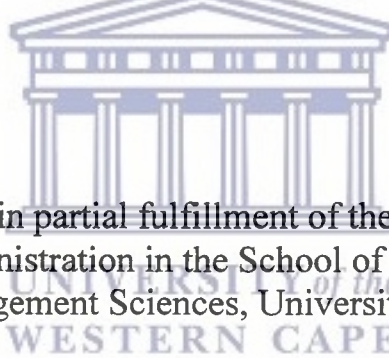


**A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON COMMUNITY  
EMPOWERMENT: THE CASES OF SELECTED  
NGOs IN ETHIOPIA**

BY

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A Mini-Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Administration in the School of Government, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, University of Western Cape

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Cape Town, September 2006

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## Declaration

I declare that *A Critical Perspective on Community Empowerment: Cases of Selected NGOs in Ethiopia*, is my own unaided work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references as indicated in the text. Furthermore, I declare that this mini-thesis has not been submitted at any university, college or institution of higher learning for any degree or academic qualification.

Sebilu Bodja

January 2006



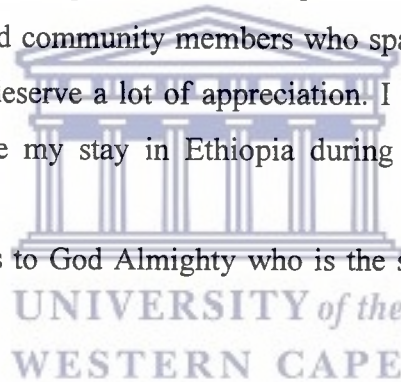
## Acknowledgment

I am grateful for a lot of individuals and organizations who have taken part to make this study abundantly a learning process. My gratitude first goes to my supervisor Ina Conradie whose intellectual guidance and keen insight immensely helped me to come up with this thesis.

I am also very thankful to my wife Helina Shimeles who has been tremendously supportive throughout my study by taking care of me and our son. I will always treasure your love. I am grateful for Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED) for sponsoring me and my family. I am particularly very thankful for the staff of the scholarship desk who were understanding and caring in every matter. My gratefulness is also to the staff of School of Government at University of Western Cape (UWC) who have made my study an enriching experience.

I am also indebted to numerous people who have helped me during the field research. Staff of the NGOs surveyed and community members who spared their precious time to provide information I needed deserve a lot of appreciation. I can not help thanking my parents and in-laws who made my stay in Ethiopia during the field research period comfortable.

Above all my deepest thanks is to God Almighty who is the source of my strength and every achievement in my life.



## Key Words

1. Community Empowerment
2. Development
3. Civil Society
4. Non-Governmental Organizations
5. Conscientization
6. Opportunity Structures
7. Assets
8. Agency
9. Formal/informal Rules
10. Collective Action



## **List of Abbreviations**

- AFD – Alliance for Development
- AHISDO – Addis Hiwot Integrated Sustainable Development Organization
- BBS – Basic Business Skill
- CBISDO – Community Based Integrated Sustainable Development Organization
- CBO/s – Community Based Organization/s
- CRDA – Christian Relief and Development Association
- DED – Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (German Development Service)
- DFID – Department for International Development
- DPPC – Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission
- HIV/AIDS – Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
- IFI/s – International Financial Institution/s
- IHAUDP – Integrated Holistic Approach Urban Development Project
- MCC – Mother and Child Care
- MOJ – Ministry of Justice
- NGO/s – Non-Governmental Organization/s
- OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
- PRA – Participatory Rural Appraisal
- RRC – Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
- SACCO/s – Saving and Credit Cooperative/s
- SAP/s – Structural Adjustment Program/s
- SPSS – Statistical Package for Social Scientists
- STD/s – Sexually Transmitted Disease/s
- UN – United Nations
- WB – World Bank
- WV-Urban ADP – World Vision Urban Area Development Program

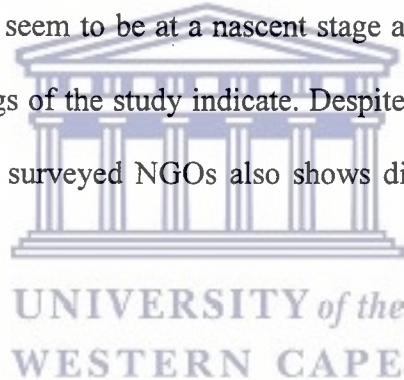


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## **Abstract**

Empowerment is a catchword that has recently entered current development debate. Development is largely perceived as a process of building capacities hence empowering people to be able to handle their affairs. As such it is a concept highly espoused by prominent development actors and mainly Non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The study attempted to examine the theoretical and empirical aspects of community empowerment from a critical perspective by surveying activities of three NGOs in Ethiopia. A recent framework developed by a working group of the World Bank for measuring and structuring analysis was used for analyzing findings. Conceptualization and practices of empowerment seem to be at a nascent stage and tools for measuring it as well; that is what the findings of the study indicate. Despite the rhetoric surrounding the concept, the experience of surveyed NGOs also shows disparities between theory and practice.



## 1. Chapter One: Introduction

Development incorporates diverse actors whose relative dominance in the past and present varies a lot. It is practically difficult to depict an accurate pattern of relationship between the dominance of a particular actor and an approach. But it goes without saying that development theories that have capitalized upon the indispensable role of one actor relative to the other have tried to explain the level of dominance different actors enjoyed over-time. Modernization and Dependency Theories, to a large extent, have explicitly and implicitly put emphasis upon the role of the state while alternative development has directed the emphasis to the role of the civil society namely grassroots and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Hence, NGOs have gradually been gaining an important role in development particularly in the past three decades. Though the emergence and growth of NGOs in the North and South has its distinct causations and routes, repeated reference is made to the fact that their proliferation is roughly a growing civil society response to the inadequacies of the state and state related agencies to address outstanding societal problems such as poverty and inequality.

For many years, development theory and practice followed a top-down approach and the result was marginalization of the poor and vulnerable groups for which development is intended. In the light of such reality, progressive NGOs have been characterized as providing alternative approaches to the failures of mainstream development theories and the paternalistic state – alternatives based upon the participation of the poor and the poorest, women and men, working from the grassroots (Craig and Mayo, 1995:6-7). Following the trend among many other NGOs in developing countries, NGOs in Ethiopia have tried to adapt to the changes in approaches by designing programmes and projects that reflect the changes in focus and strategies. Others have taken quite extraordinary steps by changing their entire orientation leading to radical transformations in their activities. In general, there is a growing tendency towards

flexibility to capture new approaches and gradually mainstream them to ongoing operations as a result of which community empowerment gained increasing attention.

Despite such developments, cases of successful community empowerment undertakings in the country are rare. There are obviously quite a range of factors causing and contributing to such a phenomenon. It will be an ambitious attempt to deal them all. However, this study will try to explain and verify, through empirical evidence, why NGOs' community empowerment activities have not been successful despite the overall increase in attention and allocation of resources.

The concept of empowerment has been at the center of the paradigm shift to alternative development. The Human Development Report (UNDP, 1993:1) states, "Development must be woven around people, not people around development - and it should empower individuals and groups than disempower them." Empowerment occupies a central place in driving such rethinking of development. Despite such significance, the concept lacks strong theoretical roots resulting in weak conceptualization. In addition, the operationalization aspect is similarly characterized by lack of widely available empowerment frameworks and means of measurement. Therefore, the study topic is strongly justified on the basis of its contribution to the body of knowledge in the sense that development actors can benefit from its findings.

On the other hand, Ethiopia, as one of the poorest countries in the world, is home to a number of NGOs. Huge amount of resources have gone into realizing development objectives among which empowering communities stands as a major one. Hence, the study topic is relevant since the presence of a large number of NGOs in the country and the perceived failures in their empowerment endeavors call for a critical assessment. The findings of this study will, therefore, provide guidelines for similar activities in the future.

The theoretical framework provides a broader background on the theory of civil society and how NGOs have risen to prominence in recent years. It continues to discuss the potential role NGOs play, the comparative advantage they possess and the limitations they exhibit in empowering beneficiaries. The conceptual origins of grassroots empowerment strategies have also been dealt to further structure the analysis. For the analysis, principally, a recent World Bank Framework was adopted. The framework argues that *agency* and *opportunity structures* act as independent variables to determine the degree of empowerment individuals or communities realize. The variables are broadly discussed in chapter two. The case studies of this research were critically examined with respect to the way they have designed empowerment activities and their achievements by looking at how community empowerment has been conceptualized and implemented in the projects. Hence, the main objective of the study is to critically examine community empowerment activities of NGOs by using a theoretical and analytical framework which incorporates various aspects of empowerment and identifies existing gaps in practice.

The specific objectives are: (a) to assess and measure the impact of empowerment activities of selected NGOs by looking at the way it is visualized and implemented; (b) assess the perception of the community<sup>1</sup> regarding the meaning of empowerment, the extent of its realization and the impact of activities of NGOs on their lives; (c) to identify possible reasons for the ineffectiveness of NGOs in realizing meaningful community empowerment; and (d) to assess the possible effects and implications of the perceived failures for civil society development in Ethiopia

The **second** chapter summarizes past and contemporary views on civil society by reviewing literature, discussing conceptual roots and practices of empowerment and presenting the theoretical design within which the main research questions are analyzed.

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<sup>1</sup> Here *Community* refers to individuals or group of individuals in a locality benefiting directly from the operations of surveyed NGOs.

The **third** chapter sets the context of analysis by describing the surveyed projects, their development priorities and strategies and overall legal and policy contexts and frameworks in which interaction among actors takes place. The **fourth** and **fifth** chapters present results of the field research together with analysis of the emerging findings. The **sixth** chapter further analyzes the major findings using relevant theoretical perspectives and discussing critical aspects of the analytical tool used in the study. The **seventh** chapter discusses possible effects of the findings on civil society development in Ethiopia and their implications for the NGO sector as a whole. Finally, conclusions are drawn from the empirical findings and present what can realistically be said regarding empowerment conceptions and practice based on the findings.



## **2. Chapter two: Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework attempts to present a structure for analysis by identifying major debates in the area of civil society, NGOs and community empowerment from a conceptual and practical perspective. The framework follows a method of argument in which historical and conceptual issues are discussed first followed by operational aspects of empowerment that the study vastly emphasizes upon.

### **2.1 Civil Society and NGOs**

Before looking at the potential and practical role NGOs can assume in the process of implementing empowerment activities, it is important to put in context the background of NGOs' emergence into current standing. Hence, the following discussion makes reference to classical writings on civil society and the state of civil society in Africa and Ethiopia.

#### **2.1.1 Historical origins, meaning and definition of civil society**

The concept of civil society is one of the complex topics of study in the world of social science and development. Quite a large volume of literature (Fine and Rai, 1997:8; Van Rooy, 1998:8) has been written in recent years as the concept drew the interest of academics and practitioners. Though historically, the theory of civil society was a topic in the writings of early Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, an organized study and a close resemble of the concept's contemporary usage is largely traced to the enlightenment period. Fine and Rai (1998:15-16) argue that enlightenment thinkers were highly influenced by the growth of changes in social life that were taking place. This was independent of the political society founded on the emergence of a bourgeois in the world of commerce, exchange and commodity production. The result was the emergence of individuals as independent owners of private property. In the light of such developments, there was a need to place civil society between the poles of private property on one hand and the state on the other. Hence, the main contribution of

enlightenment thought comes from its identification of the historical specificity of civil society between private life and political state. Among the notable pre-modern thinkers, Adam Ferguson, in his famous essay on the theory of civil society, argued for the creation of independent societies to guard against authoritarianism (Van Rooy, 1998:8). His work is largely considered as enhancement of earlier thought which linked the concept to its contemporary understanding. A number of other writers (Fine and Rai, 1997:133; Fisher, 1998:11), however, state that the current resurrection of the concept is largely attributable to the role of civil society in the struggle against communism in Eastern European countries in the 1980s.<sup>2</sup>

The various meanings of civil society illustrated in different literature largely vary depending on explanations given regarding the sphere and role of civil society in its relationship with the state and market. Conventionally, civil society is broadly conceived as including all public, political non-state activity occurring between the government and family (Kasfir, 1998:4). Others (Van Rooy, 1998:30), however, define civil society in terms of its purpose. Hence civil society is mostly referred to as the population of groups formed for collective purposes outside of the state and marketplace. In most cases, the purposes are considered good and beneficial to the quality of public life. Many groups in civil society attempt to attend to problems that are caused due to lack of capacity or failures of the state, market or other spheres of society often in a confrontational style.

### **2.1.2 NGOs as part of civil society**

There are different ways of defining NGOs and the term has different meanings in different scenarios (Wuyts et al, 1992:122; Fisher, 1998:5). The broadest definition comprises all organizations that are not-for-profit and are non-governmental such as all kinds of clubs, associations, cooperatives, charities, campaigning groups, etc. excluding

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<sup>2</sup> David Ost, 1990, also argues civil society as providing a different road from utopian socialism or capitalism but that which is in the middle.



informal networks and groupings (Wuyts et al, 1992:122; Fisher, 1998:5). A distinction, however, can be made based on their purpose – NGOs who cater for the benefits (non-financial) of their members and those set up for public benefit. Further distinction is made on the basis of the scope and scale of their activities – local, regional and international NGOs (Wuyts et al, 1992:122). The narrower definition of NGOs refers to those organizations that are not-for-profit and are devoted to aid and development (Wuyts et al, 1992:122).

*Local* NGOs comprise the so-called ‘people’s organization’ or ‘grassroots organizations’ which originated in local communities and aim at serving their members (Fisher, 1998:6-7). Such organizations include Church groups, self-help organizations, squatter associations, women’s clubs, village councils, interest associations, etc. (Wuyts, 1992:123; Fisher, 1998:6-7). *National* NGOs can be those who stand for the benefit of their members or the public or combine both. They can also be networks of similar grassroots organizations organized at a national level. In such cases, they are formed outside of the communities they aim to serve. They often confine their activities within national political boundaries and largely represent national views. They have links both to local NGOs at an intervention level and with international NGOs that channel resources for domestic use (Fisher, 1998:6-7). *International* NGOs are mainly those which raise support and resources in industrial countries in order to assist people in developing countries. The minimum requirement is for them to have sections in at least three countries (Wuyts et al, 1992:126). Such NGOs can also emerge from developing countries. They are characterized by enormous differences in the interests they represent mainly in relation to their source of funding. Some acquire funds directly from private contributors and others get large sums of their funds from the governments of the industrial countries. They operate in countries either through country offices or local partner NGOs or even governments.

Broadly speaking, NGOs are considered to have two major roles (Lewis and Wallace, 2000: 12). The first one is a kind of 'residual' role which fills in gaps in human needs not adequately covered by state or market. The second refers to their role as sources of alternative development approaches (Wuyts, 1992:118).

As NGOs implement programmes with health, literacy, microfinance or agriculture components, they have also been concerned with how projects enhance people's power - particularly the poor and marginalized (UNDP, 1993:87). The mainstreaming of empowerment in development is largely related to the operations of NGOs. Unlike mainstream development, empowerment comes from a background of grassroots or NGO activity which puts higher emphasis on bringing about development from below. It is argued that external assistance is required to organize grassroots initiatives and reduce their vulnerability because they lack an organized power base to withstand external pressures. This is where the role of NGOs is justified (IRED Nord, 1997:9).

### **2.1.3 Civil society and NGOs in Africa**

Plainly taking the conventional understanding of civil society and trying to uncover the dynamics in the African situation raises serious questions. One can start by asking whether the dichotomy of the state and civil society exists in Africa. A lot of experience and empirical evidence reveals that African states are poorly institutionalized, and therefore weakly emancipated from society and hence there is little scope of conceptualizing socio-political processes as a contest between a strong state and coherent civil society. The holders of power are not functionally detached from society and the state is largely characterized by cliental relationships based on kinship cleavages (Chabal and Daloz, 1999:21-22). The issue is whether properly institutionalized civil society that is separate from the state is emerging in Africa (Kasfir, 1998:9). Moreover, the role of patronage for maintaining African governments raises serious questions about the ability of civil organizations to maintain their autonomy from the state.

The other assumption that will be questioned is whether the emergence of civil society in Africa can be seen in same way like its western counterpart (Kasfir, 1998:9). Many assert that historical factors like colonization and the slow pace of democratization after independence in many African countries explain why it did not evolve in the same direction (Kasfir, 1998:9). While the above factors continue to affect the development of civil society in Africa, there are also signs of transition evidenced in the engagement of strong civil society in the current wave of democratization in many African countries. In this case, NGOs are said to be in the fore front (Ndegwa, 1996:1-2). There is an increasing momentum of opposition against undemocratic governments by NGOs that is further strengthened by the growth of grassroots organizations and alliances. Civil society in Africa especially NGOs are emerging as a counter-hegemonic force to which Western counterparts are responding with increasing financial and technical assistance (Kasfir, 1998:126-134).

Kasfir (1998:9) further argues that the recent growth of civil society is attributed to the poor performance of many African states in the 1980s to manage the economy and promote the badly needed growth. Apparently, in response to these failures, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) introduced a package of economic recovery initiatives under the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) aimed at assisting the poor performing economies in the Third World. SAPs mainly included measures like reducing the size and interference of the state in the market, privatization, trade and currency liberalization and ensuring overall macroeconomic stability. However, SAPs generally failed to improve the situation and are often blamed to have worsened the situation of poverty. As a result, there has been a new emphasis on the role of NGOs - considered in the West as representatives of civil society. Large resources are now channeled through NGOs operating beyond the clutch of the state as an attempt to avoid the world of state bureaucracy. However, for some people (Chabal and Daloz, 1999:22)

the proliferation of NGOs in Africa “... is rather the reflection of a successful adaptation to the conditions laid down by foreign donors on the part of local political actors who seek this way to gain access to new resources.”<sup>3</sup>

The situation in Ethiopia is no different from much of Sub-Saharan Africa. While the emergence of civil society organizations like Chambers of Commerce and professional associations dates back to the 1960s, NGOs basically came to the picture as a result of the devastating famines of 1973-74 and 1984-85 which occurred in the country (Clark, 2000:4). The second half of the last century is largely marked by the very slow and sporadic emergence of the NGO sector due to the repressive actions of consecutive dictatorial regimes. The only groups that were operational in the country in the mentioned period were international NGOs whose activities were confined to relief and emergency assistance. After the demise of the dictatorial military government in 1991, the country witnessed a sharp rise in the number of local NGOs.

Clark (2000:6-10) asserts that current developments in the NGO sector in Ethiopia can be described to have the following features. (a) There is a shift from relief to development. The fact that NGOs were restricted to relief operations meant that they mainly had short-term objectives. However, with the outlining of the national development strategy of the government in the early 1990s, NGOs were under pressure to change their orientation to be part of the overall development effort. The government further put in place *Guidelines for NGO Operations* and began to closely monitor and direct the work of NGOs which has accelerated the transition. (b) The NGO sector is vigorously pursuing capacity building goals. Lack of development under dictatorial governments, the squashing of civil society under the military government (1974-1991) and the role of international NGOs in the emergency assistance dictated that national NGOs have to start from scratch. (c) There is an increase in the number of NGO

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<sup>3</sup> For writers like Harry Blair et al, 1994, the increase in resources to African civil society organizations is argued from the perspective of fostering pluralism thereby strengthening democratic transitions. DANIDA (1995), argues in the same direction.

networks, alliances and forums reflective of the growing sophistication of the sector as traditional divisions and suspicions minimize.

## **2.2 The Concept of Community Empowerment**

Community empowerment is a concept whose theoretical roots are difficult to track since it evolved and is closely associated with the concept of participation in most literature. However, the following section deals with the definitional and conceptual origins of community empowerment as it is linked with the overall development debate.

### **2.2.1 Definition and meaning**

The term 'community' is a catchword that is put to different kinds of uses. The term basically denotes a socio-spatial entity though the scope of its usage can refer to villages, districts, towns and even cities (Midgley et al, 1986:24). In most literature, however, there is an implicit reference to the notion of 'lowest level of aggregation' to mean the smallest unit of socio-spatial organization. In a programme/project context<sup>4</sup>, however, the term community, refers to specific groups characterized by common features like impoverishment, vulnerability, deprivation, poverty, marginalization, etc. (IREN Nord, 1997:8-9). Hence, community empowerment is directed towards those groups that have been subjected to the aforementioned state or condition.

Various definitions of empowerment have been formulated which reveal the way the term has been perceived in different ways. Most definitions in the grassroots and NGO sector refer to a set of actions that need to be in place on the part of primary actors namely the community. One such a definition by Thomas-Slayter (1995), as cited in IREN Nord (1997:4) states "... empowerment is the process through which individuals, local groups, and communities, identify and shape their lives and the kind of society in which they live. Empowerment means people able to organize and influence change on

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<sup>4</sup> Glenn Laverack and Nina Wallerstein, 2001, throw light on who a community is in a programme/project context by using objectives of programmes/projects as a point of reference.

the basis of their access to knowledge, to political processes and to financial, social and natural resources.”

Other writers like Hartmut Schneider from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), as cited by Frits Wils (2001:7), refer to empowerment as “... the gaining of strength in the various ways necessary to be able to move out of poverty, rather than literally taking power from somebody else at the purely political level.” In this definition, empowerment is perceived as not involving political demands but a function of other factors like knowledge, education, and organization.

Narayan (2002:11), extending upon and capturing some of the elements of the above definitions, defines empowerment as “... the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.” This definition captures structural limitations often considered reasons for the perpetuation of powerlessness and immediate barriers that hamper small-scale initiatives by the community itself. Recently, a research group of the World Bank (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005:5) has come up with a more general and simplistic definition of empowerment which states “... empowerment is enhancing an individual’s or group’s capacity to make choices and transform these choices into desired actions and outcomes.” The last two definitions, given the wide operations of the World Bank and its global partners in mind, seem to be more comprehensive and reveal the growing shift of emphasis towards disadvantaged groups.

### **2.2.2 Conceptual roots of empowerment**

The theoretical roots of empowerment are not as clear as the concept in its contemporary understanding. Part of the ambiguity lies in the lack of a distinct theoretical path of evolution which the concept is fairly short of and the difficulties that exist in drawing clear demarcation with other rival concepts like participation. Despite such limitations, quite a number of writers have attempted to trace its

philosophical and conceptual origins and there seems to be a high degree of consensus in that regard.

