

Title

Roles and challenges of Idirs in Local Socio-Economic Development: A Case of Ambo Town, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study assessed the roles and challenges of Idirs in local socio-economic development in Ambo town, Ethiopia. Idirs are the cultural and societal associations of the local communities. Idirs utilise mutual support amongst community members. This study examined the roles of Idirs in local socio-economic development in the study area. It identified challenges of these community associations in participating in the development programs through its implementation process. For this study, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches, and descriptive research design was employed. The finding shows that Idirs have decisive impacts on the local socio-economic development. The Idirs are used as a tool for improving the local community responsibility, which is decisive for sustainable local socio-economic development. The research described issues related to roles of Idirs for local economic development and social development, encountered challenges, and potential opportunities of Idirs in the local socio-economic development. Finally, the researcher recommended government bodies and other development actors to give recognition for those local social associations as one of the development agents and the political systems should give recognitions for Idirs' and its contributions for productivity and capital development.

Key words

Challenges, Development, Ethiopia, Idirs, Local, Roles, Socio-Economic

Key dates

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Introduction and Background

In Ethiopia is well endowed with indigenous social institutions for developments. The indigenous associations are organized both formally and informally, and have been operating in Ethiopia for a century. Nigatu, et.al (2013) indicated that indigenous institutions in Ethiopia have an inclusive decision-making process and they are responsive to execute local socio-economic development roles both as a conduit of service delivery and self-determined change. Similarly, Dejene's (2002) research exclusively examines urban-based social associations and shows the existence of Idirs in different forms, and indicates their use to the community in terms of funeral insurance and economic activities.

However, mobilizing local resources in terms of finance, material, and labor to develop the social institutions in Ethiopia have not been given the support and encouragement they deserve through enabling legislation and administrative support (Dejene 2002). Altaye & Medhanit (2012) also explained in the social capital theories as they emphasize relational aspects of social institutions and community life. Accordingly, to build the capacity of local institutions, there are legal (lack of clear policies) as well as practical (technical assistance by government offices), and the overall number of indigenous institutions in Ethiopia and their share of local-level developmental activities is assumed as high. But, their effective contribution to social, economic, and political development is rarely assessed soberly and empirically.

Mulugeta (2010) identified the local community institutions in development activities mainly focused on the perspectives of local social development and a foundation stone for community-driven development management in developing countries. On the other hand, Dejene (2002) and Hailu (1995), empirical study on indigenous institutions focused on informal finance in Ethiopia, and also as neighbors, relatives, and friends help each other in times of need; as well as build local roads, bridges, schools, and churches. Even though, the mentioned empirical studies stated Idirs' roles in Ethiopia from different angles, basic descriptive information about these institutions and policy frameworks within which they operate is not stated clearly.

Besides, social and political discourse has been dominated by only two actors; the market and the state in the development program which makes the Idirs' role largely invisible in official socio-economic statistics. The focus of government structures for social helping systems association, their roles in local socio-economic development, and the theoretical gap on the Idirs financial and

economic productivity, financial development, capital increment, and social cohesions didn't well valued. The objective of this study is to assess the roles of Idirs for local socio-economic development by analyzing the roles of Idirs in local economic development, and social development as well as identifying the challenges of Idirs participation in local socio-economic development activities in the study areas.

Research Methodology

Study area

Ambo town is a zone town with the 2nd grade of administrative status located at the 114km west of Addis Ababa, on the way to "Nekemte"; sits at the altitude of 2,100 meters, has 18.6 degree Celsius, and average temperature with 987mm mean annual rainfall (Cook & Jennifer, 2013; UN-Habitat, 2008 as cited in Tadesse, 2018). The author also explained the historical establishment of Ambo town in 1889, and it had its own municipal administration in 1931 and a master plan since 1983.

