



A study of the Nature of Group Communication Among Awramba
Community Members in Promoting Social Change

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of Journalism and
Communication

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Journalism and Communication

Addis Ababa University

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

June, 2012

Addis Ababa University

School of Journalism and Communication

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Tilahun Cherie, entitled: *A study of the Nature of Group Communication Among Awramba Community Members in Promoting Social Change* and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Communication complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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Abstract

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In the spectrum of social interaction, the nature of communication visibly impacts various spheres of people's lives. Therefore, the objective of this study was to examine the nature of the communication process in fostering socio-economic transformation in Awramba community. The paper addressed how the communication behavior and shared ideologies have influenced the status of the community's transformation and dynamics. It employed qualitative methodology and ethnographic approach. The data were gathered by employing interview, observation and Focus Group Discussion. The study revealed that the high frequency of communication among members was used as a means to maintain control and stability in the community. A central theme in the communication process was protecting the existing principles which were developed by the co-founder of the community and adopted to the members in a persuasive approach. This helped the community to sustain its indigenous value systems over time. There was greater conformity since the interaction was built on a sacredness relationship; and Pressure was imposed on individuals with divergent views. In the strict communal life of Awramba community, interest of the group prevails over some interests of individuals. Change agent interventions and development initiatives in the community have succeeded in enhancing the economic status better at a communal level; and the economic transformation is a direct result of the marginalization.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my heart-felt thanks to my advisor, Dr. Gebremedhin Simon, for providing invaluable, substantive and constructive assistance in the entire preparation of this study.

I am also grateful to the participants, in the focus group discussion and to my interviewees who generously gave their time and shared their opinions. I also thank Enaney and Gebeyehu for their invaluable help in arranging Focus Group Discussions and providing efficient information about the overall essence of the community.

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Lists of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADA: Amhara Development Association

AWWCA: Amhara Water Works Construction Agency

DESA: Department of Economic and Social affairs of the United Nations Secretariat

DPPB: Disaster Preparations and Prevention Bureau

EPRDF: Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front

ESRDF: Ethiopian Social Rehabilitation and Development Fund

ETV: Ethiopian Television

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

FIDA: Finish International Development Agency

RMSSEA: Regional Micro and Small Scale Enterprise Agency

UNECA: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

It is essential to realize that local communities are the most important components of a country to function as a source for broader engagement in social change. Hence, empowering them through effective communication is the initial and cornerstone progress step in the process of empowering the nation as a whole.

Dewey emphasizes the importance of communities as a central building block of democracy and a vital level where social inequalities are reshaped. The conceptual practice of social welfare is highly connected with the life in geographically local communities. “Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community.” (1900/1956, p. 213; cited in Middaugh & Kahne 2009, p. 195). Dewey considered local communities, which are conceived of face-to-face relationships, as significant agents for developing the habits and commitments of harmonious life.

Awramba community is a local community in Ethiopia which is supposed to be a suitable habitat to its residents in exercising harmonious life. The community is located in Amhara National Regional State, South Gondar Zone, 73 kilometers East of Bahir Dar city, 631km North West of the capital Addis Ababa. The community consists of 141 households and 462 inhabitants. Zumra Nuru, a 63 year old farmer, is the co-founder and co-chair of Awramba community. In 1972, Zumra Nuru launched the society he dreamed of with 19 other people who adopted his vision. In order to join the community, one has to be honest and live peacefully: one should not lie, steal, swear, quarrel or behave immorally. They seriously condemn social disorders such as theft, corruption,

illiteracy, telling lies, quarrelling, gender inequality, and other aggressive behavior. These behaviors are reshaped in the pre-primary school, family discussion and other discussions at a community level. They don't celebrate any public holidays or other rituals as they believe it wastes their time of working.

The administration system of Awramba community is organized in 13 sub-committees. The community provides social security to its members in need. There is a home for the elderly with 24-hour care. Other committees are: a committee for weekly development, rules and regulations, field work coordinator, education, for keeping lost and found belongings, for receiving guests, taking care of patients and new mothers including those who get three months of maternity leave, for receiving complain, sanitation, community security, curbing individual and community problems. Members call this system 'a development structure of the community'. The committee consists of men and women who are selected by the community members for a defined term of service.

The community engage themselves in hand crafts, especially in weaving, due to shortage of cultivable land. Every member participates in the cooperative work except too elders and breast-feeding females and late pregnant. Tasks are given regardless of sex, but ability. In southern and some other parts of Ethiopia, forced and early marriages have been still practiced which is strictly forbidden in the context of Awuramba community. The community members believe that girls should marry when they reach 18 and above while boys are married at 22 years of age and above. The community has established a library service to the elders and a preprimary school for the children. They send their

children to kindergarten above three. Children get access to primary and secondary education in a school run by members of the community itself.

Nowadays, Awramba community is internationally recognized and becoming the main study site to many local and foreign researchers. Mekcha Engidayehu (2007, p. 8) expressed the media role in promoting the community: “today many people are not only familiar with the name Awramba but also shared their experience as well. They got it from nowhere but the media. I think more and more people would like to know about the community. This for me is the result of the positive image created by the media.” European Union Ambassador Tim Clerk, speaking at gender talk forum for Ethiopian women association on December, 2002, as mentioned in Mekcha Engdayehu, 2007, publicized the community as a model not only to the surrounding communities, but also the world.

Joumard (2010) in his study claims the community as “it is well established with a truly extraordinary life style, especially in terms of equality between men and women, community spirit, absence of religion, honesty, hard work, democracy and even ecology.” (P. 1). Abebaw Arega (2007) also stated that the community is seen as a model in which gender equality, honesty, children’s right, rejection of early marriage, and other significant values are respected.

The community members have a discussion habit to build a strong social identity through socializing and protecting their indigenous norms to the members. The community has a

regularly held discussion schedules. Each family independently holds a group discussion and evaluates what they have done. If a particular family consists of only a few members, it joins the neighboring family group and run the discussion collaboratively.

As proponents of development communication confirm, such a potential discussion among the members of the community could help them to overcome their mutual socio-economic and political problems through collective action. Schultze (2000) suggests ritual communication is one of vital aspects of life to adjust environments in a way which is compatible to the residents. The concept is a participatory ritual in and through which members create, maintain, and change their culture.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The most important element in the concept of group communication for social change is free expression of ideas. In most levels of social structure, decisions are made behind closed doors. This has to be changed to open and free discussions where all members have the opportunity to express their ideas (Murphy, 1977).

However, only allowing individuals to express their idea freely in the group might mean meaningless unless their commonly understood ideas are applied in the collective actions. Griffin (2006) argues that in order to build a progressive society, citizen should get the right of freely exercising their idea instead of only being informed or persuaded.

Hence, community members need to utilize effective communication in order to improve their livelihoods and develop a sustainable progress. According to Hoveland (2007),

successful communication is more than merely providing information. It is rather about fostering social awareness and facilitating strategic community dialogue; it is about contributing to reasonable policy and fair power distribution, and about building a shared understanding which can lead to social change. More communication does not automatically mean more development unless members of the group communicate well.

Nowadays, experts and the media have been frequently promoting that there is a significant socio-economic transformation in Awramba and claims the community as a model to other societies. Besides, I heard about an appealing discussion habit of the community.

It is evident in many communication studies that life styles and development statuses are significant products of the kind of communication utilized by identified members within the community. Hoveland places very important emphasis on the advantage of approaching communication as a systemic issue to explore the integration of the communication process with its outcome. She comments that the fundamental gap in the field of communication research is a failure to see communication as a systemic issue i.e. 'linked to economic and political processes in society'.

Hence, I thought that the group communication, a unique feature, which has not been adequately studied so far, might have a significant impact in the community to maintain a particular life style and significant achievements to its members. This has made me

enthusiast to examine the status of community members to effectively engage in the process of adopting rational principles and developing community-led initiatives.

As communication is a complex output of a variety psychological process, it is likely to be affected by various interactional factors. Consequently, the process might not achieve its appropriate outcome; and as Gibbs (1994) suggests it might be merely used as a means of social controlling which limits the degree of its dynamism. Therefore, as a social interpretive researcher, I have taken the nature of group communication into consideration and strived to find out how the communication process works in Awramba community in ensuring substantial progress.

1.3. Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study was to explore the nature of group communication among the Awramba Community members; and its significant role in promoting social change.

The specific objectives of this study were:

- To describe how norms of interaction are established.
- To identify how the communication practice creates the social identity and explore its critical implication.
- To examine the nature of members' engagement in the process of establishing development initiatives and rational value systems.

1.4. Research Questions

The group communication in Awramba needs to have significant outcomes that could add meaningful insights for the lives of the community. Therefore, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do norms of interaction influence the nature of communication in the community?
2. To what extent does the application of the indigenous communication help the community to ensure meaningful socio-economic and political transformation?
3. How are development projects and social values systems established in the community?

1.5. Scope of the Study

Since the focus of the study was on the ethnography communication, it focused on understanding how the way of life of Awramba community members was constructed through communication process. So, the scope of the study is delimited to explore the way communication is patterned and organized within the community for social and individual empowerment. It constitutes analysis of its process and the outcome.

Hereby, it deals with two fundamental issues: the first is that it explores the behavior of the communication process created by the cultural group, Awramba community. Scholars of communication note that when one tries to understand the essence of communication fully, it is important to be aware of the meaning which people attach to events and surroundings (Griffin, 2006; Hovland, 2007; Hartley, 1999). This implied that in order to

fully understand the communication of a cultural group, we need to look at how individuals make sense of the situation they are in. Thus, it covers discussing how members make sense towards value systems and social welfare issues in the community. The second is about exploring the outcome of the communication associated with social change. Although the subject matter covers many social issues, the discussion of the study is limited on some example of the community-led initiatives, and value systems from the perspective of social and individual empowerment.

1.6. Significance of the Study

The study examined the effort of indigenous communication in promoting social change in Awramba Community through developing critical principles and value systems. It carefully explores how communication is applied in the development issues. Therefore, the study may contribute the following benefits:

- The research might add meaningful insights in improving the existing level of group communication systems and skills in the community.
- It would be a vital indication to experts to provide critical contribution towards basic areas of empowerment in the community.
- The study may serve as a ground for further studies.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualizing Group Communication

Hartley (1999) has noted most books, articles, journals or research papers start with a portion that tries to define the subject matter. However, he argues that this is an obvious place to define the concept only if audiences are completely new to the subject. Similarly, communication is a universal view what everyone either consciously or unconsciously experiences throughout the world. Thus, it is less relevant to go through the elements of communication process comprehensively further than presenting a single definition from a 'change' perspective: "Communication is a process by which we understand others and in turn endeavor to be understood by them. It is dynamic, constantly changing and shifting in response to the total situation." (Anderson, 1959; as cited by Miller, 2005, p. 17).

When the issue of group communication is discussed, the nature and size of the group should be well understood. A group of individuals, in a community sense, are those who either reside in the same locality or; those who share a common principle but reside in a different place (Figueroa et al, 2002).

In the context of African tradition, a group of a community is highly identified by its cultural perspective. Banks (1995, p. 23) defines a cultural group: "Any group of people who identify themselves in some ways as distinctive or who are so identified by others in relation to a particular practice or concept." In most parts of Africa, living together as a sense of community is created from the basis of extended family system. So, the life of

the community members has a tendency to operate in a sense of sacredness rather than secularism.

Therefore, a group in the spectrum of social interaction refers a group of people in the community that includes the whole members or parts of it. In other words, the interaction in the community is understood in terms of individuals' or groups' involvement. It ranges from interpersonal communication to the whole group as a community forum including small groups. Scholars have identified exploring such communication nature that exists in a cultural group is associated with studying an *ethnographic communication*.

2.2. Theoretical Roots of the Group communication Perspective

Ellingson (as cited by Frey & Cissna, 2009) argues that when theory is applied to frame ethnographic communication research, it helped to purposely ground the research questions rather than to derive hypotheses about the problem to be tested. The argument clearly notes that theories are often formulated from the result rather than initially constructed philosophical perspectives.

He presents the nature of ethnography study of communication as “ethnography usually is conceptualized as inductive rather than deductive -that is, seeking rich description and generating deep understanding rather than testing preconceived propositions-the role of theory in the beginning, middle, and end of ethnographic research can vary considerably.” (ibid, p. 134) It is also revealed above that theories, in such studies, are driven inductively which are aimed at extending the existing philosophical foundation.

Moreover, much of the theoretical work is not taken as immediate theory, but instrument to its accomplishment.

2.2.1. Participatory Communication

Communication for social change and participatory approach have been frequently described as ‘two sides of the same development coin.’ These two interrelated concepts have been the focus of growing attention over recent years in the development community (Deane, 2010). The primary goal of this model is not to persuade audiences to adopt a predefined change, rather it strives to explore the situation and define the needed change through appropriate engagement of stake holders (Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009).

This communication theory is grounded on Paulo Freire’s dialogic approach. Freire (1973) argues group discussion that involves genuine grassroots participation is a significant agent for empowering communities. His dialogical communication model emphasizes a close dialectic between collective action and reflection and works towards empowerment. According to Freire, free and open dialogue is a central guiding principle to ensure meaningful communication for social change: “The encounter between men in order to name the world. Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this act of exclusion.” (As cited by Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009, p. 10).

Cary (in Huey, B. et al, 1973) supports this view and emphasizes the importance of participatory communication for community development. The community approach is

effective as it is based on broad engagement of participation or a cross section of the members in a particular locality. “Emphasis is on the fullest participation of citizens in determining and solving their own problems through democratic procedures and indigenous leadership.” Cary also suggests: “open participation helps to meet the participatory needs of both the people and the process. Finally, effort is made to involve as many people as possible. The purpose is not numbers alone. But to bring together as many different ideas, interests, and concerns as possible in order to reflect the full range of the community.” (ibid, p. 11)

Working papers by The Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the United Nations Secretariat (2007) signifies dialogue communication as one of the chief mechanisms for encouraging full participation of all members of society, strengthening capacity building mechanisms, and preventing and resolving conflict. These assumptions share a common understanding of participation as the involvement of ordinary people in a development process leading to change. Here, to participate is to share in common with others, and to share means a share in decisions, goals and objectives about the actions to be done. As Freire (1973) suggested, the involvement is supposed to be a significant vehicle to relief terrible environments existing in the communities. Tierney (2006), as cited by Hair et al (2005), suggests participatory communication becomes effective only for those community organizations that operate in much less hierarchical social structures in which flexibility, collaboration, and open communication are practical. The guiding principle in this strategy is achieving personal growth through community cooperation that is extends to the community development as a whole. It is implied that a strategic

discussion is an instrument to growth; and free discussion functions well when meaningful freedom is guaranteed to the individuals in the discussion. Dewey (1916) has constructed a persuasive philosophical argument that secures a practical realization, 'democracy is freedom'. According to Dewey, democracy is realized when people are drawn to group discussion and decisions are made out of arguments and discussions. It places an emphasis on the appropriate engagement of stakeholders to discuss their mutual issues and make decisions by themselves.

Paulo Freire (1983, p. 76) has indicated the appropriate scope in the notion of Participatory Communication. According to him, the concept values the importance of cultural identity of local communities in which democratization and participation operate jointly at all levels: international, national, local and individual. It gives due emphasis to a strategy, not merely inclusive of, but largely emanating from, the traditional 'receivers'.

2.2.2. Transmission View

According to this view, individuals' values, beliefs, and practices are determined by external stimuli or message as 'hypodermic' or 'bullet theory' points out. This sender-receiver scenario is not limited to mass-mediated messages; it can also work for face-to-face interaction of non-mediated communication. Hartley presents Clappitt's view for transmission model as the 'arrow approach' in which communication is like 'shooting an arrow at a target' and is 'seen as a one-way activity based primarily on the skills of the sender'(1999, p. 28). This approach is often represented by the linear model, and the quality of communication is evaluated in terms of the quality of expression regardless of

the receivers' motives. Many researchers have suggested that the transmission model of communication suffers from various drawbacks, and the primary goal of the model is perceived as a means of manipulation and control. There was no any participatory element in the early models of communication; and the strategy was targeting at changing the behavior of an individual. The assumption of these theories was showing the power of communication in enhancing development through maintaining the correct craft of the content and adequate targeting of audiences (Schutz, 2000; Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2009).

This assumption can be well supported by providing the early communication model of the American theorist, Lasswell: *Who? Says what? In what channel? To whom? With what effect?* In this model, Lasswell failed to show the precise view of communication which was developed from the perspective of sender's full decision in determining what to say to a target audience which neglects human motives.

According to Hovland (2007), the core point in talking about effective communication is viewing it as a transactional process in which both senders and receivers involve actively. Srampickal (2006) also supports the view by stressing what to mean effective communication as a means of ensuring social change. Srampickal explained that meaningful communication is about raising awareness and responsiveness to adopt rational principles instead of *transmitting information, or persuading people to change their behavior.*

2.2.3. Group Dynamics

Proponents of social interaction (Hovland, 2007; Penald & Fine, 1974) have confirmed effective communication has a great potential to produce dynamic participants in the process of realizing social change. Everyone may support the view that it is naïve to consider human cognitive skill as stagnant that remains ‘the same’ over couples of years from generation to generation. And, it is rational to think the degree of the dynamism should be reflected at all levels of the community systems as Penland & Fine (1974) describe these significant interrelated concepts: “A group is a dynamic organism, always awake, never really still; group dynamics and interpersonal dynamics are operating all the time.” (p. 11).

