Addis Ababa University

School of Graduate Studies

College of Social Sciences

Department of Social Anthropology

Socio-Cultural Values and Institutions and their Contributions to Livelihoods in the Blue Nile Basin: The Case of Agricultural Communities in Sekela *Woreda*, West Gojjam Zone of Amhara Region

By: Muluneh Animut

September 2015

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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MA Thesis

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Submitted to: The School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Art in Social anthropology

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Department of Social Anthropology

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BNB: Blue Nile Basin

CSA: Central Statistical Agency

FDRE: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

KI: Key Informant

Km: Kilo Meter

St: Saint

NGOs: Non-governmental Organizations

GOs: Governmental Organizations

NRM: Natural Resource Management

CBOs: Community Based Organizations

DFID: Department for International Development

Glossary of Local Terms

Abzi	an indigenous food which is prepared by combining four *Injera* together and by using *Wot* in the middle
Arakie[1]	homemade local liquor
Arata Abedari	informal money lenders who give credit for the people with high interest rate and by taking strong collateral
Arba	the fortieth day funeral ceremony of the dead person
Asrahulet	the twelfth day funeral ceremony of the dead person
Atela	the byproduct of *Arakie* making process which is used for animal food
Chefi	it is a religious festival celebrated once in every year (July 15) by a group of people to protect their crops, animals and family members from unexpected damages
Tenkuay	a person with a bad spirit and mostly used such spirit to attack another individuals
Dabo	refer to bread
Debtera[2]	a church-educated person who can participate in church ceremonies or religious education, or who could deal in magic and medicine as well as in church-related matters (such as the church music)
Dega	highland agro-ecological zone
Degegna	the people who lives in the highland agro-ecological zone)
Eqqub[3]	a form of rotating saving associations
Gari	a two leg vehicle pulled by horse or mule and used for transporting materials from place to place
Gebto	is a local crop used to rehabilitate the fertility of the soil
Gojjo bet[4]	a traditional small round hut made of wood, mud and grass or a small house with a thatched roof

[1] Guday (2005: 196)
[2] ibid
[3] Assefa (1999:iv)
[4] Guday (2005:197)

Got	an area inhabited by a small group of individuals, mostly family relatives, affective groups, marriage relatives and others
Gotera	a traditional crop container which is made from mud
Hamle	refers to the month of July
Hura	an activity of land rehabilitation by using cattle dung and by keeping the cattle of the neighbors together for some nights on the farmland turn by turn
Iddir	an indigenous social institution established voluntarily by the study communities to perform burial and other social and economic activities
Injera[5]	the staple pancake
Qada[6]	a traditional land measurement unit in which one *qada* is approximately equivalent with 0.25 hectare
Kareza	a traditional bed which is used to carry patients from house to health center and vice versa
Kenja[7]	oxen pairing in which poor farmers system of uniting their oxen in order to plow their farm land turn by turn
Kebele	the smallest administrative unit
Kirestena	it is a religious ceremony which is celebrated on the 40th day of male and 80th day of female children and it gives a full religious personality for children
Korkoro bet	a rectangular shaped house constructed form wood, mud and iron-corrugated roof
Madega[8]	a clay pot used by women and girls for fetching water, approximately equivalent to 20 liter
Mahaber[9]	voluntary monthly religious association organized around a parish church in honor of a chosen Saint and members take turns providing food and drinks
Qolla[10]	hot lowland ecological zone

[5] Assefa (1999:iv)
[6] Guday (2005:198)
[7] Mamo (2013:23)
[8] Guday (2005:198)
[9] ibid
[10] ibid

Qollegna	the people who lives in the lowland agro – ecological zone
Salest	the third day funeral ceremony of the dead person
Sament	the seventh day funeral ceremony of the dead person
Selasa	the thirtieth day funeral ceremony of the dead person
Senbete[11]	a voluntary weekly (on Sundays) religious as well as social gatherings with in a church compound and members take turns providing food and drinks
Shimagiles	local elders who served as mediators of disputes, divorce issues, land conGflicts and others
Tela[12]	a traditional homemade beer
Teff	is a cereal mostly used to make *Injera*
Temado	a system of mutual assistance by which an individual cultivates the land of another person by using his own agricultural equipments and raw materials based on the principle of equal sharing of the outputs
Tena Kela	refers health post
Tena Tabia	refers health center
Tett Fetela	an activity performed by *Yebuna Mahaber* members to prepare a raw material for traditional cloths
Tsebel	it is religious water which has a power to cure physical, internal, psychological and spiritual illnesses and other problems
Tselote Bered	a religious praying ceremony performed to avoid the effects of unwanted heavy rain, flooding, snow contained rain and others
Tsewa	is the turn of an individual to celebrate the *Mahaber* by providing food and drink for its members
Wet[13]	hot and spicy stew
Wonfel[14]	a mutual labor agreement whereby two or more individuals work together on each other's' plots for an equal amount of time
Woreda	the second administrative unit above the *Kebele*
Woynadega	moderate midland ecological zone

[11] Guday (2005:119)
[12] Assefa (1999:v)
[13] Guday (2005:199)
[14] ibid

Yebuna Mahaber	a form of *Mahaber* established by women and celebrated every week with their houses turn by turn
YeEqqub Dagna	a person who controls the overall activities of the *Eqqub* and considered as the head or judge
YeEqqub Tazabi	a person who looks the normal functioning of the *Eqqub* and considered as an examiner
YeEqqub Tsehafi	a person who performs all the writing related activities of the *Eqqub* and considered as a secretary
Yeferesegna Mahaber	a form of *Mahaber* established by riding horse owner especially in the commemoration of St. George
Yetsege Mahaber	a type of *Mahaber* formed by individuals for two months (between mid-September to mid-November) and celebrated every week during this period
Yezemed Mahaber	a type of *Mahaber* formed by blood relatives, fictive groups and marriage relatives

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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to investigate and analyze the socio-cultural values and institutions and their contributions to livelihoods among the agricultural communities in the Blue Nile Basin of Sekela Woreda, West Gojjam Zone of Amhara Region. More specifically, the study attempted to investigate the contributions of socio-cultural values and various community based institutions to livelihoods, and to identify the major constraints that impede the attainment of various livelihood strategies in the study communities.

To attain these objectives, the study accessed both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data were gathered through different ethnographic data collection methods involving in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, case studies and systematic observations. Secondary data sources were also critically reviewed to identify the research gaps, to obtain data on the demographic characteristics of the study communities and to support the ethnographic data with conceptual and theoretical insights. The study participants were local elders, different local institution members and leaders, women and youth association members and leaders, government officials and experts, local knowledgeable persons and others. The data collected through primary and secondary sources were thematically organized and analyzed through triangulation to increase the truth worthiness of the study findings.

The study found that various socio-cultural values contributed to the betterment of the study communities' livelihoods. These socio-cultural values include: the value/culture of using organic fertilizer, keeping forests, sharing resources, helping each other, and the extended family structure, traditional practices and indigenous knowledge systems such as crop and field rotation, off-farming activities, indigenous weather forecasting and farming methods and religious and belief systems such as the belief in Tselote Bered, Tsebel, Debtera and Chefi. Moreover, the study found that community based institutions such as social and religious associations (Eqqub, Iddir and Mahaber) and work group organizations (Wonfel, Temado, Kenja, and Hura systems) are used by the local communities as livelihood strategies in the study area. More specifically, community based institutions promote social solidarity, social relationships and mutual interdependence among the study community members. The study further identified the major constraints (economic constraint, socio-cultural constraint and infrastructural constraint) which impede the implementation of various livelihood strategies in the study area.

Finally, the study concluded by suggesting areas for possible intervention of different governmental and non-governmental organizations to strengthen the contributions of local socio-cultural values and institutions to livelihoods and to overcome the major economic, socio-cultural and infrastructural constraints that impede the effective implementation of different livelihood strategies in the study area.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Most poor rural households in Africa depend on agriculture as the main source of their livelihoods and rely on the productive use of their land. Like most Africa countries, the majority of Ethiopia's population lives in rural areas and agriculture remains the major source of employment and income (Tsegaye, 2012). It contributes a significant share to the national economy. According to Abera (2009), agriculture contributes 45% to the GDP, generates 85% of foreign currency and employs about 83% of the population. Besides, agriculture is the main source of raw materials and the majority of the country's populations base their livelihoods from it (Rahmato, 2008).

In the Ethiopian farming population, land, labor, capital, and management are the major factors of production. Among these resources, land is one of the key productive livelihood assets and the majority of the populations derive a living directly from it (Reta, 2010). According to Tesfaye (2006), land also determines an overall socioeconomic status of an individual or a household in the agrarian society. In other words, agricultural land is the fundamental asset of peasants' property and a major source of livelihoods in the rural Ethiopia. Especially, the highlands of Ethiopia in general and Central Highlands in particular are the most populous region and the majority of them participate in agricultural activities. As pointed out by Belay (2000), even though the highlands of Ethiopia only constitute 50% of the total arable land, they are the home of 85-90% of Ethiopian farmers, contain over 95% of cropped area, around 66% of livestock population and 90% of the national economic activities.

More specifically, lives and livelihoods in the Blue Nile Basin (BNB) are strongly linked with crop production and livestock management with land and water. Over 95% of the food-producing sector in the basin is based on rain-fed agriculture (Amare et al., 2009). BNB is

located in the eastern part of the BNB that flows from the Ethiopian highlands to the border between Ethiopia and Sudan. It comprises 7% of the BNB area, but contributes 62% of the Nile water at Aswan, Egypt (Solomon, 2012).

But, even if, Central Highlands and the BNB are endowed with rich natural resource base and favorable climate conditions, nowadays, agricultural land is scarcer in this area than any other part of the country and are undergoing serious ecological degradations because of increasing human and livestock population pressures (Chilot, 2007). Besides, there is a prolonged dry period at the headwaters of the BNB from October to May. In this period, the water flow is a critical constraint for both water supply and subsistence agriculture for the fast growing population. But, during the rainy season (June - September, *Kiremt* in the local language), soil erosion is a major problem due to the steep slopes and high intensity of rainfall. In addition to that, deforestation also contributed to the rapid soil erosion and diminishing of dry season water flows in the area (Solomon, 2012).

Moreover, most farmers in the area base their livelihood on unreliable rain-fed agriculture and climate variability as well as the lack of water management explains to a large extent the prevailing food insecurity and poverty (Catherine et al., 2012). Furthermore, land degradation is a severe problem in the area and this contributes to low agricultural productivity, which is reflected in cereal yields averaging less than one ton per hectare in most of the highlands, and milk yields only about one-fourth of the average for all developing countries (John, 2001).

Therefore, nowadays, most agrarian communities in the country in general and in the highlands and the BNB in particular use various livelihood strategies to cope up with the current environmental stresses. In these areas, livelihoods should no longer be viewed as being directly tied to agriculture and access to land; and the solution to rural poverty should not solely be associated with the invigoration of agriculture and the redistribution of land (Tsegaye, 2012). Rather, livelihood sources have now become diverse in the area and rural households engage in farming, agricultural wage labor, employment in rural non-farm and off-farm economy, migration and other activities. Currently, as pointed out by Chambers (1997), poor people have to engage in diversifying their livelihood sources against risks and uncertainties. But, despite the

increasing diversification of livelihood sources, agriculture continues to play a vital role through its contribution to growth, employment and livelihoods in most parts of the area.

In addition to that, most people in the area use local institutions as important livelihood strategies. Such institutions contribute a lot for maintaining both culture continuity and dynamism in most societies, particularly in agrarian societies. They are mediums through which people adapt to the current environmental changes (driven by any factors), and they are also important to maintaining some degree of social coherence and continuity in societies (Crane, 2013). Besides, socio-cultural values also play important roles for the betterment of agrarian communities' livelihoods.

Therefore, this study is aimed at exploring and examining the contributions of different socio-cultural values and community based institutions to livelihoods in the agricultural communities of Sekela *Woreda*, West Gojjam Zone of Amhara Region.

2. Statement of the Problem

In sub-Saharan Africa, livelihood insecurity has been persistent throughout the continent owing to a variety of interrelated factors which include environmental crises, economic, social causes as well as political factors. Although there is considerable variation in the level of poverty across countries, sub-Saharan African countries face the highest incidence of rural poverty in the world (IFAD, 2010). Over the past two decades or so, there has been a trend of rising vulnerability in rural areas of the region for which various factors have been mentioned including economic growth downturns, adverse trends in access to natural resources and environmental deterioration, climate change, HIV/AIDS pandemic, trade disadvantages and adverse effects of globalization (Baro and Deubel, 2006).

Besides, the recurrent natural hazards such as drought, floods, storms (hurricanes/tropical cyclones, tornadoes, sand/dust storms), heavy rain and other problems in sub-Saharan countries, are the major factors increasing the vulnerability of local communities and food insecurity of rural producers. They also hamper sustainable rural development initiatives and aggravate other financial, health and environmental shocks, and can determine the emergence of complex political disasters (Battista and Baas, 2004).

Like most African countries, agriculture is the main economic source of most of the Ethiopian populations and the growth of the agricultural sector greatly determines the economic growth of the country. But, this sector is dominated by subsistence rain-fed farming system and trapped by numerous structural problems including shrinking of farm size, high farmland fragmentation, high population pressure, farmland scarcity, erratic rainfall, environmental degradation, low rural out-migration, low farm income and productivity (Rahmato, 2008).

In the central highlands of Ethiopia, specifically around the BNB, most people base their lives and livelihoods on agricultural activities. But, even if, agriculture remains the main source of income and the land remains at the center of rural livelihoods in the area, growing problems related to land degradation, land shortages and fragmentation, landlessness, and tenure insecurity resulted in declining levels of access to this key resource thereby affecting food security and livelihoods of most households in the area (Tsegaye, 2012). Moreover, other factors include low and uncertain rainfall, limited market access and market development, land tenure insecurity, credit constraints, farmers' limited education or limited awareness of technological opportunities, poverty, and other problems affect the agricultural productivity of most households in the area (Pender et al., 1999).

So, for the rural poor people in the BNB, access to productive farmland, financial services and markets, education and training, technology and participation in decision-making provides realistic opportunities for livelihood improvements and building their assets that can enhance resilience to recurrent shocks. In addition, favorable institutions and policy environments greatly enhance their ability to engage in productive livelihood activities (Tsegaye, 2012).

In the previous times, different scientific explanations and research findings proved that most agrarian communities in Ethiopia are seriously affected by the current environmental stresses caused by rapid population growth, climate changes, globalization and other factors. Therefore, most of them try to use different livelihood strategies and diversify their economic activities in order to ensure their food security and avoid poverty. For example, Reta, in her MA thesis entitled "Livelihood Strategies among the Agricultural Land Scarce Peasants in the Central Highlands of Ethiopia-Implications on Natural Resource Base: A Case Study from Tole Woreda, Southwest Shewa" (2010), attempted to identify the livelihood strategies, livelihood assets and

outcomes of the livelihood strategies in the study area. According to Reta, livelihood diversification is the most common livelihood strategy and livelihood assets are human, social, financial, physical, and natural capitals in the study area.

Besides, Shumete, in his study entitled "Poverty, Food Insecurity and Livelihood Strategies in Rural Gedeo: The Case of Haroressa and Chichu PAs, SNNPR" (2009), identified and assessed the nature of poverty and food insecurity, the major causes of poverty and food insecurity and the livelihood strategies of people and various coping or survival strategies adopted by people in response to the problem in the study area. According to Shumete, population growth and scarcity of resources, small landholding, farmers' skills and low level of education, inappropriate production systems and marketing services, drought and variability of rainfall, lack of access to credit services and income (opportunities) and others are the major causes of poverty and food insecurity in the area.

Furthermore, Tsegaye, in his study entitled "Vulnerability, Land, Livelihoods and Migration Nexus in Rural Ethiopia: A Case Study in South Gondar Zone of Amhara Regional State" (2012), attempted to identify and examine the factors that cause persistent livelihood vulnerability of households, the opportunities and challenges households face in their pathways to overcome livelihood vulnerabilities, the diverse livelihood strategies of households and effects on household diversification strategies. In addition to that, Haileslassie, et al, in their study entitled "Institutional Settings and Livelihood Strategies in the Blue Nile Basin: Implications for "Upstream/Downstream Linkages" (2008), tried to identify the major water, land and livestock management constraints and opportunities, practices and interventions for improved land and water management and measures for assessing their impacts on poverty and rates of land degradation.

However, the previous studies did not give enough attention for the contributions of socio-cultural values and institutions to rural livelihoods. Rather, they give much emphasis on the factors or causes of food insecurity and poverty and the general livelihood strategies of households to cope- up with the current environmental problems. So, this study differs from the previous studies in the following two major dimensions.

First, unlike the previous studies, this study is aimed to investigate and analyze the socio-cultural values and institutions and their contributions to livelihoods in agricultural communities. Because, most of the previous studies underrated the roles of socio-cultural values and community based institutions to agricultural livelihoods. So, this study tried to focus its analysis on the contributions of local socio-cultural values and institutions to livelihoods in agricultural communities with specific reference to Sekela *Woreda* of West Gojjam Administrative Zone of Amhara Region.

Second, although there are ample studies on rural livelihoods, little emphasis was given to the livelihood strategies and constraints faced by agricultural households in the process of implementing various livelihood strategies in the BNB. So, unlike the above mentioned studies, this study gives major emphasis on the BNB area.

In general, this study is focused on the socio-cultural and institutional aspects of agricultural communities' livelihood strategies in the BNB of Sekela *Woreda* based on ethnographic data. The findings of this ethnographic study could be serve as the basis for comparative analysis of the various livelihood strategies of different rural communities in Ethiopia.

Therefore, by considering the importance of the previous research works conducted in the agrarian communities of the country, this study attempted to fill the above mentioned research gaps by exploring and analyzing the local socio-cultural values and institutions and their contributions to livelihoods in the Blue Nile Basin with specific reference to the agricultural communities of Sekela *Woreda,* West Gojjam Zone of Amhara Region.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study is to investigate and analyze the socio-cultural values and institutions and their contributions to livelihoods among the agricultural communities in the Blue Nile Basin of Sekela *Woreda,* West Gojjam Zone of Amhara Region.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

Based on the above general objective, this study attempted to address the following specific objectives:

1. To investigate the contributions of various socio-cultural values to livelihoods strategies in the study communities;
2. To explore the different community based institutions and their contributions to livelihoods strategies in the study area; and
3. To identify the major constraints which impede the implementation of various livelihood strategies of local communities.

1.4. Research Questions

1. What are the different socio-cultural values employed by local communities as livelihood strategies?
2. How do socio-cultural values contribute to livelihoods strategies in the study communities?
3. What are the different community based institutions employed by local communities as livelihood strategies?
4. What are the major contributions of various community based institutions to livelihoods in the study communities?
5. What are the major constraints which impede the implementation of various livelihood strategies in the study communities?

1.5. Research Approach and Methods

In this study, I used ethnographic research approach. It is a qualitative approach, which refers to inductive, holistic, emic, subjective and process-oriented methods used to understand, interpret, describe and develop a theory on a phenomenon or setting. It is a systematic and subjective approach used to describe life experiences and give them meaning. It relies on the integration of data from a variety of methods and sources of information (Maxwell, 2008).

Therefore, the ethnographer becomes involved and immersed in the phenomenon to become familiar with the study communities' culture (Suhonen, 2009). The most common data collection

techniques of this approach include systematic observation, in-depth interview, focus group discussion and case studies.

In this study, I used ethnographic research approach because this approach is more appropriate to investigate and analyze the local socio-cultural values and institutions and their contributions to livelihoods based on the study participants' point of view. So, in order to identify and examine the role of different socio-cultural values and local institutions to livelihoods and the constraints that impede the implementation of various livelihood strategies in the study agricultural communities, this approach is more appropriate to extract and build knowledge based on the study communities' view point (emic perspective).

1.5.1. Methods of Data Collection

1.5.1.1. Primary Data Collection Methods

Primary data are original in nature and directly related to the issues under study. Primary data are more relevant to the topic of the research and they improve the degree of accuracy of the study. Moreover, primary data are current and they can better give a realistic view about the topic under consideration. So, I used a combination of different primary data collection methods for this study. These include: in-depth interview, focus group discussion, case studies and systematic observation.

In-depth Interview

In this study, I used in-depth interviews to investigate the socio-cultural values and institutions employed by local communities as livelihood strategies and to examine the major constraints faced by local communities in the implementation of various livelihood strategies. In this study, I selected 22 informants among local community members through the help of local elders and administrators. Moreover, I selected 10 informants from *Woreda* Agricultural Development Office and *Woreda* Environmental Conservation and Land Administration Office Experts and Heads as well as *Kebele* Agricultural Development Experts. The total numbers of informants were 32 individuals from both Gundel and Achayta *Kebeles* (See Appendix IIIA). In the selection process, I tried to balance the participation of both sexes in the interviews.

To conduct in-depth interviews, I prepared open-ended guiding questions based on the specific objectives of the study and all interview questions were translated into Amharic language in consultation with my thesis advisor because Amharic is the language of the study communities (See Appendix IIA). Based on these guiding questions, I collected the relevant data by arranging individual interview sessions with all 32 informants and based on the respondents' consent, I recorded most of the in-depth interviews by using a voice-recorder. During the interview sessions, I took intensive field notes.

Focus Group Discussion

In this study, I used focus group discussion (FGD) to collect data on the local socio-cultural values and institutions and their contributions to livelihood because FGD is important to gather data about the issue that would not be feasible by using other methods in terms of attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions of group participants. This method helped me to triangulate data collected through other methods (in-depth interview, systematic observation and case studies) used in this study. Moreover, FGD is a group perspective and a shared understanding of participants about the issue. In conducting the FGD, I took maximum effort to reduce the domination of individuals' view point.

In this study, I held four FGDs with local elders, *Kebele* health experts, development team members and other members of the communities. In the first FGD session, 9 participants were involved, but the other three sessions included 8 participants each (See Appendix IIIB). Participants in each FGD session were selected randomly with the help of the local agricultural experts from the target group to avoid my personal judgment in the selection of FGD participants. Each FGD was guided by questions prepared in English language based on the specific objectives of the study and then translated into Amharic language in consultation with my thesis advisor (See Appendix IIB). After that, the Amharic version of the guiding questions printed with sufficient amount and the discussions were framed through these questions. During the FGD, I served as a facilitator for all sessions to improve the effectiveness of the discussions and I took intensive notes and I also used voice-recorder based on the consent of participants. Furthermore, I used a male assistant who recorded the discussion and coordinated the overall situation of the discussion sessions.

Case Studies

In this study, I used case studies to investigate the socio-cultural values and institutions and their contributions to livelihoods in the study agricultural communities. For this study, I selected seven cases with the help of local experts and institution leaders from exemplary household units in the study area (See Appendix IIIC). To conduct the case study interviews, I prepared case study guiding questions in English language and then translated them into Amharic language (See Appendix IIC). After that, I conducted the interviews with the selected cases and all information obtained from each case are documented and recorded by using field notes and voice recorder during the study period.

Systematic Observation

Systematic observation is a qualitative data collection method that can be applied during the ethnographic fieldwork in order to understand the overall situations and livelihood strategies of a given community. In this study, I used systematic observation method of data collection to see the real contributions of different socio-cultural values and institutions to livelihoods in the study communities. Besides, in order to see the actual impacts of different livelihood strategies in the study communities, I used systematic observation data collection method. Moreover, in the course of observation, all the data collected through other methods were evaluated and verified. Therefore, field observation is an important data collection method and to conduct it, I prepared observation guidelines in English language (See Appendix IID).

During the field observation, I took intensive field notes to analyze the conformity or deviation of data collected through other methods and I also took photographs to show the actual events and day-to-day activities in the study communities. So, in order to understand the role of different socio-cultural values and institutions as livelihood strategies and the constraints of effective livelihood strategies implementation in the study communities, I stayed in the field for two and half months (20 January 2015-05 April 2015). For the first week, I stayed in Gish Abay, the capital town of the study *Woreda* (Sekela) and for the remaining two months and one week, I stayed in both Gundel and Achayta *Kebeles*. During this period, in addition to systematic observation, I gathered data through other data collection methods.

1.5.2.2. Secondary Sources of Data

In addition to the primary data sources, I consulted relevant secondary data sources such as books, academic journals, conference proceedings, bulletins, electronic soft copies, relevant and related conceptual and theoretical frameworks, different empirical studies, locally written documents, and official statistical information. Reviewing of related empirical studies helped me to identify the research gaps attempted to be filled by this study. Besides, this helped me to come up with relevant and non-repetitive data. Moreover, reviewing of locally written documents and statistical information also helped me to give a clear description about the study area's demographic characteristics such as population size, economic activity, religious distribution, educational status and others.

