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SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN RURAL
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF SELASSIE
MONASTERY, DEBRE ELIAS WOREDA, AMHARA
NATIONAL REGIONAL STATE**

BY:

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ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

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By:

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Addis Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Sociology**

Advisor: Taye Negussie (PhD)

**June 2017
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

Declaration

I, hereby, declare that this thesis is my original work and has neither been presented in any other University nor was published before and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Menberu Bekabil, entitled: *The Role of Religious Institutions in Rural community Development: The Case of Sellassie Monastery of Debre Elias Woreda, Amhara Regional State* and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Degree of Master of Arts in Sociology compiles with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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Glossary of Local Terms

Abeminet:	A name given to chief administrator of the monastery
Afe Memhir:	A person who has responsibility of working as a public relation worker of the monastery
Ard'it:	People who are working as supporters and/or voluntary participants in every activity of the monastery.
Areqi:	A locally made drink having relatively high level of alcohol
Asmat (Metet):	A locally made drug (technique) used to hurt enemies
Asrat:	A material or money which is expected to be contributed/paid by followers of EOTC to their respective churches that constitutes tenth of their total income
Awaj negari:	A person who has the ability declare information
Ba'id amliko:	An extraneous belief by some people beyond his/her religion.
Betekihnet:	An administrative structure, office, or officials of EOTC where religious leaders reside
Demelash:	An act being committed to avenge previous murder of one's family. Sometimes a person who is responsible to do so is also considered as Demelash.
Idir:	An indigenous helping association through which residents contribute money or in-kind so as to mourn families of the deceased.
Gual Megabi:	A person responsible for preparation and distribution of food in the monastery
Kibre –nek:	A humiliation practice against persons considered evil eyed by the rest community members
Liqe Abew:	A person who has a responsibility of administering patients coming from different communities to be healed by being baptized through holy water of the monastery
Mahiber:	An associations organized by different persons intended to jointly participate in different works.
Megabi:	A positional name given to leaders of EOTC doctrinal schools who served as a runner of most activities in the school.
Merigeta:	An ordained person teaching basic doctrines of EOTC
Moferbet:	A name given to chief administrator of agricultural activities taking place in the monastery
Muday Metsewat:	A money or material expected to be contributed by followers through a box

	prepared by administrators/priests of a church
Qiba qidus:	A holy oil used to smear patients to be healed
Shemani (Buda):	A person who is assumed to be evil- eyed
Tabot:	A revelation of God (Saint) of a church in a community
Tegbar bet:	House/s using as kitchen in the monastery
Tella:	A locally made alcoholic drink
Tsebel:	A holy water used to baptize patients to be healed in the monastery
Tubna:	A material prepared from mud used to construct churches
Wuguz	A Prohibition not to do something wrong in accordance to values and beliefs of EOTC
Yafa Ard'it:	Voluntary participants in activities of the monastery who are going to the monastery from outside of the monastic community for temporary purpose
Yebereket Sira:	A work being done in the monastery for the sake of getting blessing from God
Yekolo Temari:	Student/s attending /learning the doctrine of EOTC
Yesebeka guba'e:	A collection of people expected to facilitate activities of a church/s. Sometimes it is defined as fee expected to be paid from believers and churches to Betekihnet
Yewust Ard'it:	Voluntary participants in activities of the monastery who are constant residents (ascetics) of the monastic community

Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
DFID	Department for International Development
DICAC	Development and Inter- Church Aid Commission
EC	Ethiopian Calendar
EOTC	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church
FBO	Faith Based Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GIS	Geographic Information System
GO	Government Organizations
HIV	Human Immune Virus
NGO	Non - Government Organizations
PESC	Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism
SLA	Sustainable Livelihood Approach
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities

Abstract

The overall purpose of this thesis is to examine the role of religious institutions in rural community development with a particular reference to Sellasie Monastery of Debre Elias Woreda. A cross-sectional study design of qualitative research approach was used emphasizing on a phenomenological methodology. Hence, in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions, and field observation have been used to generate primary data. Accordingly, study participants have been selected from ascetic members, services users and surrounding community residents of the study monastery whose information and/or data were thematically organized and analyzed. The study found out that, unless supplemented by hard working followed by helping others in need, each and every religious based activity among members of the study monastery are meaningless and will be ineffective. In view of that, activities being undertaken in the study monastery have an influence on livelihoods, social attachments and psycho-social conditions of people in the study area and nearby rural community members to be improved. At the same time, continual misunderstandings are being raised with those activities being carried out in the monastery, predominantly related with issues of (religious) healing practices and bio diversity. The study revealed that community members of the study monastery are playing their own role in the reduction of harmful traditional practices (including criminal acts), and for the improvement of health, community mobilization, social solidarity at the expense of differences in background, as well as income being generated by residents of both monastic and surrounding community members. The study further reveals that lack of doing things through appropriate time plan followed by inability to lead a better socio-economic life among most rural community residents in the study area are being considered as a result of values and beliefs of EOTC due to large number of saint days within a month while there are a number of works being done in these days that are equivalent to “working” days. Creation of ideological and socio-economic polarizations among EOTC followers themselves, the existence of higher level of EOTC leaders who want to wreck the monastery down, consideration of the monastic community as a trade center than a religious one, and human-made firing of forest in the desert where the monastery is established are challenges faced by the study monastery.

Key words: Religion, Rural Community Development, Livelihood Strategy, Social Attachment, Challenges, Monastery.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Religion has a contribution to development having an important place both to individuals and societies at large. Since ancient time, religion, not only has had an experience of promoting development, but also cause or exacerbate human conflicts which, in turn, deter development. Crusades and other more contemporary causes of conflicts due to religious extremism are major indicators of religion as a restraining factor of development (Wolfe and Moorhead 2015).

Religion satisfies the social, psychological, spiritual, and material needs that bring social welfare and cohesion, acts as an agency of social control and socialization, establishes solidarity, provides peace of mind and influences economic life (World Values Survey 2014; Andrews 2011). To the contrary, it hinders social and economic progress by making people dogmatic and superstitious which results in an opposition to scientific discoveries and technological advancements. Religion also encourages exploitation (casting people who are not member of a certain religion), and creates intolerance, mistrust, hatred and jealousy among people (Wolfe and Moorhead 2015).

Despite all religions have not quite similar essence on the issue of development, Ruben (2011) claims that religion plays its own role in supporting development by serving as an interactive force between ethical and material forces. Borowik, Dinka and Sinisa (2004) revealed that there is a characteristic compatibility between religious institutions and social structures at any stages

of socio-economic development and asserted that considering religion as an irrelevant or as a mere ideological indoctrination is a strategy which is likely to jeopardize development efforts.

Religion is the source of normative meaning that grounds the architecture of infrastructural and superstructural institutions of society that promotes community attachment and human good so as to provide basic human needs, guarantee protection of human rights, and promote integral development which, in turn, results shared motivation, common identities and community networks that are key faith driven factors for socioeconomic change (Ogbonnaya 2012).

According to Boender *et al.* (2011), since the 2nd half of the 20th century, development has less cooperated with religion in developed countries. This has to do with secularization theory; the assumption that religion would lose its meaning in the public domain due to modernization. The expectation was that, influenced by rationalism, science and technology, people would abandon religion over time, both in western world and in developing countries. Yet, in developing countries, religion and community development are heavily interwoven with public life.

Religion and community development have a considerable influence on each other, and both aim to enable and empower people. Religious organizations play a significant role in society-locally, nationally, regionally and globally. Religion shapes the attitude and value of individuals and societies in terms of social behavior, economic activity and political involvement (Mtata 2012).

Religious leaders and institutions are often most trusted institutions in promoting community development in developing countries (World Bank 2000). In many cultures, religion is the organizing principle of life. It is a belief and knowledge system around which reality is being organized. To maintain their good relations to invisible super powers, human beings try to keep

their good relation with their relatives, neighbors, and friends for their own benefit and invest in communities so as to enhance the quality of their life (Ellis and TerHar 2006).

Churches have the opportunity to raise development consciousness and capabilities among their members. This creates a myriad of ways in which religion directly influences development since individual actors, influenced by religious ideas, structures, and practices, act in a certain ways that promote the well-being of society (Mtata 2012).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, religious organizations are significant providers of public services, such as education, health care, agricultural extension and emergency humanitarian aid (Mdee and Akuni 2011). Religion is a powerful cultural factor in community life shaping production methods including agrarian cultures where rituals play an important socio economic role (Holerstein 2010).

In Ethiopia, the role being played by religion in different socio-economic structures is undeniable. Historically and traditionally, till 1974, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (patriarch) and the Ethiopian Empire (Emperor) have had a close relation, making the religious and political context nearly inseparable. Despite state-church divorce continued since the fall of imperial regime in 1974 till now, religions in general and religious institutions in particular are taking their own part in the development process of their respective communities.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Christian religion is being blamed for having excessive holidays and festivities followed by prohibitive regulations to work which, in turn, is adversely affecting development in the country, although it is playing its own positive role in the development aspect. In fact, all of such religious institutions might not have similar contributions to developmental activities.

Even though religion is playing quite an ambivalent role in community development especially in Ethiopia, in this study, the role of religious institutions in general and monastic communities in particular on livelihood assets, community attachment and maintaining psychosocial supports have been given due emphasis in this study. Moreover, monastic communities influence for the development of surrounding rural communities as well as perceptions held by nearby community members towards the monastic community, with the aforementioned activities, have been dealt in the study. Challenges facing the monastic community, have also been given due consideration in the study. Hence, this study was aimed at examining the role of religious institutions in rural community development in Sellassie monastery of Debre Elias woreda, Eastern Gojjam, Amahara national regional state.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The role of religion and/or religious organizations in the development mainstream has been almost invisible being either ignored or undervalued. The primary reason for this has been the conceptualization of development as a secular project underpinned by the view of modernization and development across the world. Religion, in fact, is not a universal remedy but aspects of it can complement as well as motivate development or obstruct (undermine) it (Lunn 2010).

Previous studies, which have been conducted focusing on religion and development, are not only few in numbers (mainly concentrated on countries outside Ethiopia) but they have also discussed few of its dimensions from different perspectives.

In USA, studies have been conducted by Alikre (2006) and Vidal (2001) focusing on both positive and negative effects of religion on development. According to Alikre (2006), religious people and institutions may be agents of advocacy, funding, innovation, empowerment, social

movements and service delivery. At the same time, they can incite violence, oppose women empowerment, deflect advocacy, absorb funding, and cast aspirations on service delivery. Vidal (2001) also tried to explain the accomplishment of community development through independently incorporated organizations and revealed that establishing and fostering the growth of such affiliated organizations are common modes of engaging in different services by congregations and possess numerous challenges.

Zaidi (2010), Alonso (2015), Philipo (2014) and Rahmany (2006), in their study, described the close and direct relation between religious institutions (including FBOs) and development in Pakistan, Nigeria, Tanzania and Saudi Arabia respectively.

Zaidi (2010) in Pakistan conducted a comparative study on FBOs and other government and non-government organizations to development. The study found out that Muslim FBOs have a close relationship with both other non-governmental and governmental organizations in several service related programs focusing on health and education. Moreover, in Nigeria, Alonso (2015) studied the potential of culture, religion, and traditional knowledge on food and nutrition security by concentrating on food preparation, processing, safety and the impact of dietary change accompanied by dietary rules of the respective culture, religion and tradition on members of the community.

On the other hand, Philipo (2014) conducted a study on the impact of educational and religious institutions on the livelihood strategies in Tanzania by using structured questionnaire of quantitative data collection methods. The study revealed by focusing on poverty reduction that evangelical religious institutions and educational institutions play their own roles in changing the livelihoods of the pastoralists. Furthermore, Rahmany (2006) studied on the role of religious

institutions in community governance affairs in Saudi Arabia. And such study found out that religious institutions are key figures in smoothly mobilizing communities' governance and concluded that governments should supervise all religious institutions and there must be a close coordination of government policies among the powerful groups of religious leaders.

In the Ethiopian context, Bulti (2012), Kumilachew (2015), and Alemayehu (2007) studied on the influential relation between religion and development in the country. In his study of “Religion and Development in Ethiopia”, Bulti (2012) focused on the role of religion in development process by taking the activities being carried out by the Norwegian Church Aid in Ethiopia in relation to the sphere of religion in the country (Ethiopia). Hence, the focus areas of the study were Faith Based Organizations by relating developmental activities of Norwian Church Aid. Kumilachew (2015), in his study of “The Socioeconomic Roles of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Churches in Addis Ababa” stated that religiosity in orthodox Christians results development in such a way that religious services and occupations foster community development. And by merely focusing on the issue of forest, Alemayehu (2007), in his study of “Ethiopian Church Forests: Opportunities and Challenges for Restoration”, found out that the woody vegetation of church forests could provide an opportunity for regeneration and/or restoration of diversified plants in those forests.

Despite the existence of studies related with religion and community development, in this study, the role of religious institutions in rural community development from the experience of monastic communities was examined where scant researches have been made related with such issue. Accordingly, livelihood assets and/or strategies being affected by the study monastery, together with psycho-social support being given due to attachment of both insider and outsider communities, have been dealt in this study. Contributions and/or effects of activities being

carried out in the study monastery to surrounding rural communities' development as well as perceptions held by surrounding community members towards overall activities being carried out in the study monastery, which have not been previously studied, have also been given due consideration in this study. Challenges facing members of the study monastery, as a result of their socio-economic activities, which haven't been studied yet, have also been examined in this study.

Besides spatial and issue wise variations, most of the previous studies were comparative studies conducted using quantitative methods of data collection using structured questionnaires. Nonetheless, results of this study have been analyzed by methodologically triangulating through different qualitative methods of data collection so as to ensure trust worthiness of the study by giving due emphasis on lived experiences of study participants related with the study issue.

Therefore, this study has been conducted in *Sellassie* monastery of *Debre Elias Woreda* where its specific and/or independent roles to the respective rural communities' development have not been previously studied.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study is to examine the role of religious institutions in rural community development with a particular emphasis on Sellassie Monastery of Debre Elias Woreda, East Gojjam, Amhara Regional State.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

In order to achieve the above general objective, the following specific objectives have been addressed.

- To describe livelihood strategies of the monastic community in the study area
- To scrutinize community attachment driven by religious values and beliefs in the study area
- To explore the influence of monastery to surrounding communities' development
- To describe challenges facing religious institutions in promoting rural community development in the study area

1.4. Significance of the Study

Religion is a major social institution in Ethiopia affecting the overall material and social life of people driven by values and norms of each religion. Besides, studying opportunities of religious institutions, particularly monasteries, together with accompanying challenges facing, will particularly have its own significance.

This study will contribute to broaden an understanding of how community development can be affected by religious values, practices, and norms which are being initiated by monasteries and their associated members or followers. This will also help to understand how religious communities mobilize and exploit their resources which, in turn, affect the development of the respective communities.

To be able to understand community attachment led by religious values and norms in the dimensions of participation, interpersonal relation and sentiment, this study will have its own significance. This study will also generate essential data with regard to how livelihood assets are being built launched by monastic communities driven by their respective religious dogmas. Grasping the overall perceptions of people from nearby communities towards different practices of the monastery will also be helpful to take a look at responses of nearby rural community members with regard to the overall influence of the monastery to the respective rural communities' development.

Describing challenges facing both monastic and surrounding communities as a result of overall practices being undertaken by the monastery, which, in turn, affects development of the respective rural communities, is quite significant. The findings of the study can also be utilized as an initiation for further research on the subject. The study will also add some clue to literature involving monastic communities and their associated contributions to rural community development which are mostly rare in Ethiopia.

1.5. Delimitation of the Study

This study was restricted in investigating religious institutions in terms of their role in rural community development, together with their associated challenges facing, from the perspective of monastic communities. To attain the set research objectives, this study was also delimited in the area of the study, selected study participants, and the problem (subject) of the study.

Problem (issue) wise, while there are various effects of religious institutions to their respective community, this study is confined to examine its opportunities in terms of attachment, livelihood assets and/or strategies, nearby community influences and accompanying challenges being faced

in stimulating development. Whereas, spatial wise, it was conducted both within the study monastery of Debre Elias Woreda and one neighboring community (Degolima) which is located in east Gojjam, Amhara National Regional State.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

While conducting this study, I have faced some limitations. One of the limitations was lack of prior researches related to the study issue, which hinders me not to cross-check the results of my study with similar studies, especially from Ethiopian rural communities' context. The second limitation was an extreme shyness of my informants, predominantly those who are from ascetic members of the monastic community who have, particularly, been participants of the FGD which, in turn, prevents me not to get deeper feelings of them regarding the study issue. The other limitation was doubts and misunderstandings of the purpose of the research; meaning, some informants who could have immense data to provide have withdrawn from the interview doubting that I am from others who are against the activities being carried out in the monastery. Inadequacy of the collected data regarding females' level of healing through the holy water of the study monastery in relation to males, which have not been substantiated by female informants and necessary others due to time shortage, is also another limitation of this study.

1.7. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. The first chapter is the introductory part which traces the contextual background, problem statement, research objectives as well as significance, delimitation and limitations of the study. Chapter two presents discussions on related conceptual, empirical and theoretical literature (including conceptual framework of the study) focusing on the four objectives (livelihood strategies, social attachment, surrounding

communities' development being influenced and challenges facing, as a result of the study monastery. The third chapter deals with the research methodology which embraces description of the study area, approach of the study, sampling of research participants, data collection methods, the way collected data have been analyzed, and ethical considerations. Presentation and analysis of the collected empirical information generated from study participants have been presented in chapter four, with different sub sections in accordance with the set objectives. The remaining chapter, chapter five, provides concluding remarks of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Conceptual Literature

2.1.1. Religion

Religion is not exactly definable because of its concept varies across different scholars and subjects (contexts) (Ter Haar and Ellis 2006). However, the most persuasive definition of religion is forwarded by Geertz (1973) as follows:

Religion is a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz 1973: 90-91 cited in Attia 2009).

Durkheim (1995) has also forwarded his own definition of such most difficult and generic concept of religion; for him: religion doesn't necessarily have to be about belief in supernatural beings - fundamentally it is the collective feeling that accountability to other human beings reflects something deeper - a reality that is invisible or lies beyond human understanding. This feeling can be reinforced and developed by various cultural means either through art, ritual, poetry or philosophical reasoning.

In order to have a manageable understanding and handle it, Ter Haar and Ellis (2006) classified (presented) religion in four religious resources, which can be used as a differentiating variables of such concept from others. These are (a) Religious ideas; the perceptions of the universe, the

world, life, nature, evil, the sacred, up to and including the virtues and values that guide us in our actions which can be expressed in stories or tales and laid down in doctrines and rules, (b) Religious practices; actions, customs, places and objects that link perceptible reality with imperceptible one, (c) Religious organizations; religious movements, communities and their (possible) leaders and the networks in which they cooperate, and (d) Religious (or spiritual) experiences; people's experiences in relation to the transcendent for the ultimate, the divine, spirits, ancestors and gods. Religious experiences can be at the root of transformations, both individually and collectively.

These four religious resources are used in this study as working definitions as Ter Haar and Ellis developed this definition in an African context. These four aspects can relate differently to each other depending on local context and time of Ethiopian rural communities', particularly monasteries that have been placed in remote countryside.

2.1.2. Development

As to religion, development is a multidimensional concept being defined differently by different scholars and/or organizations. The World Development Report, (1991) cited in Wolffe and Moorhead (2015), defined development as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, national institutions, acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty. Development, in its essence, represent the whole array of change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within the system, moves away from the condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better scholars.

Development is also defined by Mtata (2012) as a process by which members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources, and to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations.