Table 1: Total number of Idirs in the six Kebeles of Ambo town

	<i>Name of Model Idirs</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>
1	<i>Tokuma Karra Bahaa</i>	—	—	1182
2	<i>Arada Ezgarab</i>	563	461	1024
3	<i>Liban Mecha</i>	464	316	780
4	<i>Balewoldi Ketero</i>	-	-	310
5	<i>Dirre Nega</i>	254	19	265
6	<i>Golobe Karra Bahaa</i>	-	-	218
7	<i>Addis Ketema Males Iddir</i>	105	100	205
8	<i>Balewoldi and Kidanemihiret</i>	102	58	160
9	<i>Afosha Tokuma</i>	121	14	135
10	<i>Ambo Bole</i>	97	15	112

Source: Ambo Town Workers and Social Affairs Office, 2020

Research design

Mixed research method; both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used. The researcher also employed descriptive research design, and both primary and secondary sources of data were used. Data collection methods employed in the study included both survey questionnaires and key informants' interviews. The total population of the study was the total members of selected Idirs from three Idirs of Dirre Nega (265), Liban Mecha (780), and Tokuma Karra Baha (1182) which is 2227 in

numbers. The sample size is determined by the Yamane formula of (1967) and the determination required the sample size at 95% confidence level and 5% of acceptable sampling errors.

Where

n = sample size for the research use

N = Total number of Idirs’ members

e = margin of errors at 5%

$$\text{Accordingly, } n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} = \frac{2227}{1+2227(0.05)^2} = 339$$

Therefore, the 339 sample size was the members targeted from three selected Idirs populations of 2,227 and the three Idirs also had fifteen (15) key informants in total. Accordingly, 15 key informants participated in the interview from those three Idirs for the intended purpose. This means the key informants were exclusive of the sample size from those populations. The study employed a purposive sampling technique for KII and a proportional systematic random sampling technique for survey questionnaire respondents, respectively.

Table 2: Proportionally selected respondents of a sample study

Idirs	Number of all members						
	Actual Idirs’ Member ^s	Respondents Sample			Key informants Number		
		M	F	Ttl	M	F	Ttl
Toku ma Karra Bahaa	1182	136	44	180	4	1	5
Liban Mecha	780	103	15	118	5	---	5
Dire Nega	265	37	4	41	5	---	5
Total	2,227	276	63	339	15	1	15

Source: Ambo Town Workers and Social Affairs Office, 2020

The target Idirs were selected based on their monthly incomes, assets (capitals) and having of several members, working offices and they are model Idirs in the town. Therefore, since all have a more or less direct relationship with issues of socio-economic developments, the researcher took them and their members as primary sources of data.

Data analysis

Data analysis employed both qualitative and quantitative methods and data were collected through semi- self-administered and self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed and others were interviewed. The collected data from the respondents were recorded and processed. The analysis was made based on the theoretical literatures; recorded data and empirical evidence collected through questionnaires and interviews. The collected data were analysed with the help of descriptive statistics (percentage, frequencies, mean, and grand mean) which were employed for this study. To enable the aforementioned analysis of data that were collected through questionnaire, SPSS-Version 20 software version was utilized and the analyzed data were presented. After that, the data were categorized, tabulated, and narrated by words. The grand mean is also used to compare the Idirs’ roles for local economic development with social development. Qualitative data gathered from KII was translated from Afan Oromo to English, narrated, and described. Then, both quantitative & qualitative data were triangulated. Finally, presented and analyzed data were generalized to the total population of the study area.

Results

Society has been a common experience of supporting each other; particularly at times of greater need, such as during emergency or disaster situations. By this way, neighbors, relatives and friends help each other in times of need to rehabilitate victimized member. To execute these activities, community members organize themselves through social associations at the local level. This study tried to reveal the roles of Idirs (one type of known social association in Ethiopia) in local socio-economic development. The results of this study depicted the following research finding from primary sources of data.

Table 3: Respondents Perceptions on Roles of Idirs

Respon dents Percep tion	Theme	Frequency		Tit		
		M	%	F	%	
Roles in Planning	Yes	275	81.1	64	18.9	33
	No	0	0	0	0	0
Method of Contribution	Financial	141	41.6	37	11.1	17
	Labor	103	30.4	14	4.4	11
	Professional	36	28.2	8	2.5	44

Source: Research data

The highest number of survey respondents or 141(41.6%) perceived the roles of Idirs’ significances in terms of finance, labor, and profession while the least number of survey respondents, or 36(28.2%) perceived roles of Idirs by professional participation only in local socio-economic development. In short, all the respondents or 339 (100%) perceived the roles of Idirs in local socio-economic development as very important, and as they are useful both for members and non-members; in building social relations, strengthening social cohesion and solidarity amongst the local communities. By this study, both the questionnaire respondents and key informants perceived the roles of Idirs as active participants in development planning and decision making processes.

