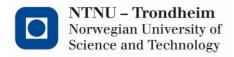Tibebu Taye Gulilat

Community Participation and Empowerment

A Study of The Hunger Project-Ethiopia's Work in Meskan Woreda, Southern Ethiopia

Master of Science (MSc) in Globalization: Transnationalism and Culture

Trondheim, December 2017

NTNU – Trondheim
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Abstract

In Ethiopia, despite the increasing number of NGOs and their rising contribution to the national development, literature doesn't show what development strategies are being employed by these NGOs. This study examines the Hunger Project Ethiopia's (THP-E's) development approach, i.e., called the epicenter development strategy, and the extent to which it has succeeded in participate and empower the people for self-reliant participatory development. The study takes Meskan epicenter, located in Southern Ethiopia, as a principal case.

Based on the ontology of alternative development approach, as a bottom-up process, this study is guided by interpretivism and employed qualitative methodology to gather relevant data. Accordingly, the study discusses participation and empowerment as the underlining process of THP-E's work. It is described as extensive and is described in four phases. In its theory of social change, THP-E perceives the people as inherently extraordinary, if assisted through strategically designed empowerment programmes, and they are capable of being self-reliant. Its conception self-reliance and

Findings indicate that THP-E could mobilize the people for their own development and is reflected from their participation by: being members to the epicenter, participating in the epicenter's leadership ladder, and contributing their local resources for the success of the epicenter's programmes. But, findings also shows that both personal and structural factors hamper the full participation of the people in the overall epicenter activities. Some external challenges and the limitations also continue to undermine its works. For instance, despite its effort to transform the status of women among the Meskan people, THP-E was unable to challenge the extremely sex-centered ritual cults among the Meskan people that have left women to be treated as second-class citizens. Moreover, even though Meskan epicenter is to be graduated as a self-reliant community by the beginning of 2018, absence of opportunity structures has mounted their needs for external support, especially of the local government, which has continued to be decisive in determining their future fate.

The study concludes that continued empowerment work, with much focus on creating enabling external conditions, is needed to further unlock the agencies of the people for self-reliant development.

Acknowledgement

I feel deeply indebted and would like to express my sincere gratitude to all who have helped me in completing this thesis project. Foremost, my sincere gratitude goes to my supervisor Professor Ragnhild Lund for her patience and continuous support of my master's thesis. Her motivation, enthusiasm and immense knowledge were invaluable for the quality of my thesis.

The warm and kind-hearted treatment that I received from THP-E and all its staff members is sincerely acknowledged. Especially W/ro Neguest Mekonen, the country director of THP-E, for her incontestable attitude and kind collaboration in every aspect of my work.

Table of Contents

<div align="center">

Lists of Figures
</div>

Lists of Acronyms

ADLI	Agricultural Development-led Industrialization Strategy
DFID	Department for International Development
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
IGAs	Income Generating Activities
NACs	National Advisory Councils
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NTNU	Norwegian University of Science and Technology
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RUSACCo	Rural Saving and Credit Cooperatives
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SNNPR	Agricultural Development-led Industrialization Strategy
THP	The Global Hunger Project
THP-E	The Hunger Project-Ethiopia
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nation High Commission for Refugees
VCA	Vision Commitment Action
WHO	World Health Organization

Non-English Terms

Enset	Also called *false banana*, is herbaceous species of flowering plant in the banana family Musaceae.
Iddir	Informal social association to assist members at times of hardship
Iqqub,	Informal financial association for savings in cash or in kind
Kebele	The smallest administrative unite of Ethiopia
Woreda	The third-level administrative divisions of Ethiopia immediately above Kebele
Ye-Jebena	Customarily refers chewing *Khat* in the morning

1 Introduction

One of the major events during the 20th century was that globalization accentuated the number and roles of international and local NGOs in the development frontiers. It has become very common to observe a growing number and diversity of NGOs making the world look like a compassionate place than any time in history. Especially in developing countries, they are active players in the field of international development. Although their roles vary, as implementers, catalysts, or partners of development, NGOs are usually meant to counterbalance the existing development gaps within a nation or worldwide (Lewis, 2010: 1057). NGOs participate in a range of development and economic activities providing essential services including providing relief and welfare, assisting small-scale self-reliant local development, or interrogating institutional and policy constraints of development Korten (1990: 147-148). Particularly, the contribution of NGOs in Africa is higher in strengthening the institutional environment, narrowing the income distribution gaps, changing in guiding development policies and practices. They are markedly invaluable in crafting alternative development options, mainstreaming gender issues in development agendas, bringing human rights and environmental issues into a prime concern (Lewis & Madon, 2004: 117).