The emergence of empowerment as a development topic is associated with the overall shift to alternative development as policies that emanated from mainstream development failed to deliver results that reduce underdevelopment. Alternative approaches which focus on social aspects of development and local communities enhanced the concept of participation along which empowerment got its entrance into the debate of development. As a result, both concepts dominate current development thinking.

There are different views as to the meaning and role of these concepts in development. Some writers (Craig and Mayo, 1995:5-6) argue that empowering communities becomes important to realize meaningful community participation – hence, the poor and relatively powerless require to be empowered to participate more effectively in development projects and programmes. In this sense, the discussion on participation precedes that of empowerment because the latter is considered a means to get more of the former. In practice, however, it is hard to make clear demarcations since there are unavoidable overlaps. Leaving aside the debate whether it is empowerment or participation that should be considered as a means or end or the other way round, the following section attempts to look at the practical bases of the emergence of the empowerment approach in the NGO sector.

### ***Conscientization approach***

A host of writers (<sup>1</sup> Marilyn, 2004:2; Marc et al, 1992:135; IRED Nord, 1997:6) agree that the ground breaking and pioneering work of Paulo Freire, *The pedagogy of the oppressed* (1970), to a large extent, provided the conceptual base for subsequent debates on empowerment. He worked among poor communities in the North East of Brazil in the 1960s and 70s and developed a teaching methodology that combined learning to

read and write with looking critically at one's social situation. The kind of education he forwards is one which is liberating and revolutionary in the sense that learners reflect on their problems, engage in a dialogue and take initiatives to transform the society which denied them social and educational opportunity - conscientization is considered a process of learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and take action against the oppressive elements of reality (Wuyts et al, 1992:135-136; Freire, 1973). Taken together, Freire's approach to education has a Marxist orientation whose ultimate objective is to transform reality through conscious political struggle (Craig and Mayo, 1995:6).

Paulo Freire's *pedagogy of the oppressed* together with the Theology of liberation movement in the 1960s in Latin America spread throughout the region and heavily influenced the emergence of political organizations and grassroots movements in the region. A growing number of NGOs, without identifying with the Freirian radical view of the world, adopted his ideas of working in dialogue with the poor (IRED Nord, 1997:6; Wuyts, 1992:136).

#### ***"Small is beautiful" approach***

Another famous work, which came in a similar time with Freire, and that has influenced the debate on empowerment is Ernst Friedrich Schumacher's best known book of *Small is Beautiful* (1973). Like Freire, Schumacher discusses what prevents people from acting on their own behalf and points to the situation of the poor. Nevertheless, he argues from another perspective that the fundamental task is to achieve smallness within large settings. What prevents people from development is not perceived in political or class terms, but in certain deficiencies in education, organization and discipline without paying attention to prevailing structural inequalities that led them to appear. Hence, he regards participation as a prerequisite for development to work which according to him is involvement in practical work of some kind rather than political participation in terms



of reflection and dialogue. He emphasizes gifts of knowledge rather than gifts of material goods because the latter makes the poor dependent (Wuyts et al, 1992:137). He goes on to argue that there should be action groups, ideally outside of the government machinery, and recommends that non-governmental voluntary agencies have a bigger role. His fundamental difference with Freire is that he tends to assume goodwill on all sides and he reduces problems to lack of understanding or unwillingness to innovate and does not make his analysis in terms of socio-political processes.

The abovementioned two distinct approaches represent contrasting versions of what is meant by 'empowerment'. Hence, there are different traditions of grassroots empowerment strategies corresponding to the ideas of Freire and Schumacher. The Freirean influence is more reflected in most of the participatory tools developed by NGOs and grassroots organizations. Schumacher's influence is seen in approaches that promote organizational innovations like marketing co-operatives or credit unions as well as technical and training solutions to local problems (Wuyts et al, 1992:138).

The operational aspect of both approaches requires close examination. The strong contribution of the conscientization approach emanates from the way it perceives marginalized communities and the trust it attaches to their ability to change oppressive elements in their environment. This has induced the revision of the assumption behind the grand development theories which perceived the poor as passive recipients in the development process. Freire's prescription for a radical transformation in the education system, however, remains the critical aspect of the approach owing to difficulties in implementing it. It also loses sight of other material and structural aspects of powerlessness which constrain the poor from pursuing the goal of integrating into the economic mainstream.

On the other hand, Schumacher's emphasis on endogenous aspects of powerlessness constitutes his main contribution. In a way, his approach has disaggregated what used to

be a crude concept into applicable project ideas. The criticism of the approach lies in its failure to look at empowerment within broader political, social and economic relationships. For instance, institutional issues like rules and regulations which may render poor communities to constant powerlessness are not considered. What unites both approaches is that they consider NGOs or the voluntary sector to have the main role in realizing empowerment. NGOs have also been in the forefront in espousing the idea of empowerment which is being taken up by the World Bank and UN agencies and portrayed as the new 'orthodoxy' in development (Wuyts et al, 1992:118; UNDP, 1993:87).

Having seen recent attempts to conceptualize and operationalize empowerment, it is essential to highlight deficiencies both in theory and practice. At a broader level, the concept of community empowerment is short of a strong theoretical foundation. Such deficiency is the likely cause for weak conceptualization and operationalization as well. The reason could be the non-academic origin of the concept as both approaches of empowerment as conscientization and gifts of knowledge, to a large extent, have their origins in practical development work.

Basically there is no single model of empowerment. There are diverse empowerment instruments used in different contexts and NGOs have made use of available instruments in different ways. However, the influence of Freire and Schumacher's approach is felt in many programmes/projects with community empowerment activities. By inference, the Freirean approach looks at powerlessness in its structural form and seeks to address it from that respect while Schumacher's approach seeks to build from the utilization of immediately accessible opportunities like education and skill provision.

### 2.2.3 Community empowerment in development theory

In the 1970s, mainstream development was under increasing criticism as envisaged development goals were not met and was also considered insufficient in addressing the multi-faceted problem of underdevelopment (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001:75). Alternative development which includes a range of scattered local-oriented notions like appropriate development, participatory development, people-centered development, human development, etc. became highly espoused in development thinking (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001:81). He (2001:78) further argues that “alternatives were developed under specific headings like participation, grassroots movements, empowerment, conscientization, liberation theology, NGOs, etc. which incorporated diverse topics but were not theoretically coherent to form a single paradigm.” However, a glance at characteristic features of alternative approaches throws light on how empowerment became an advocated topic. While mainstream development theories argue in the direction of structural macroeconomic change, alternative development emphasizes *agency*, in the sense of people’s capacity to effect change (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001:75). This is where the goal of development is combined with empowerment. Recent argument in alternative development is for a strong civil society as a counterpart to the state and market. Current practices as well as prescriptions increasingly involve synergies between government, NGOs and business firms (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001:84). Another issue fundamental to alternative development is endogenous understanding of the unit of development (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001:86). While mainstream development considers society in general or the state as a unit of development, alternative development introduces range of sites of endogeneity like people, community, local, grassroots, etc. as units and defines the role of external agents as stimulating local processes.

Nederveen Pieterse (2001:88) again states that “The hallmark of alternative development methodology is participation.” Participatory Action Research, Rapid Rural Appraisal, conscientization, empowerment are also related notions. Though not exclusive to alternative development, what is specific to alternative development is the local and popular context in which such notions are applied. Moreover, they consider development as an external intervention with some stereotypes regarding poverty or poor people – referred also as a disabling element in the development discourse (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001:88). Hence, indigenous knowledge of communities is regarded as giving substance and depth to development interventions when blended with other forms of knowledge like scientific knowledge.

In general, alternative development entails a bi-directional thinking. The first refers to redefining the goal of development by providing alternatives to the failures of mainstream development. The other focuses on the agency of local communities which has to be assisted by external actors like NGOs through participatory and empowering engagements. But such thinking is no longer distinctive of alternative development; basic needs, participation, sustainability, empowerment, etc. have long been adopted in mainstream development (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001:78). Furthermore, the concepts are being institutionalized as major global and regional development actors continue to incorporate them into their programmes. For instance, empowerment is now mentioned by the World Bank (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005:5) as one of the three pillars of poverty reduction. Such developments reveal to what extent alternative development ideas are gaining increasing attention.

### **2.3 Community Empowerment in Practice**

NGOs spearhead most practices in empowerment activities. They have comparative advantages and limitation in implementing empowerment activities. The following section deals with these issues and discusses the empowerment measuring framework

developed by the World Bank research group which is used as an analytical tool in this research.

### 2.3.1 The World Bank empowerment framework

“Despite growing interest and increased investments in empowerment, the development of instruments and indicators with which to monitor and evaluate empowerment processes and outcomes is still at an early stage. Project teams and governments still lack the tools necessary for determining whether and how projects and policies aimed at empowering stakeholders reach their intended goals.” (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005:5). Recent work by a research group in the World Bank to measure empowerment provides a comprehensive analytical framework. The framework first identifies domains and levels of empowerment. The domains within which empowerment takes place are identified as *state, market, and society*. An individual is perceived to have varying roles in each domain where a person is a civic actor in the state; economic actor in the market and social actor in the society (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005:12). The three domains are again divided into eight sub-domains; (a) the domain of the *state* is divided into sub-domains of *justice, politics* and *service delivery*; (b) the domain of *market* is divided into sub-domains of *credit, labor* and *goods* (both for consumption and production); (c) the domain of *society* is divided into sub-domains of *family* and *community* which, depending on the context, can include clans, tribe, extended family etc. (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005:11-12). People experience the domains at different levels namely *local, intermediary and macro*. A level is described to be an administrative boundary. Hence, people experience different degrees of empowerment at certain combinations of domains and levels. *Local* is understood to be a village or the immediate vicinity to which a person or group belongs; *intermediary* comprises a familiar vicinity but which is not encroached upon on everyday basis, for instance, region; *macro* is further away from the individual and is likely to be national (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005:13). Hence,

in trying to assess empowerment occurring at different levels, the framework further differentiates between individual and group empowerments. Alsop and Heinsohn (2005:35-38) state that the differences are made based on the target of interventions whose empowerment outcome is assessed; resultantly, different indicators are designed. The independent factors that are hypothesized to explain the degree of empowerment are *agency* and *opportunity structure*. *Agency* is defined as the capacity to make meaningful choice. Capacity is understood as asset endowment which can be psychological, informational, organizational, material, social, financial, or human. *Opportunity structure* is defined as formal and informal contexts within which actors operate which include laws, regulatory frameworks, and norms governing people's behavior (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005:6-9).

There is the possibility to apply the World Bank empowerment framework both at the *intervention* and *national* level.<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of this study, however, there is a need to limit the application to the *local* level where NGOs make interventions and have higher possibilities of influence. Given the operation type of NGOs selected for this study, it would be feasible to dominantly focus on the domain of *society* particularly households and community. But some aspects of NGO operations are unavoidably linked to the domains of *market* and *state* and have some level of impact. Hence, attempts will also be made to capture such issues to allow for comprehensive analysis.

### **2.3.2 Comparative advantages of NGOs in community empowerment**

NGOs are considered to possess certain characteristics which allow them to have comparative advantages compared to state implementing agencies. A number of writers (Wuyts et al, 1992:134; Franz, 2001:12-13; Cernea, 1988:18) have identified advantages that NGOs possess relative to other actors which are summarized as follows.

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<sup>5</sup> *Intervention* level refers to a domain where a particular programme/project is designed and implemented with a certain group of people in view within a defined geographical space. *National* level is basically a country level where the assessment on empowerment is done without reference to the impact of a particular programme/project or actor.

*First*, NGOs reach marginalized target groups better than government programmes because their projects are usually located and operate among such communities. *Second*, they are considered better in organizing participation, self-help and empowerment activities since such undertakings, if done by the state, could give rise to conflicting outcomes because they encroach upon existing power structures. *Third*, they are more quick and flexible to respond to local problems than their state counterparts owing to their closeness to local communities. *Fourth*, they are staffed with young and enthusiastic people willing to work for low salaries and endure hardships to work at grassroots. *Fifth*, they work with lower administrative and staff costs than government implementing organizations or private sector consultants due to the voluntary nature of their activities and low budgets.

Despite such features, there are quite a number of claims that NGOs rather behave contrary to the above assumptions. NGOs are accused of hijacking genuinely needed development aid by well established elites. They are also seen as new structures to perpetuate existing systems of neo-patrimonialism<sup>6</sup> in poor communities. NGOs, mainly international ones, have expanded their structure to the extent that they have lost their efficiency in terms of delivering cheaper and quicker service. Moreover, they are often blamed on the grounds of misunderstanding local conditions and hiring amateurs with less skill (Wuyts et al, 1992:134; Chabal and Daloz, 1999:22-24).

With regard to affecting *agency* and *opportunity structures* through their activities, the impact of NGOs is more pronounced on households and local communities. That is why this research focuses on the *local* level. Most of NGOs' activities are highly concentrated around affecting *agency* by improving the different types of assets. Such activities like awareness raising, gender education, vocational training, health education, house maintenance/construction, etc. improve informational, material and human assets.

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<sup>6</sup> Here *neo-patrimonialism* refers to a phenomenon where a heritage of confining certain benefits within a social or political group that prevails in the overall socio-political and economic system is extended to the NGO sector too.

But they are by no way confined to affecting *agency* but also have an impact on *opportunity structures* particularly social norms. NGOs also engage in improving *agency* at a community level by establishing community organization, providing civic education, setting up information centers, organizing/strengthening self-help groups, etc. Some of these activities, however, go beyond affecting *agency* to affecting *opportunity structures* by endowing people with informational assets that motivate people for collective action. In the domain of market, NGOs mainly operate in the areas of widening opportunities of self-employment, small-scale business creation, microfinance, income generating, etc. thereby improving financial and material assets that increase their access to economic resources. In the domain of state, their activities are largely confined to advocacy and lobbying. In general, NGOs' role in improving *opportunity structures* is not significant compared to their role in enhancing *agency*. In many cases, it is mainly confined to local norms and sometimes extends to formal institutions<sup>7</sup> by raising people's awareness regarding their basic rights.

### 2.3.3 Limitations of NGOs' empowerment activities

Limitations to empowerment activities of NGOs arise from several sources. The prominent one relates to the basic features of NGOs themselves. NGOs are constrained by the fact that they have limited scope of direct access to policy and the law making processes. Therefore, they are limited with regard to changing formal *opportunity structures* – in this regard their endeavor is limited to advocacy in most cases (UNDP, 1993:98). A contributing factor to the above limitation is also the fact that most of the NGO approaches to empowerment are local and often independent from the overall process of development pursued mainly by the state resulting in isolation (Wuyts et al, 1992:127). NGOs are also limited by other local factors like inefficient institutional

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<sup>7</sup> Opportunity structures comprise of *informal* and *formal* institutions. *Informal* institutions include norms, customs, and beliefs while *formal* institutions refer to laws, legislations, rules and regulations as well as long-term policies of the state.



frameworks, insufficient collaboration from local governments, weak relationships with local communities and other organizational problems within themselves.

In trying to respond to preferences of donors, local government and elites, they often lose sight of genuine empowerment needs of the community and cater for other demands from stakeholders – the result is reduced impact in changing *agency* and *opportunity structures* in favor of the community they intend to serve. These limitations are very evident in the Ethiopian situation where NGOs are undergoing transition themselves and the involvement of civil society in policy issues remains marginal owing to lack of democratic practices.

#### **2.3.4 Operationalizing community empowerment**

Though empowerment has been at the center of recent re-conceptualization of development, yet making this concept operational in program/project context remains elusive (Laverack, 2001:134; Singh and Titi, 1995:6). It is here attempted to apply the World Bank empowerment framework by refining it in such a way that the study focuses on those aspects of *agency* and *opportunity structure* that NGOs are capable of improving and avoids inclusion of those aspects beyond their reach. However, having the above-mentioned aspects of *agency* and *opportunity structure* which NGOs are likely to have impact upon in mind, the following indicators are formulated for each variable to measure it. The indicators are chosen based on two main criteria; (1) indicators which have direct bearing on those aspects likely to be impacted by the activities of NGOs; (2) necessary data that can realistically be gathered from the field. Hence, because of difficulties in gathering reliable data, for instance, psychological assets are not included in the analysis. The following table shows selected indicators for each of the variables.

**Table 1: Lists of Indicators**

Variable	Aspect	Indicators
Agency	Informational assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local availability of information source by NGO</li> <li>- availability and use of radio and newspapers owing to NGO provision</li> <li>- improvement in education level due to NGO activities</li> </ul>
	Organizational assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- number and strength of community organization<sup>8</sup> established through the assistance of NGO</li> <li>- self-help/self-reliance groups established by NGO</li> <li>- strength of leadership of community organization as a result of NGO assistance</li> <li>- improvement in number of members and gender composition of community organization due to NGO activities</li> </ul>
	Material assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- change in ownership of assets like land, house, machinery or durable goods due to NGO activities</li> </ul>
	Financial assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- availability of local financial institutions and access by target group</li> <li>- credit access and indebtedness because of NGO activity</li> <li>- saving in local banks stimulated through NGO</li> <li>- employment created via NGO activities</li> <li>- income level before NGO activity and after</li> </ul>
	Human assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- completed education level</li> <li>- improvement in health status due to NGO activity</li> </ul>
Opportunity structure	NGO affecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- application of <i>Guidelines for NGO Operations</i> in the projects</li> <li>- <i>Code of Conduct for NGOs</i> Vs specific operational behavior of NGO</li> </ul>

<sup>8</sup> *Community organization* refers to an autonomous structure established by the free will of local community members to attend to certain common interest.

	Target group affecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- change in harmful local practices/norms and customary laws due to NGO</li> <li>- increased participation of target groups in public decision making because of NGO activities</li> <li>- changes in local government policies due to NGO advocacy or lobbying</li> </ul>
<b>Degree of empowerment</b>	Individual empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- employment history since NGO began operation</li> <li>- number of employment demands made to local authorities due to impact of NGO</li> <li>- change in usage of legal system because of NGO civic education</li> <li>- improved participation in public decision making due to NGO operation</li> <li>- access to and actual usage of credit owing to NGO activities</li> <li>- added perception of political processes and participation in election as a result of NGO civic education</li> </ul>
	Group empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- autonomy of community organization as a result of NGO assistance</li> <li>- number of collective action initiatives and achievements due to NGO assistance</li> <li>- representation of target groups improved in community organization due to NGO</li> </ul>

Source: Synthesized from Ruth Alsop and Nina Heinsohn, 2005, p.88-121

## 2.4 Hypothesis and Research Questions

The variable *agency* is measured by asset endowments. For the purpose of this study, informational, organizational, material, financial and human assets are considered. The other independent variable, *opportunity structure*, is measured by the presence and operation of formal and informal institutions that determine people's access to assets. Furthermore, interdependence is assumed between the two independent variables meaning while *opportunity structures* frame access to asset endowments, asset endowments may also be instrumental in influencing the structure of existing

opportunity. But it is beyond the scope of this research to look into the influence of one independent variable over the other independent variable.

With this general background, it was attempted to operationalize the variables by linking activities of NGOs with indicators (see annexed questionnaire). *Agency* indicators have been chosen with the following justification; (a) NGOs have possibilities of improving *informational assets* either by directly providing them to the public or via improving an individual's material/financial assets which increase people's ability to gain access to information sources; (b) NGOs can help improve *organizational assets* by establishing new community organizations or strengthening already existing ones; (c) they can also increase people's *material assets* by increasing people's capacities to own them or have sustainable use right; (d) they can also improve *financial assets* by delivering financial resources themselves or increase people's access to the market by creating capacities; (e) NGOs are assumed to improve *human assets* through diverse health and education activities. *Opportunity structure* indicators are mainly confined to norms, cultural practices, customary laws and government regulatory laws to which NGOs have better chances of influence or be influenced themselves. The degree of empowerment is generally assumed to be measured by the individual or group's possibilities of having choices and being able to make desirable decisions. Having these justifications of indicators in mind, **it is hypothesized, in the first place, that NGOs are not successful in empowering the community they work with and it is so because they fail to improve asset endowments and opportunity structures of the community.**

The following research questions are deduced to test the aforementioned hypothesis.

(a) How or under what conceptual and operational framework do NGOs plan to empower the community? (b) What are the overall policy and institutional environments within which NGOs try to implement empowerment activities? (c) What activities do

they implement to improve *agency* and *opportunity structure*? (d) To what extent have they been able to improve *agency* and *opportunity structures*? (e) What is the communities' view of empowerment and how do they perceive its realization as it relates to activities of NGOs?

## 2.5 Research Methodology

Having sketched the theoretical framework containing main debates in empowerment, the study carried out the following consecutive steps in the field research. The preliminary task was to select appropriate projects on which essential empirical data can be gathered. The selection of NGOs was based primarily on the considerable presence of empowerment activities which allow empirical appraisal of diverse aspects of empowerment. It logically follows that the projects have multiple empowerment interventions - for instance income generating, microfinance, training, education, advocacy etc. - instead of sectoral projects which have very limited interventions and do not allow the measurement of various aspects incorporated in the variables *agency* and *opportunity structure* and *empowerment*. Furthermore, a mix of both phased-out and ongoing projects were surveyed in order to be able to take a look at the *process* and *outcome* of empowerment. For selecting phased out projects, it was crucial to make sure that community replaced the NGO in taking over activities of the project. Accordingly, four projects run by three different NGOs were surveyed. The phased out projects are those run by Integrated Holistic Approach Urban Development Project (IHAUDP) and Alliance for Development (AFD). Another project run by IHAUDP and World Vision Ethiopia's Urban Area Development Programme (WV- urban ADP) were the other ongoing projects surveyed.

Primary data was generated through semi-structured interviews conducted with project staff of each project namely managers and technical staff working in different capacities, leaders of community organizations and selected beneficiaries. Specifically,

interviews were conducted with the acting manager and two social workers of AFD, manager and deputy of WV- urban ADP, community development component head and social workers of IHAUDP, leaders of three saving and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) in AFD's operational area and managers of two community based organizations established by IHAUDP. Focus group discussions were also conducted to collect primary data mainly as a way of clarifying, verifying or substantiating data gathered through interviews and questionnaires. The checklist for focus group discussions was used to provide guidelines while the researcher remained a facilitator as participants discussed freely. Accordingly, focus group discussions were held with two groups of beneficiaries (one constituting men and the other women) at AFD, a group of youth and women beneficiaries at IHAUDP and one group of women at WV-urban ADP. Furthermore, a total of 72 questionnaires were administered in the surveyed projects on a house-to-house visit basis. The questionnaires were administered together with two other enumerators hired for this purpose for three weeks. They were given initial orientation on the questions designed and the possible problems they might face in communicating certain conceptual questions to beneficiaries. A pilot study was administered on five respondents after which another round of orientation took place where adjustments were made to some questions. To make the whole process as fair and objective as possible, the identification of beneficiaries followed a sequential step of first identifying the profile and number of beneficiaries in each program, sorting out activities with a meaningful empowerment component and finally selecting active beneficiaries enlisted in the sorted out activities. This also lessened, to the extent possible, pre-selection of beneficiaries by project staff who might be interested to present the 'successful' side of their interventions through exceptionally well-performing beneficiaries.