Table 4: Roles of Idirs for Local Economic Development

Roles of Idirs in Economic Development	Responses				
	N	A	SA	M	MV
Facilitate Local economic developments	115	163	61	F	3.84
Increasing Capital & local economies	163	139	37	F	3.63
Participating in Self-helping Activities	156	149	34	F	3.64
Contribute in Urban economic security & Economic Empowerment	339	----	----	F	3.00
Realize Sustainable economic development	73	232	34	F	3.89
Improve Local Economic Participation	187	128	24	F	3.52
Grand mean					3.59

Source: Research data

Local socio-economic development retains jobs to develop community self-reliance to alleviate poverty that leads to social and personal empowerment, economic development, and communities’ socio-economic transformation. Accordingly, the greatest number of questionnaire respondents, or 163(48.1%), respondents are highly satisfied and stated as their Idirs play important roles in local economic development by providing local economic inputs. This means, Idirs are synergizing local knowledge, and skills, facilitating community participation in helping HIV/AIDS patients and orphaned children, mobilizing resources from Idir members’ regular and irregular payments, accumulating constant properties such as tents, sitting benches, shops for rent, stores and rent houses of the institutions which contribute for local economic development. But the least number of survey questionnaires, 61(18%) respondents

indicated the roles of Idirs' in local economic productivity as invisible.

However, almost all of the respondents realized that the Idirs members' participation and contributions for urban economic security and improvement are ineffective. All key informants explained that the roles of their institutions in urban economic security and improvement are weak in realizing sustainable economic development. Local economic development retains jobs to develop community self-reliance that alleviates poverty for a sustainable livelihood. Statistically, the greater mean values of the economic role of Idirs in local economic development, 3.89 indicates the Idirs contribute more in sustainable economic development and the less mean, 3.00 indicates the Idirs contribution for urban economic security & economic empowerment of poor segment of the society. Source: Primary Survey, 2020

The highest number of respondents or 233(68.9%) stated that Idirs have important roles in communities' social development by strengthening social cohesion, improving the culture of living together and their social skills, strengthening community participation in social activities. The Idirs grand mean contribution for local economic development is 3.59 while 4.22 is the contributions of idirs grand mean for social developments. The comparison of both grand means showed that the Idirs overall contributions for local economic development are lower than the contributions for social development. Finally, Titi and Singh (2001) sustainable development theory suggests human and social capital treatment like natural resources and effective use of them to provide long-term benefits to local communities. In line with this statement, all (100%) of this study's respondents, and all (100%) of key informants realized that the Idirs contribute to social development in different types of social occasions and emergencies.

Both the survey respondents and key informants identified challenges of Idirs as inadequate and stagnant level of financial resources mobilizing, limited members knowledge, legal constraints, fragmented communities indigenous cultures and departed social organizations, political challenges, and limited Idirs committees' project planning skills and knowledge of bottom-up approach of planning as empowerment strategies, limited Idirs participation in local socio-economic development and low level of government support and recognitions for Idirs as independent organization /sector/ which contribute for the local development challenged Idirs.

In case of available opportunities of Idirs, the findings from survey respondents and key informants showed that availability of economic resource, social capitals of the community,

conducive environment, and constitutional provisions are some of the recognized opportunities for Idirs to contribute to local socio-economic development. Accordingly, 322(95%) of respondents explained that Idirs are the indigenous and strong socially developed self-helping activities. Lastly, George (2014) identified four pillars of community organizations such as economic circumstance and opportunity, social development and social capital, environmental character and sustainability, and institutional structures and mandates which influence the local socio-economic development processes. Similarly, Kindeye & Hailu, (1995) stated as community institutions have opportunities for constitutional provisions that permitted the fundamental freedoms underpinning the right to association. The researcher assessed and found potential opportunities which compromise with the above-mentioned empirical literature.

Discussion

Mulugeta (2014) stated the significance of indigenous Community Based Organizations (CBOs) engaged in active community participation on development activities is mainly focused on the perspectives of local contribution. He revealed that less is understood about the contractual relationships between indigenous CBOs and the community in terms of facilitating local-level development. Therefore, research respondents and key informants perceived Idirs' roles in local socio-economic development as decisive and a positive social association. In the same manner, Nigatu et.al (2013) indicated that indigenous community institutions in Ethiopia have an inclusive decision-making process and responsive to execute local economic development roles both as a conduit of service delivery and self-determined change and in the evidence of agency problems has thus far not been recorded. Similar to this empirical study, the study assessed the Idirs' roles in local economic development in terms of their participation in different local economic activities. Both the questionnaire respondents and key informants came up with the finding of the Idirs productivity in case of financial resources mobilization and increment, capital improvement, strengthening of local community's economic support systems, and participation in local economic development activities. Accordingly, Idirs have great impacts in realizing local economic development and sustainable economic development. Therefore, the results of this study realized that Idirs have decisive economic contributions for local communities and sustainability of the intended development.

