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TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING THE UNDERLYING PROCESSES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Case study of a youth association in rural Ethiopia

Bachelor Thesis

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Olomouc 2012

I declare in lieu of oath that I wrote this thesis myself. All information derived from the work of others has been acknowledged in the text and in a list of references is given.

Olomouc, 26th April, 2012   **..**

                                                            Signature

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Z á s a d y   p r o   v y p r a c o v á n í :

Annotation: The main focus of the research is on possible mechanisms facilitating the development of successful collective action in the context of non-governmental development programmes. For this purpose, a case study of a specific group-formation has been chosen as a point of reference. In order to capture possible hypotheses of how collective action is developed and maintained, secondary sources will be analyzed such as social science literature as well as documents of the external stakeholders: PADet (standing at the establishment of the group), DSW (major donor) and the government. Furthermore, primary data will be collected from programme coordinators and members of the group. For that purpose around 15 interviews will be conducted in total. The final outcome of the research should contribute to a better understanding of how group processes work under specific circumstances. These hypotheses can be used and further tested in future research for PADet.

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Abstract

The concepts of collective action and social capital are increasingly being used in development programs. However a gap in knowledge exists when understanding the underlying processes. Especially in how the formation of groups can be enhanced by development actors and how it contributes to the empowerment of members. This paper uses the so called 'Youth-to-Youth' programs as a point of reference and examines it in practice. For this purpose a case study of a youth association is chosen to illustrate certain processes that took place in the course of its development. The paper concludes with several hypotheses; that trust and existing norms of cooperation in the community are key to understanding mechanisms inherent in the emergence and development of the group. That development agents too can have an important role to play, by accepting a facilitative role in the collective efforts, they can encourage the initiative and enhance networking with other stakeholders. The paper also points to the complexity of the empowerment process. Suggesting it is something that cannot be assessed merely on perceptions, that it requires a much more in-depth analysis of behaviour and mindsets of members, as well as the community as a whole.

Abstrakt

Kolektivní hnutí a sociální kapitál jsou koncepty, které se stále častěji objevují jako součást rozvojových programů. Přesto však existují mezery ve znalostech procesů podílejících se na vzniku kolektivních hnutí. Otázkou zůstává především, jak je možno podpořit formování skupin rozvojovými aktéry a jak tyto procesy přispívají k 'zplnomocňování' účastníků. Tato práce čerpá z teorie takzvaných „Youth-to-Youth" programů a zkoumá jejich implementaci v praxi. Za tímto účelem byla zvolena případová studie mládežnické asociace, která slouží k ilustraci procesů, jež probíhaly během jejího vývoje. Z práce vychází několik hypotéz. Důvěra a již existující normy spolupráce v komunitě jsou základem k porozumění mechanismů spjatých se vznikem a vývojem skupiny. Kromě toho hrají důležitou roli také rozvojoví aktéři. V případech, kdy přijmou roli facilitátorů kolektivních hnutí, mohou podpořit iniciativy a vytváření sítí s dalšími relevantními subjekty. Tato práce také poukazuje na spletitost procesu 'zplnomocňování', kde nemůže být hodnoceno pouze z vnímání jednotlivců, ale vyžaduje hlubší analýzu způsobu uvažování a chování účastníků i celé komunity.

Klíčová slova: kolektivní hnutí, sociální kapitál, zplnomocňování, skupinové zplnomocňování, mládežnická asociace, rozvojové programy, nevládní organizace

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DKEA   Dhaloote Kee Eegii Association
            (translated as Save Your Generation Association)

DSW   German Foundation for World Population

NGO   Non-governmental organisation

PADet   Professional Alliance for Development

UN   United Nations

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In September 2011 I travelled to Ethiopia to work hand in hand with a local NGO PADet on a small research project about collective action and the participation of youth in it. The findings of the research are dealt with in this paper which is thought of as my bachelor thesis as well as a final report to PADet.

I am most grateful to the Wageningen NGO Otherwise which took up the role of a mediator in the process of searching and negotiating the right research opportunity. A special thanks goes to the Otherwise staff, Margriet, for her open and creative mind and for the determination to help me achieve my dreams.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The first chapter is dedicated to the introduction of the research problem together with the formulation of the research objectives and research questions. Moreover, it aims at the description of the socio-economic historical and institutional context in which the problem takes place.

1.1 Rationale

The bachelor thesis research is being conducted in Ethiopia with the cooperation of a local, non-governmental organization PADet (Professional Alliance for Development) focused on community development. After 12 years of intensive program implementation, PADet realizes the need for a systematic documentation of successful as well as unsuccessful practices. This documentation based on scientific research should complement traditional evaluation studies currently carried out by the staff of the organization. The main purpose of such an improved documentation is to serve as a base for better evidence-based learning about the outcomes but also processes fundamental to the specific development programs.

The demand for a better understanding of past achievements and failures has naturally arisen in the course of organizational growth and programmatic scale-up as a way to determine the direction of future efforts. Moreover, donors too are asking for a more transparent evaluation reports as a result of a current international discussion about the aid effectiveness (as in e.g. Easterly 2006 and Moyo 2009).

The specific problem of this research is dealing with the problem of collective action efforts of youth in the context of development programs. For this purpose, a case study of an existing youth association has been chosen as a point of reference. This association was initiated by a group of local young people with the purpose of awareness-raising around issues concerning sexual and reproductive health. Influenced by various external programs (mainly of PADet, the main donor and the local administration) a small informal group quickly grew into a vibrant organization formally recognized by Ethiopian authorities. However, this remarkably successful development has, in the past few years, turned into stagnation and loss of funding. The research investigates the processes responsible for the overall development of the association and its members.

1.2 Research problem

Collective action and social capital are frequently discussed concepts. Thus, there is a relatively large body of literature about the behavior of individuals in collectivities and their ability to work together towards common goals. Many authors have also discussed the implications of collective action in natural resource management. Yet, many gaps still exist in understanding the conditions facilitating the emergence and persistence of collective action as well as its social impacts on groups and individuals under different contextual factors (Upton, 2008). Moreover, the important question of whether social capital and collective action can be created or facilitated by external interventions remains unanswered to date (Paldam and Svendsen, 2000). More research has to be made into how and under which circumstances collective action functions as a development tool and what role can outsiders play in its enhancement.

1.3 Research objective and research questions

The main objective of the research is to contribute to the understanding of collective action of youth and the way they can be enhanced through external actors. This objective is to be achieved by answering following questions:

A. How has the DKE association emerged, developed and how is it currently being run and managed?

- How did the idea of the youth club come about at the first place and what have been the main triggers for the collective action (material incentives, altruism, volunteerism, strong leadership, external intervention)?

- What were the initial aims and targets of the collective action, how has that changed throughout time (if) and why?

B. What has been the role of these external actors in the development of the DKE association?

- How do external actors (PADet, DSW, government) approach and implement local youth projects?

- How has the initiative been enhanced and/or constraint by external interventions?

C. How has the collective action empowered individual group members and the group in large?

- How has the socio-economic status of the involved youth changed since the establishment of the association?

- How do the members perceive their own empowerment?

1.4 Background to the study

1.4.1 Socio-economic profile of the country

Ethiopia is a landlocked country situated in the Horn of Africa. The majority of the population lives in rural areas whereas around 80% of the population is employed in the agricultural sector (UNdata, 2005)[1]. Its geographic location with unstable climate conditions in combination with overall dependence on rain-fed agriculture (despite the great potential of Ethiopian soils) contributed to high vulnerability and often food insecurity of many Ethiopian livelihoods (Lautze et al., 2003). As indicated by the Human Development Index, Ethiopia also falls into the category of the least developed countries in the world. The GNI per capita was 343.9 US dollars in 2009[2] - as compared to e.g. 17258.3 in the Czech Republic[3] (UNdata, 2009). According to the World Bank the poverty headcount ratio at the national poverty line was almost 39% (World Bank data, 2005)[4].

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[1] http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Ethiopia (cit.2012)
[2] Ibid
[3] http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=CZECH%20REPUBLIC (cit.2012)
[4] http://data.worldbank.org/country/ethiopia (cit.2012)

The life expectancy is fairly low, being around 56 for men and 59 years for women (UNdata, 2010-2015*)[5]. The fertility rate remains high, being almost 5 births per woman on average. The combined effect of the last two is that the proportion of children under the age of 15 falls as high as 43% of the overall population, thus ranking Ethiopia among exemplary pyramid-like demographic structures, so typical for most developing countries (UNdata, 2010)[6]. The need for involving children and youth in the development of the country is thus quite substantial. The government as well as the civil sector is trying hard with various programs aimed at education, especially. As a result, the net enrollment ratio has risen significantly in the last decade, currently reaching up to 86% for boys and 81% for girls (UNICEF Statistics, 2007-2010*)[7].

1.4.2 Historical context

The 20th century in Ethiopia is marked with three different political regimes but unlike other African countries with no colonial experience. Ethiopia has entered the century as a monarchy to be sustained until 1974. After the reign of two different emperors, in 1930 Ras Tafari, crowned as the Emperor Haile Selassie, assumed power. He virtually granted himself absolute power and managed to bring the whole country under his highly centralized rule, often letting millions of people suffer. Needless to say, besides Haile Selassie´s autocratic manners, he was also a great reformer for which he deserved much of international attention. He abolished Ethiopian slave trade, promoted education and stood up against various harmful traditional practices (e.g. traditional burning of accused criminals) to name but a few of his merits. It was also during his reign, at the turn of the third decade, that Ethiopia experienced couple of years of Italian occupation. However, through strong internal resistance it successfully avoided being colonized thus leaving Ethiopia to its own independent development under Haile´s autocracy and occasional support of its western allies.