Apart from their positive contributions, NGOs, are also faced with critical questions of sustainability, transparency, and accountability of their work and the credibility of their development approaches. For instance, NGOs are frequently criticised for not taking the existing political and economic contexts of the people they work with (Lewis and Kanji, 2009: 17-20). This study further extends this analysis of NGOs and their contributions in improving the lives of the people by mainly focusing on their development practices.

The best way to understand the roles of NGOs in local development is to jump into the pool of the ongoing structure-agency debate. In the social sciences, this debate represents two parallel viewpoints, where structural accounts are contrasted with methodological individualism in comprehending the nature of human social life and organization. What is the question here? According to Tan (2011: 1), which one of the two is of prime importance to social change? Structure or of people's agency? Put differently in his own words, "[a]re individuals in control of their own actions and destinies, or are they merely […] subject to particular social circumstances that determine their behaviour?" For the representatives of each respective ontological underpinnings, the answer may be limited only to a matter of methodologic constancy in their scientific inquiries (e.g., when to use a quantitative versus qualitative

method). However, those who are keen to a reconciled understanding of human social life eventually find themselves in the middle of both viewpoints in explaining human social life and organization.

This study is, therefore, personally and academically initiated to contribute to the body of literature about NGOs and their development strategies by providing a vivid understanding of the epicenter strategy, as operationalized by the Hunger Project Ethiopia (hereafter THP-E), and its contributions in participating and empowering the people for self-reliant development. Theoretically, the study is guided by the orthodoxy of alternative development approach where important discussions such as agency and structure, participation and empowerment constitute its theoretical core.

1.1 Personal and Academic Justifications of the Study

This research project is commenced based on two motives. The first one is based on the researcher's personal curiosity, vented from my personal experience, to deeply understand the interplay between alternative development strategies, as operationalized by various NGOs, and local development in my own country. The other reason emerges from my academic perception concerning the deficiency of instructive body of knowledge in the literature about NGOs and their development practices in Ethiopia. The following sections clarifies both rationales.

1.1.1 Personally

After the 2008 financial crises, many politicians and actors claimed that the economic despair resulted from the excessive obsession with '*market fundamentalism*' had come to an end. They then called for an epistemic shift in the discourse of development from a neoliberal perspective to another alternative development approach that is more "articulated to the existing social, political, economic and technological conditions of the people" (Pieterse, 2009: 3). It was critically a period for Africans, when the prescribed structural adjustment policy failed to reduce poverty through its classical/neoliberal economic policies, to redirect their attention towards alternative development solutions.

The late prime minister of Ethiopia Meles Zenawi, for instance, argued that neoliberalism, as a promise to the African political and economic renaissance, was insignificant, or a '*dead end*' in his own words, for African development (Zenawi, 2012: 140). According to him, African countries, in general, and Ethiopia needs a paradigmatic shift away from neoliberalism to a developmental state model whose central idea is creating a state with amplified authority to

initiate development as its top priority, and mainly through active intervention in the market (Leenders, 2oo7: 3).

Ever since the appropriation of developmental state model by most African countries, the prevailing cynicism was whether there have arisen any viable developmental states conformed to have successfully articulated the core principles of the model to its existing context. Henceforth, much of the scholarly literature shows a disappointing result of the model for most countries in the continent except Botswana and Mauritius, the only two examples of successful developmental states (Yirga, 2015: 84).

In Ethiopia, although different sources and especially public documents claim a strong and persistent economic growth in the country, estimated 10.2% in 2014/15. Contrary to this firm buzzing propaganda of double-digit development, FAO in 2015 estimated that 31.6 million people are aching from hunger and undernourishment. Furthermore, decades of political turmoil, coupled with the seasonality of drought such as El Niño, have exacerbated the situation in the country. This provokes two important questions to the observers: first, why several millions of people continue to live under dire socio-economic situations while the government still claims a persistent double-digit economic prosperity? Second, also this study I interested on, is how can we articulate the contribution of the ever increasing and diverse number of NGOs in improving the lives of the people?