Development is not just a matter of reducing poverty and eliminating hunger. Rather, it is a question of building a world where everyone, no matter what his social status, can have a full human life, freed from servitude imposed on him or her by others, and a world where freedom is not an empty word (Mtata2012).

Based upon the definitions above, the following can be considered as general objectives of development: (1) raising the capability and widening the scope of life-sustaining options; (2) increasing the level of living, and (3) expanding the economic and social option available to citizens. This implies that development is not only an economic issue but a combination of social, economic and institutional process that seeks to meet the whole range of human being's needs.

As Attia (2009) described it, the first and foremost aim of development is to improve the quality of life. Meeting basic needs is no longer the sole necessary condition of life. Life needs a large number of requirements to cope with the contemporary needs of the human being. These requirements are: high level of income, better education, better health care, better nutrition, cleaner environment, participating in decision making, enjoying a higher cultural life, self-respect etc.; hence development is needed as a critical issue.

2.1.3. Community Development

Community development is defined by Vidal (2001) as an asset building that improves the quality of life among residents of low- to moderate income communities. And communities are defined (physically) as neighborhoods sharing common identity. Assets may be of many types (physical, economic, social, political, human) (Scoones 1998; Ellis 2000; Singh 2007), but all produce a stream of services over time.

2.1.4. Livelihood

Livelihood is an adequate stock and flow of food and cash to meet basic needs that comprise the capabilities, assets including both material and social resources, and activities required for a means of living (Ellis, 2000).

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) 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 both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base (Chambers and Conway 1991:6)

Livelihood assets, on the other hand, are resources that belong to recognized economic categories of different types of capital, and some of which do not, namely, claims and access (Ellis, 2000). The main livelihood assets include human capital, physical capital, social capital, financial capital, and natural capital that determine the wellbeing of households.

Natural capital is the natural resource base (farm land, water, forest, air quality) that yields products utilized by human populations for their survival. Physical assets are assets brought into existence by economic production processes (livestock, shelter, machines, roads, irrigation

canals, communication services). Human capital is the education level and health status of individuals and populations. Social capital is the social networks and associations in which people participate, and from which they can derive support that contributes their livelihoods. And, Financial capitals are stocks of cash that can be accessed in order to purchase either production or consumption goods (Ellis 2000; Scoones 1998; Singh 2007; Terefe 2014).

The strategies that can promote the livelihood assets of rural households through religious institutions are agriculture, income diversification and the natural resource base which need attention by concerned institutions in designing and implementing these strategies (Yared 2001).

2.2. Theoretical Perspectives on Religion in Development

Different paradigms that played a leading role in development thinking keep on maintaining a rather ambivalent position vis-à-vis religion and development. This is by recognizing its role in individual people's lives, by contributing to welfare provision and charity on the one hand and by maintaining careful distance of religion into political strategies towards poverty reduction on the other. Generally speaking, even though its intrinsic values are being overlooked, religion remained largely instrumental to development.

Recently, the position of religion in development is becoming marginalized again, particularly with stronger policy reliance on forces of market liberalization, privatization and deregulation. While these development strategies make the normative claim that faith belongs to the individual and that state and market should be kept separated, according to Ruben (2011), the study of religious discourse and practice is basically considered as part of the cultural institutions associated with class, ethnicity or social practices

The resistance of development studies against religion can be attributed to different views on the role of development and the character of development process. Traditional approaches consider religion as a protective device, providing people with a kind of insurance against risk. This inward looking view of religion basically considers its importance for self-protection, creating internal spaces for mitigating adverse events, but usually at the cost of staying poor.

2.2.1. Critical Theory of Religion and Development

Critical theory of religion is defined as the insight in to the essential of religion in such a way that religion is not positivistic but critical. The insight is critical in a sense that it measures what cases are from religious point of view and what the religion itself claims about the case to be, so that the potential contradiction or the possibilities of change in religious constitutions can be examined (Seibert 2015). The critical theory of religion confronts the historical reality of Christianity with its truth claim and thereby discovers its potentials and possibilities. Christianity shares this dilemma between reality and promise with all other world religions (Siebert 2015).

Dialectical Sociology of Religion and Development

Nowadays, sociology of religion, which is being strongly viewed as it is in a state of recovery after several years of inactivity and marginalization, suggests that the secularization thesis was just wrong all along, or that is primarily relevant to northern Europe. But, beyond the European framework, there is ample evidence that religion plays a major role in a society; and it is anticipated that religion will play a large role in a state and international development (Turner 2011).

When the very beginning of the sacred dogma-history of sociology have taken into consideration, it is possible to call the critical theory of religion as a dialectical sociology of

religion, in terms of the concept of positivism and the notion of Sociology, both of which have been invented by Auguste Comte. It is said to be dialectical sociology of religion when positivism and sociology be separated; if a non-positivist social theory or sociology is possible. Comte's positivistic sociology oriented itself according to the great dichotomy between the static and dynamic laws of society; that means the static laws of order and the dynamic laws of progress (Seibert 2015).

According to Siebert (2015), in the framework of such dialectical sociology, it can be discussed that because of it is an element of the social order, or of the productive relations, religion can also turn in to a factor of social progress, or a productive force of revolutionary development towards an identity change in late capitalist society, which would make possible alternative future. This creates a society characterized by prosperity, freedom and happiness not only for a few, but for all.

Turner (2011) also stressed that, beginning from 20th century, religion is being turned in to a factor of social progress and a productive force of revolutionary, qualitative change which could continue to do in to the future; continued to be shown by Christian based communities and their liberation theologies. This is in spite of the neo-conservative counterrevolutions in the name of law and order for the increase of surplus value.

Such proposition implicitly helped the researcher to explore the current situation of religious based institutions and their contribution for community development in terms of social and economic progress. Taking it in to Ethiopian context, this is in relation (as far as dialectic of religion is concerned) to the traditional and conservative ways of 'asrat', 'mitswat', 'vows' and other religious donations that have had cornerstones for Ethiopian Ortodox Tewahido Churches

to function their expected day to day services for their respective followers of their community members. Possible challenges faced by religious institutions in complementing development in general and rural community development in particular have also been investigated through the help of the above theoretical propositions.

2.2.2. Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (PESC)

From his interest in investigating the roots of modern capitalism, Weber, in his work of “The protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” (1930), asserted that capitalism was a social counterpart of Calvinist theology – the force behind an unplanned influence that created the development of capitalism. This influenced many people to engage in work in the secular world, develop their own enterprise and engage in trade for the accumulation of wealth. Hard work and economic success were taken as signs of salvation.

In his study of the relationships between religious ideas and economic activities, as an insight in to the process of transformation and rationalization, Weber distinguished factors that explains why an abundance of Protestants owned capital, were entrepreneurs, and made up most of the higher qualified personnel in modern business. He also stressed that modern capitalism involves the individual’s duty to prosper. However, he noted that ‘ascetism’ or earning more money is not a means for purchasing other goods; rather, it reveals a type of proficiency that exemplifies capitalist ethic. Weber believes that capitalism educates and selects the economic subjects through a process of economic survival of the fittest and where the people who succeed are those who completely devoted to their religion (Weber 1930; Ritzer 2011).

Weber also argued that economic forces influenced Protestantism. And individual economic thoughts, influenced by religious ideas, have been influential throughout the world. The

protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism helps to explain the differences among religions and the effect these religions had in the economic field.

Though mostly focused on religion-development relation in terms of economic activities, such work and/or assertion by Weber helped the researcher to implicitly scrutinize community development through religious (monastic) communities and associated practices emanated from their religious commitment. Hence, how members of the monastic community are dedicated to work driven by their religious values and what types of capitals have been produced and/or accumulated were dealt in this study. Furthermore, sustainability of socioeconomic contributions of the monastery as a religious institution, to the respective community, which leads to their survival, including challenges facing, were also examined through the help of such thesis and/or propositions.

2.2.3. Asset Based Approach to Community Development

This approach argues for community development involving the assets that people have, with opportunities, to enhance their livelihoods. That means, for community development to occur, it is important to link asset with essential opportunities by developing capacity to organize and mobilize the available community resources. And by matching assets with opportunities, community members are more likely to mobilize their own resources through a realistic activity or plan and they can also take a genuine responsibility for. In fact, the approach argues, community development takes place more effectively when a community has a strong leadership which can make the links to outside opportunities as well as strong associations that can mobilize local assets (Coyle 2006).

In asset based community development, planning and mobilizing resources may be catalyzed by appreciative interviewing and asset mapping. This leads to a renewal of people's confidence that they can make positive changes without any external assistance (Coyle 2006).

As long as studying on community development as a result of religious institutions is concerned, such an approach best fit because the religious (monastic) community of the study area have had its own assets being used through different resources of the community, including their religion itself (serving as a driving force for every activities of its members). Hence, this proposition helped to examine how the monastic community is exploiting the available livelihood assets driven by the respective religious values and norms which, in turn, helped for its and nearby communities' overall development.

2.3. Conceptual Framework of Study

2.3.1. The sustainable Livelihood Framework

Sustainable Livelihood Approaches (SLA) are based upon evolving thinking about poverty reduction, the way the poor live their lives, and the importance of structural and institutional issues. SLA is a way of reinforcing the best practice and focusing on core development issues (Ashley and Carney 1999). According to Bennett (2010), DFID (Department for International Development) of United Kingdom which is indicated hereunder is the most widely used framework for analyzing sustainable rural livelihoods. It also shows the link between vulnerability context, assets (capitals), transforming structures and processes, livelihood strategies and livelihood outcomes.

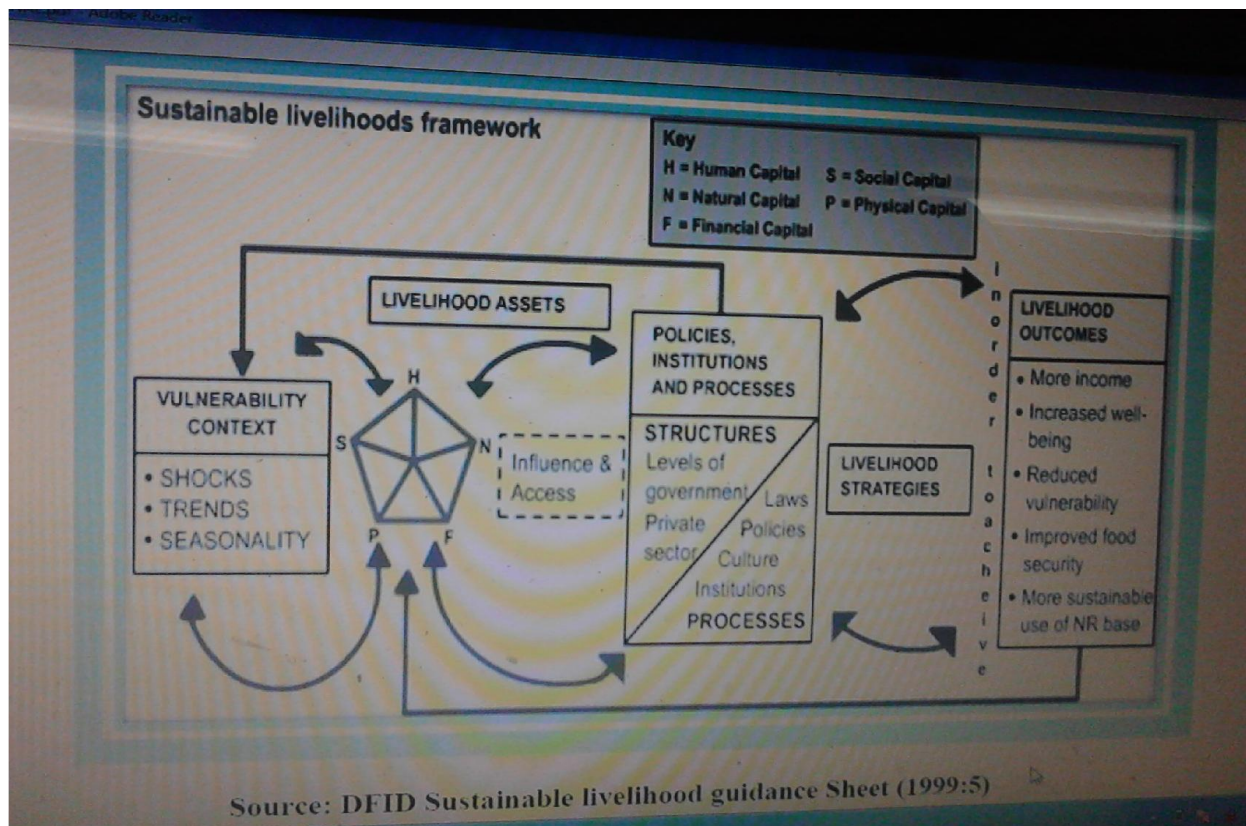


Figure 1: Sustainable Livelihood Framework (DFID 1999)

Vulnerability Context

Shocks, trends and seasonality are components of vulnerability context. Droughts, floods, diseases and economic crises such as inflation are included as shocks. Trends are comprised of population growth and density, international economic trends and market prices, and political-governance. Seasonality is related to variations in prices, production and employment opportunities (DFID 1999).

Ideological contradictions among people on activities being carried out in the monastery, human made fire on surrounding forests of the monastery are issues related to vulnerability context of such an approach in this study. Besides, fluctuation in demand of agricultural products being produced in the monastery and the difficulty of the road connecting the monastery to nearby

rural communities especially at rainy seasons are taken in this study as seasonality according to the sustainable livelihood framework.

Transforming Structures, Policies and Institutions

Institutions, organizations, policies and legislations which are mediating factors that shape livelihoods are considered as transforming structures and processes. Rural household's access to and control over resources are mediated by them (DFID 1999). National and local structures arrange resource access for people to engage in fruitful livelihood activities (Scoones 1998). The availability of satisfactory land for agriculture, the existence of people who voluntarily participate in different activities, the existence of holy water and others for health matter constitutes a way through which livelihoods of both the study monastic community as an institution and their respective surrounding community members can be mediated and/or transformed.

Livelihood strategies

Livelihood strategies constitute activities that generate the means of household survival and are planned activities that people undertake to build their livelihood (Ellis 2000). The strategies that can promote livelihood assets of rural households through religious institutions are agriculture, income diversification and natural resources which need attention by concerned institutions in designing and implementing these strategies (Yared 2001). Page 30 regarding...

Livelihood outcomes

Livelihood outcomes are results and/or achievements for livelihood strategies. These include more income, increased well-being, reduced vulnerability, improved food security and more

sustainable natural resource use (DFID 1999; Ellis 2000). This underlies the basic reason for which this study intends on an outcome, rural community development driven by religious values and beliefs in accordance with the asset they have, especially by monastic communities.

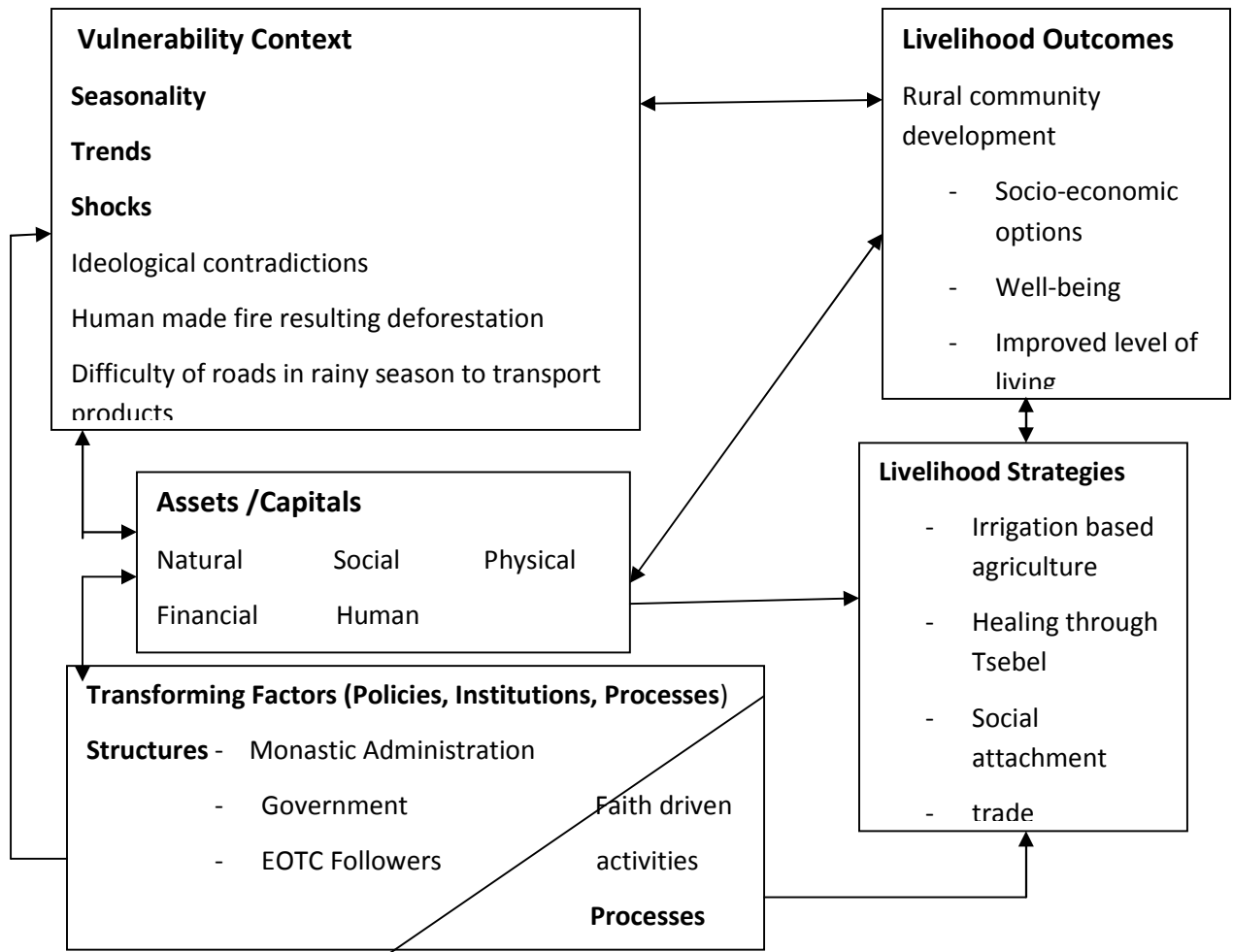


Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the study (own constructed 2017)

The above framework is adopted from DFID (1999) in order to examine the role of monasteries, as religious institutions, in influencing their respective rural communities' development. Accordingly, ideological differences, human made fire resulting deforestation, and difficulty of to be easily transported through are issues that have been seen in terms of vulnerability context.

The study monastery's administration, government, and EOTC followers are the main transforming actors and /or structures. Whereas faith driven activities that are being carried out in the study monastery are taken as transforming processes.

Irrigation based agriculture followed by trade of those agricultural products, religion based healings and social attachments are taken as the main livelihood strategies being employed in the study monastery and its surrounding rural community residents. And, finally, rural community developments comprised of (1) capacity of socio-economic options, (2) well-being, and (3) improved level of living are adopted as livelihood outcomes of the study area.

2.4. Review of Related Empirical Studies

2.4.1. Religion- Community Development Interface

Contemporary intersections between religion and development can be examined and mapped from a variety of perspectives, which inevitably overlap to some degree. According to Amartya Sen, religion and development cannot be separated from each other and stated that development can be seen as the increase in the amount of freedom for every human being to pursue what he believes is important, i.e., the freedom to realize one's own perception of the "good life". However, this freedom is influenced by (political or religious) actors in society. Consequently, perceptions of the "good life" can clash and may possibly cause conflicts (Boender et al. (2011). In fact, the role being played by religion is varied not only from one society to another but also from one religion to the other (Kumilachew 2015).