A research has shown an ‘evolutionary approach’ to group dynamics is fruitful as the perspective provides a better understanding of any group process in a social setting. It is an easier method to examine the conceptual linkages between evolutionary processes operating on ancestral populations of the group and philosophical beliefs existed within the contemporary groups. This thought has a ground basis on the work of the father of modern evolutionary theory, Charles Darwin. As the theorist pointed out, groups are critical to human survival by providing a buffer against hostile environments and fostering essential access to the contemporary members. This results a meaningful involvement of members in a range of psychological mechanisms which promote an attraction to belongingness in groups (Schaller & Vugt, 2007).

Schutz (2000) argues a group involves process, not limited to the initial coming together of the group. This implies that the early established ideas and principles might not work longer and need to be assessed reasonably so as to reshape accordingly. This opens a room to community members to freely adjust themselves to endeavor environments. Dunham (1970) as cited by Cary, in Huey, B. et al (1973), indicates that group dynamism is realized when the community action is based on unforced consensus, rather than on the promotion of a predetermined principle.

In general, group dynamics work best when there is a constantly significant change in social structure that involves a substantial shift from autocratic –to- democratic; hierarchal –to- horizontal or dialogic communication and persuasive models of leadership –to- participative way. It is also argued explicit roles in social group systems are reluctant to accelerate group dynamism so that roles negotiated and reshaped based on context and time.

2.3. Determining Factors of Group Communication

The nature of interaction among persons and the way meanings are made is influenced by contexts in which the communication process occurs. Several social interpretive researchers have identified that a number of forces that exerted upon the group from within itself as well as from the outside affect the behavior of the entire group system. These forces either constructively or destructively influence the nature and direction of community dynamics in the process of achieving substantial social change.

The predominant contexts, according to Fisher (1987), are physical contexts which include the surrounding objects of the environment and *social context* that reflects the nature of social settings. Participants in the communication are likely to be subject to several social influences. Fisher suggests these detrimental factors of communication are developed from many cultural and socio-psychological orientations.

Scholars of communication have been arguing for a long time about the relationship between human behavior and the environment. Determinists argue that the environment constitutes several stimuli that trigger the perceptual response of humans; perhaps, people might not be aware as they are exposed to the influence of this particular context (ibid, p. 35).

Unlike to the determinists' view, interactionalists propose human is a proactive being, and the context does not cause us to act in a certain way. They suggest that humans are influenced by their environment as they create or control it. "People's actions create the social meaning of their environment; that is, the environment is defined by the people who act toward it and among themselves." (ibid, p. 135). Homans (1961, p. 385) also share the argument: "If you look long enough for the secret of society you will find it in plain sight: the secret of society is that it was made by men, and there is nothing in society but what men put there." Miller (2005, p. 214) also argue: "we create structures, and the structure either enables or constrains our interaction." It is clearly implied from this particular view that the human interaction determines the environment.

Fisher (1987) indicates that physical context comprises the external environment that can appeal to our emotions. It refers “the collection of physical objects and factors that surround us.” (p. 167). Baron and his colleagues argue group size is one of the physical contexts that has a huge impact on group communication. According to them, in smaller groups a higher proportion of people is likely to participate and there is potential more time for each. There is also less anxiety; and members feel freer than in a large group (quoted in Smith, 2008).

However, the nature of group communication in a cultural group is more likely to be affected by the social context. Hartley comments early authors placed less emphasis on social contexts. He argues that it is impossible to fully understand any process of human communication without understanding the social context in which it occurs (1999, p. 88). It can be argued from the assumption that societal structures guide participants to apply a particular communication behavior in their social setting. Social context in the group communication process is, therefore, more likely to determine the nature of the communication and its desired outcome.

If there is a consensus with communication is more influenced by social context, structuration theory, the work of Anthony Giddens (1984), is appropriate to conceptualize the link between the context and the communication process in the group. According to Giddens, actions and structures are intrinsically intertwined. Miller (2005, p. 214) explains this duality structure in which the process and the context interdependent each other: “The community creates rules (the structure) for behavior in interaction. And these rules constrain our communication (action).” Hence, structuration theory helps us to

examine whether the communication process is enabled or constrained by the social context in which it operates within a structure. Some fundamental social contexts of communication are discussed below:

2.3.1. Rules

Sereno & Bodaken (1971) describe norms as group rules that are perceived as standards of acceptable group behavior which govern and reshape the way members interact towards their environment. Hartley (1999) differentiates rules from norms that rules are often written on documents; whereas norms are conceived from beliefs of cultural backgrounds.

Rules are formulated in the assumption for maintaining appropriate behavior of social interaction within the group. Thus, the interactants must share a set of rules that can reshape the communicative behavior. Shimanoff, as cited by Beebe & Masterson (1986, p. 157), has defined rule as “a followable prescription that indicates what behavior is obliged, preferred, or prohibited in certain contexts.” As it is inferred in the definition, a failure to respect these rules may result a sort of penalty in some form of criticism or even a social rejection from group or community members.

Beebe & Materson (1986) explain if members fail to fulfill these guidelines, a potential sanction is imposed up on them. Thus, the community members’ communicative behavior is reshaped in a way which is compatible to the primarily identified environment. Sereno & Bodaken (1971) argue that the more the group imposes sanctions

on its members, the greater tendency to agree with the existed norms is likely to be developed.

This leads us to the concept of cultural citizenship theory. This implies that in cultural groups, members are expected to perform certain responsibilities and obey to particular norms. In order to join the community, or stay as a member within it, one has to respect specific rules and regulations of the community. Communities acknowledge rights and obligations, or basic principles and values from the perspective of their own cultural identity. Through experiencing such dogmatic norms, they strive to build a constant territory that can abide the members of the community together.

It is criticized by some scholars concerning to its rigidity in democratizing the community and bringing a potential change to the livelihood of the society. Critics have identified that it is more of negotiating cultural identities regardless of critical reactions to the existed rules and considering individual rights. “Where democracy consisted of a changing cultural landscape under a continual process of negotiation and dispute, citizenship couldn’t longer be seen on the possession of a common culture and heritage.”(Hartley, 2002, p. 47). Nevertheless, Kallene (2004) considers guaranteeing collective or group cultural rights which are guided by identified norms is an essential part of human rights. He suggests:

The basic principle behind collective cultural rights is the group-level right of ethnic communities as such to legitimate and free expression of their ethno cultural distinctive. Article 23 (7) of the ICCR, the distinctive elements of ethno cultures may be expressed in language, religion, politico-economic design, territorial links or any combination of these and/or other defining group attributes(p. 7).

However, other scholars (Kukathas, 1995, as cited by Hartley J. et al) stated that realization of social wellbeing becomes meaningful when only these rights are reduced in to individual levels and members of the community are guaranteed cultural rights. They argued against of the cultural citizenship concept as it enforced groups to live in a constant state of change.

Sereno & Bodaken (1971, p. 157) clearly note the worst part of norms that exist in the community as “norms operate to remove differences of opinion from a group when these differences might provide creative or innovative thinking.” New members of the community or group might not agree with norms or rules, but obliged to follow them and prohibited the members from resisting the group that primarily exists for socializing. Miller argues a dialectic control is a means of manipulating members not to come up with creative ideas. He explains: “individuals are not puppets controlled by social forces but have the power to change the structures that guide many of their behaviors.” (2005, p. 215). Similarly, Penald & Fine (1974, p. 1) point out: “A group is not only a social experience; it is also a ‘think tank’ where ideas are born and take on form and direction.”

Social interpretive researchers state it is not always rational to perceive deviance as a destructive of the community value system. It is not something that the conforming members of the group or the system merely tolerate it. Cohen (1966) argues deviance may, in some circumstances, produce significant contributions to the wellbeing of the social systems as deviance can grow out of collective wisdom and meaningful experience of the group members. Beebe & Masterson (1986, p. 26) argue that “If we can reasonably

predict that certain outcomes will follow certain types of communication, then we can regulate our behavior to achieve the most desirable results.” Hare (1962) also suggests by whom norms should be developed to increase harmonious relationship among members within a group. He emphasized that norms have to be socially established concerning to what is appropriate to be acceptable by the members of the community.

2.3.2. Conformity

Members may irrationally favor what the group experiences and sometimes agree up on less relevant ideas during the process of the communication just to avoid a conflict within the group. Beebe & Masterson (1986) argue a failure to entertain variety ideas; even contradictory issues affect the degree of group dynamics. There are internal and external systems that motivate individuals to accept conformity behavior required by the group.

According to Sereno & Bodaken (1971) ego-involvement is one of internal elements that lead the individual to conform to the group behavior. It refers to the members’ involvement in the community and his perception of group’s significance to him. They present this motive: “The extent to which a person perceives the group to be significant to him will affect his desire to conform to the group’s standards behavior or operation –its norms... the degree of his respect or like to the members that compose the entire group also affects his conformity.” (pp. 218-219).

This perception leads us to review conformity from dimension of need satisfaction. Schutz (1958) on his book *The Interpersonal Underworld* that deals with science and

behavior (as cited by Beebe and Materson 1986, p. 40) suggests that three basic needs, (inclusion, control, and affection), influence the interaction of individuals in groups. Members conform the group behavior just to fulfill their need for *inclusion*. When they try to understand the group as worthy of their life, they develop a strong curiosity to be recognized as unique group of people. According to Schutz, the concept of the need for control is associated with power and status relationship. Individuals need to have some control over themselves and over others. Having a desire to get life skill guidance and direction, they need others to control them. Schutz also notes that the need for *affection* drives members to strengthen their conformity to the group they belong to so as to increase emotional warmth and closeness transaction. This complex desire potentially influences members and the group as a whole.

Beebe & Materson indicate from Shaw's research that the degree of conformity to rules and standards of the community vary according to the personality characteristics of the members:

More intelligent persons are less likely to conform than less intelligent persons; women usually conform more than men, at least on traditional tasks there is a curvilinear relationship between age and conformity; persons who generally blame themselves for what happens to them conform more than those low on self-blame; and authoritarians conform more than non authoritarian (1986, p. 216).

Homans (1961) has seen conformity from the perspective of economic principle. An individual needs to maximize rewards and minimize costs in any transaction. Therefore, it is derived that the individual will have a high tendency to conform to group opinion if the cost of the deviation is high and the reward for conforming is high (conceived from

external element), too. This assumption clearly results a potential impact on the quality of interaction as the communication behavior of individuals is shaped by the rewards and punishments that are encountered.

2.3.3. Roles

It refers the expected patterns of behavior which is linked with a position that members possess or experience with in the group which influences how and what people will communicate. These expectations can be generated from either the group or general societal expectations about how a particular role should be enacted (Hartley, 1999, p. 96).

Roles also define status and power relationship that possibly creates a status hierarchy within the group. These played roles are likely to affect the interactional dynamics of the group by determining the nature of ideology or understanding that could exist in the group (Hill, A. et al, 2007; Smith, 2005).

It is clearly inferred above that different social roles are highly associated with different degrees of status and power within the group: for example, elders might be supposed as main bodies to shape the group dynamics; children might have less power to be involved in group discussion with their elders, females may accept males as superior and lag behind to be involved in decisions of development activities. Hartley (1999, p. 118) suggests successful social interaction and communication is realized when participants in the group or community adopt complementary roles that lead them to experience harmonizing or rational way of life.

2.3.4. The Nature of Leadership

The outcome of the group experience rests on members of the group, and this outcome is highly influenced by the nature of the leadership that operates in a particular social settings. The skill of the leader in engaging rational and responsive involvement is a significant factor in determining the quality of the group product. A good leader entirely involves contact with members to significantly understand their need and to responsiveness to the ways in which members of the community fulfill those desired needs. Hence, the nature of communicative behavior among members is reshaped according to the nature of the existed leadership style in the group (Harre, 1962; Taylor, 1971)

Penland & Fine (1974) describe the righteous characteristics of an effective leadership as “the qualities of concern for people, awareness of their complexity, a willingness to get involved with them, and a sincere investment in listening to needs and responding to them are placed in a context of communication science.” (P. 43).

A working paper by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of United States secretariat has also highlighted basic elements of leadership qualities and functions attached with its appropriate outcome that can guarantee communities harmonious lives. “Visionary, empowering and collaborative leadership is indeed necessary to inspire stakeholders to overcome their preoccupation with narrow-minded interests and recognize that the security and well-being of all depend on a strengthening of social integration and engaging in processes of participatory dialogue.” (DESA, 2007). This

clearly shows that leadership is a responsible system that creates different social structures which determine the nature of social interactions in communities.

3. Purpose of Group Communication

Individuals are involved in group communication either for socio-emotional purpose or to get something accomplished. Some people are voluntarily organized in to groups: while others are embedded in natural groups of setting to accomplish a particular goal. Researchers have indicated the primary objective of the group has to be striving to change the livelihood of the people and focus on democratizing the community. “Significant and bold model of small groups of people coming together from various walks of life to build a strong democracy ...it is a positive effort on the part of the citizenry to take initiative and responsibility for talking about building a just, multi-cultural society.” (Schoem & Hurtado, 2002, p. 2). In short, the purpose of group communication is understood from two general dimensions. A group of people come together in the interaction arena either for task or socio-psychological orientations.

3.1. As a Problem Solving Process

This perspective views communication as a potential mechanism for group member to solve mutual problems and make decisions. Beebe & Masterson (1986) suggest the group problem solving mechanism provides the community or group members with opportunity to participate in the decision making process. This active involvement in turn increases, according to them, members’ satisfaction with the group decision.

Nazzaro, & Strazzabosco (2009) put due emphasis on applying successful problem solving process so as to achieve desirable outcomes. Strategic communication helps group members to promote rational judgments and critical thinking; utilizing effective communication in turn helps group members to avoid faulty decision-making and flawed problem solving. According to them, critical thinking, informed discussion, and systematic procedures are vital components to effective decision making and problem solving process.

Researchers have proposed different thoughts that confirm grass root participation regardless of considering significant variables negatively affect the desirable outcomes of the problem solving process. Studies have showed age is a pioneering variable that need to be taken into account.

Berne, a transaction theorist (as cited by Hartley, 1999, p. 182), has developed characteristics of the ego states that function differently in diverse contexts. Parents are likely to use evaluative, critical, or moralistic words. They have a tendency to discuss what is right and wrong. Adults focus on practical concepts of the problem or task at hand; whereas children like to reflect emotional expressions of jokes and talk about hopes and feelings. Having realized this, Hartley has suggested the interaction of the child is more appropriate with other significant figures particularly the mother figure, rather than with society at large-community forum.

Thomas (1973) has provided a compromising notion that can show how to reconcile variety variables to be involved in the community development process. The assumption shows capacities can be exerted from the fullest possible participation of community members in the problem solving process including the very young and the very old. Support and serving a program of action varies according to individual differences in human personality. Some members can deliver their labor; others advice; and still others may provide money to accomplish the project.

It is also important to understand the value of whole group discussion is not simply a collection of a group idea, but a critical evolution from the proposed contents by each member. Thus, effective interaction of ideas during the discussion results significant solution that can be well applied to the identified local issue (ibid).

3.2. As a Function of Socialization

New members of culturally identified group or community can't be born with the norms and beliefs that their ancestors hold. "Societal members don't just wake up one morning and magically possess the norms, values, beliefs, and traditions of a society. They learn them from experienced social members." (Fisher 1987, p. 57).

This socializing process often functions at a primary group level, family, and other institutions such as schools and community forums. Primary groups especially family members are the key sources for socialization in societies. They are seen as main place where attitudes, values and different orientations are developed and sustained. This

process helps the coming members of the community to identify what belonging to that particular group means.

Family is served as a primary source of identity building and developing social principles and values. Jandt (2004) has explained the concept of interaction within the family in socializing young members from role perspective. He has suggested that it is obvious female and male infants are often born with similar potentials. However, parents and other socializing agencies impose diverse standards of behavior on the off spring in accordance with their cultural guidelines. Socha et al (2009) suggest it is important to realize the impact of the family interaction functioning as a fundamental force in building the identity of the entire community either in a good or ill way.

Schools are also other significant socializing institutions that potentially impose influences on the behavior of students. Tocqueville (2000) argues the strength of free people resides in local communities. Therefore local institutions such as schools are to liberty what primary schools are to doctrine. Tocqueville emphasizes guaranteeing the spirit of liberty to these schools shouldn't stand alone regardless of their appropriate function in the process of socializing students. The process needs critical implementation as it is about putting variety rational principles on students' cognitive motor skill and making them use of it which extends to the people's reach..

4. Behavior Styles and Climate of Communication

In the arena of social interaction, sets of communication behavior styles and emotional tones are observed from the interactants. Communication scholars use these key characteristics of communication to describe the effectiveness of communication in fostering appropriate social interaction; and to understand the communication climate that is resulted from the nature of members' interaction with outgroups and ingroups. According to Hartley (1999, p. 115), assertive is one of behavior styles in communication which is perceived as the most effective and healthiest form of communication. It deals with devoting to insure personal rights and expressing thoughts; feelings and beliefs in direct, honest and appropriate ways which respect the rights of other people and pays significant respect to self.