The course of Ethiopian development changed drastically in 1974 when the discontent of students with the current rule escalated into massive protests supporting a new socialist movement. The revolution helped an emerging radical military group (known as *Derg*) to

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[5] http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Ethiopia (cit.2012)
[6] Ibid
[7] http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ethiopia_statistics.html#90 (cit.2012)
*Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified in the column heading

usurp political power in the country. The consequent years are marked with bloodshed and persecutions of the regime´s opponents. Ethiopia was undergoing a great socialist experiment including nationwide nationalization and collectivization. As a result, all private enterprises have been taken away from their owners as was rural and urban land. Instead, thousands of peasant associations were forcefully established to be responsible for rural development.

After the fall of the Derg regime in 1991, the new government abandoned most of previous socialist policies (however land still remains the property of the state) and showed the determination to follow the path of capitalism and liberal democracy. Unfortunately the latter soon appeared to be a mere illusion. Currently, according to the Freedom House, Ethiopia ranks 6 on the scale ranging from 1 to 7 (least free). This negative evaluation is a result of several serious violations of democratic principles including severe suppression of political opposition for the past 16 years, total control over local media and massive restrictions of the activities of non-governmental organizations to name but a few (Freedom in the World, 2011)[8].

Since the 1950s Ethiopia has been an active recipient of foreign aid as an instrument to overcome serious underdevelopment. The money from various sources has been used for both long-term development purposes and emergency relief. The picture of Ethiopia during the devastating periods of famines in 1970s and 1980s has largely remained in the minds of western public contributing to the country´s position as a donor darling (Lemi, 1960-2003). Nevertheless, to what degree has foreign aid contributed to the overall development of the country or rather created dependency, corruption and conflict remains, as in any other developing region, a matter of discussion.

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[8] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/ethiopia (cit. 2012)

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The third chapter summarizes the body of literature related to the concepts of collective action, social capital and capability approach. It shows the direct connection between these concepts and extends the traditional discussion for an application in the area of development programs and the Ethiopian context.

2.1 Collective action and the role of social capital

2.1.1 The theory of collective action

"The idea that groups tend to act in support of their group interest is supposed to follow logically from this widely accepted premise of rational, self-interested behavior. In other words, if the members of some group have a common interest or object, and if they would all be better off if that objective were achieved, it has been thought to follow logically that the individuals in that group would, if they were rational and self-interested, act to achieve that objective.   (Olson, 1965; p.1)

In the opening of his book, Olson summarizes an approach promoted by group theorists of his time. The argument that individuals tend to cooperate in order to pursue their common interests became the main target of his critique. In Olson´s line of reasoning rational, self-interested individuals will always act in their own interest instead of the interest of the group, unless its size is small or unless external coercion is present (Olson, 1965). A similarly structured argument is presented by Hardin (1968) who develops a theory coined with the expression "the tragedy of the commons". The inability of individuals to work towards a common goal is in his famous article illustrated through a hypothetical case of the degradation of common pastures typifying the general problematic of common property regimes. In Hardin´s opinion, a man following his best interests will always have an incentive to free-ride on others thus impeding any chance for successful collective action. Even if this theory was later labeled as invalid by many scientists because of its lack of empirical evidence, the strength of Hardin´s argument is in the possibility of its application on a wide variety of other development problems. Even if drifting away from environmental degradation as suggested in his original argument, a relevant parallel can be found in the problem of overpopulation, raised by Hardin himself, and a variety of others such as international cooperation discussed by Snidal (1985; cited in Ostrom, 1990) and also development aid as raised by Easterly (2010).

An important milestone in the theory of collective action is presented by a laureate of the Nobel Prize in Economics, Elinor Ostrom, in her ever famous book about governance of the commons[9]. Basing her arguments on own empirical research about successful common property regimes Ostrom challenges Olson´s and Hardin´s pessimism about the inability of individuals to act in the interest of a group. She opposes their orthodoxy of purely rational and egoist conception of human behavior by asserting that people act in accordance to *social norms,* understood as shared "understandings about actions that are obligatory, permitted, or forbidden" (Crawford and Ostrom 1995). People can be motivated to act in the common interest through the prevailing norms in a particular community such as reciprocity and trustworthiness (Ostrom, 2000). Because such behavior is considered as right by other members of the community, they will tend to reciprocate it which will in turn contribute to their own well-being. On the other hand, drifting away from community´s norms might result in an exclusion from the community.

Additionally, "the presence of a leader or entrepreneur, who articulates different ways of organizing to improve joint outcomes, is frequently an important initial stimulus" for collective action (Ostrom 2000; p. 149). Though, an important distinction has to be made between the acts of *usurping power* as described by Thorp et al. (2003) and *being vested the authority* discussed by Coleman (1994). In the latter case a charismatic leader is an instrument for the community to mobilize into a collective action. Weber (who is responsible for the development of the concept) saw a charismatic authority as someone who´s mindset and concrete acts inspires others (1947). He however raises the issue of whether charismatic people are really charismatic 'an sich' or whether they are only seen like it by other members of the community.

2.1.2 Social capital

Ostrom´s thesis about social norms enjoys theoretical support from further economists as well as sociologists and political scientist engaging in discussions about so called *social capital*. This term was introduced by James Coleman (1988), who defines social capital as "the ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organizations" (Coleman, 1988, p. 95). The ability to organize is determined by the degree to which people share norms and values such as trust (Fukuyama, 1995). Similarly, Putnam (1993)

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[9] Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action (1990)

claims that cooperation is most successful in cohesive communities, i.e. communities with social capital in abundance. He further asserts that the more people connect, the more they trust and the better off they consequently get. Overall, social capital contributes to the improvement of both the economic and social system thanks to *reciprocity* norms which discourage free-riders and instead, motivate people to act unselfishly (following the reciprocity formula: "be unto others as you would have them be unto you"). Putnam also suggests that social capital can be measured by the density of voluntary organizations in a particular community. There is thus a linear relationship between the degree of social capital represented by the number of organizations and the well-being of communities and the society in large.

2.2   Collective action and empowerment

2.2.1   The concept of empowerment

Acting collectively may bring about individual as well as collective empowerment. Groups can link up people in similar situations, creating a platform for networking, education, mutual support and campaigning (Parsons, 1991).

However, the concept of empowerment is rather problematic as it is continuously reinterpreted, providing users with the opportunity of widespread employment of the term in both theory and practice (Bebbington, 2007). Empowerment has thus become the prime term used in most of the strategic policy documents of governments and both governmental and non-governmental international organizations. This universality has however become a source of serious confusions and problems related to evaluation of programs claiming an empowerment impact.

A serious attempt for a clarification can be found in academic literature. Many authors have tried to comprehensively define the term and explain the underlying processes of empowerment. Caroline Moser (1989) can be regarded as a pioneer in trying to clear out the term in the context of development and gender studies. In her description of the empowerment approach she highlights the actual topic of *power* and power imbalance which tend to be ignored in the discussions. With respect to power, McWhirter (1991) defines empowerment as a process in which people:

(a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and (d) support the empowerment of others in the community.

(cited in Rowlands 1995: p.103)

According to Kabeer (1995), whether or not a person gets involved in the empowerment process depends on resources and agency. Resources such as income, education or social capital are often unequally distributed and their absence may disqualify people from decision-making about their lives. Agency[10] in turn determines the extent to which people are actually in control of their own decisions and actions.

The degree of people´s empowerment is usually strongly influenced by the specific kind of leadership in place. Some leaders possess the power to stimulate processes leading to empowerment and to help people and groups to reach their potential. Rather than maintaining power they are raising the status of others by giving them a possibility to emancipate and challenge dominance (Rowlands, 1995).

Often, more than by oppressive leaders per se, people´s empowerment may be constraint by "negative social constructions" which persist in a particular society. These shape the social environment but also might not allow affected people to perceive themselves as capable and rightful to act in a certain way (Rowlands 1995, p.103). Sen (1985) calls this situation, in which people´s perception of self is degraded by the prevailing social norms, the "perception bias". Rowlands (1995) further notes that empowerment should therefore "include processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to occupy that decision-making space" (p.102).

2.2.2   Empowering community settings

Taking into the account the social conditionality of empowerment, it becomes clear that it can only be addressed through an integrative approach. According to Maton (2008) *empowering community settings* can be considered as such because it accounts for individual development as well as community betterment and social change. He focuses on several domains which all include settings contributing to general community empowerment:

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[10] The notion of resources in combination with agency creates a parallel with Sen's (1985) idea of people's "capabilities" to define and live according to own wishes and believes.

"One domain includes settings that empower adults to overcome personal difficulties, helping them to change and grow. A second includes settings that empower youth growing up in adverse circumstances to develop, achieve, and accomplish. A third includes settings that empower citizens in impoverished communities to take action to improve the locality in which they live. The fourth includes settings that empower historically oppressed citizens to resist and challenge societal culture and institutions, and take action to change them."   (p.5)

Most of these settings anticipate an emergence of collective action as the only way to achieve change. Collective action displays in various forms including organizations of social action and civic engagement, self-help groups, congregations and youth development organizations. The next subchapter focuses on processes present in the last category.