A values-based development policy takes the contribution of religion as a prominent variable to development (World Values Survey 2014). Secular organizations are erroneously considered as 'neutral' but they are themselves guided by values and ideologies, not always made transparent

(UNFPA 2014). As a matter of fact, relation between religion and development can also be identified through five modes; first, religion is an instrumental to development goals; second, religion affects the people's values; third, freedom and worship within religion are fundamental to human rights; fourth, religion is a constitutive part of the well-being of the people; and fifth, religion is a political power that forms the society's structure through the economic, social, and political perspectives (Boender et al. 2011).

The role of religious ideas in economic development has a deep impact on the treatment of religion within the framework of social sciences. Weber observed that Protestants are more involved in industrial, business and trade than any other religions; and that is why capitalist have been expanded in Western Europe not anywhere else. Weber explained that the capitalistic development took place due to the features of Protestantism that include hard work, high labor productivity, high rate of saving; and, accordingly, investment, producing goods beyond the mere satisfaction of material needs are being secured (Attia 2009). Religious belief may open an independent route to serenity and meaning whether one is in difficulties, in penury, exclusion, bereavement or other troubles. Thus, religion may contribute directly to a person's well-being to a flourishing dimension (Alikire 2006).

Religion is the moral basis of society and therefore should be the very framework for conceiving development (Lunn 2009). World Bank and other development institutions have indicated the role of religion to development and remarked that religion is an omnipresent and seamless part of daily life, taking an infinite variety of forms that are part of the distinctive quality of each community. Religion could, thus, not be seen as something apart and personal. It is, rather, a dimension of life that suffuses whatever people do. Religion has an effect on many people's attitudes to everything, including such matters as savings, investment and a host of economic

decisions. In short, religion could be an important driver of change and, at the same time, it could be a break to progress (Ogbonnaya 2012).

The work of development has always been the domain of faith-based entities in which ‘intruders’ may, either, be secular organizations or not. Development actors, both faith-based and secular, must learn how to navigate the complex world of religion, rather than ignoring or marginalizing its significance (UNFPA 2014). Religion provides a unifying power that grounds the socio-political, economic, technological, cultural and moral dynamics of a culture. This is particularly true of Africans for whom life is an intricate web of the sacred and the secular (Ogbonnaya 2012).

To a certain extent, such relation was presupposed by the Old and New Testaments of Christianity and remains the dominant worldview in many communities in countries toward which most of the development efforts are directed. Even though some religious ideas have become more established and institutionalized and religious practices more organized, the basic assumption remains that God directly intervenes in the welfare of humanity and that it is in human beings’ best interest to cooperate (Mtata 2012).

In the Hebrew text of Genesis (1:26, 27), that opens the Christian Bible, irrespective of the color of their skin and gender, people are charged with the responsibility to “develop.” The object of development, at least according to the narratives of creation, was not other human beings, but the earth (Gen 1:28; Gen 2:15). Even the mandate given to human beings to “develop” the earth was not given within the context of exploitation for one’s own selfish gain (Gen 1:28), but of stewardship, whereby the stewards were charged with the responsibility to nurture earth. The latter, like human beings, is also a member of God’s household (Mtata 2012)

Recently, however, new inspiration is drawn from more value and/or religious-based approaches to development that acknowledges the importance of human agency and culture in shaping their capabilities for overcoming poverty and exclusion. Increased, attention is given to the potential role of shared motivations, common identities and community networks as key drivers for socioeconomic change. This also asks for a re-conceptualization of the interaction between ethical and material forces and the role of religion in supporting development and emancipation processes (Ruben 2011).

Religious institutions are capable of significant social mobilization, in addition to a distinct moral standing. Beyond the convening capacities inherent in raising and utilizing volunteers (which no other institution can boast worldwide), they are owners of the longest standing and most enduring mechanisms for raising financial resources. In times when traditional ‘secular’ development is confronting its strongest set of resource challenges, these capabilities cannot be underestimated. The role of religion, religious convictions and religious values as part of the cultural fabric of humanity is a fundamental and powerful force in shaping development (UNFPA 2014).

Although the above assertions identified by the respective scholars concerning direct and close relation between religion and development have quite their own significances, I contend that religion is not only instrumental in achieving development goals but it can also impede progressive social changes mostly through different religious extremism that leads and/or used as a source of different social, economic and political exclusions among societies and/or countries. Furthermore, religion cannot always ensure human well- being since all religions don’t have quite similar values to ‘this worldly’ nature of life; mostly preaching on giving up this world life for another ‘almighty world’ which, in turn, are leading to various conflicts.

Religious ideas and systems can have a considerable effect on economic development (Terefe 2014). Thus, communities develop when investments of either capital or labor produce changes in the ability of the community to foster and sustain productive community members and a good quality of life for them (Vidal 2001).

According to World Bank (2004), since a higher presence and trust within them, faith (religious) based organizations play major roles in communities constituting the world's largest share of development in general and distribution system in particular. Poor communities around the world trust religious leaders and institutions more than many other entities; in part because of their engagement in many dimensions of people's lives are robust and long term.

In rural societies, the activities being carried out by religious congregations have a multifaceted importance varying from practical activities, such as economic support for the poorest, to more mental and spiritual activities meant for all members of the Church. This is the aspect that clearly separates the activities of congregations from the work done by other actors in the countryside (Pesonen and Vesala 2006).

It has been proposed that religiously motivated social actions have certain advantages than that of actions without such motivation. This is said to be true, for example, in Christian environmental work, which is justified by ethical and other principles that are based on a long tradition, and which, in the end, lead back to a supernatural motivator. This 'chain' between a Christian communities and their respective God is said to give environmental work a much more solid foundation and clearer direction than can ever be the case with secular environmentalism (Pesonen and Vesala 2006).

From Coptic Church's perspective, Jesus was an example of a person who had his roots in a remote rural area and in the everyday life of its people. The strong sermons of Jesus for the poorest and for the despairing are said to spring out of this rural context (Harmanen 2003; Kainulainen 2003 cited in Pesonen and Vesala 2006).

Furthermore, when considering the activities of the Church and the congregations from the point of view of rural development, it is important to examine both the possibilities and limitations (if any) of the Church and congregations have for working towards social sustainability in rural areas. According to Rannikko (1999) in Pesonen and Vesala (2006), social sustainability requires developments which increase individuals' control over their lives, to support and reinforce their identities.

Resurgence of Religion on Development

Many had argued that religion would decline with the advent of secular development (Berger 1999). Instead, religion has arguably surged in numbers as well as visibility; with conservative branches of all religions and religious political parties being extremely increased (Alkire 2006). Futurity of development from faith perspectives may differ significantly from economic development. To religious groups, development experts may seem like 'one-eyed giants' who analyze, prescribe and act as if man could live by bread alone and as if human destiny could be stripped to its material dimensions alone (Boender et al. 2011).

According to the secularization thesis, the significance of religion in society is assumed to disappear when societies modernize. Nowadays, however, it is being empirically realized that religion is not losing its public significance (Boender et al 2011). For example, over the last 100 years, "the share of the world's Muslim population has risen from 12.5 per cent to 20 per cent."

And it is predicted that, in 2050, the ratio of Christians to Muslims will be three to two (with 34% of the world being Christian), but by then most Christians would live in Africa and Latin America (Jenkins 2002, Alikre 2006).

According to World Bank (2004), the "liberal assumption" that religion declines as incomes rise is a gross oversimplification because religion is patently not dying out and the importance of the world's religions is vividly rising. Forecasts suggest that, by 2020, the share of people who identify with a religion will rise to 90 percent. As a result of the migration of people from societies where religion plays a strong role, it will also have an influence on the way people live together in Germany and the whole Europe (World Values Survey 2014). Even in countries with low religious attendance and high levels of economic development such as the US and Switzerland, people still have strong religious beliefs (Jenkins 2002, Berger 1999, Inglehart 1998).

Communities will find emancipation from current conventional development models and engage with alternatives development which is appropriate and sustainable and which, in turn, will also be locally relevant, community-based, and bottom-up as opposed to the top-down development of the past. In this context, it is suggested that religious organizations, religious values and religious worldviews all hold a significant potential for emancipation and an alternative future for development (Mtata 2012).

As long as secular discourse continues to exclude religion in its analysis of globalization, progress, and development of people, the results of its analysis will always be defective. As Max Stackhouse cited in Ogbonnaya (2012) pp:3 asserts: "The neglect of religion as an ordering,

uniting and dividing factor in a number of influential interpretations of globalization is a major cause of misunderstanding and a studied blindness regarding what is going on in the world.”

Pragmatically, it has to be underlined that the engagement of religion in development is to be enduring (Alkire 2006).

2.4.2. Religion and Community Attachment

At a community level, social cohesion is an asset that provides security, regulates behavior and improves on people’s standards of living (Karbo 2013). Social values and relationships can constitute bonding ties, bridging networks or linkages amongst (groups) of people and, at the interface between religion and development, similar binding, bridging and linking networks can be distinguished (Ruben 2011). Congregations do have a great potential for strengthening community attachment. Mainline religious communities are critical sources of the norms and networks that can underpin the growth of social cohesion in rural areas (Andrews 2011). This includes many forms of participation and sensitization that congregations offer to local people.

To participate meaningfully implies the ability to positively influence the course of events (Mtata 2012). The congregations’ role in the participation and mobilization of local people takes one of the bases for the sentiments dimension of community attachment. This dimension includes the subjective or affective side of community attachment, and can also be called a “sense of community”. Such sense of community can be seen from various formal and informal associational ties that people create when attending congregational activities. It can also be seen in the religiously based feelings and motivations that congregations offer to their members. This includes spiritual and mental support for the local people, which is one of their basic tasks in rural development. Preaching the gospel, praying for rural people, pastoral care and so on, are

forms of religious action, which have the potential to give rural residents both hope for the future and the feeling that at least some personal needs are being “satisfied by the community” (Pesonen and Vesala 2000).

2.4.3. Religion and Development in Ethiopia

Regarding the livelihood of citizens in Ethiopia, the basic needs of the majority of rural households is met through agricultural farming which consists of cropping and livestock rearing (Yared 2001). Religious donations as revealed by Kumilachew (2015) are the main livelihood strategies of Addis Ababa Orthodox Christian Churches and their respective communities. These Godly donations, either through Vow, Asrat, and Mudaye Metsewat are commonly preferred by the EOTC in many ways. According to the study, Addis Ababa Churches collect an average of 476, 000 ETB per church in a month. This financial strength will last as long as the number of Orthodox Christians who see religiosity in terms of religious donations is increasing from time to time.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) has played a significant role in development efforts in Ethiopia. In the education sector, it has been a major contributor, serving the Ethiopian Ministry of Education. Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (DICAC 2011) (a development wing of the Church) revealed that major areas of intervention are: rural water supply, road construction, education, prevention of HIV and AIDS, emergency relief, sanitation and health.

EOTC’s mission is to:

Assist the disadvantaged communities in Ethiopia to attain self-reliance through tackling the root causes of poverty, drought, conflict, gender inequality and fighting

HIV/AIDS pandemic by promoting sustainable development programs and community empowerment (EOC-DICAC, 2005b, p.17)

Collaboration in peace building and conflict transformation, fresh water and safe sanitation and gender based violence are also the main thematic areas of EOTC (Bulti 2012).

Furthermore, according to DICAC (2012) and Alemayehu (2007), monastic communities are acting as pioneers for the introduction of environmental conservation and carbon trading and that they become centers of demonstration and learning for improved agricultural practices, sustainable land management techniques, improved food security and rural livelihoods such as the introduction of biogas digesters and solar energy. In fact, as scholars have already confirmed, different interventions by religious institutions in various activities of rural communities' development have quite a crucial significance.

When we come to Ethiopian rural communities' context, these institutions are still playing an ambivalent role for overall development of those communities more particularly on economic activities. If we take most of the north Ethiopian rural communities where Christian congregations took the significant share of the population, there are lots of holiday celebrities including weekends. As a result various claims are being forwarded for or against the functions of these celebrities on the issue of development. As to my understanding, in fact, due to such celebrities, there is an impact on the economic aspects of development on those rural communities. But other socio cultural aspects of development are being strengthened during those holidays at which marketing activities, gatherings concerning different socioeconomic issues, visiting relatives (including those who are in uncertainties) and, even, different works except tilling, cutting trees and the like, can also be carried out by residents of rural communities

on those days. Therefore, religious driven activities in rural communities of Ethiopia not only impedes but also facilitates development since the issue and/or concept of development itself goes beyond economic aspects.

CHAPTER THREE

STUDY SETTING AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses methodological underpinnings through which objectives of the enquiry were achieved. It incorporates description of the study area and justifications of the study site selection as well as methods employed in the study. Accordingly, sections that follow describe research approach and design, sampling design and procedure, and methods as well as procedures of data collection. Methods through which the collected data were analyzed and ethical considerations have also been described in the succeeding sub-sections of the chapter.

3.1. Study Setting

3.1.1. Description of the Study Area

Sellassie Monastery is found in Debre Elias *Woreda* of eastern Gojjam in Amhara National Regional State. The monastery is located 38 km in the western direction from Elias (the *woreda* town), 80 km from Debre Markos (the zone capital), 349 km from Bahir Dar (the region's capital), and 379 km from Addis Ababa. It has been founded in January 1994 E.C. by five monks (Debre Elias *Woreda* Culture and Tourism Office 2014).

According to the *woreda* communication office (2012), the monastery is located in a hot land area and its neighboring *kebeles* are found in midland. It is surrounded by four different *kebeles* (*Wamet* in the south west, *Degolima* in the north, *Megalburie* in the east, and *Mebesh* in the south east) and two rivers (*Temcha* and *Tetma* in the west and south respectively). The monastic community covers about 500 hectares of land in the desert that have been allowed by government at the time of its establishment. There are three churches (*Yohannes*, *Sellassie* and

Kidane Mihret) in the monastery and there are two residential villages where monks and nuns live separately.

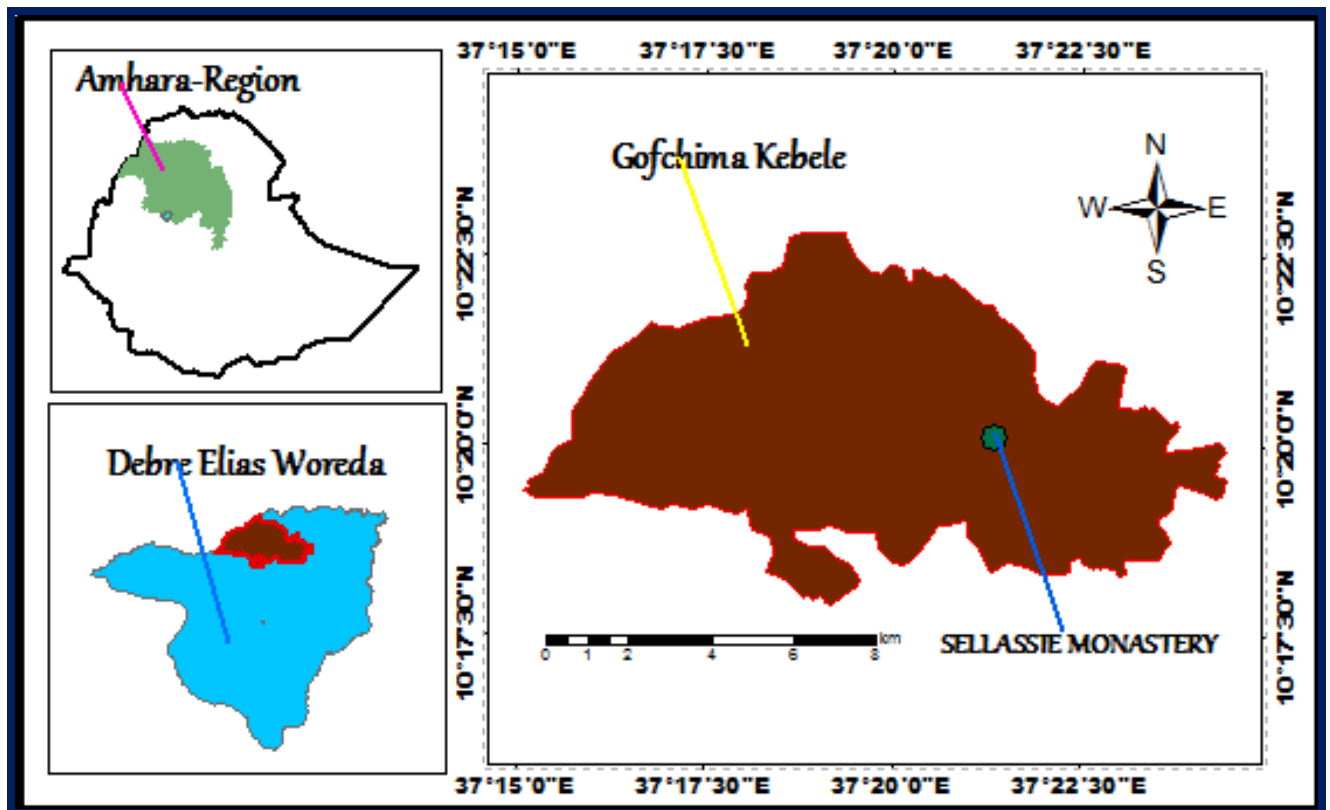


Figure:3: Map of the Study Area

Source: Ethio-GIS

Demographic Composition of the Monastery

About 83 ascetic people constantly reside in the monastery of which 59 are nuns and the rest 24 are monks. Moreover, for temporary purpose, quite a number of people go to the monastery mostly to get different services from the monastic community. In fact, people, who are continuously in-and-out of the monastery, cannot be exactly known because they can, either, be increased or decreased in different times. However, on average, about 250-300 persons join the monastery per day for temporary purpose, whose existence depend on the achievement of the needed services from the monastery, and, at the same time, equivalent number of persons leave

the monastery within a day. But at the time of annual Saint Days being celebrated in the monastery, on average, about 15,000- 18,000 persons attend (all of which are getting their food and house (hostel) from the monastery for free).

3.1.2. Justification of the Study Site Selection

Sellassie Monastery is selected due to its rapid expansion within a very short period of time since its establishment (about a decade and half) and doing different activities which has its own role to both the monastic and surrounding communities' residents. Besides, since I am from the *woreda* where the monastery is placed, time and resources used for data collection were saved and essential data for the study were collected.

{{{Another motive behind selecting such study site is that, I myself have had an exposure of visiting the monastery and considered different activities being carried out in it, together with their respective contributions to different people living in and outside the monastery, including challenges facing, are quite unusual; hence researchable.

3.2. Research Methodology

3.2.1. Research Approach

Qualitative research approach was employed in the study, taking social constructivist assumptions in which individuals seek their own understanding of the world/setting where they live and work. Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning ascribed by individuals/groups to their respective social/human problem (Cresswell 2009). Accordingly, emerging questions and procedures were given due consideration in the data collection process. Subjective meanings of study participants, which were varied and multiple,

in accordance with their experience, have also been considered in the study. Hence, such meanings, as core data gained from study participants, were relied on their views of development based on values and beliefs of their religion which they are affiliated with and being practiced in the study area.

Taking such qualitative research approach into consideration, rich, multiple and important data were collected with regard to the overall role of religious institutions in [rural] community development, including challenges facing, from the study participants. Subsequently, opportunities of the monastic community with respect to attachment, livelihood asset and perceptions held by other (surrounding) communities to the overall activities being carried out in the study area, were given due emphasis in this study.