1.5.3. Methods of Data Analysis

During the course of my fieldwork, all electronically recorded documents were transcribed into written forms. Then field notes and the transcribed information were translated into English language. Moreover, all collected data were organized, summarized and coded based on guiding research questions and based on their relevance to the study objectives.

After the summarization and categorization of data on the basis of research questions and specific objectives, they were analyzed through triangulation of the various data sources (in-depth interviews, FGDs, case studies and systematic observations) to maximize the trust worthiness of the study findings by giving due attention to observed non-verbal expressions of the study participants. So, during the analysis process, I integrated and presented all data obtained through different data collection methods in a proper and meaningful ways. Besides, I critically reviewed relevant conceptual and theoretical frameworks to strength and support the findings of my study.

1.6. Fieldwork Personal Experiences

This study was conducted in Gundel and Achayta rural *Kebeles* of Sekela *Woreda* in West Gojjam Administrative Zone of Amhara National Regional State from 20 January 2015 to 05 April 2015. By using the support letter that I obtained from Addis Ababa University, I got

permission from Sekela *Woreda* Administrative office to conduct the fieldwork soon. For the first one week, I stayed in Gish Abay town, the *Woreda's* capital town, and I collected preliminary data about the research objectives and basic data on the demographic characteristics of the *Woreda* population. After that, the head of the *Woreda* Administrative Office, Ato Tedla Habtie, wrote a support letter for both Gunidil Jigrita and Achayta Endeba Zend *Kebele* Administrators to accept and support me during the fieldwork activities. Then, I went to these *Kebeles* with the help of the *Woreda* Agricultural Development Office experts and passed the remaining periods by conducting the fieldwork activities.

In the field, my first task was identifying key informants among different social groups by the assistance of *Kebele* managers and agricultural experts. I conducted interviews and discussion with the selected key informants, case study participants and FGD participants in their farmlands, around the church compound, in their houses, in the *Kebele* Administrative centers, in the local institution centers and other areas. During my fieldwork (20 January 2015-05 April 2015), I encountered many challenges and opportunities. Some of these include:

1. Due to the problem of transportation, most of the time, I was forced to walk 10-12 Km on foot to cover the whole areas of the study *Kebele*. But, it was not a big challenge for me because I had such experience before when I worked in different governmental offices. But, the absence of pure water, food, bedroom and restroom combined with my prior problem of gastric caused a serious challenge on me during the fieldwork activities.
2. When I moved around the houses of the study communities, some young members of the communities challenged me by letting their dogs to bite me since they considered me as a government official or expert. This is because many people in the study communities were exhausted by the repetitive questions and instructions of government officials. For instance, as KI-12 explained, nowadays, it is very difficult for teachers and agriculture and health experts to move around the houses of the study agricultural communities and to follow their activities. Some people were not interested to perform the repetitive instructions of these various experts and they used to letting their dogs when they saw them moving around their houses. So, by considering me as one of these experts, some of them let their dogs when they saw me moving around their houses and this made my fieldwork activities somewhat challenging.

3. When I reached the study area for the first time, some members of the communities considered me as a government representative and they tried to provide incorrect response for my questions or they were unwilling to respond at all. Since the duration of the fieldwork was the national election campaign, most of them considered me as a spy for their political standings. On the other hand, rather than answering my questions, some others tried to raise many complains about their current problems for me to be reported to the government. But, through time, they realized my intention and they accepted me as a student. Finally, they started to cooperate with me and provided me with actual information.
4. By chance, my high school friends are working as agricultural experts in both study *Kebele*s and they played important roles for my study by assisting me in selecting key informants for in-depth interviews and by facilitating the FGDs. They also helped me by providing food and drink and by sharing their beds during the fieldwork activities. So, this was a good opportunity for me to conduct the fieldwork activities effectively.
5. Most of the study community members were very much friendly and they were happy to invite me in to their houses. Some of them also invited me to participate in their *Mahaber* and other religious celebrations. This, in turn, helped me to establish quick rapport with the study communities and to be trusted by them easily. So, this was an important opportunity for me during the fieldwork activities.
6. However, some informants misunderstood the essence of my questions and they answered wrongly. Since most of the key informants were not literate (unable to read and write), they failed to understand the questions and provide relevant information. So, I was forced to explain the questions by using the local language and contexts. This, in turn, made my fieldwork activities challenging and time consuming.

1.7. Ethical Considerations

In the course of conducting this study, I considered the following ethical issues seriously:

- Firstly, I made clear the research objectives to participants and authorities in the study communities. This helped me to get permission from authorities and local elders by understanding its academic purposes. Informed consents were also obtained from study participants before the interview and discussion.

- Secondly, I took serious care not to harm individuals' and communities' feelings and emotions while talking about the contributions of local socio-cultural values and institutions to livelihoods in the study communities.
- Finally, I asked the consent of my informants about whether to use their real names or pseudo-names, whether to use voice recorder or not and to take their pictures or not while interviewing and discussing with them.

1.8. Scope and Limitations of the Study

1.8.1. Scope of the Study

Thematically, this study was revolved around three major and interconnected issues. First, the study attempted to identify and analyze the contributions of various socio-cultural values to livelihoods in the study agricultural communities. Second, it focused on investigating the role of social institutions to livelihoods; and finally, the study attempted to explore the major constraints which hindered the implementation of various livelihood strategies in the study communities.

Geographically, this study was conducted in Sekela *Woreda* of West Gojjam Zone of Amhara Region, located around the Blue Nile Basin and northwestern part of Ethiopia. In this area, a special focus was given for the two rural *Kebeles* (Gunidil Jigrita and Achayta Endeba Zend) among the twenty-seven *Kebeles* of Sekela *Woreda*. These *Kebeles* have been chosen from highland and lowland agro-ecological zones, respectively.

1.8.2. Limitation of the Study

This study has the following major limitations:

First, this study covers only the contributions of socio-cultural values and institutions to rural livelihoods and the constraints that impede the implementation of livelihood strategies. Due to time constraints, I was not able to explore other anthropological issues in the subject under study.

Second, there were no prior anthropological researches in the study area and I faced a problem to get relevant secondary data on the issues under investigation and about the study communities. So, I found it difficult to support the primary data collected by using different methods with related secondary sources.

Third, due to time constraints, I did not have sufficient time for data organization, summarization and analysis.

The last but not the least limitation is related with the translation of transcripts. I faced a problem of finding equivalent English translation for some Amharic transcripts. Moreover, due to budget constraints, I couldn't use professional translators.

1.9. Significance of the Study

The Blue Nile Basin is one of the most important sources of water supply for Ethiopian agriculturalists in the region. But, nowadays, the region is vulnerable to environmental stresses caused by population pressure, the current climate change and other factors. So, this situation imposes a serious challenge for the livelihoods of the community members of the region and it requires an immediate response from the whole concerned bodies to reduce or alleviate its impacts.

In most cases, socio-cultural values and institutions were identified as contributing factors for environmental stresses rather than considered as means of livelihood strategies. But, my intention in this study is to explore and examine the contributions of socio-cultural values and institutions to livelihoods in the study communities. Moreover, the findings of this study enable other researchers to get an initial idea for further research.

Therefore, by investigating the contributions of socio-cultural values and institutions to livelihoods among the agricultural communities in the Blue Nile Basin of Sekela *Woreda,* this study paves the way for further academic and applied studies in the area and issue and enables policy-makers and project formulators to use this study as a source of baseline information.

1.10. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into seven different main chapters and other supplementary components. The first chapter focuses on the introductory parts of the study. It includes background of the study, problem statement, study objectives, methods used to collect and analyze the relevant data, ethical considerations, fieldwork personal experiences, scope, limitation and significance of the study. The second chapter critically reviews relevant conceptual and theoretical frameworks as well as related studies. The third chapter is all about the description of the study area and the people. It describes the study area's geographical location, climatic conditions, demographic characteristics, infrastructural developments and other relevant elements.

The other three chapters are the findings and discussion parts of the thesis. Chapter four deal with the contributions of socio-cultural systems, religious and belief systems, and traditional

practices and indigenous knowledge systems to livelihoods. Different socio-cultural values such as the value/culture of helping each other and sharing resources, indigenous farming and weather forecasting methods, crop and field rotation, off-farming activities and others are presented and discussed in this chapter. Besides, chapter five focuses on the roles of different community based institutions to livelihoods. The contributions of social and religious associations such as *Iddir, Eqqub* and *Mahabers* and work group organizations such as *Wonfel, Temado, Kenja* and *Hura* systems to livelihoods are discussed in this chapter. Moreover, chapter six elaborates the major constraints that hinder the implementation of various livelihood strategies in the study area. These include economic, socio-cultural and infrastructural constraints. The final chapter summarizes the key findings of the study and draws concluding remarks.

In addition to the main chapters, this thesis includes acknowledgements, acronyms and abbreviations, glossary of local terms, abstract, references, appendices (list of plates, fieldwork guiding questions and profiles of research participants), tables and maps.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature

2.1. Conceptualization of Key Terms

2.1.1. Livelihood

A **livelihood** comprises the capabilities, assets (including stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes for net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term (Chambers & Conway, 1991: 7-8).

Livelihood assets are the resources on which people draw in order to carry out their livelihood strategies (Farrington *et al*., 2002). Assets may be tangible, such as food stores and cash savings, as well as trees, land, livestock, tools, and other resources. Assets may also be intangible such as claims one can make for food, work, and assistance as well as access to materials, information, education, health services and employment opportunities (Darren, 2011). The members of a household combine their capabilities, skills and knowledge with the different resources at their disposal to create activities that will enable them to achieve the best possible livelihood for themselves. Everything that goes towards creating that livelihood can be thought of as a livelihood asset (Messer and Townsley, 2003). The major livelihood assets are human capital, social capital, natural capital, physical capital and financial capital (Darren, 2011).

2.1.2. Livelihood Strategies

According to DFID (1999), the term livelihood strategies are defined as the range and combination of activities and choices that people make in order to achieve their livelihood goals, including productive activities, investment strategies, reproductive choices, etc. Livelihood

strategies are composed of activities that generate the means of household survival and are the planned activities that men and women undertake to build their livelihoods (Ellis, 2000).

How people access and use assets within the aforementioned social, economic, political and environmental contexts make a livelihood strategy. The range and diversity of livelihood strategies are enormous. An individual may take on several activities to meet his/her needs. One or many individuals may engage in activities that contribute to a collective livelihood strategy. Within households, individuals often take on different responsibilities to enable the sustenance and growth of the family (Darren, 2011).

Among the various livelihood strategies the most common one is livelihood diversification. It refers to attempts by individuals and households to find new ways to raise incomes and reduce environmental risk, which differ sharply by the degree of freedom of choice and the reversibility of the outcome. Livelihood diversification includes both on and off-farm activities which are undertaken to generate income additional to that from the main household agricultural activities, via the production of other agricultural and non-agricultural goods and services, the sale of waged labor, trade, self-employment in small firms, handicraft work and others (Stark and Levhari, 1982).

2.1.3. Culture

Defining culture is one of the most challenging activities in academic spheres. It is defined and applied in various and often incompatible ways and it is the site of significant disagreement between academic disciplines (James, 2011). Starting from Edward Taylor in 1871, different anthropologists define culture in different but better ways. He defined culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Taylor, 1871). In other words, culture is a patterned way of life shared by a group of people. Besides, culture is defined by Friedl and Pfeiffer (1977), as all aspect of our existence which makes us similar to some people but different from the majority of the people in the world. It is the way of life common to a group of people, a collection of beliefs and attitudes, shared understandings and patterns of behavior that allow those people to live together in relative harmony, but set them apart from other peoples.

Moreover, Verhelst (1990), also define culture as every aspect of life; know-how, technical knowledge, customs of food and dress, religion, mentality, values, language symbols, socio-political and economic behaviors, indigenous methods of taking decisions and exercising power, methods of production and economic relations and so on. On the other hand, the Commonwealth Foundation also interprets culture in its widest sense as, the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs (Commonwealth Foundation, 2008).

So, despite its complexity, culture in this study is defined in the broadest sense to include traditional values, knowledge, customs and traditions, which are both tangible and intangible and which can be preserved, transmitted and invested across generations to improve opportunities, outcomes and sustainability of people's lives.

2.1.4. Socio-Cultural Values

Besides, according to Mohamad and Neena (2011), cultural values can be defined as measures of goodness of desirability of actions, things, choices and others. They are the group conceptions of relative desirability of a certain things. They are cultural preferences of people about the desired activities and highly related with the attitudes of people.

In this study, socio-cultural values refers to the behaviors, perceptions, attitudes, traditions and belief systems which are considered as desirable, correct, acceptable and ethical by the study communities. They are important elements of social life and they contribute a lot to the betterment of the study communities livelihoods. These include: the study communities attitudes, socio-cultural systems, traditional practices, indigenous knowledge systems, and religious and belief systems. Therefore, in this study socio-cultural values include all the above mentioned elements.

2.1.5. Social Institutions

Social institution is a well-established and structured pattern of behavior or of relationships of group of people that is accepted as a fundamental part of a culture. Institutions are structures and mechanisms of social order and cooperation governing the behavior of a set of individuals within

a given human collectivity. It is a set of organized beliefs, rules, and practices that establishes how a society will attempt to meet basic needs. It is a socially approved system of values, norms, and roles that exists to accomplish specific societal goals (Battista and Baas, 2004).

Social institutions are the aspects of culture that is governed by a standardized way of behavior existing in a society. They involve socially approved pattern of behavior of members. It is guided by the norms and values existing in the society. Besides, social institutions are interrelated and integrated one another in different ways and they contribute a lot for the effective functioning of a society (Thomas, 2001).

In this study, social institutions refers to community based institutions which are established by the study community members to meet their material, social, psychological, economic, labor and other demands. Social institutions contribute for the improvement of the study communities livelihoods and strength social solidarity among the community members. These includes, social and religious institutions such as *Iddir*, *Eqqub* and different *Mahabers*, work group organizations such as *Wonfel*, *Hura* system, *Temado* and *Kenja*. Therefore, in this study, social institutions only include informal community based social and religious associations and work group organizations.

2.1.6. Constraints to Implement Livelihood Strategies

Constraints are limitations that impede the effective implementation of various livelihood strategies. They do not only impede some forms of livelihood diversification, rather, they can also compel diversification into low-return activities. They prevent the rural people from using their full potential to support their livelihoods in a better ways (Christopher et al., 2000). According to Arega et al (2013), there are different constraints that impede the implementation of various livelihood strategies in the rural communities of Ethiopia. These include: the problem of access to credit, communication systems, market facilities and extension services and others.

In this study, livelihood constraints are those problems that affect the effective implementation of various livelihood strategies in the study area. These problems restrict the socio-economic capabilities of the study community members to use different livelihood strategies to improve their life and to reduce the effects of the current environmental stresses. So, this study only

concentrated on the major economic, socio-cultural and institutional constraints of effective implementation of various livelihood strategies in the area.

2.2. Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

The sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) is a holistic approach that tries to capture, and provide a means of understanding, the fundamental causes and dimensions of poverty. In addition, it tries to sketch out the relationships between the different aspects (causes, manifestations) of poverty, allowing for more effective prioritization of action at an operational level. The SL approach aims to help poor people achieve lasting livelihood improvements - sustainable livelihoods - measured using poverty indicators (Stephen, 2009).

Most development agencies adopt the Chambers and Conway (1991:7-8) definition of livelihoods (or some slight variation on this) which holds that:

> *A **livelihood** comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is **sustainable** which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the long and short term.*

The assets that are generally recognized within sustainable livelihoods theory, as summarized by McLeod (2001), are:

- **Natural Capital**: Natural resources (land, water, wildlife, biodiversity, environmental resources).
- **Physical Capital**: Basic infrastructure (water, sanitation, energy, transport, communications), housing and the means and equipment of production.
- **Human Capital**: Health, knowledge, skills, information, ability to labor.
- **Social Capital**: Social resources (relationships of trust, membership of groups, networks, access to wider institutions).
- **Financial Capital**: Financial resources available (regular remittances or pensions, savings, supplies of credit).

The livelihoods approach is typically set out in the form of a framework that brings together the principal components that are thought to comply with the livelihoods definition (Livelihood Assets, Livelihood Strategies, Livelihood Outcomes and others), as well as demonstrating the interactions between them. The operational framework of the SL approach brings together various actors, including local government and municipal authorities and local communities in decision-making, and policy formulation and implementation (Knutsson, 2006).

2.2.1. Sustainable Livelihood Framework

Sustainable livelihood framework (SLF) views people operating in a context of vulnerability. Within this context they have access to various assets or poverty reducing factors which gain their meaning and value through the prevailing social, institutional and organizational environment. SLF includes the following major concepts.

Livelihood strategies: the ways in which people combine and use assets in pursuit of beneficial livelihood outcomes that meet their own livelihood objectives - are also influenced by this environment. The viability and effectiveness of livelihood strategies is dependent upon the availability and accessibility of assets, services and opportunities which can be positively enhanced or adversely undermined by ecological factors, social structures or institutional processes. The SLF is able to handle the complexities of local realities, livelihood strategies and poverty outcomes, and the dynamic interrelations between them (Diana, 2004).

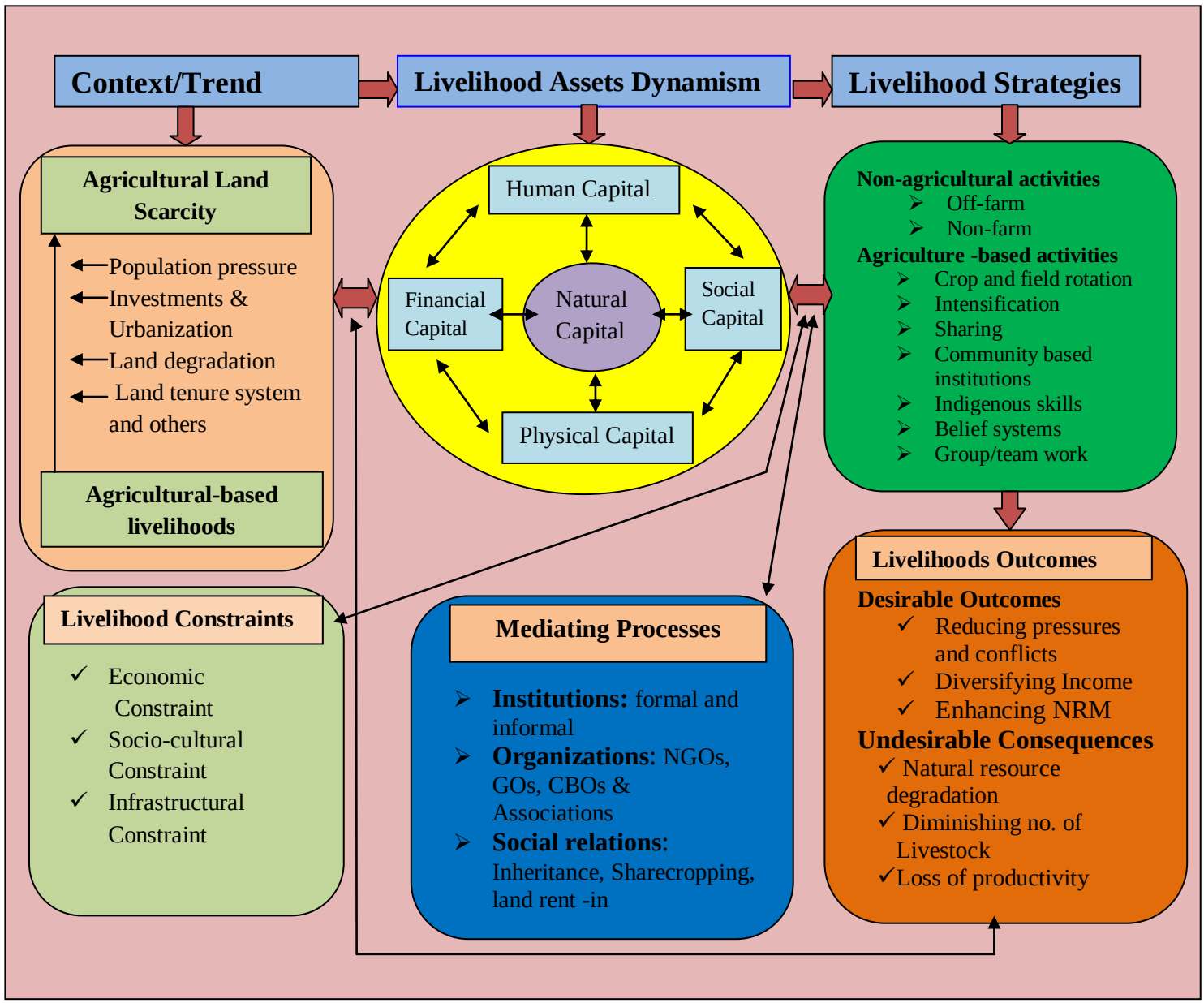
Livelihood Outcomes: The desirable outcomes tend to expand the asset base while undesirable (negative) outcomes tend to erode it. Livelihood outcomes are the result of the interfaces of enormous elements in the livelihood schema and have implications on natural resource management (Reta, 2010). In this context, an outcome of livelihood strategy is desirable when it supports the life of land scarce farmer without the expense of land resource deterioration and/or enhances it.

Mediating Processes: are institutions, organizations, and social relations that determine access to livelihood assets to pursue the alternative livelihood strategies (Reta, 2010). These are developed through formal and informal institutions, *Woreda* and local level organizations, and participation in informal and formal groups (member of *Eqqub*, *Iddir*, *Wonfel* and saving and

credit organizations), social relations, networks and connections, reciprocity and interchanges which facilitate the cooperation, team work, enhance natural resource management and others.

Livelihood Dynamism refers that households do not stay solely on their farm generation after generation consistently, their livelihood strategies change from time to time with changing circumstances (Reta, 2010). It is important to stress that livelihood strategies are not static and a household may vary its strategies, as it responds to shocks or environmental changes.

Figure 1: A Framework to Analyze Rural Livelihood Strategies



Adopted from Scoones (1998); DFID (1999; 2000) an Reta (2010)

2.3. Review of Related Empirical Studies

There are ample of scientific studies on the issue of livelihoods and livelihood strategies in the agricultural communities of Ethiopia. These studies raised various issues about the causes of food insecurity and poverty, the different livelihood strategies, the impacts of various livelihood strategies on social life and other issues in the agrarian communities of the country.

2.3.1. Causes of Food Insecurity and Poverty

Many studies (Shumete, 2009; Tsegaye, 2012; Reta, 2010; Stephen, 2000; Arega et al., 2013) identified the major causes of food insecurity and poverty to the rural people of Ethiopia. For instance, Shumete (2009) and Arega et al. (2013), identified population growth and scarcity of resources, small landholding, farmers skills and low level of education, inappropriate production systems and marketing services, drought and variability of rainfall and lack of access to credit services and income (opportunities) as the main causes of poverty and food insecurity to the rural populations of Ethiopia.

Besides, Tsegaye (2012) and Reta (2010) also investigated the various factors which contributed the current food insecurity and poverty problems in the rural people of the country. These include: in- and off-farm unemployment, lack of access to health services, lack of good-governance, participation and empowerment, land degradation, land scarcity and fragmentation, landlessness and tenure insecurity are the major factors to food insecurity and poverty.

Moreover, as pointed out by Stephen (2000), dependence on unreliable and low-productivity rain fed agriculture, over fragmentation of farmland due to rapid population growth, continuous soil erosion due to intensive cultivation and limited application of yield-enhancing inputs, recurrent droughts and food production shocks and limited off-farm employment opportunities are the main factors of food insecurity in rural people of Ethiopia.

2.3.2. The Major Livelihood Strategies

In the previous time different studies (Reta, 2010; Kebede et al., 2014, Arega et al., 2013, Gebrehiwot and Fekadu. 2012; John et al., 2001; Yishak et al., 2014) examined the various livelihood strategies used by the agricultural communities of the country.

According to Gebrehiwot and Fekadu (2012) and John et al. (2001), crop production and livestock rearing is the main livelihood strategy for the rural communities of the country. The majority people of the rural communities based their livelihoods on the agricultural activities of crop farming and animal rearing. But, while traditional agriculture is still the dominant livelihood strategy for large poor households in the rural areas of the country, due to the recurrent occurrence of drought, erratic rain fall, too small farm and grazing land, high soil infertility, less access to agricultural extension service and high population pressure that leads to poor agricultural production and productivity in terms of quality and quantity, farmers were living in a worse livelihood situation. So, nowadays, many people involve in other off-farm and non-farm economic activities to support their livelihoods in a better ways.