2.2.3   Youth empowerment through collective action

As illustrated above, youth empowerment has to be considered in the wider context of societal change. The inclusion of youth is crucial from many perspectives. Most psychologists agree that adolescence (from ages 10 until 24 years) is a period of profound physical as well as psychological changes which naturally lead to issues connected to personal identity and perception of others. On the one hand adolescents become more independent on their parents, but on the other hand they increasingly seek for acceptance among their peers and wider society (Lacon and Mahoney, 2005). This process is by Roeser and Lau equated "to the struggle for a jazz musician to blend his or her individual solo with the collective voice of the band − both necessary for a strong performance" (cited in Lacon and Mahoney, 2005).

The dynamic period of searching can present many challenges, sometimes exposing young people to risky behaviors (Lerner et al., 2005). The process of *positive youth development* (PYD) can be understood as influenced by two major factors: the degree to which young people gain control over their lives and the degree to which they feel affiliated to the community - feeling of belonging, influence, understanding, etc. (Lacon and Mahoney, 2005[11]). The key strategies thus include the creation of possibilities for knowledge acquisition and skill development as well as opportunities to belong somewhere and to develop valuable relationships (Lerner et al., 2005).

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[11] Based on previous studies.

Clearly, encouraging young people to engage in peer organization with a community orientation can facilitate many of the above mentioned processes. According to Chinman and Linney (1998), social bonding in the context of community service can prevent youth from risky behaviors. In addition, collective engagement in meaningful activities can reinforce the development of positive, pro-social norms in the peer group (Lacon and Mahoney, 2005). Furthermore, it can gain the participants recognition of the adults and through its practical focus it also provides opportunities for the development of important life skills (Jennings et al., 2006).

2.3 The role of external actors

Looking into the theory of collective action and social capital, it is possible to detect a rather pessimistic opinion of several authors concerning the possibility of any external intervention to enable or enhance group endeavors. Putnam (1993) is especially skeptical about external attempts to establish social capital where it does not already exist. In his view, trust and norms can only be established through interactions over long period of time once individuals get the chance to experience the benefits of collective action. Thus, cooperation represents a continued practice and cannot be implanted at once. If so, it will not be sustainable because such practices are not embedded in the culture and thus disappear as soon as the third party eases off its influence.

Ostrom (2000) points out that rules and structures introduced by external actors have the dangerous potential to crowd out pre-existing cooperative behavior or, in case of heavy enforcement, to block the development of internal norms whatsoever. Paldam and Svendsen (1999) go further in the definition of enforcement and differentiate between an active and passive level. The former level involves situations of active inducement of people to work together, which usually results in dysfunctional social relations in the long-term. Passive enforcement on the other hand refers to the construction of official institutions on top and around local initiatives which these authors consider "the precondition for having social capital" (Paldam and Svendsen, 1999: p. 354).

Despite numerous doubts about viewing social capital and collective action as a ´project´, the group approach has inspired many policy makers in the design of their programs. Social capital has thus become one of the central organizing themes in global development (Porter and Lyon 2006; Upton, 2008). Several reports and policy papers of the World Bank

(World Development Report 1999[12], 2002[13]) and other big donors (currently "UN International Year of Cooperatives 2012" [14]) promote the organization of people into groups of various names and aims including micro-credit institutions, women self-help groups, saving associations, farmers´ cooperatives and various natural resource management group formations. Thus, it becomes apparent that making use of social capital in the name of *empowerment* has become a wide-spread and frequently used strategy for natural resource management, livelihood improvement and economic development.

Although, the literature and policy frameworks stress the importance of building upon local social context there are countless examples of donor, state and NGO projects unwisely ignoring the specificities of the target society using implanted cooperation as a blueprint. Many projects behave in an "ahistorical, aspatial and asocial" manner predetermined to failure because local relationships and institutions do not seem flexible to brisk transformations (Upton, 2008: p. 176).

The donor preoccupation with the idea of social capital as a developmental tool utilizing social forces has been marked with the publication *Social Capital: The missing link* published by the World Bank in the 1997 (Harris 2002 cited in Porter and Lyon 2006). This paper recognizes the undisputable role of social capital in economic, social and political spheres and highlights its high potential in development outcomes. Moreover, it offers recommendations for a successful use of the concept in development policies. These guidelines stress the importance of the local context and give preference to the provision of assistance to local group initiatives and emerging institutions as opposed to efforts aimed at pure creation of social capital. Similarly, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) in their research paper for the World Bank, promote cooperation among various society actors. In the so called *synergy view* they advocate for: "dynamic professional alliances and relationships— between and within state bureaucracies and various civil society actors." By citing Uphoff they point out local initiatives but also recognize the role of external interventions:

> "Paradoxical though it may seem, 'top-down' efforts are usually needed to introduce, sustain, and institutionalize 'bottom-up' development. We are commonly constrained to think in 'either-or'

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[12] *Entering the 21st Century*
http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/EXTWDRS/0,,contentMDK:22295143~pagePK:478093~piPK:477627~theSitePK:477624,00.html
[13] *Building Institutions for Markets*
http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/EXTWDRS/0,,contentMDK:22295291~pagePK:478093~piPK:477627~theSitePK:477624,00.html
[14] http://social.un.org/coopsyear/index.html

terms—the more of one the less of the other—when both are needed in a positive-sum way to achieve our purposes."   Uphoff (1992: p. 273)

Moreover, in communities with strong ties among its members, external involvement can play a crucial role in establishing so called *bridging* social capital created through links exceeding local cooperation. New partnerships with outsiders can enhance local cooperation in number of ways ranging from new ways of thinking and doing to receiving valuable resources (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

From the empowerment point of view, Jo Rowlands (1995) from Oxfam GB, advocates for a facilitative role of professionals. In her opinion, empowerment cannot be directly imposed by outsiders but can be stimulated and encouraged because real power only comes from within (cited from Taliaferro, 1991). Moreover, she remarks, in the context of external interventions there is a paradox in the empowerment process, since donors will always remain in a more powerful position, given their full control over resources to be divided.

2.4   Collective action in Ethiopia

The extent of formal institutions dealing with the prevalence of social problems at the local level is generally very limited in developing countries. In Ethiopia, social security is restricted to government employees unless private-sector employees decide to contribute voluntarily (SSPTW, 2011)[15]. Health insurance is virtually non-existent and official credit and saving institutions rarely reach out to the poor (Aredo, 1993).

Having described the challenges in Ethiopia including unreliable and often absent formal institutions previously, it is important to consider mechanisms people developed to deal with the insecure environments and "with the intrusions and depredations of the state" (Rahmato, 2002). Besides numerous governmental as well as non-governmental interventions there are also examples of strategies traditionally developed by the local population from bottom-up. These adaptations include institutional responses which are often initially informal and based on collective action. Mutual self-help is deep-rooted in

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[15] Social Security Programs Throughout the World: http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/ssptw/2010-2011/africa/ethiopia.pdf

the Ethiopian culture and is based on religious beliefs as well as traditional norms of social organization (Pankhurst 1958; Rahmato, 2002).

There are several traditional institutions operating at local levels drawing especially upon networking and reciprocity as a form of such collective action. Iddir is the most common indigenous institution which has been primarily developed by communities to deal with unexpected costs as an "informal risk-sharing mechanism" (Dercon et al., 2004, p.7). Originally, this was mainly related to funeral arrangements which tend to be associated with relatively high costs for the poor bereaved. Thus people join iddirs in order to receive financial and material support[16] in case a family member dies (Aredo, 1993; Dercon et al., 2007). Nowadays, however, iddirs are formed by various community groups such as family, church groups, neighbors or youth and acquire a wide range of new functions too. Aredo (2009) mentions business activities, credit facilities and even community development work such as building infrastructure. Moreover, some iddirs even engage in health education in their communities (Dercon et al., 2004).

Iddir and various other local organisations (e.g. *iqqub*, see Aredo, 1993) have become the target for a scale-up. Various external agents have realized the potential of these organizations to pursue community development goals and to establish formal insurance and saving institutions. According to Dercon et al. (2004, 2007), one of the main arguments to target these is their established legitimacy and trust in the society and wide networks of people traditionally relying upon them. Thus, many international (e.g ACORD Ethiopia) but also indigenous NGOs are building on local informal institutions in areas of health education, water and sanitation (Dercon, 2004).

Nevertheless, involving traditional institutions might not be as unproblematic as it seems, as pointed out by Mengesha (2002). Many Ethiopians involved in these organizations still remember the forced and ineffective collectivization during the Derg regime which might have contributed to their general mistrust towards top-down interventions involving cooperation. Moreover, although local institutions including *iddirs* have withstood the political circumstances of several regimes, it is important to count with a potential reluctance or even resistance to external interventions due to their previous experience (Mengesha, 2002).

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[16] Additionally, belonging to an iddir has another, personal dimension. Iddir societies usually grieve together and thus provide emotional support to the bereaved. Moreover, it provides a member with the confidence that when he dies there will be many people present at his funeral (from an interview with an iddir member).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical orientation

The methodology of this research is being informed by the basic ideas of realism. Thus, the inquiry is driven by the assumption that external reality does exist independent of the observer (Bhaskar, 1978). This reality is however, only hardly observable and apprehensible. "Window on to that blurry, external reality" is created by the investigation of the perceptions of people involved (Sobh and Perry, 2005). However, to get a comprehensive picture of the reality researchers ought to use multiple sources of inquiry (Sobh and Perry, 2005), a strategy which has been coined by the term *triangulation of findings* (Denzin, 1978).