3.2.2. Study Design

A phenomenological methodology of qualitative research approach with a cross sectional study design was adopted in the study aimed at investigating whether religious institutions have a role in rural community development or not, taking both the insider (monastic community members) and outsiders' point of view of the study participants. Phenomenology is a critical reflection of conscious and lived experience in terms of the individuals' relationship with time, space, and personal history in order to understand social reality (Grounding 2002). This study design was employed in the study because it is important to examine the vitality of symbols, codes, and most importantly the creation of new communities associated with understanding their origins and particular techniques/practices on the studied issue. Furthermore, by using such design, study participants were selected since they have lived and/or experienced the issue being studied in the

study area (Monastery). Consequently, how those informants make sense of their experience was examined which, in turn, was recognized through the process of interpretation.

Time wise, cross sectional study design was employed in the study. The intention behind using cross sectional study design in scrutinizing religious institutions nexus community development from the monastic and nearby communities' perspective is that the study was undertaken through collection of data at a specific period of time mainly because of time limitation which deters conducting longitudinal study design.

3.2.3. Sampling Design and Procedure

In this study, sample study participants were selected by using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is important to have study participants that will yield the most relevant and plentiful data in the issue to be studied (Yin 2011). Instead of selecting study participants through other sampling techniques in accordance with their ready availability which is likely to produce incomplete data, purposive sampling was important to obtain broad and full information and perspectives from study subjects of this study.

Therefore, in order to get rich and full information in relation to religious (monastic) institutions with their respective role to rural community development; and by taking religious perspectives on development into consideration, founders of the study monastery and associated leaders (monks) were, initially, selected purposively. Then other (ordinary) members who are constantly residing in the monastery and practically experiencing the monastic life were also purposively selected as sample study participants. Moreover, people, who are familiar with the monastery; either by using different services of the monastery (such as *Tsebel*) or who have the experience of participating in different activities of the monastery were selected as sample study

participants. The latter study participants were mostly selected from residents of nearby communities because they are the most frequently affected (either positively or negatively) by the very existence of the monastery which is important to get their view towards the overall activities of the monastic community. Besides, other persons, whose life has been greatly influenced due to activities being undertaken in the monastery, have also been selected as study participants from elsewhere but found in the monastery at the time of data collection. Accordingly, numbers of sample study participants were determined based on the saturation of the information (data) collected as long as the issues of religious practices, in relation with rural community development, are concerned. And, hence, the number of sample study participants of the respective method of data collection depended on the adequacy of the collected data.

3.2.4. Procedure of Data Collection

While conducting data collection, I strictly considered both ethical issues and scientific rules of qualitative data collection method, as far as procedure of data collection was concerned in this study. Primarily, I have got an approval from the Advisor and other concerned bodies of Addis Ababa University. Then, I consulted the concerned body from *Debre Elias woreda* culture and tourism office showing letter of creed (cooperation) given by Sociology department heads of both Addis Ababa and Debre Markos Universities. The concerned *woreda* administrator issued the letter to leaders of the study monastery. Then I arranged time of data collection by consulting leaders of the monastery and other study participants after their willingness to be interviewed have been confirmed through personal orientation sessions; hence actual date and time of data collection (interview) was arranged. The entire data collections have been carried out from March 07th to April 4th of 2017.

Accordingly, data collection began with field observation, followed by in-depth interview and end with focus group discussions. And systematic observations were kept to be carried out throughout the data collection process that helped me to grasp the overall activities of the monastic community. All necessary data for the study were collected by me.

3.2.5. Sources and Methods of Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data sources were used in the study. Anew data gathered for the first time were collected as primary data. On the other hand, data which have already been collected by someone else were also collected as secondary data sources in this study. Thus, different books, journal articles and other necessary literature related with religion and development in general and community development in particular were reviewed. Besides, afresh (primary) data was collected using different qualitative data collection tools of in-depth interview, focus group discussion, and direct (systematic) observation. These primary data collection methods, together with their respective procedural usage in the study, are presented as follows:

Individual In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews are those interviews that are designed to discover basic motives and desires. Such an interview methods of collecting data involves presentation of stimuli, and get replication in terms of overall response (Kothari 2004); hence are conducted to explore needs, desires and feelings of informants in this study.

In order to have detailed data on the subject pertinent to the objectives of the study, the researcher conducted in-depth interview with 24 sample study participants. 7 of them have been drawn from members of the monastic community, including associated leaders (monks) of the

monastery and 6 interviewees were selected from different persons who have an exposure to use various services of the monastery. Besides, 11 outsider community members, who are drawn from nearby residents of the monastery, with regard to their sense of attachment and how they perceive the overall activities of the monastic community and its contribution to their community since its establishment were also taken as an in- depth interviewees.

Both unstructured and semi structured interview questions were employed in this method of data collection in order to probe more detailed responses where informants were kindly requested to clarify what they have said. And since this is a phenomenological study which concerned with meanings that people ascribe to phenomena, interviewees were requested to stick with talking about their own work and/or experience with regard to overall practices of the monastic community and its overall opportunities and challenges to him/herself and to the respective nearby community.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussion is a data collection instrument in qualitative research approach in which the opinion and perception towards the issue (subject) are explored through free and open discussions between members of a group and the researcher (Yeraswork 2010). Those groups are said to be “focused” because the researcher is expected to gather individuals who previously have had some common experience or presumably share some common views on the subject (Yin 2011).

Activities being carried out in the monastery related with its opportunities to community attachment, securing livelihood assets, complemented by nearby community members’ perception, were explicitly explored through explicit use of group interaction to produce rich

data about the issue. Social responsibilities, gender, age and other persons who have had special exposure to the monastery, among others, were taken in to consideration while purposefully selecting discussants of the focus group. Accordingly, three FGDs were arranged. The first FGD was arranged taking 7 participants (discussants) from ascetic members of the monastic community who are constantly residing in the monastery. Other (outsider) persons who have a continuous experience of being in-and-out of the monastery to be able to get different services of the monastery and who have had an exposure of participating in different activities were also selected as members of the second FGD. Accordingly, 9 informants were selected as the second FGD participants (discussants) from *Mahibere Kidane Mihret*; one of the six associations organized to participate in different activities of the monastery. The third FGD was arranged from neighboring community members who were selected by considering responsibility, gender and age as criteria; hence, 7 discussants were purposefully selected from one of these *kebeles* (Degolima) which was also selected purposively.

Field Observation

Direct observation was taken place in a systematic way that help the researcher complement data gained through other methods of data collection. Moreover, through observation, it is possible to avoid the hidden bias (if any) and very important to entertain rival explanations of the study participants (Yin 2009).

Hence, such method was used to understand what is really happening in the monastery in relation to its overall opportunities and challenges to both the monastic and surrounding communities' development. Besides, how individuals/groups behave, act and interact with each other while

participating in the overall activities of the monastery was understood through this method of data collection.

3.2.6. Methodological Triangulation

Religion is one of the complex and dynamic phenomenon to be dealt in terms of its opportunities and challenges to community development. Triangulating data sources of a study is used for seeking convergence across qualitative and quantitative data (Yeraswork 2010). Hence, to better achieve the objectives of this study, it is plausible to triangulate using primary data collection methods (discussed above); even though all of those data collection methods are qualitative ones.

Therefore, procedure of data collection was applied as a strategy of converging data which is vital to get trustworthiness and expand the interpretations of data that were collected and presented through different methods. Accordingly, summarized and triangulated version of primary data collection methods, with their respective specific objectives, unit of analysis and data sources is indicated in the table below.

Table 1: Methodological Triangulation

Specific objectives	Unit of analysis	Observation unit (data source)	Method of data collection
To describe livelihood strategies of the monastic community in the study area	-Livelihood strategies of the monastic community -Activities being carried out -Effects shown -livelihood assets being generated	-selected leaders of the monastery -selected worshipers (ascetic) within the monastery -selected nearby community residents	-In-depth interview -Filed observation -FGD
To scrutinize the community attachment driven by religious values and beliefs in the study area	-Participation, -Interpersonal relationships and -Sentiments to each other within the monastery	-Selected Monks -Selected worshipers -sample community residents	-FGD -in-depth interview -Field observation
To explore the influence of monastery to surrounding communities' development	-effects on livelihood -impact on health (psycho social support) -effects on crime prevention	-Selected nearby community residents	-In-depth interview - FGD
To describe challenges facing religious institutions in promoting rural community development in the study area	Challenges of community development as a result of the monastic community	- key informants - sample community residents - <i>woreda</i> officials	-in-depth interview -FGD -Field observation

3.2.7. Method of Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis is making sense of massive amount of collected data, reducing the volume of information, identifying significant patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal and, hence, producing findings (Creswell 2009).

Initially, the collected data were reviewed through reading and listening of the note taken by the researcher and tape recorder respectively which were employed as data collection equipment. The tape recorded material/data were directly transcribed into Amharic and, then, translated into English. Direct quoting was also used to make a comprehensive understanding. And direct/lived experience of informants and other data gained from all methods of data collection were thematically analyzed.

The overall collected data of the study subject/issue was organized by using different codes in accordance with the respective themes. Those themes were arranged taking each specific objective as a base and reducing/breaking it into more specific sub themes by using manageable units. Then different data that have been arranged in their respective sub themes and/or objectives were synthesized to give meaningful finding and, after that, the synthesized information was given a pattern to be able to make it coherent and understandable enough.

In terms of theoretical orientation of interpretation, the already analyzed data were interpreted using interpretive phenomenological analysis to be able to understand how study participants make sense of their own experiences by considering/recognizing their accounts and actions as having another verifiable reality. Subjective states were also considered by taking an insider's perspective while interpreting the data. Through interpretation, the negotiation between the researcher and study participants were recognized to exhaustively produce the account of the insider's perspective.

3.2.8. Ethical Considerations

While studying groups of a particular rural community having its own religious connotation, research ethics, as key issues in any research, need to be strictly maintained. Taking this into

consideration, maximum effort was exerted to safeguard the rights of all research participants; by keeping their confidentiality, respecting each of them and acknowledging their values, norms and government laws in the whole process of carrying out this study.

Before data collection, the researcher has had supportive letters, written both in English and Amharic, from Addis Ababa University and *Debre Markos* University respectively. Accordingly, the researcher obtained legal permission from the respective concerned bodies of the *woreda* and study participants.

During data collection, the necessary supportive letter was presented for all of the study participants along with open communication of the study objectives. Study participants were also kindly requested to have freedom from asking questions, including the identity (address) of the researcher and refusing to participate at any stage of data collection. Consent of each participant were also obtained to participate in the study and to be able to audio record by the researcher. With the exception of study participants who have been included in the acknowledgement, to the rest informants, pseudonym was given and/or used to each of them that will help the researcher keep their confidentiality.

Study participants were recruited and sampled stick to the design of the research set by the researcher. Any time after data collection, the researcher will be responsible for any misleads (if any) which will be emanated from findings of this research, and which, in turn, will affect the rights of all study participants and the monastic community at large.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

In this section, major findings of the study are analyzed and interpreted in a sequential order pertaining to each of the stated objectives. Accordingly, it started with giving preliminary information on the main livelihood strategies being carried out by members of the monastic community. Then how the monastic community, driven by faith, affects social attachment and the way different community members are being mobilized, have been dealt. The role being played by the study monastery to the respective nearby communities' development, due to activities taking place in it, with respect to psycho social support, generation of alternative income, crime reduction and eradication of harmful traditions are also indicated. Challenges encountered by the study monastery in its overall socio economic as well as religious activities have also been presented at the end of this section.

4.2. Livelihood Strategies of the Monastic Community

4.2.1. Irrigation Based Agriculture

For community development to occur, according to asset based approach to development, it is important to link asset with essential opportunities by developing capacity to organize and mobilize the available community resources (Coyle 2006). Asset building, as revealed by Vidal (2001), improves the quality of life among residents of low- to moderate-income communities. And by matching assets with opportunities, community members are more likely to mobilize their own resources through a realistic activity or plan and they can also take a genuine responsibility for.

Yared (2001) argued that the strategies that can promote the livelihood assets of rural households through religious institutions are agriculture, income diversification and the natural resource base which need attention by concerned institutions in designing and implementing these strategies. Similarly, this study found out that members of the study monastic community are using agriculture as the main livelihood strategy. Most of the agricultural products are being produced through an irrigation system through which the long lasting tradition of crop production led by rain fed agriculture in the surrounding rural communities of the study monastery are being influenced and/or transformed. Even if the monastery is placed on a desert area where the soil cannot absorb rain water for a long period of time, there is considerable agricultural practices/productivity being carried out through different innovative irrigation activities. Most of such agricultural practices are being undertaken by taking water from Tetma river to various and, topographically, difficult places where farmlands found and through continuous watering of farms.



Figure 4: Irrigation canal made by the monastic community from Tetma River.

Firstly, drafted by Abeminet of the monastery in 1996 EC, 43, who is among the leading founders of the monastery, with the help of member residents as well as other voluntary persons from surrounding communities, such an irrigation system is designed to take water from the river to topographically higher places and distributed back to the lower ones where most of the monastic community members reside and where most of the agricultural lands placed through different drainage systems. Each of the drainages has been made to play quite specific roles beginning from drinking, food preparation, and other agricultural activities.



Figure 5: Canals being used for irrigation and drinking in the Monastery

Such irrigation based agricultural activity is the way through which most of the livelihoods of the monastic community members (including people who are temporarily living there to get various services of the monastery) depend on. Such description is also substantiated by a study conducted by DICAC (2012), which stated that monastic communities are acting as pioneers and/or centers of demonstration and learning for improved agricultural practices, sustainable land management techniques, improved food security and rural livelihoods.

Production of sugarcane takes the highest share of the agricultural activities being produced through such an irrigation system followed by production of maize, mango, banana etc. Other crops such as *teff* and wheat are also being tried to be produced, but are difficult to be productive enough because of the nature of the soil that cannot absorb water for a long period of time. A 42 years old monk having an authority of Moferbet in the monastery described the difficulty of producing crops in the monastery as follows:

Even though we are producing teff and wheat, we cannot, even, be subsistent to feed ourselves and our guests. What we are doing is buying such products from farmers of surrounding communities placed outside the desert through the money being made by selling other agricultural products (mostly sugarcane and fruits) being produced in the monastic community (Moferbet of the Monastery, In-depth Interviewee, 10 March 2017).

From the above description, it can be understood that despite the possibility of producing such food crops, it takes much effort and time demanding continuous watering much higher than other herbages that have a tendency of absorbing water by their relatively longer roots in the soil where they grow

All agricultural activities are being undertaken through native resources and/or equipment and without any expertise help from concerned government bodies. Agricultural products being produced in the monastery through irrigation, with their respective amount of products and appropriate land coverage are indicated on the table below.

Table 2: Agricultural products being produced in the monastery with their respective land coverage

S/no	Product	Land Coverage/hectare	Remarks
1	Sugarcane	40	-
2	Maize	14	-
3	Mango +Banana	6	Both are being simultaneously produced at similar farmland at a time
4	Avocado +papaya	4.5	Both are being simultaneously produced at similar farmland at a time
5	Wheat	4	-
6	Pepper	2.5	-
7	Sesame	2	Being also produced by the help of rain water (do not need continuous watering as such)
8	Garlic	2	-
9	Mace	0.25	-
10	Traditional Honey	30 hives	-

From the above table we can infer that though the monastic community is using little (less than a quarter) of the farm land given by the government, much is being produced through an intensive irrigation system where herbages take the lion share of these agricultural productivities, which are relatively conducive to be produced in such a desert area than other food crops.

Another and quite significant role of these herbages and fruits over other crops of *teff* and wheat is that these herbages and fruits, once planted, can be used for a long period of time with no need of replanting them at any season of production which saves time and energy. Particularly, products of sugarcane and banana can be used throughout the year and others can give fruits and/or products for consumption at least twice in a year.



Figure 6: Agricultural products being produced through irrigation in the monastery

Such agricultural products being produced through irrigation system are not only used for feeding all members of the monastic community and guests who are continuously visiting the monastery without any payment, but also serve for other developmental and/or infrastructural activities being made through selling these products to nearby *kebeles*, towns and/or markets. Hence, Abeminet of the monastery described, the monastic community's income depends on such an irrigation based intensive agricultural productivity.

According to the Abeminet, what makes Sellasie monastery different from other EOTC or monasteries is that there are no any promotion activities to get money either through vows or other mechanisms from believers and guests. Religious donations as revealed by Kumilachew (2015) are the main livelihood strategies of Addis Ababa Orthodox Christian Churches and their respective communities which are being paid/donated, either through silet, Asrat or Mudaye Metsewat that are commonly preferred by the EOTC in many ways. Quite differently, in the study monastery, it is strictly forbidden to make any begging activities either through preparation

of bids, umbrella or by preaching people to give money by means of silet, asrat etc. The Abeminet asserts:

It is not through giving money to churches through which people can satisfy the almighty God, but through good behavior supplemented by hard working. Currently, most priests and other leaders of churches, as to my understanding, are deceiving followers and/or believers as if they give money or any other material and non -material contributions to churches (no matter what ill behavior or sinful activities they commit), will get heaven in their future “eternal” life after death. In our monastery, we didn’t ever say “if such positive things, such as healing, happen to you, you would pay such amount of vows, unless you would miss such opportunities” which is against the very beliefs and values of our religion. For me such types of activities are not different from trading practices than religious ones (Abeminet of the Monastery, In-depth interviewee, March 2017).

Such an assertion is supported by a 36 years old monk with an authority of *Megabi* in the monastery who argue for hard working as the possible way of being sanctified by God. He indicated:

If we are at work, we cannot get enough time to commit “devilish” activities and/or behaviors like gossiping, theft, murder, engaging in conflict etc. The overall objective of our monastery is to defend the life of people from their destructive and other unwanted behaviors by practically teaching them and make corrective measures to their life. And the most significant way of accomplishing such teaching is hard working in various developmental activities of the monastery where agricultural practices, through irrigation, takes the significant share (Megabi of the Monastery.7 March 2017).

The foregoing assertions indicate that the monastic community’s aim is not to depend on others but to be relied on its own development made through its own members’ hard working and helping outside (nearby) community members in need.

In fact, if there are people who want to give vows or any other patronages or supports, they would not be prohibited to give and if there are people who want to do so, they are supposed to

give in kind. And through such vows and other in-kind supports, about 4 halls, which have a capacity of holding about 300 persons each and which are using as hostels for guests, have been constructed through different persons organized through “*mahiber*”. And currently about 11 halls are found in the monastery.

4.2.2. Selling Agricultural Products

Coming back to income sources being generated through agricultural products, the monastery has two shops that are using to sell those products (one for sugarcane and the other for other products to be sold through) both of which are placed in the monastery. Through these shops about 1500-2000 and 1000-1500 birr is being gained on average per day from sell of agricultural products. These selling activities carried out to persons, particularly youth, of surrounding communities who are buying those products for profit. Besides, other incomes are being gained through selling agricultural products of the monastery to outside communities and towns such as Debre Markos, Bichena, and *Motta* by transporting through the help of a car bought by the monastic community by 830, 000 birr in 2006 E.C. And about 2500-3000 birr is being gained per day on average through selling sugarcane and other products such as banana, mango and papaya.

A 52 years old teacher of Nigus Tekle Haymanot general secondary school placed at Debre Markos town, found collecting mango from mango trees of the monastery also described the reason that made him be a constant customer of the monastic community as follows:

I firstly come to the monastery with my wife who was sick of asthma to be healed through the holy water of the monastery. And right after being here in the monastery, I became a constant customer not only for the improvement of my wife's health through the holy water of the monastery but also, and the begging free developmental activities taking place in it. Before coming here, I was in conflict with myself at every moment of watching wide spreading begging activities in many churches and monasteries by the name of vows and any other

measures. And I used to perceive that, in the near future, most churches will be changed to shops or market places instead of serving their expected religious services. Quite differently, in this monastery, even though there are many guests coming to get its different services and there are many people who are constantly residing in it, the monastic community is reliant enough on its own agricultural activities rather than depending on vows (in my opinion begging) through which most other churches and monasteries are dependent on. Besides, what I am always surprised is that, beyond feeding people who are constantly flowing in to for free, it has a considerable support to other (nearby) communities (In-depth interview with teacher, 9 March 2017).