In 2015, I got the opportunity to work for a local NGO in Ethiopia, which primarily provides social services to poor orphans and their families. Although I worked only for less than a year, I got the exposure to work at the grassroots level with the people in the project areas. There I started questioning myself about NGOs' practices. One of my critical observations about the NGO that I have been working for was that it failed to ensure the participation of the local people for a sustainable change, which many of the existing NGOs also lack in Ethiopia. This was apparently observed when the government changed its emphasis and shifted the NGOs roles from relief and aid services to long-term developmental works, where the government reported that many of them lack a long-term development focus (Clark, 2000: 2). Quite strikingly also, most of them were found to foster strategies that ended up in creating dependency in the mindset of the people (ibid: 5). This furthermore complicates some basic questions regarding NGOs and their strategies such as the community's right to participate in matters affecting their lives, sustainability of their work, and the synergy between NGO approaches and the dynamics of rural development.

1.1.2 Academically

Academically, this study is inspired by three principal reasons where initial review of the existing literature indicates that there is a knowledge gap in relation to NGOs. First, despite the increasing number and contribution of NGOs in Ethiopia, literature does not show the various development strategies that NGOs employ to realize their long-term development objectives. The existing research works regarding NGOs and their activities in Ethiopia are only limited to a few research topics, including NGOs contributions in empowering the local communities, NGOs-state relations and the heated debate regarding Ethiopia's controversial NGO laws, and challenges and prospects of NGOs in Ethiopia.

For instance, Belshaw and Coyle (2001, 73) attempted to qualitatively ground true the roles of selected NGO projects to poverty reduction in Ethiopia. Accordingly, they identified and confirmed that NGOs are effectively supporting the country's poverty reduction activities. However, they noted, with reference to the limited impact of Agricultural Development-led Industrialization Strategy (ADLI) on poverty reduction, that a more effective range of pro-poor development options needs to be identified and put into effect to persistently secure poverty reduction in the country. More specifically, Pillay (2010: 116) on her critical work on the roles of NGOs and educational policy development in Ethiopia, in addition to the positive roles of NGOs, she systematically indicated the threat of NGOs intercession in turning the national educational policy towards a westernized system. For her, this has become a growing trend that NGOs, apart from their contribution to poverty reduction, are also potential dangers to the languages, cultures and educational prospects of the people. Reflecting on the status of other NGOs as well, Pillay stated that Ethiopians old pride for never having been colonized doesn't indicate what is accruing on the ground.

Secondly, while it is essential to recognize the context in which NGOs function, such as the socio-political and ideological backgrounds of the people, there is no a detailed work that connects the NGOs work with the existing context of the country. Only a few works do exist that show the NGOs-state relations in the country. For instance, Campbell argued that blockage can historically characterize the Ethiopian case (1996, 17). Furthermore, in July 2012, Amnesty International made the following statement regarding the Ethiopian Charities and Societies Proclamation (No.621/2009),

> *The 2009 Ethiopian Charities and Societies Proclamation places excessive restrictions on the work of human rights organi[z]ations. The law has had a devastating impact on human rights work, both in terms of the practical*

obstacles it creates for human rights defenders, and in exacerbating the climate of fear in which they operate.

Apart from direct prohibition imposed by the law, the government also makes excessive supervisory inspection on the activities of the NGOs that undermines the works of many NGOs in the country. The question at this point must then be what strategies do NGOs in Ethiopia employ to manage their works under such a constraining political and institutional environment, particularly, those grassroots NGOs that are guided by a holistic approach to local development. It is, therefore, timely and reasonable to join the academic inquiry to understand this relationship by emphasizing more on NGOs strategy of creating synergy between all local development actors and their interests.

Lastly, one of the critical questions in relation to NGOs work is the question of sustainability of their manner of service provision. Literature answer this question through a generalization that some NGOs have consistently shown their successful service provision strategy that contributed to development, whereas, others are found to be less efficient. Moon (2017, 2) conceptualizes sustainability as the tasks of an NGO in *"identifying, developing and promoting sustainable mind-sets, practices, and policies to maintain a healthy natural environment but in an economically sound as well as socially viable manner."* He also remarks that the vastness of its scope, the complexity of its nature, and above all, the need to consider the multiple interactions between economic, environmental and social elements make weighing sustainability as a difficult task.