Conversely, Aggressive Style, according to Cohen (1966), is resulted from frustration, and predominantly characterized by a way of manipulating others by creating a win-lose situation. The underlying perception from this style is that using intimidation and power is the only means to satisfy manipulators' needs. Hargie, Saunders, & Dickson (1994) have showed that this behavior is understood as disrespectful and hurtful to others in the communication process. It has a tendency to win others regardless of their feelings and uses abusive communication techniques like loud and abusive talk, interruptions, and glaring or staring eye contact.

On other hands, participants in passive communication behavior style give less respect to them as they usually develop low sense of self-esteem. In this mode, people prefer to talk

less and they feel that others have more right than they act. They are hesitators and not good at agreeing with shared values. They often want others to decide for themselves and don't express their own wants and feelings.

In previous philosophical foundations about the quality of communication in social setting, it has been discussed that meaningful communication comes out of its transactional aspect. Through our transactional experience, we get an opportunity to realize how others perceive us, and vice versa. Thus, our communication behavior is reshaped accordingly. (Hartley 1999, p. 109; Mead, 1962 in Griffin, 2012) have indicated that we develop opinions about how other people see us, and how we would like to be seen by other people.

Jack Gibb and some other communication theorists have observed communication behavior of people within groups and identified the mood of communication which contributes to a defensive and supportive climate. Gibb points out that defensive climate conceptualization accounts for both the internal traits and external states from which defensive communication may spring. Stamp, Vangelisti, and Daly (1992), in Becker et al (2005) have indicated in their model: "defensive communication involves a self perceived flaw that an individual refuses to admit to another person, a sensitivity to that flaw, and an attack by another person that focuses on the flaw." According to Gibb, defensive communication is resulted from variety motives which are originated from a particular perception. He shows the likely attempt that participants of this typical communication exert to defend themselves:

The person who behaves defensively, even though he also gives some attention to the common task, devotes an appreciable portion of his energy to defending himself. Besides talking about the topic, he thinks about how he appears to others, how he may be seen more favorably, how he may win, dominate, impress or escape punishment, and/or how he may avoid or mitigate a perceived or an anticipated attacks (1961, p. 141).

It is clearly indicated that individuals use defensive communication when they perceive that they are under attack, and getting negative criticism or attitudes from outside environment that produce defensive reaction. A person or a group of individuals who is defensive devotes a significant amount of personal energy to self-protection (Becker et al, 2005; Jones, 2006). It can be predicted from this explanation that high levels of defensive communication are associated with higher levels of burnout. Thus, defensive communication imposes negative effects on the quality of the relationship between in groups and out groups at a community level.

The most harm that defensive communication style causes to a particular social setting is that the defensive members spend much time and energy in reacting against others' view. This energy comes at the cost of performing related tasks that focus on how to create a favorable impression on others, how to win, dominate, impress, escape punishment, and the like. Research has found that individuals who use defensive style are also reluctant to grasp critical motives, values, and emotions of the sender. They always tend to perceive it in terms of how the received communication might be a threat to them.

From this point of view it is understood that defensive communication creates social control concept as it tends to manipulate members of the community or group to concentrate on defending a particular social reality instead of being responsive to

significant changes. The right to communicate and its desirable role is seriously affected by structures and dominant models of communication systems in various social settings. Many scholars argue communication has not to be used as a way of manipulating societies, but a means of accelerating social change. The critical role of communication has been stated:

A well planned true communication process performs a communicative, not a controlling social function. It facilitates cooperation, not manipulation. It fosters self-direction and self-determination, not dependency or conformity. Its climate is one of intellectual freedom and exploration, not restriction and exploitation (Penland & Fine, 1974, p. 4).

Hierarchical concept of 'command and control' in social or group climate is likely to oppress the mind of its people to be abided in a single philosophical orientation. Social control theorists have proposed there is no critical reaction of societies towards their environment freely so as to add meaningful insights to their lives.

Indifferences is less likely to persist in this kind of social climate, for interactions brings reaction and reaction brings involvement...disagreement arise from an intellectual analysis of the issue at hand, out of basic differences in philosophy, out of hostility to the group and/or the leader and/or the structural system, or out of interpersonal discord among members of the group (ibid, pp. 65-66).

5. Communication Networks

(Katz ; et al 2004) have pointed out the range of ties or networks may fall within a level of analysis (e.g., individual-to-individual ties) or may cross levels of analysis (e.g., individual-to-group ties, or in-group to out-group ties). In interaction analysis, researchers have identified the two most common roles that affect a group's effectiveness: the person who dominates and the person who remains silent. "It can be as

difficult to get the quiet person to speak as it is to get the talkative person to talk less.” (Nazzaro & Strazzabosco, 2009).

McLeod et al (1999) describe the nature of communication networks in communities from two different dimensions. The first is from interpersonal point of view which is a key role for a broad engagement in community integration: they have reviewed the concept of interpersonal networks by mentioning several works such as Bender, 1982; Calhoun, 1988; and Wellman, 1982 in which the perspective is described as “connectedness of individuals to active local primary groups beyond the family”.

This point of view is, therefore, understood from the degree to which an individual is involved in interpersonal networks that comprises his or her discussion of multiple ideas with various components of the community. The interaction ranges from discussion of problems in the area, frequency of getting together with other members, and a higher proportion of getting acquaintance with friends living in the area.

When the nature of communication networks within a group is analyzed, it is important to examine the participation rates of its members in the flow of communication. Although there is less barriers in small group communication (Watson et al; Jandt, 2004), some members may have much more active part in the process. Studies have showed that females often take passive part in the interaction. A *muted group theory* which is developed by Kramarae (1999) suggests women take less part in the communication flow and their speech is not given significant attention and considered as valueless. When women try to use efforts to avoid this inequality, the over domination of masculine

communication makes their speech less worthy. According to Bennett & Slater (2008), this domination has a potential impact on social-political system. They suggest that men's dominance in the discussion has a direct relationship with their dominance in power.

This assumption ignores the core principles identified in the concept of effective communication by Beebe & Materson, 1986: communication is a transaction in which everybody reacts in the process and plays both roles- receiving and sending information. In some cultural contexts, norms of appropriate behaviors are set to give power and interactional control to men while keeping women not to control rather to support men in the interaction (Bennett & Slater, 2008).

The second dimension of communication network is used to measure the macroscopic community characteristics as an inclusive perspective in terms of its transaction with the outside communities. Mefalopulos & Tufte (2009) argue the value of participatory communication should not be evaluated from only the perspective of outcomes that the process can yield to a particular community; but also from the assumption of its members' right to be involved in broad social functions.

The assumption presented above leads us to review the most common theory- *social exchange theory*, which is a pioneering concept that describes best the level of communities' interaction in the process of ensuring social change. Theorists and researchers of the area explain the communicative behavior of this issue in terms of behavioral psychology and economic theory. They analyze social exchange concept from

the perspective of what rewards community members receive from a given relationship with outsiders and what it costs them to obtain those rewards.

Beebe & Materson argue that it is impossible for groups not to be affected by the external environment; rather it operates in an open system. “Groups don’t operate in isolation; they are continually affected by interactions with the outside environment.” (1986, p. 32). Therefore, it can be argued in this notion that the nature of the interaction that the community or the group involves with the outside communities has a potential impact on their growth. Hartley (1999, p. 100) emphasizes maintaining quality social contact with neighboring residents and higher level settings is a key to exchange development experiences. He indicates a failure to establish effective relationships results serious harmful effects on the lives of the local residents.

All actions involved in the framework of social exchange thought are fundamentally supposed to be 'rational' in character and that people calculate the likely costs and benefits of any action before deciding what to do. This approach to theory is known as *rational choice theory*, and its application to social interaction takes the form of *exchange theory* (Scott, 2000). Cohen emphasizes establishing tie and critical transactions with the outside environment to exist as an effective community:

If we want to understand what goes on in a person’s mind, our starting point should be what goes on in the minds of the people around him. This is the essence of what we mean by culture; the infant in the household and the novitiate in a social group, if they are to survive as social beings, must do business with others, and to do this they must “take the role of the other (1966, p. 16).

The above assumption gives due attention to the necessity of establishing a good network with multicultural societies, and claims such transactions as more fluid and responsive to change. Scholars have suggested that individuals should develop multicultural or intercultural identities instead of abiding in specific cultural identities. Being a member of a particular group shouldn't lead the member to perceive the group's boundaries as immutable or inflexible. This is termed as a potential barrier that makes members unresponsive to contextual changes (Fung & Chuang, 2004; Banks, 1995).

Axner & Berkowitz (n.d) also support the view by regarding comprehensive interaction as a means of bringing substantial change through establishing sustainable intercultural and group relationship with outside the environment:

Whether you want to make sure your children get a good education, bring quality health care into your communities, or promote economic development, there is a good chance you will need to work with people from several different racial, language, ethnic, or economic groups. And in order to work with people from different cultural groups effectively, you will need to build sturdy and caring relationships based on trust, understanding, and shared goals (p. 14).

From the concept of external transaction presented above, it can be deduced that the quality of the life of the people in a particular social setting is determined by the quality of the relationships they involve with the outsiders. It can also be argued that the degree of their interaction is determined by the pleasurable outcomes that the group will achieve by interacting with outside communities.

6. Individualism Versus Communalism

It is very important to recognize ‘understanding the nature of individuals’ means ‘understanding the community process’ as a collection of individuals builds the entire community. Scott (2000) has described the rational assumption of individualism in social group settings as: “all statements about social phenomena are reducible to statements about individual action.” (p. 26).

However, many researchers have commented that early studies focused on the group's task and ignored the interpersonal aspects of the entire system. These interpersonal aspects are the vital entities of the community that are significantly influence the way group members go about accomplishing their tasks. As Beebe & Materson (1986) have explained, groups are not inseparable part of the psychological assumptions of individuals. This interrelated concept reveals group is influenced by individual needs; where as an individual is affected by group norms and standards.

There are many controversial beliefs among researchers about the notion of unity and diversity, or individualism and communalism within a particular social setting. In one side, there is a belief that the fundamental issue of diversity is to create understanding among diversified individuals. Nevertheless, opponents clearly reveals an underlying assumption from this that addressing discrimination and oppression will trigger ‘pointing fingers of blame’ rather than providing a basis for common ground (Miller’s analysis of diversity as cited by Frey & Cissna, 2009, p. xxviii).

However, Scott (2000) has argued contrarily towards the dilemma of collective notion and posed some important questions that can highlight the challenge of individuals to adjust themselves to the predetermined set of mutual or common thoughts in communities: “why individuals should ever feel any sense of obligation or wish to act in altruistic ways. Why, that is, should individuals obey norms that lead them to act in nonself- interested ways?” (p. 28).

In fact, the western thought of individualism significantly differs from the African traditional communal systems. Kenyan rural sociologist at the University of Nairobi, Preston Chitere, highlights the influence of individualism in many sub-Saharan African nations. He blames cultural imperialism by western countries for bringing an adverse impact on African community and family life. He argues:

The effects of capitalism are already being felt in our families. Individualism in society is increasing. Even families in rural areas like to operate in isolation, and those who offer any help are keen to help their immediate families only. The (conjugal) family is becoming more independent. The loss of community networks and the development of individualism have resulted in (increased occurrences of) suicide, loneliness, drug abuse and mental illness. The communal system is breaking down (Kimani 1998, p. 1, quoted in Barkey et al, 2000, p. 14).

Senegalese philosopher Leopold Senghor (1966) regards that the life of traditional African society is based "on the community and on the person and in which, because it was founded on dialogue and reciprocity, the group had priority over the individual without crushing him, but allowing him to blossom as a person" (1966, p. 5, as cited in African quarterly studies, 2000, p. 11). The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, DESA (2007) has suggested a compromising idea that can reconcile these contrary issues so as to be applied in development process. Successful

social integration adopts the guiding principles of unity within diversity: a system in which individuals are guaranteed the right to develop different beliefs and attitudes; and maintaining significant devotion for common visions and collective actions. It encourages members within communities to come together by fully respecting differences. In this assumption, diversity is a key to build healthy societies; and a source for sustainable learning, promoting creativity in problem-solving skills that are essential for individual and societal development.

Obaid (1996) also indicates how the individual right is guaranteed and exercised in the social thoughts of African community. He has provided two criteria for the reason of granting individual right within the community: (1) Since individual capacities are not equal, their contributions to the community are expected to be unequal. In other words, individuals are recognized on the basis of their merits to some extent. (2) The individual *qua* individual has a will, identity, aspirations and desires which can be described as peculiar.

The fabrication of these different arguments confirms that the exercise of individual rights in the African community is inseparable component of democracy that is conceived from basic human rights. Therefore, the exercise of this right is a manifestation for the attainment of human dignity and the proper functioning of the community's development with a significant respect of the interest of the community.

7. Bridging the Process with its Outcome

It has been discussed in the previous sections that the most sustainable communication for social change is an ongoing discussion centering on the core principles, social systems, and applications of the community-based issues which are generated from participatory communication and smooth interaction among members (Barber, 1984; Puntnam, 2000). The concept refers to a systematic and functional process by which members within a community produce significant change and construct a particular life style. Researchers and communication scholars agree with common components of social change in defining the term. According to them, Social change is associated with a positive change in members' lives. It deals with significant shifts in the attitudes, behaviors, to better reflect values of inclusion, fairness, diversity and opportunity; and a significant improvement in the integration of members within and outside the community to solve common problems through effective communication (Greenwood & Guner, 2008; Figuero, Kincaid, Rani & Lewis, 2002; Frey & Cissana, 2009).

Morris and Binstock (as cited by Huey, B., 1973), provide us with three grand concepts that show how a change takes place. According to them change would take place through: (1) modifying human attitudes and behavioral patterns through educational or other means, (2) altering social conditions by changing the policies of formal organizations, or (3) effecting reforms in major legal and functional systems of a society.

When we discuss the nature of change within a social setting, researchers suggest it can be achieved through different ways. Huey, B. et al (1973, p. 12) have identified three

types of processes in which a change occurs: (1) evolutionary change, (2) accidental change and (3) planned change. Based on the notion that a certain communication process should result significant outcomes within a community; Figueroa et al, 2002; Hovland, 2007 and others have proposed some key outcome indicators at both the individual and community levels.

Individual Change

- **Skills**
- **Ideation:-**
Knowledge, Attitudes, Perceived Risk, Subjective Norms, Self-Image, Emotion, Self-Efficacy, Social Influence, and Personal Advocacy
- **Intention**
- **Behavior**

Social Change

- **Leadership:** Development of sustained and effective leadership.
- **Degree and Equity of Participation:** Diversified or inclusive involvement in the activities of the community.
- **Information Equity:** equal access to information.
- **Collective Self-Efficacy:** confidence for succeeding in future projects.
- **Sense of Ownership**
- **Social Cohesion:** *cooperation towards the community projects, and interconnectedness, respect for diversity and social trust, meaningful interaction across groups.*
- **Social Norms:-** developing acceptable rules for participation.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Methodology

As far as the study is aimed at exploring the nature of group communication in Awramba community in improving the livelihood of members' lives, the task demands critical interpretation of the existing social interaction. So, qualitative research methodology was appropriate to be employed in this study as Miller (2005) suggested group communication researchers should employ the method of interaction analysis.

Awramba community is guided by culturally conceived principles; therefore, the process of examining how a culture-sharing group develops shared patterns of behavior of interaction over time requires a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2002; Silverman, 2010). Many scholars distinguish a qualitative study from a quantitative one by its compatibility to explore more complex and flexible issues. It is often used to understand and interpret social interaction by discovering the way they construct meanings towards several aspects of their life and act accordingly (Jack & Baxter, 2008).

This methodological approach fundamentally takes the primordial scene of social life which reflects direct interaction among community members. Researchers argue if one is concerned with exploring people's life histories or everyday behavior through communication process, it is appropriate to use discourse analysis. Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton (2001, p. 538) indicate how the scope of discourse varies according to the purpose of the study. It rarely, in the context of this study, involves with a single sentence, but extended multi science concepts. They noted that discourse is studied

within broader socio-cultural contexts which refer to “socially shared habits of thought, perception, and behavior reflected in numerous social aspects.”

3.2. Design

Among basic designs of qualitative study (phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, case study and narrative), ethnographic design was found appropriate to be employed for this study. The idea of Ethnographic communication was introduced by Hymes (1962). Carbough (1989) indicates Ethnographic Communication is “an approach, a perspective, and method to and is the study of culturally distinctive means and meanings of communication”. Frey & Cissna (2009) suggest ethnography is a key approach to fully explore how the communication process operates within a cultural group. Ellingson (2009) also suggests exploring the communication style of culturally identified communities is highly associated with applying ethnography communication research. Communication scholars find this particular approach to examine structures within a culturally identified group by studying how structures are constituted by communication among members. Goffman describes the extent in which ethnography of communication approach constitutes in any interactional exploration:

The statements and communication acts of the participants need to be understood in terms of the context of their occurrence. The context includes such factors as the setting of the interaction, the relationship of the participants, the goals that the participants wish the interaction to achieve, the emotional pitch or feeling of the interaction, and the norms of communication that are appropriate for this interaction (Goffman, 1967, p. 5, quoted in Radford et al, 2011).