Realism is theory-driven which means that researchers enter the field with a prior hypothesis (Sobh and Perry, 2005). The authors of one the applications of the paradigm, Pawson and Tilly (2004) relate this realist attribute to establishing program theories to be tested in the field. In their approach of realist evaluation they assert that program theories are "hypothesis of social betterment" which "are shaped by a vision of change" and it should be tested in the field how well these ideas adhere to the reality (Pawson and Tilly, 2004).

This research specifically engaged in undertaking the first step of realist evaluation which took a form of a qualitative exploratory research. The main aim of it was to establish a preliminary conceptual framework "from the literature and/or from people with experience with the phenomenon" (Sobh and Perry, 2005) and to apply it in the field. To establish the program theory, as suggested by Pawson and Tilly (2004), I traced the social science literature, donor discourse and project documentation as well as opinions of project designers and practitioners. Subsequently, beneficiaries of the project were asked to share their perceptions. Primary attention was paid to the perceptions of different authors and stakeholders concerning what program *"works for whom, in what circumstances and in what respects and how?"* (Pawson and Tilly, 2004).

3.2   Site selection and sampling

The selection of the site was made after extensive discussions with PADet representatives. From the range of choices involving group-based projects a timely choice ended up being a youth association (Dhaloote Khegi association, Sele, Oromia region) pioneering group-based projects of PADet. The final decision was made after finding out that there is a strong demand from the side of PADet coordinators to explain and describe the development of this association. Moreover, access to the community, logistical support and translation from the side of PADet was easily arrangable in these circumstances.

The sampling method was based on randomization. As a first step it involved the identification of key stakeholders including their interests and roles relative to the association. Furthermore, the relationships between the stakeholders were made explicit. These two points were carried out by a thorough stakeholder analysis. Subsequent selection of individuals was made with respect to gender and different positions and functions in the association (members) as well as outside of it (community representatives, PADet and DSW coordinators) to secure a wide range of views and opinions.

3.2.1   Stakeholder analysis

The stakeholder analysis is to be found in Annex 1.

3.3   Methods of data collection

The research comprises of both primary and secondary sources of information. The primary data was collected through qualitative field research whereas secondary data was drawn from social science literature and project documents.

3.3.1   Secondary data

From the realist point of you it is clear that people had experienced, researched and documented the problem of collective action before. The already elaborated empirical material was taken into account in the literature review which focused on the underlying concepts of *collective action*, *social capital* and their relevance to *human capabilities* and *external interventions*. This information served as a basis for the formulation of concrete hypothesis which were tested in the field through primary data collection.

Moreover, program theories of NGOs usually reflect the understanding of a particular problem and the approach they take towards its solution. In this respect, they constituted another important source of concrete hypothesis and thus deserved a separate analysis. The program theory of the *Youth2Youth* program involving the facilitation of youth associations was established through an analysis of documents of DSW, the NGO responsible for the introduction and sponsoring of the targeted youth association.

3.3.2 Primary data

Primary data was collected during a month-long stay in the main head-quarters of PADet (Addis Abeba) and a 24-day field trip to Sele (+ 2 consecutive days with a break in between). During the field trip, accommodation was arranged in Muketuri, a town located about 5 kilometers away from the research site, the Sele village. All field research was carried out with the support of PADet which provided logistical support as well as translation service. Project designers as well as practitioners of PADet at the same time acted as key informants and also enabled me to access the beneficiaries of the project.

Observation:

Observation was a critical source of information for this research. In many cases, initial observations inspired and motivated further interviews or directly complemented data gained through other methods. In this way, it contributed to overall triangulation of findings.

Main targets of the observation involved life of people in the village with a special focus on the behavior of young people and also life around the association. For both categories, regular visits to the village were necessary. However, hanging around the village without a real purpose seemed strange for local people. In these moments I regretted I could not stay in the village with a local family. To solve this problem, I tried to come earlier and stay longer during times when I had appointments for interviews. As much as possible I also tried to follow all the activities and events of the association. Moreover, to get closer to the local community of young people (who were the main targets of the association) I started to hold regular English classes in the local village school. Three times a week I had the opportunity to directly interact with local children, whereas some of them were even members of the researched association.

Interviews:

Interviews are a particular kind of conversation and are the most widely used method in qualitative research (Green and Thorogood, 2004). In this research the use of interviews was necessary in order to learn about people´s perceptions and to triangulate it with other peoples´ views and opinions. The semi-structured interviews were mostly realized along appropriate topic lists. These were prepared based on information and hypothesis drawn from the program theory, reviewed literature and also from previous interviews. All interviews were conducted in person and recorded with a digital device after the agreement of the interviewees.

With coordinators implementing the program

Representatives from both the coordinating (and funding) NGO DSW and the implementing NGO PADet were interviewed. Two rounds of interviews were conducted. The first round included 4 semi-structured to unstructured interviews with PADet coordinators who had personally worked with the youth association. The main aim was to gain general information about the research site, the structure and the performance of the association in recent years. Their experience added valuable information about how the project was implemented and received by the members of the association and the local community. Moreover, their accounts provided an overview of how the program should work in an ideal case and in what sense did the Dhaloote Khegi association shift from this norm, in both the positive and negative sense. These accounts were captured as hypothesis for further investigation in the community.

After the visit and research in the community, a second round of interviews with the coordinators was conducted. This time the interviews aimed at triangulating specific information previously gathered in the association. This is why the questions were targeted at specific people and besides 2 additional structured interviews with PADet coordinators involved also 1 semi-structured interview with the main *Youth2Youth* program coordinator from DSW. However, several new topics emerged in these accounts, so another consequent round of interviews had to be conducted in the association too.

With members of the association and other community representatives

Two rounds of interviews were conducted with the members of the association and in the community. As for the association, both leaders of the association as well as ordinary members were asked to share their opinions. The topic lists were made according to

previous hypotheses collected through the literature review and interviews with project coordinators and also initial observations. Nevertheless, sufficient space has been provided for the interviewees to raise new topics too. The main focus of the questions was on members´ perception of the development of the association and its contribution to their capabilities. To assess possible implications of the membership, 2 life histories were conducted to complement ordinary interviews.

As already indicated, there has been a break between the two rounds, which was used for additional data collection among the project coordinators to motivate future questions for the association.

Table 1: **Interview overview**

		Individual interviews		Group interviews
1st round interviews	**Project coordinators**	• Executive Director PADet (m) • Programme Officer PADet (m) • Former Regional Coordinator PADet (m) • Current Regional Coordinator PADet (m)		xxx
	Association and community members	• Association Leader 2x (m) • Board of directors member (f) • Nurse in local youth friendly clinic (m) • Local priest • Member of the association (m)		• Theatre group (1f + 7m) • Management team (2f + 2m) • Women association members (appx. 8f)
2nd round interviews	**Project coordinators**	• Executive Director PADet • Program Manager DSW • Program Advisor and former Regional Coordinator PADet		xxx
	Association and community members	• Management team (m) • Management team (f)		• Board (2f + 5m)

Participatory theatre workshops:

With the theatre group

Drama is a tool the association traditionally uses for awareness raising in the community during selected events. For this purpose, a particular section of the association is dedicated to the theatre group comprising of those members who have an interest in theatre and community education. After initial observations of the rehearsals it became clear to me that the group performances accumulate perceptions of problems in the community and are thus strongly value-laden. Indeed, according to Leavy (2009), theatre can become a method for data collection because, together with other art-based research practices, it expands the range of investigative and communication tools to understand and gather social meanings. Moreover, drama can enhance researchers´ understanding of local habits and practices even though he does not get direct access to real-life events. This is because drama tends to depict community themes and also experiments with the testing of various hypotheses via "the magic of if" (Norris, 2000 cited in Leavy, 2009).

In total I attended 4 consecutive rehearsals of the theatre group. Besides coming to the rehearsals as an observer and understanding the theatrical expression of the youth as a window into their mindsets, I also used the gatherings to initiate and facilitate additional theatre exercises in order to get closer to the participants and to target specific questions of my research.

3.4   Methods for data analysis

Data collected during the document analysis and interviews was analyzed according to the guidelines of the content analysis. According to Green and Thorogood (2004), content analysis is appropriate if a researcher aims to find common themes and topics emerging in the responses of the target population. In order to get an overview of common themes and topics all observations, interviews and drama exercises were first summarized based on the field notes, audio and video records. Consequently, while reading through, common themes relating to the underlying concepts of collective action, social capital and external intervention were highlighted and compared with each other. In the final stage of the analysis, the way the literature review informs my conclusions and vice versa was examined.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 The case

DKEA (Dhaloote Kee Eegii Association) is located[17] in Sele Kebele, Debre Libanos Woreda of North Shoa Zone, Oromia Region (see Annex 2). Sele is a village located approximately 80km from Addis Ababa, on the main roadway to the capital of the Amhara Region, Bahir Dar. The population of the Sele municipality is currently about 3844. This includes the village of Sele but also further, more remote houses and neighborhoods. There is a primary school (up to the 8th grade) and a youth-friendly clinic (providing family planning services and basic nursing) in the village.