In the case of Ethiopia, the question of sustainability of NGOs activities remains as one of the most dubious issues. This is partly because of most (80%) of NGOs in the country lack long-term development objectives (Clark, 2000: 5). This makes it unclear to answer whether NGOs have unique strategies to measure the sustainability of their activities. This open-ended question calls for a research work that commits itself to studying the various strategies that NGOs in Ethiopia ensure their impact on the sustainability of local development.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

Based on my academic and personal justifications, as have been outlined in the above section, this study is dedicated to studying THP-E approach to integrated rural development called the epicenter strategy. The study aims to provide an understanding of the epicenter strategy, as operationalize by THP-E in one of its epicenters located in Meskan woreda, and to provide an analysis of its role in participating and empowering the people for self-reliant development.

To attain the overarching research objective, the following specific research questions have guided the data collection and fieldwork processes:

- How does THP-E operate its epicenter development strategy?
- What are the challenges and limitations of the epicenter strategy?
- To what extent has THP-E succeeded in participating and empowering people to create self-reliant development?

1.3   Description of the Study Area

1.3.1   Meskan Worde, Gurage Zone

Gurage zone is one of the many zones located in SNNPRs. In this zone alone, THP-E has three epicenters including Misran, Enamour, and Worob. The fieldwork covered from mid-August until mid-October 2016 and identifies Meskal epicenter, as a principal case to address the study question. *Geographically*, Mescal worked is situated in SNNP regional state in Ethiopia. It is approximately 135 km away from the capital Addis Ababa. The worked has an area of 50,177 ha and is positioned between 7.99-8.27^{o}N latitude and 38.26-38.57^{oE} longitude. Climatically, Mescal woreda is divided between the *dega* (cold zone) covering 20 per cent and *woina dega* (mild temperate) embracing the 80 per cent (Admassu, 2013: 148).

Demographically, the woreda's information bureau estimates, as of 2011, a total population of 174, 647 (Kebede, 2015: 40). Most houses in Meskan woreda are round huts built from timber and mud, and a thatched roof. Of an estimated 35, 211 households, approximately 34.9 per cent are female-headed. With an average household size of 5 persons, the woreda is characterized by its highest reproductive rate (ibid.). Majority of the people (61 per cent) are followers of Islamic religion, followed by Orthodox Christianity. A significant portion of the community also practices common traditional faith, which is highly labelled by its sex-centered ritual cults and "complex series of ritual activities" (Palmisano, 2016: 11). 'Guragegna' is the major language in the Gurage zone with different dialects. Most of the people do also speak the national language, i.e., Amharic (Berhane & Byass, 2002: 1).

Figure 1. Location map of Meskan **woreda and the epicenter Kebeles**

(Source: Ethio-ArcGIS, 2015)

Livelihood at Meskan woreda is predominantly subsistence farming, 92 per cent are farmers, integrated with livestock production. Farming system among the Meskan people is divided to *enset* and cereals. Esset (*false banana*) is the soul of Gurage's economic and social life and they are known for enset complex culture. It is intensively cultivated and used for a variety of food and medical purposes (Shack 1966 in Legesse, 1966). Added to enset is also a variety of cash crops such as maize and sorghum (Admassu, 2013: 148). The nutrition status of the people is, however, reported to be poor with the prevalence of global acute malnutrition of 9.9 per cent. Poor household food availability is considered as one of the aggravating factors (Unit-Ethiopia, 2006: 5). Moreover, Kebede adds that a range of other factors including, farming and non-farming related constraints, have also contributed to the high proportion of food insecurity in the woreda.

Regarding *Infrastructure and public services*, Kebede describes the physical, social and economic infrastructures of Meskan woreda as one of the least developed in the country. Although there has been recent attempt to improve necessary infrastructures, it has not yet covered the rural areas. For instance, speaking of the electric power infrastructure, Kebede stated that of the 40 kebeles in the woreda, only 24 get access (Kebede, 2015: 40). In Meskan

woreda, access to potable water is also low, and just stands at 42 per cent. As a result, poor sanitation with an insufficient number of latrine complicates the health status of the people. The mortality rate is high in Meskan woreda and mainly associated with infectious and maternal causes. Moreover, the absence of adequate health services in the area exacerbates the health problem (Unit-Ethiopia, 2006: 5; Berhane & Byass, 2002: 1). Lack of road infrastructure that connects the rural with cities such as Butajira further worsens the situation (Kebede, 2015: 40).