Secondary data was also gathered by referring to documentation in the surveyed projects such as periodic reports, agreements and evaluations. Information on policies and legislation related to the operations of NGOs were mainly gathered from the resource center of an umbrella organization for NGOs- Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA). Contemporary literatures on NGOs and civil society state in Ethiopia and African situation were also consulted.

The data processing followed a procedure of first searching for any emerging pattern of relationship in the set of data gathered using different methods. For this purpose, primary data gathered through questionnaires was further processed using the program Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Data from focus group discussions and interviews was summarized along broader categories of relationships and was again analyzed together with data from the questionnaire. The analysis of data was conducted using the World Bank analytical framework which largely guided the structure used in the presentation of the analysis. It follows that the findings of the research are in most cases qualitative in nature substantiated by numerical figures and percentages where relevant. The interpretation of some of the results of the study is made using information gathered through open questions in the questionnaire and relevant secondary data. The study also includes careful attempts made to relate the findings of the study to wider explanations of theory.

## **2.6 The field research and challenges encountered**

The field research was initially planned to gather essential data from three main groups namely NGOs staff, local government officials and benefiting community members. Except for local government officials who were either unavailable or not willing, NGO staff and a cross-section of community groups have been cooperative in providing vital data. Local authorities were preparing to hand over the city administration to the opposition party which won the May 2005 elections during the field research period and

that is the main reason for their unavailability. The discussion on NGO-government relations at a local level would have been comprehensive had the views of local authorities been secured. It had its implications on the study by making some aspects of the findings on NGO-government relations inconclusive.

Regarding the kind of projects to be surveyed, the original idea was to have a mix of development projects both from urban and rural areas. Due to the tense political situation in rural areas at the time and the limitations on free access to community members, the field research was conducted on projects located in the capital city, Addis Ababa. Hence, the findings would have more relevance to urban projects implemented by NGOs albeit they may have features that could be useful for rural projects too.

Another challenge was getting the genuine opinion of community members when focus group discussions were conducted. Some participants showed reservation to disclose their genuine opinion in a group setting but were relatively open when interviewed individually. All possible attempts were made to make the group setting less ominous by encouraging members to speak out their opinion irrespective of their differences and it paid off in most cases.

In general, the theoretical framework and the research design put in perspective the guiding assumptions, the principal issue that the study wants critically examine and how empowerment was operationalized in the context of this study. It was also attempted to provide a conceptual background against which empowerment should be assessed. At an operational level, two variables namely *agency* and *opportunity structure* were identified to determine the level of empowerment individuals or communities realize. Consequently, indicators were set for the dependent and independent variables having the nature of interventions by NGOs in mind.



### 3. Chapter Three: Setting the Context

The three projects surveyed, in some instances, shared similar features that made the subsequent analysis easily manageable. But there were also other features particularly with respect to the size and type of interventions that made them different hence presented a fairly complex scenario for analysis. This chapter, therefore, starts by primarily describing each of the surveyed projects and the areas in which they operate followed by a discussion on structural issues that have a significant level of impact on the operations of NGOs. In doing so, the attempt is to lay down an empirical background in which the entire analysis of both primary and secondary data take place.

#### 3.1 NGOs and Operational Areas

All three projects are located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's political and economic capital. They also operate in areas mainly inhabited by poor households through diverse kinds of interventions. The operational duration of all projects is above five years providing the benefit of looking through different empowerment activities over a period of time. However, for the purpose of clarity, it was preferred to start the discussion by way of presenting essential factual information about each NGO and their respective projects.

##### 3.1.1 Alliance for Development (AFD)

In the initial days when the organization started operations it was called Woman Aid Development. It commenced its activities with a group of 18 women in one of the *kebeles* of the *Akaki-Kaliti* sub-city.<sup>9</sup> Physical features of *Akaki-Kaliti* sub-city are dominated by a large presence of light industries and agricultural activities on the outskirts. The majority of low-income inhabitants are either workers in the surrounding industries or unemployed because they are laid off due to privatization and downsizing. The project initially provided the selected women with vocational training in the field of

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<sup>9</sup> The recent overhaul of city administration created 10 district municipals called *sub-cities*. *Kebeles* are the lowest administrative units accountable to *sub-cities*. A *sub-city* comprises of 8-11 *kebeles* with an average population for each *kebele* estimated to be between 20,000-25,000. For more information on the administrative structure of Addis Ababa, see the following website <http://www.addisababacity.gov.et/sub-cities.htm>

weaving and assisted them to engage in self-employment activities. The activity was initially confined to this group of people because of scarcity of resources on the part of the NGO. As more resources were acquired and additional needs were identified, it expanded its activities, the number of beneficiaries and the operational area.<sup>10</sup> While women and children, presumed to be more disadvantaged, constituted the majority of the beneficiaries, men have increasingly become involved as the project attempted to introduce gender-sensitive activities. Such a gradual process prompted a change in the name of the NGO to Alliance for Development. AFD is now legally recognized by the government as a local NGO operating in three *kebeles* of the *Akaki-Kaliti* sub-city. In a nutshell, AFD's objective states that it seeks to improve access to basic service facilities to low-income groups, improve living standards of the poor through promotion of self-help initiatives and to promote active community participation.<sup>11</sup> To this end, the project put into operation activities like saving and credit cooperatives, water and environmental sanitation, garbage collection and disposal, kitchen upgrading, HIV/AIDS prevention, reproductive health and self-help promotion.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.1.2 Integrated Holistic Approach Urban Development Project (IHAUDP)**

IHAUDP was officially launched in 1989 in four *kebeles* (fully) and two others (partially) in *Lideta* sub-city among eight *kebeles* identified to be the poorest of the poor in Addis Ababa according to a study by the World Bank (Jember, 1998:2). The inception of the project is often traced to the experiences of a pilot project by Redd Barna (Norwegian Save the Children) which started an integrated development programme in one of the slums of the city. The pilot project was one of its kind which combined upgrading infrastructure with socio-economic programmes.<sup>13</sup> The project received wider recognition when it was declared one of the best 25 projects by Habitat

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Ato Mengesha Seyoum, social worker at AFD on 22/08/05

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.crdaethiopia.org/membersprofile.php#>

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Ato Mengesha Seyoum, social worker at AFD on 22/08/05.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

International in 1987. Despite the pioneering role it played in the history of urban projects in Ethiopia, the badly managed phase-out strategy required another course of action to make such a new venture successful. Hence, IHAUDP adopted some of the principles of this project and took over Redd Barna in the same area.<sup>14</sup>

IHAUDP has implemented two mega projects since 1990; one in a part of Addis Ababa locally known as *Teklehaimanot* (1990-1997) and another in *Kirkos* sub-city (1998-to date). The first project was handed over in 1997 to a community organization and IHAUDP replicated itself in the later location beginning from 1998.<sup>15</sup> *Tekelehaimanot* is situated adjacent to the biggest open market in the country, presumably in Africa. Its physical features are typical of a slum with congested shanty housing, poor drainage structures, informal economic activities, abject poverty, a high rate of unemployment, etc. The present project area shares a lot of features of with the former except that it is smaller in size and the activities carried out were largely downscaled. It presumes principles of integration and holisticness to be its main philosophical foundations. The following is a brief description of activities which, more or less, were similar for both successive projects.

IHAUDP organized itself into three main components namely community development, physical upgrading and primary health care. Community development is said to be responsible for the software part of the work engaging mainly in the activities of awareness raising, youth education, employment creation, income generating, delinquency rehabilitation, and care for the elderly and disabled. The primary health care component attends to both preventive and treatment aspects of health care whereby members of the community are provided with essential health services within the project area. Health education on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), mother and

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<sup>14</sup> The founder and current coordinator of IHA-UDP was one of the staff in the Redd Barna Project, who later further developed the idea of urban integrated projects through her MA studies in the UK and commenced the project in 1989.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Ato Getachew Negash, head of community development component at IHAUDP on 30/08/05

child care (MCC), reproductive health services, etc. are predominantly provided through health institutions run by the project. The physical upgrading component takes care of all construction-related activities which supposedly are thought to consume the bulk of project resources. The constructions of houses, kitchens, water points, communal latrines, communal showers, roads/ditches are the main activities under this component.<sup>16</sup>

The way the NGO organized and implemented activities in both projects is to a large extent similar. Hence, there is no need to deal with them separately. However, this study has considered both projects despite the fact that the former was phased out in 1997 and handed over to the community.<sup>17</sup> This is likely to create the opportunity for analysing empowerment in a situation where external assistance is largely withdrawn and project outcomes are in the hands of the community.

### 3.1.3 World Vision Urban Area Development Program (WV- urban ADP)

World Vision (WV) became one of the few international NGOs operating during the devastating drought and famine years of 1983-84. It began its work with an emergency relief operation which later was transformed into a development-oriented multi-package program called Area Development Program (ADP). In the latter approach, the aim is described to be enhancing household food security through a number of integrated interventions. Dictated in the past by the spatial prevalence of drought and famine, WV's interventions were principally limited to rural areas and hence the Addis Ababa ADP became the first initiative for the NGO in an urban context. The project was launched in 1998 in the *Lideta* and *Yeka* sub-cities. This study only considers the project operation in *Lideta* sub-city.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Ato Getachew Negash, Zebeay Atnafu and Makdes Admasu, head and staff in community development component of IHAUDP on 31/08/05 and 05/09/05, respectively.

<sup>17</sup> The former IHAUDP project in *Teklehaimanot* area phased out through joint agreement with the government that a new 'community organization' will take over project activities. The new organization was named Community Based Integrated Sustainable Development Organization (CBISDO) and is running activities it took over.

The ADP approach is based on the conception of poverty as an interwoven phenomena requiring multiple set of interventions converging at one ultimate purpose. Hence, it follows that several activities are incorporated under ADP. This project was largely perceived as a pilot one to allow WV gain experience in an urban context. One of the difficulties faced in doing that was transforming programs in ADP designed largely to suit rural areas towards urban programmes and still achieve meaningful results. The implementation was largely a sort of trial and error exercise for the NGO.<sup>18</sup> The project area is in one of the busiest business district and highly populated part of Addis Ababa. The project targeted the poorest in the area particularly women, children and youth and street children. Health, income generation, child-sponsorship, HIV/AIDS awareness, and capacity building are the major areas of intervention.<sup>19</sup>

### **3.2 Socio-economic Profile of Project Areas**

Very few places in Addis Ababa are devoid of slum-characterizing features. All of the projects are located in areas identified by the city government as poor and are open to NGO intervention. The following description is intended to provide the socio-economic features of the project areas through which the NGOs justified their intervention.

#### **3.2.1 Religion and demographic attributes**

*Akaki-Kaliti* sub-city, where AFD carries out its activities, is estimated to have a population of 182,502, according to recent statistics from the city administration.<sup>20</sup> The sub-city lies in the southern outskirts of the city the main highway to four large regions passing through it. Unlike the situation in the centre of the city, this sub-city has a sparse settlement. The majority of the residents, as high as 85% are orthodox Christian followers, one of the dominant faith groups in the country.

*Kirkos and Lideta* sub-cities, where IHAUDP and WV operate, are the oldest and most densely populated areas having an estimated population of 318,508 and 296.073,

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Ato Lakew, deputy manager of WV-ADP on 16/09/05

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Sr. Medenkia Sisay, manager of WV-ADP on 19/09/05

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.addisababacity.gov.et/sub-cities.htm>

respectively.<sup>21</sup> They have a similar composition to the *Akaki-Kaliti* sub-city with regard to religion, and both are inhabited by people with a diverse socio-economic profile.

### 3.2.2 Economic Activities

The location of the project area seemed to determine the kind of economic activity pursued by the majority of low-income groups that the NGOs seem to target. *Akaki-kaliti* is largely dominated by the presence of light industries and agriculture on the peripheries. Due to its geographical location, the area serves as a meeting point for most of the surrounding farmers to sell products like grains and vegetables in the big market at the centre of the sub-city. As a result, grain retailing has become a dominant economic activity among low-income groups, especially women. On the other hand, except for the main highway, horse-pulled carts are the main means of transport in the inner parts of the sub-city creating jobs for many unemployed men. AFD's activities seem to align with the gender aspects of the main economic activities in the area.

The *Kirkos* sub-city can not be described with one dominant economic activity covering all parts of the sub-city. Taking the specific *kebele* in which IHAUDP is working into account and the fact that the area is a typical residential area for poor people, the dominant economic engagement observed by poor people is petty-trade in the nearby open market, daily labour and retailing. The city's abattoir's presence in the *kebele* seems to deter people with resources to come to the area and develop it thereby restricting economic activities largely to the informal sector.

*Lideta* sub-city is the oldest and main business district with lots of formal and informal activities operating alongside. It is marked by unplanned settlement, large slum compartments and congestion. Part of the sub-city where IHAUDP was involved particularly shows such characteristics. During the five years of Italian occupation of Ethiopia, all beggars in Addis Ababa were forcefully made to settle there and to this date beggars find and lodge with fellow beggars in this corner of the sub-city (Jember,

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.addisababacity.gov.et/sub-cities.htm>

1998:3). IHAUDP claims that due to this alms-receiving habit and mentality, its efforts have largely been an uphill battle and a fight against what it calls ‘inherited’ poverty.<sup>22</sup> Although the presence of the largest open market in the area makes it one of the most economically active and vibrant locations, the poor seem to have a hard time integrating themselves into even the informal system. WV, which operates in the same sub-city in another location, also discovered similar trends in its operational area. The large presence of businesses (informal and formal), having provided opportunities for some groups, has marginalized others who could not afford to pay rents or taxes levied upon them by local government.<sup>23</sup>

### **3.3 Development Priorities of NGOs**

The NGOs ascertain that they had more or less gone through the conventional procedures of developing projects by conducting baseline surveys, need assessments and submitting formal project documents for funding and approval by the government. They also stated that development priorities are set in this process of designing projects mainly by the benefiting community<sup>24</sup>. For some of the projects like IHAUDP, documentation of such procedures is available. While the question of whether the real priorities of the community are effectively reflected in the formal project documents and implementation remains to be dealt in a separate section, the attempt here is to deal with those priorities with a considerable empowerment component.

#### **3.3.1 Empowerment-related priorities**

There is a wide range of activities in each of the surveyed projects. Though it is a common feature of such projects, this study does not seek to deal with each of them. The study presumed that the way empowerment is reflected as a priority within the operation of the projects is significantly linked to the manner in which it was conceptualized by projects. In other words, the outcome of conceptualization process by

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid; Interview with Ato Taye Kebede, manager of CBISDO on 12/09/05

<sup>23</sup> The city administration has made all kinds street vending illegal except those permitted by the government.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with project managers of AFD and WV-urban ADP on 19/08/05 and 20/09/05, respectively

projects determined how much of a priority empowerment had been to each of the projects.<sup>25</sup> While admitting the difficulties and inaccuracies involved in synthesizing priorities from a range of facts and documents, priorities seem to demonstrate substantial correlation with the activities being implemented. For simplicity purposes, the priorities discussed hereafter were assessed by using the WB analytical framework as a guide.

IHAUDP stated that it formulated two kinds of priorities; one by the community and another by professionals namely consultants (Tefera, 1998:4).<sup>26</sup> The project further claims that priorities were decisively set by the community and it only formulated them into acceptable project programmes. Moreover, there is an assertion that both sets of priorities exhibit large similarity.<sup>27</sup> However, taking both sets of priorities into account, awareness raising, housing, health, employment creation and education are priorities with significant empowerment features relating to aspects of informational, material, human and financial assets in the WB framework.

AFD has pursued a different course in developing priorities. Instead of a single thorough process of identifying priorities, it followed an unconscious gradual process of assessing needs through its interventions. Nevertheless, over time it developed priorities depicting its area of focus. Micro-finance, health, awareness and employment creation are its priorities again relating to aspects of human, informational and financial assets in the WB framework.<sup>28</sup>

Initial documentations revealed that priority setting in the surveyed project of WV had been an outcome of an intensive need assessment done using planning tools like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).<sup>29</sup> Prioritization is claimed to have come directly

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<sup>25</sup> Conceptualization process here refers to the way projects analyze socio-economic problems of the community, identify causes and effects and provide a framework for implementation.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Ato Getachew Negash, head of community development component at IHAUDP.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Ato Mengesha Seyoum, social worker at AFD on 23/08/05

<sup>29</sup> PRA is defined as a label given to a growing family of participatory approaches and methods that emphasize local knowledge and enable local people to make their own appraisal, analysis and plans.



from the community particularly from women and youth, target groups of the project. Micro-finance, health, income generation and employment creation are priorities with an ultimate aim of reducing urban unemployment, the central theme of the project.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.3.2 Intervention Strategies

While common features dominate priorities by each of the projects, their intervention strategies were marked, in some instances, by basic differences. These differences emanated largely from the resource endowments of projects, methodological orientations and principles they uphold.

AFD has had difficulties with securing reasonably adequate resources to implement activities without significant constraint. This seems to have propelled it to adapt strategies that do not require heavy investment. The emphasis rather has been on strategies that only require a one time grant from the project and can revolve among beneficiaries. For instance, the project reported that it provided capital grants to saving and credit cooperatives (SACCOs), provided training on basic business skills (BBS), legalized them and handed over the management to the beneficiaries. In another instance, the project provided training, material and financial support for selected household heads for them to be able to start a new business.<sup>31</sup> Currently, it is intensively conducting the self-help program<sup>32</sup>, an initiative of DED (Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst), which solely relies on local resources except for the facilitatory role of the project.

IHAUDP is widely regarded as the most resourceful of all existing urban projects of its type. It puts much emphasis on upgrading physical structures that portray characteristics of poorer areas. The argument for such an emphasis is the psychological, environmental and physical impact of unsuitable physical surroundings on the poor; resource allocation

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Sr. Medenekia Sisay, manager WV-urban ADP on 20/09/05.

<sup>31</sup> The project provided horses, carts, and feed for six months to 14 household heads each to get involved in the business of transporting people and goods.

<sup>32</sup> The self-help program refers to a small, largely homogenous group trying to pool resources and create a system of mutual interdependence with little external assistance.

reflected the priorities of the project. Looking at the proportion, infrastructure upgrading activities took as much as 35 % of the entire project budget (Tefera, 1998:49). Intensive awareness raising using community structures, capital grants for SACCOs, and vocational training for the youth are strategies used to empower low-income groups.<sup>33</sup> The fact that the project puts a lot of emphasis on the betterment of housing and related conditions of beneficiaries increases the chances of improving material assets of the beneficiaries compared to other kinds of assets.

WV argued that the most important problems exacerbating urban unemployment relate to lack of access to finance, lack of marketable skill and low organizational and managerial capacity among low-income groups.<sup>34</sup> Hence, interventions took the form of directly responding to these inabilities. To this end, awareness raising, providing access to micro-finance institutions, skill training to young beneficiaries, and the building of capacities by way of technical and material assistance for local organizations were dominant strategies WV claimed to have put in place.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.4 NGO-Government Relations

Varying trends have been observed regarding NGO-government relations under different regimes in Ethiopia. The study did not attempt to review the relation in retrospect; instead the focus was on current relations that have bearing on the operations of NGOs.

#### 3.4.1 Legislations for NGO operations

Usually, NGOs need to undergo registration, signing operational agreements with the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC), getting approval for projects and finally signing a project agreement before they start operations.<sup>36</sup> The kind

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Ato Getachew Negash and Zebenay Atnafu, staff at IHAUDP on 30/08/05 and 05/09/05, respectively.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Sr. Medenkia Sisay, manager of WV-urban ADP on 20/09/05

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Ato Lakew, deputy manager of WV-urban ADP on 16/09/05

<sup>36</sup> DPPC is the responsible government body to regulate activities of NGOs. After NGOs are registered by the Ministry of Justice, they are required to sign an operational agreement before submitting any project proposal for approval.

of programmatic areas NGOs could be involved in, procedures to be followed and classification of the sector are described in detail in the *Guidelines for NGO Operations* (RRC, 1995). While the law for the registration of NGOs was put in place in 1960, regulatory laws pertaining to operational aspects are largely absent. Many agree upon the necessity for a new, updated law, outlining NGO rights and responsibilities, and a more streamlined regulatory framework in which they can operate (Jeffrey, 2000:12). The need for efficient regulatory laws is further demanded for the reason that NGOs have grave complaints about the inefficiency of the law enforcing and regulatory bodies that have seriously affected their operations.

### 3.4.2 Networking among NGOs

Networking has become a new phenomenon characterizing intra-NGO relations in Ethiopia. Though there is no all-inclusive national umbrella organization for NGOs in Ethiopia, there are an impressive number of NGO networks, alliances, and forums reflective of the growing sophistication of the sector. Traditional divisions and suspicions reflective of the larger society initially hampered the emergence of networks, and government policies have not been conducive to their growth. But as the sector grew in size and strength, the capacity to work collaboratively on a common agenda clearly expanded (Clark, 2000:10).

The oldest and largest NGO membership association in the country, dating 1973 is Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA). Virtually half of the officially registered NGOs (estimated to be around 350) are members of CRDA and about 106 NGOs are associate members.<sup>37</sup> CRDA has undergone several phases of transformation often prompted by a change of regime and shifts in programmatic orientations of NGOs. Emergency and relief activities that had dominated CRDA's involvement in the 1970s and 80s have gradually been replaced with development; an orientation that was urged by the current government since it took over power in 1991. At present, there is an

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.wmich.edu/hcenter/cadpr/abstracts.kebede.asrat.html>

evidence of a collective action over some political issues by CRDA to which the government responded strongly arguing that such activities are beyond the mandate of NGOs.<sup>38</sup>

Apart from CRDA, there are other subsidiary networks founded by NGOs engaged in similar or related sectors. The formation of an Orphans Networking Group, composed of NGOs and community-based organizations that work with orphans and street children, is indicative of the gradual change in networking among NGOs. Micro-enterprise and education networks of NGOs have also evolved (Clark, 2000:10).