In case of the roles of Idirs in social development, Altaye & Medhanit (2012) also explained in the social capital theories as they emphasize relational

aspects of social institutions and community life. Accordingly, to build the capacity of local institutions, there are legal (lack of clear policies) as well as practical (technical assistance by government offices), and the overall number of indigenous institutions in Ethiopia and their share of local-level developmental activities is assumed as high. Therefore, the results of the study also showed that Idirs have contributions to social development by helping orphaned children through buying educational materials and feeding on holy days, giving meal grinding services, supplying basic service goods for local communities such as edible oil, sugar, and flour with lower prices, members' empowerment, and decision making, participation in urban waste management and quality improvement activities, sustaining social cohesions, building solidarity and social capitals amongst the members and realizing sustainable social development guarantees.

In issues related to challenges of Idirs, Ayman (2011) explains the challenging factors of community association deal with legal constraints, regulations, and technical standards, planning methods, project management procedures, or the absence of a workable model. Similarly, this study resulted the challenges of limited financial resources, low economic productivity, limited knowledge and skills, legal constraints, fragmented social organizations and departed community lives, limitations on members' empowerment, participation, and decision-making activities, and deteriorated indigenous social capitals of the community are identified as challenging factors.

Finally, in case of potential opportunities of Idirs for socio-economic development, George (2014) identified four pillars of community organizations such as economic circumstance and opportunity, social development and social capital, environmental character and sustainability, and institutional structures and mandates which influence the local socio-economic development processes. Similarly, Kindeye & Hailu, (1995) stated as community institutions have opportunities for constitutional provisions that permitted the fundamental freedoms underpinning the right to association. The researcher assessed and found potential opportunities which compromise with the above-mentioned empirical literature.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researcher forwarded the next suggestions. Accordingly, government, political systems and development institutions should allow and give recognition for different social associations like Idirs as development actor and also should emphasize on ensuring its economic productivity and capital development. Idirs' leaders

are retirees and non-professionals; this situation leads to stagnant development on their improvements and Idirs should be managed by professional leaders who have knowledge and skills of project management and planning.

In addition, members of Idirs should focus on improving their financial and capital capacity by diversifying source of income generating activities to realize their contributions for local socio-economic development. On the other hand, rules and regulations of the government on the social associations should be integrated with community's cultural values and customs of supporting system. Because the community associations are everlasting, and sustainable local socio-economic development should be supported by realizing Idirs' empowerment, their full participation and have to develop the sense of ownership amongst the members.

Conclusion

By this study, the Idirs' roles in local socio-economic development, challenges, and problems related with Idirs participation are analyzed by relating it to indigenous and strong economic and social helping systems. The study analyzed the Idirs' economic contributions in line with productivity, financial resources, capital assets, level of skill and knowledge accumulations, and members' roles of participation in socio-economic empowerment for sustainable local socio-economic development. The researcher identified that the Idirs added values to the local economy by building stores, meal grinding machines, and shops for the local communities. These economic assets are also contributing to local economic development. In addition, Idirs are contributing to social development by strengthening and considering the existence of social capitals, social cohesions, solidarity, psychological and social supports during emergencies and social activities, especially on funeral services. By doing so, the Idirs' members help local communities by supplying basic social services like oil, sugar, and flour lower costs and prices. Further, the Idirs' members buy uniforms and different educational materials for orphans and vulnerable children. They also support PLWHA socially and financially. The Idirs provide car services on funeral system and support local community on different emergency times. The study also investigated challenges and explored the opportunities of Idirs for local socio-economic development. Accordingly, shortage of financial resources, weak organizational capacity, and lack of skilled manpower, social fragmentation, and low level of knowledge for advancing Idirs for the prosperous stages are some of encountered challenges. Availability of economic resources, supportive community's social capitals, availability

of legal instruments, and constitutional provisions are some of potential opportunities of Idir's roles in socio-economic development.

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