1.4   Readers Guide

This study is organized into six chapters. *Chapter one* briefly introduces the study background and explains the rationale behind the selection of the study area. *Chapter two* constitutes the theoretical, conceptual and analytical groundwork of the study. Under the theoretical framework of alternative development, the study logically situates itself on the ongoing debates on structure and agency. Moreover, the chapter outlines how the nexus between participation and empowerment can be used as an analytical framework to understand the works of THP-E.

Chapter three addresses the study methodology and explains the various steps, procedures and strategies used in collecting, and analysing relevant data. The chapter also includes discussions on ethical issues and reflections on the validity of the study, and the researcher's positions and personality.

Chapter four: presents THP-E's participation and empowerment program by emphasizing on its theory of social change. It describes the processes involved, all actors engaged and the development goals and objectives that THP-E aspires to achieve. THP-E's philosophy of sustainable social transformation, i.e., self-reliance, is also covered in this chapter. The last section discusses the main challenges and limitations of the epicenter strategy.

Chapter five continues the discussion on the main findings of the study and attempts to establish a causal relationship between THP-E participation and empowerment work with the actual changes in the personal and collative lives of the people. The main discussion includes the community's perception and participation in THP-E's empowerment program, women's representation, and the role of the local government in the epicenter's strategy.

Chapter six sums up the findings of the study by informing us how the study managed to answer all research questions.

2   Theory, Concepts, and Analysis

Development is a celebrated concept at least since the second half of the 20th century, and scrutinizing its very essence is a long-standing tradition among both academicians and practitioners. In spite of its eclectic nature, different outlooks have arisen over the time to theorize development indicating the acquaintance of each respective period. What is important to consider here is a paradigmatic shift from metanarratives to alternative development approaches, also heralded by conjectural shift, above all, from macro to micro-level approach to development. Equally important is also the growth spurt of NGOs in the terrace of development, and theorizing NGOs roles in local development is also an old academic fashion yet with an extensive gap in the body of knowledge.

The chapter is dedicated to highlighting the theoretical foundations of the study, which framed the study process and provided an analytical framework to analyse the data.

2.1   Structure - Agency Debate

2.1.1   Structures, Actors, and Structuration

2.1.1.1   Structures

What is referred as the structural approach encompasses a broad range of theories and concepts in the social sciences to understand human social life and organization. For instance, Emile Durkheim, dedicated his work to elucidate the role of structure and hierarchy in the formation of a society. For him, culture is the sum total of human beings', a system of representations encompassing its "constituent elements including, norms, customs, traditions, institutions". Such social structure exists above the level of the individual and determines people's behaviour (Simon, 2005: 2).

In the social sciences, their contribution of the concept of social structure is invaluable. In this study, the concept of social structure is treated as an important yet disputing concept (Ozdemir, 2011: 1). By critically examining the existing literature, Propora (1989, 340) identifies four different conceptions of structure. First, structure as aggregate behaviour– '*stable or repeated'*. The proposal is that once structure is formed as repeated behaviour at the micro level, the macro level will be the by-product of it. Second, the structure as *law-like regularities among social facts*. It argues that group cohesion/equilibrium is achieved and maintained through law-like regularities which cement the relation between *social facts* and group properties. Third, structure as *systems of human relations among social positions*. Much has been said about this tradition and Propora simply explains that the *system* is what Karl Marx refers to as the *modes*

of production and whereas *social position* stands for *class positions*. Fourth, it is particularly associated with the works of Giddens who considers '*social structure as rules and resources*'. Unlike the third conception, Giddens assumes that *the systemic patterns of relations* that we see are organized around the rules and resources, which he refers to as the structure (1984, 40-42). This signal a major divergence from the initial assumption that only social structure entails objective and external constraints on human beings to a more actors oriented perspectives (ibid: 346).

2.1.1.2 Actors and Agency

In 1960s, rational choice and social exchange perspectives challenged the structural nation and renewed the theoretical and methodological path in favour of "[t]he analysis of intimate, everyday interactions" (Sztompka, 1994:30 quoted in Tan, 2010: 41). This is an individualistic approach and reverse the power of individual's decision in constituting social 'structures (Shilling, 1999, 544). Max Weber is among the scholars, who supported this idea throughout his writings and called for an *agency-centric* perspective to theorize and explain human social processes and changes. According to him, the role of sociologists is to focus on active individuals, who are rational actors and able to maximize their interests from the plethora of alternatives (ibid. 544). The main assumption for Weber is that unravelling the rationalization of individuals in any given situations requires an *"interpretive understanding"* of social actors in various contexts of actions. From his definition, I can also understand the existence of different levels of agency and the dynamic, rational, and motivated nature of actors (Tan, 2011: 42).