Ethnography design requires a direct involvement of the researcher with a culturally identified group which results strangeness to the environment. Thus, it is argued that

many ethnography researchers face difficulties while getting in to the research site and conducting the study. However, the researcher has not encountered any problem since the community has an established committee that hosts visitors and guests. Thus, after describing the purpose of my arrival in the community, I have got guides who introduce me with the entire socio-cultural aspects. As a result, it was not challengeable to the researcher to be acquainted with members and other cultural systems.

3.3. Sampling, Participant Recruitment

When the study is aimed at exploring natural phenomena within a group, which is very common in interpretive studies, Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007) suggest that the researcher purposefully selects individuals and settings to increase understanding of phenomena.

Sandelowski (1995) and Flick (1998) have shared common assumptions for recruiting reasonable number of participants in social interpretive studies. They recommended that sample sizes in qualitative research should not be too large as it is difficult to categorize or code the abundant data; and too small as it is difficult to achieve data saturation.

Having taken the sample size and the appropriate strategy into account, participants of the study who are the potential sources of information were selected from three major categories. The researcher employed purposive sampling and critical number of informants to find out relevant data to the research questions of the study. The first and fundamental information sources were incorporated from the Awramba Community members. The second participants were recruited from individuals who live in

Awramba but not members of the community. The last group of participants was selected from members of the surrounding communities. Thus, the recruitment process employed purposive sampling to explore significant issues of the study from stake participants.

As the research mainly examines the nature of group communication among Awramba Community members, it was essential to recruit members as the fundamental data sources to explore the role of the communication process for the critical empowerment of individuals and the community as a whole. Researches have showed that sampling in qualitative research is often made during and before the collection of data.

The researcher, therefore, has got some essential and introductory information about the community from the guest recipients. Thus, the researcher has felt it is important to take the guest recipients, Enaney (Zumra's wife) and other two female guides, as key informants and received a vivid picture of the community from them. Zumra, the co-founder of the community, was another main key participant who supplied information regarding to the role of leadership and other established value systems in creating open societies for group discussion and rational empowerment.

Another sources of information were committee leaders who were supposed to supply information concerning to the communication structure and socio-economy power distribution in the community. Households, children and other social workers of the community were participated in the study to fully explore the process and outcome of the

group communication process. Some of these participants were reached through the help of guides by using snow ball mechanism (chain referral sampling).

Another group of participants were selected from those who live in the community but not members of it. This was found to be appropriate to get concrete facts about the community as an external observer since they have a sustainable interaction with them over a period of time. These participants were teachers who were working in the school which was established in the community from grade 1-10. They live by renting dormitories from the households, so it was reasonable to recruit them to get detail and unbiased information from the point of view of an outsider towards the social life of the community.

Participants from the nearby villages were participated to examine the social and economical transaction role of the communication process and to describe its implication for cross-cultural interaction. These informants recruited from the neighboring communities such as Deldalit, Jib Gudguad, Alembor and Woreta.

3.4 Data Gathering Techniques

Scholars in applied communication research have indicated basic data gathering techniques that fall under the umbrella of ethnography qualitative research. Ethnography mainly involves observation/fieldwork, formal and informal interviewing, analysis of documents, interaction with participants in a focused group discussion (Atkinson et al.,

2001). The researcher applied the following data collection methods so as to bring the study meaningful.

3.4.1. Observation

Participant observation often takes place in community settings and is suitable to observe in person what they experience. According to Bradley, Curry & Nembhard (2012), observational method of data gathering is defined as “systematic, detailed observation of people and events to learn about behaviors and interactions in natural settings.” In some cases participants may be asked to elaborate how they behave in definite ways. However, there is no any to assurance whether they actually do what they say or not. Therefore, observation serves as a significant technique for verifying or invalidating the provided information by the interviewees (Hancock, 2002).

The researcher attended group discussions and interactions in an interpersonal, family and community levels so as to observe the nature and process of communication. This tool was essential to examine how meanings are made and how practical actions are accomplished in actual communicative sites. Moreover, interactions of the community members towards value systems were well observed and recorded in an organized field note.

3.4.2. Focused Group Discussion (FGD)

Focused group discussion is advantageous in qualitative research to get information from a number of individuals who share common factors, and it is important to understand

their views within the identified population (Mack et al, 2005; Kruger, 1994). The conducted group discussion in this study served as a catalyst to generate unique insights into understanding shared experiences and social norms. For this achievement, committee leaders of the community and some other members were participated to explore issues of communication structures, power experience and distribution among members.

3.4.3. In-depth Interview

In depth interview gives opportunity to relevant group members in the community to offer detail information and express themselves in an ordinary way of life. According to Boyce & Neale (2006), conducting in depth interview is useful to explore thorough information about a person's thoughts and behaviors in depth.

Boyce & Neale argue In-depth interviews can be applied in place of focus groups for two important reasons. The first is that when it is impractical to include the potential participants with other ordinary ones in the discussion. The second reason is that some people may feel expressing their view individually more comfortable than discussing it with other people openly. It is an effective mechanism to explore complaints' idea freely towards critical facts of socio-political and economical aspects in the community. Bradley, Curry & Nembhard (2012) support the thought during the process of applying this technique: "privacy may alleviate fear of reprisal for negative statements."

Having taken all these vital perspectives into consideration, a comprehensive qualitative interview was applied in this research to find out different thoughts and their critical

implications in the life scene of Awramba Community. This technique was found appropriate to determine what the group of the community wants or would like to have. It also helped to find out the degree of members' satisfaction in the process of communication and their role in decision making about mutual issues of the community.

Hence, a semi- structured interview was used to elicit important information from these participants. This kind of interview gives freedom to the interviewer to make further data generation out of the original response of the interviewee. Therefore, open-ended questions were posed both formally and informally to some individual interviewees in the community such as the community leader, households, students and other stakeholder members including some persons from the nearby villages.

3.5. Method of Data Analysis

The unique feature unlike to quantitative study, data generation and analysis often occur simultaneously in qualitative research. Especially, data analysis in ethnography approach takes place throughout the study (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Kenny, 1996) Therefore; the researcher took critical interpretation about the nature of communication during the generation of primary data. This strategy was very helpful to reshape the focus of data generation to maintain effective treatment and coverage of the study.

The second strategy of data analysis was made by using thematic approaches of categorization. Creating categories in qualitative research is quite challengeable and crucial concept; data that are going to be composed in to the same category must relate to

an appropriate analytic context. The work of Dey (2005) clearly states how the process of categorization takes place in a qualitative study: “breaking data down into ‘bits’ and then beating the ‘bits’ together.” (p. 101).

Dey strongly argues how much it is important to maintain a careful data categorization. When the researcher develops a category, he/she is making decisions about how to sort out the data in ways which are suitable for the analysis. So, one has to be aware of how this category is going to fit into this wider analytic context. He concludes:

Categories which seem fine ‘in theory’ are no good if they do not fit the data. Categories which do fit the data are not good if they cannot relate to a wider conceptual context. We could say that categories must have two aspects, an internal aspect—they must be meaningful in relation to the data—and an external aspect— they must be meaningful in relation to the other categories (ibid, p. 103).

Hence, after the completion of the data generation, I primarily reviewed the purpose of the study and what to find out from the generated information. To make it easier, the data were transcribed and translated in to English. Then, I categorized the data into similar observation having realized fundamental questions that I want my analysis to answer. The process of my categorization was based on two empirical steps that are characterized as ‘crux of qualitative analysis’ by Powell & Renner (2003). These were (first) *Identifying themes or patterns*, and (second) *organize them into coherent categories followed by a comprehensive interpretation*.

3.6. Ethical Consideration

Research ethics primarily deals with the interaction between the researcher and the research population being studied. Mack et al (2005) have identified basic categories of principles to be considered in research ethics such as relationships with participants, intellectual property, fabrication of data, and plagiarism among others. So, the following points were taken into critical consideration while conducting the study:

- I disclosed who I am and why I was there.
- I briefly explained what participating in this particular research means to the participants. So, they had an appropriate consent about why they were participating.
- Participants were selected voluntarily and guaranteed the right to withdraw from the participation at any time.
- Informants were informed how the confidentiality would be protected, and was applied accordingly.

Chapter Four: Data presentation, Analysis and Findings

4.1. Historical Foundation and Membership of the Community

Awramba community is located in Amhara National Regional State, South Gondar Zone, Fogera Woreda, 73 kilometers East of Bahir Dar city, 631km North West of the capital Addis Ababa towards the way road to Debre Tabor. The community consists of 141 households and 462 inhabitants. Zumra Nuru, a 63 years old farmer, is the co-founder and co-chair of Awramba community. In 1972, Zumra Nuru launched the society he dreamed of with 19 households who adopted his vision.

Zumra stated that the establishment of the community couldn't easily come to an end. He had rather come up with many difficulties starting from the time that he conceived the idea of the community when he was a child. Zumra said, "My mother told me that I raised issues of belief at the age of two, and social issues at four. He described how he was inspired to begin his distinctive journey to the establishment of Awramba:

...My parents were farmers and they spent their time on field work ploughing, scything, weeding, harvesting, etc. when they come home in the evening, my father's work ended, but my mother's work continued at home. Fetching water, collecting firewood, cooking, looking after the children and washing my father's feet were her regular duties. Sometimes, she would even get beaten by her husband. I questioned about this injustice in which women are like servants and men are like masters...

In addition to issues of gender roles revealed above, Zumra argued that he noticed violation of children right, mistreatment of elders and less fortunes. According to him, he was perceived as a mad for protesting the existed social reality. He finally left his birth place, *Estie*, at the age of 13 and become a wonderer preacher in some areas of Amhara region: *Gojjam*, *Gondar* and *Wollo*. Five years later, at the age of 18, he returned to his

village and got married. In 1972, he found a group of people, 66 individuals, who could share his vision and established Awramba community with them.

However, their way of life was quite unusual to the surrounding community and they received a consecutive attack from their neighbors and the then regime, Derg. Derg tried to integrate the community in its system which could affect their life style. Zumra was arrested and spent about six days in jail. When the threat towards the community became more severe, members fled to *Bonga*, southern Ethiopia.

In 1993-94, they come back to Awramba when the situation became more stable after EPRDF took power. Some of their members died because of hunger and illness and the number of the community members was reduced from the original one. The land they used to own had been taken over by their neighbors and members were enforced to settle on only 17.5 hectare land out of the previous 50 hectare. Enaney argued:

...we wouldn't have returned from Bonga, if our motive was looking for advantages only for ourselves. There was better farm land coverage in Southern- Ethiopia. Therefore, we could have been beneficial if we had stayed there. But, we noticed that social injustices are more aggravated in Amhara region. So, we decided to return to Awramba to change the existing harsh situation...

The nature of membership in Awramba community is understood from the two perspectives: community membership and cooperative membership. The former type of membership is issued for both those who live in the community and outside the community. But, these members are believed to share the culture and of the community and live it accordingly. They are not also expected to participate in the activities of the community and gain benefits from it.

The latter membership, cooperative membership, is only designed for those who live within the community and share the overall cultural principles of the community strictly. They participate in the daily activities of the cooperative and share the profit made equally. There are some individuals in the community, but who are not members of the cooperative. Enaney described the reason why they don't join the cooperative is that some members want to work independently as the membership is based on personal interest.

Nevertheless, the interview with these members and the FGD result proved that rules are stricter to the cooperative membership and new applicants of the community members are put in a laboratory test for further screening. Drinking any types of alcohol, coffee, chewing chat and other related events are prohibited as they are perceived as addictions which influence the natural thinking process of humans. So, new applicants must come across with such checklists and other ideally sketched assumptions. Based on this, the cooperative consists of 153 members and eight candidate members. There are also six community members who have not been admitted in the cooperative.

The system seems different from the communism principle as members have the right not to join the cooperative life of the community, but they are indirectly indebted to join the cooperative as more opportunities are available to this membership. The community has limited amount of land; all big businesses which are the source of income belong to the cooperative; every external aid and the community empowerment process is made in a cooperative level which gives no significant consideration for other members. So, as my

interview with those who are not members of the cooperative revealed, they don't want to work independently as no other ways of income generation are adopted.

4.2. Norms for the Social Interaction

The community is guided by sets of norms that were established during the foundation of the community. The producer of these principles is the co-founder of the community, Zumra. He said, "I was wondering from place to place looking for people who could share my ideas. I finally found some people and established the community. The norms that we follow are what I was holding in my inside starting from my childhood." According to participants, a discussion forum was held by the grand community establishers to confirm the proposed guidelines. The discussion in which many debates were entertained lasted for a month and six days (36 days).

Here, it is argued that launching such public sphere before social rules are proclaimed opens a room for practicing deliberative democracy. However, having taken the issue of grass root participation into account, one can question the effort of members' participation starting from generating normative rules instead of merely supporting its application. All principles of norms were generated by Zumra and the purpose of the discussion was just to persuade members about the importance of rules to them. This is confirmed by critically examining the 36 days discussion in which no idea was rejected and added apart from fostering common awareness towards the normative principles. Zumra said the ideas were critical so that all members agreed up on them.

Hence, it is unclear to measure the community members' feeling of ownership towards norms for social interaction. Members' role is examined only from the perspective of protecting the primarily established norms which were once proposed by Zumra and accepted by members. Though the literature argues conversely, some key informants assured that there is no any norm that has been reshaped or changed through critical social interaction since the establishment of the community, 1972. It is likely to drive two possible reasons for this sluggish way of interaction. It might be because of; either the existing leadership doesn't allow members to come up with better and creative ways of shared wisdoms, or the established norms are extraordinary and beyond the members' capability to be improved or reshaped.

There is an established mechanism of protecting the established norms and controlling those who show deviant behavior in the community. When a new member joins the community, the person has to confirm his/her commitment to obey to guidelines by signing on a paper. The procedure applies an open approach which is based on the willingness of the individual. However, it is discovered by ethnography communication researchers that there is a greater conformity of norms when the limits of the community tolerance and the penalties for deviation are clearly stated. This means that members are held together by legal ties of contractual obligation.

If an Awramba community member deviates from the norm, he/she is advised up to three consecutive times. If the member refuses to improve his/her behavior, the person is isolated from any social service of the community. If the member is still reluctant to act according to the established norms, he is enforced to leave the community **ከሶስት ጊዜ ምክር በኋላ ግን በፈረመበት ነገር መሰማት ያስበት** (a key interviewee).

But, participants confirmed that they haven't come across with such situation and no any member has withdrawn from the community so far. However, an interviewee from Godguadit confirmed that there are members who withdraw from the community and join the nearby towns like *Alember* and *Woreta*. I have also met some individuals who were members of Awramba community, but now withdraw from it and live outside.

Zumra was asked to clarify if the existing norms will be capable to fit the interest of the next generation of Awramba community. He explained, "Principles of Awramba community are always new and compatible to our incoming generation. Perhaps, it may be difficult to be easily followed by youths, but it never becomes out of control as we reshape it in the family discussion." Proponents of communication (Fong, M. & Chuang, R., 2004; Schultze, 2000) argue that human mind is dynamics and the norms that govern people how to interact towards their environment is more likely to be changed through the time span of societal interaction. An interactional norm set by a few people 40 years ago may not be appropriate for current 462 people; and even for the contemporary societies in the future. Scholars point out greater difficulty of reaching consensus occurs as a result of the size of members increases and greater variety of ideas exists. Therefore, modifying guiding principles accordingly is found a critical dynamism of communication. This dogmatic stand has evidently affected the performance of their problem solving skill in terms of its timeliness and participatory perspective.

For example, for some years in the past, their children had to go away from their village for attending their education from neighboring communities. The community members

started worrying for the security of their children. According to Enaney, Zumra proposed a solution and ordered students to walk in *queue* when they go to and come from school. The queue is arranged in terms of students' age in which young take the front position and adults at back. According to Enaney, it helped to watch younger ones from any accidents. She added her further justification:

...If the elders used their normal potential speed, they wouldn't recognize what could happen to their younger brothers and sisters behind. If the young get sickness or any problems, elders can bring them by caring them on their back or shoulder. If they are incapable of carrying them, they can rush to the community and inform us so that we can help them. Because, we believe that man is the most valuable wealth on the earth; so we need to take care of him...

This remarkable event has been aired on regional and national media for many times with a less explorative approach of its experience. Here, the point I like to make from its timeliness and participatory point of view is that: firstly, the school is now located in the village and students are attending their school within the community. Therefore, students wouldn't go in queue if it was for the sake of their security since they are no more out of the village. It can be argued that a solution identified for a specific problem in the past can't be experienced for no reason at present.

It has also a negative impact on their interpersonal interaction with students of outside communities. Since the queue doesn't include outsiders, students of Awramba are not free to discuss diverse ideas with other students while they go to and come from school. As a result, it makes them reluctant to know what realities exist outside and to adopt new skills from them. It has a tendency to make them only mono-cultural societies. I have evidently observed a community student getting worried for her delaines to join her

fellows who were going to school in queue. She had been doing her homework with some students of the nearby communities under the tree. Then, these students were about to hide the student by standing around her to block Zumra from observing her. All these show that to what extent members are open to adopt and keep practicing what their leader proposes without any consideration.