From the very beginning till now EOTC is being criticized for preaching begging to be expanded by the name of “*asrat*”, vows and, even, for students (*Yekolo Temari*) to beg and get their food , as if they would be clever enough in their education by doing so. But such types of preaching are not allowed in *Sellassie* monastery.

Weber, (1930), asserted that, hard work and economic success were taken as signs of salvation, the force behind an unplanned influence that created the development of capitalism, in which people develop their own enterprise and engage in trade for the accumulation of wealth. In the Ethiopian monastic communities’ context, DICAC (2012) found out and concluded that Monasteries have a pool of reliably disciplined labor, able to perform different tasks to a tight schedule and in organized manner which, in turn, have a great benefit for agricultural research and extension. Likewise, FGD discussants from the ascetic members of the study monastery point out that there are a number of monks and other *ardi’it* in the monastery working day and night with full commitment. They work together with all members at the day time; and, at night, instead of sleeping, they spend most of their time doing many things by tying battery on their forehead.

Hence, the above explanation by FGD discussants and foregoing points of interviewees helps to apprehend that, unlike in most churches of the EOTC particularly the urban ones whose members' livelihood depends on the money/material contributions of followers, there are uniquely practicing agricultural activities in the study monastic community to ensure livelihood of members that made them be self-reliant. Hence, there is a begging free livelihood strategy being undertaken in the study monastery.

4.2.3. Dilemma of working on “Working” and Saint Days

Currently, the EOTC is being continuously blamed for the excessive holidays being celebrated followed by prohibitive norms, values and beliefs not to do any work at the times of these saint days which, in turn, are assumed to deter development especially in rural parts of Ethiopia in general and in the nearby rural areas of the study monastery in particular.

Critical theory of religion argues for the essential nature of religion in such a way that religion is not positivistic but critical. The insight is critical in a sense that it measures what cases are from religious point of view and what the religion itself claims about the case to be, so that the potential contradiction or the possibilities of change in religious constitutions can be examined (Seibert 2015). The critical theory of religion confronts the historical reality of Christianity with its truth claim and thereby discovers its potentials and possibilities. Christianity shares this dilemma between reality and promise with all other world religions (Siebert 2015). This study also shows such a dilemma in such a way that, on the one hand, religion (EOTC) preaches believers to be hard workers based on the holy bible, and on the other hand, quite a number (more than half) of days within a month are represented by different Saints that prohibits different works not to be done through. The practical reality related with such contradictory

arguments are dealt hereunder standing from the experience of the study monastic community and its neighboring rural communities.

In fact, said a 47 years old administrator of Debre Elias Woreda communication office, the existence of large number of saint days have an effect in most parts of the *woreda*, including nearby farming communities of sellassie monastery. But, he added, these assumptions are not quite true in some parts of the *woreda* especially in Sellassie monastery where everything is being carried out based only on religious values and beliefs. According to a description made by Abeminet of the monastery, EOTC doesn't have any objection of working on saint days. He extended such an argument as: *If there are persons and/or religious leaders who preach people not to do anything in saint days, they are deceiving the people whom they are preaching and are to blame for such deception (Abeminet of the Monastery 2017).*

Of course, there are a number of saint days being commemorated by almost all believers of the religion. But these believers do not spend these saint days without doing any work. Because there are various works being done both in working and saint days. "If we take this monastery as an example", said Megabi of the monastery, "besides Sabbath days and others, there are three saint days being commemorated by days of 7 (Sellassie), 16 (Kidane Mihret) and 30 (Yohannis) of each month since these three saints (tabots) exist in the monastery within three churches (one for each). On these three saint days, along with other days being commemorated annually, there are works prohibited to be done like digging, cutting trees, plowing, etc. which are assumed to be "hard" works. But members of the monastic community spend these saint days doing "light" works such as watering plants and other farm lands, and decomposition of farm lands from residues of sugarcane products and other agricultural products intended to replace modern fertilizers. Carrying sugarcane and other products to the needed places, giving psycho social

supports by leaders of the monastery, undertaking different marketing activities needed for the monastery, and creating conducive conditions for the next “working” days to do things in a planned manner are other works being done on saint days.

An administrator of Debre Elias Culture and Tourism office also explained that people who assume saint days of EOTC as deterrent factor of development are those who want to project their own problem on the church. And works that are being done in the monasteries such as Sellassie monastery are best examples for EOTC not to be blamed as a result of its saint days. And he also explained that: *Except people’s laziness of doing works on saint days, there are quite a number of “light” works to be done in these days which are not less, if not greater, than “hard” works being done in “working” days (In-depth interview with Culture and Tourism Officer of the Woreda, 14 March 2017).*

A 79 years old man (Merigeta) from Gofchima kebele described supporting the above argument in such a way that:

Jesus himself criticized worshipers of ancient Israel, whom he was preaching, for spending Sabbath days without doing anything. Even he ordered, as St. Paul put it in the holy bible (Thessalonians 3:10) ‘the one who do not want to do should not eat’. And if there is a person who eats without doing, he/she is a debtor (In-depth interview with Merigeta at Gofchima Kebele, 16 March 2017).

From the above explanation, we can understand that even though there is a slight difference between works of “working” and saint days that have been developed by the EOTC followers through time, there is no passage of the holy bible that prohibits for works not to be done on Saint Days. And with the exception of categorizations of works to be accomplished on such “working” and Saint Days, if a person is committed enough, there is no day supposed to be spent without working. As FGD participants from service users (members of Kidane Mihret voluntary

association) revealed that the biggest problem is people's thoughts and/or mere considerations of works being done on "working" days as real works. But there are a number of works being done on Saint Days which have a multi-faceted influence on a person's livelihood; particularly on the improvement of his/her social capital that has a crucial impact to his/her overall development.

Megabi of Sellassie monastery also explained about working on saint days standing from rural communities of Ethiopia among EOTC believers that:

Even if doing on saint days are mostly considered in most rural parts of Ethiopia as a sin, there are many things to be done on these days. But the biggest problem in most of rural areas is lack of doing things through appropriate time plan (In-depth interview with Megabi of the Monastery, 7 March 2017).

Though there are quite a number of works being done on Saint Days, they are not taken as part of development works; and are considered as routines, even, by those who are spending these days by working, especially farmers themselves. Development is not all about digging, cutting trees, tilling and the like which are taken as "hard" works to be done in "working" days.

Most socio cultural activities of rural communities surrounding the study area, which are parts of day to day life of each and every person, are being accomplished through saint days. And development is not only about assuring economic issues to oneself unless supported by other socio-cultural activities such as asking and/or helping those who are in jail, in hospitals because of their sickness, participating in different community meetings such as Idir and mahiber, asking/helping those who are in mourning, etc., which, in turn, are vital to make sure social well-being.

FGD participants held with different service users and/ or customers of Sellassie monastery at Degolima community indicated that what makes the EOTC to be blamed as a result of its

different saint days that have a tendency of deterring development is that most people (especially farmers) are spending these Saint Days by going to nearby towns and are unnecessarily spending the income they earned by doing on “working” days. Alcohol drinking followed by different criminal acts are being committed on these saint days. One of the discussants from the FGD pointed out that:

The main reason that made us lag behind is lack of doing things through a well-organized plan of action, which is being seen not only by farmers of our communities but also by those living in most urban places. And the problem of such lagging behind is attributed to values and beliefs of EOTC mostly through its saint days (FGD Participant at Degolima, 1 April 2017).

A farmer, 46, whom I found participating in a decomposition activity being made from residues of agricultural products of Sellassie monastery at Sunday described the overall nature of working in “working” and saint days in the community where he reside (Hame Tekle Haymanot) as follows:

Besides Saturdays and Sundays, there are other Saint Days in each month which are assumed by most of our community residents as a serious sin if one spend these days through doing “hard” works. These are “Michael”, “Mariam”, and “Balegziabher” being represented by 12th, 21st, and 29th days of each month respectively. Besides, especially in our Kebele, since the “tabot” of our community’s church is “Tekle Haymanot” represented by every 24th day of each month, every member of our Kebele don’t do those “hard” types of works on the day. However, there are many types of “light” works being done in our community that are not in conflict with these saint days. With the exception of these saint days, we spend other days accomplishing our routine farming activities including tilling and other “hard” types of works. Mostly you can observe farmers who are living outside of our community such as “Megalburie” tilling on the 24th day of “Tekle Haymanot” since their community’s “tabot” of church is “Kiros” being commemorated on the 8th day of each month, which is different from ours (In-depth interview with a farmer, 08 March 2017).

What the informant meant is that farmers of most communities spend a day without doing “hard” types of works if and only if that day represents the tabot of their respective church. For instance, there are lots of “hard” types of works being done on the 24th day of “Tekle Haymanot” in sellassie monastery whereas people of the monastic community don’t do or “touch” on the day of Sellasie (7th day of each month), with the exception of “light” works that are not assumed to demote such a saint day.

From such descriptions by the informant, we can also understand that people living in Sellassie monastery and its surrounding communities have both “working” and saint days respectively. Therefore, unless people do not want to do on saint days, there are a number of works to be carried out that have an equivalent value to farmers in relation to “working” days.

A 38 years old priest, who is serving as an evangelical preaching under the EOTC forwarded his own ideological stance on the argument that EOTC’s large number of Saint Days have their own effects in deterring development” as follows:

I strongly agree that the EOTC, as a result of its large number of saint days being spent without work, have a deterrent effect on development. Because, most of EOTC follower farmers, including me and other priests, spend more than half of all days in a month without doing. As to my understanding, this is a culture developed through time than belief. If we read the books of the EOTC, including the holy bible in-depth, with the exception of some Saint Days being celebrated once per annum including Sabbath days which are fundamental saint days, there is no any saint day to be spent without doing any work. Spending days without work according to the real dogma of the EOTC, is a sin by itself, as we can understand from the holy book. From the very beginning, devil goes to Adam to deceive but found him working and couldn’t meet his goal, and turned back to Hewan whom he found without work and made her be deceived. And right after the deception of Hewan by devil that we began to talk about sin and goodness. Hence, work is one way of assuring goodness. Unless belief is supported by work, it would be nonsense (In-depth interview with male Preacher, 16 March 2017).

From such an ideological stance of the priest about work in Saint Days, we can infer that members of Sellassie monastery are doing most of their works depending on the order of the holy bible assuming that hard working is a bridge to heaven.

Supporting the above description made by the priest Liqe Abew of Sellassie monastery pointed out that *most people assume that they can make sure goodness only through fasting, praying, and merely commemorating saint days without doing, which are incorrect acts of such types of believers*. Therefore, as we can understand from the experience of the monastic community, there is a mutual relationship between EOTC and work and/or development instead of one affecting the other though those saint days which, in turn, are affecting work/development especially in most parts of the surrounding rural communities of the monastery. He (Liqe Abew) concluded that it takes more time and effort to avoid such tradition than religion based activities of surrounding rural communities of the monastery, by which the ever growing begging in most church administrators can be stopped.

As I have observed, religious leaders and/or monks of the monastery initiate other members of the monastic community to participate in works at “light” saint days in such a way that, at any time they want things to be done, they firstly begin doing themselves and others join to participate in those things being done by leaders.

Participants of the FGD held with residents of the surrounding community (Degolima) pointed out that, it is not the religion which is demotivating people not to work as a result of saint days; but absence of situations being created by the necessary bodies as well as by the people’s own personal weakness. Even, they mentioned, there are a number of people who are spending working days drinking tella and areqi by continuously going to nearby towns instead of working

on their farm lands and others by those “working” days. Hence, there are a lot to be done by the concerned bodies’ to make people industrious enough instead of merely blaming saint days of the EOTC.

Therefore, the above explanations tell us that while there are a number of works to be accomplished even in those saint days, it becomes a tradition among most rural community residents not do anything on these days. And by the name of recreation, quite a number of destructive acts are being committed on such days which contradict with the assumption that spending a saint day without working is just to get blessing from God. But if a person is able to lead his/her life in a planned manner, supplemented by the necessary support by responsible governmental and nongovernmental bodies, there are quite a number of works to be done on those saint days which have a positive impact on his /her life.

4.3. Faith Driven Social Attachment in the Monastery

Recently, new inspiration is drawn from more value and/or religious-based approaches to development acknowledging the importance of human agency and culture in shaping behavior and in overcoming poverty and exclusion. Increased attention is given to the potential role of shared motivations, common identities and community networks as key drivers for socioeconomic change. This also asks for a re-conceptualization of the interaction between ethical and material forces and the role of religion in supporting development and emancipation processes (Ruben 2011). In line with this, although people who are constantly living in the study monastery as well as those who are temporarily going there to get different services are not quite similar in their ethnicity, language and places of residence or origin, they are required to be united as they are from one family.

As the Abeminet says depending on the Holy Bible, all people in the world, no matter how currently looks different in their color, race, language, as well as place of residence, are from one family. And, hence, according to the values and beliefs of the EOTC in general and Sellassie monastery in particular, there should not be any feeling of difference and/or isolation among people. This is similar with an argument made by Ruben (2011), who stated that social values and relationships can constitute bonding ties, bridging networks or linkages amongst (groups) of people and, at the interface between religion and development, similar binding, bridging and linking networks can be distinguished. That is why almost all guests as well as residents of the monastery, at every moment of their relation, are acting each other as brothers and sisters without any reservations. The Abeminet indicated:

While we are creating (developing) unity by narrowing down differences, any act showing difference among people found in the monastery, including forwarding political ideologies is strictly forbidden (wuguz) (In-depth interview with Abeminet of the Monastery, 7 March 2017).

Right after people's arrival in the monastery, they are always ordered by leaders of the monastery to spend their time with others with a feeling of love and help each other by avoiding their differences in different socio-economic circumstances. Even, at the times of feeding, assuming to avoid differences and developing unity, people are assigned by Gualmegabi of the monastery to sit with "different" persons whom they didn't know each other before and are asked to feed each other under a single feeding plate. About 5-7 persons are assigned to sit per plate.



Figure 7: Feeding practice of guests for free found in the monastery after participation in Yebereket sira

A 21 year old lady from shindi (west Gojjam) and a 34 years old man from Arba Minch (SNNP), whom I found feeding each other under a single plate described that feeding in such a way with such differences help them know each other, make a smooth interaction, do works as one family and exchange cultures followed by norms and values of their origin. Through such practices, people are being made to go back to their origin developing how to live in peace, love, humility and understanding at the expense of their differences.

The most important thing that I have observed is that different works (*yebereket sira*) within the monastery are being done by all persons found in the monastery, with full sentiment even if those works differ and are assigned in accordance with the capacity of each and every person. Congregations do have a great potential for strengthening community attachment. Mainline religious communities are critical sources of the norms and networks that can underpin the growth of social cohesion in rural areas (Andrews 2011). This includes many forms of participation and sensitization that congregations offer to local people. Such a

conclusion is similar to the finding of the study at hand. Generally, people work and feed together within the monastery.

Afememhir of the monastery, with whom I have once gone to the monastery, described the social network he has built as a result of his membership as follows:

Due to my relationship with others which is produced in the monastery, my social capital has been significantly improved. I have a continuous contact either through face to face interaction or by calling with each other through phone in order to share different socio economic opportunities and challenges of ourselves and the monastic community at large. Currently, there are a number of persons calling me from different places; form shoe-shine boys to doctors and other professionals, and from engineers to farmers in order to make discussions to solve our personal problems and other problems of the monastic community. I have learned a lot about living with others with full of love and sentiment with each other without any expectation of reciprocity from each other (In-depth interview with Afememhir of the Monastery, 8 March 2017).

Such an experience based description exemplifies how religion is using as a tool for social solidarity among believers which has a significant value to people beginning from feeling in need by different persons up to achieving socio economic progress. In fact, as Mtata (2012) described it based on his finding, development is not just a matter of reducing poverty and eliminating hunger. Rather, it is a question of building a world where everyone, no matter what his/her social status, can have a full human life, freed from servitude imposed on him or her by others, and a world where freedom is not an empty word. Therefore, the study monastery has a substantial effect on both ascetic people and those who are found there in order to get different services by creating peaceful social relationship, with full sentiment to each other, at the expense of previously perceived differences which is being solidified by equally and voluntarily participating in different activities being carried out in it.

4.3.1. The Monastery as an Agent of Community Mobilization

According to UNFPA (2014), religious institutions are capable of significant social mobilization, in addition to a distinct moral standing. Beyond the convening capacities inherent in raising and utilizing volunteers, they are owners of the longest standing and most enduring mechanisms for raising financial resources. In times when traditional ‘secular’ development is confronting its strongest set of resource challenges, these capabilities cannot be underestimated. Pesonen and Vesala (2006) also proposed that religiously motivated social actions have certain advantages than that of actions without such motivation. In line with such findings, there are a number of people (*ardi’it*) voluntarily doing various activities that have a decisive role to the development and/or expansion of the monastic community. In fact, there are two types of persons (*ardi’it*) in the monastery (1) from residents living in the monastery known as *yewust ardi’t* and (2) from outside (nearby) communities of the monastery known as *yafa ardi’it*. Those *yafa ardi’it* are persons who are going to the monastery in one way or another to get different services of the monastery including *tsebel* and other income generating activities through buying agricultural products with big discount and selling for profit. And at every time of their existence in the monastery, they are expected to voluntarily participate in different works of the monastery as they are getting food for free.

Besides the 83 monks/nuns, there are about 170 *ardi’its* who are constantly living in the monastery but are not monks. These *yewust ardi’it* are contributing the lion- share of developmental activities taking place in the monastic community by voluntarily participating in *yebereket sira*. And about 250-300 persons join the monastery for temporary purpose and similar number of persons exit from the monastic community within a day. Even though there are people who are going to get different services from the monastery, there are also

persons intentionally going there only for doing different yebereket sira with full self-initiation. It is believed that if there are persons who are hesitant to participate in yebereket sira at times of their existence in the monastery, they believed that they would not get mercy and other sanctifications from God.

The congregations' role in the participation and mobilization of local people takes one of the bases for the sentiments' dimension of community attachment. This dimension includes the subjective or affective side of community attachment, and can also be called a "sense of community" (Pesonen and Vesala 2000). Such sense of community, as revealed by researchers from reviewed literatures, can be seen from various formal and informal associational ties that people create within the study monastery when attending congregational activities. It can also be seen in the religiously based feelings and motivations that congregations offer to their members. This includes spiritual and mental support for the local people, which is one of their basic tasks in rural development.

Moreover, the aforementioned statements are substantiated by results of this study because quite a number of youth, organized by different associations, are frequently going to the monastery from different places in order to participate in various developmental activities taking place in the monastery. And currently, (at the time of data collection (March 2017), there are about 6 youth associations who are participating in yebereket sira in the monastery in accordance with the rules and regulations enacted by all members of each association.

These associations, with their respective place of origin, are: (1) Mahibere-Kidane Mihret from Debre Elias town (2) Mahibere Giorgis from Debre Markos town, (3) Mahibere Gebrel from students of Debre Elias Secodary and Preparatory School, and the rest three associations all

having the name of Mahibere Sellassie are from (4) Shindi *woreda* of western Gojjam, (5) *Degolima*, which is a surrounding *Kebele* of the monastery, and (6) members (residents) of the monastic community. All of the working associations have their own specific rules and programs to voluntarily work in the monastery.