The area, covered with continuous and flat grass surfaces is very suitable for livestock keeping and together with its proximity to Addis Ababa provides excellent conditions for milk production. Local livelihoods have been traditionally relying on farming but thanks to the increasing demand for dairy products in urban areas and subsequent value-chain development, many of the farmers have now the opportunity to market their milk in Addis Ababa. Nevertheless, the agricultural production in the area remains small-scale. This is mainly due to the lack of capital which compels people to rely on grass fodder (subject of high variation due to changing weather conditions) and on local cattle breeds (milk productivity is significantly lower as compared to graded up breeds). Thus, milk production is usually accompanied by subsistence cropping.

Thanks to the relatively small size of the Sele village, people tend to know each other personally. The main uniting element seemed to be the church and numerous Ethiopian Orthodox celebrations organized throughout the year. Also, during the harvesting season farmers rely on each others´ support to be able to get their grass and crops from the fields in time. This reciprocal custom could be translated as "offering bread" as it is connected to inviting neighbors for a little feast with homemade bread, roasted grains and fermented barley drink. Subsequently, invited people are expected to follow the host to the field to help him with his harvest. There are many "offering breads" ceremonies happening at different households during the season.

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[17] According to Ethiopian administrative division: kebele (municipality), woreda (county), zone (region), region (ethnic division/state)

Local youth is usually also involved in farming and household work. Very often, they are responsible for babysitting of younger siblings and livestock grazing. Especially, during the intensive period of harvesting, they also engage in cultivation activities. However, most of local children do participate in schooling, at least up the 8th grade at the village school. After that they have the opportunity to continue studying in the neighboring small town up to the 10th grade. A small percentage of youth accomplishes also the 11th and 12th grades which make one eligible for the university.

DKEA´s membership is based on volunteering and the members can be presented in two categories. One category comprises of off-school people who were responsible for the establishment, early development and nowadays management of the association. These are people between 23 and 36 years. They are further referred to as 'pioneer members' in this paper. As for their socio-economic profile, the male pioneer members are involved in small-scale farming and the two young women work either for the local government office or a local NGO. The second category of members is composed of younger, school age children. These are mainly involved in the theatre group and the peer-to-peer group (which currently not operating, however).

4.2 DKEA´s emergence and stages of growth[18]

"Preconditions to take off"

The emergence of the association happened as a result of the convergence of two parallel initiatives. First of all, the idea of organized youth existed in the village of Sele in the form of *"youth iddir"* as classified by nowadays leader of the association who played a significant role in its initiation and establishment. He also noted that his engagement in support of local collective action was inspired by information gained through regular Sunday radio sessions dealing with youth initiatives in the context of HIV/AIDS prevention. The informal gatherings of interested young people that subsequently arouse with close links to the local church, constituted an opportunity to discuss local challenges. The leader notes that: *"That was a problem with young people in our village, so we had to organize"*. The iddir decided to take a stand (so far only rhetorical) against various youth practices and habits in the community, especially the use of alcohol and risky sexual

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[18] The consecutive periods, describing the different stages of the associational development, have been labeled based on the terminology of Rostow´s stages of growth. They have however, for the purposes of this paper, been assigned different meanings.

behavior (having various sexual partners) seen as a threat in terms of HIV/AIDS transmission.

At about the same time, in 1999, the German non-profit organization DSW came up with a new concept in their development strategy coined with the term Youth-to-Youth (Y2Y) Initiatives (see the Info box p. 37). DSW´s strategy in the program implementation phase was using local partners to introduce the concept to the community. At this point PADet was invited as an intermediary to spread the idea across various communities. Thanks to the proximity of PADet´s regional office, Sele village was decided to become the pilot community. According to PADet, youth club members and community representatives, the intention to establish a youth club in the village was publicly announced by PADet representatives during a religious festival. The local priest considers PADet´s approach very successful because *"often people tend to think that organizations are coming with a new religion, like missionaries, but now people understood that PADet is not coming with a new religion and that their program wants to change traditional harmful practices and stands for the rights of young people in our community. From the beginning we understood."*

After the public announcement, five young men, including people already engaged in the youth iddir, showed interest and got involved in further trainings of PADet and DSW. Two of them, who have remained members to date, point out a crucial moment in the initiation of the association, when they got granted a place (though no equipment) by the Sele kebelle, local administration, to perform future activities. Also, the number of members started to increase gradually.

"Take off"
The youth group called Dhaloote Kee Eegii Association was officially established in 2001 as an Anti-AIDS club to work on HIV/AIDS prevention and promotion youth sexual and reproductive health in Sele Kebele. Later, in 2006 it even gained legal recognition at the Oromia Region Justice Office (Strategic Plan Document, 2009-2011). Profile of the members

In this phase, PADet was playing a key role in the development of the association, coaching and playing the intermediary between DKEA and DSW. Next to the mediation of DSW´s program visions and missions, it was also channeling and overlooking small grants

from DSW which were used to cover basic needs of the association and at that point also for substantial livelihood support of some members via individual loans (these individuals were chosen based on their merits to the association and their reputation of trustworthy and capable people in the community). Both PADet and DSW claim further intensive engagement with the group in terms of training, advising and networking. Interestingly, both organizations independently termed the association their *"baby"*, stressing the importance of it as a pilot and model project.

The main claim to fame for the successful start and further development of the association was however by most interviewees ascribed to the leader of DKEA. The coordinator of local youth-friendly clinic says that he became the leader of the association because other members noticed his great potential: *"He is a brave man! He doesn´t drink and cheat on other people so he has the trust of people in the community. He also is the reason why other young people join the association; they want to be like him because his life is good"*. The secretary and original member of the association similarly assigns importance to the *"clear record"* of the leader and his relative closeness to the people in the community. The last point was confirmed by multiple field observations. The leader was very often seen during formal as well as informal interactions with the elders and religious leaders, denoting deep-rooted relationships and the respect he enjoys in the wider community. Yet, strong feeling of affiliation, responsibility and before all – ownership of the initiative is apparent also from the side of the leader. He himself noted that: *"Even if I know that the association is the property of all the members, 40% of it is my personal contribution"*. The responsible coordinator at DSW also draws attention to the topic by saying that:*"Sometimes when you´re coordinating during the establishment of the club, you feel like the owner – this kind of mentality."* Also another member confirms this; she commented that: *"He* [the leader] *loves this place* [the association] *more than his own home"*. Various coordinators of both PADet and DSW do agree that his established personality in the community and high commitment contributed to the fast early growth of the association but they also recognize the contribution of other members, generally talking about *"committed leadership"* or *"committed members"*.

"Drive to maturity": sustainability?

Since its establishment the number of active members has risen to 26-30 permanent members (between 13 and 36 years) in the past three years out of which about 30% are

girls. As for the governance, the association is being led by the management team (5 men and 2 women plus the leader) which is, in theory, accountable to the general assembly of all permanent members[19]. There is also a board (comprised of local government and PADet representatives) who´s main task is to raise relevant issues and discuss future directions of the association. The actual members are organized in various sub-sections connected to different tasks. These include the *sports group* (leisure group, responsible for the organization of tournaments), *peer-to-peer group* (responsible mainly for informal awareness-raising), *theatre group* (responsible mainly for the preparation of public edutainment activities) and the *income-generation group* (responsible for the entrepreneurial activities) directed by the management team to a greater extent. The membership is open to anyone who issues an application to the association and has a *"good track record in the community"* because *"not everyone is suitable to become a public educator"* as stated by one of the management team members.

Via the above mentioned community outreach mechanisms the association had engaged in a very intensive dialogue with the community, trying to challenge prevailing norms and habits. According to the local priest and various board members the endeavor had been received very positively by the community. DSW coordinator point out that: *"DSW was highly inspired by the way the association was mobilizing the local community to address the reproductive and health needs of young people."* He also appreciated that DKEA managed to establish useful partnerships with government offices at various levels. As a result, the association was continuously receiving support in the form of administration assistance from the kebelle office and trainings from the woreda health office. Additionally, the association received a special award from DSW and the leader himself received several awards including one from the president of Ethiopia for being a successful youth model both in terms of his own livelihood as well as participation in the community.

As a reaction to DKEA´s positive development, DSW decided to promote it to the next level, called the *model club*[20]. According to the scheme, model clubs do no longer communicate with DSW via an intermediary; PADet was thus asked to cease their influence at that point. According to the executive director and coordinators in the area,

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[19] To what extent it is really so could not be proved during this research.
[20] The model club is the second out of three levels in the promotional system of DSW. Reaching the third and last level means being promoted to an NGO.

PADet did consequently lose track of the communication running between DKEA and DSW, nevertheless, its informal support to the association continued.

The promotion opened new possibilities for the association in terms of better funding. However, it also posed several challenges related to bigger independence and higher performance demands from DSW. One of the expectations of DSW was a very vibrant income-generation segment which could support a more substantial part of DKEA´s activities. DKEA reacted with an agricultural plan aimed at planting vegetables under an irrigation scheme. From the point of view of PADet representatives, this was a very innovative step in relation to local agricultural standards. The executive director even notes that: *"these young people were playing the role of extension workers in the area. They taught the community to use the water pump."* A significant role in the initiation of the project was played by the woreda agricultural office which provided the water pump and seeds. Even though the harvest was good, prices of vegetables on the marker were not. This was given as an explanation by DKEA for the overall failure of the plan and its non-profitable character. The DSW coordinator points out that the association should have been more careful in the planning. Rather than rushing and relying on their emotions they should have sought advice by consulting various stakeholders. In general, the failure of the project apparently exerted a strong influence upon participants´ motivation which resulted in an overall reluctance to a new trial. No new joint agriculture projects have been realized ever since. Alternatively, a retail business with animal feed was started. The general opinion among the members and coordinators about it is that the revenues from the business are minimal and that the association does not reach its potential. The explanations why, however, vary largely among the stakeholders. These opinions will be elaborated on in the next sub-chapter, as these arguments relate to the general discussion of why "maturity", in this paper equaled to sustainability, has not been achieved yet.