### **3.4.3 Code of Conduct: an NGO initiative**

NGO-government relations in Ethiopia have often been described as poor (Van Diesen and Walker, 1999:90). NGOs often complain of drawn out and complicated registration procedures, confusion about coordination and dialogue with the government, problems with obtaining work permits for international staff, conflicts about income generation, even when it is on a not-for-profit scheme, delays in signing project agreements and so forth. The government, on the other hand, accuses NGOs of poor implementation capacity, high overhead costs, lack of coordination, inappropriate preference for operational areas and self-centered motivation (Van Diesen and Walker, 1999:90). To ease these tensions and improve relations with the government, the NGO community took the initiative to develop a code of conduct for NGOs in Ethiopia.

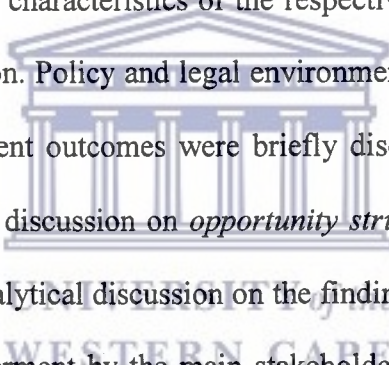
The *Code of Conduct for NGOs* was modeled on a similar pact formulated by the Kenyan NGO community a number of years ago, and it provides basic guidance on acceptable and expected behavior of signatory parties. It was formally adopted in March 1999, when the overwhelming majority of NGOs operating in the country swore to uphold its principles (Clark, 2000:11). Principles that the Code intends to apply to signatories mainly refer to moral and ethical integrity, transparency and accountability, good governance, independence, collaboration, gender equity, environmental

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.crdaethiopia.org/>

consciousness and sustainability (Code of Conduct, 1999:6-11). It has also put in place permanent structures that ensure the observance of the code across signatory NGOs. The drive to adopt the measure in Ethiopia was twofold: to send the signal to the government that the NGO community can set its own standards and policing and to ascertain that individual NGOs have to put their house in order for the betterment of relations. However, not enough data is available to assess the impact of the code in improving NGO-government relations and whether the code's observance has improved alleged inefficiencies of the sector.

The above discussion on the broader contextual features of the projects raised main issues defining the overall setting under which NGOs operated. The discussion further highlighted the socio-economic characteristics of the respective locations by which the NGOs justified their intervention. Policy and legal environments affecting the activities of NGOs and hence development outcomes were briefly discussed in order to give a background for the subsequent discussion on *opportunity structures*. To further lay an empirical foundation for the analytical discussion on the findings, the next chapter deals with the perception of empowerment by the main stakeholders in the projects and the way consensus is formed in the course of implementing them.



## **4. Chapter Four: Perceptions on Community Empowerment**

It is hypothesized in this study that perceptions of empowerment have an influence on the kind of operational measures that will be introduced to realize it. To deal with this hypothesis, it was attempted to gather information on conceptual dimensions of empowerment both from the community and the implementing NGO staff. Accordingly, an attempt has been made to breakdown the concept of empowerment to a level comprehensible by both sets of respondents through the questions addressed to them. Analyzing the concept of empowerment in this way had two objectives in the context of this study. One aim was to see if there is a considerable relationship between perceptions and operations that could be predicted by a theory. The other aim was to lay a background for the next chapter which deals with operational dimensions of empowerment.

### **4.1 Understanding empowerment in a project context**

While theoretical underpinnings of empowerment discussed in the first part of this paper gave clarity to the overall understanding of the concept, comprehending empowerment in a project context was in many ways tied with operational aspects. This was so because projects frequently come at an intervention level when intangible aspects of empowerment have more or less been sketched at a pre-intervention phase (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005:13). Therefore, the conceptual aspect of empowerment, in a project context, was examined from the perspective of what was taking place around and during implementation between the main actors (stakeholders) and the process they employed to reach a consensus. Another interesting point to look at was be the differences and similarities between perceptions as they influence the final outcome of how empowerment is to be operationalized.

### 4.1.1 Community Perspectives

In the first place, it should be noted that for two reasons it was difficult to detect the community's perspective of empowerment. First, there were challenges in communicating conceptual aspects of empowerment to the community because of some difficulties involved in accurately translating it to local language and the level of understanding of some community members. Second, there were quite diverging views across different community groups which complicated analyzing the concept within a meaningful framework. Having this challenge in mind, what was attempted was hold focus group discussions with community members in which the concept was explained thoroughly and at ease. This provided a wider platform for orally explaining the concept on a level comprehensible by the participants. Therefore, the following discussion is an outcome of findings from the focus group discussions.

Asking community members to directly define empowerment was deliberately avoided in order to begin more simply. The emphasis was rather on an indirect way of asking them what they thought the reasons of powerlessness were taking poverty as a core manifestation of powerlessness because they indicated that their state of poverty was what made them eligible for empowerment interventions. For instance, for some community members in the AFD's operational area, poverty is understood as not being able to support one's daily needs. An overwhelming majority of the focus group discussion participants asserted unemployment to be the major cause for their poverty.<sup>39</sup> Further underlying reasons for the widespread unemployment were mentioned to be lack of education and downsizing of the surrounding industries which used to employ what are regarded as unskilled laborers with a low level of education.<sup>40</sup> Hence, for such people empowerment was perceived as being able to recover their job or get some kind

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<sup>39</sup> Focus group discussion with *Netseberak* self-help group at the AFD's project area on 26/08/05.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

of employment that generated sufficient income for their daily needs. Similar results held true for focus group discussions at the IHA-UDP and WV-Ethiopia projects.

Regarding their requirements to be empowered, there were a lot of differences in opinion among participants of the discussion mainly depending on their immediate need. Women, who are the dominant group of beneficiaries in all of the projects, expressed that their needs for empowerment largely fall in the categories of training, finance and material assets.<sup>41</sup> Those who have received some kind of skill training argued that their important need is sustainable access to finance and market outlets, while those without skill stated they virtually required all of the above to be empowered.<sup>42</sup> But they had difficulties stating their opinion regarding in what order or in what amount they required these inputs. For instance, regarding the kind of skill they needed they did not have a clear idea of which skill is marketable and could deliver employment or what they meant by sustainable source of finance. In most cases they stated those skills which are fashionable and material assets that meant procurement of land or a business shop that they can use for selling products which, in most cases, were beyond the capacity of the projects to offer them.<sup>43</sup> For these reasons, they were highly susceptible to dictation from the NGO staff which made its own judgment of what they needed for empowerment. Empowerment, as meeting immediate needs seemed to be the overriding perception of the community and needed interventions designed in that direction.

Quite strikingly, there were entirely no opinions from the community that appeared to suggest that they are looking at powerlessness in relation to the efficiency or inefficiency of local government in carrying out its responsibilities. Instead there was a high regard for and expectation on the part of the community of the NGOs which, in

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<sup>41</sup> Focus group discussion with the leadership of *Mesob* SACCO at AFD's project area on 29/08/05

<sup>42</sup> Focus group discussion with the leadership of *Kebele 06* women's SACCO, AFD, on 02/09/05

<sup>43</sup> Focus group discussion with *Netseberak* self-help group at the AFD's project area on 26/08/05



their view, possessed better resources and technical staff than local government.<sup>44</sup> Focus group discussion participants seldom mentioned what local government should do to allow them to be empowered or to assist the actions of NGOs to empower them. Neither are there intentions of organized programs based on their own initiative to bring to the attention of local authorities what their demands for better capacities are. In this sense, it is one indication that the NGOs operated with a high leverage of affecting community opinion. This put them in a very precarious position where they had to meet demands from the community on one hand and in the process posed a threat to local authorities increasingly in need of public recognition which is shifting to the NGOs.

#### 4.1.2 NGO Perspectives

Poverty, with its multi-faceted causes and effects, seemed to be the overriding element through which virtually all surveyed NGOs attempted to address perceived powerlessness among their target groups. Much of what was perceived to be a cause of poverty was synonymously used to explain the existing powerlessness within the low-income group.<sup>45</sup> Hence, what is discussed hereafter revolves around how the surveyed NGOs attempted to establish a relationship between poverty and powerlessness.

AFD appeared to look at poverty in two dimensions; poverty as being caused by lack of employment and financial resources on one hand and being exacerbated by unavailability of basic service facilities on the other. Apart from these two causes of poverty, it also identified absence of or inactive community organizations as a contributing factor.<sup>46</sup> Hence, for AFD, the main cause of powerlessness was unemployment and the inaccessibility of finance. Furthermore, it asserted that the poor are confronted with poor basic service facilities like housing, schooling, health access, etc.; limiting any efforts on their part to build capacities to overcome the above stated

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<sup>44</sup> Focus group discussion with leaders of the garbage collection and disposal team, AFD on 26/08/05

<sup>45</sup> Low income groups normally comprise of people without regular employment and/or with income very low to meet daily needs.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Ato Markos Lebsework, acting coordinator for AFD project

causes of poverty.<sup>47</sup> According to the staff, organizational problems appeared as contributory factors. This is based on the evidence of a lack of meaningful initiative in the target community to collectively address major constraints hampering the realization of their aspirations.<sup>48</sup>

IHAUDP, comparatively, had more expertise than the other projects and the preliminary assessments that provided essential information to conceptualize empowerment. The fact that the vast majority of the present staff had an earlier experience with a similar project can be considered an added advantage. But, the task of conceptualizing empowerment took two different forms in the case of this project. An interview with the project staff revealed that, prior to launching the project, the NGO conducted a baseline survey and need assessment to come up with the priorities of the community which supposedly were considered indicative of existing powerlessness.<sup>49</sup> The other list of information came from consultants. Based on these outcomes, the project tried to develop a network of causes and effects of poverty. Poor infrastructure, a fatalistic attitude to life by the poor and lack of access to finance were considered main causes of poverty and hence powerlessness (Tefera, 1998:4). Poor infrastructure refers mainly to the deteriorating physical surroundings of the poor which, the project argues, has negative psychological impacts which so often are overlooked. Such impact, labeled fatalistic by the project, is expressed in the pessimist view of the majority of the poor regarding the prospects of life which are reflections of their surrounding. Lack of access to finance is argued to have significant impact in perpetuating poverty by deterring efforts of the poor for self-employment or expansion of the existing one, the project further argued.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Ato Mengesha Seyoum, social worker at AFD on 23/08/05

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Ato Getachew Negash, head of community development component at IHA-UDP on 31/08/05

WV-Ethiopia, on the other hand, attempted to present powerlessness within low-income groups as boiling down to unemployment.<sup>50</sup> However, it also looked at empowerment from the broader perspective where on the one hand the individual person needing empowerment was perceived to have physical, social and spiritual needs which have to be addressed holistically; and on the other, stakeholders of the project perceived to have capacity building needs also required empowerment. From the individual empowerment perspective, social needs refer to a low level of awareness, low self-esteem, low education, lack of skill; physical needs relate to livelihood and poor availability of facilities like housing, water and sanitation, etc. while spiritual need refers to moral apathy and a crisis in faith dimensions which emanates from the Christian orientation of the organization.<sup>51</sup> The aspect of stakeholder empowerment is, comparatively, uniquely conceived by WV-Ethiopia. The rationale for such thinking, according to the project, is that if projects have to be successful ventures with respect to empowering target groups, capacities of stakeholders which decide upon empowerment interventions on behalf of the poor require prior empowerment. Here community organizations and local government offices were the subjects.<sup>52</sup>

Leaving similarities and differences in conceptions among different NGOs for a later discussion, an interesting issue to look at this point would be to see the place of the conceptions discussed above in theory. Theory looks at empowerment firstly from the perspective of power relations where the poor are at the marginal end and another where they lack the necessary capacity to make meaningful choices for themselves commonly understood as *agency*. Powerlessness resulting from disadvantageous structural power relations is often discussed within political contexts where any engagement to alter it should imperatively require political engagement. Given the nature of the political situation of the country and the scope or mandate of NGOs, it would be hard to expect

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Sr. Medenekia Sisay, manager of WV- urban ADP on 20/09/05

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Ato lakew, deputy manager for WV-urban ADP on 16/09/05.

of NGOs to engage in such activities. Having endorsed the plausibility of the debate in partially explaining powerlessness among low-income groups, the study predicted, right from the onset, that NGOs' interventions will have limited outcomes in improving *opportunity structures*.<sup>53</sup> Hence, in light of the WB analytical framework which predicts that for *agency* to make any betterment in the life of the subjects, *opportunity structures* have to be conducive and hence being unable to affect *opportunity structures* will have serious implications on NGOs' efforts to empower people. This is more pronounced in the light of the finding that none of the NGOs have official objectives of participating in efforts that at least attempt to, consciously and deliberately, bring to the attention of local governments those policies or regulations negatively affecting their empowerment endeavor. A lot of what they did is about *agency* which will be thoroughly explained in chapter **five**.

But alternative theories which largely predict a bottom-up change in power relations seem to be confirmed in the activities of the surveyed NGOs. Virtually all NGOs have placed a high emphasis upon forming grassroots organizations, having the objective of lobbying or advocating on behalf of the poor. However, how much of that objective is translated into reality through their intervention will be examined in the next chapter. What can be said at this stage, by looking at the kind of priorities and interventions the NGOs have put in place, is that it is not certain whether they conceive empowerment as something that is to be effected as a result of the actions of subjects themselves rather than an external body working on behalf of them thereby aligning with alternative theories. Despite their efforts, the NGOs claim that efforts to strengthen grassroots organizations have largely been accepted with lots of suspicion by the local government

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<sup>53</sup> NGOs would highly be constrained in making efforts to change opportunity structures for legitimacy reasons also. The overall perception is that NGOs are not welcomed for such activities and they also endanger their existence in the context of current relations with local authorities if they want to aggressively pursue confronting the government for its policies.

for fear that it encroaches upon and competes with the existing government structures for public acceptance.<sup>54</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Reaching a consensus

The process of reaching a consensus regarding which conception dictated interventions varied among NGOs surveyed. According to what the projects alleged, what they agreed to implement was what the community identified as its need. If we take such a claim at face value, the process of reaching a consensus will be understood as a dictation from one actor namely the community. But in reality, there are other factors and actors that interact to determine the final outcome of what could be understood as empowerment in projects. It would make more sense to look at this feature rather than describing the nitty-gritty of how projects were designed, financed and implemented.

All the projects surveyed did some kind of need assessment which, according to them, formed the basis for subsequent project appraisal. On the other hand, the three NGOs had already set objectives before intervention which characterized their areas of focus and what they consider as the main reason for powerlessness. It has to be noted that such pre-intervention orientation of projects is at least not a direct empirical reflection of prevailing problems in project areas relating to powerlessness. But it somehow appears to be an important component in setting conditions for consensus. For instance, AFD at the initial stage conceptualized that giving priority to assisting women is central to bringing development in society.<sup>55</sup> IHAUDP argued that for poverty to be effectively reduced in slum areas, infrastructure development has to be central to NGOs' intervention (Tefera, 1998:3). WV-Ethiopia's urban ADP, somehow defended that if it can empower women and youth with skill and access to finance, it can generate self-employment that would reduce vast unemployment in its operational area.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Ato Lakew, deputy manager of WV-Urban ADP on 16/09/05

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Ato Mengesha Seyoum, social worker at AFD 23/08/05

Coupled with the above pre-intervention orientations of projects other factors that influenced the process of forming consensus are the funding conditions of the financing partner (donor) of the project and nature of interaction with local government authorities. Regarding funding, all of the NGOs relied on diverse sources which have their own priority areas. In most cases, the NGOs dissect activities in a single project and apply to different funding agencies in accordance with their requirements. Hence, ultimately the implementation of activities whether they have directly come from the community or are primarily the opinion of the NGO staff depended on fund availabilities.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, the nature of interaction of the NGO with local and regional governments is an important factor. Usually, projects are supposed to be appraised and endorsed by local government before signing agreement with regional government. This process entails that NGOs need to convince local authorities of their intended interventions by appealing to their orientations. In most cases local governments have a list of priorities which they want NGOs to be involved in and hence attempt to guide them in that direction thereby affecting the final outcome of the project. The findings suggest that the nature of the interactions usually took a subjective form the outcome of which largely depended on the personalities involved on both sides.

The final outcome regarding interventions came as a result of interplay between several actors namely the community, local government, NGO and the financing agency. Which actor has the most important role in shaping the outcome and at what level will be discussed in section 4.3.

#### **4.2 Explaining Similarities and differences**

Similarities and differences of perceptions across community groups and NGOs played a role in shaping the overall direction the particular project took. It would be more

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<sup>56</sup> The *Guidelines for NGO Operations* states that NGOs need to deliver in a verification of funding before they sign agreement to implement the project. Funds secured during implementation can only be used after necessary amendments are made on the project document and approved by pertinent government body.

interesting to know factors that were behind such phenomena. Besides its own merit, discussing similarities and differences in perceptions in the community and the respective projects will have an added advantage by laying a foundation for subsequent discussion on operational aspect of empowerment.

#### **4.2.1 Among community groups**

What is referred as community perception in the study should not mistakenly be viewed to have surfaced out of a single homogenous group. Which community group is representative of the poor and how do projects identify that will not be an issue to discuss here. Normally, projects have target groups which share some common characteristics that make treatment of beneficiaries within one single group justifiable. But within the target group itself, we have similarities and differences. While there was an overwhelming consensus regarding the perception of powerlessness as being poor, much of the variations in perception seemed to have come for reasons of age and gender.

The fact that 61 (84.7%) respondents were female and the remaining 11 (15.3%) were male is a fair representation and depicts the gender proportion of active target groups in the project areas. Hence, women have been central in the analysis of perception. Younger women beneficiaries perceived themselves as units of empowerment while older women considered that empowerment could be better achieved if the assistance is directed to their offspring. Out of this perception followed that younger beneficiaries demanded skill upgrading, financial assistance and employment creation as means of engaging with poverty. Older women, on the other hand, asserted that they have little prospect of improving their living conditions for reasons of age and capacity and argued in favor of enhancing education, health and employment opportunities for the younger members of the community.<sup>57</sup> In light of this view of the community, the fact that 84% of the respondents are between the ages of 21-55 shows the aligning focus of the

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<sup>57</sup> Focus group discussion with *Netsebrak* self-help group, AFD on 26/08/06

projects on the working and relatively younger section of the community instead of the ageing.

Gender-wise, male respondents defended that empowerment requires quite a lot of inputs on a consistent basis in the areas of skill, materials and finance. Most of them argued that they have the necessary management skills to make self-employment ventures successful if only the aforementioned assistance can be provided. Hence, they perceive of empowerment as happening as a result of external resource injection.<sup>58</sup>

Women beneficiaries, endorsing the role of external assistance to a great extent, largely seemed to be in agreement with the idea of setting up home-based and easily manageable business activities. They asserted that this perception may have come as a result of a lot of domestic responsibilities they shoulder like taking care of children, house-keeping and food preparation.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Across the NGOs

There were no marked differences in the conception of empowerment among NGOs as all of them consider poverty to be a form of powerlessness that results in undermining the mental, material and physical capacities of people to engage in efforts that change their living conditions. However, there were marked differences that emerged during implementation which revealed that there are other things that intervene and affect the operational aspect of empowerment despite a more or less similar conception. In fact there were no hard facts to prove whether the differences in operational aspects of empowerment emerged as a result of differences in conceptions. It is, however, clear from the discussion in section 3.1.2 that the surveyed NGOs try to deal with empowerment with different strategies. At this level, it would be early to discuss the variations thoroughly before looking at operational aspects. Hence, what can be said at

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<sup>58</sup> Focus group discussion with leaders of garbage collection and disposal group, AFD and interview with members of *Biruh Tesfa* metal and wood work association, IHAUDP on 25/08/05 and 08/09/05, respectively.

<sup>59</sup> Focus group discussion with *Netsebrak* self-help group, AFD on 26/08/06



this stage is that the NGOs had a similar benchmark when it comes to conceiving powerlessness but started to diverge in dealing with it.

### 4.3 Whose Perception Matters?

Having seen how different actors come into play and interact to affect the final outcome of what is considered as empowerment, it would be essential to look at whose perception of empowerment cuts across all phases of the projects. Taking the normal procedural steps the projects had gone through *ex ante* and during implementation into account; actors seem to take alternate prominence at different phases. At the inception phase, there was an attempt on the part of NGOs to form their perceptions on direct empirical information from the community. At this stage the community seemed to have had the upper hand in setting priorities of empowerment as per its perception. But during the project appraisal phase where much of the task was to translate felt-needs into an achievable set of activities in a formal project format, the NGOs admitted that it became a difficult task and the probabilities of not being able to effectively reflect community interests were moderately high.<sup>60</sup> More complications come during implementation particularly when local authorities and funding partners became involved in the task and sought outcomes mainly in their interests. The other issue that the NGOs repeatedly raised relates to high expectations of local communities whereby the NGOs are seen as having ready-made solutions to local problems. Such an attitude has also been reflected during the focus group discussions where participants were mainly speaking of themselves as recipients of the NGOs' intervention.

In light of such circumstances, one can not arrive at a definite conclusion regarding whose perception is consistently governing throughout the project period. Understandably, if NGOs entirely overlooked the interests of the community and pursued their way of understanding empowerment, they could endanger their legitimacy and gradually lose acceptance. On the other hand, fully sticking to community demands

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Ato Getachew Negash, head of community development component, IHAUDP on 30/08/05

was unrealistic due to the limited capacity of the NGOs and interference of actors like donors and local government. The NGOs stated that they somehow tried to find a compromise in which the community got a reasonable way of expressing its interests and the project tried to implement it within the range of its limited resources.<sup>61</sup>

The above discussion concentrated on the interplay of different actors and factors that create the conditions for the way empowerment is perceived by different stakeholders. Actors alternate roles, at different phases of the project, in determining the final outcome of what is understood as empowerment in the projects. Hence, empowerment is differently perceived by stakeholders making the operational aspect difficult to analyze. However, by looking at how different stakeholders reached consensus, it was possible to look at how empowerment was conceptualized in a project context.



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<sup>61</sup> Interview with managers of AFD and WV-urban ADP on 18/08/05 and 19/09/05, respectively.