The second aspect of this event is; if it is guided with a participatory fashion students must share the assumption of why they are experiencing, its critical relevance to them, when it is appropriate...etc., but the fact was different from this. I have seen group of Awramba students going to school in queue. I approached them and asked a grade five student to tell me why they experience it. She replied, “I don’t know, we practice it because Zumra ordered us to go in queue.” I also observed other group of preprimary school students coming back from the school in queue and sat near Zumra’s home. Some of them were asked to justify the reason for that distinctive event. They responded, “We often do this. If Ebabey Zumra is present at his home, he asks us about our education and provides us with some advises.” However, I could get no reason for the queue. It is ‘do approach’ that likely lacks a participatory element of communication within it. But, Enaney protested it and she contended that students know what they are doing even though my observation and interview with students proved differently.

4.3. Structure, Network and Climate of Communication in Awramba Community

The nature of the communication structure in a particular social group highly affects the members’ performance in ensuring substantial progress in their lives. It is identified by

the communication researchers that the structure of the communication in the community is mainly constructed by two positions: formal and informal (leaders and followers). Since Zumra's position as a leader in the community is secured by the informal structure, his power is hoped to play the informal role of hosting discussion meetings near his house.

As the plane area in front of Zomra's house is served as a central place to get all members together, they meet each other every morning before they go out for work; and every evening after they return from their work. Almost all members of the community are brought together to discuss their common socio-emotional and task problems. The principle of Confucianism guides the social relationship of the village. The Confucius's assumption (quoted in Fong & Chuang, 2004): "To live in harmony with the universe and with your fellow man through proper behavior." is the ethical-moral principle set ideally intended to govern all social relationships in Awramba community. This positive communal relationship provides an ethical and moral framework to members to live harmoniously by helping each other. This behavior is well manifested in the community for their maintaining significant care and support for those who are in need of help.

Ritual greetings appear in the daily lives of Awramba community. It serves as an opening move in a conversation between two or among small groups of members who have not seen each other for a while. They enact these interactions without thinking about it. The most common ritual expressions that are seen among the community members are: *how are you? Fine! Shaking hands with a following smile*, etc. These rituals are used for

making a transition between a period of absences and a period of increased access. The ritual communication in the community reveals the sense of brotherhood and solidarity developed by members to achieve their common goals. My informant also told me a fascinating way how members of the community address ritual greeting to their leader, Zumra. According to him, every morning, members go to Zumra's home and greet him,

“Good morning ‘*Ebabey Zumra*’?”

Good morning!

How are you, today?

I am fine, and you?...

...Where is the place of our work, today?

It is understood from this ritual exchange that members of the community maintain a fatherly approach to their leader, Zumra. And places of tasks as well as the person in charge of them are determined by him. In Ethiopian culture, the title in which Zumra is called by, ‘Ebabey’ is given to fathers and elders of close relatives. In such kind of relation, there is a tendency for members to take everything what their leader says irrespective of its rationality.

I have observed a group of people frequently going to Zumra's residence and sat on the flat stones that are prepared for hosting any comer. The whole members might not necessarily come at the same time. Group of persons regardless of sex, age, power, and other social statuses often visit the area. Members who have retired from the union activity and are waiting for to join the elders' room always spend their time talking with their fellows sitting in the spot.

Some members were asked to clarify why they go to Zumra's home and prefer it as the center of their contact. Participants responded that they go there to ask Zumra any question and get some advices from him. However, I have observed group of persons sitting and talking each other near Zumra's home without him. It seems a place of worship as members go to the place (individually and in group), sitting for a while exchanging some rituals, and then depart soon. Conversely, Zumra argued that, "If I could read and write, I would have an office to serve my guests like other committee leaders. Since I am illiterate I have to use this area as my office to discuss our common problems." In this particular social interaction, issues of task effectiveness and strengthening members' cohesiveness by reshaping their behavior were found to be almost the identical purpose why all members get together for the discussion.

Other key participants also confirmed that it helps them to make themselves avail each other as integrated partner to be engaged in collective action. According to them it plays a significant role in realizing appropriate social movement by building collective identity and solidarity among the community members. In this kind of structure, there was an indicator of structurally equivalent in getting the access to information about any issue that could affect their lives. This also prevents the information from being distorted.

However, the existing feeling of passive assertiveness which is created by the perceived power of the community founder significantly influences the process of the communication. It is important to notice that the influence of the communication behavior over members is not measured merely in terms of the structure, but also the

position of the actor. Hence, Zumra possesses the central position in the communication structure and controls the flow of communication within the community.

The community members tend to feel defensive as they have been evaluated by the external society for their unique life style. Hence, their communication climate is reshaped accordingly. I have noticed that members use identical reaction towards their unique life styles. I have watched many interviews of Zumra and his wife; as well as other community members about their value systems in person and on media. The tone, structure and content of their utterance remains the same. Jack Gibb (1961) has indicated that the group that develops defensive communication spends much time by concentrating on flaws or critiques so as to reshape it accordingly. Unlikely, what makes the defensive communication in Awramba Community unique is that no energy is exerted to make it favorable to the outsiders. An informant from the outside argued that the community tends to simply oppose the cultural assets of the surrounding people and conceive unique principles just for nothing, but fearing not to lose the attention from the external community. However, member participants disconfirmed that the indigenous principles are handed down from their great fathers and all members value them much.

4.4. Scheduled Discussions

4.4.1. Family Discussion

This is a regular discussion program in which groups of two or more families meet together at every 15 days to evaluate their plan and control the behavior of members. It usually takes place at night when all members come back from their field work and after

the daily activities are nearly over. The formation of the group is made based on the spatial distance and the number of the family members that each household constitutes.

Participants who are gathered for the family discussion, ranging from children-to-elders, take a circular setting. According to participants, this setting is deliberately applied to provide discussants with equal opportunity to express their opinion turn-by-turn. The discussion is chaired by one of the participants who is chosen by the group members. The role of guiding the discussion is not only taken by matured members, children are also highly encouraged to lead the discussion. Someone is assigned to help them if they are incapable of chairing the discussion in order to easily adopt them with social forums. According to Gebeyehu, this is very helpful for them to develop the skill of participation and self confidence in expressing their views in any social interactions. In the example presented below, I have noticed that every member including children was actively participating in the discussion. They were orators and good at expressing their thought.

It was nearly 7:00 pm in the fall down of the day. About 22 participants of four families which are composed from elders, adults, children, females and males were gathered for the family discussion at the veranda of Zumra's home. The conversation started with the murmur of some participants, "who is the chairman of the discussion, today?" Others replied, "It is Agenagnew... Agenagnew..." This was followed by a short speech of the chairperson that could launch the discussion officially.

My informants asserted as the seating is formed regardless of any consideration. However, in this particular family discussion in which Zumra's family members and other three households participated, the seat is built with significant considerations. Members who belong to the same family were sitting closely side to side. Zumra took the center position among participants on an elevated especial chair. Despite of this, the literature argues that in this kind of setting, discussants may feel that they have lower status in many perspectives than Zumra; and the nature of their interaction is influenced by this perception.

The discussion began from the person who were sitting at the left side of the chairman and went round in the circle until the last participant. In this scene, there was an equal opportunity for representing the self opinion for participant in the discussion. Indirectly, speech acts in the discussion were not discussed in terms of interest of the speakers as everyone is expected to report their successes and drawbacks turn -by- turn. There are two themes that each discussant is supposed to discuss: *plan accomplishment* and *characteristic evaluation*. The full version of the utterance which remains the same for almost all members is "I have accomplished my plans in the past 15 days. If there is any problem in my behavior that I am not aware of, I am willingness to accept comments from the discussants and reshape them accordingly."

All members reported that they were succeeded in their routine activities. Contrary to this, two cases were raised as breakdowns of their perceived social reality. The first was reported by a mother participant. She complained that her daughter became upset for

nothing and refused to eat her breakfast before she went to school. Other participants commented on her misbehaving; and finally the daughter was asked to confirm whether she accepted the comment or not. She then admitted it as a wrong behavior and promised not to behave in that way again.

The second case was raised by Zumra. It dealt with the bitter dialogue he had with his son. Zumra said, the son came from school with crying, because he quarreled with an outsider student. Zumra complained, “I asked him to tell me why he was crying, but he kept on crying instead of answering me back. Then I reacted to him aggressively.” Participants suggested that what Zumra did to his son is not considered as *misbehaving*. As soon as discussants finished evaluating their performance and commenting on other drawbacks, the chairperson asked them to forward their opinion about the scenery of the discussion. Some members gave their feedback about the procedure of the discussion and it ended after an hour.

The aim of the family discussion revolves around one central theme, characteristics evaluation. It serves as a means of disagreement reduction by safeguarding the previously established norms by Zumra. It functions as a mechanism of controlling the behavior of deviant members. Besides, I have noticed that serious issues are not raised in the discussion. It is limited on only evaluating individual characteristics and encourages no participants to come up with creative ways of life by entertaining new ideas. But, according to participants, it has a potential impact in producing honest, respectful, hardworking and peaceful members in the community.

4.4.2. Other Scheduled Group Discussions in the Community

Participants of the study confirmed that group discussion among members is a vital instrument to protect values and principles of the community. It is also used for enhancing members' integration towards their common welfare. I have observed that almost all members meet each other in the morning and evening, before and after the daily activities of the cooperative. Besides, there are scheduled discussion times for the members. All members are drawn to the general community forum once a year to discuss issues that affect their life. According to my key informant in the community: evaluating their past progress, how to reshape drawbacks and encourage successes, and determining future directions of the community are the basic issues that are raised in the community forum.

Youths are gathered for the group discussion twice a year at every six months. The first term of the discussion is held in September as it is suitable for including the university students and some other members who live outside the community. The second one is held around February. For this particular time of discussion, university students and some other members might not attend the discussion, but the result of the discussion is reported to them. They propose some points for the discussion, too. The central theme of the youth's discussion revolves around the meaningful commitment in keeping their culture that has been handed down from their illiterate great fathers. It includes details of points about reshaping deviant youngsters, enhancing the community assets through modern wisdom and realizing the previously set goals by promoting Awramba effectively to the external community.

Committees in charge with norms and rules, which consists of 15 members, also launch a meeting three times a year. According to the committee members, they examine whether the rules are well respected by the community or not. Before they are gathered for the meeting all members are asked to contribute their ideas for the points of the discussion to be taken. Ideas such as rules that need to be reshaped, changed or added are collected from all members to be discussed in the meeting. However, Zumra asserted that there is no any piece of rules or norms that has been either reshaped or changed so far.

4.5. Nature of Leadership in the Community

Opponents of leadership initiative for social change argue that good governance creates a fertile ground for securing development. If there is a consensus for the serious contribution of leadership to development, it is essential to consider the critical contribution of traditional leadership in the empowerment process.

A workshop was held in Johannesburg by UNECA, 2007, on the theme of incorporating the traditional system of governance with the modern state. It was emphasized in the workshop that successful integration of traditional system of governance with the modern structures is very essential to ensure substantial change to communities. It is implied in the report that intertwining democratic principles with the traditional way of governance is very important for the wellbeing of community members.

Likewise, Awramba community is guided by traditionally established ways of administrative system; and its leadership role in this study is examined from the

perspective of: allowing free flow of expression, creating conducive environment to enhance human and economic development by employing participatory leadership and fair distribution of power. The establishment of value systems in the community didn't have the pressure imposed by the expectation of an external body. This helped the community to create a context for the emergence of unique traditional leadership over time.

The administrative system is organized into 12 sub committees. There is an overall committee known as 'development committee' that coordinates the various activities of sub-committees. Members call this structure, 'development structure'. The community founder and leader, Zumra Nuru, has been serving as the chairperson for the development committee. As Zumra has held the traditionally assigned leader role, he is responsible for creating a cultural context that is a fertile ground for both human and economic development.

However, Zumra doesn't seem open to claim himself as a leader. He said, "I am not a leader. I possess no power, but idea." Scholars suggest that language (idea), power, and society are intertwined concepts that affect the nature of social structure. All members regardless of sex want to socialize from Zumra and take his ideas as they consider of it 'virtuous thoughts'. So, his ideas are powerful as they are fabricated into sets of principles and these principles are applied in the leadership system to influence members. Though powers are provided to the committees of the development structure, Zumra

revealed that he takes the most part in overcoming problems of members. He further explained:

Everyone comes with various problems. When something goes wrong in the community, they come in the middle of the day and report it to me. Then, I provide solutions to them. They often prefer to bring problems to me. **ያሁን ችግሩን ያመጣህ፡ ያሁን ችግሩን ያመጣህ፡፡ ከዚያም ሰባቱም መፍትሄ እሰጣለሁ፡ ቀን ስለቀን ደግሞ ይመጣሉ፡፡ ይህ ነገር እንዲህ ሆነ ይሳሉ፡፡ ስንድ ሰው ጤና የጎደለ፡፡ ቢኖርም ርጠ፡ ነ፡ ሠደኔ የሚመጡት፡፡**

The fundamental democratic feature of leadership for achieving meaningful social change is allowing free exercise of expression (Griffin, 2006). Accordingly, the community members are encouraged to express their ideas freely. This was approved in the task approach communication as members are engaged in various conversations and discuss how they should implement their daily routine activities in a participatory fashion. Consequently, there is a deliberate collaboration for the common good and meaningful commitment to overcome their mutual problems. Every member has the right to participation in a more empowered form of engagement for collective action.

However, it has been significantly observed and found that there is an evident limitation on emotional approaches of communication. It is natural that members in communities are composed from different socio-psychological aspects and it is likely to imagine divergent components of life. Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani, & Lewis (2002, p. 2) argue, “Communities are not homogenous entities, but are composed of subgroups with social strata and divergent interest.” Conversely, convergence is perceived as the ultimate goal of the interaction and conforming to the ideas that are originated from the center is considered as the valuable outcome. As a result, different views are considered as causes for dissolution and perceived in the community as ‘a transmit disease’ which could

hinder the sustainability of the community development. The literature indicates a participatory leadership doesn't only persuade members to bring behavior changes, but also understand the critical needs of the members and responds accordingly.

In some cases, as reflected on other topics of the study, the leadership guarantees the collective rights; and gives less emphasis for individual opportunities. Consequently, the collective rights go against of human rights: for example, the right to marry a person from another culture, the right to belief, etc. but, scholars point out community change operates in societies whose population are more diverse; and 'diversity' characterizes 'democratic leadership.' (Checkoway, 2007). The International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems also argues that "This calls for a new attitude for overcoming stereotyped thinking and to promote more understanding of diversity and plurality, with full respect for the dignity and equality of peoples living in different conditions and acting in different ways" (MacBride, 1980, p. 254, quoted in Servaes, 2007, p. 169).

Another important aspect of leadership that characterizes social change is structural change. It is associated with redistribution of power which implies power shouldn't be only exercised for the members, but also by members. In the FGD with the committee leaders and members of the community, it was reported that committee leaders are elected by members for a defined terms of service. According to participants, these members are fully delegated by the consent of whole members in a fair election.

But, I have significantly observed unbalanced power distribution among members. For example; Zumra is serving for three different positions namely: the chair person of the

development committee, a committee of norm originator and regulator; and a guest recipient. Zumra's wife, Enaney is also serving for two positions: as guest recipient and a committee of complain receiver. Zumra's daughter, Melkie Zumra, is serving as a central committee for the cooperative. According to some members in the community and an interview with the community high school teacher, Zumra's son has possessed a privilege to pick fruits from local trees and distribute to the community's children. However, Enaney protested it and confirmed that he is not the only legitimated person to distribute fruits to the children; any one can rather do it.

4.6. Socio-Economic Transaction and Neighborhood Integration

It has been argued in recent works that social relation is a fundamental element that characterizes the status of social change in a particular community (Servaes, 2007). Awramba, in the social interaction spectrum, is perceived as a marginalized social group for their unique life style especially associated with religion and other social assets as these are the basic components in the life of the surrounding people. Participants within and outside the community confirmed that the community has been facing a nail-biting resistance from the neighboring communities as the way of their life is very unusual for the area.

The outcome of the situation can be analyzed from the two perspectives: The first view is that the resistance of the external communities has resulted a significant impact for achieving a steady socio-economic transformation of Awramba community. The member informant has described the contribution of the opposition for their achievement:

What we consider as a good deed from the surrounding society is that their strong resistance has created a strong growth to the community. This has helped us to get significant attention from the government and intellectuals in their study. **ሰአካባቢ፣ ህብረተሰብ ዙሪያ እንደ ወሰታ የምንቆጥርበት ጠንካራ ተቋሚሞ ማንሳቱ ጠንካራ እድገትን ነዉ የመስራተዋል፡፡**

From this, one can realize that their marginalization has been an important factor for the community in accelerating its growth. According to participants, in addition to attracting many change agents to the community, the threat they have been receiving from the neighbors helped them to build a strong solidarity, cohesiveness and commitment to overcome their mutual problems and go forward.

The second is that their odd life style is not developed gradually in an evolutionist process, but conceived out of a small village and practiced straightforwardly. This caused the outside community to view members as a deviant group and develop negative attitude towards them. This harsh atmosphere created a strong wall between Awramba and other communities. As a result, these communities have been operating in a blocked cross-cultural relationship scenario which involves poor life experience exposure.

As a result, the life principle of Awramba has not been adopted by the neighboring communities though it is excelled as valuable by its members and some scholars. The participant explained, “People from abroad are adopting our way of life, but local people don’t want to learn from us because of religion. Neighbors have unreasonable hatred towards us.” Zumra also confirmed in his interview that their life principles couldn’t be learnt by the outside communities. He said:

I had been looking for someone who would either ask or understand me. These days, although *it is difficult to say my ideas are taken*, many people

from different parts of the world are spending their time in the community exploring our ideologies. So, I can say that I have walked one step forward in realizing my vision.