Besides, Reta (2010) and Yishak et al. (2014) elaborated the various livelihood strategies of the rural communities. These include: extensification and intensification of farmland, participation in off-farming activities like selling firewood/charcoal/grass, involving in handicraft work, trade, animal fattening, selling local alcohol and seasonal migration and others. Besides, Kebede et al. (2014) and Arega et al. (2013) also identified farming, off-farming and non-farming activities are the major livelihood strategies to the rural communities of the country. These include crop production, animal rearing, unskilled labor, gathering of wild fruits and fire woods, honey production, handcrafts and petty trade.

2.3.3. The Outcomes of Various Livelihood Strategies

Livelihood outcomes are the achievements of livelihood strategies, such as more income (e.g. cash), increased well-being (e.g. non material goods, like self-esteem, health status, access to services, sense of inclusion), and reduced vulnerability (e.g. better resilience through increase in asset status), improved food security (e.g. increase in financial capital in order to buy food) and a more sustainable use of natural resources (e.g. appropriate property rights) (Scoones, 1998)

Various studies in the previous times (Reta, 2010; Shumete, 2009; Arega et al., 2013; Ayele, 2005) analyzed the outcomes of different livelihood strategies on the life of the agricultural communities of the country. According to Shumete (2009) and Arega et al. (2013), different livelihood strategies have both positive and negative outcomes on the life of rural communities. For example, land scarce farmers who practice intensive farming with a low level of technology

as a livelihood strategy causes huge problem on the environment like land degradation, soil erosion, loss of productivity and others. On the other hand, alternative off-farming and non-farming activities enabled the agricultural communities to support their livelihoods in a better ways and to fulfill their food securities.

Furthermore, Reta (2010) and Ayele (2005) also identified the outcomes of various livelihood strategies have a potential to enhance or degrade the livelihood of the land scarce farmers. Some activities are unattractive and unsustainable livelihood strategies and they depressed social progress as little of the incomes from it went to asset buildings and human capabilities in comparison to its cumulative effects. On the other hand, different livelihood strategies have significant outcomes to improve food security conditions, to build human capabilities, to improve agricultural input utilizations, to protect environmental degradation and to build natural resource management capacities of the rural communities.

CHAPTER THREE

Description of the Study Area and the People

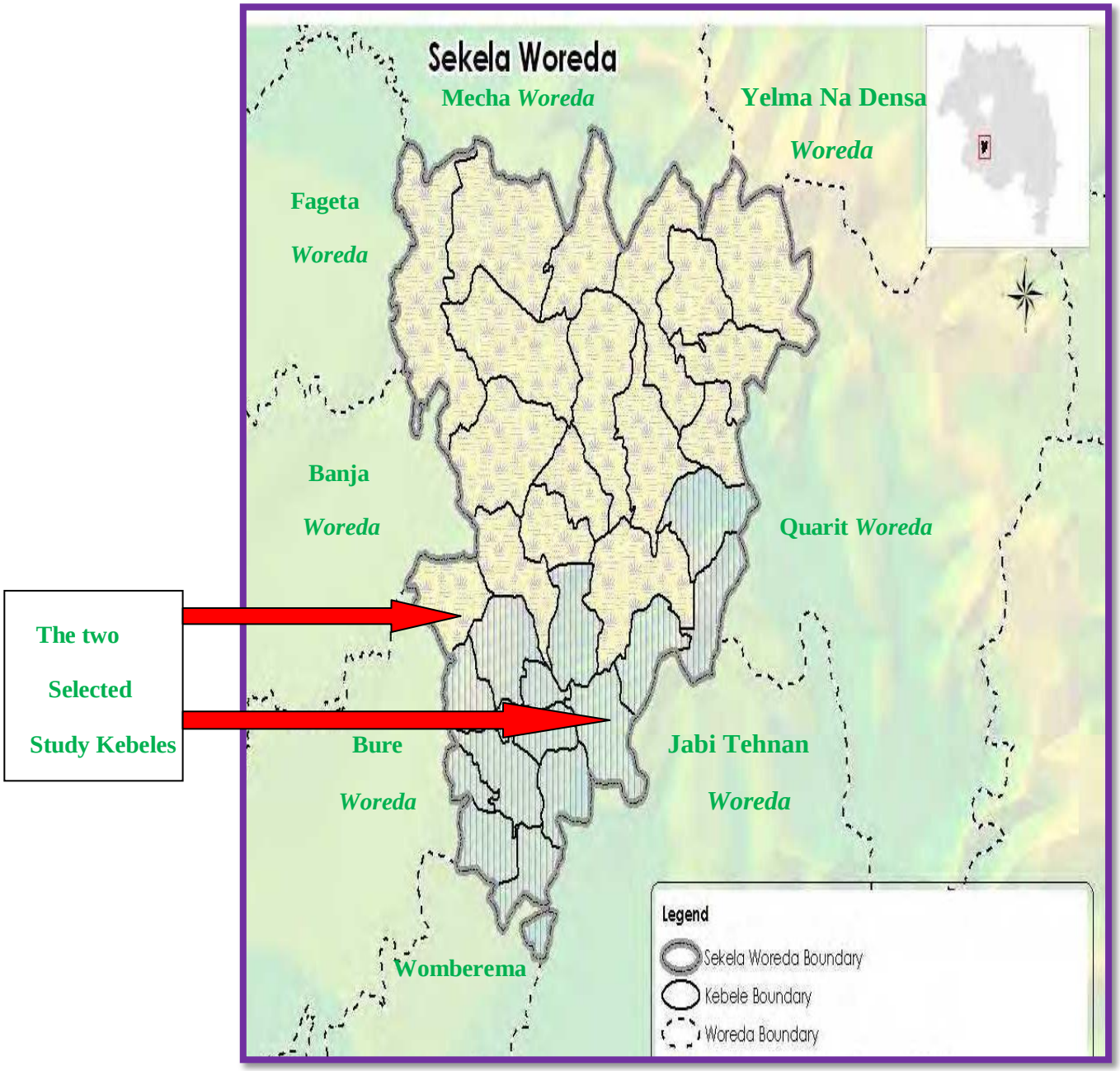
3.1. Geographical Location

This study was conducted in Sekela *Woreda* which is one of the fourteen[15] W*oredas* in west Gojjam zone of Amhara National Regional State. It is located at 459 km away North West from Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, 160 km away south east from Bahir Dar, the capital of Amhara National Regional State, and 74 km away north east from Finote Selam, the capital town of West Gojjam Zone (CSA, 2008).

Topographically, Sekela *Woreda* is located at an elevation of 3062 meter above sea level and 10˚55'0" N latitude and 37˚31'60" E longitude. It is bordered on the southwest by Bure *Woreda*, on the west by Awi Zone, on the north by Mecha *Woreda*, on the northeast by Yilmana Densa *Woreda*, on the east by Quarit *Woreda* and on the southeast by Jabi Tehnan *Woreda*. The administrative center of Sekela *Woreda* is Gish Abay town (ibid) (see the location map of the study below).

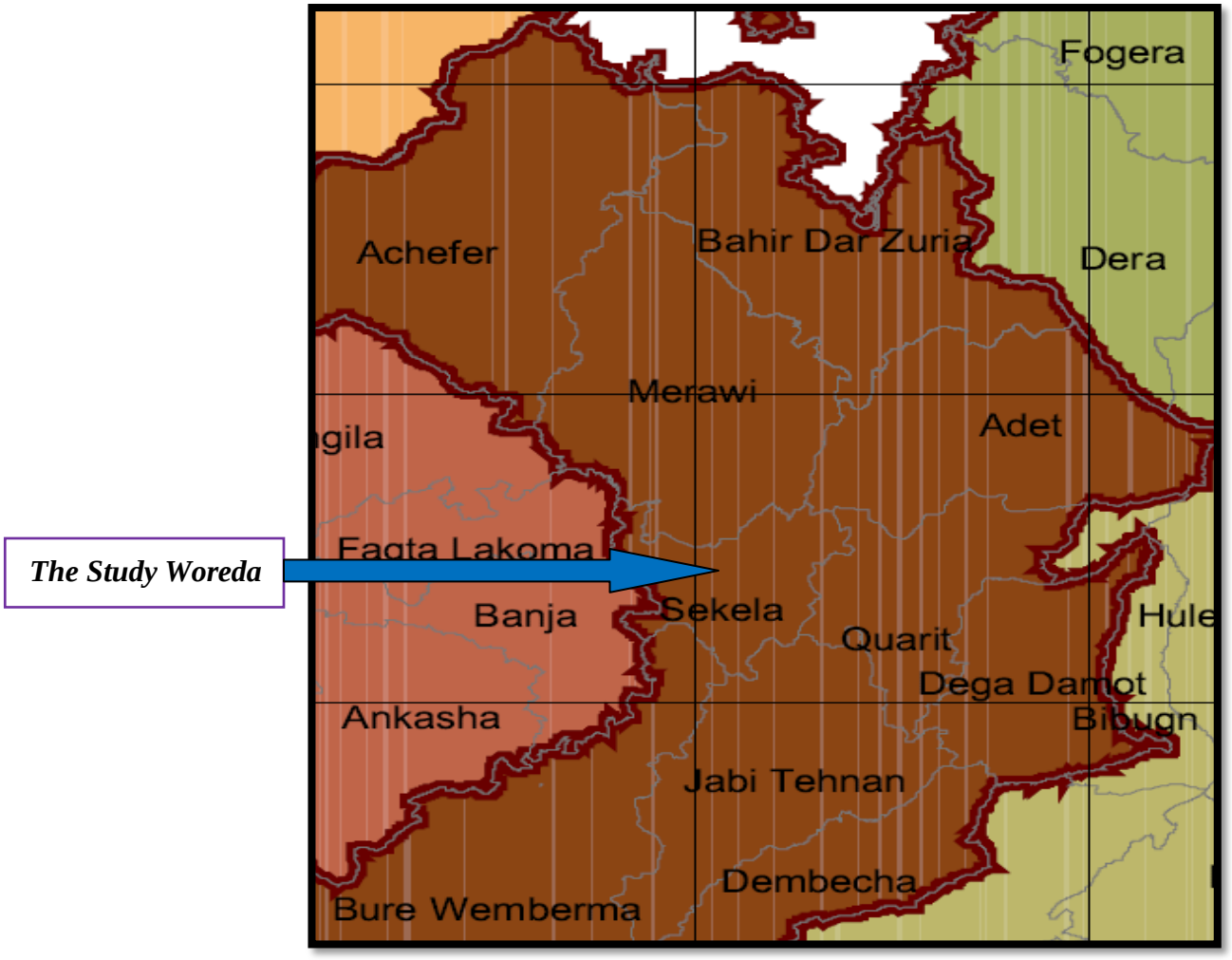
[15] The fourteen *Woredas* in West Gojjam Zone include: Semen Achefer, Bahir Dar Zuria, Yelma Na Densa, Mecha, Sekela, Quarit, Dega Damot, Dembecha, Jabi Tehnan, Bure, Womberma, Goncha, Debub Achefer and Finote Selam *Woreda*

Figure 2: Location Map of the Study *Area*



Source: Amhara Livelihood Zone Report (2005)

Figure 3: Location maps of the Study *Woreda*



Source: Administrative Maps of Amhara Region (2006)

3.2. Climatic Conditions

According to the Sekela *Woreda* Communication Office (2013), the *Woreda* is characterized by 70% highland (*Dega*), 18% midland (*Woynadega*) and 12 % lowland (*Qola*) agro-ecological zones. Besides, the geographical location of the *Woreda* is also identified as 65% mountainous, 10% plateau and 25% of the area is valley. The average temperature of the *Woreda* is 18 ^{o}C.

Based on the Amhara Livelihood Zone Report (2007), the average annual rainfall of the area ranges from 1600mm to 1800mm. Agricultural activities are highly dependent on *Kiremt* (summer) rain which falls from June to September. But some households use irrigation,

particularly for potato production. Besides, the *Woreda* has different soil types such as 60% red, 20% brown, 15% black and 5% gray soil which are suitable for producing various crop species.

1.3. Demographic Characteristics

According to CSA (2008), Sekela *Woreda* consists of 1 urban and 26 rural *Kebeles* with a total population of 138,691. With an area of 768.83 square km, it has a population density of 180.39 persons per square km, which is greater than the Zone average of 158.25 persons per square km.

Table 1 describes the total population of Sekela *Woreda* based on the residence area (urban-rural) and sex (male-female) parameters.

Table.1: Total Population of Sekela *Woreda* by Sex and Residence Area

Residence Area	Population by Sex					
	Male		Female		Both sexes	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Urban Population	3,394	2.45%	3,385	2.44%	6,779	4.89%
Rural Population	65,624	47.31%	66,288	47.79%	131,912	95.11%
Total Population	69,018	49.76%	69,673	50.24%	138,691	100%

Source: CSA (2008:58)

Only 4.89% of the total *Woreda* populations are urban residents and the majorities (95.11%) of the Woreda populations are rural residents. Besides, from 49.76% male population of the *Woreda*, 47.31% of them are living in rural areas and the remaining 2.45% are urban residents. In addition to that, from the 50.24% female populations of the *Woreda*, 47.79% of them are living in the rural areas and the other 2.44% are urban residents.

Besides, all *Kebeles* in Sekela *Woreda* with a corresponding population size, number of households and housing units are also described in the next table as follows:

Table.2. Population Size by *Kebele,* Sex, Number of Households and Household Units

No	*Kebele*	Population Size			Number of Households	Number of Household Units
		Both Sexes	Male	Female		
1	Shurba Bifeta	9463	4792	4671	2056	2031
2	Gitim Trarai	7535	3738	3797	1609	1581
3	Abiyot Chora	4123	2050	2073	846	827
3	Abekeres	3459	1688	1771	718	697
5	Lijambera Teta	7634	3790	3844	1616	1597
6	Gulesha Legua	3554	1744	1810	728	716
7	Abesen Gideta	3318	1605	1713	704	694
8	Solisela Derishe	1981	930	1051	396	389
9	Ginde Temem	2781	1367	1414	569	562
10	Abela Kirach	5570	2763	2807	1206	1189
11	Kolel Lecha	5483	2632	2851	2128	1106
12	Abay Sanigib	5859	2908	2951	1215	1039
13	Sewsa	3452	1761	1691	709	689
14	Gumobila	4854	2428	2426	966	952
15	Mage Abegira	2018	1000	1018	428	423
16	Shafira Dawirit	4430	2230	2200	946	931
17	Alibo Genete	1876	936	940	391	391
18	Lichima Rebu Gebeya	6189	3064	3125	1232	1180
19	Bahirzaf Guderkani	7665	3901	3764	1605	1575
20	Ambisi Wara	2991	1496	1495	630	625
21	Gundel Jigirita	7788	3898	3890	1539	1521
22	Achayta Endeba Zend	7126	3537	3589	1530	1509
23	Tilim Jigrita Menta Debir	5478	2644	2834	1202	1165
24	Lelima Dedana	4556	2272	2284	990	980
25	Gafit Gunkan	5773	2938	2835	1206	1196
26	Asewa	3543	1763	1780	761	745
27	Zegeza	3413	1749	1664	701	684
Total		**138691**	**69018**	**69673**	**28627**	**26994**

Source: CSA (2008:351)

The above table shows that, the *Woreda* includes 27 *Kebeles* with their respective population size based on sex, number of household and household units. Based on the table, on average 4.8 individuals are living in one household and one household unit leads on average 4.14 individuals in the study area.

Besides, according to the Sekela *Woreda* Communication Office (2013), almost all populations of the *Woreda* are Amhara ethnic groups and 99.95% of them are Amharic language speakers. The remaining 0.05% populations are speakers of other languages such as Agew, Tegregna, Oromifa and others. Furthermore, Base on the data from CSA (2008), 99.96% of the populations in Sekela *Woreda* are followers of Orthodox Christianity religion. Among them, 49.76% are

males and 50.24% are females. The remaining 0.02%, 0.015% and 0.005% of the *Woreda* populations are Islam, Protestant and other religion followers, respectively. On the other hand, most of the *Woreda* populations are illiterate. As elaborated by CSA (2008), among the total populations of Sekela *Woreda* who are eligible to education (children 5 years and above), only 28,848 (24.18%) are currently attending formal education and 12,649 (10.6%) were attended formal education in the past. But, the rest 77,789 (65.21%) of the *Woreda* population never attended formal education.

1.4. Livelihood Bases

Rural people use different livelihood strategies as coping and adaptation mechanism to the current changing climatic conditions. For example, they use livelihood diversification includes diversification of income sources from farm to non-farm income, agricultural diversification including the use of better suited crop varieties and others. Besides, they use short term adaptation strategies such as drawing on available capital assets to minimize the effects of sudden shocks are common place. For example, drawing on savings, consuming food stocks, and selling livestock amongst other strategies are undertaken depending on the context of both the shock and household (Berman et al, 2013).

In the fieldwork, I observed that, the economic base of Sekela *Woreda* population is crop production with mixed animal rearing. They are also involved in other off-farming activities. According to Sekela *Woreda* Communication Office (2013), 98% of the *Woreda* populations are involved in agricultural activities. The main crops cultivated in the central highland areas of the *Woreda* are barley and potato and the bulk of these are produced for household consumption. Besides, the dominant crop types cultivated in the south west areas of the *Woreda* are Maize, Finger Millet and *Teff* (Amhara Livelihood Zone Report, 2005). On the other hand, the remaining 2% populations are participating in other off-farming economic activities such as trade, handicraft, animal fattening, *Arekie* distilling and other activities. In addition to that, the *Woreda* also has plenty of animal wealth such as 115,920 livestock, 116,742 Sheep and Goat, 39,277 Hen, 527 modern, 14 transitional and 6,292 traditional beehives (Sekela *Woreda* Communication Office, 2013).

The two study *Kebele* (Gundel and Achayta) populations use agriculture as a basic means of livelihood strategies. The main crops produced in Gundel *Kebele* include Potato, *Gebto*[16], maize, *Teff*[17], barley and others. On the other hand, the people of Achayta *Kebele* mainly produced *Teff*, Potato, Beans and Peas, Sorghum, barley, Maize, wheat and others. Besides, the study communities herd cattle, sheep, goats and hens to support their family life in a better ways. However, nowadays, extensive degradation and high soil acidity have reduced the agricultural potential of the study area and this, in turn, forced the study communities to participate in other off-farming economic activities (ibid).

Therefore, households and communities in the study area employ different livelihood strategies to cope up with the current environmental stresses. In response, they have developed multiple livelihood strategies, including growing of drought tolerant and early maturing crop varieties, increasing wetlands cultivation, water harvesting for small-scale irrigation and participating in off-farming activities such as trade, handicraft, distilling *Arakie*, honey production, daily labor, charcoal production and others.

1.5. Social Infrastructure

In the field, I observed that, there are 2 health posts in the two *Kebeles* (1 health post for one *Kebele*). Besides, according to Sekela *Woreda* Communication Office (2013), the health service coverage of the *Woreda* increases continuously. In 2013, 29 health posts (*Tena Kelas*[18]) and 7 health centers (*Tena Tabias*[19]) are found in the *Woreda*. Moreover, the *Woreda* nearly finished the construction of 4 health posts (*Tena Kelas*) and 2 health centers (*Tena Tabias*) in different *Kebeles.*

Besides, educational institutions are expanded rapidly in the study *Woreda*. Currently, there are 64 primary schools, 2 secondary schools, 1 general secondary and preparatory school and 1 technical and vocational training institute in the *Woreda*. Moreover, the *Woreda* has a plan to construct 3 primary and 1 secondary schools to give educational service for the near future (Sekela *Woreda* communication Office, 2013).

[16] *Gebto – is a local crop used to rehabilitate the fertility of the soil*
[17] *Teff – is a cereal mostly used to make Injera*
[18] *Tena Kela – refers health post*
[19] *Tena Tabia – refers health center*

Furthermore, the *Woreda* Populations construct their houses from different construction materials such as wood, mud, bricks, stone and others. In the field, I observed that most people have a house constructed from wood and mud with a grass roof called *Gojjo bet*[20]. But, some people constructed houses from wood, mud and iron-corrugated roof which are called *Korkoro bet*[21] when their income increased. In the study area, having a *Korkoro bet* is a sign of richness and development. According to CSA (2008), the majority (98.73%) of houses in the *Woreda* are constructed by using wood and mud materials. But some houses (1.13%) of the *Woreda* are constructed from wood only and the remaining 0.14% houses are constructed from different construction materials like stone, bricks, bamboo and others.

On the other hand, the major water sources of the *Woreda* Population are river/lake/pond (53.26%), unprotected well spring (22.88%), protected well spring (14.08%) and tap outside compound (8%). Among the urban population (4.89%) of the *Woreda*, 56.06% of them get water from tap outside the compound. But, for rural population (95.11%), the main source of water (about 57.4%) is river/ lake/pond (CSA, 2008).

1.6. Land Use Systems

The total area coverage of Sekela *Woreda* is 79,317 hectare. From this area, only 24,915.67 hectare is suitable for agriculture and the other 48,792.1 hectare of land is not suitable for agricultural activities. Furthermore, from the available land, 12,264.35 hectare of land is covered by forests and the other 20,773.8 hectare land is available for cattle grazing (Sekela *Woreda* communication Office, 2013).

In the study area, people use different techniques to protect their land from erosion and to enhance its fertility. As explained by Sekela *Woreda* Communication Office (2013), the *Woreda* Population used 415,558 meter cube organic fertilizer to improve the fertility of their land in 2012. Besides, in the same year, they constructed 1417.087 km soil trench, 2431.335 km stone trench and 76,750 km terrace to protect the soil from erosion. Furthermore, they used 94 motor pumps, 80 pedal pumps and 75 rope pumps to irrigation production. Therefore, the study communities employ different mechanisms to use their farm and grazing lands in a better ways.

[20] *Gojjo bet – a traditional small round hut made of wood, mud and grass (Guday 2005:211)*
[21] *Korkoro bet – a rectangular shaped house constructed form wood, mud and iron-corrugated roof*

CHAPTER FOUR

The Contributions of Socio-Cultural Values to Livelihoods

This chapter attempts to examine the inter-related aspects of socio-cultural values involving socio-cultural systems, traditional practices and indigenous knowledge systems, and religious and belief systems and their contributions to livelihoods among the study agricultural communities in Sekela *Woreda,* the study area.

4.1. Socio-Cultural Systems

In the study communities, there are various socio-cultural activities which are considered as valuable for the well-being of community members. This sub-section of the study is specifically concerned with the contributions of various socio-cultural systems to livelihoods to the study community members. Among these, the value/culture of using organic fertilizer, sharing resources, keeping forests, helping each other, and the extended family systems are the most commonly mentioned types of local socio-cultural systems used as livelihood strategies in both study agricultural communities. Each of these socio-cultural systems is presented and discussed below.

4.1.1. The Value of Using Organic Fertilizer

According to key informant 7 (hereafter KI), in the study communities, people have a preference of organic fertilizer over chemical ones. Due to the continuous cost increment of chemical fertilizers, nowadays most farmers use organic fertilizer as a means of productivity enhancement. This helped them to decrease their raw material costs and to improve the fertility of their lands.

As I observed in the field, most of the study community members used to prepare organic fertilizer (Compost) nearby their compounds to improve the productivity of their farmlands. Besides, as explained by KI-27, organic fertilizer has a great significance in the process of rehabilitating soil fertility and natural productivity. Its organic elements are very important to the land to restore its productive capacity. In addition to that, organic fertilizer requires a least cost and it enables them to save a large amount of money from chemical fertilizer expense.

Furthermore, participants of focus group discussion 2 (FGD hereafter), more elaborated the importance of organic fertilizer for the improvement of soil fertility and cost minimization. They argued that, if it is prepared based on the proper instructions, organic fertilizer is very much effective to enhance soil fertility and improve productivity. Besides, it helped them to shift the money prepared for buying chemical fertilizers to other important expenses.

Generally, in the study communities, organic fertilizer serves as an alternative to chemical fertilizers and this helped them to avoid credit and high interest rate to acquire chemical fertilizers. Besides, this enabled them to preserve money for more important and necessary expenses.

4.1.2. The Value of Sharing Resources

Resource sharing is a tradition that has long been used as an adaptive mechanism to cope up with the current environmental change effects. Households who received the support from others, in turn, contribute to them through labor and other ways. The activity of sharing resources ranges from simple household materials to large agricultural equipments (Aklilu and Alebachew, 2012).