## 5. Chapter Five: Operational Aspects of Empowerment and Performance

So far the findings suggest that conceptual aspects of empowerment were more of an implicit pursuit of the NGOs rather than explicit expressions of their objectives. Therefore, empowerment seemed to be targeted indirectly via interventions expected to have similar results that can be considered as empowerment. Hence, while trying to analyze the operations of NGOs using the World Bank framework, an attempt was primarily made to identify those activities which have features concurrent to those aspects described in the framework. Consequently, the projects' activities were examined in the order where respondents were first asked what they required to be empowered; second how exactly the acquisition of their requirements lead to empowerment and finally the role of the NGOs and its impact as it were assessed by them. Therefore, the following discussion attempts to take a look at the performance of NGOs in enhancing *agency*, improving *opportunity structures* and the degree of empowerment resulting from the combined effect of these efforts.

### 5.1 Enhancing agency

The argument of the World Bank analytical framework which states that agency will be enhanced by improving asset endowments of beneficiaries finds its expression in the activities of the NGOs, but in a different manner. All the NGOs, obviously, did make a lot of efforts to avail various kinds of information to the community, but the study focused on those activities in which it was deliberately attempted to widen information access of the community.

### 5.1.1 Access to information

The effort made by NGOs to widen information access is related to what is mostly referred as awareness raising<sup>62</sup> by the NGOs. All the surveyed NGOs claimed that they had this component in their activities and incorporated it in reference to perceived lack of awareness on the part of the community. However, when asked which type of information they needed most for their daily life, beneficiaries responded in the following way.

**Table 2: Type of information most needed by respondents**

Information needs of the community		Frequency	Percent
1	Market information	34	47.2
2	Political information	17	23.6
3	Information about vacancy	10	13.9
4	Can not state	11	15.3
Total		72	100.0

Source: author

Nearly half of the respondents desired *market information* on price and easy accessibility of consumer goods and raw materials used for producing items they sell. *Political information* refers to information regarding current peace and stability conditions of the country which appeared to be unpredictable following allegations of fraud after the recent election. Most expressed serious concern as their road-side businesses became endangered during riots and mass demonstrations which resulted in frequent halt of business activities across the city. *Information about vacancy* is expressed as information regarding village-level employment opportunities which do not require higher skills and not necessarily formal vacancies for which the low-income people are often underqualified. Those who 'can not state' expressed that they do not have meaningful engagements because they are mainly dependent on others.

<sup>62</sup> Awareness raising is normally considered as a continuous process of exchange of information among stakeholders namely NGOs, beneficiaries and local government bodies. It specifically involves provision of information on the objectives of the project, the kind of roles different parties should assume in the cooperation and a way of bringing about changes in perception of the stakeholders on matters that are perceived to be not well understood.

There seems to be no significant variation in the kind of information needed across beneficiaries of the three NGOs except for demand of some particular kind of information by respondents in a single project. The following table shows the spread of responses among the four project locations.

**Table 3: Location of projects and information needs**

Location of the project	Information most needed by respondents			
	Political information	Market information	Information about vacancy	Can not state
1 Akaki-kaliti (AFD)	3	13	4	1
2 Kirkos (IHAUDP)	9	9	1	7
3 Lideta 1(IHAUDP)	4	7	2	1
4 Lideta 2 (WV-urban ADP)	1	5	3	2
Total	17	34	10	11

*Source: author*

Looking at the above table, there seemed to be high requirement for market information by beneficiaries of AFD and the possible reason for it is that most respondents are engaged in retailing and petty trade activities thereby requiring market information. Quite good number of respondents in Kirkos project of IHAUDP could not state their information needs because some respondents are aged and largely depended on the assistance from the project.

**Table 4: Sources of information**

Information source	Frequency	Percent
1 Radio	28	38.9
2 TV and Radio	20	27.8
3 Radio and News paper	9	12.5
4 Television	6	8.3
5 Neighbours	3	4.2
6 TV and News paper	2	2.8
7 others	4	5.6
Total	72	100.0

*Source: author*

A large number of respondents used Radio and TV as an information source. But asked whether they have ownership of these sources because of the activities of the project, 52 (72.2%) said No and 20 (27.8%) said Yes expressing that they had it either before the projects' interventions or managed to buy them using income from other sources. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that having access to these information sources did not automatically translate into ownership and nor did it mean it satisfactorily provided the kind of information most needed by beneficiaries. For instance, some respondents expressed that they had access to Television either from neighbours or public centres like bars.

When asked about the overall status of access to information in light of NGOs' operations, 49 (68.1%) said improved, 4 (5.6%) said deteriorated and 19 (26.4%) said it stayed about the same. The respondents who stated they saw overall improvement cited better awareness regarding prospect of life and management of their activities, enhanced communal exchange of information and increased awareness of HIV/AIDS as indicators of having better access. It seems obvious from the above discussion that much of the impact for improving the access to information by the NGOs comes not from enhancing the ownership of media sources like TV and Radio but through other mechanisms like providing trainings, organizing meetings for community members, health education, etc. During focus group and individual discussions, it was observed that respondents cited better awareness regarding saving, small-scale business management and harmful traditional practices as one of the main impacts of the projects.<sup>63</sup>

### **5.1.2 Organizing community members**

Organizing the community in some ways where it could either be used as a means of pursuing collective goals or creating a responsible body to take over the project after phase-out marked the activities of all surveyed NGOs. They argued that setting up

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<sup>63</sup> Focus group discussion with *Netsebrak* self-help group and women's group in WV-urban ADP on 26/08/05 and 22/09/05, respectively

independent community organizations would have strong implications for what they call *sustainability* of project activities.<sup>64</sup> The attempts made in this regard were based on the idea of forming entirely new organizations rather than strengthening or modifying already existing ones though the type, membership base and strength of community organizations considerably varied from one project to another.

AFD normally operated on selecting its target groups from the array of prospective beneficiaries and organized them before embarking on providing any assistance. Organizations formed in this way took a form of self-help groups, saving and credit cooperatives and self-employed income generating groups.<sup>65</sup> There were hardly any local community organizations, both new and old, with a considerable mass base and represented interests of diverse community members to form a momentum for collective action. The groups formed were established first as a requirement for receiving assistance from the project and second as mechanisms of ensuring continuity when the project phases out.<sup>66</sup> Their service and existence was meant for the benefit of their members who comprised of a few people compared to the overall prevalence of low-income people in the project areas.

IHAUDP employed a quite different strategy of organizing the community by trying to set up *Kebele*-wide organization that would incorporate members from all walks of life and not only target groups. The rationale behind such a strategy was the idea that potentially all kinds of people in the project area can contribute to the success of the project if a mechanism can be set up that meaningfully allowed for participation.<sup>67</sup> Avoiding designing such embracing structures is argued to isolate the effort to assist the poor and could generate potential risks of division among community members. As a result of this conviction, IHAUDP established community organizations in both project

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<sup>64</sup> *Sustainability* is widely regarded as a state where activities that projects have been carrying out and their impacts continue without significant change in quality after the NGOs have withdrawn external inputs from the project.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Ato Markos Lebsework, acting manager of AFD on 19/08/05

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Ato Mengesha Seyoum, social worker at AFD 22/08/05

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Ato Getachew Negash, head of community development component at IHAUDP on 30/08/05

areas with similar structures.<sup>68</sup> The organizations have four tiers starting from neighbourhood groups at the bottom to a council at the top. Ideally every household has a representation in the community organization at some level. Households living closer to each other first formed *neighbourhood groups* and then several neighbourhood groups established a cluster called a *sub-zone committee* and these in turn formed *zone committees* and finally a *Kebele-wide council*.<sup>69</sup> But when the project tried to legalize them, the government demanded that such structures can not be left alone to the community after phase out. Hence, the structure was amended to include representatives from local government offices. Afterwards, a kind of board was set up to lead these organizations that was comprised of representatives from the *Kebele* administration, youth association, workers of the income generating institutions set up by NGOs, and the regional government office that coordinates and monitors activities of NGOs.<sup>70</sup> Looking at the representation, government officials seemed to have the leverage to make decisions in their favour and in that sense it was a costly compromise on the part of the NGO. In addition to such *Kebele-wide* structures, there are other forms of organizations like saving and credit cooperatives, women and youth groups.

WV-urban ADP used very similar methods of organizing the community like AFD. It initially selected women and youth beneficiaries together with local *Kebele* administration and organized them into working groups like a local food processing group and a garbage collection and disposal group.<sup>71</sup> The justification was that assisting beneficiaries and building their capacities was perceived to be more effective in groups than individually.

Beneficiaries have been asked what they needed to be better organized, what assistance they received from the NGO and its impact in empowering them. When asked what they

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<sup>68</sup> In the former project site of IHAUDP, a community organization called Community Based Integrated Sustainable Development Organization was established and legalized. In the current project site (Kirkos sub-city) a similar organization called *Addis Hiwot* Integrated Sustainable Development Organization was established and is functional.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Ato Taye Kebede, manager of CBISDO on 13/09/05

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Sr. Medenkia Sisay, manager of WV-urban ADP on 20/09/05



needed to be better organized, 21 (29.2%) stated financial assistance, 14 (19.4%) training, 11 (15.3%) material support, 19 (26.4%) technical support and the remaining 7 (9.7%) said they do not know. By technical assistance it was meant assisting groups with legal processes, contacting government officials, awareness raising, etc. On the other hand, asked whether there are community organizations formed through the assistance of the NGOs and of which they are a member, 48 (66.7%) stated Yes and the remaining 24 (33.3%) said No and Do Not Know. Those who responded Yes were again asked regarding the kind of assistance they received from the NGOs and 12 stated financial assistance, 15 training, 8 material support and 13 all of these. An interesting issue to look at this point would be the level of alignment between what beneficiaries expected and what they actually received from the NGOs; this refers to those only who are members in organizations formed through the assistance of the NGOs.

**Table 5: Assistance required and assistance provided to community organizations**

What do you need to be better organized?		What kind of assistance did your organization receive from NGO?			
		Financial assistance	Training	Material support	All of these
1	Financial assistance	4	7	3	2
2	Training	2	3	1	3
3	Material support	2	1	4	1
4	Technical	3	3		4
5	Do not know	1	1		3
	Total	12	15	8	13

*Source: author*

Looking at the above table, one can not see a pattern where needs dictated interventions. One can not be sure whether respondents had same list of priorities before the projects' intervention or if they had developed it after projects' intervention. In any case, there seemed to be no significant match between needs and deliveries. This being the case, however, it has to be noted that a match between needs and deliveries may not necessarily lead to empowerment or it may be that NGOs intervened in situations where

beneficiaries failed to state their needs; this is at least true for 5 respondents who did not know what they needed to be better organized but received assistance of some kind from the NGOs. Regarding the relevance of being a member in these organizations, 27 said very relevant, 17 fairly relevant and the rest 4 not relevant. A vast majority of respondents think that their membership has brought some benefits to them in terms of catering for their individual needs. Much of the NGOs assistance seemed to be directed to those organizations or groups having their existence as a result of NGOs' intervention. Already existing self-help groups appeared not to draw the attention of the NGOs and are confined to their traditional role.<sup>72</sup> Almost all of the respondents stated membership in one of these organizations the main benefit being security against emergency situations.

Organizational issues are very sensitive looking at the cases in the surveyed projects. They are sensitive because they involve some kind of conscientization seen very suspiciously by government authorities. *Kebele*-wide structures particularly face this risk because they clearly compete with local governments' popularity. For instance, some beneficiaries stated that they consider IHAUDP to have effectively replaced the *Kebele* administration in the project area with regard to providing financial and social services to the community. For them that was why local authorities sought representation in what are referred as community based organizations (CBOs) to closely monitor their activities. In general, the main benefit that respondents appeared to refer to is that they became eligible to receive assistance from the projects for being members. These organizations are basically confined to taking care of needs of their few members and have not transcended towards mobilizing a critical mass of the community for meaningful collective action. Those NGOs that chose a strategy of organizing the

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<sup>72</sup> The commonest forms of self-help groupings are locally referred to as *Idir* and *Equb*. *Idir* refers to a form of grouping where willing members who often are neighbors or close friends collect a fixed amount of money on a regular basis to be used during the death of a member or his/her relatives to finance funeral processions. *Equb* is a kind of local saving where willing members decide to contribute fixed amount of money on a regular basis and take turns to receive the collected money.

community in small groups consider it a safe approach given the existing NGO-government relations.

### 5.1.3 Material assets and ownership rights

There was disparity among the NGOs in the kind of emphasis they gave to improving endowment of material assets as a means of enhancing empowerment. For AFD, a stronger emphasis was given to improving financial assets and then material assets if they can assist the realization of the former. For IHAUDP, more investment into physical structures had multi-dimensional effects by restoring self-worth and dignity of the poor. WV-urban ADP considered that material assets made a difference in empowering the poor when there were necessary capacities in terms of skill, finance and management in place.

Asked what kind of material assets respondents needed for their empowerment, 20 (27.8%) stated housing, 12 (16.7%) machinery, 35 (48.6%) market place and the remaining 5 (6.9%) said others such as land for dairy farming and producing vegetables. These responses have to be seen in the light of what specific needs they addressed that led to empowerment. Hence, the next question was why acquisition of these assets brings about empowerment and the responses are summarized in the following table.

**Table 6: Material possessions and usefulness for empowerment**

What kind of materials do you need to be empowered?	Usefulness of material assets for empowerment			
	Helps me become self-reliant	Expand my business	Improve my income	No significant usefulness
1 House	8	11		1
2 Machinery	8	2	2	
3 Market place	18	10	7	
4 others	3	2		
Total	37	25	9	1

*Source: author*

Almost half of the respondents stated that they needed a market place. A lot of beneficiaries again responded that they have intentions of using these materials for self-

employment activities in order that they become self-reliant. Quite a considerable group of respondents also expressed intentions to use these assets to expand their existing businesses. Looking at the efforts of NGOs along with the above-stated needs, one sees variations in the mechanisms employed to address it. IHAUDP seems the leading NGO to have allocated a great deal of financial, human and material resources to upgrade housing, road networks and overall physical structures (Tefera, 1998:49). AFD had little involvement in infrastructure works but employed a strategy of individually supplying productive materials to selected beneficiaries.<sup>73</sup> In some cases, it also renovated kitchens after ensuring that women required it to use it for production activities.<sup>74</sup> Attempts have also been made to establish income generating institutions and hand them over to saving and credit cooperatives organized by AFD. WV-urban ADP put a lot of emphasis on supplying materials after beneficiaries received training. In some instances it negotiated for the supply of materials at the disposal of local authorities and provided other materials needed to make use of that.<sup>75</sup>

A lot of what can be considered as empowerment through the use of material assets provided by the NGOs depended either on the ownership or sustainable use right of the assets. There seemed to be a lot of complications in realizing this. For instance, it was difficult to change existing ownership status of houses through the activities of NGOs and the best they could do was renovate or build a new one. IHAUDP did renovation or entirely constructed new ones virtually for all houses that required renovation but the ownership of the vast majority of the houses remained under the government.<sup>76</sup> During a

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<sup>73</sup> For instance, a group of 14 men have been selected jointly by AFD and *Kebele* administration and were each given a pair of horses, carts, accessories and feed for the horses. The agreement was that the beneficiaries will collect garbage from the villages before noon free of charge and use the horses to transport humans in the afternoon charging normal prices which will be entirely theirs. The project agreed to cover costs of maintenance of carts and feed for the horses for six months to allow them have grace period within which they will build their financial capacities.

<sup>74</sup> A considerable number of women in AFD's project area engage in brewing of local alcoholic drinks and preparation of food items for which they need to extensively use kitchens. AFD constructed reasonably better kitchens with energy-saving stoves.

<sup>75</sup> A group of women were given a container by local authorities which was renovated and placed at the side of a main road by the project. The women use it as a shop to sell food items and vegetables.

<sup>76</sup> In a lot of cases, the houses that people with low income inhabit are rented from the government and are badly maintained. The government claims it does not have the resources to renovate them. Hence, IHA-UDP stepped in to do the maintenance with the agreement that the monthly rent will not be increased because of the improved condition

meeting with leaders of three saving and credit cooperatives in the AFD's project area, they mentioned that legal transfer of ownership of assets handed over to them remains suspended.<sup>77</sup> In some cases, local authorities ordered the cooperatives' leadership to move out of their offices because they needed the premises for other purposes. Such gaps in ownership had two-fold effects. First they served as an incentive not to invest in expansion of the businesses by members. Second they also hampered the possibilities of getting access to more capital from formal financial institutions such as Banks which normally required collateral.

In general, there seems to be no major difference in acquisition of material assets brought about by the activities of NGOs. When asked if beneficiaries were enabled to buy durable materials like Television, Radio, Motor Cycle, Refrigerator, etc. through the assistance of NGOs, 55 (76.4%) stated it has no relationship, 9 (12.5%) said NGO provided credit, 5 (6.9%) stated their income increased and 3 (4.2%) said NGO offered employment. Hence, a big majority of the respondents said they had these material assets either before the projects' intervention or bought it using income from another sources. This does not mean NGOs did not make investments that could potentially improve material assets, but a lot of their actions did not reach to a level of making them owners or that individuals were not enabled to keep them functional on a consistent basis. For instance, some beneficiaries who were assisted with horses and carts for income generating purposes by AFD said that they were facing difficulties maintaining the carts and supplying the horses with enough feed after the project withdrew its assistance.<sup>78</sup>

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of the house. However, the title deed remained under the government and beneficiaries can not use it as collateral to have better access to finance or make fixed investments on the houses so that it generates income for them.

<sup>77</sup> AFD handed over a public shower, a shop, water distribution points and a plot of land to the cooperatives but the pertinent government office is not willing to process their application for entitlement because it is not convinced that they are eligible for it. Hence, the current status of ownership is vague and there are no guarantees for sustainable use right also.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Ato Kefyalew Lema, one of leaders of garbage collection and disposal group at AFD on 25/08/05

#### 5.1.4 Performance of financial institutions

Providing or improving financial access is one of the areas which practically all of the NGOs surveyed got involved in with varying degree. During interviews with leaders of the NGOs, all of them stated that enhancing financial access is central to their efforts to empower the community.<sup>79</sup> Central to this task was forming saving and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) which financed self-employment initiatives of beneficiaries. Hence a lot of what could be regarded as enhancing financial assets revolved around the performance of saving and credit cooperatives.

AFD established four SACCOs after training members, providing seed money and office. There are altogether 243 members mainly women whose overall capital is estimated to be 320,000 Ethiopian Birr.<sup>80</sup> Women who are household heads and were willing and able to participate in business activities were selected to be members. The members were entitled to borrow money from the cooperative after they have saved an amount for a given period of time. The seed money provided by AFD to the cooperative was used for borrowing because members could not save enough money to be borrowed by large number of members at a time. IHAUDP established one SACCO with 54 members who were given the same support like that of AFD while WV-urban ADP did not establish any but tried to link its beneficiaries to a micro-finance institution. All NGOs gave what is commonly called basic business skill (BBS) training as part of a capacity building process. Most beneficiaries used loans from the financial institutions to initiate or expand home-based self-employment activities like petty trade, alcohol drinks brewing, retailing, etc.

Asked whether the NGOs assisted them in improving their financial status taking the pre-intervention situation as a benchmark, 42 (58.3%) stated Yes and 30 (41.7%) No.

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Ato Markos Lebsework, acting manager of AFD; Ato Getachew Negash, community development component head at IHAUDP; Sr. Medenkia Sisay; manager of WV-urban ADP on 19/08/05, 31/08/05 and 20/09/05, respectively.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Ato Mengesha Seyoum, social worker at AFD on 23/08/05 . Birr is the name for Ethiopian currency. The current exchange rate against Euro is 1€ = 10.26 Birr.

More than half of the respondents witnessed an improvement in their financial status but asked to rate the role of their current financial status in empowering them 21 (29.1%) stated it has significant role, 49 (68.1%) said it has insignificant role and 2 (2.8%) are undecided. This indicated that though there was an overall improvement in financial status either because they had better access or increased their income through self-employment, most beneficiaries did not think the improvement to have major significance in empowering them. Most of them stated that they have struggles earning enough money to cover their daily needs irrespective of the improvement. Those beneficiaries who claimed to have experienced improvement in income were asked in what ways NGOs' assistance brought the change and 25 said capital access, 7 said employment in the NGOs, 8 said training and 2 said support in organizing them. Capital access seems to play a leading role in improving the financial situation of beneficiaries. Employment in the NGOs is usually short-lived or terminates when the NGOs phase out putting the sustainability under question. But those who have received training stated that even when they could not have permanent employment they considered themselves as 'skilled unemployed' instead of the former 'unskilled unemployed'. Financial institutions' performance in improving access to capital was, to a large extent, positively perceived by beneficiaries but the biggest challenge remained whether it has reached a level which beneficiaries consider sustainable.

### **5.1.5 Human assets and performance**

Increasing access to health and education services had been one of the primary engagements of all NGOs. The commonest approach used by the NGOs was to deliver services by setting up health institutions in the project areas. Basically, there are strict government policies that dictated what kind of institutions NGOs are eligible to establish at a local level.<sup>81</sup> With regard to health, what are on the whole referred to as health posts were the ones permitted at a *Kebele* level. The main task in health posts is

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<sup>81</sup> Health policy of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 1993, p.6

delivery of preventive aspects of health care and not treatment. Hence, most of the activities revolved around giving health education, immunization and reproductive health services. With regard to education, NGOs, in most cases, could be involved in providing assistance to improve the access to primary education.

AFD set up a health post and an HIV/AIDS voluntary testing and counselling centre in the project area where people were provided the services with a minimum price.<sup>82</sup> In addition, it constructed communal latrines, supplied waste bins to residents and set up a sanitary team in an overall effort to improve the environmental sanitation. There was no significant involvement on its part in education. IHAUDP established a new health post and hired staff together with the running cost in both project areas.<sup>83</sup> The former project area has a clinic which provides treatment services but still depends on funds from abroad nine years after phase-out.<sup>84</sup> It also invested huge resources in providing waste bins, constructing communal latrines, sewerage systems and water distribution points to improve sanitation. It renovated, constructed new classrooms, equipped them and handed it over to the local elementary school. Besides, it provides educational materials and sponsorship programs for children from destitute families.<sup>85</sup> WV-urban ADP targeted HIV/AIDS patients and commercial sex workers in its health program by providing them home-based support. Education wise, it ran sponsorship programmes and supplied educational materials to children from poor families.