Thus, these servants (*ardi'it*) are voluntarily participating in different works of the monastery, including preparation and distribution of food, with full happiness, and sentiment to each other and unity.

An informant, by the age of 36 from the FGD held with Mahibere Sellassie of *Degolima* (Surrounding *kebele* of the monastery) which have 180 members explained how and what members of their association are expected to do in the monastery as follows:

All members of our association are expected to participate in yebereket sira at least once in every two months (at least for three days each). Besides, every member of the association is expected to contribute 10 birr per month which will be used for supplementing receptive activities of two major saint days being celebrated in the monastery; Tir 7 and Hamle 7 E.C. Through such financial and labor contributions, we have built a hall in the monastery having a capacity of holding 300 persons to be rested at a time (FGD Participant, 1 March 2017).

Moreover, a 24 years old informant from Mahibere Kidane Mihret explained that, beyond participating in different *yebereket sira*, which is required to be done voluntarily, each member of the association is expected to prepare all the necessary works for the holiday being celebrated once in a year (in every *Nehassie* 16 E.C.) including reception. All guests of the holiday are being warmly received and get services, including food, by members of such an association. As he said, it is up to all members of the association for such holiday to be peacefully and easily celebrated beginning from eve to the end. And that is why, he said, the monastery become

relatively faster in its overall expansion than other similar churches and monasteries established far before.

Therefore, the monastic community is doing a lot by mobilizing people, especially youth from different communities. And the main reason behind the expansion of the monastery within a short period of time, as to my understanding, is its ability to successfully mobilize most community members especially nearby *kebele* youth to be active participants in overall activities of the monastery.

As a result of being a customer of the monastery, a person has an exposure of knowing different persons from different places and other socio-economic positions, having their own influence on an individual's life through such social capital. People are not only going to the monastery to get services and participate in *yebereket sira*, but also go there to exchange best practices from different monasteries like *Ziquala* and *Debre Libanos* monasteries even if they are aged enough in relation to *sellassie* monastery by their time of establishment.

4.3. The Role of the Monastery in Surrounding Communities' Development

Religious activities taking place within the monastery are not delimited on mere preaching of fasting, prayer and baptism through holy water to be healed and get eternal life. The monastic community, through its various faith driven developmental activities, mostly with its different agro forestry practices, is playing its own role for surrounding communities' development.

4.3.1. Building /Maintaining Churches and other Infrastructures

In rural societies, as concluded by Pesonen and Vesala (2006), the activities being carried out by religious congregations have a multifaceted importance varying from practical activities, such as

economic support for the poorest, to more mental and spiritual activities meant for all members of the Church. Correspondingly, there are quite a number of people residing outside (nearby) communities of the monastery, who need an immediate spiritual and other psycho social supports that need to be gained by going to nearby churches. But these nearby churches have various deficiencies that made them unable to fulfill expectations needed by the respective believers. To solve these problems, Megabi of the monastery described, the monastery is building different new churches and maintaining the old ones which are found in different surrounding communities of the monastery.

Churches and other service centers of surrounding communities that have been built and maintained through the help of the monastic community, together with expenditures spent, according to Megabi of the monastery are indicated as follows: (1) About 150,000 birr cash, and labor support equivalent to 40,000 *birr*, have been spent to maintain Degolima Mariam church; (2) 150,000 birr have been delivered to rebuild Megalburie Kiros Church; (3) 65,000 *birr* have been given to residents of Mebesh Giorgis to build irrigation canals and maintain their church; (4) about 200,000 *birr* support have been given together with free expert support for the purpose of building new church for residents of Jiret Giorgis; and (5) about 40,000 birr have also been spent from revenues of the monastery to maintain Meqar Michael church.

Besides these supports, the monastery's administration has delivered other in-kind supports such as clothes to be dressed by priests and/or deacons. Such supports by the monastic community helps residents of the respective churches not to spend extra expenditure from their own revenues. This is related with, Ruben (2011), who found out that their closeness to poor households in remote communities, their long term relationships with the civic cause and strong

identification with the demands of the poor make FBOs highly reliable partners for grass root oriented development.

In terms of infrastructural development, though only works at dry seasons, about 16 k.m road has been constructed from Degolima to the monastery through facilitation of Amhara Road Authority by accepting the appeal of religious leaders of the monastic community. This is contrary to the finding made by DICAC (2012) which argues that monasteries often face hurdles due to lack of infrastructure, in particular lack of roads which permit them to take their agricultural products to markets and access to agricultural extension; and lack of access road prevents visit of pilgrims at major festivals, who could constitute a source of potential for extra revenue and partnership in development projects.

The construction of the road creates various opportunities not only to residents of the study monastic community but also to neighboring community residing in *woina-dega* climate condition. From the very beginning, if the road was planned to be built by community members' expenditure, it would be impossible for them to spend about 8 million *birr*. After the construction of the road, different agricultural products of the monastery began to be easily transported both by traders and by members of the monastic community themselves. Currently, such products are being easily transported through human labor, donkey or car. Above all, due to the construction of the road, people who used to spend 5-6 hours to walk to the monastery (from Gofchima town) can arrive to the monastery below an hour either through car or motor bicycle that help them save their time and energy.

4.3.2. Generating Alternative Income to Members of Nearby Communities

Above all, the monastic community is creating quite a number of job opportunities to different segments and/or members of surrounding communities, especially youth, to whom new routes of trade have been opened. This is revealed by DICAC (2012) which argues that since monasteries are located in isolated underdeveloped areas where there is often no or little NGO activity, they traditionally champion the interests of the local peasant communities, especially the marginalized and disadvantaged, those affected by natural disasters, orphans, widows, etc. Before, as described by the Abeminet of the monastery, there were lots of youth who want to do anything that can help them earn revenue; but couldn't do that due to lack of startup capital. For these youth, the monastic administration allowed to take various agricultural products like sugarcane, banana, Mango etc. for free and return the money back to the monastic administration after they have sold those products with profit. These products are usually transported to markets where they are intended to be sold either through labor, animate power (donkey) and, sometimes, by car. As a result, explained by Megabi of the monastery, these youth are engaging in different income generating activities such as poultry and sheep reproduction through which they are becoming self-reliant.

A 28 years old farmer from Degolima community whom I found preparing to take sugar cane from the monastery on Saturday morning through his three donkeys expressed:

I am buying sugarcane of about one meter with 1 birr. I am expecting to sell it with 5 birr. Each of my donkeys can hold at least 30 sugarcane of 1 meter each and I am expecting to earn about 360 birr profit from the sugarcane I load with three of these donkeys. Such a profit has a multidimensional relevance to me, my mother, my wife and three of my daughters whom I am living with. Even though I take sugarcane and other products from here once in a week or other saint days, the money which I am making through such activity is helping me and my family to supplement our

livelihoods. Unless a critical condition is created, I would not sell agricultural products of my own (In-depth interview with a farmer, 17 March 2017).

As I have observed, traders, who are taking products from the monastery for profit go to the monastery mostly on Friday and return back to their residential areas and/or markets on Saturday morning. And besides sugarcane, there are a number of youth especially females who have been engaged in taking banana, mango, papaya and others from the monastery to get profit. A 32 years old woman from Gofchima Kebele, whom I found preparing to take banana by her own labor through basket from the monastery described:

I began taking banana and mango from here for profit since October 2009 E.C. As you can see, I buy one banana through 1 birr. And I will sell it within a range of 2 up to 2.50 birr at markets of Gofchima and Elias. Mostly I, once, take about 120 bananas and I am getting (expecting to get) about 150 birr profit on average. Through this, I will cover academic and other expenditures of my two fatherless children, besides the revenue I am earning from the rented 1 hectare farm land that I have. This monastery is a gift that has been sent by God to me. Before, I used to supplement my livelihood by selling tella. But now, since most of the women in Gofchima town depend on selling tella, the profit I used to earn before has been decreased that made me face from financial problems. But now, thanks to this monastery, my livelihood has been improved (In-depth interview women (trader), 18 March 2017).

Such an explanation based on experience is also supported by participants of the FGD held with Degolima community. They indicated that though the monastery is established for religious purpose, various opportunities are being created to most of the community residents in terms of sharing its irrigation based agricultural productivity and trade opportunities being created through buying these products to be sold for profit. Besides, they explained, the monastic administration is helping about 12 children who have lost one or both of their parents, including 2 university students, by covering their academic and other expenditures. Along those economically destitute children, they described, other students and their parents are getting

necessary advises at every moment of facing different socioeconomic problems mostly from *Abeminet* of the monastery.

From the above descriptions, we can infer that the monastic community is playing a significant role in nearby residents in terms of solving different socio economic as well as psychological problems that they are facing. This is in line with findings made by Terefe (2014) and Vidal (2001) from reviewed literatures of this study, who concluded that religious ideas and systems can have a considerable effect on economic development. Thus, communities develop when investments of either capital or labor produce changes in the ability of the community to foster and sustain productive community members and a good quality of life for them.

According to the *Abeminet*, the study monastic administration, being led by values and beliefs of EOTC, doesn't have an aim of accumulating money; instead aimed at helping the needy depending on problems they face.

As also revealed by participants of the FGD held with the ascetic members of the monastic community, through an initial capital given for free, about three female associations have been organized to make money by preparing and selling food, *tella*, *tea*, etc. Two of these female working associations organized by the *Abeminet* of the monastery are working in Gofchima town, whereas members of the third association are working in the town of Guay.

The monastery feeds each and every person who is found there to get different services of the monastery including those who depend on trading without any payment.

A 46 years old resident of Degolima community described the overall role of the monastery to the nearby community members standing from his own experience as follows:

I didn't have an experience of frequently going to the monastery because I was among people who were against the monastery. The main reason of my objection with the existence of the monastery is that all other monasteries that I know before were merely concerned with fasting, prayer, and other ceremonial religious practices which, I assume, do not have any extra relevance to our community members since these religious practices are being routinely done in our church. But when I frequently see so many people coming from different places including Addis Ababa through different buses and heard that various developmental activities being undertaken through irrigation, I decided to go there and make sure whether such practices are being truly undertaken or not. After watching what is going on there, I consider the monastery not only as a religious institution but also as a place of investment made by an investor. As to my understanding, it is a place of believing by doing through which most of our community members' economic, social, psychological problems are being solved (In-depth interview with a male farmer, 16 March 2017).

FGD participants from Mahibere Kidane Mihiret also disclosed that the monastic community is changing the overall socio cultural and economic images of Debre Elias *woreda* especially Elias town and other communities surrounding the monastery to be introduced as tourist sites.

Generally, the monastic administration uses the revenue being earned through agricultural productivity to feed all people attended the monastery by going there either to participate in different works or to be baptized through holy water. As administrator of Debre Elias *Woreda* communication office described that the monastery is a potential to *Elias* town in particular and to the whole *woreda* in general. He also indicated that products of the monastery, beyond the *woreda*, are being transported to different and relatively bigger towns of eastern Gojjam, which also has its own impact in building and introducing the *woreda*'s sociocultural image.

Therefore, the monastery, through its products being sold, is also playing its own role in making people be united and tolerant enough at the expense of their difference in religion and other socio cultural issues.

4.3.3. Giving Psycho Social Support

In rural societies, the activities being carried out by religious congregations have a multifaceted importance varying from practical activities, such as economic support for the poorest, to more mental and spiritual activities meant for all members of the Church (Pesonen and Vesala 2006). Similarly, developmental works taking place in the study monastery have their own positive effects on the conscience relief, psychological strength and, more importantly, to an individual's overall relation with others. According to World Bank (2004), poor communities around the world trust religious leaders and institutions more than many other entities; in part because of their engagement in many dimensions of people's lives are robust and long term. The same is true for most surrounding community members and others who are going to the monastery who have a full trust on leaders (especially the Abeminet) of the monastery.

No matter how different in their color, race, background, and where they come from, people who are constantly and/or temporarily present in the monastery have full equality at any time of their existence in the study monastery, without any favor of one against another since the core values and beliefs of EOTC request to do so.

As Megabi of the monastery described, there are different types of persons who are going to the monastery having health and other socio economic problems. Besides, there are persons who go to the monastery for the purposes of visiting and spiritual satisfaction. And he added that these people are being received and getting services equally in accordance with the extent of their problems and are doing works depending on the capacity of each. A 46 years old Afememhir, who has a responsibility of working as a public relation officer in the monastery, also described the way members of the monastic community receive guests as follows:

As God teaches us not to make differences among people with different backgrounds, in this monastery, we are receiving people with full equality and we are giving them services they seek and assigning works equally. In fact, participating in works of the monastery is entirely voluntary and load of works depend on the level of energy each person has (In-depth interview with Afememhir of the Monastery, 8 March 2017).

Participants of the FGD that has been takes placed in the monastic community members who are constantly living in the monastery indicated that, there are about three special services being delivered in the monastery.

First, currently, as a result of an endless load of life, people are facing various psychological problems and/or anxieties and need an immediate relief from such problems. And the monastery is doing a lot for these people to be relieved from such problems through different mechanisms beginning from advices by the Abeminet to each of them up to making them watch overall activities and other effects of the monastery as a result of developmental works being carried out; mostly related to agro forestry practices. Besides, each person, in his/her order of arrival in the monastery is getting essential life advices from different religious leaders or monks.

Second, beyond psychological problems, people are also facing other health defects and are being healed from their health problems by being baptized through the holy water or “*Tsebel*” of the monastery.

Third, surrounding the monastic community, there are lots of psychologically and economically vulnerable children who lost one or both of their parents. And the monastic administration is doing a lot for them by summoning these children and giving essential advices, and by providing different equipment necessary for schooling as well as feeding. The Afememhir explained that

without accomplishing such quite crucial things, along other similar works, the establishment and role of monasteries is good for nothing.

In terms of community service through psycho-social support being carried out, monks and/or leaders of the monastery are also doing a lot in avoiding conflicts through different negotiation activities among people who have been in conflicts with one another before. For example, as Megabi of the monastery described:

There were a long lasting personal conflicts and misunderstandings between priests and Deacons of Debre Elias church found in Elias town of our woreda. Even, two priests used to enter to temple to sanctify with full of mess and feeling of revenge with each other as a result of previous personal disputes or misunderstandings. There were also priests (especially deacons) who used to beaten up each other while they are inside the church or temple. Understanding such a serious problem, Abeminet of the monastery, together with other elders and religious leaders, made all the 17 priests and 29 Deacons to come here in the monastery by covering transportation fee to all of them to make a negotiation between each of them which we have been successful. Through such negotiation, persons who have been in conflict for about 20 years and above come to be negotiated by resolving their previous misunderstandings that were leading them to engage in conflict with each other. After going back to their church where they are working, they began to serve their population in need with full sentiment and love of each other. Even, after watching and/or visiting all developmental activities and other social and health related practices, they promised to do such activities in the church where they are working and/or serving (In-depth interview with Megabi of the monastery, 7 March 2017).

According to the above explanation, the monastic community, not only have a crucial effect to nearby community members of the study monastery but also to some other segments of a population in the *woreda*. And besides works being done related with psychological rehabilitation mostly by leaders of the monastery, negotiation, as one form of social control and/or process, is also carried out among people who have been in conflict

The monastic community's religious based activities are also playing a significant role in behavioral change of most nearby rural community members as well as all other people in *Debre Elias Woreda*. A 31 years old man found preparing tubna to be used as a blocket for the Tegbarbet being constructed narrated the overall change he get as a result of being a member of the monastery as follows:

Before coming here in the monastery in July 1999 E.C., I frequently used to beat people found in front of me especially at night times and snatch their holdings. I also used to think that I can do everything through power and threatening people initiated by my excessive intoxication of alcohols and other drugs. At that time, I know nothing about religion except routine religious activities being carried out by my family members and other persons which, I used to assume good for nothing but created to deceive people. Since I came here through a continuous pressure of my friends, I began to see various works driven by good behaviors of each participant. Since then, I gradually developed good behavior and make smooth relationship not only with members of the monastic community but also with people of neighboring residents of my family, including my friends. Through this monastery, I learned how to live in peace with others (including enemies) with patience as prescribed by the dogma of our religion. Today, at every moment of bad feeling I felt, I immediately come here and get an advice from leaders of the monastery, especially from the Abeminet and go back home with full relief. If such monastery were not here, still now, I would, either be killed or kill other person and spend most of my life time in to jail (In-depth interview with farmer, 9 March 2017).

Life in “World” and Monastery

FGD participants constantly residing in the monastery explained that living in the monastery made them be happier than their former way of leading life in the “world”.

Such an argument on the contribution of the monastic community in creating a psychologically free society is supported by a 34 years old nun who joined the monastery since 2003 E.C. She explained that spending time in the monastery made her happier enough expecting to get an

“eternal” after death life. Besides, she added that as a result of being there in the monastery she became ethically good and courageous in her spiritual life by being a nun.

From her explanation, we can understand that if there are priests and other religious leaders who interpret and implement the right values and beliefs, EOTC can be used as a rehabilitation center for those who are facing psycho social problems. And the monastery has a multi-dimensional usage both to the surrounding communities as well as others who are from distant places. From the very beginning, the main objective of monks who found the monastery is to avoid harmful traditional irreligious practices through hard working without which the monastery would not be expanded as such. These monks and nuns are showing the significance of living for others.

Large number of persons, especially youth, who are facing different internal (mental) or external (social) problems in their academic and other socio economic issues, continuously go to the monastery to get solution and go back to their residential areas with most of their problems solved. Generally, people are getting freedom in their conscience and, hence, their psychological and social stabilities are being secured in the monastery.

4.3.5 Healing Through Holy Water (*Tsebel*)

According to Kumilachew (2015), Tsebel is the most widely used mode of healing in the EOTCs. It is not only used for the purpose of healing, but it is also used when the Church wants to bless anything. He also found out that the spiritual practice of Tsebel in the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches has two basic roles to health: its protective and healing role. The protective role of Tsebel is observed being used by individuals who are not suffering with diseases to protect themselves from illness; mental or physical. And its healing role is made by sprinkling Tsebel on the outside of one’s body or on the wall of his/her house to be relieved from previous

illness or evil spirits. In the same way, beyond its socio-economic advantages, the study monastery is helping a number of people assumed as being healed from their diseases and other health related problems as a result of the holy water and qiba qidus that cannot be healed through modern medical treatments. Liqe Abew of the monastery described that, through the holy water, qiba qidus and other prayers by monks of the monastery, people, with different diseases (especially wart and diabetes) are being healed.

A 43 years old woman who explained me that she is working in Meta brewery factory described her experience related with the healing practice within the monastery as follows:

Since I was affected by diabetes, I didn't use to spend any day without measuring my blood pressure; even I didn't have been eating sugarcane because it is assumed to have a tendency of aggravating such a chronic disease. After beginning to be baptized through tsebel of the monastery for 14 days, thanks to God, I become fully relieved from the disease that has been with me for more than 6 years (In-depth interview with female employee at NGO, 19 March 2017).

Another lady, 19, who is an 11th grade student in Debre Elias preparatory school, also described the health problem she faced and how she copes up such problem through tsebel of the monastery as follows:

I have been facing a disease of asthma that frequently caused me to be withdrawn from my academic attendance. I tried a lot to be healed by seeing different physicians from different health institutions such as Debre Markos Referral Hospital; but I couldn't. After that, as a last alternative, I decided to come here and be baptized through the holy water. However, my teachers didn't want to give me permission, assuming my decision to be baptized through holy water is a traditional and outdated practice; which forced me to wait for summer to be baptized here in the monastery through which I have relieved from my disease within 21 days of my baptism (In-depth interview with a female student, 22 March 2017).