4.3 Perceived impediments to achieving "maturity"

At the beginning of the year 2011, DSW stopped the funding for DKEA. As a result, some of the programs had to be suspended. Especially, bigger public edutainment activities have not been organized since and peer-to-peer sessions which require travelling to neighboring villages, have been partly set back too.

The official reasoning addressed to the association in a letter was that the proposal was submitted to DSW with formal mistakes. The discussion with the responsible coordinator at DSW revealed that the main reasons to stop the funding was in reality bad management and poor reporting of the income-generating projects, high reliance on grants from DSW and primarily: the overly centralized governance of the association. He did not agree with the long functional period of the majority of the management team members (who have been in function since the establishment of DKEA in 2001). Especially, he expressed serious criticism towards the leader, talking about him as someone who was *"trying to control and monopolize everything"* in the association. He was supposed to attend most of the trainings himself instead of trying to capacitate other members. Overall, the capacity transfer was very limited, the coordinator points out. These concerns were shared with the association by DSW representatives personally in 2010, granting the management the period of one year to decentralize. When, according to DSW, nothing happened, the funding was stopped for the following year.

However, the leader of DKEA was convinced that DSW stopped the funding because disliked the fact that during the monitoring meetings the female members were not assertive enough. Further, he also mentioned the unsuccessful income-generation project as a motive. Overall, the leader seemed angry and not quite understanding why DSW suddenly stop their support. He asked himself: *"Why did they praise us a year ago and suddenly criticize everything so much"*. Moreover, he tries to defend himself by saying that he could have stolen the money from the bank account of the association and he did not even though no one would have noticed.

The records show that in the year 2010 the leader alone still took part in 50 percents of the trainings aimed at management team members in general. On the question about why the leader has not been replaced yet in his position, two members (f+m) of the management team answered that no one else really has time for such a difficult task based on volunteering. One of them also said that that the leader was repeatedly supported because he is a *"constant figure in the community"*. The female person said that she feels like she would never be able to work as hard as the leader because leading an organization is a long process. She also considered his persistence as something very positive because: *"Other youth associations in the neighborhood have been exchanging their leaders and they aren´t prosperous"*. A member of the theatre group, still a student, on the contrary, notes that the leader should be maybe replaced by someone who does not have so many other

responsibilities and could focus better on the leadership; he himself however did not feel ready to take over the responsibility yet. One of PADet´s coordinators who used to work with the association notes that: *"There is tacit conflict in the group because the members do not voice their concerns in front of the leader because they are too scared to lose him."* Overall, the topic of exchanging the leader seemed to be rather sensitive in the association, as most members did not want to mention it at all, and if, they were very careful and ambiguous with their answers.

In the past year, PADet has been trying to mediate again between DKEA and DSW. It´s approach to the issue is not very clear though. On the one hand it realizes the problem of the extended functional period of the leader but on the other hand no concrete actions have been made so far to support the power handover. This can be explained by a very close affiliation and trust relationship between the head of PADet who realizes the contribution the leader has made to the association. Being with a close contact with the community in the past, he seems to sympathize with the members in general, trying to understand the difficult situation some of them might be going through. Thus, he tries to search for alternative explanations for the stagnation of the association, such as insufficient support of individual livelihoods of members and inappropriate design of DSW programs. Due to the scope of this research these arguments could not be examined, their validity is thus questionable.

4.4 Perceived contribution to members´ capabilities

The data about capabilities was gained through interviews, group sessions and theatre exercises about what members appreciate about the association and how they perceive its influence in the context of their lives. This data could be in some cases triangulated via field observations and interviews with non-members.

The findings presented below are structured in different categories as per topics and statements which roughly characterize the related set of data. The nature of responses differed significantly between the pioneer and younger members of the association. Thus, where relevant, this difference is being pointed at.

Awareness

"I know how to protect myself against HIV/AIDS"

The members of the theatre group appreciated the knowledge they gained about sexual and reproductive health issues. When they were asked to dramatically portray what they had learnt in the trainings they automatically started acting out an educational session about reproductive and health issues, providing extensive and comprehensive information about the issue. When asking further about the topic they said they really liked learning about the topic because it has a direct link to their health and lives of other people in the community.

Self-esteem

"I´m less shy than before"

From the observations of local youth in the community, it was apparent that they are usually very self-conscious in their communication with grown-ups. Especially girls and young women usually behaved very carefully and rather avoided direct confrontations with elder, men and strangers, at least in public. The coordinator of the youth-friendly clinic also drew attention to conservative norms concerning women behavior and relationships between genders which both still persist in the Ethiopian society. However, things are changing, he adds, also thanks to the activities of the association.

One of the pioneer female members explains that she used to be very scared of contact with other people, particularly at school. She understood everything that was said but always failed to respond when the teacher asked a question. She could not explain the origins of this fear. However, just after joining the association and engaging in theatre performances in public, the fear started to disappear.

Similarly, another, younger male member, highlights the positive effect theatre performing has had on his self-confidence. He feels like he found a way to reach out to the people through acting out.

Lastly, the leader of the association appreciated the initial training he received from DSW. It helped him to act more independently of the peer-pressure. *"I decided not to look at the culture of my neighbors. I decided to live independently, to be myself"*.

Purpose

"We wouldn´t be together otherwise"

This statement came from the younger members of the association organized in the theatre group. They appreciated that thanks to the association they gained new friends and the space to meet and organize because else they would be only *"doing some random, unimportant stuff on Sundays"*. Moreover, most of the members agreed that what they liked most is that they are serving and helping their community. They felt it was important to educate people about HIV/AIDS and other issues.

Critical thinking

"We´re thinking differently than our fathers"

During a group discussion with the younger members (theatre group) they all agreed that their mindset is significantly different from the one of their parents. Along with the philosophy of the association, they promote the importance of education, also for girls, and they denounce various habits in the community such as drinking alcohol, adduction, having various sexual partners and practicing the so called "kamfarodaj"[21]. The rejection of several aspects of the "old culture" was quite obvious from the content of their oral accounts as well as theatre performances. On the one hand these opinions seemed to originate from the common ideological phrases of the program; on the other hand, however, the youngsters often manage to reveal the substance of problems when they search for suitable ways to portray them. Thanks to role-playing, these people gained the necessary space to experiment with the topics, to analyze them and track down their causes and impacts. Moreover, for one boy, playing theatre has become an opportunity for the reflection of his past deeds. He wants to prepare a theatre play about his behavior prior to joining the association.

Aspirations

"We´ve got an idea about our lives"

This new wave of thinking seems to be related to aspirations the members assign to their own lives. One young girl from the theatre group mentions that she now knows what she

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[21] Kamfarodaj is a widely spread habit in Ethiopian countryside and involves teenage boys having various „kissing friends"among the girls. Some reports draw attention to the fact that lately, it is not only a matter of kissing but also sexual contact. Generally, this habit is considered to cause many conflicts in the community and is risky from the sexual disease perspective.

wants in her life. She prefers not to get married and pregnant early; rather, she wishes to accomplish her education first. She also said she would not accept "kamfarodaj" anymore. Another boy, who is about to finish his secondary education, talks about the association as something that had shaped his idea of what he wanted to study at the university: he was going to focus on public health. Yet another boy is determined that he wants to pursue his career as a musician. Also the pioneer members mention that thanks to the association they gained an idea about what they wanted to become later in their lives.

Resources

"It gave me tools to achieve my goals"

Several pioneer members talked about the contributions their involvement in the association has had on their hitherto socio-economic capabilities. Since most of these members are involved in small-scale farming on their own behalf, their households constitute an entity of both consumption and production. Thus, saving and planning are often perceived as overarching capabilities helping to improve their livelihoods in general.

Members usually valued the knowledge they gained about how to become more prosperous in their lives. Thanks to the life skill trainings provided by DSW, members learnt to plan in order to improve their livelihoods. *"I learnt to save and plan"* was a very frequent answer. Gradual saving allowed a female member to buy a cow and hens which is *"unusual"* because she is still quite young (mid-twenties) and is not married yet. Moreover, thanks to the specialized knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, she won the selection of twenty candidates for a paid position with another local organization working with women in the neighborhood areas.

The leader said that thanks to the training in life skills he learnt to make informed decisions and to save money *"bit-by-bit"*. He developed a personal, integrated 5-year business plan which helps him to coordinate his entrepreneurial activities as a milk farmer with other household matters. The leader is also the head of a new private milk cooperative in the village which arose as a reaction on adverse conditions of the governmental one. Based on several observations, the compound of DKEA was also used by the leader for the activities of the milk cooperative.

Two of the former participants (m) of the livelihood program organized by PADet at the start of the association, both said that the loan they received as adolescents helped them to

start up their own farming activities and to become independent on their parents´ households.

Overall, it seemed that the association provided space for its members to experiment with various entrepreneurial activities. First of all, it brought them the opportunity to try out working with irrigation technique which in some cases adopted for their personal use too, improving their harvests. Furthermore, trying to sell or retail certain products gave them a direct experience with the market environment facilitating useful knowledge for their future lives.