By and large, one can see that there was the concern and allocation of resources to improve human assets. Beneficiaries were asked regarding their most important health need and the level of easiness in meeting those needs. The following table shows the range of health needs that respondents evidenced. Those who did not state their needs

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<sup>82</sup> For instance, a voluntary test for HIV/AIDS at the center requires 10 Ethiopian Birr which is about 1 Euro. Compared to other testing centers in the city, the charge is cheap. In some cases, willing persons who want the test but can not afford are not charged but they need to deliver verification from the kebele administration.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Ato Getachew Negash, community development component head at IHAUDP on 30/08/05.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Ato Taye Kebede, manager of CBISDO on 12/09/05

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Ato Getachew Negash, community development component head at IHAUDP on 31/08/05 and site visit



had difficulties in articulating their needs and some of them claimed to be relatively satisfied with the current provision.

**Table 7: Most important health needs of respondents**

Health needs		Frequency	Percent
1	Access to nearby health institutions	22	30.6
2	Environmental sanitation	11	15.3
3	Health education	10	13.9
4	Nutrition	6	8.3
5	Hospitals	2	2.8
6	Communal latrine	1	1.4
7	Did not state	20	27.8
Total		72	100.0

*Source: author*

Regarding the level of easiness in getting the health services they need, 25 (34.7%) stated very easy, 22 (30.6%) fairly easy, 20 (27.8%) fairly difficult and 5 (6.9%) very difficult. In general, the respondents found it easy to access though it can not be generalized for all projects. For instance, asked if NGOs contributed in improving the access to health services, 44 (66.7%) said Yes and 24 (33.3%) said No. Out of those who stated No, 16 were respondents from AFD, 6 from WV-urban ADP and 2 from IHAUDP. This could be an indication of the disparities in the contribution of NGOs in improving the access.

With regard to education, similar sets of questions designed for health were presented to respondents. It is here essential to note that most women respondents stated needs of their children instead of themselves because they think it is too late for them to be educated and foresee a better impact on their children than themselves. When asked about their most important education needs, 35 (48.6%) said primary education, 4 (5.6%) said technical training, 2 (2.8%) stated sponsorship and the rest 31 (43.1%) could not state their needs. More than half of those who could not state their needs were respondents from IHAUDP expressing that their needs were reasonably met. Another

considerable majority of respondents are in favour of primary education to which IHAUDP seems to have responded well. But others have confined themselves to occasional provision of educational materials and running sponsorship programmes which, from the perspective of empowering beneficiaries, are highly questionable.

Looking at the above findings of the study, one can see that attempts have been made to improve human assets. The performance can be seen again from the point of mere improvement in coverage and access or from the perspective of continuity of services when external assistance is withdrawn. Quite obviously, the huge investments in health and education institutions and structures have improved the overall access. However, since virtually all health institutions except schools are being run by financial and human resources of the project, the fate of these institutions in terms of sustainability after project phase-out remains vague. The fact that a clinic in the former IHAUDP is operating by getting 80% of its running cost from abroad nine years after phase-out is a good example to this assertion.<sup>86</sup> Again, strategies like sponsorship programmes or annual supply of educational materials are further indicators of continuing dependency.

#### **5.1.6 Overall performance of enhancing agency**

After having seen the overall efforts made by NGOs to improve agency by enhancing asset endowment of various kind, it made sense to see some critical aspects that have emerged through the findings. It is now clear that the NGOs operated with a framework that is different in formulation from the analytical framework used for this study. Therefore, the attempt in the study, from the beginning, was to track activities that supposedly have similar features with the analytical framework and analyze them on their impact using measurements of the framework.

The stronger side of the NGOs in improving asset endowments came in the area of informational assets. Accesses to information have generally been widened mainly by enhancing exchange of local information and introducing new information through

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Ato Taye Kebede, manager of CBISDO on 12/09/05

training and mass education. Organizational assets have shown mixed results. On the one hand, respondents highlighted the positive impacts of being organized in circumstances where it is a requirement for getting assistance. In this regard, individual members seemed to draw a higher utility. On the other hand though, there appears to be less engagement in collective action that would have broader positive effects due to weak representation and inability to reach a broader section of the community and mobilize them.

A lot of efforts have been made to improve endowment of material assets. Seen from an individual and group perspective, we will have two different results. Individual respondents stated that any significant material assets they possessed had little to do with NGOs' activity. On the other hand, endeavours made to increase material assets for groups and organizations eventually failed to ensure ownership or sustainable use right. Financial assets generally improved for the majority of the respondents and they attributed it to the intervention of the NGOs in terms of providing capital, training and sometimes offering temporary employment. Improving financial access appeared to have been particularly targeted for self-employment activities. NGOs have largely preferred financing individually-managed activities instead of group-managed efforts. The critical aspect remained that beneficiaries did not consider improvements in financial assets sufficient to regard themselves as empowered. Access to health and education services is stated to have improved due to the intervention of NGOs thereby fostering human assets. Here the critical aspect relates to making sure that the access continues on a sustainable basis after the phase-out of projects.

We have seen mixed results with regard to enhancing agency. Even in situations when we have had significant improvements in agency, the use of it largely depended on prevailing opportunity structures and that is what the next sub-chapter is all about. By

looking at opportunity structures and what NGOs could potentially and in reality do to make it enabling, the study investigates different interventions.

## **5.2 Improving Opportunity Structures**

Opportunity structures set the conditions for the use of gained agency. They are basically the rules of the game. In such a way they determine the conditions and outcomes of interactions. But before looking at what have actually changed with regard to opportunity structures due to the activities of NGOs, the reasonable approach would be to look at what was expected of NGOs given the context and peculiarities of their operations. In fact, their performance has to be measured in terms of existing possibilities and not on normative standards.

### **5.2.1 Limits to the role of NGOs**

While looking at the role of NGOs, one has to take into account particular features of NGOs in Ethiopia in context. In the first place, meaningful involvement of NGOs in development activities is quite a recent phenomenon. Besides, there were virtually no significant experiences on engagements by NGOs with the government on policy issues that have had a vital impact on the livelihood of the poor. The engagements have largely been those which relate to creating an enabling environment for NGOs themselves in terms of easing bureaucratic barriers for things mainly related to getting and renewing licences and build overall trust (Code of Conduct, 1999:2). Accordingly, the increasing involvement of NGOs in advocacy, human rights and civic education is one that emerged in recent years (Code of Conduct, 1999:2).

On the whole, what NGOs can realistically do given the current NGO-government relations can take two routes. They can address what they consider a crucial issue for their operations jointly through umbrella organizations or take another route where they mobilize the community through civic education and awareness raising. In the latter case, demand for better policies and change in opportunity structures were envisaged to

come by the direct action of community organizations. What the surveyed projects did in organizing various community groups was mainly intended to form a kind of grassroots organizations that would be local voices for the groups they represented. The NGOs' role is largely confined to advocating for what is claimed to be the community's demand. Though there were no rules or regulations that prohibited NGOs from having an engagement in human rights or civic education issues, the NGOs' staff claimed having difficulties in making that a reality.<sup>87</sup> They said it was harder at a local level where daily activities were closely monitored by local authorities. There were instances where they were not allowed to hold meetings with community members.<sup>88</sup>

NGOs repeatedly argued that the current state of overall NGO-government relationship is far from being enabling and cite it as a factor limiting progresses in meaningful NGO engagement with the government for pro-poor policies and regulations. In some instances local authorities prepared joint meetings to discuss current progress of NGOs' activities. However, such forums ended up discussing technical matters and not policy issues that have higher significance, the NGOs' staff asserted. Given such state of operational environment, endeavours by NGOs for improved opportunity structures will have very limited impacts.

### **5.2.2 Formal/informal rules as explaining factors**

Formal and informal rules are the institutions through which opportunity structures find their expression. After explaining the difference between these two kinds of rules, beneficiaries were asked if they consider formal and/or informal rules to have impact on their empowerment and 33 (45.8%) said Yes, 34 (47.2%) No and 5 (6.9%) Don't Know. On the whole, the perception regarding the impact of formal and informal rules is vague. Beneficiaries who stated 'don't know' expressed difficulties understanding the

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Ato Lakew, deputy manager of WV-urban ADP on 16/09/05

<sup>88</sup> For example, following the disputed election in May 2005 which was a complete victory for the opposition party in Addis Ababa, AFD's staff were prohibited from accessing the community for meetings by the ruling party authorities for fear that they would stir up community members against the ruling party. Similar incidents have been mentioned by WV-urban ADP.

relationship. Regarding the kind of regulations that have had impacts on their empowerment, those who stated 'yes' mentioned mainly regulations on taxation and licensing. A few years ago, those beneficiaries who engaged in retailing and petty trade in the nearby open market did not have to pay taxes because they were exempted. But beneficiaries complained that the city administration's recent regulation has levied higher taxes, if at all it was the right thing to do given the nature of the activity and the level of income generated out of the business. In addition, the amount of capital required and the bureaucracy involved to have a license or get a market place in the open markets is mentioned to be another limiting factor.

Among the informal rules that beneficiaries mentioned affected their empowerment ethnic cleavages, nepotism, bribes, and stigma against disabled people and HIV/AIDS patients are major ones. Faulty perceptions, harmful traditional practices and discrimination associated with disability and HIV/AIDS seem to be on the decrease, according to beneficiaries, which is mainly ascribed to awareness raising by NGOs. Asked if beneficiaries observed changes in such practices due to NGOs' activities, 58 (80.6%) said Yes and 14 (19.4%) said NO. Hence, NGOs comparatively were able to influence informal rules associated with harmful traditional practices and perceptions. It is indicative of the prospect for better performance in opportunity structures through awareness raising. On the other hand, when beneficiaries were asked about the relevance of participation in public meetings as a way of affecting decision making in their favour, 20 (27.8%) said relevant, 47 (65.3%) fairly relevant and 5 (6.9%) not relevant. But they qualified this opinion by stating that their perception applies mainly to decision making within the NGOs and not local government. In fact, this would be an indication of the level of openness for popular participation by the NGOs and not necessarily transparency and accountability in the entire decision-making system.

### 5.2.3 Government policies and NGOs' performance

Given the location of the projects in the most urbanized part of the country where customary and informal laws have largely been replaced, formal laws generally fixed opportunity structures that determined the use of agency. However, as it is mentioned in section 4.2.1, the surveyed NGOs, like many others in the country, hold little practice of strong engagements with the government that resulted in change of policies in favour of the poor. Most limitations of the formal legal sector on the efforts of the poor come in the area of self-employment where beneficiaries needed a kind of 'positive discrimination' that put them at an advantage in the overall competition for market.

In a nutshell, the current government policies place a lot of emphasis on poverty reduction and NGOs find it aligning with their objectives. However, whether such policy declarations have been translated to realistic guidelines that can be implemented at a local level is one outstanding predicament. Hence, NGOs seemed to find themselves grabbing with what the government has outlined in its policies on the one hand and lack of genuine political will to realize it on the other.

When beneficiaries were asked if they witness any changes in government policy as a result of NGOs' efforts, 10 (13.9%) said Yes, 59 (81.9%) said No and 3 (4.2%) said Don't Know. Those who stated 'yes' mainly referred to the role NGOs played in liaising and lobbying for administrative support when beneficiaries most needed it from local authorities. One may argue it would not make sense to expect the government to change its policies because of pressure from three different NGOs operating in different locations. However, if we may look at the above opinion of beneficiaries in light of the following statement made by the chairperson of CRDA, the biggest umbrella organization for NGOs, one would optimize what can be expected from the entire sector taken together.

'NGOs are at times seen as irrelevant to the development goals, as aspiring competitors for external assistance as well as alternative sources of influence and

power. In many instances they are considered as agencies with little accountability for expenditure of resources.’<sup>89</sup>

Hence, NGOs’ performance, especially in a context where public policy making of the country is one of the politically-sensitive areas, would be to the lowest minimum if not absent. Evidence suggests that not only is the current legal and political setting not conducive for NGOs to make meaningful progress in impacting formal opportunity structures, the sector itself appears to be less motivated to organize itself around such a task which endangers its operations. The resulting performance is very weak in the area of formal policies and regulations that possess high relevance for empowerment of beneficiaries. The comparative success the NGOs realized in the informal aspect of opportunity structures is one commended by beneficiaries but its relative standing in importance for their empowerment is mentioned to be less. Therefore, the overall performance, seen from the view of beneficiaries, was not satisfactory and nor could that be anticipated under existing circumstances.

### **5.3 Assessing Degree of Empowerment**

The main analytical framework used in this study predicts that if interventions resulted in enhancing agency and improving opportunity structures, the degree of empowerment that subjects eventually experienced will be positive. Therefore, one had to put the above findings of the study in perspective when assessing what degree of empowerment had been realized through the intervention of NGOs. In the following sections, the discussion revolves around what has been the result of a combined effect of partially enhanced agency and largely insignificant improvement in opportunity structures.

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<sup>89</sup> <http://www.wmich.edu/hcenter/cadpr/abstracts.kebede.asrat.html>



### 5.3.1 Sustainability of employment and financial improvements

A reference has already been made to beneficiaries stating that there are improvements in financial assets and better self-employment conditions. It is vital for these improvements to be stable and sustainable if a meaningful degree of empowerment is to be realized. The following was the response of beneficiaries to the question 'How do you rank your level of empowerment as a result of your employment?'

**Table 8: Perceived level of empowerment resulting from employment**

Level of empowerment		Frequency	Percent
1	Very low	12	16.7
2	low	19	26.4
3	moderately low	17	23.6
4	Moderately high	20	27.8
5	High	4	5.6
6	Very high	-	-
Total		72	100.0

Source: author

The majority of the respondents perceived that they have not attained the level of empowerment that they considered sustainable. They also stated that they rarely made applications to local authorities for employment because they believed that they got little help from them. In fact, most respondents stated that they employed themselves in those occupations they had before the intervention of projects. However, those who stated that they had experienced a high level of empowerment provided improved and sustainable income as a reason. The same question was forwarded regarding the level of empowerment beneficiaries perceive as a result of improved financial assets. The following table summarizes their perception.

**Table 9: Perceived level of empowerment as a result of improved financial assets**

Level of empowerment	Frequency	Percent
1 Very low	22	30.6
2 Low	10	13.9
3 Moderately low	15	20.8
4 Moderately high	20	27.8
5 High	5	6.9
6 Very high	-	-
Total	72	100.0

*Source: author*

Again, the majority of the respondents consider improved financial assets to have brought little results in terms of empowering them. This finding has to be interpreted in relation to what beneficiaries consider as empowerment. The NGOs targeted to improve financial assets tantamount to the official poverty line which is 250 Birr/month/person. It was not possible to find whether beneficiaries ranking used the poverty line as a benchmark because they have different perceptions of what it means to 'meet daily needs'.

### **5.3.2 The dilemmas in political engagements**

The nature of the political system and the kind of utility that beneficiaries expected to derive by integrating themselves into the system seemed to determine the level of participation of beneficiaries and not the NGOs' activities. The NGOs were mostly not engaged in those sorts of activities that would give an impression to local authorities that they are politically sensitizing the community for some sort of action. The fact that the country was under the rule of dictatorship governments for many years could be put in perspective here. In addition, though the recent parliamentary election (May 2005) in the country was the third since 1991, the general perception was that most voters considered past elections to be ostensible. These had superimposed a kind of belief upon beneficiaries that their political engagement through elections will bring them little benefits. However, about 96% of the respondents stated voting in the last election

perceiving significant improvements in the credibility of the process though the outcome is highly contested.<sup>90</sup>

But respondents consider their involvement in the political process to be low because apart from elections they have little room to participate in public decision making forums. Asked about their feeling regarding involvement in the political process, about 87% of the respondents stated that they have weak involvement. Those who stated that they have strong involvement in the political process were asked if their involvement was influenced through NGOs' activities, 96% of them said it had nothing to do. Hence, the dilemmas in political engagements on the part of NGOs come mainly from the fear that they would be wrongly perceived by the government and considered as counter-state forces.

### **5.3.3 The role of formal and informal legal system**

Ideally everyone in the country is entitled to the right to present and process any kind of legal cases in the courts. During focus group discussions, beneficiaries expressed that they are aware of such rights. However, they also stated that they would avoid taking cases to the courts as much as possible for various reasons. They consider that getting a final and favourable verdict in the courts is a lengthy process involving unbearable costs in the process of litigation. Moreover, depending on the gravity of the offence, they would consider to settle the majority of the cases through the mediation of neighbours. In many cases, such a decision of avoidance is made for fear of being considered as someone spoiling communal togetherness and trust. Beneficiaries further mentioned that the use of the informal legal system is mainly confined to cases within the family or among relatives where elders acceptable by parties on both sides have the final say.

Not only individuals, but community organizations seems to share this opinion. During focus group discussions with leaders of community organizations, the use of the formal

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<sup>90</sup> According to the Ethiopian constitution, every citizen above the age of 18 is entitled to vote both in parliamentary and provincial elections.

legal system was repeatedly mentioned to have insignificant impact in terms of getting favourable outcomes. They also asserted that it required a lot of resources which they could not afford or rather allocate for other purposes.<sup>91</sup> There are also difficulties differentiating between cases that could be taken to the courts and those that needed to be settled in local administration offices.

The NGOs' management largely believed that engagements with local administration on ownership and administrative matters had to be handled carefully to avoid strife and misunderstanding.<sup>92</sup> They argued that they did not consider courts as an alternative when projects themselves are about cooperation among stakeholders. They did not consider such actions even when local administration offices fall short of their responsibilities.

In general, the use of the formal and informal legal system remains a marginal matter with regard to its role in empowerment in the surveyed projects. This finding should not be taken as a measurement of the performance of the legal system; it only refers to how it is perceived by beneficiaries. Whether the use of it would have led to more empowerment is also hard to determine in a scenario where both beneficiaries and NGOs have avoided using it.

#### **5.3.4 Strength of community organizations and collective action**

Community organizations have been assessed for the degree of autonomy, financial capacity and legal status to look at their organizational strength. The NGOs' original objective of setting up independent community organizations which could last beyond the projects' operational period was attempted to realize by providing continuous

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<sup>91</sup> During discussion with leaders of *Mesob* SACCO to which a public shower and water distribution points were handed over by AFD, they mentioned that they have no knowledge regarding the kind of agreement made between the project and the government when the construction took place. They asked the NGO to provide them all documentations but could not obtain. They are currently administering the businesses; however, they do not have any formal and acceptable documentation that entitled them for it. They also stated that they do not think of taking the local administration, which denied them the right to ownership, to the court.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Sr. Medenekia Sisay, manager of WV-urban ADP on 19/09/05

assistance of various types. In this regard, the NGOs seemed to have considered financial, material and technical assistance as the main priorities.

Financial assistance was provided mainly in a form of one time capital grant. Though with varying degree, all of the NGOs have also attempted to set up income generating establishments as a way of installing financial freedom to the organizations. For instance, IHAUDP set up a number of income generating institutions at the former project site and handed them over to CBISDO. Looking at their financial statements and the interviews with the leadership, income generation efforts seemed to have produced no significant results. In fact, IHAUDP had to subsidize some of them to keep the institutions operational for the sake of the workers. CBISDO received close to 7 million Ethiopian birr in the past seven years from IHA-UDP as a form of top-up.<sup>93</sup> This is one example of the existing financial dependency of the organizations on the NGOs.

Material assistance given in the form of office, office equipments and machineries have had positive impacts in adding value to the formal aspect of the organizations. But relocations enforced by local authorities have sparked serious doubts as to whether material possessions are genuinely at the disposal of the community organizations.<sup>94</sup>

Technical assistance given in the form of training, organizing offices and setting up administrative procedures for organizational management has also been positively perceived by the organizations' leadership. But when the organizations' leadership was asked if they are capable to run the organizations without any technical assistance from the NGOs, they expressed some doubts which emanate from the incapacity of personnel.<sup>95</sup>

There are divergent features when it comes to the legal status of the organizations. Community organizations in the form of financial institutions like SACCOs have a

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Ato Taye Kebede, manager of CBISDO on 13/09/05

<sup>94</sup> AFD built an office for one of the SACCOs and handed it over for the SACCO. But the local authorities relocated the office by claiming that they want the premise to use it as a residence for Police trainees. CBISDO was asked to hand in some of the premises it took over from IHA-UDP because it was needed for the local Kebele office.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Ato Mulugeta, manager of AHISDO on 06/09/05

different legal status compared to *Kebele*-wide organizations set up by IHAUDP. SACCOs are legalized by the regional office for the organization and promotion of cooperatives while *Kebele*-wide organizations are legalized by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). For instance, two of the community organizations set up by IHAUDP namely CBISDO and *Addis Hiwot* Integrated Sustainable Development organization (AHISDO) have been legalized by MOJ with restrictions on their activities. They are not allowed to raise funds from the community or other sources and can only accept funds through IHAUDP. In reality, they are unavoidably dependent on the legal status of the NGO. Such dependency casts serious doubts on their ability to continue as independent community voices especially after the withdrawal of projects. Resultantly, collective actions initiated by these organizations are very rare. The only meaningful case was one initiated by CBISDO when the entire project area was to be sold to a Malaysian group of investors but was later prohibited partly by the consistent demands made jointly by IHAUDP and CBISDO. But the CBISDO leadership admits that such an achievement would not been realized if it were left to CBISDO alone.<sup>96</sup>

Mixed results were observed with regard to the impact of NGOs in improving *agency* and *opportunity structures*. The resulting degree of empowerment was no different. Better results were realized in enhancing *agency* compared to *opportunity structures*. However, the predictions of theory and the analytical framework used require a close examination in the light of the above findings of the survey. How much of the predictions align with the findings and what are the critical aspects of the analytical framework are just some of the questions to be considered. The next chapter attempts to deal with these questions and point out main issues.

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Ato Taye Kebede, Manager of CBISDO on 13/09/05

## **6. Chapter Six: The Findings in Theoretical perspective and their**

### **Critical Aspects**

The study envisages looking at the findings presented in chapter three and four in light of the general arguments of theory and the analytical framework used. This will be continued to be dealt in detail in the next chapter particularly in relation to the likely effect on civil society development in Ethiopia. In such a way, it is attempted to examine how the predictions of theory and the analytic framework relate and contrast with the empirical findings. Moreover, it also serves as a means of highlighting missing elements in the framework when applied in a project context. This chapter has two main parts; the first part attempts to deal with the relative position of some of the major findings to the broader explanations in theory and conceptual dimensions of empowerment while the second part deals with the positive and critical aspects of the analytical tool used in the study.

