegera and Dembia) and Directors of the Department of Agriculture (also Wegera and Dembia).
- Read auditors' reports in the office of the North Gondar Administration Zone
- Met the managers of Commercial Bank of Ethiopia and Development Bank of Ethiopia.
- Met an officer from the Department of Finance
- Attended public meetings
- Met four Kebele officials
- Talked to 23 local individuals

April 1997

- Wrote a progress report
- Went around to see three terrace construction sites in Kerker Kebele
- Met the Chairman of the Woreda Council
- Interviewed two farmers and talked to other 4 individuals
- Attended a *debait* and made an observation
- Wrap up

May 1996

- Met an official from the Department of Health, read reports
- Read project documents from Department of Planning and economic Development
- Went to Bahir Dar (regional capital) and I only succeeded in arranging a brief meeting with the Amhara Development Association (an NGO) and in obtaining the Regional State's constitution from a government office.

End of May to August 7 (Addis Ababa)

Most of the time was spent reading literature at:

- Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Institute of Development Research at Addis Ababa University
- International Livestock Research Institute
- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

However, there were other activities, such as:

- Traveling to Wello and Tigray regions (which periodically are affected by famine)
- And talked with different people regarding my research.

Appendix III

North Gondar Zone Population Size and Density by Woreda (1995/96)

Woreda	Male	Female	Total	Area (km ²)	Density
Gondar Town	53,417	63,385	116,862	78	1,498
Gondar Zuria	100,389	96,530	196,919	1,512	130
Dembia	113,951	109,256	223,207	1,271	176
Wegera	96,155	91,685	187,840	1,812	104
Dabat	61,445	59,973	121,418	1,659	73
Debark	61,835	61,941	123,776	2,391	52
L/Armachiho	60,044	60,136	120,180	4,889	25
T/Armachiho	55,655	52,527	108,182	7,081	15
Chilga	86,768	83,201	169,969	3,945	43
Alefa/Taqusa	112,663	106,296	218,959	5,137	41
Metama	30,309	26,036	56,345	6,566	9
Belasa	74,200	69,250	143,450	2,390	60
Adarkay	55,463	54,039	109,502	3,320	33
Quara	18,970	17,429	36,399	4,655	8
Janamora	64,758	63,585	126,343	3,941	33
Beyeda	39,231	39,128	78,359	2,521	31
Total	1,085,319	1,054,387	2,139,310	53,168	40

Source: Projected Population from 1994 Population and Housing Census, NGZ Department of Planning and Economic Development, North Gondar Zone, 1997.

North Gondar Zone Rural Population by Woreda (1995/96)

Woreda	Male	Female	Total
Gondar Zuria	93,286	87,286	180,572
Dembia	106,202	98,612	204,814
Wegera	92,375	86,710	179,085
Dabat	56,609	53,365	109,974
Debark	55,344	53,364	108,708
Lay Armachiho	57,935	57,264	115,200
Tegede/Tach Armachiho	53,639	50,492	104,131
Chilga	82,363	77,593	159,956
Alefa Taqusa	107,393	99,056	206,453
Metema	24,513	20,327	44,840
Belesa	71,555	65,798	137,353
Quara	18,794	17,304	36,098
Janamora	64,111	62,584	126,695
Adarkay	52,210	49,958	102,168
Beyeda	38,867	38,450	77,317
Total	975,200	918,164	1,893,364

Source: Projected Population from 1994 Population and Housing Census, Department of Planning and Economic Development, North Gondar Zone, 1997.

North Gondar Zone Urban Population by Woreda (1995/96)

Woreda	Male	Female	Total
Gondar City	53,477	63,385	116,862
Gondar Zuria	7,103	9,244	16,347
Dembia	7,749	10,644	18,393
Wegera	3,780	4,975	8,755
Dabat	4,836	6,608	11,444
Debark	6,491	8,577	15,068
Lay Armachiho	2,109	2,871	4,980
Tsgede/Tach Armachiho	2,016	2,035	4,051
Chilga	4,405	5,608	10,013
Alefa	5,266	7,240	12,510
Metama	5,796	5,709	11,505
Belesa	2,645	3,452	6,097
Quara	176	125	301
Janamora	647	1,001	1,648
Adarakay	3,253	4,081	7,334
Beyeda	364	678	1,042
Total	110,113	136,233	246,340

Source: Projected Population from 1994 Population and Housing Census, Department of Planning and Economic Development, North Gondar Zone, 1997.

Appendix IV

Lay Armachiho Woreda Population Estimates by Kebele

Kebele ¹	Male	Female	Total
Tikil Dingay	2,156	2,936	5,092
Lomeye/Shumara	2,006	2,002	4,028
Kerker Medahniale/Endbina	2,024	2,092	4,116
Kech Aynetwuha/Kemfeta	2,434	2,340	4,774
Adisgie	1,512	1,464	2,976
Giha	1,307	1,301	2,608
Kerker Belegziabhere	1,425	1,414	2,839
Sebia/Sayna	2,368	2,502	4,873
Gramta	1,252	1,227	2,479
Abela/Bamblo	1,700	1,663	3,363
Chira/Ambezo	3,120	3,104	6,224
Anchew	1,517	1,548	3,065
Genbera/Angeraba	2,570	2,572	5,142
Ledaho	1,268	1,200	2,468

...continued.

¹

Note: The slash (/) indicate that two Kebeles (formerly peasant associations) have been brought into one Kebele administrative jurisdiction area.