Info box: Youth-to-Youth (Y2Y) Initiatives

The main philosophy behind the program of Youth-to-Youth Initiatives has been the confidence that young people (defined as 10- to 24-year-old individuals) should no longer be thought of as passive beneficiaries of development programs. Rather, provided the frame and tools, they should be counted on as active promoters of development, their own as well as the one of the community. The major focus is on the improvement of sexual and reproductive health of young people; however, the program also claims their general socio-economic "empowerment". Both goals are being accounted for in a comprehensive program strategy: DSW encourages young people to organize in clubs and association following the basic premise of adolescence as a period of physical, emotional and social transition. The advantage of youth organization is by DSW explained as follows:

"As adolescents develop, peer groups help young people gain a sense of their own identity and become their primary social outlet. This, in turn, leads to the development and practice of social skills that will stay with them throughout their lives. Peer education takes advantage of the positive aspects of peer groups by helping young people learn from each other – something they do naturally anyway." (2002)

Once organized, the youth groups receive further support from DSW through trainings in life skills, reproductive and sexual health issues as well as in leadership and management. The newly acquired knowledge and skills will help them to improve their lives and also equip them with capabilities to influence lives of other people through peer-to-peer education, edutainment activities and other community services. Collective action with such a community outreach will in turn facilitate dialogue with other community members and local authorities, improving members´ communication and negotiation skills and strengthening the voice of young people in the society. Furthermore, because DSW believes that socio-economic status significantly influences sexual behavior of people, their trainings also target capabilities connected to income-generation such as entrepreneurship, business, and resource mobilization skills.

To sum up, Youth-to-Youth projects supposedly help young people to shape their own identity and to create social networks. Furthermore, increased knowledge about sexual and reproductive health and socio-economic capabilities combined with stronger position in the community will contribute to better health, family planning and general well-being among the young population and the generations yet to come. Especially girls and women will benefit, being given the capabilities to avoid prostitution, early pregnancies and unwanted and/or unprotected sex.

5 ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 How has the DKE association emerged, developed and how is it currently being run and managed?

Most of the research findings, illustrated in the previous section, point to a necessity to consider the role of social norms in any attempt to interpret the data. The established notions of good and bad manners, beneficial and harmful practices and even reciprocity are evident from many responses. The social dimension of people's decision-making helps to illuminate some of the findings.

The social environment, in which the association emerged and developed, seems to have played an important role in the evolution of the process. The vast majority of the people in the village are practicing Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, which seemed to create a sense of a *community,* through their participation in church activities. Without trying to draw any links between concrete religious values and collective action, it is a matter of fact, that there has long existed a tradition of cooperation in the community.

Specifically, people have been relying on reciprocal support during harvesting and other difficult periods of their lives, for which they had established informal institutions such as "offering bread" and iddir. The local youth too, started to organize informally; thus, taking an account of the social environment in which it arose, seems to be one of the keys to understanding subsequent processes. In Ostrom´s terms, shared values and beliefs usually contribute to a mindset that makes people think and act in a similar direction. In this case, common social background surely helped the youth to formulate a shared idea about cooperation, as well as appropriate and inappropriate behaviours. It's exactly thanks to this premise that the youth initiative could be accepted by the rest of the community, because that was where its ideology originated.

Similarly, the emergence of the charismatic leader needs to be understood as an emergence *from* the local context. In relation to Webers´ dilemma of whether charismatic leaders really do exist, or if they are merely perceived, the findings of this research indicate that both aspects actually coexist. On the one hand, the leader did have a vision and an entrepreneurial mind, as deemed important by Frolich et al. But on the other, only thanks to the trust which he enjoyed in the community, who considered him to be an honest and hardworking man, where his personality and ideas able to reach the required level of

prominence and legitimacy. Once established, he also received enormous amount of respect, a very important dimension of relationships in the community.

The trust bestowed on the leader, by both the community and the members of the association, created an entity that no one had a real need to control. The situation is aptly illustrated through one of the leaders´ statements, in which he stated openly that he had had opportunities to steal from the budget of the association, but had not done so. This confirms Ostrom´s theory about trust being a natural regulator of collective action. Defaulting is prevented thanks to the prevailing norms in the society that are also inherent in the mindset of the leader. It's possible that the cohesive nature of the community also makes it too risky for anyone to default since it would mean being directly and publicly discredited. In this way collective action is made possible without investing large amounts of resources into monitoring those in charge.

Nevertheless, a leadership that develops entirely from trust and charisma, however justified, raises questions connected to sustainability. Despite the beneficial effects of trust, it might also have deterred others from following, understanding and learning the tasks associated with leadership. Moreover, it seemed to have created an aura of supremacy, making others believe that they are not good enough to hold such a post. Yet another hypothesis can be found to explain this problem; looking at the nature of relationships in the community, it is possible to detect a great respect for the elderly and people who occupy reputable positions. It is thus likely that people generally tend to refrain from criticizing those who have, in their opinion, achieved something valuable in their lives.

In the case of DKEA, the path to empowerment of other members might have been partly constrained by either of the two factors, resulting in the overall difficulties with transition of power and successful continuity of leadership. It is thus more probable that, rather than a leader-dictator, the real causes of the problem lie in the social setting and mentality of participants because, as suggested by Rowlands, empowerment might not be self-evident even after access to decision-making has been opened up. Not all leaders have the capability to stimulate power in others. Therefore re-discussion of prevailing norms would be necessary to make people realize they can criticize and challenge the opinions of opinions without fearing that they might offend or hurt anyone.

5.2 What has been the role of these external actors in the development of DKEA?

The decisive trigger for the collective take-off arrived in the form of an educational program about reproductive and sexual health issues on the Ethiopian radio. The main message was essentially confirming already existing norms of inappropriate youth behaviour (only termed 'risky behavior' or 'harmful practices' in the development dictionary). The information seemed to have implanted an idea, in the head of the listener, that local youth can organize and so play a role in social betterment of the community. The listener I refer to happened to be the future leader of the association who also managed to attract some of his peers to join him. In short, the educational program on the radio provided *inspiration* for a collective action, as well as additional *legitimacy* to local norms and beliefs.

The next institution to take the role of critical outsider, in the emergence of the association, was played by PADet. It seemed to have acted as a facilitator, as advocated by the vast majority of both empowerment and collective action theorists. First of all, PADet offered training and a formal structure to the emerging grass roots initiative. Secondly, it also acted as a bridge to resources from outside the community. Granovetter in particular addressed this issue, asserting that more attention should be paid to establishing valuable ties between the 'inner' and 'outer' environment in order to facilitate a flow of information, knowledge, finances and other valuable resources. Following the example of synergetic development (Uphoff), PADet encouraged the involvement of various stakeholders as partners of the association (and their participation on the board). These overarching relationships have gained the association attention from a wider circle of actors, thus facilitating additional flow of resources in both directions. Thirdly, PADet acted as an intermediary between the association and DSW, the project funder, which seemed to have lubricated the interaction between both parties.

The key role of PADet became particularly obvious once the organisation was asked to reduce its influence. Specifically, the communication between the association and DSW has radically deteriorated, leading to various misunderstandings. And even though PADet was once again invited to mediate the discussion it could no longer prevent the eventual discontinuation of funding. In this respect, we must question the extent to which the group has actually been *empowered* to act independently and collectively in critical situations.

Leading me to conclude that the capabilities to negotiate with partners should be strengthened in DKEA.

5.3 How has the collective action empowered individual group members and the group in large?

The perceived contribution to members´ capabilities essentially goes along with the *program theory* as presented by DSW. From the perspective of pioneer members, the involvement in the association has brought them better access to various resources such as knowledge, skills and, for some, material resources. This in turn provided them with increased opportunities for employment and household organization. Many members say they have translated these opportunities into real outcomes, improving their livelihoods and, in case of the leader, raising their status and influence in the community.

Younger members in the theatre group seemed to have gained space favorable for what psychologists call *positive youth development*. The mean ideas of a healthy and productive life, with a stress on education, have been reinforced within the peer-group, creating a strong sense of affiliation among the like-minded group of individuals. With this new stimulus for their identity they also arrived at a new perception of their role in the community as public educators. Their aspirations too; counting their future education and professions, seemed to have been directly shaped by the group's activities.

The empowerment of the group as well as its individuals is, however, very difficult to comprehensively trace from the data set available and is largely based on participants´ own perceptions of the benefits provided by the association. Yet this information is not entirely sufficient without having the opportunity to triangulate it with more substantial information, on the situation of non-members, for example.

Moreover, in the case of younger members, no conclusions can be drawn whatsoever. Because, as Rowland's suggests, it is not just a question of analyzing acquired capabilities but also about looking at what extent people can actually make use of them while taking into account the implications of power. For example, a girl can be educated about HIV/AIDS prevention and also have the desire to avoid early pregnancies. But if her parents make her marry young and her husband does not care about condom protection, she is directly exposed to a double risk, despite her nominal capabilities. Thus, how young

members´ aspirations eventually transfer into concrete outcomes, would make an interesting follow-up to this research since it would allow more concrete conclusions about the empowerment process to be drawn.

Similar attention should be paid to the analysis of collective capabilities. For example, having the capability to plant quality vegetables as an income-generating activity does not necessarily result in higher income, because there are factors, such as the market conditions, which the association has no control over.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This paper tried to address the underlying processes of collective action in the context of a youth development program. Taking into account the ambitious research questions and little time spent in the field, the conclusions drawn from the research should be considered more as hypothesis, to avoid overstatements.