What Zumra perceives as a one step progress is getting many people to know what Awramba community is experiencing, but there is a common consensus that their way of life has not yet been adopted.

But, according to key informants, they established normative rules not only for Awramba community but also for all human beings in the world. Zumra is always heard complaining for only Awramba community members are blessed out of nearly seven billion people of the world. This leads us to feel their philosophical orientation has a basis approach of assumption. Its pioneering tendency is about spreading out the existing life principle of Awramba to the external community regardless of significant consideration of realities that exist outside.

It is important to understand what reality exists in the global sphere. The world is composed of different countries in which each nation entities distinctive life styles and value systems. However, there is no way in Awramba community to acknowledge multicultural realities. Therefore, it could be infeasible to think the life style of a conservative mono cultural community can rule the diversified entities of the world. The norms that were established 40 years ago by 19 people may not also be appropriate for the contemporary societies of the world.

The community wants others to learn from them, but they are reluctant to adopt any life style from other communities. It is revealed from the Zumra's point of view that "I had been looking for someone who could either ask or understand me." This implies that Zumra's primary goal was letting others understand or ask him. In his speech, it couldn't indicate any inclination of learning from others. This assumption also contradicts with Zumra's saying which is posted on the wall of the guest welcoming room. It says,

"There are three kinds of persons; the intelligence one knows and asks; the medium one knows, but doesn't ask; and the stupid one neither knows nor asks." ሐሰት አይነት ሰው አለ፡፡ የመጃመሪያው ሰው፡ ያውቃል ይጠይቃል፡፡ መካከለኛው ሰው ያውቃል፡ ግን አይጠይቅም፡፡ የመጨረሻው ሰው አያውቅም አይጠይቅም፡፡

As it is clearly revealed from the above philosophy, the quality of a person is evaluated from the transactional point of view of communication. According to the justification given above, the intelligence one shares his knowledge and learns from others. Therefore from the saying point of view, Zumra's position as well as the community (since members are directly following his principles) is grouped from the *medium one* since they know but not willingness to learn from others.

Transaction and good net work ties among societies are indicated by many scholars as the fundamental qualities of communication process to exchange basic assumptions of development issues. Therefore it can be argued that sustainable development is achieved when communities are open to learn each other. Scholars also argue development is a process, not an end. Hence, it is suggested that instead of inclining only letting others know about our way of life and take lessons from us, it is also critical to adopt how others are dealing with development affairs with a careful consideration of indigenous traditional values.

The neighborhood integration in many aspects of social affairs is also termed as uneven. In most parts of Ethiopia, people are gathered in the funeral and wedding places to share sadness and happiness together. This is considered as a manifestation of solidarity and a means of revealing how one is concerned for another's grief. Conversely, Awramba community members don't go outside to celebrate these events. They even undermine these social assets which are experienced by the external community. Enaney explained this:

We don't go to our neighbors for wedding. If we go there, we are expected to pay them back. But, we can't invite them since we don't prepare banquets for our wedding. In case of mourning, we believe in helping each other before someone dies. So, we don't want to waste our time by getting gathered under a tree for nothing. እገሌ ስበቡ ሙታሰና እቅባባቡ እቅቱረቱ ባባረካ ስር ስናሞቅ ስንወጣም፡፡

Unlike the status of social transaction, the community is becoming the center of business deal for the neighboring communities. This has been enhanced by the consecutive involvement of the change agents to empower the community. Having become the owner of relatively big businesses and the increanment of their income, Awramba is serving as a market place in which commodities and goods are exchanged.

As trade is being expanded in the community, the Isuzu truck brings raw materials from the neighboring communities and takes products to the outside. According to participants in the FGD, when there is inflation in the area, the community stables the market by bringing cereal crops from *Gojjam* and other places. Then, they supply it to the surrounding farmers with fair price. Farmers also sell their products in the community having considered the spatial advantage. An interview with an outsider farmer also

confirmed that they prefer to sell their products in the Awramba community for its proximity. But, in some cases there is a value difference compared with the outside market. Because of this, some farmers go to *Woreta* and *Alember* to sell their products deserving to get attractive values. There is also a mechanism in which the Isuzu truck brings grains for the annual food consumption of each household from outside since the community owns too small amount of land to cultivate enough consumption for their livelihoods.

Besides, many people come to Awramba for different purposes. There are shops in the community and people go for shopping goods and weaver products. Starting from the installment of mills in the community by the Amhara Development Association, many people from the surrounding community visit Awramba for getting their grains milled.

These people spend their time at the teahouse waiting for their grain to be milled. The teahouse (another source of income for the community) which is located at the heart of the village is the suitable place where people from the nearby communities meet, gossip and debate about every day things as well as big philosophical matters. For example, a woman drinking tea with her boy flew some water on the floor. The waiter, who is a member of the community, became angry and stared at her. He said to her, “why did you do so? It is taboo to flow water here.” The woman replied, “You should have put a bowl under the table so that I could add the water there.” It was quite a philosophical reaction.

4.7. Community-Driven Developments and Change Agent Interventions

4.7.1. A Challenge to Secure Economic Development

Scholars argue that the key manifestation of social change in communities is securing self-reliance which is now becoming a basic criterion for development (Servaes, 2007). Conversely, the Awramba community members give priority for human development than the economic growth. They believe that the basic wealth to a man is his fellow human being, but money comes later. So, they want to describe the status of their progress from the human development perspective. Similarly, Freire (1970) and Ranis, G. (2004) indicate that the ultimate goal of development is being human.

According to the community members, they have come across with a nail-biting challenge to secure their economic growth. The ideology what they were following was strange and strongly opposed by the surrounding people. As a result, they received a consecutive repression from the outside. They were finally enforced by the then government, Derg, to flee to the south parts of Ethiopia which prevented them from leading a stable way of economic life. The problem became more challengeable to Awrambans after they returned from South. Their land was taken over by the neighboring communities and reduced from 50 hectare to 17.5 hectare as a result it was difficult to the members to secure their livelihoods. A participant of the community member explained:

After we returned from South, our land that we used to own was taken by our neighbors and left only 17.5 hectare. We had finished what we brought from South, and left nothing to eat. We were fed the seed of cotton. Due to the severity of the hunger and trouble, our eyes were turned into green. There was even a time in which we saved our life by drinking only water.
የጥጥ ፍሬ ስጥሟት እየተመገብን፤ ከረሃብና ችግሩ ልናት የተነሳ ስደናችን ስረንጋዴ መስቡ □ዓ ብቻ ስየመጣን የኖርንበት ገዜ ነበር፡፡

According to the interviewee, members were not only reluctantly able to secure their daily food. It was also challengeable to them to ensure shelter as a basic need. The participant further explained, “Our houses seemed a small hut of a traditional church education student (*yekolo temari*). Their roof was covered with leaves of *abalo* (*an Ethiopian indigenous tree*) as we couldn’t afford to make it thatch roof.”

The lightening up of this highly recognized economic insecurity was driven by some change agents after the community’s culture was broadcasted on ETV in July, 2001. Participants asserted that their economic growth started shining after the regional, national and international media promoted their way of life. This attracted the interest of many change agents towards the village and helped members to get significant attention from governmental and non-governmental organizations in the empowerment process. Having understood the amount of land available for the community, agricultural approach was not found to be appropriate to ensure meaningful economic transformation. They believed that their economic problem could be solved best by working together and helping each other.

Thus, they established a cooperative in which all members comprehensively engaged in traditional weaving to overcome their poverty. From the situation, it is noticed that they started their economic mobilization from a stumpy ground. Regional Micro and Small Scale Enterprise Development Agency (REMSEDA) was the first change agent which was involved in the community to assist members by providing them with essential training skills and modern weaving machines. This contribution was very important to the community as it is based on the needs and priorities of the members. The selected

trainees were paid 18br. per a day for two months; and the community used the total amount of money gained from trainees (8005) as the initial amount of the cooperative. During this time, according to participants, the amount of profit that was distributed to each member of the cooperative was only 50 br. annually.

Although Awramba community follows a 'self-help' principle, it is frequently receiving external aid and operating in a dependency syndrome. Zumra contended that community members are not Beggars, but he confirmed any external contribution or assistance is welcome to accelerate the community development process. Based on this, Amhara Development Association (ADA) and the Netherland government provided the community with improved looms and the shade for the weaving. Besides, ADA supported the community members by providing grinding mills which have now become the main service center for the surrounding community. Moreover, the Finish International Development Agency (FIDA), the Ethiopian Social Rehabilitation and development Fund (ESRDF), (REMSEDA), Bureau of Agriculture, the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Bureau (DPPB) and some individuals were involved in the process of empowering the community

However, there was a communication failure between development field workers of change agents and the stakeholders. As a result, many development projects failed. For example, providing beehives and hens by the Bureau of Agriculture was supposed to improve their livelihoods. However, it had no basis of grass root involvement with community members about its effectiveness; and the demographic characteristic of the

area was not carefully considered. Consequently, the bees flew away and the desired outcome couldn't be achieved. Oxen were also provided to the community without considering the local reality. The community doesn't own plenty of lands to be ploughed by these oxen. Members of the community couldn't sell them since they were provided on credit. Finally, all oxen died so that members didn't get any profit from it.

Following the change agent interventions, there has been a significant economic enhancement in the Awramba community. But, the visibly means of evaluating the performance of the economic growth in the community is on its macro level. All big business sources in the community such as weaving workshop, mills, shops within and outside the community, teahouse and the Isuzu truck belong to the cooperative. It also owns two branches of product supply shops in the towns of *Woreta* and *Alember*. In addition to the site, the shops supply shirts, towels, hats, scarves, skirts, tablecloths, dresses, blankets, bijamas and other garments to the customers. According to the participants in the FGD, the capital of the cooperative now reaches 3.5m/n br. Informants also confirmed that each member of the cooperative could share 3000.00 br. For the last three years. But, before these years, the amount of money distributed to the members was not more than 200-300.00 br.

Such full-scale engagement of cooperative life in which all members involved in collective action are believed to trigger reasonable disagreement among members. Different individuals have different capacities in the cooperative activities. Therefore, deserving different outputs according to the effort they used can be seen as a critical

legacy of economic right. As the community believes in ‘tasks are given based on ability’, a principle of ‘profit shall be gained based on inputs or efforts’ might be considered as logical for the sustainability of the system. The system evidently went against of the traditional values of the community as confirmed in the marriage life of Zumra. The community is guided by one-to-one marriage principle. However, Zumra was engaged in marriage with six women because, his wives were not happy to share their own products with others. Zumra explained it:

My wife could stay with me only until harvest season. When I started sharing my product to people who are in need of help, she left me alone. Due to this, I divorced with my five wives and I am now with my 6th wife. I did it just for the sake of my objective.

It can be argued that the ex-wives of Zumra might be right for deserving their products to use only for themselves as it is associated with personal interest. It might also be examined from the point of view of encouraging the weak and discouraging the hardworking ones. As a result, there is likely to be less individual curiosity of creativity which influences the sustainability of the inclusive communal system of life. The degree of collectivism in the community is understood in a sense that *every resource must be shared equally to members* unlike to *everyone has equal access to the resources*. For example, there are some *wanza* (an endemic tree of Ethiopia) trees in the village and no any child is allowed to pick fruits from these trees. They are rather equally shared to the children of the community. I have seen a child climbing on one of these trees and staring at the fruits. I told him to pick and enjoy eating them, but he responded that no one is allowed to do it at any time whenever they want. He added that only Zumra’s son is legitimized to distribute fruits to the whole children of the community when fruits become matured to be eaten. The child further explained that “Ebabey Zumra whips us if

we pick fruits from the trees.” This is a distinctive aspect of children’s life which is unlike to the other communities in Ethiopia.

The economic status at a micro-level is much less attractive than the cooperative one. The community founder, Zumra confirmed that “Our life is still on the breadline, but we are working day and night to improve our livelihood. We are also confident that we will secure our economic deficit very soon.” I have also noticed there is no extra ordinary economic progress at a household level and they are not better fed and dressed, but tidy. Despite of this, each household has its own traditional weaving tool at their home to compensate their income. They engage in their private activities before the cooperative work begins and after it ends to improve their livelihoods.

The main evident for the manifestation of changes at a household level is that their houses were built of mud with a thatch roof. However, as an interview with a high school teacher in the community witnessed, these houses are increasingly changed with corrugated iron within the last two or three years. I have also observed that each household possesses almost similar ordinary furniture. The fire wood-saving stone is common to all houses. Zumra claimed that the creativity of the model of the stove belongs to him. According to him, he experimented it for three trials and he finally could produce the newly designed. It is elevated from the ground to prevent family members from being burnt. The bend at chimney helps to boil water and clean the stove.

4.7.2. Clean Water Supply

Access of water supply had been challengeable to the community for years since the area is drier and water is scarcely available. Consequently, it was necessary to solve the problem by installing water pumps. According to a member participant, this initiative was started with a significant pressure of Zumra which was followed by the regional government intervention. The participant stated:

We used to fetch water from a stream which was away from our village. Then Zumra proposed as we had to dig a well at the center of the village. Then we started the initiative by ourselves. After we had dug about 15m down, the state appreciated our effort and installed the pump.

Members were principally affected by the need of water as it is revealed from the mobilization of the above community-led initiative. Their commitment to recognize and overcome their mutual problem is also highly appreciated although the solution usually tends to be originated from one actor. As the single water pump couldn't fully meet the demand of the community residents, members continued requesting the regional state to install some more water taps in the community. However, one of the additional ones was not properly installed by considering the economic capability of the members. The stakeholders were not consulted and their role was limited on only identifying their problem and reporting to experts. As a result, the tap was designed to work in diesel which is unaffordable and less worthy for the sustainability of water supply in the community.

The fee is not affordable since the tap is working only in diesel. If we use the battery once, it is no more functional and we must buy another. Because of this, we are not using it. The experts made the decision by themselves without consulting us. We noticed only when they were about to install it. When we complained about it, they promised us to change it. But, it has not yet been changed (a key interviewee).

From the above explanation, it is realized that the beneficiaries were not consulted about the design of the water system in a participatory fashion. The empowerment structure is identified as top-down way of development process. As the interviewee stated, the problem was studied by the regional water bureau and given to the Amhara Water Works Construction Agency (AWWCA). Then, AWWCA explained to the community that they installed the water tap based on the design that they agreed upon with the regional water bureau. Therefore it is identified that there was a communication problem between the stakeholders and the regional water bureau, the designer of the water system. Development communication researchers suggest that all these skills could have been reshaped by maintaining fundamental skills including the use of participatory discussion with the members starting from designing plans for development projects up to its accomplishment.

4.7.3. Health

The initial engagement of this development was driven by the indigenous knowledge utilization. This initiative was operated in a participatory fashion in which all members were actively engaged in the problem identification and resolving process. According to Enaney, the establishment of the health initiative in the community was started for two fundamental reasons. The first is that women were facing a serious health problem during giving birth. So, it was aimed at saving the lives of mothers by establishing health station. She further explained:

We used to go to *Woreta*, 13km away, to get the medical service. There were mothers who lost their life in the middle of the journey. Having realized all these problems, we questioned ourselves, ‘why don’t we build clinic?’ We then built it and the shelves for the medicine were made of

mud. We finally employed a nurse by ourselves after the clinic had been licensed as 'medium clinic'.

The second reason for establishing this particular initiative was, according to informants, was originated from Zumra. It was aimed at using the indigenous man power in the community by creating an institutional system that can hold the graduate members. The assumption behind this initiative can be interpreted from two perspectives: the first is from the view of creating job opportunity. This is supported by Enaney as she explains Zumra's motive, "Our children shouldn't worry about unemployment. Let's create job opportunities to them. Then, they can upgrade the clinic to hospital by getting license from the government."

The second is examined from the perspective of communal centrism. Informants stated that some community members are studying medical education in universities. Other are graduates and working outside the community. Thus, the main reason for running community-led health initiative is to build the community's capacity by bringing these members to the village. This is possible to argue that the thought narrows the community and nation relationship in securing social changes collaboratively. White (2008) argued results in African communication research showed that the fundamental communication problem in many African communities is a tendency to be restricted in local issues in the development arena. According to him, a critical engagement in the development process is well described from the perspective of "how people in local communities communicate among themselves to solve local problems but rather how people at the grassroots level

can articulate their views, needs and interests up to the district, regional and national level”.

Waste management is another important feature in the community that keeps the village clean. There are rubbish containers in the village. The dumped piles of rubbish materials are finally burnt outside the village. Every household has also a very small hatch roof toilet rooms which are located outside the village. However, it might be difficult to use them during night and for emergency cases as it is away from the village about 50-100m. One of the participants stated that the reason toilets are located outside is to keep the village clean from bad smells that could come out of the toilets.