Kebele	Male	Female	Total
Dazyhon	1,233	1,167	2,400
Mahin Abou	1,904	1,952	3,856
Chilga/Dewel	1,866	1,790	3,636
Kerewa/Mezewa	1,309	1,291	2,600
Begamgie	1,735	1,686	3,424
Birlebho/Enchinoko	3,188	3,118	6,306
Weynoch/Gezena	2,503	2,480	4,983
Medre Arone/Sata	2,571	2,471	5,042
Jinkra	1,295	1,175	2,470
Zeraige	2,464	2,362	4,826
Chinkya	1,761	1,768	3,539
Aleg/Muna	2,470	2,479	4,949
Janikaw/Kunjiba	2,747	2,745	5,492
Atsie Medir	2,200	2,138	4,338
Chaikir/Ayjua	2,610	2,643	4,916
Merina	2,516	2,400	4,916
Workmedir	1,227	528	1,755
Total	62,258	61, 588	123,846

Source: Planning and Economic Department, North Gondar Administrative Zone, 1996.

Appendix V

School Enrollment in North Gondar Zone By Woreda (1996/97)

Kindergarten

Woreda	No. of Schools	Male	Female	No. of Teachers
Metama	2	191	125	4
Dabat	1	4	16	1
Gondar City	10	657	578	24
Debark	1	91	64	1
Lay Armachiho	1	74	81	2
Adarkay	1	29	41	2
Dembia	2	46	62	3
Alefa	1	100	110	2
Wegera	2	93	123	4
Gondar Zuria	1	40	44	2
Chilga	2	95	94	4
Total	24	1,430	1,338	49

Source: NGZ Department of Education, 1996.

Elementary

Woreda	No. of Schools	Male	Female	Teachers	
				Male	Female
Gondar City	19	9,987	10,708	236	347
Lay Armachiho	31	4,421	7,925	156	86
Wegara	40	4,126	6,329	146	66
Chilga	32	3,611	5,956	128	70
Gondar Zuria	33	4,123	5,276	149	107
Dembia	43	3,528	5,683	158	102
Dabat	27	3,618	4,981	104	78
Debark	35	3,577	4,404	127	73
Alefa	25	2,959	4,118	89	48
Belesa	37	3,677	1,933	102	31
Adarkay	18	2,713	2,991	63	18
T.Armachiho	17	2,082	2,380	77	18
Metama	21	2,586	2,380	63	8
Janamora	19	1,596	1,158	153	15
Beyeda	13	1,997	573	45	0
Quara	10	830	425	37	0
Total	420	55,431	67,220	1,833	1,067

Source: NGZ Department of Education for North Gondar Zone, 1996.

Junior Secondary

Woreda	No. of Schools	Male	Female	Teachers Male	Female
Gondar City	8	3,263	4,296	127	20
Chilga	2	418	823	19	1
Dembia	4	534	653	39	3
Lay Armachiho	3	302	720	16	3
Gondar Zuria	5	412	369	24	1
Dabat	2	443	281	16	3
Debark	1	327	380	14	3
Wegera	2	268	307	13	2
Alefa	3	202	254	22	1
Metama	1	133	39	28	0
Adarkay	2	113	60	2	0
Belesa	2	68	31	1	1
Janamora	1	42	11	5	0
Beyeda	1	47	1	4	0
Total	39	7,639	8,225	330	38

Source: NGZ Department of Education for North Gondar Zone, 1996.

High School

Woreda	No. of Schools	Male	Female	Teachers	
				Male	Female
Gondar City	4	4,267	4,874	192	7
Dembia	2	678	671	32	1
Chilga	1	393	799	23	1
Lay Armachiho	1	269	432	9	1
Debark	1	317	269	13	0
Dabat	1	295	281	14	0
Alefa	2	143	193	5	0
Gondar Zuria	1	172	110	11	0
Wegera	1	88	59	10	1
Total	14	6,622	7,661	309	11

Source: NGZ Department of Education for North Gondar Zone, 1996.

Appendix VI

Tikil Dingay “Market” Day (November 6, 1996): Marketable Products

Food Crops

1. Maize
2. Sorghum
3. Durrarot (a variety of sorghum)
4. Redorgum (a variety of sorghum)
5. Chickpeas
6. Horse beans
7. Millet
8. Finger millet
9. Barley
10. Duragna (a variety which is a mix of barley and wheat)
11. Wheat

Oil Seeds

12. Noug
13. Flax

Fruits

14. *Teringo* (citrus medica)
15. Lemon
16. Banana
17. Peach

Cash Crops

18. Gesho (used to make local beer)
19. Endod
19. Coffee

.....continued.

Spices

20. Scared basil
21. Rue
22. Rapeseed
23. Green pepper
24. *Berbere* (red pepper)
25. Chilli pepper
26. Cardamom
27. Onion
28. Garlic
29. Curry
30. Black curry
31. Fenugreek
32. Mustard

Others

33. Egg
34. Chicken
35. Goat
36. Butter
37. Pumpkin
38. *Aregresa* (medicinal leaf used to treat sickness such as sun stroke)
39. *Gramta* (used to make traditional craft such as eating plate)
40. *Adese* (traditional perfume)
41. Phonix
42. Clay (cooking pot, baking pan, water container, and so on)
43. Thread
44. *Sendedo* (used to make traditional craft)
45. Gourd
46. A Variety of factory outlets which come from as far as Addis Ababa and the world market.

Source: Author's field notes.

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)

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