In the field, I observed that the people of both Gundel and Achayta *Kebeles* shared their resources with one another during agricultural and household activities. They provide agricultural and household equipments for poor members of the community, who could not afford it by themselves. They also provide agricultural products for those farmers who could not produce enough products for their family consumption due to weather crisis and other problems. In addition to that, if one person loses his/her property such as horse or ox due to death, theft or other reasons, the neighbors assist him/her by giving their own ox or horse during the plowing season. So, sharing resources is an important livelihood strategy to the study communities which helped them to reduce the current environmental crisis effects caused by climate changes, rapid population growth, urbanization and others. The importance of sharing resources to livelihoods was more elaborated by KI-3 as follows:

> *Due to the current environmental changes in the area, there is a recurrent occurrence of new plant, animal and human diseases, loss of production through heavy and snow contained rain, high soil erosion, rainfall variability*

and other problems. These events, in turn, caused serious problems like loss of productivity, crop destruction, animal and human death, crop failure and other problems on the lives of our community members. So, to reduce the effects of such problems, we share our equipments, products, labor and money with one another (Gundel, 13 February 2015).

In addition to that, one discussant of FGD-2 described the contributions of sharing agricultural and household equipments to livelihoods as follows:

[…] *Sharing resources is the basis of our communities living strategy. We share our household and farming materials and products with one another in the time of crisis and difficulty. For instance, two years ago, I lost my two oxen due to disease and I faced a problem of plowing my farmland. But my neighbors provided me their oxen and I plowed my land without any problem. Besides, they collected some money and gave me to buy oxen. In addition to that, our community members also share seeds, money, agricultural products and labor with one another. Therefore, sharing resources is an important livelihood strategy to our community and it enabled us to solve material, economic, labor and social problems through cooperation (Achayta, 14 February 2015).*

As further elaborated by KI-28, sharing resources is a good cultural value and an important livelihood strategy for the study community members. They share their agricultural equipments, products, money and labor with their neighbors and relatives during difficult periods. In general, sharing resources improved social relationships and created social solidarity among the study community members. Besides, it helped them to cope up with the current environmental effects and to reduce the problems of labor, raw material, money and product shortages.

4.1.3. The Value of Keeping Forests

Forests play an important role to maintain the normal environmental conditions of a given area. They are very important to protect the environment from high temperature, the soil from continuous erosion, the land from heavy rainfall, the area form recurrent drought and others. As I observed in the field, large size lands in both *Kebeles* are covered by different plants such as

Tsed (Juniperu procera), native Gerar (Acacial abyssinica), foreign Gerar (Acacia decurrens), Korch (Eryhrina abyissinica), Wanza (Cordia africana), Shola (ficus sur) and other indigenous plants. According to the data obtained from *Sekela Woreda* Environmental Protection and Land Administration Office, nowadays 17% of the land in the *Woreda* is covered by different plant species.

According to KI-8, currently the study community members are aware of the importance of forests as a means of protecting the environment from climate change related problems and as a source of income. In the previous periods, the large area of the *Kebele* was not covered by forests and it was exposed for continuous soil erosion and heavy rainfall. But, now with the help of the *Woreda* Agricultural Development and Environmental Protection Office, the eroded and unproductive lands of the area are covered by various indigenous plant species to protect the environment from climate change effects like erosion, heavy rain, high temperature and others.

In addition to that, nowadays individual members of the study area are also involved in planting different forest species in their own lands. They plant forests to generate income to support their livelihoods and currently it is serves as an important source of income for them. Apart from their primary intentions of using the forests as a source of income, they also used them to protect their land from natural hazards. It was more elaborated by KI-12 as follows:

> *Before 10 years, our community members were highly destroying natural forests to expand agricultural lands, to use the wood for house construction and fire, to prepare agricultural equipments, to produce charcoal and for other purposes and this leads to deforestation, soil erosion, high temperature, heavy rainfall and other consequences in the area. So, due to these problems, currently large agricultural lands lost their productivity and they are less suitable for agricultural activities. Therefore, many people in our area plant different forest species on these unproductive lands and they use them to produce timber and charcoal, to construct house and farming equipments, to use for firewood and other purposes. So, this helped us to support our livelihoods with additional income sources (Gundel, 26 March 2015).*

Generally, developing and selling of forests is an important livelihood strategy in the study communities. Many people actively involved in forest plantation in the unproductive lands and this helped them to generate additional income to support their family livelihoods. Besides, it requires less effort and within 5-7 years they are ready to different functions.

4.1.4. The Culture of Helping Each Other

In the field, I observed that the study community members helped each other in different situations such as in the time of crisis, house construction, weed removal, wedding ceremony, collecting harvests and others. Especially, by taking into account the current weather condition, which is very unpredictable and variable, helping each other in various circumstances is important for them to lead a better and successful social life. As explained by KI-17, helping each other is an important livelihood strategy in the study community. He stated that:

> *Helping each other is the basic essence of social life in our community. Even if the change in life style in the current time leads to a more private centered way of life, still there are different situations which required cooperation among our community members. These include wedding and funeral ceremonies, house construction activities, weed removal and harvest collection periods and others. Besides, we also help elderly and widow members of our community by plowing their lands, collecting their harvests, constructing their houses, providing seeds and plowing equipments and others. So, all these enabled us to reduce labor problems and to strength social cohesion among ourselves (Achayta, 06 March 2015).*

Moreover, in the study communities, helping each other is based on the principles of reciprocity and it contributes a lot to their livelihoods. This is further elaborated by one discussant of FGD-1 as follows:

> *Most of the time, in our community, one individual helps the other by calculating the immediate or later response from that person. For instance, if one individual participates in the harvest collection of his/her neighbor, he or she expects the involvement of that person during his/her harvest collection. In addition to that, an*

individual also participates in house construction, wedding and funeral ceremonies, and other activities of his/her neighbors by expecting a similar response from them. On the other hand, there are some situations in which an individual helps his/her neighbor without expecting immediate response from that person. For example, in situations like house burning, animal death, harvest destruction through heavy rainfall and others, neighboring members of the individual used to help the victim through labor, money, resource and others based on their capacity (Gundel, 14 February 2015).

Helping each other and helping the poor and the elderly is one of the livelihood strategies in the study communities and in this communities helping each other performed based on friendship relations, neighborhood or kinship ties, a certain group membership rules and other criteria. So, helping each other improves social relationships and solves labor shortage in the study area.

The following case provides additional explanation of the life experience of an individual from Achayta *Kebele*.

Case Study 1: The Culture of Helping Each Other as a Livelihood Strategy

W/ro Genet (46 years old) is living in Achayta Kebele with her two daughters. Her husband died 7 years ago due to Malaria infection. Due to economic problems, her daughters are not involved in formal educational institutions. Rather, they support their mother by involving in agricultural and other economic activities like making pots for sale. She has 0.75 hectare (3 Qada) of land for agriculture.

After the death of her husband, she faced with a problem of plowing and cultivating the farmland as well as following the cattle. So, she gave her land for another farmer through Temado[22] and sold her cattle for immediate household consumption. But, after some time, she faced with survival problem due to shortage of agricultural products. At that time, her neighbors provided her some amount of crops to support her family life. But, this could not serve as a long lasting solution for her family.

[22] *Temado-a system of mutual assistance by which an individual cultivates the land of another person by using his own agricultural equipments and raw materials based on the principle of equal sharing of the outputs*.

Therefore, being advised by her husband's families, she stopped the Temado agreement. After that, her and her husband's relatives plowed the land by using their own oxen and plowing equipments. Then she followed the progress of the harvests with the help of her daughters. During the harvesting season, her neighbors and relatives participated in the cutting and collecting activities. So, she lived in the community for the last 4 years in a very destitute condition, but due to the help of her relatives and neighbors, currently the standards of her livelihoods are much better than the previous times.

In addition to agriculture, she is also involved in other economic activity, which is called pottery making. She made different pots, dishes and others with her daughters and sell them to the community members in the local market to subsidize her family's livelihood. So, nowadays, with the help of her relatives and neighbors, she reduced the problems of labor shortage due to her husband death.

(Interview with W/ro Genet (Real name) living in Achayta Kebele, 16 March 2015)

In general, the culture of helping each other and helping the weak/elderly and the poor members is an essential livelihood strategy in the study communities. People help each other during harvest collection, house construction, wedding and funeral ceremonies and other events. This helped them to reduce labor shortages, to strength social relationships, to reduce the impacts of untimely rains on harvests and other problems. So, helping each other enhances mutual support and social cohesion among the study community members.

4.1.5. The Value of Extended Family Systems

In the field, I observed that most close relatives live together around their own agricultural lands. Nuclear family, which is the most common type of family structure in urban areas, also exist in some extent in the study agricultural rural communities. In the study communities, most people live in extended families consisting of grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, grandsons, granddaughters, uncles, aunts, marriage relatives such as daughter-in-laws and others. This helped them to work and solve different social, economic, psychological, environmental and other problems together.

According to KI-5, living together with their close relatives is one of the livelihood strategies in the study communities and it is very important to help each other during agricultural activities,

house constructions, wedding and funeral ceremonies and others. In addition to that, it gives freedom or security for child development and to lead a safe way of life because, according to the informant, a person with many relatives is not threatened by others and highly respected by the community members.

The contribution of living in the extended family circle to livelihoods was further elaborated by KI-15 as follows:

> *I and my family live together with my parents in the same homestead but in our own houses. My elder brother also lives with his family nearby my house. Most of the time, all of us live and work together and our children also grow, learn, play, eat and work together. Even, if one of our son fights with another son from different family or Got[23], all his brothers and relatives' children would be involved in the fighting with the side of him. Besides, we work together during plowing, harvest collection, wedding preparation, house and fence construction and other activities. So, all these situations created a great solidarity or bond among our kinship groups and this, in turn, made our life simple and interesting (Achayta, 06 March 2015).*

Furthermore, living with close relatives enabled the study communities to cope up with the current environmental stress impacts caused by over population, farmland fragmentation, over grazing, deforestation and others. As pointed out by KI-22, there is a great tendency of helping each other among kinship groups during a period of difficult situations like illness, death, crop failure, animal illness and death, land plowing and crop collection, bankruptcy and other situations. In these cases, extended family members are more willing to help each other than outside the extended family community members. So, living together with kinship members helped them to reduce the negative impacts of the current environmental hazards such as untimely rain, crop failure and others through cooperative efforts.

Generally, extended family system is an important livelihood strategy in the study communities and by living together with their kinship groups, most extended families used to share resources like seeds, plowing materials, money, agricultural products and others, worked together during

[23] *Got – an area inhabited by a small group of individuals, mostly family relatives, affinial groups, marriage relatives and others*

harvesting seasons, house construction and others, contributing money, food and drink during wedding and funeral ceremonies. Besides, extended families are a source of social security and wellbeing to its members. It creates a strong social bondage among the extended family members.

4.1.2. Traditional Practices and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

In the study communities, there are different traditional practices which have been transmitted from the previous generation to the current ones through different ways. Besides, they have indigenous knowledge about farming, land management, environmental protection and adaptation, house construction and others. These traditional practices and indigenous knowledge systems contribute to the betterment of the study communities livelihoods. Among the various traditional practices and indigenous knowledge systems, crop rotation, field rotation, indigenous farming and weather forecasting methods and off-farm activities are the most important ones, which are briefly discussed below.

4.2.1. Crop Rotation

Crop rotation is one of the important livelihood strategies in the study communities. People harvested some crop species in one harvesting season and changed the others for the next harvesting season. This helped them to get the maximum outputs from the available land in the communities. In addition to that, crop rotation enabled them to produce different crops two or three times in a year from the same farmland and to utilize the land in a better ways without putting a strong pressure on it.

According to KI-11, Achayta *Kebele* was considered as mid-temperate (*Woynadega*) area before 10 years and it produced crops which are suitable for such climatic areas. But, nowadays the temperature of the area is high as compared with the previous ones and it is more favorable to produce high temperature oriented crops than mid-temperate crops. In the previous times, the area was more suitable to produce potato, barley, *Teff* and other mid-temperature supported crops. But now, the land is more favorable to produce high temperature oriented crops such as Maize, sorghum, Beans, Peas and others. So, this agro-ecological shift forced them to change

their livelihood strategies and to rotate their crops in order to utilize the maximum potential of their farmlands.

Crop rotation is an important response of the study communities to soil erosion and land degradation in the area. This is more elaborated by one discussant among FGD-1 participants as follows:

> *Nowadays, it is very difficult to produce the same crop for the consecutive two or more years without changing or rotating it by other crops due to soil erosion and land degradation effects. If someone is doing so, the amount of production decreases from time to time and it was difficult for him/her to produce similar crops more than once in a year with the same farmland. So, currently most of us performed the practice of crop rotation as a livelihood strategy and it helped us to produce different crops for two or three times in a year, to utilize the maximum potentials of the land or to improve the productive capacity of the land and to reduce the negative side effects of land degradation in the area (Gundel, 14 February 2015).*

Furthermore, according to KI-23, crop rotation is not only improving productivity but also reduces land pressure and soil erosions in the area. Previously, when people produced the same crop in a similar land continuously, there were high soil erosion rate and the land was exhausted from production activities very quickly. But, now when they started rotating crops, the rate of soil erosion is relatively reduced and there is better productivity. So, crop rotation helped them to manipulate the maximum potentials of the land by exerting little impact on it.

In general, crop rotation is an important livelihood strategy which enabled the study agricultural communities to use the available farmlands effectively, to reduce the rate of soil erosion and land degradation significantly and to increase crop productivity.

4.2.2. Field Rotation

Due to the current environmental stresses caused by deforestation, soil erosion, land fragmentation, rapid population growth and other factors in the study area, the agricultural lands' productive capacity is very limited. Most of the time, people tried to recover the productive

capacities of their farmlands by using fertilizers, improved seeds and other methods. But, in some occasions, it is very difficult to rehabilitate the productivity of the over-utilized agricultural lands by using fertilizers, improved seeds and other techniques. In this case, they give their farmland a rest for two or more years in order to revive its important components and to recover its productive capacity. But, due to the rapid increment of population size and over fragmentation of agricultural lands in the area, it is very challenging to fallow the farmland from production. However, in order to recover the fertility of the farmland and to use it for a long period of time, some people give a two or three years rest for their farmland. This was better elaborated by KI-19 as follows:

> *I have 5 Qada (1.25 hectare) land and the production capacity of the land was decreased even if I used fertilizers and harvested various crop species. Due to the over utilization of the farmland for a long period of time without fallowing, the productive capacity of the land was reduced by half and more. So, even if it was very difficult to fallow the land for a year or more from production, in order to improve the productive capacity of the farmland and to recover the fertility of the soil, I gave a rest of two years for each Qada of land consecutively. That means, I gave a rest for 1 Qada (0.25 hectare) of land from farming activity for the first two years and I used that land to produce grass for cattle. After that I gave a rest for the other 4 Qada (1 hectare) of land, turn by turn, and this made the land relatively more productive than the previous ones (Achayta, 14 March 2015).*

Besides, as pointed out by KI-25, field rotation or fallowing is the least implemented but the most effective mechanism to recover the fertility and productivity of the farmlands in the study communities. Many people understood the importance of field rotation as a means of improving land productivity and recovering soil fertility but, due to shortage of arable land in the area, they were not implementing it on the available land at hand. But, when the land losses its total productive capacity, they are forced to fallow the land for two or more years from production. Finally, after the land recovers its productive potential, they start to exploit it again.

In general, fallowing is one of the important livelihood strategies in the study communities. It is very essential mechanism to utilize the farmland for a long period of time by giving a two or

three year rest for it. This helped the land to restore its lost fertility and to get back its productive capacity. Besides, field rotation enabled the study communities to reduce the impacts of soil erosion and land degradation.

4.2.3. Off-Farming Activities

The majority of households in rural Ethiopia are poor, often face income fluctuation and fail to stabilized their consumption patterns due to price changes, weather related shocks, pests, death and illness of family member, as well as livestock. The propensity of high risks and shocks perpetuates poverty, affects economic growth and household consumption, and reduces the capacity of household's human capital formation. Therefore, households use off-farming activities such as collecting and selling firewood, making straw and dung cakes, weaving and spinning, crop and livestock trading, making and selling farming implements and providing transport services (using pack animals) to support their livelihoods (Abera and Manfred, 2012).

Because participation in off-farm activities is dependent on family labor, which is also used for on-farm activities, the complementary nature of off-farm employment to farm employment is likely to depend on agricultural conditions. In the face of acute weather variability, off-farm activities could become an important livelihood strategy in the rural agricultural communities (Gunner et al, 2010).

As explained by KI-21, nowadays, it is very difficult to lead a successful and comfortable life by using agricultural activities alone in the study area. Because, due to the over fragmentation of agricultural land, the reduction of soil fertility and the rapid increment of population density in the area, most people could not fully support their family by using the benefits of agricultural activities only. So, in addition to the agricultural activities, most people are involved in other economic activities to generate additional income and to support their families in a better ways.

In the field, I observed that apart from the agricultural activities, many people are engaged in other off-farming activities like craftwork, trade, animal fattening, daily labor, charcoal production and others. By taking into account the current changing environmental conditions, depending only in the agricultural activities and its productions is very much uncertain.

Especially, those farmers who have less than 0.5 hectare (2 *Qada*) of farmland in the study area took other alternative economic activities as basic sources of income for their livelihoods.

According to KI-12, apart from the agricultural activities, craftworks like pottery and weaving activities played important roles for the betterment of his family's livelihoods. He stated it as follows:

> *Before 10 years, craftwork was an activity which was left for some groups of the community and those people who worked crafts were considered as socially marginalized groups and they were excluded from different social relationships. For instance, the other members of the communities were not willing to get married with the sons or daughters of a craft worker. But, nowadays, the attitudes of most people are changed gradually and many people in this locality (including me) are involved in craftwork activities like weaving, pottery, blacksmith and others by understanding the importance of the activities as a means of income-generating mechanism. I have only 2 Qada (0.5 hectare) of land and by using such small land I could not support all the seven members of my family for a long period of time. So, apart from the agricultural activities which are performed seasonally, I am also involved in weaving and my wife is involved in pottery making activities. These activities helped us a lot to generate additional income which is very important to teach our children in formal educational institutions and to cover the whole household expenses (Gundel, 24 March 2015).*

Currently, it is obvious to find a person who is involved in two or more economic activities to improve the living conditions of his/her family. Discussants of FGD-2 argued that, all of them have at least one additional economic activity apart from agriculture. They believed that, nowadays, it is unthinkable to lead a successful family and social life merely based on agricultural products. Even some discussants of FGD-2 clearly noted that they are involved in two or more additional economic activities. For instance, one discussant is involved in animal fattening, trade and charcoal production activities. On the other hand, the other discussant is also involved in animal fattening and weaving activities.

Therefore, except some weak and older community members, most of them are involved in different additional income-generating activities. This was further elaborated by the following case from Achayta *Kebele* as follows:

Case Study 2: Craft Work as a Livelihood Strategy

Ato Endalew (54 years old) lives in Achayta Kebele. He has 3 Qada (0.75 hectare) land and he used it to produce crops and to graze animals. But, the shortage of farmland and reduction of productivity due to soil erosion, rainfall variability and other factors forced him and his wife to get involved in other economic activities. He was in prison for two years since he committed a crime and during that time he learned about weaving activities. After he has been released from the prison, he started to get involved in weaving activity and by using the incomes from such activity he could support the lives of his family. Nowadays, he gets a significant amount of money from his weaving activity, which enabled him to cover the whole expenses of his children's educational costs and other household expenses. On the other hand, his wife, W/ro Shashe, also started distilling Arakie[24] when her husband was in prison. After that, with the help of her younger daughter, she distills Arakie two times a week and she sells it in the local market and she gets some money used to cover some of her household's expenses. So, the income generated from this activity helped her to lead a better family life as compared with the previous times.

Besides, they used the byproducts of distilled Arakie which is called Atela[25] to feed their cattle. Therefore, for them, apart from farming activities, cattle herding, weaving and distilling Arakie contributed a lot for the betterments of their livelihoods.

(Interview with Ato Endalew (real name) and his wife W/ro Shashe (real name) in Achayta Kebele, 02 April 2015)

In addition to the agricultural activities which are commonly performed by most of the study communities, the contributions of off-farm activities to the betterment of livelihood conditions is repeatedly mentioned by most study participants. As explained by KI-2, nowadays, no one wants to rely only on the farming activities for the fulfillments of his or her livelihoods unless he or she

[24] *Arakie - homemade local liquor (Guday 2005: 210)*
[25] *Atela – the byproduct of Arakie making process which is used to feed cattle*

is very weak or old. Even, some people, who could not have the initial capital to start a new business, are engaged in daily labor activities in the nearby rural towns of the study *Woreda* (Sekela) to generate income to support their family life.

In general, due to the current agricultural land and productivity reduction caused by high population pressure, over utilization and fragmentation of agricultural lands, deforestation, soil erosion, rainfall variability, and other factors in the study area, nowadays most people are involved in off-farming economic activities to improve their family's livelihoods. So, apart from the agricultural activities, participating in other off-farming economic activities is an important livelihood strategy in the study communities.

4.2.4. Indigenous Farming Methods

As I observed in the field, the farming techniques of both Gundel and Achayta *Kebeles (*agricultural communities) have some differences due to climatic variations. Gundel *Kebele* is characterized as a relatively low temperature and the *Kebele* is considered by the local people as *Dega*[26] area and its people are called by others as *Degegna*[27]. On the other hand, Achayta *Kebele* is characterized by hot temperature and the area is considered as *Qolla*[28] and the people are called by others as *Qollegna*[29].

According to KI-22, due to the low temperature and the nature of the soil in Gundel *Kebele*, the local people plowed the farmland many times to make the land more suitable for better production. But, the number of plowing repetition varies from crop to crop. For example, when they want to produce *Teff*, they plow the farmland for 7 to 8 times. On the other hand, when they want to produce potato, they plow the farmland for 3 to 4 times. Besides, they plow their farmlands horizontally to protect the soil from erosion and in this area agricultural production requires some repetition in plowing and a little bit longer crop maturing period. As elaborated by KI-9, the plowing activities of summer production starts in February and continues for more than two months. Due to the condensed nature of the soil and the low temperature in the area, the maturing periods of crops are longer than the high temperature areas. In this area, crops need

[26] *Dega - highland agro - ecological zone*
[27] *Degegna - people who live in the highland agro – ecological zone*
[28] *Qolla - lowland agro ecological zone*
[29] *Qollegna –people who live in the lowland agro – ecological zone*

more than four months to mature and to be ready for collection, but in hot temperature areas like Achayta *Kebele*, crops can be matured within three to four months and ready for collection.

On the other hand, based on the data gathered from FGD-2 discussants, Achayta *Kebele* is characterized by high temperature for 7 months (October to May) in a year. So, due to this high temperature and different soil nature, the local farmers plow their farmland not more than 5 times to produce a certain product. Even for some crop types, the plowing repetition decreases to 3 from 5 times. For instance, they plow the farmland for 3 times to produce maize, 5 times to produce *Teff* and 4 times to produce beans and peas. Moreover, most of them use pair oxen to plow their farmlands. But, some farmers also use horses to plow their farmland.

Furthermore, as pointed out by KI-11, the majority of the people in Achayta *Kebele* produce *Teff*, sorghum, Wheat, Beans, Peas and other hot temperate crops, which helped them to exploit the maximum potentials of their farmlands. He explained it more briefly as follows:

> *In our area, the plowing activities for summer production begin in the late March by using a pair of oxen or horses. To protect the soil from erosion, we plow the land horizontally. After we plow the land 3 to 5 times, we wait until the rain gives the farmland some moisture for crop development. Besides, due to the high temperature in the area, the crops mature quickly as compared with the other low temperature oriented crops (Achayta, 01 March 2015).*

In general, the study communities' knowledge about the nature of the soil, suitable crops for the farmland, horizontal plowing method, variations in plowing repetitions for different crops and others are important livelihood strategies to them. They enabled them to manage the land in better ways and to reduce the impacts of the current environmental stresses.

4.2.5. Indigenous Weather Forecasting

The study communities have their own weather forecasting techniques for the upcoming harvesting season. Based on their weather prediction, they properly managed the period of farmland plowing time, planting time and harvest collection time. As explained by FGD-3 discussants and KI-10, members of the local community understand the upcoming season

weather conditions based on the current season weather conditions. Especially, the older members of the community can predict or forecast about the coming season's climatic conditions based on their experience and current weather condition indicators. This was further elaborated by KI-14 as follows:

> *In our community, elders try to predict about the coming season's weather conditions every year. They tell us different important information about the proper land plowing periods, the more suitable crop types, the approximate time when the rain starts, the right time for planting and collecting crops, and other events. But, even if it is difficult to forecast the upcoming season's weather condition perfectly due to the current climatic changes, still weather predictions of elders helped us a lot to perform our agricultural activities in a better ways (Achayta, 03 March 2015).*

In addition to that, the study communities also predict the cheapest and most expensive periods of harvest marketing. As explained by KI-28, most of the time, the prices of agricultural products decrease during the period of harvest collection, in most cases between October and February. On the other hand, product price increases in the summer especially between June and September. In addition to that, when there was crop failure, crop disease, output reduction due to various factors, they predict the increments of harvest prices and they used to store their harvests until its prices raised significantly. So, based on their productivity assessments, they used to store their product during the cheapest periods and sell it when the price rises.