Another amazing feature in the community associated with health communication is the campaign members use to fight against HIV/AIDS. My key informant illustrated, “HIV/AIDS is mainly transmitted by sexual intercourse. So, we don’t worry about it as we follow one-to –one marriage principle. We believe that HIV/AIDS is a holly disease that doesn’t catch us unless we touch it. ሌድስ ካሰደረሱበት የማይነካ ቅጽህ በሽታ ነዉ።” but, the campaign seems lack to consider other ways of transmission. Some members like Zumra might be engaged in marriage with more than one spouse. There are many situations in which outsiders come to the village for different purposes. Their children also spend their time at school with the students who come from 70, 000 people of the neighboring communities. Therefore it was critical to consider these realities and create meaningful awareness of other transmission methods. But, Gebeyehu stated that such cases are taught by Zumra as a form of advice.

4.7.4. Education

The community believes that each child should have the right to get the access of education. Having realized this, the community has independently built a preprimary school to provide basic skills to their children. An informant of the community member stated, “Many children of our neighbor communities don’t have the access to education. They spend all their time by herding cattle. But, every child in our community has the right to learn and it is well secured.”

According to Enaney, the pre primary school takes the most part in socializing children and bringing them familiar with the existing environment of the community. Even though, it rarely introduces as other realities could exist in the external community, the preprimary school has a potential impact in reshaping students’ attitude. It makes them more ethical and free to express their ideas according to the established local traditions. The preprimary school coordinators, who are assigned from the community, help the children to adopt basic principles of the community through the song: “We kids don’t take someone else’s property. If we find any lost belongings, we return it to the owner. We produce by working collaboratively and sympathetically.” Students always sing it to Zumra near his home and in the school. The song encompasses basic elements of *hard working, cooperation, helping each other* and *honesty* which are the fundamental features of the community. It also introduces a lesson to fight against corruption which is now becoming a barrier for the development process at various levels of a country. The community has built the old and new libraries by itself in 1997 and 2007 respectively. It was aimed at broadening the community’s understanding by making some books avail in

the cheaply built house. Every material in the libraries such as benches, tables and shelves are traditionally made of stone, wood, mud and plastic.

All members can visit the libraries except for adults since they are busy working in the cooperative activities. Most of the books in the libraries deal with languages and natural sciences. Books that discuss issues of literature and social aspects are scarcely available. As a key interview explained its reason, technology is the crucial aspect to be adopted and practiced; where as other social issues can be learnt in the community.

The regional state commitment to establish a primary school was a promising achievement to the children of Awramba community as they used to go a long distance to attend their education. The state built an eleven classroom school (1-8) and opened in September, 2009. This has paved a way to build a cross-cultural relationship between Awramba community and students of the nearby societies. The community perceives education expansion not only as a means of ensuring the right of children and adult, but also from the perspective of spreading out their culture to the external community. Enaney argued that “The population of our neighboring communities is about 70, 000. If their children come to our school, they don’t only learn their education, but also the culture of the community.”

Taking this assumption into consideration, the community collaboratively started working hard on the further extension of education development. Accordingly, grade 9 and 10 have been recently opened in September, 2010 and 2011 respectively, although

the building is still underway. The initiative is being fully driven by the capacity of the community. According to the members, both the cooperative and other members of the community are working together by investing their money and labor for its accomplishment. They stated that the involvement of the regional education bureau is restricted on providing license and following up the standard of the building.

4.8. Towards Communal Value Systems and Ideologies

4.8.1. Religion

Christianity and Muslim are the two most common religions that are highly practiced in the most parts of Northern Ethiopia. It is socially perceived in the area that, though freedom is guaranteed in the constitution, being a follower of none of these two religions is considered as being marginalized from the society. It is identified by many scholars that religion serves as a cohesive force that holds members together and builds the feeling of national spirit.

However, religion in Awramba community has been perceived as the most controversial issue for its unclear interpretation and manifestation. Many neighboring societies, visitors and researchers claim the members of the community as they don't follow any religion. This perception clearly produces a potential influence on the nature of the community's interaction with the outside communities. An interview with Ibrahim, who had been a member of the community for two months and recently withdrew from the community, clearly reveals how members are perceived by their neighbors and its possible consequence of social disorder.

I got married with a daughter of Awramba Community and left my birth place. But, my father sorely cried for my decision and warned me to leave the community. He said to me, “Members of Awramba community are *living deads* (እነሱ በቁማቸዉ የሞቱ ናቸዉ:-). Why do you change your religion for the sake of money? I will slaughter you unless you bring all your belongings just today.” And I am now going there to bring my properties.

The interviewee also asserted that a big loss what he encountered during his stay with Awramba community members is being refrained from practicing any worship activities of his religion. It is also understood from this point of view that the right to belief which is an element of human right is functioning at the community level as a whole rather than an individual level.

Another interviewee who lives in *Godguadit*, a nearby community, also confirmed how their religion affects the cross cultural relationship:

When we come together for the kebele meeting, members of Awramba Community briefly share thief life experience to us. But, no one accepts them because of their distinctive religious practice. We appreciate their cooperative and honesty, but their religion has been a threat for the culture of the surrounding societies. When we question their stand, they are neither Muslims nor Christians. Once some people asked Zumra and he promised as he would establish an arch, but he is lying to us and causing disorder to the surrounding people. So, what makes joining the community difficult is the issue of religion. There are some members who withdrew from the community because of this. If a person accumulates enough money to open a shop, the member leaves the community and joins the nearby towns.

A key informant in the community also confirmed that religion has been a potential factor to the presence of poor interaction with the neighboring communities. However, the community founder, Zumra, highly protested the assumption and assured as the community members do follow religion.

Others say to us ‘you don’t have religion’. But, we are experiencing the right belief and we manifest it by doing good things. If their reason is for not worshipping and constructing churches or mosques, let them misperceive us. We have one creator so that we will meet together in front of him. Then, he shall say to us you don’t have a belief.

Members associate constructing worshipping institutions like mosque and church with restricting the presence of the creator in a defined place. Participants stated that the creator exists everywhere. Hence, believing that communicating with the creator at a church or mosque is right is considered as deceiving oneself as God is found everywhere. So, locking the one creator inside the church/mosque is uncritical. Participants also reflect their philosophical stand towards the names that are given to the creator and the associated doctrines such as ‘God/ Allah; Christianity/Muslim... They believe that religion means being obeyed to the single super natural force. So, if there is a full consent for the presence of one creator (አኅዱ ፈጣኛ), dividing him and the doctrine by giving different names is wrong of human beings. A key informant elaborated it more:

We all originally belong to the children of Adam and Eve. And there is one creator of the world. If you go and ask Muslims about the divine, they believe in one creator, Allah. Christians also believe in one creator and call him ‘God.’ When you ask both of them if there are two creators, they agree with the presence of only one creator. So, you can prove that they are different only with the name, but same in belief.

Participants also asserted that members of the community have a truly sustained commitment of implementing all things that are mentioned in all doctrine of religions. Enaney strongly disagrees with the image given to the village by the external community about their religion although their daily life is fully based on what any religion orders. She argued:

Belief shall be manifested in practice by doing good things. We practice everything what Bible and Quran command. The 10 commandments of the

holy bible are highly respected in our community. We can't say a community doesn't have a religion unless it has a religious institution or a place of worship. They are judging us only for not going to churches/mosques.

She explained that the reason of going to religious institutions is for confessing wrong doings to our creator. Some worshiping activities such as fasting and others have also the same purpose. Enaney argued for this that “we need to care for our activities before we commit any mistakes that can make our creator sad. ሰርቆ ከሚሰብ ስህተትን መሰብሰብ፡፡ What else is expected from us if we perform what he says properly? This is why we don't practice any worship.”

The above justification for not being involved in activities of worship is found to be contradictory in this study with the establishment of complain receiving committee. This committee is established by anticipating the possible occurrence of conflicts, injustices, and other social disorders which are the source of sins or ill-manners. Therefore, ignoring worshiping because of their perfectness sounds irrational. There would have been an expectation of a failure to be obeyed to the creator like their perception for the possible occurrence of the above mentioned bad things.

Enaney's justification also contradicts with what Zumra and Agenagnew pointed out for not being involved in clear activities of worships. It also revealed that there is different and unclear consent for the practice of any religion. “We give priority to our activities. We don't like to waste our working time by worshiping. Some religions also don't allow working on some days which takes working times unnecessarily.” Agenagnew also justified his reason, “we don't want a religion to divide us.”

Another significant consideration is that members have clear awareness about the doctrine of the two dominant religions in the area: Christianity and Muslim. So, it is possible to argue that their belief is constructed out of these religions. This is supported by Zumra's idea about the way value systems and ideologies are established. He said, "We rejected all evil things and took good things from the culture of the area." For example, the community doesn't allow marriage among kinships by counting the ancestral tie upward up to seven. Gebeyehu justified for this that they adopted it from the culture of the surrounding people as the community members felt it is important to them. However, they are not deliberately open that some aspects of the culture they live is generated out of others; they rather claim that they have created their own typical and fascinating way of life.

In some cases, in many parts of the world, naming style is based on religious background. But, the discussion with the members of the community approved that no meaning is associated with the name of a person. They use it just only to call a person, but for no any religious case. However, the researcher observed that most of the community members use an Arabic naming styles such as Mohammed, Ibrahim, Hussein...Some members find out names for their children by associating with a secular particular event like in most parts of Ethiopia. According to participants in the focus group discussion, the reality for this naming style is that members of Awramba are composed of Muslims and Christians in which most of the members belong to the former one.

As Hacking (2005, p. 6) differentiated the concept of religion from belief; religion is holistically defined as “The acts, rituals and ideas of individuals and societies in which the relationship between the immanent reality and the transcendent reality (or aspects of it) becomes visible through word, image and acts.” According to Hacking, belief especially in African tradition is associated with spirituality. He argues: “It tends to be the spirit (life force, energy, essence) of a specific culture, expressing the most basic values of that culture.” Therefore, from the perspective of this assumption and the discourse reality existing in the surrounding culture, it has been confirmed in this study that Awramba Community doesn’t follow any religion, but believes in the existence of one creator. This perception was evident to be a key constraining factor that influences the nature of intergroup communication.

4.8.2. Gender Issues

Proponents of development communication indicate that community empowerment becomes meaningful when it encompasses basic elements of social change. Gender issue is taken as one of these endeavor ingredients that has adverse impacts on valuable development goals. Thus, empowering women is considered as a critical instrument to poverty reduction at household level and overall national development.

Nations in many parts of the world exhibit considerable gender inequality in employment, education, health outcomes the access to resources, and other spectrums of social statuses. Women and men are given different traditionally perceived roles in the social interaction. The construction of gender within a social setting that determines roles

and opportunities have been inspiring many researchers in the area to critically examine issues of femininity and masculine in the development process.

In most parts of Ethiopia, activities are traditionally identified based on gender division. For example, fetching water in most rural parts, baking, making coffee, preparing food and being involved in some other household activities is perceived as appropriate for women. Despite of this, ploughing, slaughtering, hunting, mediating conflicts, etc. are assigned and acceptable for men.

Conversely, in Awramba communities, roles are not identified to a particular gender unless it is associated with the natural characteristic of females or males. I have evidently observed members participating in all household activities and field works. Participants also confirmed that “jobs are not given based on gender, but ability.” (ሰራ ርታን ሳዲሆን ችሎታን መሰረት ያደረገ ነዉ፡፡), said Zibad, a community member. I have observed a distinctive feature of working habit related with gender unlike other communities. Women were involved in ploughing, and in other traditionally assigned roles of men. Men were also participating in take caring of children, fetching water, baking injera, etc. A woman participant asserted that “we don’t face any difficulties in doing the work of men as we come up with it since our childhood.” Enaney described the engagement of their children in household activities regardless of sex by comparing with their neighbors. She stated, “Our students help their parents by being involved in all activities after and before school. Females and males cooperatively work together within a family. When a son bakes injera, his sister washes objects.”

One may think that it is about shifting the traditionally perceived roles of gender based labors from women to men and the vice versa. In this scenario, it means that men spend their time at home; and women go out and engaged in the activities of the field work. This leads us to conclude uncritical women empowerment can be examined from the point of view maintaining less attention to masculine as it considerably advocates feminism. Or, according to the existing assumption, it seems creating opportunities to the previously oppressed social groups to take the power over the people who were oppressing them and in turn oppress them again.

However, an interview with the community member proved that gender issue in Awramba is not a role vice versa of mostly reflected Ethiopian culture. It rather fosters reasonable respect for both genders and empowers women equally to men. The interviewee further explained, “Gender equality is never ensured by letting women engaged in ploughing; and men in baking injera. It is about maintaining shared equality of assumptions among themselves. Then, they can be aware that everything concerns them.”

As reported by a woman member about the nature of decision making at a household level, there is equal authority of supervising activities in the family. She further said, “We have equal power with men in making decisions. Both the husband and the wife are the heads of the household.” Enaney also stated that women take the most part in having financial supervision over the family as they are good at managing money. A woman participant, who has joined the community recently, also asserted: “we had never heard

about the rights of women before. Men were superior to us. But, men and women are equal in Awramba.”

My informant from the neighboring communities argues that in the surrounding culture, women may work much longer hours; and deal with burden tasks at home compared with men. Apart from this, norms of gender-based labor division have been willingly established and handed down from great fathers. It is an ongoing process which is socially constructed by men and women. It might be driven from this that not only in the neighboring communities of Awramba but also in many parts of the region, no clear obligations are imposed to deal with specified perceived roles. It rather has been grounded on shared assumptions or agreements by interactants except some cases that obviously deprive the opportunity and wellbeing of a particular gender, especially women.

Some other philosophical justifications were still constructed from the participants of neighboring communities: in some cases, task assignment to a particular gender is associated with the spatial nature of the activity. Farm lands are mostly located away from villages. This makes the situation difficult to women to be comprehensively engaged in such field works as they are influenced by recognized biological factors. They come across with several natural features such as pregnancy, breast-feeding, menstruation, etc. Hence, it is found critical for them to take some activities that are located near home for the sake of their safety. Such consensus towards gender-based labor division is also understood from Zumra’s interview; he said, “In our community,

men do women's work; and women do men's work." From Zumra's saying, there is also a clear consensus towards *women's role*. It says, "የሴት ስራ በመስራቱ የተቀየረው ማህደምነቱ እንደ ወንድነቱ አይደለም።" It is implied in this expression that there is a shared assumption of task assignment to a particular gender that has been socially constructed. So, what makes Awramba unique is developing a work habit that can break the border of gender-based labor division that has been constructed and practiced by the surrounding society for ages.

As the literature discusses, gender equality is understood from the perspective of providing women with "equal access to social, economic, political and cultural opportunities as men." (United Nations Conference Centre, 2008). This doesn't assume assigning a particular activity to a defined gender as a threat. But, it gives much emphasis for recognizing the similarities and differences in men and women, and equally valuing these features. So, in this study, it is identified that members of Awramba community enjoy gender equality as there is equal access to education, resources, decision making, etc. regardless of sex.

4.8.3. Marriage

Key informants asserted that marriage in the community is arranged based on the full consent of the bride and the bridegroom unlike the long existed tradition of Amhara region. Especially, in most rural parts of the region, marriage has been arranged by the parents of couples although some improvements are presently observed.

In contrary to this, an interviewee from *Alember* said that there is an involvement of the community founder and parents in arranging marriage to couples. Conversely, Zumra contented that the role of the parents is limited only on the provision of financial and material support as far as they are capable of it. But, they are not involved in choosing a husband or wife to their daughters or sons. This was also approved in the Focus Group Discussion and interview, and participants asserted that Zumra is not involved in arranging marriage to members, and family approval is rather needed for the formality of the marriage as it is common in many parts of the country.

Another admirable aspect in the regard of marriage is that the community has identified age restriction for couples. Studies indicated that childhood marriage was very common to the surrounding area. Research participants stated that females and males should get married at the age of 19 and 20 or above respectively. Marriage before this age restriction is considered as unfruitful since lovers are not matured enough to take critical decisions for their life. Consequently, interviewees approved that sexual intercourse before and after marriage, and divorce is very uncommon in the community. Enaney also contended that marriage is practiced in Awramba in a way which can guarantee the right of couples. She supported her idea by witnessing the thorough investigation of behavior that couples use to choose their love mates independently. However, it is revealed from the interview with some members that no freedom is guaranteed to be engaged in a marriage with the outside communities. ‘unfencing the wall and bridging the difference’ is found as the critical factor to secure social welfare at a wider perspective. But, the reality in Awramba contradicts with the assumption.

If a member of Awramba community falls in love with an outsider, we don't mind for his going out. It is up to them, no one is obliged even my children. What we care for is for incoming members. If our member wishes to live the new culture for the sake of his an outside lover, he/she has to leave the community. But, if the outsider wants to marry our member and live with us, the person has to accept and live our culture (Enaney).

As quoted above, members have the right to be engaged in marriage with whomever they like. But, it is possible to drive from it that members are deprived of their right to live with their relatives in the community as far as they are engaged with the person from another culture. A privilege or sanction has also been placed on outsiders to live the culture of Awramba if they want to marry their members.

Another distinctive feature in the community is that members don't celebrate any wedding ceremony. They believe that marriage ceremony is an extravagance which demolishes all the accumulated money of parents and couples within a few days. As a result an informant of the member stated that they don't even make tea for any marriage celebration. The only required thing is that couples should confirm their agreement by putting their signature in front of a witness (the witness might be a female or male). The bride and the bridegroom are never given even a day to enjoy their marriage; they are expected to join the field work very soon.