First of all, the research has highlighted the importance of the local social context, which seems to have influenced, or directly facilitated, various processes within the collective action - (a) The cohesiveness of the community and its common beliefs contributed to the emergence of the idea of collective action. (b) The social foundation of the ideas pursued by the collective action allowed them to be accepted in the community. (c) The trusting communal relationships gave rise to a charismatic leader, both allowing the successful development of the collective action, but also; (d) complicating the possibility of a future sustainable leadership due to the 'aura of supremacy'.

Secondly, it becomes clear that development agents can indeed add value to a local collective action and, through accepting a facilitative role in these processes, they can possibly: (a) give legitimacy to pre-existing ideas, or offer new ways of looking at problems; (b) act as intermediaries between the local community and external resources and (c) keep an overview of the situation - linking various stakeholders and facilitating discussion between them.

Thirdly, the research aimed to understand the contribution of collective action to individual, as well as collective capabilities. In the course of data analysis, however, it became clear that analyzing capabilities without the consideration of power relationships is inadequate. There are factors which can be addressed by the collective action, such as increased access to resources (such as knowledge and capital), however some can only be addressed in the long-term (change of social norms and power redistribution) and some usually remain unaddressed (such as market conditions). Although it is not possible to draw concrete conclusions from the data set available, since a thorough analysis of the community setting is missing, it is still possible to suggest that there is an 'empowering situation' in place, as usefully distinguished from 'empowerment' by McWhirter.

7 REFLECTION AND LESSONS LEARNT

This paper is, to a greater extent, the first field research I have ever done and, as such, it contains several mistakes in the set up as well the methodology. Also, from my point of view, many of the steps undertaken were slightly chaotic; loosing track of my research goals couple of times, especially in the data collection phase. However, all these mistakes provided me with an excellent opportunity to learn and improve my skills. I can also say that I essentially enjoyed the entire process, especially the field work, where, while losing track of my actual research objectives, I received many new insights and impulses, eventually contributing to the research as well as to my overall motivation for the next go.

7.1 Practical

Working with/for an NGO

- The set up and methodology had to adapt to the wishes, needs and possibilities of the partner NGO. For instance, the focus of the research has changed as did the location and my own base (eventually spending most of the time outside of the community because no possibility of living directly in the community was provided).

- The role of the NGO as the gate-keeper to the community required diplomatic skills, regarding some of the sensitive information, not to jeopardize the relationship between them and the beneficiaries.

- A decision had to be made between crossing the border between pure observation and more direct involvement based on action research. Due to my limited experience, I opted for non-interference, even though the border seemed to be very blurry sometimes.

The role of an outsider

- It proved to be inconvenient living outside of the research community, because many important facts remain unnoticed, thus impeding the possibility of successful triangulation of findings. Moreover, it is more difficult to establish trust relationships with the participants.

- Sometimes it was difficult to be assertive and proceed with the research despite the obvious busyness of the participants. An ethical question thus arises to which no

clear answers can be provided: To what extent am I able to interfere with the lives of the participants?

- Not being able to speak the local language is a big disadvantage and a lot of information gets lost in the translation process. It is however an asset to find a skillful local research partner who, in addition to accurate translation, is also able to provide a gateway into the mentality and culture of the interviewed people.

- At the end of the research I discovered that a piece of the truth has been purposefully kept hidden in front of me, which highlighted my role as an outsider not permitted to have insight into all matters.

7.2   Theoretical/methodological

- The research questions have been too ambitious for the small time frame and little experience.

- Too many concepts used resulted in too many potential hypotheses contributing to the overall fragmentation of the paper.

- As for the methodology, there was a mistake in the sequence of the interviews. The responses of the DSW coordinator were very hinting and if done earlier, the subsequent research could have been much more focused. Thus, there is a lesson learnt that in case of realist evaluation, the point of view of the program implementors should be included as soon as possible.

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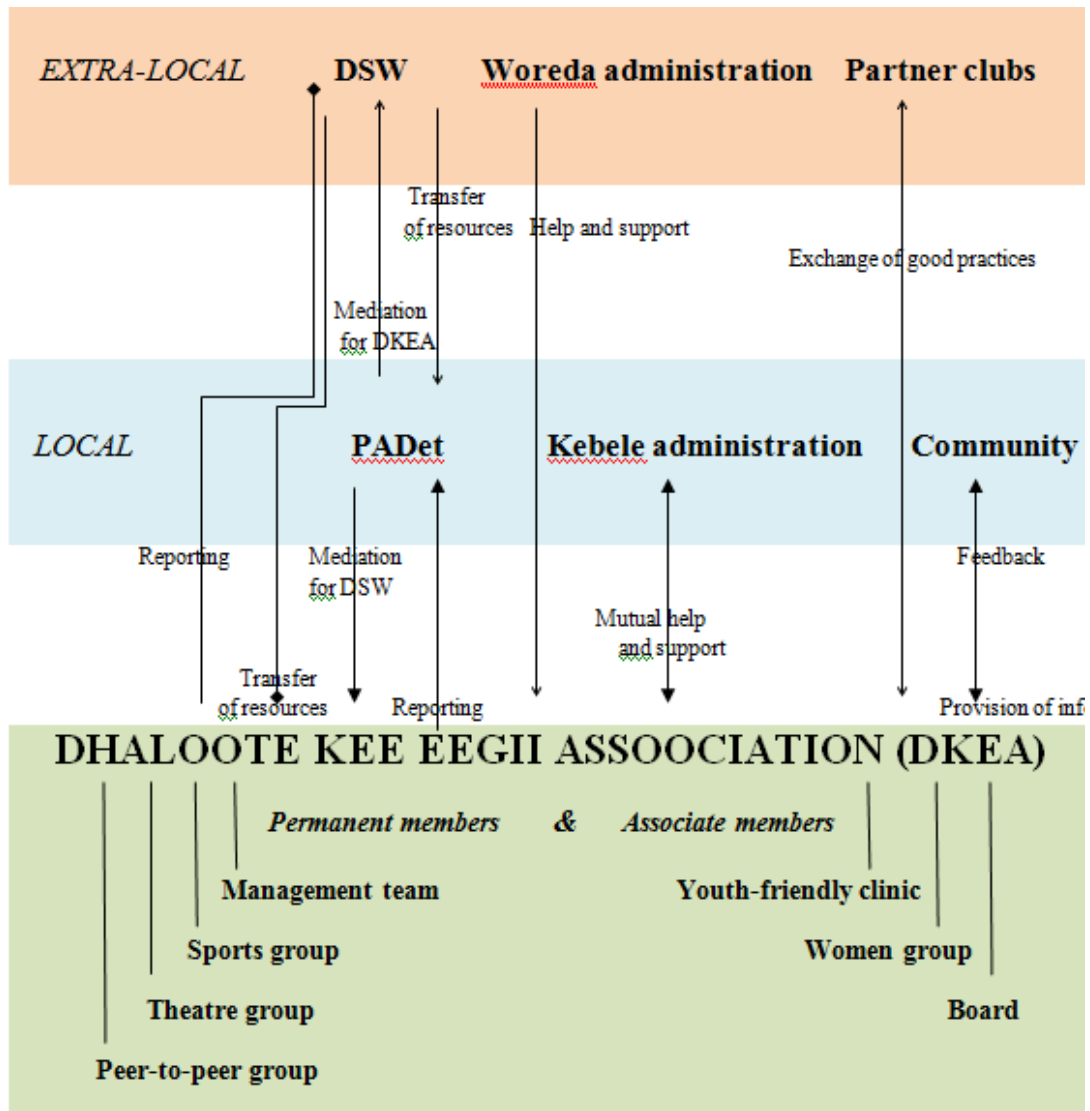
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ANNEXES

Annex 1: Stakeholder Analysis

EXTRA-LOCAL   DSW   **Woreda administration**   **Partner clubs**

Transfer
of resources   Help and support

Exchange of good practices

Mediation
for DKEA

LOCAL   **PADet**   **Kebele administration**   **Community**

Reporting   Mediation
for DSW

Feedback

Mutual help
and support

Transfer
of resources   Reporting

Provision of inf

DHALOOTE KEE EEGII ASSOOCIATION (DKEA)

Permanent members   &   *Associate members*

Management team   **Youth-friendly clinic**

Sports group   **Women group**

Theatre group   **Board**

Peer-to-peer group

→ **Strong partnership**

→ **Partnership**

→ **Conflict**

Annex 2: Location of the study area[22]

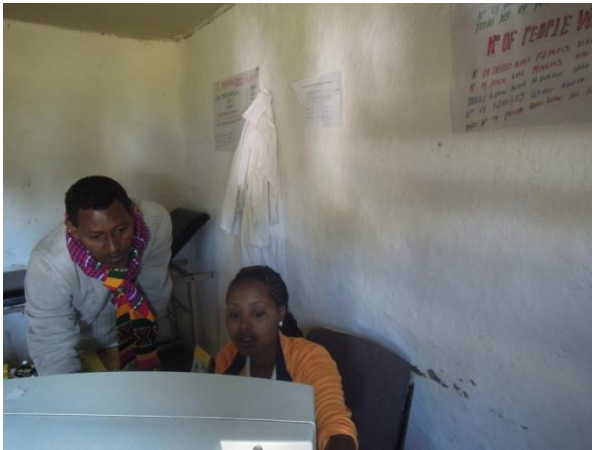## Annex 3: Photo documentation

Compound of DKEA

Youth friendly clinic

Members of the theatre group