Therefore, the local communities' weather forecasting skill helped them in making production and marketing decisions. It enabled them to select the appropriate crop types for the coming harvesting's season, to start plowing the farmland on the right time, to collect the harvested crops on time, to sell the outputs for a better price and others. In general, the indigenous weather forecasting/prediction skill is an important livelihood strategy for the study communities.

4.3. Religious and Belief Systems

Religious and belief systems are the basis of all our intrigues, decisions, actions and conversations. They exist independent from the believers who experienced the commitment. The

believers do not contain the belief system. In fact, the believer is unlikely to be aware of more than a small part of it and, knowingly or unknowingly, he/she must take the rest of the belief system on faith (Domenech and Selva, 2008). Religion and belief systems play significant roles for the betterments of the study communities' livelihoods. Among the different religious and belief systems which have been existing in the study communities, the contributions of most important ones to livelihoods are briefly discussed as follows.

4.3.1. *Tselote Bered*[30]

In the study communities, there is a belief system called *Tselote Bered*, which is performed every year during the summer season by religious leaders and local community members to prevent the damages of heavy rain, flooding and ice contained rain. It is a religious activity and most of the time the ceremony is performed between the months of late May to early June. As explained by KI-6, *Tselote Bered* has the following major contributions for the betterment of the study communities' livelihoods:

> *In our community, there is an annual praying ceremony called Tselote Bered, which is performed by the whole community members through the leadership of religious fathers. The praying ceremony is performed inside the church compound and there is a particular holy book which is used by the priests during the praying ceremony. After the end of the praying activity, the holy book is circulated to every sub-Kebele and village by some priests and most of our community members follow these priests until they covered the whole areas of the church followers. Finally, they return the holy book to the church and concluded the ceremony by acknowledging God and by wishing a better harvesting season. The main objective of this ceremony is to beg our God for a proper rainy season for our harvests and to prevent unwanted happenings such as ice contained rain, heavy rain, flooding, crop and cattle diseases and others (Achayta, 29 January 2015).*

Moreover, FGD-3 discussants and KI-15 noted that, *Tselote Bered* is also performed when the rain was too late or did not come on the right time. Normally, in both *Kebeles*, the rain is

[30] *Tselote Bered – a religious praying ceremony performed to avoid the effects of unwanted heavy rain, flooding, snow contained rain and others*

expected to start on the late April onwards. But, sometimes the rain did not begin on time and this caused a huge problem on the production processes and created frustration on the study communities about the effectiveness of the coming season's production period. At this time, they believed that, the rain stopped due to God's disappointment by them. So, they asked the community religious leaders to mediate them with their God. Then, local priests used to prepare the ceremony of *Tselote Bered* in which the whole members of the local church involved.

In general, *Tselote Bered* is an important livelihood strategy in the study communities which is performed on the belief that the ceremony protect them from the coming of unnecessary heavy rain, ice contained rain, flooding and others unwanted happenings and to correct the lateness of the rainfall staring timings. But, its major contribution is to give a psychological and religious relief to the study community members. They are very optimistic about the goodness of the coming season's weather conditions after the ceremony is performed.

4.3.2. *Debtera*[31]

Most of the time, *Debteras* are identified as one contributing factor for social and religious crisis through their damaging practices and they are condemned by most community members and administrators. But, apart from their negative impacts, the study communities believe that *Debteras* also contribute some important roles for the betterment of their livelihoods.

Discussants of FGD-1 believed that, *Debteras* have negative and positive impacts on the social functioning of their *Kebele*. Even though, most of the time, they used their religious knowledge for negative purposes, sometimes they used their skills to help the community members by protecting their harvests from untimely rain. The study community members believed that, *Debteras* have a power to control rain. So, when there was an unexpected rain during the time of harvesting, the local people ask *Debteras* to stop the rain until they finished their harvesting period. After the local *Debteras* agreed to control the rain, the local community members believed that, *Debteras* can stop the rain until they finished their harvesting period.

[31] *Debtera is a church-educated person who has a special knowledge to deal with magic, medicine and other supernatural matters*

In addition to that, as explained by KI-18, the role of *Debteras* in the study communities is not restricted only to stopping rain during harvest collection periods. He believed that, they also played important roles in different social events. For instance, when an individual has a wedding ceremony and get frustrated about the disruption of the ceremony by unexpected rain, he or she goes to the house of local *Debtera* and asks him to control the rain until the wedding ceremony is completed. Then the person can celebrate the wedding ceremony without the disruption of unexpected rainfall. Besides, in other social events like the funeral ceremony of the well-known person in the locality, the annual religious festivals, communal development works like road construction, trench construction and others the selected community elders asked *Debteras* to stop the rain and they used to control it until they finished their activities or events.

To sum up, the study communities believed that *Debteras* have positive contributions for the betterment of their livelihoods. Nowadays, in the study area, the rain comes unexpectedly and it causes a serious damage on the production activities of the people. In this case, the study communities believe on the power of local *Debteras* and they contact them to fix the problems.

4.3.3. *Chefi*[32] System

According to KI-29, in the study area, the local people perform a *Chefi* ceremony once in every year on Hamle[33] 8. They do that on the belief to make the coming harvesting season more productive, risk free and healthy for their animals. They celebrated this annual festival by slaughtering a couple of Sheep or Goats on the communal land. After they slaughtered the Sheep or Goats, they took the blood on plant leaves or grasses and hit all their animals by using the bloody leaves or grasses and spray the blood into the agricultural lands by wishing a better production season for their cultivation and a healthy season for their animals. Then, they eat the slaughtered Sheep or Goats and drink the contributed *Tela*[34] together by discussing about the coming season's production activities and other social issues.

According to discussants of FGD-2 and KI-13, the study community members believe that, the *Chefi* festival prevented most negative impacts of environmental changes in their area. They

[32] *Chefi – it is a religious festival celebrated once in every year (Hamle 8) by a group of people to protect their crops, animals and family members from unexpected damages*
[33] *Hamle – refers to the month of July*
[34] *Tela – a traditional homemade beer*

argued that the ceremony protected the occurrence of harmful plant weeds and epidemic animal diseases, heavy and ice contained rain, flooding and other unwanted environmental hazards.

In addition to that, KI-11 also believed on the importance of *Chefi* festival for the improvement of their livelihoods and he elaborated it as follows:

> *In our community, Chefi is performed in every year on Hamle 8 by the whole community members in every Got. It is a religious festival and celebrated on the annual day of St. Kiros. One week before the celebration of the ceremony, our community members gather together and discuss about the festival programs, the amount of money, Injera[35], Tela and other things should be contributed by each members of the Got, the number of Sheep or Goats should be bought for the ceremony and other important issues should be discussed during the festival. After that, on the day of the festival, all members of the Got get together in the communal land with their family members and animals. Then, after the local elders thank God and make blessings, the Sheep or Goats are slaughtered by Got leaders and elders. Thereafter, our children took the blood on grasses or plant leaves and hit the backs of the whole cattle and livestock by using it, and then dropped the grasses or leaves on the whole cultivable lands. This is performed every year based on the belief that, the blood protects our animals and cultivations from different diseases, heavy rain, flooding, drought and other hazards. So, these activities enabled us to be optimistic and mentally strong persons (Achayta, 01 March 2015).*

In general, the *Chefi* festival gives a psychological and social relief for the study community members. It helped them to do their day to day activities with a great ambition of success and productivity. Besides, the festival enabled them to get together and discuss on the common environmental and social issues which are very important for the overall survival of the communities. Therefore, the annual ceremony of *Chefi* is an important livelihood strategy in the study communities.

[35] *Injera - the staple pancake (Assefa 1999:iv)*

4.3.4. *Tsebel*[36]

Tsebel is a religious holy water used as medicine by the followers of Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church. It is believed that the holy water cures people from spiritual, physical, internal and other health problems. Gish Abay, the capital town of the study *Woreda* (Sekela) is well known by its *Tsebel* (Gish Abay *Tsebel)* by the *Woreda's* and its surrounding *Woredas'* populations. The *Tsebel* cured many people from various diseases and as I observed during my fieldwork, many people concentrate on the *Tsebel* area every day and most of them stay in the *Tsebel* area for one week, two weeks, or more.

According to FGD-3 discussants, in addition to the Gish Abay *Tsebel,* there are also other *Tsebels* in the *Woreda* which are used to cure people from various spiritual and physical health problems. Nowadays, due to environmental changes, different new problems for humans, animals and crops are emerging in the study area. So, to reduce these problems the local people use different techniques and among these techniques *Tsebel* is an important one. As explained by KI-12, when people face problems like new crop and animal diseases, spiritual and mental problems and others, some of them use *Tsebel* and solve the problems.

Moreover, the importance of *Tsebel* as a livelihood strategy was further elaborated by KI-20 as follows:

> *[...] Due to the current environmental stresses, sometimes new epidemic diseases were created and caused serious problems on the day to day activities of our community members. Even, in some cases, new diseases lead to serious human and animal death and huge crop destruction in our area. So, to avoid such mass destructions, in addition to bio-medical treatments, we use Tsebel to reduce the effects of such harmful hazards. For example, two years ago my two cows were affected by water borne diseases and I was very much frustrated by the situation. But, my neighbors advised me to go to Sekela and bring the Tsebel of Gish Abay and to give it for the ill cows. Based on their advice, I brought the Tsebel and gave it for the ill cows. After I gave the Tsebel for three days continuously, the cows started eating*

[36] *Tsebel – it is religious holy water which has a power to cure physical, internal, psychological and spiritual illnesses and other problems*

grass and walking slowly and after one week they recovered fully from their diseases. After that, I used to give the Tsebel for my cattle and family members in every month to protect them from different diseases. In addition to that, I and my neighbors spray Tsebel to our Gotera[37] (crop container) to protect the crops from the attacks of insects, mouse and others (Achayta, 17 March 2015).

In general, the study communities believed that *Tsebel* contributed a lot for the betterment of their livelihoods. They used it when their cattle or family members are affected by a certain problems or diseases. Besides, they used it to protect their crops from insect damages. Therefore, in the study communities, *Tsebel* provides a psychological, social and spiritual relief for most people.

4.2. Summary of Key Findings and Discussion

Socio-cultural values involving socio-cultural systems, traditional practices and indigenous knowledge systems as well as religious and belief systems are important to livelihoods in the study agricultural communities. The local people believed that socio-cultural values helped them to reduce the impacts of the current environmental stresses caused by rapid population growth, farmland fragmentation, deforestation, soil erosion and other factors.

The major socio-cultural systems used to as a livelihood strategy in the study communities include the preference of using organic fertilizer to that of chemical ones, the value of keeping forests, the culture of helping each other, the value of sharing resources and the value of extended family structure. All these helped them to reduce the costs of agricultural raw materials, to protect the soil from erosion, to share agricultural means of production such as plowing oxen, seeds, money and others, to feel secured, to help each other during the periods of emergencies such as harvest collection during untimely rains, taking the ill-person into the nearby heath center by carrying on *Kareza*[38] (traditional bed), constructing houses, preparing the funeral places and the like. These value systems also enabled the study community members to help the weak/elderly people and poor members by plowing their farmlands, by collecting their harvests, by constructing their houses, by giving farm products if needed and others.

[37] *Gotera – a traditional crop container which is made from mud*
[38] *Kareza-a traditional bed which is used to carry patients from house to health center and vice versa*

Besides, traditional practices and indigenous knowledge systems have a significant contribution to the betterment of the study communities' livelihoods. These traditional practices and indigenous knowledge systems include crop and field rotation, off-farming activities, indigenous farming and weather forecasting techniques. All these enabled the local communities to maximize the productivity of their farmlands, to produce two or three times in a year, to exploit the variable rainfall patterns and temperature conditions, to rehabilitate the eroded soil fertilities and others.

Moreover, currently, the study communities are no more dependent on the agricultural activities due to the unpredictable and variable nature of rainfall, reduction of productivity, over fragmentation of the farmlands and other reasons. So, most of them started to get involved in other non-farming or off-farm economic activities such as animal fattening, trade, craft work, charcoal production, distilling *Arakie* and others. Therefore, in addition to the agricultural activities, most of them are involved in one or more of other non-farming or off-farm economic activities in order to improve their income and support their family and this, in turn, helped them to improve their livelihoods in a better ways. In addition, the study communities' indigenous farming and weather forecasting knowledge have a significant contribution for the betterment of the study communities' livelihoods. They have their own methods of farming based on the areas' temperature conditions. In low temperature areas, they plow their farmlands more repeatedly and earlier than the high temperature areas. Besides, the study communities plow the land horizontally to protect the land from erosion. On the other hand, the indigenous weather forecasting skills of the study communities helped them to prepare early for the coming season's agricultural activities, to take a precaution action during unwanted rainfall occurrences and to make a right marketing decision for their outputs.

Furthermore, different religious and belief systems also played important roles for the improvement of the study communities' livelihoods. People used to perform *Tselote Bered* ceremony on the belief to prevent the effects of high rainfall and flooding in the area. In addition to that, when the rain comes late or did not come on time, they perform *Tselote Bered* to beg their God to send the rain to them. They also use *Debteras* to stop untimely rain during harvest collection, house construction, wedding ceremony, annual religious ceremonies/festivities and others. Besides, they also use *Tsebel* to protect the harvests, cattle and humans from different

diseases and perform *Chefi* festival to make the season comfortable for cattle and harvests and to protect the cattle, crops and humans from various health problems. In general, socio-cultural systems, traditional practices and indigenous knowledge, religious and belief systems play important roles for the betterment of the study agricultural communities' livelihoods.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Contributions of Social Institutions to Livelihoods

5.1. Community Based Institutions

In the study communities, there are different social institutions which are established by local community members to achieve a certain socio-cultural objectives. These institutions have their own principles and guiding rules. So, members are expected to operate based on such rules and principles. In the next parts of the analysis, I present these institutions one by one to show their importance to the local communities' livelihoods.

5.1.1. Social and Religious Associations

5.1.1.1. *Iddir*[39]

Iddir is one of the indigenous informal institutions in Ethiopia which is established voluntarily by the community members and involved in self-help and other social activities. The primary aim of *Iddirs* is the provision of mutual support in time of death. Among the functions of *Iddir* decent burial comes first and foremost. Besides, *Iddirs* also include financial, material and emotional support during the bereavement period and they are established by a group of persons united by ties in families, friendship, neighborhood or belonging to the same job (Pankhurst & Mariam, 2000).

But, nowadays, *Iddirs* transformed themselves from burial associations to multifunctional institutions as *Iddirs* have started undertaking a number of development works, business activities and credit facilities. In accordance with the capacity of the *Iddirs*, some work on sanitation development in the neighborhood, sharing responsibilities in building smaller infrastructures like feeder roads and sewerage systems, and good social or neighborly relations, social control, day cares, schools and the likes (Solomon, 2009).

[39] *Iddir – an indigenous social institution established voluntarily by the study communities to perform burial and other social and economic activities.*

As I observed from the field, the whole members of the local *Iddir* are involved in the funeral ceremonies of the *Iddir* members. After the end of the funeral ceremony, the *Iddir* Secretary checked the attendance of the *Iddir* members in the ceremony and the absent members are fined by the *Iddir* some money unless they presented a convincing reason for their absence.

According to KI-8, the local *Iddir* Associations have their own rules and regulations. Each members of the *Iddir* are expected to respect the whole rules and regulations and deviation from such rules lead punishment by the *Iddir* administrators. The *Iddir* administrators include: Chairperson, Secretary, Accountant and money Depositor. They have their own responsibilities for the proper functioning of the *Iddir* and they administer the members based on the rules and regulations of the *Iddir*.

Besides, as explained by KI-4 &12, members of the local *Iddir* pay a certain amount of money (4 birr for two headed households and 2 birr for single headed households in Gundel *Kebele* and 5 birr for two headed households and 3 birr for single headed households in Achayta *Kebele*) every month to continue as a member and they can pay the annual payment once. But, if one member stopped to pay the monthly payment for the consecutive three months, the *Iddir* administrators expelled the person from the *Iddir* based on its regulations. However, since death is the unavoidable fate of all human beings, almost all members of the study communities are involved in the local *Iddir* and they are highly committed to the rules and regulations, unless they faced serious problems. In this regard, what Gebre (2007) wrote about similar institution in Dawro holds true for this study area. "*Iddir* is so indispensable and life would be unimaginably difficult without membership to it. Few farmers will miss *Iddir* occasion and fewer still will bear the heavy social costs of being excluded or removed from membership. Based on this, one can argue that, *Iddir* is not an absolute voluntary association rather, there is some sense of obligation to be a member" (Gebre, 2007:45).

Based on the explanations of FGD-2 discussants, *Iddir* is an important social institution which helps them when they lost their family members and close relatives through death. When one member of the local *Iddir* lost his/her family member or close relative, the whole members of the *Iddir* organize themselves to handle the burial and consolatory activities. Besides, the *Iddir* members prepare the burial place for the dead person and they prepare the food and drink for the

participants of the funeral ceremony and the deceased person's family. In addition to that, the *Iddir* also gives a certain amount of money for the deceased person's family to cover some of the costs of burial house construction and to prepare the remaining ceremonies of the funeral processes such as *Salest*[40], *Sament*[41], *Asrahulet*[42], *Selasa*[43], *Arba*[44] and others.

In the study communities, the function of *Iddir* is not only restricted to help people in funeral activities. According to KI-8, *Iddir* also assist its members in case of the adverse shocks such as asset loses due to theft or fire, the death of livestock like oxen, health problems or other difficult situations. *Iddir* also covers some medical expenses to its members during serious illness and contribute money during certain ceremonies and this enabled them to challenge difficulties in a better ways. *Iddir* insured the poor by helping them during funerals, house constructions, agricultural practices, fire breakings, sickness and other events.

The role of *Iddirs* for the communities' well-being was further elaborated by KI-31 as follows;

> *In our Kebele, there are seven or eight Iddirs established by each Sub-Kebele or Got members. In my Got named Wondayta, most community members are the members of the local Iddir called Tenker and I am the Chairperson of this Iddir. Each members of our Iddir used to pay 50 birr for membership fee and they pay 5 birr every month to strength the Iddir's capital. But, the registration and monthly fee is decreased to 30 and 3 birr for single headed households, respectively. Our Iddir helps its members during the time of family members' or close relatives' death. For instance, when one member or his/her family member died, the whole members of the Iddir should attend the funeral ceremony and share the grief with the deceased person family members. Besides, our Iddir members should prepare food and drink to the deceased's family for seven days and the Iddir provides 1000 birr for the death of household head (husband or wife), 500 birr for the death of Father, Mother, Children, Brothers or Sisters, 300 birr for the death of Aunts, Uncles, Grandparents, Grandchildren and other close relatives. Furthermore, our Iddir provides credit to its members without*

[40] *Salest – the third day funeral ceremony of the dead person*
[41] *Sament - the seventh day funeral ceremony of the dead person*
[42] *Asrahulet - the twelfth day funeral ceremony of the dead person*
[43] *Selasa - the thirtieth day funeral ceremony of the dead person*
[44] *Arba - the fortieth day funeral ceremony of the dead person*

interest when members face serious financial problems to accomplish different activities like wedding, to buy chemical fertilizers, improved seeds and plowing oxen, to cover health costs and others. In addition to that, Iddirs are important mechanisms for transferring information to the community members. We are transmitting information to the Iddir members about soil rehabilitation, sanitation, terrace construction, and others in funeral places after the end of the funeral ceremony and in the Iddir members' meeting places. Moreover, our Iddir played important roles to solve conflicts rose among its members due to land borders, irrigation water usage, communal land usage and other reasons (Achayta, 08 March 2015).

Nowadays, it is very easy to find a person who is a member of at least one *Iddir* in the study communities. Even, some persons are involved in two *Iddirs* to get much compensation and help during the time of family or close relative's death and other difficult occasions. The following case provides a better explanation about the importance of *Iddir* for the betterment of the study communities' livelihoods.

Case Study 3: The Contributions of Iddir to Livelihoods

W/ro Zewde (51 years old) is living in Gundel Kebele for 30 years. She has three daughters and four sons from her husband before his death around 6 years ago. When her husband died in the summer of 2001 E.C (before six years), the local Iddir took the responsibility of preparing the funeral place, burying the dead and sharing the grief with her family members. Besides, the Iddir prepared food and drink for 5 days for her family and relatives and provided 800 birr for her to cover the remaining funeral ceremonies like Salest, Sament, Selasa, Arba and others. This helped her a lot by covering the unexpected expenses of the funeral processes.

Furthermore, the Iddir members also helped her during the then period of farming. Because, due to the death of her husband during the summer harvesting season, she faced a problem of cultivating the farmlands. But, the local Iddir assigned her neighbors to plow, follow and collect the harvests for that harvesting season and this enabled her to settle the

situation and adjust the life of her family easily and quickly. Besides, after the death of her husband, the Iddir reduced her monthly fee from 4 birr to 2 birr. In addition to that, she took an interest free credit/loan from the local Iddir in two occasions and she returned the money to the Iddir on the right time. So, the local Iddir helped her a lot to develop a sense of togetherness and a feeling of respect, to overcome her grief easily and to adjust her family life situations properly.

Interview with W/ro Zewde (pseudo name) in Gundel Kebele, 05 April 2015

In general, *Iddirs* play important roles for the better functioning of social life and they enabled the study communities to share their grief with their relatives, neighbors and other community members. They helped the deceased person's family by covering some costs of the funeral activities. Moreover, they also enabled the study communities to transmit information and resolve conflicts among themselves. All these, in turn, have significant contributions to the betterment of the study communities' livelihoods.

5.1.1.2. *Eqqub*[45]

According to Dessalegn and Aklilu (1999), *Eqqub* is an informal institution established voluntarily to collect a specific amount of money from the members on a specific date to be paid on round and lottery basis to the members. The members know each other and thus trust each other to make the *Eqqub* function smoothly. *Eqqub* is serving as a traditional saving institution for improved income and investment in productive assets and it solves the financial constraint of the members which are not accessible by formal institutions. *Eqqub* provides the sum amount of money for the members without interest and without any need of collateral. Hence, *Eqqub*, without exaggeration is replacing the function of banks (Frankenberger et al., 2007).

In the field, I observed that many people in the study communities are involved in different *Eqqubs* and almost all *Eqqubs* are held in every Sunday. According to KI-1, *Eqqubs* have their own governing rules, regulations and executive bodies. Each *Eqqub* operates by three persons

[45] *Eqqub - A form of rotating saving associations (Assefa 1999:iv)*

and they are appointed by the *Eqqub* members to the role of *YeEqqub Dagna*[46] (*Eqqub* Judge), *YeEqqub Tsehafi*[47] (*Eqqub* Secretary) and *YeEqqub Tazabi*[48] (*Eqqub* Examiner). Before the *Eqqub* started its function, these three committees draft the rules and regulations of how the *Eqqub* operates and its members enact.

Besides, as pointed out by KI-5, the primary objective of *Eqqub* is to pool a certain sum of money from individual members and give to the members turn by turn on lottery basis. Many people in the study communities are involved in different *Eqqubs* based on their capacity. They save 20-1000 birr every week based on their income and saving capacity. Every week, the collected money is given to the *Eqqub* members based on a lottery method. But, in the first, third and fifth week of the *Eqqub*, the collected money is given to *YeEqqub Dagna* (*Eqqub* Judge), *YeEqqub Tsehafi* (*Eqqub* Secretary) and *YeEqqub Tazabi (Eqqub* Examiner*)*, respectively without a lottery basis as a compensation for their service to the proper functioning of the *Eqqub*. Except for some situations, the *Eqqub* provides the money collected in other weeks to its members based on their chance in the lottery. When one member won the lottery, he/she is expected to present another member of the *Eqqub*, who did not won his/her money, as a Guaranty. Because, if the person stops returning the money to the *Eqqub* after he/she won the lottery, the *Eqqub* committees ask the guaranteed person to continue the *Eqqub* or they take the collected money of the guaranteed person to cover the deficit.

In addition to that, the socio-economic contributions of *Eqqub* in the study communities are further elaborated by FGD-2 & 3 discussants. According to these discussants, *Eqqub* helped many people in the communities to participate in different economic activities by giving an initial capital for work. Some people won the lottery of the *Eqqub* very early and by using the money they fulfilled the whole agricultural raw materials and started new off-farming economic activities or expanded the already started off-farming activities such as charcoal production, trade, honey production, animal fattening and others. This, in turn, enabled them to get additional money to improve their saving capacities and to cover different expenses. For instance, the money enabled the people to buy clothes for their children, to construct a new and better house,

[46] *YeEqqub Dagna – a person who controls the overall activities of the Eqqub and considered as the head or judge*
[47] *YeEqqub Tsehafi – a person who performs all the writing related activities of the Eqqub and considered as a secretary*
[48] *YeEqqub Tazabi – a person who looks the normal functioning of the Eqqub and considered as an examiner*

to cover medical expenses, to teach their children in a better school, to expand the agricultural activities and others.