2.1.1.3 Structuration

In order to balance the causal relationship between structure and agency, many scholars have come forward with divergent perspectives. *Structuration theories* were among the counter-ideological attempts advanced to balance that structure-agency conflation. Giddens, in his structuration theory, proposes a two-way interpretation of "an account of the conditions and consequences of action; and an interpretation of 'structure' as somehow embroiled in both those conditions and consequences*"* (Giddens, 1984: 49). For him, the interplay between structure and agency can be understood from their interdependence and dialectical relationships (ibid: 53).

Although many scholars praise Giddens for his contributions, quite a few have also criticized him on several grounds. Many scholars underline the deficiency of Giddens' structuration

theory to provide specific principles and/or methodological guidelines that can be translated and applied to pragmatic studies. Giddens is also criticized for not identifying himself with any of the two positions to avoid an *objectivist* or *subjectivist* generalizations. Giddens is also criticized for failing to specify "which structures, what agencies, in what sequences go to make up the object of inquiry of social theory" (McLennan (1984) cited in Tan, 2011: 45).

2.2 Alternative Development

In the 1950s and 1960s, dissatisfaction with mainstream development approach and its practical elements crystalized into alternative, people-centered approaches (Pieterse, 1998: 346). Alternative development starts from the main epistemological quest "who the producers of development knowledge and practices are"; and involves a methodological and practical shift from the mainstream thoughts to an "alternative*"* and "*just"* form of development (Brun & Blaikei, 2016: 2). This is also described by Pieterse (1998: 348), who argues that the term *alternative* generally refers to alternative agents, methods and objectives or values in the realm of organizing and executing development activities. Brun & Blaikei (2016:2), on the other hand, noted that 'alternative' is usually used to represent the voices of marginalized individuals and groups in a range of development spheres including political, spatial, economic and environmental. More technically, the moral and political mission of alternative approach is to challenge "the status-quo leading to marginalization (ibid: 2).

In relation to structure-agency debate, Bauwens (2014), on the one hand, stated that alternative development approach promotes social change that is initiated from within communities, endogenously, or at least in equal collaboration with external agents. Brun & Blaikei (2014:8), on the other hand, stress that the recognition of people's 'agency' is the foundation of the approach. They go on to define the concept of agency as "people's capacity to make choices and pressure their own goals". In this sense, local stakeholders here are key holders of power and play active roles in the decision making. However, the prevailing power differential is also key in the sense that it answers the question who develops what, and when. The development project is then reduced to part and parcel of human everyday needs, the community itself identifies its own process of organizing and projecting its future development goals and aims (Bauwens, 2014).

Unlike the mainstream school of thoughts, alternative development approach doesn't see economic growth as the limit of development, it instead connotes a wide range of components including health, community, peace, food security, ecological health, citizen

participation/engagement, and public space (Bauwens, 2014). According to Brun & Blaikei (2014:2), the ultimate purpose of alternative development is to promote a just society whose individuals and groups voices are heard, basic needs and basic rights are fulfilled, and with access to the decision making. In this context, development implies a "striving for social justices and involves empowerment through the exercise of agency by subjects across different geographical scales and in different locations" (ibid: 3).

Methodologically, alternative development is guided by an epistemologically premise of *holism*, which states that "parts cannot be understood apart from their wholes and wholes are different from the sum of their parts" (Prayas, 2004: 22). Alternative development is skeptical of projecting cultural transformation through 'development', as defined by capitalists; and it challenges the 'diffusion model', which states that cultural transformation can take place by importing western scientific and technological advancements to '*developing'* nations. Contrary to this idea, alternative development values the development knowledge and practices of the local people as legitimate and authoritative, often heterogeneous, and crucial to holistic development (Bauwens, 2014). Pieterse (1998: 346) methodologically defines alternative development as development "*from below";* where *'below'* refers two prominent actors in local development including the community, local governments, and NGOs. Development from bellow implies that creating rural agrarian society is essential such that it enables the reconfiguration of a society that is surfaced on small-scale communities with "direct personal relationships, and face-to-face contact" (Prayas, 2004: 41). In addition, Chambers (1994:953) suggests that Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), is an important platform to bring all local development actors together to analyse their conditions, knowledge, and practices of life to plan and act; thereby contributing to the groundwork of alternative development.