#### **6.1 Theoretical Relevance of the Empirical Findings**

Theoretical discussions in the second chapter have brought to the surface the fact that the concept of empowerment largely lends itself to the family of theories in the so called 'alternatives' paradigm (Korten, 1990:67). Alternative theories like the name suggests forward alternatives to the mainstream development theories and there is concurrence in the rise of the theories themselves and the increasing attention NGOs and grassroots have received as alternative actors in development (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001:84). That could be the reason why NGOs seemed to draw the major share of their framework for intervention from a range of approaches in the 'alternatives'. Nevertheless, the empirical context, the sample and the theoretical significance of the findings do not allow a conclusion that NGOs' intervention exclusively lends itself to alternative approaches alone. But it is worth looking at those findings which possess a high degree of theoretical relevance and help achieve the objective of this study.

### 6.1.1 Awareness raising vs. conscientization

As it is broadly dealt in section 5.1.1, information access has been largely widened as a result of an activity commonly referred to as ‘awareness raising’ by the NGOs. One of the crucial issues entailed in this activity is the need to upgrade beneficiaries’ level of consciousness regarding their outlook on the material, economic and social world around them. In this regard, NGOs sought to present sets of information that would ‘positively’ contribute to raising the awareness of their subjects. What they attempted to do in the area of awareness raising has some features similar with Paulo Freire’s ‘conscientization’ conception of empowerment.<sup>97</sup> Exploring the similarities and differences helps assess how much of the conscientization concept gained access to the activities of surveyed NGOs.

The surveyed NGOs considered awareness raising to be a kind of first phase activity that paves the way and prepares beneficiaries for the incoming activities.<sup>98</sup> In this regard, there was a strong contact with beneficiaries at the initial stages to see how they perceived interventions and sought to participate. The NGOs further argued that awareness raising was a continuous process of mutual learning where they communicated vital information and became familiar with community perspectives about interventions. This goes in a very similar direction with the approach of conscientization which assumes an intensive dialogue with the poor as a means of initiating reflection to discover oppressive realities around them (IRED Nord, 1997:6). However, with the surveyed projects, the meetings and sometimes dialogue with beneficiaries happened occasionally and were confined to issues related to planned interventions by the NGOs. Here lies the main difference of awareness raising activities by NGOs with the conscientization approach.

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<sup>97</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/subject/education/freire/pedagogy>

<sup>98</sup> Interview with heads of AFD, IHAUDP and WV-urban ADP on 19/08/05, 31/08/05 and 20/09/05, respectively



Moreover, though NGOs alleged that awareness raising was a mutual learning process, the strategy was widely used to deliver information to beneficiaries based on perceived lack of awareness on their part. This placed beneficiaries mainly at the receiving end of the process instead of being the main actors in the dialogue.<sup>99</sup> Though awareness raising lends itself to the dialogue aspect of conscientization, the most important aspect of the dialogue which seeks to reflect upon oppressive elements in terms of broader power relations is missed out on. Even in the conscientization approach, such a method is recommended within the context of redesigning the entire pedagogy of educating the poor (Wuyts et al, 1992:135-136). Hence, the probability of the method to be practiced in the operations of NGOs was less given the nature of their mandate. It is all the more impractical taking into account the prevailing prohibitive working environment within which the surveyed NGOs operated because of the difficulties they had in getting access to beneficiaries as much as they desire.

#### **6.1.2 NGOs and grassroots organizations as main alternative actors**

The opinion that the growing interest in the NGO sector and grassroots communities is largely a reaction to the increasing dissatisfaction with the inefficiencies of the state and the market is widely shared in the development debate (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001:80-82). This was more pronounced by the role non-state actors particularly civil society began to assume in development activities. The amount of resources channelled through the voluntary sector has been on the rise in Ethiopia exacerbated by the proliferation of NGOs and grassroots organizations after 1991. An interesting issue to look at at this point would be whether the NGOs surveyed and the grassroots organizations they attempted to set up provided an alternative to the ineffectiveness of local government and the market.

The surveyed project areas are among the poorest in the city of Addis Ababa with long-standing socio-economic problems to which the government has largely been unable to

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<sup>99</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/subject/education/freire/pedagogy>

respond. Hence, the intervention of the NGOs was highly welcomed by local residents and did make certain changes in the social and economic life of the localities.<sup>100</sup> In this regard, the NGOs' intervention could be regarded as a step forward especially when seen in comparison to the amount of resources at the disposal of local authorities. In the light of the aforementioned findings, could NGOs deliver results that could not be achieved through the operations of other actors? That remains an important question which can not be fully answered through this study. However, a few remarks can be made tantamount to the findings of the study. The remarks are separately made for the NGOs and grassroots organizations.

The NGOs have evidenced limitations emanating from the nature of their operations and the policy context in which they functioned. In this way the limits related highly to issues external to them. The findings have brought to light the fact that without enabling institutional and policy environments, the efforts of NGOs remain highly isolated and ineffective (Clark, 2000:12). Endeavours at a local level by NGOs need parallel supports by local and regional government structures in terms of easing administrative procedures and introducing pro-poor affirmative policies. This is all the more necessary and justifiable when the overwhelming portion of the city's inhabitants earns an income far below the poverty line. The huge amount of resources the NGOs pulled together and invested did not translate into expected outcomes in the project areas (Tefera, 1998:49). This is one indication that massive channelling of resources through the sector by considering it the nearest alternative to the state at the local level does not necessarily lead to the achievement of results unless backed by sound policies and genuine participation of beneficiaries (Kasfir, 1998:126).

Grassroots organizations, particularly those whose genesis is related to the operations of the NGOs have also evidenced limitations that have had their implications in realizing

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with leaders of *Mesob* SACCO at AFD and Manager of AHISDO at IHA-UDP 29/08/05 and 06/09/05, respectively.

empowerment. Their high level of dependence on financial resources and personnel of NGOs, their inability to meaningfully engage with local administration for the needs of the community and weak mass base could be cited as marks of incapacities. They fall short of creating the kind of momentum needed to get community voices heard and bring about changes in their favour. The way they are structured organizationally has opened room for the interference of other bodies like the government who might have the leverage to influence decisions contrary to the wishes of the community. A lot of their ineffectiveness can be ascribed to the legal and political contexts within which they operate though (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001:83).

Having seen limitations both on the side of the NGOs and grassroots organizations to emerge as effective counterparts of state, the likely scenario to be considered conducive for empowering beneficiaries could be a result of the synergetic effect of cooperation among several actors. Hence, one may think in the direction of the contemporary notion which argues for more partnership among actors like the state, civil society and the private sector having maintained a unique role each can play in the cooperation (Korten, 1990:95). The findings of the study seem to indicate the same notion of having meaningful cooperation where the community is enabled to act by itself for its cause, local administration puts in place enabling policy and political settings, and the NGOs provide relevant technical and financial assistance to materialize empowerment goals.

### **6.1.3 Participation as a means and an end to empowerment**

Participation cut across virtually all kinds of interventions by the surveyed NGOs. It was a kind of manifesto for all the surveyed NGOs. It happened in different ways ranging from organizing meetings for community members to other forms of participation like contributing labour and money. For instance, IHAUDP demanded that family members needed to provide free labour when their house is renovated.<sup>101</sup> AFD required a certain level of saving by members of SACCO before it disbursed seed

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with Ato Getachew Negash, head of community development component at IHAUDP on 31/08/05

money they can use for loans.<sup>102</sup> But the general perception about participation among the NGOs is that it is a means to empowerment meaning more participation of beneficiaries is thought to bring about more empowerment. There were also some cases where NGOs seemed to use empowerment to get more participation from beneficiaries. In the latter case, the argument is that if beneficiaries are not empowered, they lack the necessary awareness and organizational means for meaningful participation. Hence, empowerment is envisaged to be realized through awareness raising and upgrading organizational capacities.<sup>103</sup>

There are quite divergent theoretical arguments on the need for participation in ventures such as projects. Some arguments are forwarded from a moral perspective where participation is argued for in terms of the right of beneficiaries to make major decisions concerning their affairs by themselves.<sup>104</sup> There are also other arguments which state participation increases the chances of building a sense of belonging and ownership among participants thereby ensuring the sustainability of project outcomes (DFID, 2002:7.1). Apparently, the surveyed NGOs also used the same arguments whose outcomes were not necessarily similar to the predictions. While NGOs alleged that a lot has been done to increase participation of beneficiaries, it remained that beneficiaries still considered themselves dependent on the operations of NGOs and desired an indefinite extension of project activities. There were also cases where they attempted to give more room for beneficiaries to do much of the work in what is called 'self-help promotion programs'.<sup>105</sup> In such cases, beneficiaries expressed more confidence in the continuity of the groups after the phase-out of projects since they relied less on the

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<sup>102</sup> Interview with Ato Mengesha Seyoum, social worker at AFD on 22/08/06

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Ato Getachew Negash, head of community development component at IHAUDP; Ato Taye Kebede, manager of CBISDO on 31/08/05 and 12/09/05, respectively.

<sup>104</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/subject/education/freire/pedagogy>

<sup>105</sup> Self-help promotion program is funded and promoted by DED. It is a means by which a small group of people with homogenous socio-economic status mobilize local resources to get their desires met with the minimum possible external assistance. Usually there is a small regular contribution and meetings to discuss on burning issues and how to tackle them. AFD has established 25 groups of this kind which enroll about 449 members by assigning facilitators who assist the groups to meet regularly.

resources of the project. It is vital to put in perspective the level of participation NGOs claimed to have realized when looking at the role of participation. One could think of increasing levels of participation along a continuum. It could start from a simple form of consulting beneficiaries and ascend up to making them the very initiators and owners of undertakings. At each level, a different degree of empowerment can be realized (DFID, 2002:7.5). Looking at the findings, a lot of what they considered as participation seemed to have remained at the simplest form where beneficiaries were mainly consulted at the planning stage without necessarily having the right to make specific decision on the kind and magnitude of interventions. Hence, it appeared that the form of participation was a determinant in affecting the degree of empowerment to be realized.

## **6.2 The analytical framework in critical perspective**

The analytical framework was a valuable tool in the systematic analysis of what seems to be an elusive concept to be measured and monitored. A significant contribution of the framework was also associated with the structure it provided in analysing empowerment in practice (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005:5). The fact that the framework largely incorporated major efforts of measuring empowerment in the past has added to this strength. Nevertheless, there were some critical aspects in the framework that the findings of this study have brought to the surface. They related more to the practical application of the framework than its conceptual constitution as presented in the following discussion.

### **6.2.1 Classification of assets**

Asset endowments are regarded as measurements of agency in the framework (see section 2.3.1). It follows a classification of assets based on the perception of the nature of the intervention and its intended effects. Though the framework does not avoid the possibility of multiple asset endowments resulting from a single intervention, there were practical difficulties in assigning a certain intervention's effect to an endowment of a

particular asset (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005:8). For instance, respondents whose houses have been renovated were asked what kind of asset they would consider the intervention has ultimately endowed them with. For them the most important outcome of house renovation was the self-confidence and dignity it restored in them.<sup>106</sup> They now consider themselves equal and active members of their community because they are living in clean and better quality houses. But under the framework, it would be categorized as a material asset. Understanding the complex interaction of assets within interventions and the resulting different levels of empowerment presents challenges (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005:8). The framework has little helpfulness in capturing such interactions.

The gap in perception between the subjective valuation of assets by beneficiaries and the intents of the NGOs in introducing a particular intervention also presented another challenge in classifying assets. Beneficiaries have evidenced a high degree of subjectivity in their judgement of assets they have acquired as a result of interventions. For example, when AFD established SACCOs, the intention was to increase financial access to low-income groups, but members claim that the ultimate gains have been awareness about saving and the sense of togetherness enhanced among members by belonging to the same SACCO.<sup>107</sup> The other aspect of the challenge was when set of beneficiaries involved in a similar programme came up with diverging judgements over the effect of same intervention. In the case of IHAUDP's vocational training programme for young people, some participants have claimed that they gave higher value to the skill acquired while some others stressed that they would value the financial and material assistance they would be entitled to receive from the project by being participants.<sup>108</sup> The biggest challenge remains that the classification of assets either has to be on the basis of subjective valuation of beneficiaries which is not uniform even for

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with beneficiaries whose houses have been constructed by IHAUDP on 07/09/05

<sup>107</sup> Interview with selected members of *Kebele 06* SACCO at AFD 02/09/05

<sup>108</sup> Interview with *Biruh Tesfa* members of metal and wood work group at IHA-UDP on 08/09/05

similar interventions or the original objective of the NGOs in introducing the activity; whichever the choice it is difficult to analyze.

### **6.2.2 Individual vs. group empowerment**

The framework treats individual and group empowerment separately and proposes a different set of indicators to measure it (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005:35-40). In a practical setting, demarcating the two levels of empowerment became complicated as the difference was blurred. There were references in the findings that indicated both individual and group empowerment can happen interchangeably in both settings. For instance, there were cases where individual empowerment was considered a necessary requirement before group empowerment took place. Trainees of metal and wood work in the IHAUDP workshop, after completing the training, demanded that they be organized as a group because they claimed that they recognized they have little chance of using the skill they acquired unless organized in a group.<sup>109</sup> At the same time, it made sense and was justifiable for the project to provide assistance in terms of machinery and finance to a group than individuals. In this case, individual empowerment that happened during the training was a necessary requirement to put forward the demand for getting organized as a group.

There were also references made by beneficiaries that individual empowerment took place in the group they belonged to. Members of SACCO in the AFD's operational area asserted that most of the important exchange of (market) information took place when they met as groups. Hence, individual empowerment in terms of getting access to market information took place when the group was active to meet and discuss important matters.<sup>110</sup> Hence, it would not have been possible for individual members to benefit if it were not for the group which had the organizational strength to keep communication intact. In many circumstances, the interdependency between these two kinds of

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<sup>109</sup> Interview with *Biruh Tesfa* metal and wood work group members at IHA-UDP on 08/09/05

<sup>110</sup> Interview with leadership of *Mesob* SACCO on 29/08/05

empowerment presented a difficulty in making accurate demarcation. But while it is important, for the purpose of analysis, to treat them separately, an acknowledgement needs to be in place that they are not mutually exclusive and it follows that one has to be alert to see features of both appearing during the analysis.

### **6.2.3 Interdependence between opportunity structures and agency**

The framework asserts that there is a two-way relationship between the two variables determining the degree of empowerment (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005:6). While there is no evidence from the study's findings that contradicts this assumption of the framework, there is no evidence either that enhanced agency would eventually lead to positive outcomes in opportunity structures. Opportunity structures in the project areas seemed to be fixed largely by the presence and operation of formal rules. In such a setting, it was difficult to foresee changes in opportunity structures to be the result of enhanced agency when popular participation in public decision making is low. The government usually made its preference for and decisions in favour of a certain policy based on its own orientations and less on grassroots opinion.

The analytical framework helped structure the analysis of what appears to be a very elusive concept; that is its major contribution. In practical terms, however, there were difficulties that emerged esp. in the area of classifying assets and tracking the diverging perception of beneficiaries on similar activities. Other challenges relate to differentiating between individual and group empowerment and identifying the way *agency* and *opportunity structures* interact to result in some form of empowerment. Beyond their theoretical implications and critical aspects, the findings of this study mean a lot to civil society development. It is particularly important to further examine this matter to see the role of civil society as a development actor be it NGOs or grassroots organizations. The next chapter is intended to highlight on the main implications of the findings on the overall civil society development.



## **7. Chapter Seven: Effects on Civil Society Development**

The findings of this study relate to several matters that have relevance for development. Hence, the findings are not confined to matters pertaining to civil society alone and neither are their effects and implications. But when we look at them from the point of view of the contemporary notion regarding the role of civil society in development practice, it would be worth to take into account the overall performance of the NGOs and community organizations. The performance of the surveyed NGOs and the prospect of grassroots organizations in their current state give a small indication as to what can be expected about civil society development in Ethiopia. In quite a lot of cases, both the NGOs and community organizations have indicated that the progresses they want to make in becoming meaningful actors in their sphere will barely change in light of the current state of civil society and their relationship with the local state apparatus. There is, therefore, a high stake in looking at the matter closely and highlighting its developmental effects. This is how the emphasis on civil society out of the range of issues relevant for development is justified.

The following discussion is mainly based on findings relating to organizational matters in the activities of both the NGOs and the grassroots organizations they attempted to set up. The effects are derived from a part of the analysis that presented the administrative challenges and local political contexts in which the NGOs operated. The effects are divided mainly on a time range as short and long. There is also an attempt made to relate the issues to broader discussions on civil society.

### **7.1 Short-term Effects**

When looking at the state of NGO-government relations at a local level, it appears that creating an understanding of cooperation with local authorities is not an easy task. It required a lot of lobbying and dialogue before local administrators extended their support in the form of allowing the NGOs to have free access to the community and

assist them on administrative matters such as permitting the use of resources like land.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, the NGOs stated that the consistency of cooperation from local authorities was unpredictable because of frequent change of local officials.<sup>112</sup> Taking the general features of the relationship at the operational level and the findings in view, the following implications are anticipated in the short-term.

### **7.1.1 Increasing rivalry**

The stakes are high both for the NGOs and local administration to get popular participation of local communities. NGO interventions are usually received with high expectations by local people and have a magnetic effect of drawing people. This raises tension with local administrators which often seek more popular support for their political activities. The rivalry is more felt when NGOs' intervention is perceived to be more successful than their government counterparts. In some cases, local administrators appeared in meetings organized by NGOs to communicate particular notices from the government.<sup>113</sup> They do so because there is a comparatively low attendance when meetings are called by local authorities. Such a situation has led some officials to take action by forbidding NGOs to organize meetings without the knowledge and consent of local *Kebele* administration. The NGOs complained that such overstretched concerns from local administrators have exposed them to routine check-ups and politicization of their operations. The issue becomes worse when there are political tensions at national or regional level or when the government suspects that local people are being mobilized for potentially sensitive political activities.<sup>114</sup>

Local authorities take a much stronger stand against community organizations which are characterized by weak legal, administrative and financial capacities to withstand pressures from local authorities. There are even attempts to set up community structures

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with Ato Lakew, deputy manager of WV-urban ADP on 16/09/05

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Ato Getachew Negash, head of community development component head at IHAUDP on 30/08/05

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Ato Getachew Negash, head of community development component head at IHAUDP on 31/08/05

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Ato Mengesha Seyoum, social worker at AFD on 23/08/05

with similar objectives that compete for popular support and resources. There seems to be an effort on the part of the local government to set up a prohibitive working environment for community organizations so that they do not act as counter-state forces. This goes in line with arguments that state the dichotomy of state and civil society in Africa is far from its full-fledged form (Chabal and Daloz, 1999:20-21). In fact, the attempt appears to be diverting such a process, if at all it is moving in that direction, at the nascent stage.

### **7.1.2 Absence of independence**

Independence of civil society bodies like the NGOs and grassroots organizations is a very critical matter as per the findings of the study. The independence of implementing NGOs referring to their organizational, financial, and legal aspects remains in doubt (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001:80). There is no strong evidence that suggest they have a local mass base supporting the cause they stand for. In two of the cases, the projects are synonymous to the NGOs and their existence is entirely tied to their operations and not the support they were able to mobilize from local communities. Financially, all of them are entirely dependent on external funding. One can imagine the kind of compromises that have to be made on their objectives and supposed community interests to attract more funds. There are no cases of local fundraising initiatives except minor contributions in free labour and local materials which are insignificant compared to the overall volume of work they undertook. Organizationally, they do not have structures that ensure lasting affiliations with local communities whose cause they claim to advocate. This limitation is in many ways related to their financial dependence on external sources. Legal restrictions on the kind of activities they are involved in also present a prohibitive environment for genuine civil society action.

The community organizations which the NGOs alleged are independent exhibit more dependence against the claim. The evidence is more in the direction that they are

dependent on the NGOs financially and technically for their existence.<sup>115</sup> They appear to have sound organizational stature, but in essence they are far from being independent community structures with a reliable popular base. The direct representation of government officials in the organizations' structure is strong evidence of the interest of local authorities in keeping these organizations from being antagonistic towards the state even at the expense of their independence. There are allegations by the NGOs that local administrators even want these structures to be extensions of the administrations' local structure to get hold of the popular support they have been able to build as a result of the NGOs' intervention.

The nature of such challenges in the operations of NGOs and grassroots organizations presents features characterizing civil society in Ethiopia. The evidences is in favour of the argument that lack of independence of both NGOs and mainly grassroots organizations is part of the scheme on the State's part to circumvent the emergence of counter-hegemonic civil society (Kasfir, 1998:9). Rare initiatives from civil society to challenge the state on its policies and politically motivated decisions on the sector have been met with strong warnings forcing NGOs to operate only in 'safe' zones.

### **7.1.3 Depressed motivation for voluntarism**

Civil society engagements usually lend themselves to voluntary participation of actors (Hyden and Hailemariam, 2003:220). The surveyed cases have brought to light this aspect of civil society's characteristics. Except for personnel in the NGOs who are paid, leaders and members of community organizations are not remunerated for their contribution. However, the leadership and members seem to derive their utility from the benefit they get from the community organization they belong to.<sup>116</sup> They have indicated reservations in continuing to give voluntary service because they foresee growing tensions and confrontations with local administration in the imminent

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<sup>115</sup> Interview with Ato Taye Kebede, head of CBISDO on 13/09/05

<sup>116</sup> Interview with the leadership of three SACCOs at AFD on 29/08/05 and 02/09/05

withdrawal of projects. This threat becomes more realistic when the NGOs plan to hand over project outcomes that local authorities want to use for their purposes. They asserted that the presence of projects provided an essential coverage when the government considered actions that were against their desires.<sup>117</sup> In some cases local authorities showed an interest and used compulsion to seize premises and establishments handed over to community organizations. Hence, the prospect of strong grassroots organizations emerging through devoted voluntary engagement of beneficiaries became less as administrative structures were perceived to have disabling effects. This eventually led to a lot of people becoming less motivated to voluntarily involve themselves in community organizations that are perceived to be weakened and become contentious when projects phase-out.

## **7.2 Long-term Effects**

The short term implications coupled with the prevailing attitude of the government on the matter will certainly have a cumulative impact of generating long term effects. These effects contain within themselves far reaching implications for the overall development of civil society in Ethiopia. A thorough discussion on the matter could have been relevant if the findings had been inclusive of the views of local and regional authorities. Hence, the following discussion bases itself on the direct long-term effects anticipated in the operations of NGOs.