Furthermore, according to KI-32, most *Eqqubs* have a certain rule of helping its members during a time of emergencies. For example, if one member loses his/her plowing ox or horse through accidental death, the *Eqqub* committees give the collected money for the victim person without a lottery. Then, he/she buys an ox or horse to continue the agricultural activities. Besides, if the house of the member is burned, the cattle died by diseases, the harvest destructed by natural disaster, the family member attacked by heavy or accidental disease and during other serious problems, the *Eqqub* gives the collected money to the person who is affected by one or more of such problems. In addition to that, the *Eqqub* has its own capital accumulated through fines, lottery selling, taking a certain amount of money from the *Eqqub* winners and other ways. So, the *Eqqub* provides interest free credit/loan service for its members when they need the money for serious purposes.

The contributions of *Eqqubs* to livelihoods in the study area were better explained by the following case:

Case Study 4: Eqqub as a Livelihood Strategy

Ato Belayneh (47 years old) lives in Achayta Kebele with his wife, a son and two daughters. His other two sons are attending their higher education away from home. His main economic activity is agriculture. But, he also participates in crop trading, honey production and animal fattening activities.

He got the initial capital for crop trading from the local Eqqub. He has been involved in Eqqub for 10 years. When he started the Eqqub, he saved 20 birr every week and got 1200 birr when in his turn. After that, he increased the amount of money he saved to 50 birr, 80 birr, 100 birr … and now he saves 400 birr every week.

Two years ago, he saved 300 birr per week and got more than 25,000 birr in his turn. Then he gave 10,000 birr for his second son to start learning as a Nurse in Alkan Medical Science College in Bahir Dar. By using the remaining 15,000 birr he started crop trading and now his

capital rose into 22,000 birr. Besides, he constructed iron-corrugated roof house for his family and he bought six modern beehives by using the money he got from the Eqqub in this year (2007EC). In addition to that, four years ago, when he lost his plowing oxen and herding cattle due to accidental disease, the Eqqub provided a credit service for him without any interest and this enabled him to cope up with the then difficult situations. In general, Eqqub means a lot for him and it supported the livelihoods of his family in a better ways.

Interview with Ato Belayneh (real name) in Achayta Kebele, 29 March 2015

To sum up, in the study communities the importance of *Eqqub* is multifaceted. It helped them to improve their saving capacity, to strength social solidarity, to create capital to start new business or to expand the already started economic activities, to transmit information to its members and play other important functions.

5.1.1.3. Mahaber[49]

Mahabers are voluntary and mutual aid community or religious associations peculiar to Orthodox religion followers. The members gather together at church or in one of the member's house so as to pray together to get blessing from God and Saint and discuss their problems and further share information. In doing so, the members bring food and drinks to church to feed the poor and themselves and discuss matters of common interest. *Mahabers* are also very crucial informal institutions involved in various community activities such as risk coping, provision of information, addressing human power and traction force and conflict resolution (Moges, 2006).

As I observed in the field, there are different religious based *Mahabers* in the study communities such as St. Gorge *Mahaber*, *St.* Michael *Mahaber*, *St.* Marry *Mahaber*, *St.* Gebriel *Mahaber*, *St.* Medhanialem *Mahaber*, St. Abunegebremenfeskidus (hereafter Abo) *Mahaber* and others. According to KI-3, except the Abo *Mahaber*, all the other *Mahabers* are celebrated inside the

[49] *Mahaber- a voluntary monthly religious association organized around a parish church in honor of a chosen Saint and members take turns providing food and drinks (Guday 2005:212)*

church compound or in the houses of the members by using *Tela* and *Abzi*[50]. But, in the case of Abo *Mahaber,* it is always celebrated in the houses of its members by using *Dabo*[51] and *Tela*.

Besides, as pointed out by KI-18, these *Mahabers* celebrate every month on the days of Saints or Angles. For example, St. George is celebrated on 23, St. Michael on12, St. Gebriel on 19, St. Medhanialem on 27 and Abo on 5 of every month according to the Ethiopian calendar.

According to discussant of FGD-1, the primary functions of celebrating the days of Saints and Angeles are to memorize the days of Saints and Angeles and to get spiritual relief and blessing from them. In addition to that, *Mahabers* have other significances for the study community members. These include: strengthening social relationships and social bonding, promoting mutual support during difficult situations, providing interest free credit service for their members, and others. Furthermore, it is common for *Mahabers* to be involved in community issues to solve disagreement between or among individual members. For instance, *Mahabers* resolved disputes or conflicts on land, property transfer, divorce, theft, vandalism and other issues by using local aged people called *Shimagiles*[52].

Mahabers also played important roles for the betterment of study communities' livelihoods. This was more elaborated by KI-9 as follows:

> *I am a member of three different Mahabers in our locality. These include: Abo, Michael and Georgis (St. George) Mahabers. Most members of these three Mahabers are similar and they are my neighbors. Abo and Michael Mahabers are held in the houses of each member of the Mahabers turn by turn. But, Georgis Mahaber takes place every month within the compound of the local church. These Mahabers helped me to develop a strong social relationship and social solidarity with my neighbors and community members. Besides, they enabled us to discuss on various socio-economic and environmental issues and to solve different problems and conflicts among/between members. Furthermore, our Mahabers provide interest free credit service for the members during accidental occasions. In addition to that,*

[50] *Abzi - an indigenous food which is prepared by combining four Injera together and by using Wot in the middle*
[51] *Dabo – refer to Bread*
[52] *Shimagiles – local elders who served as mediators of disputes, divorce issues, land conflicts and others*

members of our Mahabers share the expenses of different social events together. For instance, when one member of our Michael Mahaber prepares a wedding feast to marry his/her son or daughter, all members of the Mahaber used to bring 20 Injera and one Madega[53] Tela as contributions to the wedding feast. On the other hand, when one member of our Abo Mahaber wants to construct a new house or collect his/her harvest, the whole members of the Mahaber are involved in the house construction or harvest collection activities (Gundel, 22 February 2015).

Therefore, in addition to their religious functions, *Mahabers* played important roles for the betterment of social life and strengthen social cohesion among the study communities. They enabled them to feel supported and interdependent with each other during difficult and happy periods. So, all these helped them to improve their livelihoods in a better ways.

In addition to the above mentioned religious *Mahabers*, the following types of *Mahabers* also exist in the study communities.

Yezemed Mahaber[54]

Yezemed Mahaber is one form of *Mahaber* which is established by blood relatives, fictive families and marriage relatives. According to KI-18, *Yezemed Mahaber* has no geographical boundary limits and all blood, fictive and marriage relatives from different areas can involve or participate in the *Mahaber*. Besides, this *Mahaber* holds every year in different *Kebeles* and *Sub-Kebeles* on a certain specific day which is selected by the whole members through consensus. In the day of the *Mahaber*, the host *Kebele* members of the *Mahaber* bring food (*Injera* and *Wot*) and drink (*Tela*) in the area where the *Mahaber* takes place.

Furthermore, as pointed out by FGD-3 discussants, the major function of this *Mahaber* is to introduce the sons and daughters of the whole member relatives each other and to increase social solidarity among them. Besides, it enables them to help each other in times of difficult situations and joyful events. For instance, if one member of the *Mahaber* faces a problem to plow his/her farmland due to the death of farming oxen or horses, members of this *Mahaber* are responsible to

[53] *Madega – a traditional medium sized pot which is made from clay*
[54] *Yezemed Mahaber – a type of Mahaber formed by blood relatives, fictive groups and marriage relatives*

give oxen or help him/her by doing the required activities. In addition to that, its members are also helping each other by exchanging agricultural equipments and products, by lending and borrowing money among themselves, by working together during house constructions, harvest cutting and collections and other activities. Therefore, all these reflect the socio-economic values (such as strong social interaction, family bondage, and mutual support) of *Yezemed Mahaber* among relatives.

Yeferesegna Mahaber[55]

This type of *Mahaber* is formed by people who have a riding horse in the study communities. As I observed in the field, this *Mahaber* exists in both study *Kebeles* and each *Kebele* celebrates it in every month as a commemoration of St. Gorge. During the day of the *Mahaber*, its members gather together inside the local church compound and they celebrate the *Mahaber* by eating *Abzi* and drinking *Tela*. Due to the inclusion of most riding horse owners of the *Kebele* into one *Mahaber*, the number of members in the *Mahaber* is a lot and every month, the *Mahaber* executive committee members assign three or more members to prepare and serve the necessary food and drink for the members.

According to KI-7 and FGD-4 discussants, *Yeferesegna Mahaber* is open only for individuals who have a riding horse. Besides, the *Mahaber* is only attended by males and each members of the *Mahaber* are expected to ride the horse during the respective *Kebele's* annual holidays and wedding and funeral ceremonies of the members. So, in these cases, members are expected to decorate and use their horses to make the ceremony or holiday more attractive for the general population. In addition to that, its socio-economic importance for the members was more elaborated by KI-13 as follows:

> *I am a member of our Kebele's Yeferesegna Mahaber for the last 7 years. I and all other members of the Mahaber have a riding horse. Often, some members use their riding horses to plow their farmlands and transport agricultural products into the market. But most of us did not use the riding horses to other activities except for riding purpose. The primary function of this Mahaber is to make the wedding and funeral ceremonies of the members attractive by riding decorated horses. For instance, when*

[55] *Yeferesegna Mahaber –a form of Mahaber established by riding horse owner of the Kebele*

one member loses his family member or close relative through death, we go to the funeral ceremony by riding our decorated horses and share the grief of the victim person together. In addition to that, our Mahaber collects 5 birr every month from all members and use the money to support and console its members when they have a funeral ceremony. But, in other situations like theft, fire, crop destruction, illness and other serious problems, the Mahaber also provide free interest credit service, material and labor support and other assistances for its members (Gundel, 27 March 2015).

Furthermore, as stated by KI-16, the *Mahaber* also helps the member by postponing the turn of his *Tsewa*[56] to another time if he faces serious social or economic problems. For instance, if one member loses his harvest by accidental problems and when his turn of celebrating the *Mahaber* is approaching, the *Mahabe*r executive committee members postpones his turn to another time and assists him by credit, labor or material to recover from the problem. So, this helped them a lot to improve their livelihood situations in a better ways.

Yebuna Mahaber[57]

As compared with other *Mahabers, Yebuna Mahaber* is the recent and new form of *Mahaber* in the study area. In the field, I observed that this *Mahaber* is established by women members of the study communities. Most of the time, the *Mahaber* includes 8-14 woman members. They meet every Sunday on the house of one woman and the host woman prepares a coffee ceremony, *Abzi* and *Tela* for the members. In the day of the *Mahaber,* in line with the eating and drinking ceremony, all members also perform an activity of *Tett Fetela*[58] for producing raw materials to be used by weavers to make traditional clothes.

As pointed out by KI-8, the basic intention of the *Mahaber* is to strengthen social relationships and mutual support among women and to perform activities quickly and easily through group involvement. So, every Sunday members of the *Mahaber* collect together in the houses of each members turn by turn and they perform the group task of *Tett Fetela*. Besides, by performing the

[56] *Tsewa – is the turn of an individual to celebrate the Mahaber by providing food and drink for its members*
[57] *Yebuna Mahaber – a form of Mahaber established by women and celebrated every week with their houses turn by turn.*
[58] *Tett Fetela – Spinning cotton activity performed by Yebuna Mahaber members to prepare a raw material for making traditional clothes.*

activity of *Tett Fetela*, they also discuss about different social, economic, environmental and other issues and personal experiences on various life aspects. After they finished the *Tett Fetela* activity, they prepare a lottery and give the prepared *Tett* to the winner woman.

Besides, based on FGD-2 discussants, the *Mahaber* created a strong bond and interdependence among its members. They help each other during various circumstances. For example, when one member has a wedding ceremony or a huge *Mahaber* preparation, members of this *Mahaber* are involved in the preparatory activities by contributing their materials and labor. In addition to that, they also help each other during difficult situations like family illness, death, crop failure and others. Therefore, all these established strong social relationships and mutual support among its members.

Yetsege Mahaber[59]

It is a different form of *Mahaber,* which is established by local community members for two months every year from mid-September to mid-November. It has a religious basis and celebrated every week on a common and central place for all members. According to KI-17*, Yetsege Mahaber* is a short-term *Mahaber* celebrated for 8 weeks every year from mid-September to mid-November. During this time, members of the *Mahaber* gather in a common place every Sunday and celebrate it by using food *(Abzi)* and drink *(Tela)*. Unlike the other *Mahabers*, in this *Mahaber* children of the members also participate in the ceremony. Its members are grouped into eight groups with a member of two or three individuals and every week one group presents and serves the necessary food and drink for the whole members turn by turn. But, sometimes due to the involvement of many members in this *Mahaber*, it is difficult to finish it within 8 weeks and it will extend into ten weeks or beyond.

As pointed out by FGD-4 discussants, the basic function of this *Mahaber* is to create a strong social relationship and cohesion among its members. It also enables its members to discuss and state solutions about different social issues like security problems, crop and cattle diseases, rainfall variability, organic fertilizer preparation, next season farming preferences and others. In addition to that, members also have a responsibility to support the weak/elderly and poor

[59] *Yetsege Mahaber-a type of Mahaber formed by individuals for two months (between mid-September to mid-November) and celebrated every week during this periods.*

members of the *Mahaber* during difficult circumstances and accidental occasions. So, this *Mahaber* contributed a lot to the betterment of its member's livelihoods.

Senbete[60]

Senbete is another form of *Mahaber* which is celebrated by its members every Sunday. It is formed by *Sub-Kebele (hereafter Got)* members and celebrated every Sunday inside the nearby church compound. As I observed in the field, three or four members of the *Mahaber* presented and served *Abzi* and *Tela* every Sunday for the members and the whole members were gathered together within the church compound and celebrated the *Mahaber* by eating and drinking. Besides, according to KI-8, this *Mahaber* is celebrated by the whole *Got* male and female members. Due to the involvement of the entire *Got* members and the discontinuity of the *Mahaber* from March to October, one member waits for a year or more to celebrate or to present and serve the food and drink to the *Mahaber* members. Furthermore, based on the explanations of FGD-4 discussants, the *Mahaber* has its own rules and regulations to guide its members' activities. For instance, all members are expected to attend the *Mahaber* every week and absence without permission for four weeks leads to exclusion from the *Mahaber.* In addition to that, it has a rule of helping the poor and weak/elderly members during the time of accidental problems and difficult life situations.

Senbete has a great significance for strengthening community members' socio-economic relationships and creating mutual interdependence among themselves. As clarified by KI-4, the *Mahaber* helps its members when they face various social problems like illness, death, fire, theft and others. That means, when members of the *Mahaber* are affected by a serious disease or lost their family member through death, the *Mahaber* helps them by giving a certain amount of money for treatment or share their grief and the *Mahaber* also assists the diseased person's family members by plowing their land, by following and collecting their harvests and others. Therefore, *Senbete* enabled its members to improve their livelihoods through mutual support among its members.

[60] *Senbete- a voluntary weekly (on Sundays) religious as well as social gatherings with in a church compound and members take turns providing food and drinks (Guday 2005:212).*

5.1.2. Work Group Organizations

5.1.2.1. *Wonfel*[61]

Wonfel is an arrangement of agricultural work groups in rural Ethiopia that create structures for pooling the labor of a number of people from an area to assist one or more individuals with building a house, cultivating a large piece of land, or plowing, harvesting crops, clearing forests for plowing and similar tasks through promises of future reciprocity among member participants (Getachew, 1998). *Wonfel* is a form of festive labor, where a person will provide food and drink for a large work party in order to carry out a time-sensitive agricultural task and others. This informal institution contributes a lot to the group like manpower and traction force and mobilizing to the community (Kiros, 2012).

As I observed in the field, the study community members work together during harvest cutting and collection, house construction, fence construction, wedding preparation and other activities. They helped each other in various difficult and good situations. Besides, according to KI-30 and FGD-2 discussants, *Wonfel* groups are formed by relatives, fictive groups or neighbor members of the study communities. They organized the group on the assumption that, working together is more effective and productive than working alone. So, in the study area people organized themselves into *Wonfel* Groups and in most occasions they work together to finish the work quickly and easily. The importance of *Wonfel* groups was more elaborated by KI-7 as follows:

> *Wonfel is the common form of performing activities in group in our community. I and my neighbors have a Wonfel group which consists of 12 household heads. We work together as a group in different circumstances. For instance, all members of the group are involved in the cutting and collection activities of my harvest and I also participate in the same activities of the group members. Besides, I also get involved in other activities of my group members such as house and fence construction, preparation of wedding feasts, funeral ceremony, organic fertilizer and the like and they also help me when I want to do the same.*

[61] *Wonfel - a mutual labor agreement whereby two or more individuals work together on each other's plots for an equal amount of time (Guday 2005:2013)*

By working together as a Wonfel group, we reduced the effects of the current environmental stresses more easily and efficiently. That means, working together enabled us to easily cope up with the effects of unpredictable rainfall on harvest gathering activities, on house construction and wedding celebration activities and others. So, doing activities as a team helped us to carry out the agricultural activities at the right time and in the right ways. Therefore, Wonfel is the most common form of livelihood strategy in our community (Gundel, 18 February 2015).

Nowadays, the contributions of *Wonfel* groups to the betterment of livelihoods are recognized by local government officials. As pointed out by KI-24, the traditional form of working together method which is called *Wonfel* is currently developed into a more formal and recognized systems of working units in the name of development group (*Yelemat Buden*) and work group (*Yesera Buden*). But, still the traditional and indigenous forms of *Wonfel* groups are well-functioning in the study communities.

Furthermore, as elaborated by KI-9, *Wonfel* groups give special emphasis for helping the poor and weak/elderly members of the community. If there is an accidental or unpredictable rain in the area, *Wonfel* groups give priority to collect the harvests of the weak and poor members of the groups and other members of the community outside the groups. In addition to that, the groups also helped the weak and poor members of the community by plowing their farmlands, by constructing their houses, by working in their wedding preparations and others.

The importance of *Wonfel* groups to livelihoods in the study area was further clarified by the following case as follows:

Case Study 5: The Contributions of Wonfel Group to Livelihoods

W/ro Teguaded (45 years old) is living in Gundel Kebele. She has 2 daughters from her first husband and after she divorced from him, she married another person and she got 2 sons and 2 daughters from her second husband. But, due to the death of her second husband 5 years ago through accident, now she is living with her 4 children. But the other 2 daughters are living by themselves with their husbands.

She has 1.5 hectare (6 Qada) of land for cultivation and animal grazing. Before his death, her husband was responsible to cultivate the agricultural land and to tend the cattle. But, after his death, the family faced a serious shortage of male labor for cultivating the farmlands and effectively collecting the harvests when there was unanticipated rain in the area. But, at that time, the neighbors Wonfel group members helped her by collecting her harvests.

Now, she is a member of the neighbors' Wonfel group and she sends her son and daughters when there is an activity which is performed by group members. On the other hand, when she needs the help of the group during farmland plowing, harvest cutting and collection, house construction and others, the whole members of the group will be involved in these activities. Therefore, by working together with her neighbors, she could manipulate the maximum potential of her farmland and solve the labor problems of her family in a better ways.

Interview with W/ro Teguaded (pseudo name) in Gundel Kebele, 06 April 2015

In general, working together as a team is very important to the livelihoods of the study communities because it helps them to accomplish agricultural and other activities together and to reduce the effects of the current environmental stresses in a better ways. Besides, it is very important to reduce the labor problems of many households.

5.1.2.2. Hura[62] System

Hura is a system of rehabilitating agricultural lands by using animal dung. It is an indigenous method of soil rehabilitation in the study area. It is performed by gathering the cattle of the neighbors together and keeps them on the grazing and farmlands of one individual for 5 to 7 nights. After that, they shift the cattle for another week to the land of another person and by doing so, the local community members treated or rehabilitated their lands very well. According to KI-13, *Hura* is an activity which is performed by cattle owner members of the study communities during the *Bega* (dry) season of every year. During the dry season, when the harvests are fully collected and the farmlands and grazing lands are free, they keep their cattle

[62] *Hura – an activity of land rehabilitation by using cattle dung and by keeping the cattle of the neighbors together for some nights on the farmland of each participant.*

for 5 nights on the land of one person and they continue this activity to the land of the whole participants.

Besides, as pointed out by KI-5 and FGD-2 discussants, *Hura* is an important system to rehabilitate soil fertility and productive capacity of the farmlands. During the rainy season they prepare a house to their cattle and keep them on the house during the nights. But, during the dry season, *Hura* groups keep their cattle in the farming and grazing lands together during the night and used their dung to improve the fertility and productivity of their lands. By using this system, within 5 to 7 days, one person covers his/her entire farm and grazing lands by using cattle dung and this makes the land more mature, productive and durable.

Furthermore, as elaborated by KI-6, the importance of cattle is not only restricted to income generation in the area. The dung of the cattle also helped them to improve the productivity and fertility of agricultural lands. Apart from the preparation of organic fertilizer (Compost) by using animal dung and other materials, they also implement *Hura* to recover the eroded soil fertility due to flooding, deforestation, soil erosion and others. In addition to that, *Hura* helped them a lot to reduce the expenses of chemical fertilizers.

Generally, *Hura* is the oldest form of soil rehabilitation mechanism in the study communities. It is a costless and problem free strategy of soil rehabilitation in the area. It enabled the study communities to use their cattle dung to recover the fertility and productivity of their farm and grazing lands for a long period of time.

5.1.2.3. Temado[63]

Temado is a mutual assistance mechanism between the weak and poor members on the one side and strong and rich members of the communities on the other side. Strong and rich members cultivate the farmlands of poor and weak individuals by using their own agricultural equipments and seeds and finally they share the outputs equally. As I observed in the field, many farmers in the study area cultivate the farmlands of weak and poor members through *Temado*. They perform

[63] *Temado - a system of mutual assistance by which an individual cultivates the land of another person by using his own agricultural equipments and raw materials based on the principle of equal sharing of the outputs*.

the whole agricultural activities by themselves and when the crop harvested, they divide the yield equally and give the half yield for the owners of the lands.

According to KI-1, *Temado* is an important mechanism of land expansion for many farmers in the study area. Nowadays, due to the rapid increment of population size in the area, it is very difficult to get enough land for cultivation. So, many people did not exploit their maximum potential in the farming activities. Even though their capital and labor potential is enough to cultivate a large farmland, due to the shortage of arable land, actually they cultivate a small amount of land. But some of them found a solution for this problem by cultivating the lands of poor and weak members of the community based on the principles of *Temado* or equal sharing of the outputs. So, by accepting the rule of equal sharing most weak and poor individuals in the study communities give their farmlands for the strong members for one season or more. This, in turn, enabled many strong and capable farmers to cultivate a large amount of farmland every season and collect surplus products for market consumption.

Temado system benefits both parties in the process. First, the owners of the farmland could not cultivate the farmland by themselves due to the problems of agricultural equipments, physical incapability, shortage of labor and others. So, by providing the farmland for the strong and capable farmers through *Temado*, they get half of the outputs from their land without exerting any effort on the production process. Second, people who cultivate the farmlands of the weak and poor farmers of the communities have a capacity and enough agricultural equipment to cultivate large farmlands. But due to the shortage of arable land, they could not exploit their maximum potentials. So, *Temado* enables them to get additional land for production and to use their maximum potential in the production processes. Therefore, *Temado* makes both groups happy and beneficial from the process and makes them mutually interdependent.

In addition to the agricultural lands, the study communities also implement the *Temado* system for animals. Some people provide sheep, goats or cattle for other persons through *Temado*. That means, some people have the capacity to buy cattle, goats and/or sheep and a problem of grazing lands or/and cattle keepers. On the other hand, some others have a large grazing lands and better cattle keepers but also a problem of money to buy enough cattle, sheep or/and goats. So, in this case, both parties agreed to solve the problems of each other through mutual support and equal

benefit. Some bought cattle, goats and/or sheep and give them for others who want tending them for mutual benefit. Therefore, all the products of the cattle, sheep and goats will be divided equally for both parties.