As the lady described, though there are various effective traditional healing practices being undertaken, still now, most people are deceptively assume as if any of such religion based traditional medicines are not effective enough. It is also assumed that there are no any right religious leaders and/or monks who can correctly baptize. But still now as we can understand from the above cases, there are some traditional medicines including the holy water (*tsebel*), that have an equivalent value to modern types of medicines. Even, as described by discussants of the FGD held with members of Kidane Mihret Mahiber, there are a number of diseases that cannot be healed only through modern medicine unless supplemented by the traditional ones. The following case of a 37 years old farmer can also strengthen the above argument.

Beginning from 2003 E.C. both of my legs were half paralyzed and as a result, I used to walk through walking stick. After trying a lot to get modern medication roaming many towns, which I couldn't be successful, I chose to be died here in the monastery assuming my death is inevitable in the near future. Right after my arrival, I tried to get an advice from the Abeminet and Liqe Abew, and they advised me to be baptized through holy water of the monastery for about three weeks. Then, after some progress have been shown with my legs, the Abeminet told me to go back home placed at the community of Mebesh to avoid believe in gods (ba'id amliko) being takes placed through my family. Since then, I become fully relieved from my health problem after three months (In-depth interview with a male farmer, 22 March 2017).

From the above explanation, we can realize that, though faith based medicines especially holy water are currently criticized as irrelevant, still large number of people are using them as an alternative ways of relief from their diseases which are impossible to be treated through the modern ones. And most of these traditional ways of healing practices are relatively effective in Sellassie monastery.

According to Abeminet of the monastery, it is females who take the lion share of participation in baptism activities of the monastery because their tendency to be exposed to different diseases is

relatively higher. Liqe Abew of the monastery, also supported such an argument in such a way that the main reason for females' high level of exposure to different diseases, including the chronic ones, is that since females are relatively weaker in terms of physical strength than males, they become frequently affected by different diseases while they are doing heavier works. Due to such fact, females share the significant share of those who are in health problem and, hence, being baptized through tsebel in the monastery. And, proportionally, it is females who are being healed from their diseases in relation to males. According to *Liqe Abew, Females believe faster than males and, hence, are being healed faster than males.*

Why Females?

According to Megabi of the Monastery, most people who are either constantly or temporarily living in the monastery are females than males. Because he explained, females, in relation to males, are flexible enough in terms of accepting or rejecting something within a short period of time, especially religious issues. In fact, he said, though there is lower number of males living in the monastery, they are stronger than females; meaning, it takes a long period of time to accept and practice something, including religious or other traditional socio economic opportunities, and once they accept, they won't reject within a short period of time. That is why, according to Liqe Abew, females are considered as awaj negari. They want to make what they see and hear in to practice as much as they can with a short time interval. And he confirmed that most of the services, especially healings through tsebel are at female's favor.

4.3.6. Reduction of Harmful Traditional Practices

Religious leaders of Debre Elias woreda especially leaders of Sellassie monastery are playing a significant role in mobilizing people to do different developmental and other sociocultural works

jointly and voluntarily. Following high level of agricultural productivity in the *woreda*, according to administrator of culture and tourism office of the *woreda*, there were different harmful traditional practices such as early marriage and other extravagant activities including criminal acts. Especially the *woreda* is known for high level of harmful social stratifications through which some segments of the population are being frequently out casted being considered as they are other creatures than full human beings created to harm the “normal” ones.

Megabi of the monastery narrated the main reason that made him decide to live in the monastery by relating with such harmful traditional practices he faced as follows:

The main reason that made me live here in the monastery is that there were harmful traditional practices being exerted against my family assuming that all members of my family are evil eyed (shemane). And as if one or more of my family members would harm persons (usually children) from our neighbors, almost all members of our kebele did not want to make a relation in any ways with any of my family members including me. Beyond this, all of my family members are facing various kibre-nek practices. Even cattle of our families didn't need to be mixed with others'. Almost all members of our kebele tried to eradicate our family from the kebele by using different “metet”. In most of the morning times when we open our doors we used to get various things or “asmat”. As a result, continuous conflicts were arising between my family members and others that used to make me feel isolated and hence, unhappy and anxious. Right after coming here in the monastery, I got a relief from previous psychological problems. Before, I myself have had already accepted as if I am a “shemane”; thanks to Abeminet of the monastery, who gave me a deep advice that such out casting activities are not accepted by the holy bible and all persons are created equal. After two months of my arrival in the monastery, I, with three other monks (leaders) of the monastery, have gone back to the place where my families live and made a successive negotiation between them and other members of the kebele in which such traditional practices become “wuguz” by leaders of the monastery (In-depth interview with Megabi of the Monastery, 7 March 2017).

From the above narration one can understand that there are people whose feeling is seriously hurt in many ways because of they are assumed as “evil eyed” by the rest of the respective community members. But, as *Liqe Abew* of the monastery described, all people in the world are

created equal and such considerations of people as “evil eyed”, “*buda*”, “*shemane*”, etc are deceptive assumptions that are socially constructed through time than real ones. And, though significantly decreasing due to efforts of leaders of the monastic community and other concerned bodies, yet, people who are facing from such types of social exclusions are obliged either to have an isolated residential area or totally leave their residence to some other places including to the study monastery. Hence, religious leaders of the monastic community are playing their own role in changing cultural image of the *woreda*, especially nearby communities of Sellassie monastery to the right way, even though such problem didn’t have been totally resolved.

4.3.7. Monastic Community’s Role in Decreasing Crime within Nearby Communities

Before the establishment of the Sellassie monastery, Debre Elias *woreda* (especially surrounding communities of the monastery) were known by its high level of crime that had been frequently committed. The *woreda* was the leader among all other *woredas* of eastern Gojjam since there was high level of personal conflicts followed by a number of murders being committed. Criminal acts of theft, beating each other and murder that have been committed from 1999-2007 E.C. in *Debre Elias woreda* are shown in the table below:

Table 3: Trend of criminal acts committed in *Debre Elias Woreda* from 1999-2007 E.C.

S/No	Type of Crime	Year								
		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
1	Theft	171	130	121	133	102	81	83	68	61
2	Beating	225	181	199	112	114	94	75	80	70
3	Murder	15	11	8	10	6	6	4	5	2
	Total	411	322	328	255	222	181	162	153	133

Source: Office of Debre Elias Woreda Community Policing

As depicted on the above table, there is a significant decrement (by 67.64%) of criminal activities among all the three major types of crimes being committed between 1999 and 2007 EC. And a 36 years old woman working in the *woreda* community policing office explained that, even though such data indicates criminal acts that have been committed throughout the *woreda*, there is a significant contribution of Sellasisie monastery for such decrement.

One of the ardi't living in the monastery as an ascetic narrated the main reason that made him join monastic life by relating with criminal acts being committed and their associated consequences from his own experience as follows:

I began living in the monastery since 1997. The main reason behind my decision to spend the rest of my life here in the monastery is that there were various criminal activities related to revenge by the name of "Demelash" upon previous murder of my families' neighbor by my elder brother as a result of conflict in farm land. In fact, my brother is getting essential and corrective punishment and leading his life in jail. But the murdered person's family members are disturbing my family by continuously warning us that they would double revenge us by killing one of my family members. As a result and since then, me and all male members of my family began to live in anxiety as if we would be killed one day. And since then, my family members have been displaced to another place far

away from the murdered person's family; but I continued being disturbed as if they would come in our new residence and kill one or more of my family members. One day I have gone to church and ask an advice from one of the religious leaders and he advised me to spend some time by coming here in the monastery and be relieved from my anxiety. Right after my arrival, I began living here with full stability and relative happiness because, I assume, even if they would come here and kill me, it would be better for my eternal life than being killed in the "world" (In-depth interview an ascetic resident of the Monastery, 11 March 2017).

In fact, such demelash practice is significantly decreasing in most surrounding *kebeles* where these two families reside due to the unreserved effort of both the monastic communities' administration and necessary government bodies. But the aforementioned case indicated that he chose to live in the monastery to the end of his life because, he assume, living in the "world" has a double jeopardy; living this world without stability and/or security and losing the after death "eternal" life.

An expert, 36, from the *woreda* community policing office described that, there were frequent thefts, and other physical attacks besides murders in the *woreda*. And surrounding communities of the monastery were highly facing such problems since such places are main routes to eastern *wollega* where most criminals used to escape. The central reason for most people (especially youth) to be engaged in criminal acts is an economic crisis followed by unemployment and other socio economic issues. But now, she described, such types of criminal activities, are significantly decreasing as a result of the unreserved effort of community policing officers of the area with the help of leaders and/or monks of *sellassie* monastery by giving essential advices driven by values and beliefs of EOTC.

The monastic administration is helping different youth, particularly who are from surrounding communities, to be disciplined. Besides, for those who are willing, the monastery arranges

different economic opportunities to participate through trade by taking its agricultural products for free till they become able to make an initial capital.

Therefore, according to the expert from community policing officer of the *woreda*, the place where the monastery is established was using as a center for most criminal activities used to be committed and where most criminals from everywhere in the *woreda* used to escape through. And the monastic community played an important role by replacing a place which was considered as a criminal ground to a place where developmental and/or spiritual activities being undertaken.

To sum up, contribution of the monastic community for the reduction of criminal acts, especially within surrounding communities of the monastery, are immense; because, (1) most people of the *woreda*, especially youth, are developing a culture of frequently going to the monastery where their behavior is being shaped as a result of different religious advices as well as participating in different works in the monastery, and (2) most criminal acts in the *woreda* were highly committed (practiced) at nearby places of the desert where the monastery has been established, which had been used as a center of escape for criminals. Hence, the monastic community, through most of its direct and indirect interventions and/or effects, is contributing its own part in decreasing crime in the *woreda* and, particularly, in the surrounding communities of the monastery, despite a lot is required from all the concerned bodies yet.

4.4. Challenges Facing the Monastery and the Consequent Coping Strategies

4.4.1. Perceptive Contradictions

The monastery faces various challenges since the time of its establishment. Most of these challenges arise both from believers of the EOTC themselves and others with different religion. Among challenges arising from the EOTC believers, most of the socio economic activities being carried out in the monastery are considered as trade activities as if they are being done not for others but for residents of the monastic community members themselves. For most people who are against the activities of the monastic community, leaders and/or members of the monastery are being blamed as they are misinterpreting the values and dogmas of EOTC by changing religion to an economic institution which is the “worldly” practice.

Beginning from its establishment, as revealed by participants of the FGD held with members of Mahibere Kidane Mihret, quite a number of nicknames are given to people who are continuously going to the monastery as “Sellassie cabinees” and similar others. And most of the healing practices are being taken as activities which are being undertaken through magic (*metet*) than through real religious practice. Even most people who want to go to the monastery are frequently seen being prohibited not to go there by people who do not accept most of the socio economic activities including some priests themselves.

Megabi of the monastery disclosed that there are a number of critics being exerted against the monastery taking a passage from the holy bible which says “*you made my home a place of trade center*” and as if such saying directly concerns the monastery. All activities of the monastic community through its agricultural products are mostly considered as an irreligious practice

which deviates from the dogma of EOTC by those who were against activities of the monastic community.

By expecting all religious institutions, especially, monasteries as a mere places where fasting, praying, and preaching takes place by ascetic people, such types of economic activities by the study monastery is frequently seen being blamed. And most of such criticisms arise knowingly or not, by some residents and/or farmers of surrounding communities.

A 38 years old nun from the FGD carried out with ascetic monks and nuns of the monastery described the challenge she faced as a result of being an ascetic member of the monastery that:

I came from Hame T/Haymanot. I faced various prohibitive acts especially from my family members not to come here in the monastery by mentioning the monastery as a place of jobless and lazy people. They (my family members) tried to make me out of my ascetic life in the monastery through different accusations of the monastic community's administration to community policing office of our kebele because they want me to live with them having my own husband followed by children. But they couldn't do that because such an accusation is rejected by the concerned community policing officers of our kebele by indicating that it is none of the police's business, as a government body to interfere in religious practices and/or issues (FGD Participant (Preacher), 16 March 2017).

Afememhir of the monastery described that the most difficult of all problems being faced by monastic community members which could not be resolved still now, is that while higher level of EOTC administrators (Betekihnet), both from the *woreda* and zone (east Gojjam) are expected to help in strengthening the monastery by taking it as a role model, they are mostly accused while they are trying to wreck it. The reason behind such hostility is that, like other churches, they request money to be paid (Yesebeka guba'e) for the *woreda* and zone Betekihnet from the monastic administration. But according to dogma of EOTC, all monasteries are exempted from such type of annual payment to *Betekihnet*. Nonetheless, because of large amount of income

being generated in Sellassie monastery, in relation to other monasteries, they are continuously requesting money to be paid while they did nothing for the monastery beginning from the establishment of the monastery.

As a result of serious protest from leaders of the monastery and other worshipers against people working in *Betekihnet* different types of measurements have been tried intended to wreck the monastery down by these people. *Abeminet* of the monastery described the situation:

We tried to resolve such conflict by organizing a committee both from government officials and other leaders of EOTC and sending to Debre Markos where Betekihnet leaders found. But they are not willing to make a negotiation. This made us and most of believers of EOTC abashed for not creating a negotiation while we are doing a lot for others (In-depth interview with Abeminet of the monastery, 7 March 2017).

4.4.2. Sanitation, Housing and Other Internal Infrastructures

The construction of access roads and other infra-structure and social facilities are indispensable aids to monastic communities' development (DICAC 2012). Accordingly, in relation to sanitation, before 2007 E.C. the biggest problem facing the monastic community was the absence of toilet which used to force people found in the monastery go far away from the area of residence for the sake of excretion. This was difficult especially for different patients, especially disabled ones. According to Megabi of the monastery, considering such problem, in 2007, the monastic administration built a 12 class toilet, two of which are built considering disable people, through modern ways of construction. About 150,000 *birr* have been spent to buy the necessary equipment and approximately, 30,000 *birr* have been spent for labors and construction experts. What makes such toilet different from others is that it is also using for the production of biogas so that the toilet can be used for a long period of time. The biogas being produced from the toilet is using as an energy replacing fuel wood.

In terms of housing, most people going to the monastery are seen sleeping at bare lands since there is no satisfactory house to be rested in the monastery. Such problems are mostly aggravated especially at rainy seasons. In fact, there are 7 halls that have been built by different associations (Mahiber) each having the capacity of holding about 280-300 persons at a time. But these halls are not sufficient enough to be rested with especially at times of three annual holidays being celebrated in the monastery (the 7th days of January and July as well as the 16th day of August) since relatively larger number of people are getting in the monastery at times of those holidays.

Till 2006, there was no any modern grinding mill in the monastery which forced residents of the monastery to take food crops to be grinded at places far in the surrounding community of Degolima by using donkey. Besides the highest levels of energy being exerted, it was difficult to prepare and provide food for people found in the monastic community. Currently (March 2009 E.C.), beyond two grinding mills built by the expenditure of the monastic administration in November 2006 E.C.), two other grinding mills have also been built through the contribution of customers of the monastery including surrounding communities' residents. All of the four grinding mills work by using diesel. Since then, problems related with timely affordability of food have been resolved.

4.4.3. Controversies on Effect of the Monastic Community on Biodiversity

While Monasteries and Churches are traditional centers for the protection of indigenous biodiversity, which constitute the basis for wider ecological projects, ecosystems, which were untouched by human beings such as natural forests in steep lands, these monasteries and church yards are now being affected by human beings for getting firewood and additional land for crop production (Alemayehu 2007). Likewise, from the very beginning of its establishment, quite a

number of questions and objections were continually exerted from different segments of people including from surrounding community members themselves assuming that the monastery has an effect on deforestation followed by eradication of wild animals from the desert where the monastery is established.

From the very beginning, EOTC is contributing its part in preserving different (ancient) plants and crops as well as fruits through conservation of their breeds, with their original existence, especially monasteries like Sellassie monastery

In fact, lots of plants were cut from the place where the monastery is established for the sake of opening a free space land that has been used to build churches, houses, and halls. But there are a number of trees that have been planted by the monastic community which replaced the deforested ones. And there is an afforestation practice in the monastery which has a dual advantage compared to the previous ones. Meaning, through different afforestation practices in the monastery, the previous forest that had only been used for biodiversity and environmental protection has been replaced by plants that are edible besides the aforementioned functions.

Moferbet of the monastery described dual advantages of trees being planted in the monastery over the previous ones as:

There are a number of plants being planted in the monastery that have their own fruits which are edible. Hence, I can say that the monastic community replaces inedible plants by edible ones (In-depth interview with Moferbet of the Monastery, 10 March 2017),

The other advantage of the current afforestation practice by the monastic community, as I have observed, is that it is remarkable that can be relished by tourists and/or guests including its photosynthetic usages.

Natural forests or plants previously existed in the desert, as being seen in other parts of the desert where the monastery is established, didn't have any leaf especially in dry seasons which have their own defect on their photosynthetic function. But plants replacing the previous ones through the monastic community are ever green throughout a year since there is a continuous watering activity by members of the monastic community. And most trees being planted in the monastic community's residence (such as sugarcane, banana, papaya etc.) are drought resistant. Therefore, the monastic community has properly responded for different questions and objections that used to be exerted related with its deforestation practices through double benefiting afforestation activities.

But, Abeminet of the monastery informed how different deforestation practices around the monastic community are being carried out as:

There are different deforestation activities being made both by some members of surrounding communities of the desert as well as by government led organizations. In many times, broader areas of desert lands are being given by the government to investors in different parts of Ethiopia including the desert where our monastery is established which have their own effect for plants to be deforested. And mostly investors are not seen taking any measure to restore plants that have been deforested as a result of their investment. If there is somebody who should take responsibility for the deforestation of the desert, it should be such types of investments than ours (In-depth interview with Abeminet of the Monastery, 7 March 2017).

Along the practice of afforestation in our monastery, from the very beginning, most churches of EOTC are playing a significant role in encouraging forestry activities and in preserving forests with diverse plants. That is why, according to the Abeminet, EOTC's churches, especially Sellassie monastery should not be blamed for the issue of deforestation.

Concerning wildlife, objections against the monastic community continue from different directions as if wild animals are being retreated from the place where the monastery has been

established. But, in line with a finding conducted by Alemayehu (2007, which noted that forests around monasteries and parish churches are found to be good habitat for many kinds of wild animals, there are a number of wild animals found within the territory of the study monastery, including hyena, monkey, ape, boar, pig, fox and other reptiles.

Though some of these wild animals, especially ape and monkey, continuously seen damaging some of the crops being produced on the monastery, there is no any measure of attacking them. Instead, they are carefully looked for not to damage those agricultural products by all members of the monastery. It is strictly forbidden (wuguz) for anybody to attack or kill any wild animal found in the territory of the monastic community including hunting. Even, Moferbet of the monastery explained, there are different wild animals that are going to the monastery's territory to live within in plants of the monastic community.

The other and most critical problem which is facing the monastery, according to FGD discussants residing in the monastery, is the frequent occurrence of high level of man-made fire which is burning forests of the desert found on nearby places of the monastic community's territory. Such forests are intensively burning down by people who are from surrounding community residents of the desert, particularly in the dry seasons for the sake of opening ways to freely move in the desert and get what they need from the desert such as cutting bludgeon and producing incense. Besides, they described, there are a number of people who are continuously crossing the desert to Wellega in order to make money through coffee gleaning and other works. Since there is no main road, the only option for them to pass through the desert is by burning plants found in the needed ways of the desert and creating temporary road at every direction they want to go. But the fire didn't stop by only burning plants found in the needed ways/roads but goes beyond.