### **7.2.1 Deepened mistrust**

Past and current NGO-government relations in the country have been characterized as depictions of the overall picture of civil society-state relations. There are arguments which asserted that while the number of civil society organizations like NGOs and grassroots organizations is on the increase, improvements in the state of relations have remained static. The leadership of surveyed NGOs have capitalized upon the element of

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<sup>117</sup> Interview with Ato Taye Kebede, manager of CBISDO on 12/09/05

trust as the most essential aspect affecting the relationship.<sup>118</sup> They alleged that the government characterizes NGOs as wasteful, uncoordinated, self-centred and incapacitated to implement what they have agreed to undertake. The surveyed NGOs do not show evidence suggesting the decrease of the mistrust.

On the other hand, the NGOs appeared not as self-critical as one would expect for various reasons. Lack of government's capacity to regulate their activity, lack of institutional arrangements that ensure transparency and accountability in the use of resources, weak enforcement of agreements are some of the reasons (Van Diesen and Walker, 1999:90). There are virtually no significant efforts in the direction of bringing matters up for discussion and constructive dialogue on both sides. In some matters such as providing more freedom for community organizations, there are polarized differences for fear that the organizations would turn themselves into political actors. The most inactive of the actors in such situations are NGO-initiated community organizations which do not have the leverage to positively influence local authorities to engage with the NGOs in a constructive way. These organizations find themselves marginalized in negotiations between the NGOs and the government when they are the prospective actors to take over from the projects.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, these complex scenarios of suspicion and mutual avoidance act in combination to further deepen the existing mistrust on the long run.

### **7.2.2 Emerging cliental cleavages**

The representation of government officials in community organizations and their continued influence on the operation of the community organizations is feared to serve as a mechanism of extending government structures into civil society. There were cases where local government officials attempted to influence the election process so that those loyal to them became members of the leadership of community organizations.

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<sup>118</sup> Interview with Ato Lakew, deputy manager of WV-urban ADP on 16/09/05

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Ato Kassahun Gizaw, manager of AHISDO on 06/09/05

There is an increasing tendency on the part of local authorities to gather those with similar political orientations around community organizations so that government's presence and influence is felt at that level too. The NGOs alleged that the hidden objective in such an attempt is to get hold of resources channelled to community organizations by the NGOs (Chabal and Daloz, 1999:22). Increasingly, such processes at local level make the emergence of a vibrant civil society less of a reality.

On the other hand, the long-term effect of weak institutional arrangements and high discretion at local government level means frequent interference and possible manipulation by local authorities to get things done in their favour. The anticipated cliental cleavages will gradually emerge when projects phase out and community organizations become highly susceptible to pressures by local authorities.

### **7.3 Expectations vs. Reality**

There is enough evidence to argue that dominant features of civil society in Africa have manifested in the surveyed cases also. The prohibitive institutional setting, the nascent state of civil society and the blurred demarcations between state and civil society seem to be the dominant signs (Kasfir, 1998:9; Ndegwa, 1996:1-2). Civil society structures like NGOs and grassroots organizations seem to find it difficult to institutionalize themselves in the current legal and political setting. This had two way effects by undermining the potential influence they might exercise on state structures and policies through strong engagements and making them permeable to excessive state interference. A clearly separated civil society able to pursue purely identified collective goals and mobilize people for collective action is highly improbable under the prevailing situation (Hyden and Hailemariam, 2003:233). The possible alternative for NGOs is to follow a more aggressive and confrontational approach.

Contrary to the expectations of Western donors which consider NGOs as emerging parts of a promising civil society providing an alternative to weak state structure, both NGOs

and grassroots organizations have evidenced that they fall short of that expectation (Ndegwa, 1996:2). The legal and political context within which they operate seems to be the overriding factor in determining their performance rather than the normative expectations attributed to the sector as part of civil society. The increasing amount of resources channelled through the sector could not change the performance either and seems to have exacerbated confrontation with local officials who operate with comparatively low resources. The attempt to get access to NGOs resources through community organizations could also be part of the strategy to make up for that. Such inefficiencies at a local level make it less probable for the sector to spearhead advocating and struggling for macro-level changes in policies and legislation which require a much stronger engagement (Clark, 2000:14).

In general, the effects briefly analyzed above on a time range provide a glimpse of the challenges the sector faces. Normative standards of the sector are no realistic parameters to understand the interplay of local factors which have surfaced as major determinants; the setting appears to be more crucial than the rest. In this way, the study has brought results in many ways different from what NGOs could potentially perform in an ideal setting.



## Conclusions

This study set out with the assumption that NGOs are generally unsuccessful in empowering communities they work with. The main reasons considered were their perceived weakness in improving agency and opportunity structures taking into account limitations emanating from the nature of their operations and other factors. The analytical tool used in the study to verify the above assumption has revealed mixed results in all of the main variables examined. In consequence, the following conclusions have been drawn by synthesizing the results. Relevant recommendations are embedded in the conclusions so that the context in which they are forwarded is not lost by separately presenting them.

### **A. Conceptualizing empowerment was an implicit pursuit and consequentially not clearly framed in the activities of NGOs.**

The NGOs have shown explicit intentions to bring about empowerment through their interventions. Conceptualization of empowerment is perceived to have taken place during the initial phase of planning and implementation. Taking this process into account, the evidence shows that the NGOs did not follow clearly structured thinking to direct the course of interventions. The conceptual foundation of their intentions is largely weak and the effect is directly reflected in their operations. It was as if every single activity led to some form of empowerment as it was conceived by the NGOs.

Though there are explicit intentions of realizing empowerment through their operations, it stayed for the NGOs fundamentally as an implicit pursuit. Hence, instead of concepts leading operations the reverse process was witnessed in the surveyed NGOs. The NGOs seemed to draw their conceptual basis of empowerment from a set of activities they implemented. This may not be unusual for a sector that attributes its conception of empowerment mainly from practice; nevertheless, it depicts the main difference in the conceptualization of empowerment with the analytical framework which, on the

contrary, appears to present clear structure. The obliqueness of the concept in the operations had also undermined critical thinking about empowerment within NGOs. As a result, they lacked objective parameters to measure empowerment outcomes. Moreover, the conception remained very susceptible to subjective valuations of different actors namely NGO staff, donors and the community. It has been shown that there is no consistent conceptualization at the different stages in the project cycle. The implementation of activities in a situation of weak conceptual framework presented a scenario where the use of objective measurements became practically impossible. Therefore, NGOs with similar objectives and context have to engage in the critical appraisal of projects in order to identify possible measurements for empowerment outcomes.

**B. Improvements in certain aspects of agency and opportunity structures were realized but not at a sufficient level to bring the desired level of empowerment by beneficiaries.**

The NGOs were able to improve informational assets to a large extent and material, financial, organizational and human assets only to some extent. Beneficiaries hold no major contention in the realized improvements but do not feel empowered either. They think the improvements are insufficient to consider themselves empowered. Seen together with the conclusion discussed above, such subjective valuation of empowerment further reveals the variations among actors regarding their perception on the outcomes of interventions. In opportunity structures, NGOs were able to have impact in positively changing informal rules especially traditional beliefs and practices through awareness raising. The weakness lied in their inability to have a meaningful influence on formal aspects of opportunity structures which appeared to have more relevance in fixing opportunity structures in the project areas. Hence, the level at which a certain degree of improvement is sufficient to result in empowerment would best be

measured, in light of the findings, by the perception of beneficiaries who are targets of empowerment activities. It would serve the interest of NGOs, donors and other stakeholders to give priority to community views not only at the planning phase but in such exercises like monitoring and evaluation where the attempt is largely to measure outcome and impact of interventions.

**C. NGOs are comparatively better positioned for influence at a community level than their government counterparts.**

In terms of bringing attitudinal change through delivery of new information, winning the support of community members and financial and organizational capacities they are endowed with, NGOs seemed to command high leverage. These may be the result of the frequency of contacts with different groups of the community, the amount of resources at their disposal and the relative neutrality of their operations in terms of local politics. In many instances, local people seemed to show better trust for NGOs than local government administrations. They have revealed their favour by participating more in the NGOs' activities than local government structures. However, NGOs are institutionally in a weaker position. Attempts to institutionalize their impact through community organizations have been limited by the poor prospect of these organizations to emerge as independent and locally-grounded entities. Under the current scenario, NGOs might find an alternative route by strengthening already existing community organizations, which are more institutionalized, rather than setting up new ones which seem to have aggravated confrontation with local authorities.

**D. Opportunity structures, as expressions of legal and regulatory frameworks, dictate the use of enhanced agency.**

Enhanced agency would need to be utilized either by individuals or groups to result in empowerment. Its utilization is bounded by the kind of prevailing opportunity structures. The study has revealed that the use of improved agency in the areas of

financial, material and organizational assets have been highly limited because the legal and regulatory setting was described to be not enabling. It follows that the performance of NGOs remains half-backed. The inability of NGOs to bring about meaningful changes in government policies and regulations could be put in perspective here. However, collective action can be an alternative which all surveyed NGOs seem to have not properly explored. The fear that such attempts could be politicized by local authorities can not always be justified. Therefore, NGOs could envisage mobilizing community members (not only beneficiaries) as interest groups to advocate for the cause of the poor.

**E. Improved organizational assets require institutionalization in order that strong collective action follows.**

Evidences showed that improvements in organizational assets have been positive; nevertheless marred by the weak legal position of organizations. A lot of resources have been invested in creating and building capacities of community organizations but efforts to institutionalize them were largely unsuccessful. In cases where legality was secured, it was with restrictions having serious implications for their future operations. In fact, leaders of these organizations have doubts about the long-term existence of the organizations. Collective action usually requires strong and stable organizational capacity which can articulate demands and mobilize a critical mass. It becomes difficult to envisage strong community action to emerge in the light of the prevailing poor organizational strength of CBOs. The overall effects of such conditions on civil society development in Ethiopia is quite significant taking into account the fact that NGOs are currently the most prominent and meaningful actors with engagements for the emergence of strong civil society.

In general, the findings of the study, together with limitations discussed in section 2.5, need to be interpreted carefully. The above conclusions are by no means generalizations

of the entire NGO sector in the country. They mainly refer to those kinds of NGOs working in urban areas and which have multi-interventions. There is no major difference in the performances of the NGOs surveyed. The differences in the amount of resources invested by the respective NGOs are reflected in the differences of physical structure of project areas and not on the level of empowerment beneficiaries claimed to have been reached.

The findings also show the complexities involved in measuring empowerment at a project level. The intricacy of interplay of diverse local factors and the critical aspects of the analytical tool (as discussed in section 6.2) testify that measuring empowerment is not an easy task hence requiring further research. It becomes more complex when there are varied perceptions of empowerment even among apparently homogenous groups. Hence developing a set of plausible measuring tools and indicators of empowerment outcomes needs to be a dynamic process requiring continuous research.

Not much can be recommended about ways of improving NGO-government relations which were found to be weak at the local level because the opinion of local authorities has not been secured. NGOs have evidenced strong aspects in winning the support of local communities more than local administration. There is a need on the part of local authorities to positively accept such developments and consider NGOs as development partners who can be useful in the overall efforts of reducing urban poverty. NGOs need to make use of existing opportunities to cultivate a culture of trust and cooperation on a consistent basis.

While all the above conclusions contain vital aspects helpful in understanding empowerment, the fundamental intent of this study was to invoke critical thinking about community empowerment especially in the operations of NGOs which overtime have become prominent actors in development.

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## III. List of Interviewees (arranged by date of interviews)

- 1- Ato Markos Lebsework, acting manager of AFD, from 18/08/05 – 19/08/05 at the project's site in Addis Ababa.
- 2- Ato Mengesha Seyoum, social worker at AFD, from 22/08/05 – 23/08/05 at the project's site in Addis Ababa.
- 3- Ato Kefyalew Lema, leader of garbage collection and disposal group, on 25/08/05 at the AFD project's office in Addis Ababa.
- 4- Ato Getachew Negash, head of community development component at IHAUDP, from 30/08/05 – 31/08/05 at the project's office in Addis Ababa
- 5- Ato Zebenay Atnafu, social worker at IHAUDP, on 05/09/05 at the project's office in Addis Ababa.
- 6- W/ro Mekdes Admasu, social worker at IHAUDP, on 05/09/05 at the project's office in Addis Ababa.
- 7- Ato Kassahun Gizaw, manager of AHISDO, on 06/09/05 at the office of AHISDO in Addis Ababa.
- 8- Ato Taye Kebede, manager of CBISDO, from 12/09/05- 13/09/05 at the project office in Addis Ababa
- 9- Ato Lakew, deputy manager of WV-urban ADP, on 16/09/05 at the projects site in Addis Ababa.
- 10- Sr. Medenkia Sisay, manager of WV-urban ADP, from 19/09/05 – 20/09/05 at the project site in Addis Ababa.



1. Amhara
2. Oromo
3. Tigre
4. Gurage
5. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

1.8 What educational level have you reached at the moment?

1. Read and write
2. Elementary (not completed)
3. Elementary (completed)
4. Secondary (not completed)
5. Technical College graduate
6. University graduate
7. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2: Indicators of Agency**

In the following set of questions, I would like to know about your feelings towards the activities of the NGO and its impact and the property and assets you own or have access to.

**Informational assets**

2.1 What kinds of information are important for your daily life?

2.2 What is the often used information source?

1. Television      2. Radio      3. Newspaper      4. Neighbors      5. Others





2.3 Did NGO activity help you own any one/both of the above assets?

1. Yes      2. No

2.4 In general, compared to the situation before the NGO's entry to the area, has your access to information improved, deteriorated, or stayed about the same?

1. Improved
2. Deteriorated
3. Stayed about the same

2.5 If improved, in what ways?

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## Organizational Assets

2.6 What do you need in order to be better organized?

1. Financial assistance
2. Training
3. Material support
4. Technical support
5. Do not know

2.7 Is there a community organization formed through the assistance of the NGO?

1. Yes      2. No

2.8 If yes, what kind of assistance did the organization you are a member receive?

1. Financial assistance
2. Training
3. Material support
4. All of the above

2.9 In terms of catering for your individual needs or needs of your kind, how do you rank the relevance of the organization?

1. Very relevant
2. Fairly relevant
3. Not relevant

2.10 In terms of fulfilling its objective, how effective is the organization's leadership?

1. Very effective
2. Fairly effective
3. Not effective

2.11 Is the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of the leadership related to NGO activity? If so, in what ways?

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2.12 Are you a member of self-help/self-reliance group?

1. Yes      2. No

2.13 If yes, which type of self-help group are you a member?

1. *Idir*
2. *Equb*
3. *Meredaja mahber*
4. Saving and credit cooperative
5. Other, specify

2.14 How do you assess the importance of being a member of the self-help group in terms of empowering you?

1. Very important
2. Fairly important
3. Not important

2.15 If your answer is very/fairly important, in what ways did it empower you?

---

2.16 Does the NGO assist the group?

1. Yes
2. No

2.17 If yes, in what ways does the NGO provide the assistance?

1. Financially
2. Materially
3. Technically
4. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

2.18 Did the assistance strengthen the group?

1. Yes
2. No

2.19 If so, in what ways?

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### Material Assets

2.20 What kind of materials/goods do you need to be empowered?

1. House
2. Machinery
3. Market place
4. Other

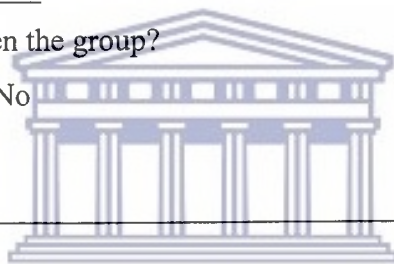
2.21 Why are they important for your empowerment?

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2.22 Is your home .....

1. Owned and completely paid for
2. Owned with a mortgage
3. Rented from private owner
4. Rented from government
5. Squatter
6. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

2.23 How many rooms does your house have?



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2.24 What is the condition of the house? (Observation only)

1. Good

2. Fairly good

3. Bad

2.25 Is there any improvement in the condition/ownership of the house because of the activities of the NGO?

1. Yes

2. No

2.26 If yes, in what ways?

1. NGO renovated the house

2. NGO built new house

3. NGO provided credit

4. NGO lobbied government for improvement

2.27 Which of the following items do you own, if any?

1. Bicycle

2. Television

3. Radio

4. Refrigerator

5. Motor bike

6. Motor vehicle



2.28 How has the NGO's activities assisted you in owning one or more of these material assets?

\_\_\_\_\_.

2.29 How do you assess the impact of owning these goods in terms of empowering you?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Financial assets

2.30 How significant is your current financial situation in terms of empowering you?

1. Significant

2. Insignificant

3. Have no idea

2.31 Did the NGO assist you in improving your financial situation?

1. Yes

2.No

2.32 Did the NGO assist you get your current employment?

1. Yes                      2. No

2.33 In what ways did NGO assist you to have the current employment?

1. NGO provided training
2. NGO provided finance
3. NGO created employment
4. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

2.34 Did your current income change as a result of NGO activity?

1. Yes                      2.No

2.35 Have you ever borrowed money from other institution or person?

1. Yes                      2.No

2.36 If yes, from which one?

1. Local money lenders
2. Saving and credit cooperative
3. Bank
4. Microfinance
5. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

2.37 Did the NGO provide access to financial institutions?

1.Yes                      2.No

2.38 Did the acquisition of material assets improve your access to credit?

1. Yes                      2. No

2.39 How indebted would you say you are at the moment?

1. Extremely indebted
2. Very indebted
3. Fairly indebted
4. A little indebted
5. Not indebted at all

2.40 Do you observe any improvements in your capacity to repay your debts as a result of NGO activity?

1. Highly improved
2. Fairly improved
3. Not improved

2.41 If improved, in what ways?

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**Human assets**

2.42 What is the most important health or health-related need for you or your family?

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2.43 How easy do you find it to access health services you need?

- 1. Very easy
- 2. Fairly easy
- 3. Fairly difficult
- 4. Very difficult
- 5. Impossible

2.44 Did the NGO contribute in improving the access?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

2.45 If yes, in what ways?

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2.46 What is the most important education need for you or your family?

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2.47 How easy do you find it to access education or training when you want to?

- 1. Very easy
- 2. Fairly easy
- 3. Fairly difficult
- 4. Very difficult
- 5. Impossible

2.48 Did the NGO contribute in improving the access?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

2.49 If yes, in what ways did the NGO contribute?

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**Section 3: Opportunity structure**

3.1 Are there formal/ informal rules that affect your empowerment?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

3.2 If yes, can you list some of them?

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_



3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

3.3 How do you perceive public decision making in terms of their relevance for your welfare?

1. Relevant
2. Fairly relevant
3. Not relevant

3.4 How often do you participate in public meetings?

1. Very often
2. Fairly often
3. Not at all

3.5 How do you consider your participation in terms of determining outcomes in your favor?

1. Very useful
2. Fairly useful
3. Not useful

3.6 Did you see any changes in the government policies as a result of the NGOs' activities?

1. Yes

2.No

3.6 What changes did you see in the government policies as a result of the NGO's activities?

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3.7 If yes, in what ways?

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3.7 Did you observe any changes regarding harmful traditional practices, local norms, and customary laws due to NGO activities?

1. Yes
2. No

**Section 4: Degree of empowerment**

4.1 How stable is your current employment?

1. Very stable
2. Fairly stable
3. Not stable

4.2 How do you evaluate your level of empowerment as a result of your employment?

Very low 

1	2	3	4	5	6
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 Very high

4.3 If unemployed, how often do you make application to local authorities?

- 1. Very often
- 2. Fairly often
- 3. Not at all

4.4 Which legal system do you use most?

- 1. Informal legal systems
- 2. Formal legal systems
- 3. Other, specify

4.5 If informal legal systems, how happy were you with the outcome?

- 1. Completely happy
- 2. Fairly happy
- 3. Neither happy nor unhappy
- 4. Fairly unhappy
- 5. Completely unhappy

4.6 Does the informal legal system have any influence on your empowerment?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

4.7 If yes, how?



4.8 How often are elections usually held to choose local, regional, and national governments/administrations?

- 1. Never
- 2. Not held on a regular basis at all
- 3. Every four or five years
- 4. Every six or seven years
- 5. Do not know

4.9 Were you entitled to vote in the last election at the local level?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

4.10 Did you vote in the last election at local level?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

4.11 How involved in the political process do you feel you are at the moment?

Not at all 

1	2	3	4	5	6
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 Very much

4.12 Was your involvement in the political process influenced through NGO activities?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

4.13 If yes, in what ways?

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4.14 How important are the local community organizations in the political process

Least important 

1	2	3	4	5	6
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 Very important

4.15 How do you rank your level of empowerment as a result of improved financial assets?

Very low 

1	2	3	4	5	6
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 Very high

4.16 How do you rank your level of empowerment because of improved material assets?

Very low 

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

 Very high

4.17 How do you rank your level of empowerment because of improved informational assets?

Very low 

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

 Very high

4.18 How do you rank your level of empowerment as a result of improved human assets?

Very low 

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

 Very high

4.19 How do you rank your level of empowerment as a result of improved organizational assets?

Very low 

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

 Very high

4.20 How do you consider the overall importance of activities of the NGO in empowering your life?

Least important 

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

 Very important

4.21 Do you think you have better capacities because of NGO activities?

1. Yes      2. No

4.22 If yes, in what ways?

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## **Checklist questions for semi-structured Interviews**

### **For Project Leadership and Staff**

1. What are the major forms of powerlessness you perceive/understand in the community?
2. What specific programmes have you designed to address the problem?
3. How did you design the activities? What was the role of different stakeholders?
4. How much were you successful in implementing planned empowerment activities?
5. How do you evaluate the impact of your activities? Is there improvement as a result of your intervention? If so, would you mention specific cases?

### **For Community Leadership**

1. What are the main features of powerlessness you perceived before the NGO intervention?
2. How do you perceive empowerment?
3. In what ways do you think the issue can be addressed?
4. What is your idea regarding the activities of NGO in terms of empowering the community?
5. Which of the empowerment activities of the NGO were successful and which were not?
6. How do you evaluate the level of participation of the community in the project?
7. How strong is your local organization? How large is the membership and gender composition?
8. What assistance did you get from the NGO? What was the impact of the assistance?

## **Checklist for moderating Focus Group Discussions with Different Community Groups**

- Is there a consensus regarding the major forms and reasons of powerlessness among stakeholders?
- What is the perception of local community members regarding empowerment vis-à-vis NGO perception?
- How transparent is the entire project undertaking?
- What is the perception of the community regarding the role of local government in the NGO activity?
- To what extent does the community feel they have control over their affairs as a result of the NGO activity?
- What is the overall evaluation of community members regarding the success/failure of NGO activities in terms of empowering them?