The importance of *Temado* system to livelihood was more elaborated by KI-2 as follows:

> *Temado enabled many adults in our community to cultivate the farmlands of many weak, poor or widow farmers. Besides, this helped me to farm additional lands and produce additional outputs. For instance, I have only 2 Qada (0.5 hectare) of land for cultivation. But, I have the capacity to cultivate 8 Qada (2 hectare) of land in one production season because I have enough agricultural equipments and physical strength to do so. Therefore, I asked those people who have a large farmland but also a problem to cultivate it by themselves due to capacity, material, money or other problems. By doing so, now I got 4 Qada (1 hectare) of land from 2 persons and I cultivated it by using my own seeds and agricultural equipments. After harvesting the crops, I give the half product for the land owners and I use the remaining half for myself. In addition to that, I also got 3 sheep from one person to develop and benefit from their output equally with him. So, Temado helped persons like me who have labor and capital, but insufficient land on the one hand and persons who have a large amount of land but physically unable to cultivate it on the other hand. This, in turn, helped us a lot to improve our livelihoods through additional income (Gundel, 12 February 2015).*

Furthermore, *Temado* system is an essential livelihood strategy to the study communities. Most people understood that, the major factors of low productivity of the lands are soil erosion, flooding, rainfall variability others. So, in order to cope up with such problems, increasing farmland size is one important mechanism and most of them strive to expand their farmlands through the system of *Temado*. Besides, those women who lost their husbands through death and prison, those individuals who lost their labor due to age or accident, those persons who have no capable sons to assist them in the agricultural activities and others give their farmlands to other individuals through *Temado* and use the half benefit. This was better clarified by the next case from *Achayta Kebele as follows:*

Case Study 6: Temado as a Livelihood Strategy

W/ro Asres (42 years old) is living in Achayta Kebele with her two daughters. Her husband is in prison for the last 6 years by killing his brother due to land inheritance related issues. She has 5 Qada (1.25 hectare) of land for farming and grazing. When her husband got imprisoned 6 years ago, she faced a huge problem of plowing and cultivating the farmland. Even, her and her husband's relatives ignored her and stopped helping her due to the crimes her husband committed on his brother.

To survive in such difficult circumstances, she provided the arable land to the neighboring strong farmer through Temado. After that, she sold the plowing oxen and used the money to her family's immediate consumption and to start a new economic activity called distilling Arakie. Then, with the help of her daughters, now she distills Arakie two times in a week and uses its byproducts for cattle consumption. Therefore, by receiving half of the products of her farmland through Temado and by using the outputs of the cattle and the profits of her new economic activity, now she is able to support her family in a better ways.

Interview with W/ro Asres (pseudo name) in Achayta kebele, 18 March 2015

To sum up, *Temado* system is an important livelihood strategy to the study communities and it helped them to mutually support themselves by exchanging labor and capital on the one side and land on the other side. Besides, it enabled the weak and poor members of the community to use their lands effectively without exerting a little effort. In addition to that, it also enabled the young and landless members of the community to cultivate a certain amount of land through the principle of equal benefit.

5.1.2.4. Kenja[64]

Kenja is an informal interdependence between two farmers in the study communities by exchanging their farming ox or horse to plow their lands. As I observed in the field, many people have only one ox or horse and they cannot cultivate the land by using one ox or horse. So, two farmers who have only one ox or horse assisted one another by giving and taking their ox or horse during plowing seasons. As pointed out by KI-15, *Kenja* system is a common practice in the area since it is performed on the principle of balanced reciprocity. That means, if one farmer wants to plow his or her land, the other farmer gives his or her ox or horse for him or her and vice-versa.

Besides, according to FGD-3 discussants, *Kenja* system helped the poor members of the local communities to use their ox or horse effectively by combining with other farmer's ox or horse. As stated by one FGD-3 discussant, nowadays due to the rapid increment of population in the area, the farmland size of individuals decreased dramatically. So, as compared with the previous periods, currently the arable and grazing land size owned by many people is very small. In this case, it is difficult to own two oxen or horses for one farmer. Because, on the one hand, due to the small size of the grazing land, it is difficult to support two oxen or horses at a time in the grazing land and on the other hand, due to the small size of the farmland, having two plowing oxen or horses is wastage. That means, if someone has two oxen or horses and a small amount of farmland, the oxen or horses remain idle after they finished the plowing of this small plot of land. Therefore, in order to use their small grazing land and their plowing ox or horse effectively, most farmers prefer to have only one plowing ox or horse and use it by combining with the other farmer's ox or horse.

The contributions of the *Kenja* System to livelihoods were further elaborated by KI-4 as follows:

> *Nowadays, the activity of giving and taking plowing ox or horse with the neighbors or relatives gain much recognition by our community members. For instance, I have 3 Qada (0.75 hectare) of land for cultivation and animal grazing. The grazing land cannot support more that some sheep and two caws. So, I have only one horse for*

[64] *Kenja - Oxen pairing in which poor farmers system of uniting their oxen in order to plow their farm land turn by turn (Mamo, 2013:23).*

plowing and when I want to plow my farmland I used to borrow the ox of my neighbor and I give my horse for him when he wants to plow his farmland. This system helped me and my neighbor to use our ox and horse on effective and efficient ways and to preserve the available small grazing land for most useful cattle and sheep.

In addition to that, I preferred to have a horse over ox for plowing due to the horse's function to other services. For instance, apart from plowing the farmlands, horses are also useful to transport agricultural products to market, grinding mills and other areas, to transport humans from place to place and for other purposes.

Therefore, Kenja system is an important livelihood strategy to our community members. It made the agricultural activities of poor members simple by enabling them to help each other during the plowing seasons. Without it, it is very difficult to use the available ox or horse and small size farm and grazing lands efficiently and effectively (Achayta, January 2015)

5.2. Summary of Key Findings and Discussion

In the study communities, there are different community based institutions which played important roles for the betterment of social life. According to Agedew and Isabel (2002), social institutions improve individuals or groups' ability to develop their productive, social, cultural and organizational capacity to improve their living conditions and to achieve sustainable problem solving capacity. They also meet psychological needs for social acceptance and belongingness, friendship and security. Community based institutions include social and religious associations and work group organizations.

Social and religious associations are established by the study communities to accomplish a certain social and religious functions. These associations include *Eqqubs, Iddirs* and different *Mahabers.* They improved the study communities' economic and social capacities to solve various socio-cultural and economic problems. For instance, *Eqqubs* helped them to save some money and to get financial capital for various expenses such as to buy chemical fertilizer and quality seeds, to cover their family demands, to start or expand farming or off-farming economic

activities and others. Besides, *Iddirs* are organized by the study communities to ease the burial difficulty of a family by raising contingency funds through a monthly collection. In addition to that, they are also involved in addressing other socio-economic problems of its members. Moreover, there are different types of *Mahabers* in the study area. These include religious *Mahabers*, kinship *Mahabers*, friendship *Mahabers* and others. These *Mahabers* enabled their members to help each other during difficult and good situations. Therefore, social and religious associations improve the livelihoods of the study communities through financial, labor, material, psychological and other supports.

Work group organizations are important collaborative work teams in the study communities and they are organized by themselves to do agricultural and other activities together. These include *Wonfel, Hura, Kenja* and *Temado*. *Wonfel* helped the study communities to work together during different occasions such as harvest collection, house construction, wedding ceremony preparation and others. Besides, *Hura* enabled the study communities to improve their farming and grazing lands fertility by using their cattle dung. They gather their cattle together during the nights of the dry season on the farm and grazing lands of each member and they use the dung to rehabilitate the fertility of the eroded soil.

Moreover, *Kenja* enabled the study communities to share their plowing equipments to perform their agricultural activities. Two farmers exchange their ox or horses to plow their lands interchangeability. This, in turn, helped them to use their plowing ox or horse effectively. Furthermore, *Temado* helped the weak and poor members and the strong and landless members of the study communities a lot. Without exerting any effort, weak and poor individuals get half products of their land by giving it to the strong and landless persons through *Temado*. In general, work group organizations helped the study communities' to improve their livelihoods.

Chapter Six

Constraints to Implement Livelihood Strategies

This chapter attempted to explore the major constraints that impede the effective implementation of various livelihood strategies among the study agricultural communities in Sekela *Woreda*, the study area. This include: economic, socio-cultural, and institutional constraints, discussed below.

6.1. Economic Constraints

Economic constraints are the most challenging problems of livelihoods in the study communities. In the field, I observed that, most of the study community members use traditional and old technologies due to the problem of financial capital. In this regard what Degefa (2002) wrote about economic constraints in Oromiya Zone holds true for this study area. "Economic constraints are the main bottlenecks to farmers against promoting agricultural developments. They made most farmers subsistence cultivators with no surplus production at all and they also limited farmer's capacity to diversify their cash income through employment in off-farming or non-farming activities. Besides, capital constraints stick farmers to traditional farming methods and unable them to modernize their agriculture" (Degefa, 2002:76).

According to FGD-4 discussants and KI-12, financial constraints restricted the study communities from modernizing their agricultural activities and starting new off-farming economic activities. So, most of them depends on small scale farming and produce only for household consumptions. In addition to that, due to capital problems, some farmers rented their land to other farmers for 1 year to 25 years and after they finished the money obtained from the rented land, many farmers face serious problems to survive.

Moreover, economic constraints prevented the study communities from utilizing the available resources efficiently and effectively. As explained by KI-19, many farmers in the community did not have all the necessary agricultural equipments to cultivate their farmlands. So, some of them try to either borrow the money to buy the necessary agricultural raw materials or give their farmlands to other farmers on the basis of *Temado* system. This, in turn, forced them to sell half

or more of their products to cover the money borrowed to buy the agricultural raw materials or reduced the output quantity by half. The impacts of financial constraints on livelihoods are more elaborated by KI-13 as follows:

> *Before 20 and 30 years, agricultural activities were very simple, least cost and we were producing a large amount of products from a small land. But, due to the current environmental changes and its subsequent effects on the land, nowadays, it is very difficult to produce agricultural products easily. Rather, the current production system requires the usage of organic and chemical fertilizers, excessive follow ups, quality seeds, modern farming technologies and others. But, all these resources require a big sum of money and due to financial problems, we did not use all the necessary raw materials and modern technologies to produce agricultural products. Rather, most of us use traditional farming technologies and low quality seeds and this, in turn, reduces agricultural productivity and the quality of our livelihoods (Gundel, 27 March 2015).*

On the other hand, economic constraints limited the study communities' capacity to buy new agricultural technologies like chemical fertilizers, rope and motor pumps, quality seeds and others. Nowadays, modern technologies enable people to protect the soil from erosion, to improve the land productivity, to generate water for household consumption and crop production, to improve the milk production of indigenous caws and others. But, economic problems prevented the study communities from using such technologies in the agricultural production systems. According to KI-18, the costs of modern agricultural technologies such as chemical fertilizers, quality and hybrid seeds, motor pumps, foreign cattle species and others are very expensive for them. So, due to the financial constraints, most of them preferred to use the traditional and least cost agricultural technologies and this, in turn, made the activities of improving their life situations very difficult to the study communities.

In general, economic constraints prevented the study communities from using their full potential and knowledge to enhance their livelihoods. They restricted them on the traditional and less productive technologies. Because, modern agricultural technologies require more money as compared with the traditional ones and due to their financial problems, many people cannot

afford to use new technological inputs. Besides, capital constraints also made the study communities excessively dependent on the agricultural activities only due to the lack of initial capital to start additional non-farming or off-farming economic activities. Therefore, economic constraints posed a serious challenge to improve the livelihoods of the study communities.

6.2. Socio-Cultural Constraints

In the field, I observed that some people are involved in more than 3 *Mahabers.* Even if *Mahabers* contribute a significant role for the betterment of the study communities' livelihoods, but some individuals in the study area involved in many Mahabers and they lose most of their agricultural products by preparing feasts. Besides, there are many holidays in the communities and in these days many people passed their time by gathering together and drinking *Arakie* and *Tela* in the nearby small towns. In addition to that, the work habit of some people was weak. So, after finishing their agricultural activities, some of them passed the days by moving here and there. Even, some of them were not interested to participate in other non-farming or off-farming economic activities on their free time to support their livelihoods with additional income. Therefore, all these and other socio-cultural traditions slowed the improvement of the study communities' livelihoods and the effective implementation of different livelihood strategies.

As pointed out by one discussant from FGD-1, there is a negative traditional belief system called inferiority complex in the study communities. He stated that as follows in his own words:

> *የኛን ማህበረሰብ ወደ ኋላ ካስቀሩት አስተሳሰቦች አንዱ ከማን አንሼ የሚለው ፈሊጥ ነው። ምንም እንኳን ማህበራት የራሳቸው ጥቅም ቢኖራቸውም ብዙዎቻችን ግን ከጎረቤትና ከሰፈር ሰው ላለመለየት ሰንል ያለሃቅማችን ብዙ ማህበራት እንገባለን። ከዚያም በሰንት ልፋት ያጠራቀምነውን ሃብት ማህበር በማውጣት እንጨርሳለን። አልፎ ተርፎም ከሰው ሰርግ እየሄድኩ ስበላ ከርሜ እንዴት እኔ ልጆን ያለ ሰርግ እድራለሁ በማለት የራሳችንን ሃብት ጨርሰን ለማንወጣው ብድር ጭምር እንዳረጋለን። በዚህም የተነሳ እስከ ብዙ ጊዜ ድረስ የሰው እዳ ለመመለስ ሰንል እራሳችንን እና ቤተሰቦቻችንን ለከፍተኛ ችግር እናጋልጣለን። ይህ ደግሞ ከወቅቱ አስቸጋሪ የተፈጥሮ ሁኔታ ጋር ተጨምሮ ነገሩን የበለጠ አስከፊ አድርጎብናል።*

This is literally translated in to English language as follows:

> *The belief of inferiority complex is the one among the various factors which made our community underdeveloped. Even though, Mahabers have their own important functions, most of us involve in many Mahabers not to separate from our neighbors and community members, without considering our capacity. After that, we lost our expensive wealth by preparing Mahaber feasts. Furthermore, most of us use our wealth or borrow money from other persons to prepare a wedding ceremony for our children. This is because, we believed that, it is unethical and shameful to married our children without preparing a wedding feast after we attended the wedding ceremony of other persons. Finally, in order to return the borrowed money, we sell our cattle and agricultural products and this, in turn, expose our families to serious problems for a long period of time. So, with the combination of the current changing environmental conditions, this belief system made our life situation very difficult to accommodate (Gundel, 14 February 2015).*

Besides, the study communities also have a tradition of depending on rain fed agricultural activities. As pointed out by KI-14, many farmers cultivate their farmland once in a year by using the rain water. But, nowadays, due to the unpredictable and variable nature of rainfall patterns, the tradition of depending on rain fed agriculture did not enabled them to produce enough agricultural products and to support their livelihoods in a better ways. In addition to that, many people prepare feasts to different religious festivals like *Arba, Kirestena*[65], annual Saints or Angeles days and others. So, all these ceremonies restricted the study communities' capacities to improve their livelihoods and to secure their food requirements.

Furthermore, many people in the study area believe in different traditional belief systems. According to KI-16, some people go to *Debtera* or *Tenkuay*[66] houses when they face a certain economic, social or health problems, when they want to attack other individuals, when they want to accumulate wealth without much effort and other issues. Even if, almost all of the study

[65] *Kirestena – it is a religious ceremony which is celebrated on the 40th birthday of male and 80th birthday of female children and it gives a full religious personality for children*
[66] *Tenkuay – a person with a bad sprit and mostly used such sprit to attack another individuals*

community members are orthodox Christians, many of them are also believers in other traditional belief systems. This is more elaborated by KI-17 as follows:

> *“አብዛኞቻችን የሁለት አምላክ ተገዥዎች ነን። ጥዋት ቤተ ክርስቲያን ተሳልመን ከሰዓት በየደብተራውና በየጠንቋዩ ቤት እንውላለን።”*

This is literally translated into English language as follows:

> *Most of us are governed by two Gods. We go to church in the morning and the house of Debtera and Tenkuay in the afternoon (Achayta, 13 March 2015).*

Due to this, some people lose their time by perform traditional belief systems and by fulfill the orders of local *Debtera* or *Tenkuay*. Besides, most of the time, *Debteras* or *Tenkuays* direct the people towards a wrong direction and cause a serious conflict between the study community members. Even, sometimes, they are the causes for individual deaths and material destructions in the area. Therefore, some traditional belief systems affect the study communities’ social life and the effectiveness of their livelihood strategies.

On the other hand, according to KI-23, the study communities are less open to new things and they are highly resistant to accept and use new agricultural technologies for the first time. They believed that, new farming technologies may affect their lands’ productivity, reduce the qualities of productions, require more money and others. For instance, for a long period of time, many people resisted to accept the importance of trench construction on their farmland as a means of preventing soil erosion and they did not used the method until recent time. So, sometimes they resist to accept new methods and technologies quickly and this, in turn, reduced the productivity of their agricultural activities and slowed the improvement of their life situations.

In general, these and other socio-cultural variables affect the betterment of the study communities’ livelihoods and the effectiveness of different livelihood strategies in the area. Some people destroy the outputs they produce through difficult situations easily by celebrating different traditional ceremonies and by preparing feasts. Furthermore, due to the weak work habit, the negative impacts of traditional belief systems, the existence of so many holidays, and other factors, it was very difficult to implement various livelihood strategies effectively and to improve the life conditions of many people in the area.

6.3. Infrastructural Constraints

Infrastructures have a great role for any society's social, cultural, economic, political and other developments. Infrastructures include transportation, communication, electricity, pure water, market, health and others. As I observed in the field, the infrastructural development of the study area was at its lower stage. There was a problem of transportation, modern communication systems, assessing of electricity and market, timely information and pure water supply in the study area. There was also a problem of standardized roads in the area which is suitable for cars and most of the time people use their foot to move within the *Kebele* and the *Woreda*. Besides, in most villages of the study area there was no mobile network and other modern communication facilities such as internet service, post office and others.

In addition to that, access of electricity was also very limited in the urban centers of the *Woreda* and most rural *Kebeles* did not have electricity service. People used kerosene to generate light in the night and firewood to prepare their food. Furthermore, there were no private water pumps in the study area and most people used communal water pumps as a source of drinking water. But, they used river water to wash their clothes, to drink their cattle and to perform other household activities. Therefore, based on my observation in the field, infrastructures were not well developed in the study area and this, in turn, affected the effective implementation of different livelihood strategies and the improvement of life situations in the area.

Infrastructural constraints highly restricted the effectiveness of various livelihood strategies in the study communities. This was more elaborated by KI-8 as follows:

> *The problem of standardized road and transportation service hindered our community from accessing markets, health centers, schools and others easily. Our children are forced to move 2 hours on foot to attain secondary school education due to the unavailability of transportation service in the area. Besides, there is one health post (Tena Kela) in the Kebele and when people affected by a serious or harmful disease, it is very difficult to get solution in the health post and due to the problem of modern transportation services, some people lost their life before reaching into better health centers. In addition to that, the unavailability of electricity and telecommunication service is also restricted us to depend only with*

some livelihood strategies or alternatives. For instance, we used firewood to cook our food and to generate light in the night. Therefore, the underdevelopments of infrastructural facilities in our communities' hampered the effectiveness of various livelihood strategies (Gundel, 20 February 2015).

Furthermore, according to KI-16 and Discussants of FGD-4, the current environmental stresses caused unexpected health problems on humans, animals and harvests. So, to cope up with such problems, better health centers are required from the area. But, the unavailability of better health centers in the area made the effects of environmental changes more severe.

On the other hand, as I observed in the field, the study communities have their own ways of transmitting essential information from one area to another. Most of the time, the local administrators, local health and agricultural experts, *Woreda* officers, *Woreda* officials and other persons used the church meetings of every Sunday to transmit important messages to the whole community members. Besides, they used *Mahabers, Iddirs* and other associations to transfer information to the community members. But, the information transmission speed was very slow and its area coverage was also very limited.

According to discussants of FGD-1 and KI-6 & 17, local information transmitted within the study area easily and effectively. But, national and international information such as daily resource and output prices, daily weather condition predictions, daily world situations and others are hardly reached the study area. So, some people affected highly by the recurrent variability of resource and output prices, variable and unpredictable weather conditions, daily flexible national and world market situations and other events. Besides, due to the absence of daily marketing and weather forecasting information, sometimes the study community members sold their products in a low price and bought raw materials in a high cost and they lost a large amount of agricultural products by unexpected rainfall.

Furthermore, as pointed out by KI-11, the study communities suffered a lot due to the absence of modern information transmission methods. In the study area, only some people have radio or tape recorder and there was on television or internet Service due to the unavailability of electricity and network connection. Moreover, there was a limited mobile network in the study area and most people could not use mobile phone to communicate and transmit information with

others. All these constraints prevented the study communities from taking a precaution action during accidental weather changes and this, in turn, affected the livelihoods of the study communities a lot and lowered the effectiveness of different livelihood strategies.

In addition to that, the problem of available market settings and low market consumption of products in the study area exhausted the study communities by moving a long distance to find better markets. As I observed in the field, the study community members moved more than 2 hours on foot to buy and sell raw materials and agricultural products. Even, most of them moved such distance by carrying their products on their back. But, currently horse or mule *Gari*[67] started helping them by carrying their products and raw materials from the market to their home or vice versa. However, due to the long distance of the markets, most of them went to the market in the morning and returned to their houses in the evening. Besides, often the available markets could not consume the whole products presented by them and this forced them to sell their products cheaply or to return the products back to their house. So, all these situations hampered them to improve their livelihood in a better ways.

In general, infrastructural constraints such as the unavailability of secondary and higher schools, quality road and transportation services, better health centers, pure water supply, electricity and telecommunication services, modern information centers, better markets and others affected the effectiveness of different livelihood strategies and the betterment of the study communities' livelihoods.

In general, in the study communities there are different constraints which impeded them from improving their life situation in a better ways and to secure their food requirements. These include economic constraints, socio-cultural constraints and infrastructural constraints.

The study communities have a serious problem of financial capital to acquire the necessary agricultural raw materials such as chemical fertilizers, quality seeds, plowing oxen or horses, modern technologies and others. Besides, they wanted to start other off-farming economic activities such as trade, craftwork, animal fattening and others to subsidize their life. But, due to the unavailability of formal credit institutions in the study area, most people suffered a lot from

[67] *Gari-a two leg vehicle pulled by horse or mule and used for transporting materials from place to place*

the high interest rate of informal credit providers called *Arata Abedari*[68]. Sometimes, people sold their cattle, agricultural products or rented their agricultural lands to return the credit and its interest to the creditor and this, in turn, aggravated poverty and food insecurity problems and the effective implementation of various livelihood strategies.

Socio-cultural barriers impeded the effectiveness of different livelihood strategies in the study communities. Some of the study communities celebrate many *Mahabers* by using most of their agricultural products. In addition, there are so many holidays and they have weak work habits. These, in turn, negatively affected their life situations by reducing their economic capital and working time. Furthermore, infrastructural constraints were also highly affected the livelihoods of the study communities. In most parts of the study area, there was on standardized road for transportation, no network coverage for mobile and internet, no information centers, no modern market, no better health centers, no electricity service and other important facilities. These problems, in turn, made the livelihoods of the study communities less effective.

Therefore, all the concerned bodies should strive to expand credit and saving institutions and to avoid the negative impacts of illegal credit providers in the area. Because, these enable the study communities to get financial capital to expand their agricultural activities, to start new off-farming businesses, to fulfill household needs and other demands. Besides, better infrastructural development is very essential to improve the livelihood situations of the study communities. In the absence of different infrastructural facilities, avoiding poverty and securing food guaranty is very difficult. So, to make the activities of different livelihoods strategies more effective, the importance of expanding infrastructural facilities are unquestionable.

[68] *Arata Abedari – illegal individuals who give credit for the people with high interest rate and by taking strong collateral*

CHAPTER SEVEN

Summary and Conclusion

7.1. Summary of Major Findings

This study tried to explore the socio-cultural values and community based institutions and their contributions to livelihoods in the agricultural communities around the Blue Nile Basin with particular reference to Sekela *Woreda*, West Gojjam Zone of Amhara National Regional State. Based on the ethnographic data gathered through a combination of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, case studies, informal conversations and field observations, the following major findings are obtained.

The study investigated the contributions of different socio-cultural values of Gundel and Achayta agricultural communities (here after the study communities) to livelihoods and found that:

(1) Socio-cultural systems such as the value/culture of using organic fertilizer, keeping forests, helping each other, sharing resources and extended family systems have significant contributions to the betterment of the study communities' livelihoods. They helped them to protect the soil from erosion, to share agricultural equipments, to help each other in harvest collection during untimely rains, taking the ill-person into the nearby heath center by carrying on *Kareza*[69] (traditional bed), constructing houses, preparing burial places and in other social events.

(2) Traditional practices and indigenous knowledge systems have also contributed to the improvement of the study communities' livelihoods. These include crop and field rotation, off-farming activities, indigenous farming and weather forecasting techniques. All these enabled the study communities to maximize the productivity of their farmlands, to produce two or three times in a year, to increase their incomes, to improve their life situations through income diversification, to exploit the variable rainfall patterns, to rehabilitate the eroded soil fertilities and others.