4.8.4. Convergence Communication as a Means of Peace Building

Peace is perceived as a cornerstone for the entire socio-economic development in the community. Enaney, Zumra's wife described its role: "peace is the ladder to development." Zumra indicated that households are the fundamental levels where peace

is conceived from and developed up ward: “If everyone comes out of his/her home filled with peace, the village becomes peaceful. If villages are well secured with peace, then we will have a peaceful world.”

The community believes that the only means of securing justice is drying out the roots of conflict. Having realized this, they have established a system in which conflicts and disagreements are resolved from their roots. When disagreements occur in any interpersonal interaction, it is managed through the mediation of two or three persons. If the conflict remains unresolved at this level, it is raised during the family discussion. According to members, family discussion functions as a basic mechanism for securing peace by reshaping all deviant behaviors in the community.

According to Gebeyehu, the cooperative committee member, failing to be obeyed to the established principles triggers conflicts in the community. And the conflict which is not manageable in the family discussion is resolved by isolating individuals from any social services. He said: “It is not punishment that can teach a person, but isolation. An isolated person is like a fish out of the sea.” (ሰጢን የሚያስተምረዉ ቅጣት ስደደስም፡፡ ሰጢን የሚያስተምረዉ ማግስሰ ነጢ፡፡ከሰጢ የተገሰሰ ሰጢ፡ ከባህር የወጣ ዓላ ማስት ነጢ፡፡) As a result, agreements tend to be high and conflicts rarely occur having taken the possible punishment into account. Participants in the focus group discussion stated that conflict is a strange event in the community. Compliant recipient is one of the development structures in the community which is established to receive complains from members. However, Enaney, the member of the committee, stated that the committees are complaining for being jobless as no issues of

conflict are taken to them. Some informants also confirmed that none of community members has any record of crime at any levels of courts or police stations of the country. According to informants, this has inspired The United Nations to award the village two gold medals and honor Zumra as a peace ambassador for maintaining peace in the community. Wondie Teka, the interviewee from *Alember*, approved that the children of Awramba community are well known by their discipline and peaceful interaction. The participant described the ethical orientation of the community children by comparing with other neighboring communities:

It is unusual to observe any child crying in Awramba community. Whereas members of a nuclear family in our communities spend all their time fighting each other like oxen. As a result, we get trouble to manage conflicts. Conversely, in their family, there is cooperative, honesty, and no theft. They don't steal anything out of someone's pocket. They don't even take lost and found objects for themselves.

The researcher also witnessed that the children were interacting in a complete peaceful environment and no any symptom of conflict was seen during the research observation. It creates an extraordinary feeling for an outsider to observe the evening in the life of Awramba children. There were about 50 children playing under the big tree (*Warka*). It is located at the center of the village surrounded by an extensive bare land which is very risky as it is covered with stones. But, it is quite a fearless interaction. The movement is very attractive and it is not easy to notice even a single semantic element out of these many voices. According to participants, the children always get together at this place for playing traditional games such as *abarosh*, *dibibikosh*, etc. What makes the event more surprising is that it was unusual to hear any child crying among these plenty interactants. Zumra was asked to clarify how this behavior could be adopted and able to guide children to act in a more ethical and peaceful way. He explained:

If everyone comes from his/her home discussing peace, they swim on the same sea. Whichever family they come from, they are renewed with peace. So, everyone swims on the sea of peace; and there is no crying on the sea of peace, but only playing... በሰላም ላይ ስለሚገኙ ሰላማዊ ሕይወቶች ምሳሌ፡፡

In this research, it is identified that the family discussion which is held at every 15 days has contributed a potential role in reshaping the behavior of the members in a way which reduces any disagreements among themselves. Conformity to the primarily established norms and ignoring multi-cultural assets in the community is perceived as the best way of maintaining peace. Consequently, any deviation of norms or disagreements is considered as a threat for the peace of the community in order to sustain its image. For example, Zumra was asked to explain their attitude towards the possible experience of diverse cultural values by new members in the community. He replied:

We don't care for naming the religion: Muslim or Christian, but for its interpretation. The point is about securing peace. If one demolishes peace, we let him withdraw from the community based on what he/she signed before. One can live in the community as far as he/she keeps peace.

The implied assumption from the above response is that becoming a mono-cultural society is the best way of securing peace. Because, the underlying reality is that the community has no rooms for neither of the two religions, and being affiliated by these beliefs is considered as a deviant behavior. So, it can be argued that the community is unlikely to be model for multi-cultural communities in maintaining peace and security. The security committee of the development structure also takes a significant part in managing the security of the community. It assigns gunmen to take care of the property and wellbeing of the community by rounding the village. As Cohen (1986) indicated, aggression behavior of social groups is resulted from the frustration that members

develop towards other people. The assumption is helpful to examine this particular value system, the security committee, of the community though it was primarily opposed by the key participant, Enaney. She argued that their village is kept the whole day by gunmen just for the purpose of take caring of properties as developmental infrastructures are significantly expanded in the community. However, this security system was existed since the establishment of the community, 1964, before modern development machines were introduced to the village. Enaney, finally revealed that this security system is associated with the nature of relationships that they have with their neighbors. She stated:

We believe that there has to be a guarding system since 1964. Our neighbors also keep their village. What makes our system unique is that we keep our village day and night. There are many people who have negative attitude towards our way of life as we observed from our past life... if any new comer arrives at the village, the stranger is asked to describe himself and elaborate why he comes...

Zumra also confirmed the above idea, “we have to look after ourselves unless situations are changed. Therefore, we need something to protect us.” The village guard, Agenagnew also gave similar explanation for the role assigned to him. He said, “I carry a gun because people have strongly opposed us for our way of life.” In all times that I had in the community for gathering data, I haven’t seen Zumra moving lonely in the village. A gun man follows Zumra when he walks; stands nearby him when he sits, and watches him at a near distance until he finishes discussing with visitors. My informant from Gib Gudguad also stated that Zumra doesn’t dare to visit the neighboring communities freely. He justified that Zumra knows as some people could shoot him so that he frustrates much keeping the situation in his mind. The guard man also confirmed, “They target on killing Zumra as he is the principal leader. That is why I protect him.”

Chapter Five

5.1. Conclusions

Awramba Community is an island village in the Amhara National Regional State in practicing a distinctive way of life compared to the neighboring societies. The people of the surrounding communities are defined by their strict attitude towards their cultural practices which have been handed down from earlier ancestors and practiced over time. Paradoxically, Awramba community has emerged its own principles and value systems in a way different from the usual evolutionary process of cultural formation. Norms of interaction have been conceived from an individual and brought to some members to conform to ones constructed way of life. No process of teaching and learning; or try and error; has been observed in the process of constructing the culture.

The community operates in a communal cultural assimilation principle. It abides members within its territory by establishing sets of rules and norms. Since the deviant member could be isolated or even withdrawn from the community, an individual has to follow every segmented rule and perceived norm of interaction as far as the member wants to live in the community. Norms that govern members how to interact towards their environment is not more likely to be changed or improved through the time span of their interaction. This has sustained as the community encourages negotiating with the existing rules by maintaining strict sanction and virtue obligation on deviants. Hartley (2002, p. 47) argues that such strict privilege of cultural assimilation couldn't longer be seen since human mind is dynamism.

The community exercises democratic principles in the sense that equal engagement and distribution of resources to the members. Developing brotherhood empathy, helping the misfortune and conflict reduction are basic principles of the community. A significant enhancement has also been made in empowering women. Unlike to the surrounding culture, the community could reshape the traditionally perceived role of women and men. The guiding perceived principle to ensure gender equality in the community is interpreted by assigning tasks regardless of sex, but ability.

There is high rate of communication in the community. The process shares a common element with Paulo Friere's dialogic approach and John Dewey's deliberative democracy principle:- Every member in the community is drawn for the discussion that could affect their lives. What makes the communication process in *Awramba* different from these thoughts is that every discussion is operated in a previously determined scope. It is limited on only protecting the existing norms. Unlike to the Friere's and Dewey's thoughts, points are not made out of the discussion. The result is predetermined before members of the community are gathered for the discussion. This assumption is well linked with structuration theory of Antony Giddens (Miller, 2005; Yahia & Olson, 2006; Berends, H. et al, 2003). Likewise, the social structure in the community was created by Zumra many years ago and the symbolical domination of Zumra and submission of the community members exist in the delicate power relationship. Hence, the communication process is evidently constrained by the existing social structure. This has influenced the community to live in a static change of social interaction. The communication process is not a dynamic one, but stable and constraining phenomenon. However, since the

discussion is operated in a ritualistic manner and focused on behavior assessment, it helped the community to produce honest, hardworking, ethical and cooperative members.

The model of the communication is operating in the highest centralized index situation. Zumra, the founder of the community, plays the greatest part in providing members with socio-emotional and task-oriented guidance. He acts as a centre actor who maintains a direct contact with every other member in the community network. As Freeman (quoted in Berggren & Elfving, 2004) has pointed out in such types of network, a *star* or *wheel network*, all members of the community have equal access of information about any issue that could affect their lives. There is also a maximum degree of closeness since there is only one path distance to all members. Therefore, it has been approved that the central actor could have an evident control over actors. Members maintain a fatherly approach and consider the central actor as not a community leader, but as a prophet or a spiritual leader. As a result, the idea of Zumra has a tendency to be taken as the source of every social asset in the community regardless of any consideration. Although the pre-primary school plays a great role in socializing children, he is also the influential figure in socializing the whole members.

Members are drawn effectively in the community dialogue and engaged in the application of development projects. But, ideologies and almost all ideas of development initiatives are generated from only Zumra. Such approach was found to be a cause to trigger low feeling of ownership towards value systems and development projects. It has also produced an evident impact on individual creativity as members expect imaginative ideas from Zumra.

It can be argued that any value system that regards members of a particular community as recipients lacks rationality. It rather needs to consider them as creators of change and progress. In this environment, communication functions as a means of manipulation and control by which members of a group create cultures that promote symbolic exploitation and encourage monologue communication. The purpose of the overall communication process does not enter the community trying to impose change, nor does it place blame or criticize their traditions critically; rather, the existing traditional leadership facilitates dialog only to protect previously identified rules and increase the degree of members' conformity towards the norms by controlling deviant behaviors. But, as Hill et al (2007) argue; in a free society, members should feel no prohibition about expressing opinions even the idea is deviant which is not in accord with the majority views. Members as a whole agrees up on broad issues of social realities that serve as common welfare or communal interest.

Hence, the community has created a conflict-free society in which differences among members are ignored as it is seen as dissolution. The community judges the quality of the existing communication not in terms of the effects it can have on an individual, but in terms of only the capacity to build bonds of solidarity and the integration of members to the group. It acts like collective personalities which misinterpreted the relative full scale of social welfare and ignores significant place of critical individual views. For example, the right to be different such as the right to believe and the right to marry an outsider who has different culture is exclusively prohibited.

What the system lacks is the notion of the integrity of self with the group. It failed to cope the necessary elements of human rights with the traditional democratic system.

Otherwise, only creating a conforming group of members or conflict free traditional society can't fully characterize the social wellbeing. Servaes (2004) argues that cultural tolerance, accommodation of divergent views and the mechanisms of coping with change should be the focus to secure social change in communities. Hence, the strict communal system of Awramba Community may not sustain for a long time as the communication system discourages meaningful opportunities to individuals.

Awramba's economic growth in the past 40 years can be divided in to two periods: pre-promotion period (before 2001) and the post-promotion period (after 2001). The years before 2001 represent a challengeable time in which the economic performance of the community was pictured as impoverished. However, starting from 2001 a decisive role has been played by the media in promoting the culture of the community. Following this, many researchers, experts and change agents have showed a keen interest to explore their distinctive way of life. So, it is argued that the current economic status of the community is a significant result of the *media* and their *marginalization*.

Several change agents have intervened in the empowerment process and brought a meaningful economic progress at a communal level. However, there was a problem of interpersonal communication between the experts and stake holders in some cases. As a result, some development projects failed to bring sustainable solutions for their problems. Scholars of development communication (Pratchett, L. et al, 2009) suggest that there has to be a systematic balance between what stakeholders need and change agents can provide based on the critical consideration of the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the locality. So, the empowerment would have been effective in the

community if the initiatives or development projects had been dealt with in a participatory fashion.

Even if the community follows a self-help principle, external aid is considered as the main source for the economic empowerment of the community. The situation has tempted the community to operate in a dependency syndrome for a long time. Though it is difficult to notice a substantial change at a household level, the community has achieved a significant economic growth within a short period of time at a cooperative level. The village is functioning as a big trade and service center for the neighboring communities. The cooperative has been functioning as a cohesive force that holds members together. As leaving the community results losing all the wealth that they have accommodated for a long time as a social capital, members strongly conform to the norms. Hence, there is greater integrity among members of the community.

Religion is considered as a demanded element of identity in the area. However, Awramba's distinctive attitude towards religion and other cultural values has critically influenced the nature of social interaction. The community has been perceived as a deviant group by its neighboring communities like other traditionally marginalized societies of Ethiopia. Because of this, members develop defensive style of communication (Gibb, 1961) to defend others' critique towards their way of life. The critique and evaluation has increased members' integration to resist the threat they receive from outgroups collaboratively. It is found that every member uses identical form, content and style of utterance when they react towards principles and value systems in replying for others' critique. Consequently, their way of life has not yet been adopted

by the neighboring communities. Its social transaction with the outside community is poor and understood from the point of view of linear approach. They wish ideas and principles to flow from the community to the world, but not the reversal. The community, in general, did not succeed in reconciling economic growth with social justice. There are problems of justice from the relationship between the individual and the group; and the group with the external community.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Guide questions for Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Focus Group Discussion

1. What are the criteria to be a member of Awramba Community? Do you have any established process for accepting new members?
2. To what extent is the existing social structure suitable to utilize meaningful communication so as to foster positive improvements in your lives?
3. Does the community come up with creative ways to improve the socio-economic and political aspects of its members' lives, even without external assistance?
4. Do you have a constant scheduled discussion time in the community? What are the most common issues raised in these discussions?
5. Who takes the most part in socializing new members?
6. Is a deliberative approach applied before events happen in the community?
7. How are the leader and different committee officials of the community elected? To whom are these officials accountable?
8. Who has the power to decide on mutual issues of the community? Under what circumstance is this power given?
9. How do members participate in the community-driven development issues?
10. Is there socio-economic transformation in the community? What things are seen as evidences of growth?

Appendix B: In-depth Interviews

1. How was the community established?
2. How are norms of interaction developed?
3. How are those who develop deviant behavior treated in the community?
4. Is there any circumstance in which norms or rules are reshaped or changed?
5. How much did you benefit from the established social value systems?
6. How do you participate in development projects in your community?
7. What benefit do you get by being a member of the community?
8. If you had a chance to live freely in another community, how would you feel about leaving? Why?
9. How do you express your ideas, beliefs and philosophical orientations?
10. How do you feel about the possible existence of different ethnic, racial, or religious groups within and outside the community?
11. Can you describe how other societies think of you? What influence does it have on your life? How do you perceive their life style, too?
12. Do change agents such as NGOs and other governmental bodies have significant concern for Awramba Community? If so, to what extent do you have the same concerns to the neighboring communities as other people have in your area?
13. How is the socio-economic transaction with the neighboring communities?

Interview questions for other community members

1. How is your relationship with Awramba Community?
2. How do you perceive the members of the community?
3. What can other communities learn from everyday activities, ideologies and value systems from Awramba?

Appendix C

The Number of Awramba Community Inhabitants in Some Past Years

Year	1972	2003	2006	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number of Inhabitants	66	340	400	403	412	431	462

Appendix D: Zumra's sayings that are posted on the guest house of the community and considered as basic ideologies shared by the members.

1. በህይወቴ ከምንም ነገር በላይ የሚያስከፋኝ የተቸገረ ሰው አይቸ የምስጦል ነገር ሳጣ ነው።
2. In my life I feel the most anguish when I don't have the resources to help those in need .
3. ለራሱ ብቻ የሚያስብ ሰው ስለሰዎች እውቅና የለውም።
4. A selfish person only thinks of himself/herself he/she is not conscious of others
5. ጸብን የሚያመጡ ነገሮች መጥፎ አስራርና መጥፎ አነጋገር ናቸው።
6. At the center of all conflicts are bad doings and heartfelt words.
7. የሴት ስራ በመስራቴ የተቀየረው ማህይምነቴ እንጅ ወንድነቴ አይደለም።
8. Doing a women's job doesn't change my sex, it changes my ignorance.
9. ትስቁ ሰው ማነዉ? ያዉቃሰ ይጠደቃሰ። ጠካከለኛዉ ሰው ማነዉ? ያዉቃሰ ስይጠደቅም። ትንሹ ሰው ማነዉ? ስያዉቅም። ስይጠደቅም።
10. ለሰው ትልቁ ገንዘቡ ሰው ነው። ሌላው ገንዘብ በሁለተኛ ደረጃ የሚታይ ነው።
11. ጸብ እንደሸረረት ድር ያደራል እንጅ ስር የለውም።
12. ከሰው የተገለለ ሰው ከባህር የወጣ ዓሳ ማለት ነው።
13. ከሰራን ለምንን ያጣነውን ሳንለምን እናገኘዋለን።
14. መስጠትን ያላወቀ መለመንን ማን አስተማረው?