As a result of such firing, large coverage of forests in the desert is being burned down reaching in the area of the monastic community through which plants and other residential houses of the monastic community are being seriously affected.

Along with the aforementioned reasons, people burn down forests of the desert for the purpose of either killing reptiles such as snakes and other dangerous animals or making them retreat from the way people want to go through. They do this not to be hurt by those reptiles. As a result, different animals are retreating to the territory of the monastic community where various green plants exist, which, in turn, are affecting crops and, particularly, fruits being produced and other tame animals such as oxen, cows and donkeys in the monastery. Moferbet of the monastery revealed that large numbers of people are being assigned to carefully look for those tame animals not to be affected by retreating wild animals. While looking after properties of the monastic community, he extended, nobody is allowed (wuguz) to hurt any of those wild animals.

It is also strictly forbidden to make any hunting activity in the nearby areas both by members of the monastic community and others who are coming from communities with *dega* and *woina-dega* climate condition.

A 58 years old farmer, living with his family at the entrance of the desert area narrated the prohibition of hunting in the desert by leaders of the monastic community from his own experience, as follows:

I, with all of my family members, began living here in the brink of the desert where the monastery is established since 1979 E.C. I used to get more than a quarter of my family's food through hunting of boar, quail and other animals from the forest in the desert. But right after the establishment of Sellassie monastery, any of my family members as well as other residents of our kebele have been strictly prohibited (wuguz) by Abeminet of the monastery not to make any hunting as well as cutting

trees from the desert surrounding the monastery. At that time, I really disappointed because of such prohibition; and I was among those who were against all activities of the monastery. I tried all my best for the monastery either to be destroyed or not to be expanded. I and all my family members didn't ever have been go to the monastery while a number of people were flooding from many directions to get the necessary services being provided. I firstly began going to the monastery when I see different neighboring farmers whose livelihoods being improved by sharing best agricultural practices of the monastery, mainly through irrigation. And it's me who firstly asked an apology of leaders of the monastery. By feeling happy as a result of my apology, leaders of the monastery helped me more than the neighboring farmers by giving different plants and fruits to be planted through irrigation in my farm land near to the upper part of "Tetma" river. They even helped me by sending experienced persons from the monastery to do these modern ways of agricultural practices. Now, besides such agricultural practices and/or productivities I am employing through irrigation, I began farming through the rest of my farmland which I returned back from farmers whom I have rented before. And I am producing about 60-80 quintals of crops per year (In-depth interview with a male farmer, 24 March 2017).

From the above expression, one can understand that, the monastic community, along with its contribution in stoppage of hunting and other destructive acts in the desert, is playing a great role in creating different alternative income generating activities for people living in surrounding communities of the monastery.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The study monastery, as a religious institution, has a considerable effect to the overall development of its associated residents, neighboring communities, and some other people who are going there from elsewhere, in terms of building and /or improving their livelihood asset as well as social attachment. At the same time, lots of challenges are being faced by the monastic community as a result of activities being carried out in it. Boender et al. (2012) noted that the issue of development is not a one-eyed giant which can be realized, analyzed and prescribed as if human destiny depends only on economic (material) dimension. Rather, it has to be substantiated by psycho-social support, physiological as well as environmental well-being and a healthy relationship with the surrounding social environment; all of which are found being implemented by the study monastery.

Irrigation based intensive agriculture is the main livelihood strategy taking place in the study area through which new trade routes are being opened to those who want to engage. Sugarcane and other fruits take the significant share of agricultural products being produced in the monastery through such irrigation system. The study monastic community's income depends on such agricultural activity than asrat, Silet and muday metsewat which are strictly forbidden to be requested by each and every member of the community.

The main objectives behind people who are frequently going to the monastery are: (1) to improve their income by engaging in trading activities of the monastery's agricultural products; (2) to be healed from their health related problems through *tsebel* and other religious sanctifications; (3) to get religious based advices related to different psycho social issues; (4) to

voluntarily participate in different types of works (yebereket sira); (5) to visit the overall developmental activities and/or effects of the monastic community driven by values and beliefs of the EOTC and (6) to be an ascetic resident of the monastic community since living in the monastery is assumed to have a dual advantage (living one's life time with full freedom, and assuring the after death "eternal" goodness) over living in the "world".

Hard working is a way through which sanctification from God followed by goodness can be assured; because, it is assumed by members of the study community that "when a person is at the time of working, he/she would be free from any sinful acts". And there are a number of "light" and "hard" works being undertaken in the study monastery in Saint and "working" days respectively. Farmers of most rural communities surrounding the study area spend a day without participating in "hard" types of works only if that day is represented by tabot of their respective churches. And, in the study monastery, it is forbidden (wuguz) for any person to spend any time, including Saint days, without working if he/she want to get blessing from God.

Religion (the study monastic community) has a power of creating social solidarity and/or attachment in terms of voluntary participation, sentiment to each other and smooth social relationships among believers. And there are a number of people who are voluntarily participating in different works of the monastery, including youth who are organized by an association for such purpose, which is the base behind the effectiveness of the monastery in its agriculture based developmental activities within a short period of time. Such activities have at their own significance to the surrounding communities' development. Church and irrigation canal building/maintenance, income generation, psycho-social support, reduction of crime as well as harmful traditional practices are the main issues being intervened by the monastic community to respective nearby rural communities.

While all activities in the monastery are being carried out in line with values and beliefs of the EOTC, members of the monastic community are being considered as traders or “this -worldly actors” than religious ones, by those who are against these activities. This is because of such types of religious institutions, especially monasteries, are assumed (expected) to be mere centers for prayer and other religious celebrities. And while such developmental activities didn’t have been confirmed as religious ones, much money is being requested from the monastic administration by different organizations especially from higher level leaders of the EOTC (Betekihnet) which is against the dogma of the religion.

Yet insufficient, there are a number of sanitation works (including toilet) houses/halls to be rested by guests. And though the monastic community is also being blamed for its deforestation activities, different trees are being replanted having a dual function of (1) conserving biodiversity besides their photosynthetic functions, and (2) serving as sources of food (income); hence, inedible plants of the past are being replaced by edible ones. Instead, human-made wild fire, which is being intentionally created by some persons, is the main problem faced by the monastic community because, beyond its impact on eradication of plants in the desert and making different wild animals retreat to the monastery’s territory, it is affecting/hurting houses and agricultural products and/or plants within the monastery.

Therefore, monastic communities, through their religious based socio economic activities, have an influence in strengthening community development. Instead of declining with the advent of various developmental projects being designed to be realized in a secular manner, at present time, religion has a multi-faceted influence on the overall development of a certain community, particularly to rural communities surrounding the study monastery where most people accomplish their day- to- day activities in reference to their respective religious dogma’s.

Further Research

This study shows how religion, as a social institution, influences the current situation of people living in rural communities. But further enquires are needed regarding the role of religion (EOTC) in reducing (or increasing) harmful traditional practices as well as crimes since this issues have not been exhaustively studied in this study. Besides, especially EOTC is also continuously blamed for its masculine favors in most of its religious based activities and/ or services which requires further studies.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Instruments

Addis Ababa University

College of Social Sciences

Department of Sociology

Interview and FGD Guidelines

Dear Informant/s, my name is Menberu Bekabil. I am a full time employee at Debre Markos University; and currently I am a Sociology Post Graduate student of Addis Ababa University. Accordingly, I am supposed to undertake a research entitled “The Role of Religious Institutions in Rural Community Development: the case of Sellassie Monsastery of Debe Elias Woreda” which will be used as a partial fulfillment of Master of Arts degree.

The overall objective of the research is just to examine the socioeconomic opportunities and challenges of religious institutions in the process of rural community development by taking both insider and outsider communities and their respective residents of Sellassie monastery as a case. Accordingly, this objective can only be attained when you, as a key stakeholder or interested party regarding the issue being studied, are willing to provide your genuine information. Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary.

Dear informant/s! Please bear in mind that the interview will be audio taped based on your informed consent and, still, you are free to withdraw at any time and without giving reason. And I assure you that your information will never be used for any other purposes other than the

research. You can be confident that participating in the study will never cause any physical, moral/psychological, financial or material loss to you with the exception of sacrificing some of your time. For this, some documents such as ethical clearances will be attached as testimonials witnessing that I belong to the institution indicated above. Your anonymity can also be guaranteed throughout the research by using pseudonym.

This research will be reviewed and approved by college of social sciences research and publication committee of Addis Ababa University.

Cognizant of the above terms and conditions, you are asked to sign on this consent form on the space provided here under to show your agreement and willingness to take part in the study.

Thank you very much in advance for taking part in this research!

Informant signature

Researcher's signature

Date

Guiding Questions for In-depth Interview

For Residents of the Monastic Community

Basic Information

Sex _____

Date of Interview _____

Age _____

Job title _____

1. How do you describe overall activities taking place in the monastery?
2. Does the monastery affect your job, income, and overall livelihood status as a result of these activities taking place in the monastery? How?
3. How do you describe the role of the monastery on your attachment with community members as compelled by values and beliefs of the EOTC?
4. Do you think that these social attachments being created in the monastery have an effect both to the monastic and surrounding communities? How?
5. Do you think that activities being carried out in the monastery influence (positively or negatively) the overall development of your community? How?
6. Currently, EOTC is being blamed for its excessive holidays accompanying with prohibitive dogmas to work in those days; how do you view such arguments?
7. How do you describe challenges (if any) being posed by the monastic community as a result of activities taking place in it?

8. Being member of the monastic community, what challenges have you face/facing (if any)?
9. What measures have you applied/applying to cope up with those challenges (if any)?
10. Is there anything that you would like to add or recommend?

For Outside (Nearby) Residents of the Monastery

Basic Information

Name _____

Date of Interview _____

Sex _____

Job title _____

1. How do you view overall activities taking placed in Sellassie Monastery?
2. How do you see the effect of these activities taking placed in the monastery on your livelihood status?
3. How do your exposure (if any) to the monastery affect your attachment with others in terms of your social interaction and participation?
4. How do you describe the (positive or negative) influences of the monastery to your community?

5. How could you reply to the argument that “EOTC, as a result of large number of Saint Days and rituals being spent without work, deters development”, from your perceived experience of the monastery?
6. What challenges (if any) have you been facing due to activities being carried out in the monastery?
7. Is there anything you would like to add?

For Users of Services of the Monastery

1. For what reasons have you experienced joining the monastery?
2. What are the services being delivered in the monastic community?
3. How do you see different services of the monastery standing from service/s you are getting?
4. Do you think that the activities taking place in the monastery have an effect on your living condition? How?
5. Standing from monastery's experience, how do you reply on the argument that large numbers of Saint Days being spent without working and other ritual activities in EOTC have an influence on the development of the respective communities to be lagged behind?
6. How do you describe the influence of the monastery on your attachment with others? What roles do such an attachment play/ing to your living condition?

7. What problems (if any) you encounter as a result of your entrance to the monastic community to get the needed services?
8. How do you see the determining factors (positive or negative) of EOTC, including the monastery, in relation to its socio economic roles?
9. Is there anything that you would like to add or recommend?

Guiding Questions for FGD

1. What activities are being carried out in the monastery?
2. How do you see the overall influence (positively or negatively) of the monastery with regard to your living condition due to its various activities?
3. In what way does the monastery affect your social attachment? How do you describe the significance of these social attachments being created to your life?
4. What are the challenges facing you and your community as a result activities being carried out by religious institutions, particularly, in the monastery?
5. Standing from values and beliefs of EOTC, particularly the monastery, how do you describe the relation between religion and development?

Observation Checklists

1. Overall activities being carried out by monastic communities.
2. Accessibilities of both natural and man-made resources, including water and road, in the monastery and how they are being mobilized and/or used by the monastic community.
3. Availability and/or capability of the monastery in promoting social attachment and its situation.
4. The availability and situation of residential houses and hostels in the monastery.
5. Accessibility, situation, affordability, and inclusiveness of livelihood assets in the monastery.
6. Tendency of people's commitment in their participation to socioeconomic activities being takes placed in the monastery.
7. Sewerage and other sanitation issues in the monastery.
8. Accessibility and distance (location) of shops, grinding mills, markets etc. relative to residential areas of monastic community members.
9. The existence of environmental conservation or not, including afforestation and/or deforestation.
10. The way that administrative structures have been/ being communicated and implemented.
11. Others (if any).

Appendix B: Profile of Study Participants

I. Profile of In-depth Interviewees

No .	Name of Interviewee	Age	Sex	Educational level	Position/occupation	Date of Interview
1	Aba Elsa Demeke	43	M	Can read and write	<i>Abeminet</i> of the monastery	07/03/17
2	Knife Michael	36	M	12 th complete	<i>Megabi</i> of the monastery	07/03/17
3	Gebremedhin Eshetie	46	M	12 th complete	<i>Afememhir</i> of the monastery	08/03/17
4	Solomon Abebe	52	M	1 st Degree	Teacher	09/03/17
5	Amare Getaneh	31	M	8 th Complete	Farmer	09/03/17
6	Edmealem Demeke	52	M	Can read and write	<i>Moferbet</i> of the monastery	10/03/17
7	Tsigemariam Yetnayet	34	F	10+3	Ascetic (Food preparation)	11/03/17
8	Anchinalu Hunegnaw	21	F	10 th complete	Trader	11/03/17
9	Beza Tilahun	34	M	1 st Degree	Teacher	13/03/17
10	Kelem Worku	24	F	10 th complete	Trader	13/03/17
12	Abebe Tekle	47	M	1 st Degree	Administrator of Woreda Communication Office	14/03/17
13	Animaw Mengistie	41	M	1 st Degree	Administrator of woreda	14/03/17

					culture and tourism office	
14	Alemayehu Mossie	79	M	Read and write	<i>Merigeta</i>	16/03/17
15	Andarg Abitew	46	M	Illiterate	Farmer	16/03/17
16	Temesgen Mehari	38	M	9 th grade student	Preacher	16/03/17
17	Amare Tibebu	28	M	Read and write	Farmer	17/03/17
18	Genet Ejigu	32	F	Illiterate	Farmer+Trader	17/03/17
19	Bizuye Degarege	36	M	10+2 complete	Community policing officer	18/03/17
20	Nithsuh Gezie	43	F	1 st Degree	Employee at NGO	19/03/17
21	Emaway Mehari	19	F	11 th Grade	Student	22/03/17
22	Atirsaw Abitie	37	M	Can't read and write	Farmer	22/03/17
23	Aba Wolde Nedhin	37	M	10 th complete	Lique Abew of the monastery	24/03/17
24	Genanew Asmare	58	M	Can't read and write	Farmer	24/03/17

II. Profile of FGD Participants

FGD 1: Ascetic Residents of the Monastic Community

No .	Name of FGD1 Participants	Age	Sex	Educational level	Position/occupation	Date of Interview
1	Kinfe Michael	36	M	12 th complete	<i>Megabi</i> of the monastery	27/03/17
2	Gebremedhin Eshetie	46	M	12 th complete	<i>Afememhir</i> of the monastery	
3	Aba Gebre Tsadik	64	M	Read and write	-	
4	Wolete Senbet	33	M	Read and write	Tegbarbet Controller	
5	Aba Wolde Nedhin	37	M	10 th complete	Liqe Abew of the monastery	
6	Ema Wolete Mariam	53	M	Can't read and write	Food preparation	
7	Ema Amete Mariam	42	F	Can read	Food preparation	

**FGD 2: Members from Mahiber Kidane Mihret of Elias Town who are Service Users
and/or Participants in Yebereket Sira of the Monastery**

No .	Name of FGD 2 Participants	Age	Sex	Educational level	Position/occupation	Date of Interview
1	Awoke Abatihun	24	M	10+2	Trader (motor bicycle transportation)	04/04/17
2	Tadesse Alamirew (priest)	36	M	10 th complete	Carpenter +Serving as a priest at D/Elias Church	
3	Molla Aniley	29	M	College diploma	Government employee	
4	Nigussie Wondimagegn	33	M	10 th complete	Carpenter + broker	
5	Betelhem Mersie	27	F	1 st Degree	Teacher	
6	Diress Anteneh	38	M	10 th compete	Farmer +trader	
7	Gedefaye Aniley	32	M	8 th complete	Farmer	
8	Yihun Belachew	37	M	Read and write	Trader	
9	Diress Amogne	41	M	12 th complete	Trader	

FGD 3: Nearby Community Members of an Association with the name of Mahibere

Sellassie (Degolima Community)

No .	Name of FGD 3 Participants	Age	Sex	Educational level	Position/occupation	Date of Interview
1	Kumie Ayalsew	27	M	10+2	Farmer+ trader	01/04/17
2	Hassabe Yetnayet	38	F	8 th complete	Farmer	
3	Begale Limenih	36	M	Read and write	Farmer	
4	Ayalew Anteneh	24	M	10 th complete	Farmer +trader	
5	Betelhem Mersie	27	F	College diploma	Teacher	
6	Asressie Sahilu	32	M	10 th compete	Farmer +trader	
7	Zewdu Mulie	31	M	8 th complete	Farmer	

Appendix C: Administrative Structure of the Monastery

The study monastery has its own administrative structure, having unique name for each administrators in accordance with specific functions and/or responsibility being assigned to lead all the activities in it. Such administrators, with their respective name and level of administration from top to bottom, are indicated as follows:

Abeminet: Controls the overall activities being carried out in the monastery such as healing through baptism and other developmental practices, leads all lower level administrative workers, and advises people who face different psycho social problems. There is only one *Abeminet* in the monastery.

Megabi: Works as a Vice administrator under the supervision of the *Abeminet*. He controls and/or supervises all works being done by lower level administrators. Do all activities representing the *Abeminet* in the absence of the *Abeminet*. There is only one *Megabi* in the monastery.

Gual Megabi: their may work is preparation and distribution of food serving for all members of the monastic community. Sometimes, they work representing the *Megabi* in his absence, for activities being carried out in the monastery. There are 10 persons (7 female and 3 male with the responsibility of *gual megabi* in the monastery.

Liqe Abew: Has the responsibility of controlling all patients going from different communities to be healed by being baptized through the holy water (tsebel) of the monastery. this include identification of patients by their level of sickness (patients with critical get priority in the healing practice). In the absence of the *Abeminet*, he baptizes those patients, give religious

preaching and sanctifications, and most importantly, report the overall situation of all patients to the *Abeminet*. (At the time of my data collection, there are about 16 persons with mental health problems in the monastery expecting to be healed by the holy water. In fact, unlike other EOTC churches, there are no as such sanctifications being employed in the monastery. It is only for 6 days within a year through which sanctification practice takes place (Christmas, Easter, New Year, January 7 and August 16 E.C.).

Moferbet: have a responsibility of controlling all developmental and/or agricultural practices within the monastery under the supervision of *Megabi*. There are two persons (1 male and 1 female) with a responsibility of *moferbet*.

Afememhir: works as a public relation officer. Issues related with both inside and, particularly, outside the monastery that either positively or negatively affects the monastic community are seriously considered by the *Afememhir*. Besides doing different missionary activities, the *Afememhir* has also a responsibility of promoting the monastery to concerned bodies. There is only one male *Afememhir* in the monastery.

Liqe Red'i: facilitates all people found in the monastery to participate in different activities, assign works of any type for each person (*Red'i*) to accomplish, and report each and every progress to the concerned person/s of the upper level administrators. There are two persons (1 male and 1 female) serving as *Liqe Red'i* in the monastery.

Red'i: all people found in the monastery who are participating in *Yebereket sira*. This includes people who are either constantly living in the monastic community or not.

From this administrative structure, one can understand that, if appropriately used, locally, and/or traditionally, designed administrative structures have their own significance just like, if not better, than “modern” types of such structures.

Source: Megabi of Sellassie Monastery; March, 2017