[69] *Kareza-a traditional bed which is used to carry patients from house to health center and vice versa*

(3) Religious and belief systems such as *Tselote Bered, Debtera, Tsebel and Chefi* also contribute to the betterment of the study communities' life situations. More specifically, *Tselote Bered* enables the study communities to prevent the effects of high rainfall and flooding; *Debteras* used to control untimely rain during harvest collection, house construction, wedding ceremony, annual religious ceremony and others; *Tsebel* helps them to protect the harvests, cattle and humans form different diseases; and *Chefi* festival is used to make the season comfortable for cattle, humans and harvests. In general, socio-cultural systems, traditional practices and indigenous knowledge systems, religious and belief systems play important roles for the improvement of the study communities' livelihoods.

The study further explored the contributions of various social institutions to livelihoods in the study area and identified the following community based institutions used by the local people as livelihood strategies:

(1) Social and religious associations are established by the study communities to accomplish a certain social and religious functions. These associations include *Eqqubs, Iddirs* and different *Mahabers.* They improved the study communities' economic and social capacities to improve their livelihoods. *Eqqubs* helped them to save some money and to get financial capital for various expenses such as to buy chemical fertilizer and quality seeds, to cover their family expenses, to start or expand farming or off-farming economic activities and others. Besides, *Iddirs* are very important to ease the burial difficulty of a family by raising contingency funds through a monthly collection. In addition to that, they are also involved in addressing other socio-economic problems of its members. Moreover, there are different types of *Mahabers* in the study communities and these *Mahabers* enabled their members to help each other during difficult and good situations. Therefore, social and religious associations improve the study communities' livelihoods through financial, labor, material, psychological and other assistance.

(2) Work group organizations also contributed to the betterment of the study communities' livelihoods. These include *Wonfel, Hura* System, *Kenja* and *Temado*. *Wonfel* helped the study communities to work together during different occasions such as harvest collection, house construction, wedding preparation and others. Besides, *Hura* system enabled them

to improve their farming and grazing lands fertility by using their cattle dung. On the other hand, *Kenja* enabled the study communities to share their plowing equipments to perform their agricultural activities. Furthermore, *Temado* helped the weak and poor members and the strong and landless members of the study communities. Generally, work group organizations helped the study communities' to improve their life situations by enabling its members to work together during difficult situations.

Finally, the study identified the following major constraints that impede the effective implementation of various livelihood strategies in the study area:

(1) Economic constraints such as problem of financial capital to acquire the necessary agricultural raw materials like chemical fertilizers, quality seeds, plowing oxen or horses, modern technologies and others, to start other off-farming economic activities such as trading, craftwork, animal fattening and others to subsidize their life limit the study communities' capacities to implement different livelihood strategies in a better ways.

(2) Socio-cultural constraints such the local peoples' being unable to work in various holidays, extravagant behaviors, and absence of strong work habits and others affect the local peoples' livelihoods by reducing their economic capital and working time.

(3) Infrastructural constraints such as absence of standardized road for transportation, poor or absence of network coverage for mobile and internet, lack of information centers, absence of modern market, lack of health centers, absence of electricity service, and other important facilities are major constraints that impede the effective implementation of various livelihood strategies in the study area.

7.2. Concluding Remarks

Based on the above mentioned key findings, the study draws the following concluding remarks.

(1) In the study communities various socio-cultural systems, traditional practices and indigenous knowledge systems and religious and belief systems contributed to the improvement of livelihoods. So, strengthening and formally recognizing these socio-cultural values are important to eradicate poverty and to secure food requirements in the study communities.

(2) Community based institutions such as social and religious associations (*Eqqub, Iddir* and *Mahaber)* and work group organizations (*Wonfel, Temado, Hura and Kenja)* have also significant contributions to the betterment of the study communities' livelihoods. These institutions further promote social solidarity and mutual interdependence among the study community members. Therefore, the importance of these community based institutions need to be recognized and supported by local governments and different non-governmental organizations in order to exploit the maximum potentials of these institutions to improve the livelihoods of the study communities.

(3) The implementation of various livelihood strategies in the study area was affected by different constraints such as economic, socio-cultural and institutional constraints. These constraints are found to be major obstacles that require solution to implement different livelihood strategies in a better ways. Better life situation requires the expansion of modern financial institutions, continuous education and training, new technological application, the fulfillment of various infrastructural facilities and others. So, in order to improve the livelihoods of the study communities and to make the implementation of various livelihood strategies more effective, governmental and non-governmental organization need to overcome such constraints in the study communities. Furthermore, the study recommends the need for undertaking future research on socio-cultural constraints to livelihood in the study area.

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Appendices

Appendix I: List of Plates

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Appendix II: Fieldwork Guiding Questions

A. Interview Guiding Questions

A1. Interview Guide for Local Community Level Key Informants

General Introduction: The purpose of this interview is to collect data about **"Socio-Cultural Values and Institutions and their Contributions to Livelihoods in the Blue Nile Basin of Sekela *Woreda*."** This interview guide is prepared only for an academic purpose of writing M.A Thesis in Social Anthropology. Therefore, you are kindly requested to participate in the interview in which confidentiality of any information is protected and valued. I also kindly request you to record your voices/responses through a voice recorder since it is difficult to write all your responses while interviewing.

Thank you in advance for your kind cooperation!

Part I. Personal Data of Key Informants

1. Age_____
2. Sex_____
3. Religion_____
4. Marital status_____
5. Educational background_____
6. Source of income_____
7. Occupation_____
8. *Kebele/sub-kebele* _____
9. Year of stay in the area_____
10. Place of interview_____
11. Date of interview _____Starting Time: _____ Finishing Time: _____
12. Interviewer's Name _____

Part II. Interview Questions

2.1. Questions related to the Contributions of Socio-Cultural Values, Traditions and Belief Systems of Local Communities to Livelihoods

1. What are the major causes of food insecurity and poverty in your community?
2. What are the consequences of food insecurity and poverty in your locality?

3. What are the different socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems in your community?
4. Do socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems have roles to livelihoods? If so, what are these roles?
5. To what extent these socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems contribute to livelihoods?

2.2. Questions related to the Contributions of Social Institutions to Livelihoods

1. Can you please describe social institutions which exist in your locality?
2. Do you believe that these institutions have contributions to livelihoods? If so, what are these contributions?
3. Which visible life changes have been observed due to the works of social institutions?
4. To what extent local institutions are successful in bringing livelihood changes?
5. What are the local practices of women and men in response to livelihood problems?
6. Do you have any additional information or views on the issue under discussion?

2.3. Questions related to the Major Constraints that impeded the Implementation of Various Livelihood Strategies

1. Do you believe that, livelihood strategies in your locality are effective enough to solve the problems of poverty and food insecurity? If not, why not?
2. What are the major constraints that impede the effective implementation of different livelihood strategies in the area?
3. What are the major constraints of women and men in the process of implementing various livelihood strategies in the area?
4. What measurements are taken by local community members and local administrations to solve the major constraints of livelihood strategies in your locality?
5. Do you believe that those measurements are effective enough to solve the constraints of various livelihood strategies in your locality? If not, Why not?
6. What is your view regarding the future directions to effectively implement different livelihood strategies?

2.4. Summary Questions about Different Livelihood Strategies

1. Are there any capacity-building program implemented in your locality to solve various livelihood problems? If so, would you explain them?
2. How do you compare the rate of environmental stresses vis-a-vis the actions taken to solve the problems in your locality?
3. Do you have any additional ideas related to the issue under discussion?

Thank you very much for your valuable information!

A2. Interview Guide for *Woreda* Level Key Informants

Part I. Personal Data of Key Informants

1. Age_____
2. Sex_____
3. Religion_____
4. Marital status_____
5. Educational background_____
6. Occupation/Responsibility_____

Part II. Interview Questions

2.1. Questions related to the Contributions of Socio-Cultural Values, Traditions and Belief Systems of Local Communities to Livelihoods

1. What are the major causes of food insecurity and poverty in your *Woreda*?
2. What are the consequences of food insecurity and poverty in your *Woreda*?
3. What are the different socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems in your *Woreda*?
4. Do socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems have roles to livelihoods? If so, what are these roles?
5. To what extent these socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems contribute to livelihoods?

2.2. Questions related to the Contributions of Social Institutions to Livelihoods

1. Can you describe local institutions which are existed in this *Woreda*, especially in Gundel and Achayta *Kebeles*?
2. Do you believe that these institutions have contributions to livelihoods? If so, what are these contributions?
3. How much the contributions of these social institutions have gained recognition by the local administrations?
4. Which visible changes have been observed due to the works of social institutions to livelihoods?

5. To what extent social institutions are successful in bringing livelihood changes?
6. What are the local practices of women and men in response to livelihood problems?
7. Do you have any additional information or views on the issue under discussion?

2.3. Questions related to the Major Constraints that impeded the Implementation of Various Livelihood Strategies

1. Do you believe that, livelihood strategies in this *Woreda* are effective enough to solve the problems of poverty and food insecurity? If not, why?
2. What are the major constraints faced by local community members in this *Woreda*?
3. What measurements are taken by *Woreda* population and administrators to solve the major constraints of livelihood strategies in this *Woreda*?
4. Do you believe that those measurements are effective enough to solve the constraints of various livelihood strategies in this *Woreda*? If not, Why not?
5. What is your view regarding the future directions to effectively implement different livelihood strategies?

Thank you very much for your valuable information!

B. Focus Group Discussion Guide

General Introduction: The purpose of this focus group discussion (FGD) guide is to collect data about the **"Socio-Cultural Values and Institutions and their Contribution to Livelihoods in the Blue Nile Basin of Sekela *Woreda*."** This discussion guide is prepared only for an academic purpose of writing M.A Thesis in Social Anthropology. Therefore, you are kindly requested to participate in the discussion in which confidentiality of any information is protected and valued. I also kindly request you to record your voices/responses through a tape/voice recorder since it is difficult to write all your discussion points.

Thank you in advance for your kind participation!

Part I. Personal Data of FGD Participants

1. Age_____
2. Sex_____
3. Religion_____
4. Marital status_____
5. Educational background_____
6. Occupation _____
7. *Kebele/Sub-Kebele* _____
8. Year of stay in the area_____
9. Place of the focus group discussion_____
10. Date of the focus group discussion: _____
11. Facilitator's Name_____

Part II. FGD Questions

2.1. Questions related to the Contributions of Socio-Cultural Values, Traditions and Belief Systems of Local Communities to Livelihoods

1. What are the major causes and consequences of poverty and food insecurity in your locality?

2. What are the different socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems exist in your area?
3. Do socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems have contributions to livelihoods? If so, what are these contributions?
4. To what extent socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems help the community to solve the problems of poverty and food insecurity and which visible changes are observed in your area?

2.2. Questions related to the Contributions of Social Institutions to Livelihoods

1. Which community based institutions are working to improve livelihoods in your locality? And what are these contributions?
2. How these institutions are working to improve your Livelihoods?
3. To what extent community based institutions are successful in bringing livelihood changes in your locality?

2.3. Questions related to the Major Constraints that impeded the Implementation of Various Livelihood Strategies

1. What are the major constraints that impede the effective implementation of various livelihood strategies in your locality?
2. What measurements are taken by local community members and local administrations to solve the major constraints of livelihood strategies?
3. Are those measurements are effective enough to solve the constraints of various livelihood strategies in your locality? If not, Why not?
4. What is your view regarding the future directions to effectively implement different livelihood strategies?

Thank you very much for your valuable information!!

C. Case Study Interview Guides

General Introduction: The purpose of this interview is to collect data about **"Socio-Cultural Values and Institutions and their Contributions to Livelihoods in the Blue Nile Basin of Sekela *Woreda*."** This interview guide is prepared only for an academic purpose of writing M.A Thesis in Social Anthropology. Therefore, you are kindly requested to participate in the interview in which confidentiality of any information is protected and valued. I also kindly request you to record your voices/responses through a voice recorder since it is difficult to write all your responses while interviewing.

Thank you in advance for your kind cooperation!

Part I. Personal Data of Case Study Participants

1. Real Name/ Pseudo Name_____
2. Age_____
3. Sex_____
4. Religion_____
5. Marital status_____
6. Number of sons_____ and daughters_____
7. Marital status of children _____
8. Educational background_____
9. Children educational background_____
10. Source of income_____
11. Occupation_____
12. *Kebele/Sub-kebele* _____
13. Year of stay in the area_____
14. Place of interview_____
15. Date of interview _____Starting Time: _____ Finishing Time: _____
16. Interviewer's Name _____

Part II. Case study Questions

2.1. Questions related to the Contributions of Socio-Cultural Values, Traditions and Belief Systems of Local Communities to Livelihoods

1. What are the different socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems in your community?
2. Do socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems have contributions to livelihoods? If so, what are these roles?
3. Do you use socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems to improve your livelihoods? If so what are these socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems? And how do you use them to improve your livelihoods?
4. To what extent these socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems improve your livelihoods?

2.2. Questions related to the Contributions of Social Institutions to Livelihoods

1. What are the different community based institutions exist in your area?
2. Do you believe that these institutions have contributions to livelihoods? If so, what are these contributions?
3. Do you use community based institutions to improve your livelihoods in your area? If so what are these community based institutions? And how do you use them to improve your livelihoods?
4. Which visible changes do you observed due to the works of community based institutions on livelihoods?
5. To what extent these community based institutions improved your livelihoods in your area?

2.3. Questions related to the Major Constraints that impeded the Implementation of Various Livelihood Strategies

1. Do you believe that, livelihood strategies in your locality are effective enough to solve the problems of poverty and food insecurity? If not, why not?
2. What are the major constraints that impeded the effective implementation to various livelihood strategies in your area?

3. What measurements are you taken to solve the major constraints of livelihood strategies in your locality?
4. Do you believe that your measurements are effective enough to solve the constraints of various livelihood strategies in your locality? If not, Why not?
5. What is your view regarding the future directions to effectively implement various livelihood strategies?

Thank you very much for your valuable information!

D. Field Observation Guiding Questions

1. Questions related to the Contributions of Socio-Cultural Values, Traditions and Belief Systems of Local Communities to Livelihoods

1.1. What are the different socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems exist in the study communities?

1.2. Do socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems have a role to livelihoods? If so, what are these contributions of socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems to livelihoods?

1.3. How do these socio-cultural values, traditional practices and belief systems operate to improve livelihoods of the study communities?

2. Questions related to the Contributions of Social Institutions to Livelihoods

2.1. What are the different community based institutions exist in the study communities?

2.2. Do these institutions have contributions to improve the study communities' livelihoods? If so, what are these functions of community based institutions?

2.3. How do these community based institutions operate to improve the study communities' livelihoods?

3. Questions related to the Major Constraints that impeded the Implementation of Various Livelihood Strategies

3.1. What are the major constraints that impede the effective implementation of various livelihood strategies in the study area?

3.2. What are the major problems imposed by these constraints on the study communities' livelihoods?

3.3. What measurements are taken by local community members and local administrations to solve the major constraints that impede the effective implementation of various livelihood strategies in the study area?

Appendix III: Profiles of Research Participants

A. Profiles of Key Informants

No	Sex	Age	*Kebele/ Sub-Kebele*	Marital Status	Occupation/ Position	Level of Education	Date of Interview
KI – 1	*Male*	*41*	*Achayta*	*Married*	*Agriculture & trade*	*Read and Write*	*26 January 2015*
KI – 2	*Male*	*38*	*Gundel*	*Married*	*Agriculture & Waving*	*Read and Write*	*12 February 2015*
KI – 3	*Female*	*46*	*Gundel*	*Widow*	*Agriculture & Pottery making*	*Illiterate*	*13 February 2015*
KI – ³	*Male*	*49*	*Achayta*	*Married*	*Agriculture*	*Illiterate*	*27 January 2015*
KI – 5	*Male*	*32*	*Gundel*	*Married*	*Agriculture & Trade*	*Grade 4 completed*	*15 February 2015*
KI – 6	*Female*	*39*	*Achayta*	*Married but her husband is Imprison*	*Agriculture &distilling Arakie*	*Illiterate*	*29 January 2015*
KI – 7	*Male*	*48*	*Gundel*	*Married*	*Agriculture & Charcoal production*	*Read and Write*	*18 February 2015*
KI – 8	*Female*	*51*	*Gundel*	*Divorced*	*Agriculture*	*Illiterate*	*20 February 2015*
KI – 9	*Male*	*56*	*Gundel*	*Married*	*Agriculture*	*Illiterate*	*22 February 2015*
KI – 10	*Female*	*27*	*Gundel*	*Married*	*Agriculture & distilling Arakie*	*Grade 6 completed*	*26 February 2015*
KI – 11	*Male*	*38*	*Achayta*	*Married*	*Agriculture, Trade & charcoal production*	*Grade 8 completed*	*01 March 2015*
KI – 12	*Female*	*46*	*Gundel*	*Widow*	*Agriculture & Pottery making*	*Illiterate*	*24 March 2015*
KI – 13	*Female*	*31*	*Gundel*	*Married*	*Agriculture*	*Illiterate*	*27 March 2015*
KI – 14	*Male*	*28*	*Achayta*	*Unmarried*	*Agriculture & Trade*	*Grade 6 completed*	*03 March 2015*
KI – 15	*Female*	*32*	*Achayta*	*Married*	*Agriculture &Crop Trade*	*Read and write*	*06 March 2015*
KI – 16	*Male*	*49*	*Gundel*	*Married*	*Agriculture & Cattle Trade*	*Illiterate*	*28 March 2015*
KI – 17	*Female*	*37*	*Achayta*	*Widow*	*Agriculture & distilling Arakie*	*Illiterate*	*06 March 2015*
KI – 18	*Female*	*28*	*Achayta*	*Married*	*Agriculture & Arakie Trade*	*Read and Write*	*10 March 2015*
KI – 19	*Male*	*58*	*Achayta*	*Married*	*Agriculture*	*Illiterate*	*14 March*

							2015
KI – 20	*Female*	*33*	*Achayta*	*Married*	*Agriculture*	*Read and Write*	*17 March 2015*
KI – 21	*Male*	*30*	*Gish Abay*	*Unmarried*	*Sekela Woreda Environmental Conservation office Work process Coordinator*	*Degree*	*16 February 2015*
KI – 22	*Female*	*34*	*Gish Abay*	*Married*	*Sekela Woreda Agricultural Development Office, Natural Resource Conservation expert*	*Degree*	*17 February 2015*
KI – 23	*Male*	*36*	*Gish Abay*	*Married*	*Sekela Woreda Agricultural Development Office vice head*	*Degree*	*19 February 2015*
KI – 24	*Male*	*34*	*Gish Abay*	*Married*	*Sekela Woreda Environmental Conservation office Work process expert*	*Degree*	*21 February 2015*
KI – 25	*Male*	*32*	*Gish Abay*	*Unmarried*	*Sekela Woreda Agricultural Development Office vice Head*	*Degree*	*23 February 2015*
KI – 26	*Male*	*38*	*Gish Abay*	*Married*	*Sekela Woreda Environmental Conservation office Head*	*Degree*	*24 February 2015*
KI – 27	*Female*	*27*	*Achayta*	*Married*	*Achayta Kebele Agricultural development Expert*	*Diploma*	*16 March 2015*
KI – 28	*Female*	*26*	*Gundel*	*Unmarried*	*Gundel Kebele agricultural development Expert*	*Diploma*	*25 March 2015*
KI – 29	*Male*	*32*	*Gundel*	*Married*	*Gundel Kebele Administrator*	*Diploma*	*26 march 2015*
KI – 30	*Male*	*35*	*Achayta*	*Married*	*Achayta Kebele Administrator*	*Diploma*	*18 March 2015*
KI – 31	*Male*	*42*	*Achayta*	*Married*	*Chair person of the local Iddir*	*Grade 10 complete*	*08 March 2015*
KI – 32	*Male*	*54*	*Gundel*	*Married*	*Chair person of local Eqqub*	*Grade 8 Complete*	*01 April 2015*

B. Profiles of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Participants

	No	*Sex*	*Age*	*Marital Status*	*Kebele/ Sub-Kebele*	*Role/Position*	*Level of Education*	*Religion*	*Date of FGD*
FGD 1	*1*	*Male*	*44*	*Married*	*Gundel*	*Kebele commander*	*Grade 4*	*Orthodox Christian*	*14 February 2015*
	2	*>>*	*48*	*Married*	*>>*	*>>*	*Grade 3*	*>>*	
	3	*>>*	*42*	*Married*	*>>*	*Iddir chairman*	*Grade 6*	*>>*	
	3	*>>*	*58*	*Married*	*>>*	*Kebele elder*	*Read and write*	*>>*	
	5	*>>*	*64*	*Married*	*>>*	*Kebele elder*	*Illiterate*	*>>*	
	6	*>>*	*66*	*Married*	*>>*	*Kebele elder*	*Illiterate*	*>>*	
	7	*>>*	*32*	*Married*	*>>*	*Model farmer*	*Grade 8*	*>>*	
	8	*>>*	*53*	*Married*	*>>*	*Kebele official*	*Read and write*	*>>*	
	9	*>>*	*42*	*Married*	*>>*	*Kebele vice Administrator*	*Grade 6*	*>>*	
FGD 2	*1*	*Male*	*53*	*Married*	*Achayta*	*Kebele Priest*	*Read and write*	*Orthodox Christian*	*28 February 2015*
	2	*>>*	*57*	*Married*	*>>*	*Iddir Chairman*	*Read and write*	*>>*	
	3	*>>*	*27*	*Unmarried*	*>>*	*Member of youth league*	*10 complete*	*>>*	
	3	*>>*	*30*	*Married*	*>>*	*>>*	*Grade 8*	*>>*	
	5	*>>*	*34*	*Married*	*>>*	*Youth league secretary*	*10 complete*	*>>*	
	6	*>>*	*48*	*Married*	*>>*	*YeEqqub Tazabi*	*Read and write*	*>>*	
	7	*Female*	*22*	*Unmarried*	*>>*	*Members of women association*	*10 complete*	*>>*	
	8	*>>*	*24*	*Unmarried*	*>>*	*Kebele Health expert*	*Diploma*	*>>*	
	1	*Male*	*36*	*Married*	*Gundel*	*Construction worker*	*Grade 8*	*Orthodox Christian*	*07*

FGD 3	2	Male	38	>>	>>	Kebele official	Grade 8	>>	March 2015
	3	Female	49	Widow	>>	Member of women Association	Illiterate	>>	
	³	Female	20	Unmarried	>>	Artesian	10 + 2	>>	
	5	Female	24	Unmarried	>>	Kebele health expert	Diploma		
	6	Male	50	Married	>>	Kebele elder	Illiterate		
	7	Male	35	Married	>>	Development team leader	10 complete	>>	
	8	Male	43	>>	>>	Work team leader	Grade 4	>>	
FGD 4	1	Male	48	Married	Achayta	YeEqqub Dagna	Grade 8	Orthodox Christian	13 March 2015
	2	>>	32	>>	>>	youth league secretary	10 complete	>>	
	3	>>	41	>>	>>	Kebele Commander	Read and Write	>>	
	³	Female	57	widow	>>	Local elder	Illiterate	>>	
	5	male	36	Married	>>	Kebele official	Grade 6	>>	
	6	>>	52	>>	>>	Kebele elder	Read and write	>>	
	7	female	42	>>	>>	House wife	Illiterate	>>	
	8	male	29	Unmarried	>>	Youth league member	10 complete	>>	

C. Profiles of Case Study Participants

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Kebele /Sub-Kebele	Date of Interview
1	*Ato Mezgebu (real name)*	*Male*	*58*	*Married*	*Gundel*	*28 March 2015*
2	*W/ro Genet (real name)*	*Female*	*46*	*Widowed*	*Achayta*	*16 March 2015*
3	*Ato Endalew (real name)*	*Male*	*54*	*Married*	*Achayta*	*02 April 2015*
4	*W/ro Zewde (pseudo name)*	*Female*	*51*	*Widowed*	*Gundel*	*05 April 2015*
5	*Ato Belayneh (real name)*	*Male*	*47*	*Married*	*Achayta*	*29 March 2015*
6	*W/ro Teguaded (pseudo name)*	*Female*	*45*	*Widowed*	*Gundel*	*06 April 2015*
7	*W/ro Asres (pseudo name)*	*Female*	*42*	*Married*	*Achayta*	*18 March 2015*

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this Thesis is my original work, has not been presented for a degree in any other University and that all sources of material used for the Thesis have been appropriately acknowledged.

Declared by

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Confirmed By

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____