Alternative development did not escape from a series of public critiques on many grounds. More particularly, Prayas (2004: 41), comprehended the existing literature on the critiques of alternative perspective and found out the following inadequacies, as can be summarised: First, critiques of the alternative perspective are not happy with the idea that state institutions should be removed or minimized. Their main concern here is that human sociality, without the state, will go back to the state of primitive communities, for direct development will also "[offer] no guaranty of ethical social norms". Second, they criticize alternative positions for their denial of the *parochial* nature of rural people who are predominantly *conservative* and *elitist*. Lastly, they are not happy about disregarding the need for modern/western science and technology in favour of small-scale amateur technological attempts to rural development.

Apart from these criticisms, Brun & Blaikei claimed that alternative development is a great success, as some of its key concepts such as participation and empowerment have become buzz words in the vocabulary of development (2014:3). A wide variety of implementing countries, donors and practitioners are also coming together in many international conferences, and expert working groups to discuss, define and redefine its concepts, also to add new tools and methods (UN, 2015: 77).

Under the auspices of alternative development, this study uses two concepts to theoretical inform the study undertakings, i.e., participation and empowerment as means and ends to each other. However, their meanings and relationships remain vague. The next section highlights the concepts of participation and empowerment, followed by a section on how NGOs rely on participation and empowerment to obtain self-reliance.

2.2.1   Participation

First, participation must not be confused, both as a term or concept, with empowerment. Participation itself is a widely used yet poorly defined concept both in the academics and practical work (Mulgan, 2005: 7). It has a long and rich history, as the earlier western philosophers were pondering to unpack the mysterious relationship between individual citizens and institutions of governance. There is also a high demand for explicating the importance of citizen's participation and engagement in development (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012: 2399). Naraya-Parker, on the other hand, describes participation as one measurement of a successful empowerment strategy. Success can be understood in two ways: (1) empowering people for inclusion; and (2) empowering them to expand their roles of participation (2002: 15). Inclusion is vital for the poor as they are usually excluded from the public decision making, especially over the issues of limited public resources. In the same way, once the people are empowered enough and included, they would be able to play active roles in their own development. Multidimensional empowerment is therefore important 'to create a space for people to identify their common issues and participate directly or indirectly in the local and national priority settings, budget formation, and delivery of basic services' (ibid.).

Participatory development approach is not without limitation. Throughout their books titled '*Participation: The New Tyranny?*' Cooke and Kothari (2001) discuss that participation approach ignores the very existence of group dynamics is a given society. Instead, it is founded on the assumption of the homogeneity of a society, where issues such as power relations are torn out of existence (ibid: 6). Apart from the shortcomings, the recent resurgence to reframe

participation as a viable and legitimate approach indicates that participatory approaches have the potential to be transformative provided that the following three approaches are integrated in the existing definition: (1) participation must be ideologically explicit and tied to a coherent theory of development; (2) the locus of transformation must go beyond the individual and local and involve multiscale strategies that encompass institutional and structural elements; and (3) they propose, "radicalized notion of citizenship" provides the intermediary analytical and strategic basis upon which a project can be pursued (ibid.). They also explain that most participatory development approaches agree on some of the basic goals of participation, which is to transform 'the existing development practice', 'the social relation', 'institutional practices and capacity gaps that cause social exclusion'. However, they argue, on the reverse, that institutional and structural transformations should be placed at the heart of "participatory practice or political action" (ibid: 13). Cornwall (2004: 1) adds to this argument that the recent upsurge in participation debate and the rising concern on principal concepts, such as "rights, power, and deference", has brought the subject of institutional and structural transformation at the center of a new democratic experiment.

2.2.2 Empowerment

The concept of empowerment has likewise enlivened the epistemic move toward alternative development. Since its emergence, the concept is grasped in development practice and has appeared to fit different contexts (Parpart, 2002, 41-42). Its meaning is also fluid and is partly due to the mutability of the concept of *power,* which is central to it (Rai, 2007: 4). A summary of contextual usage of the term empowerment across different literature also yields other terms including "self-strength, self-reliance, a life of dignity in accordance with one's values, own decision making, and awakening" (Narayan-Parker, 2002 :10). Therefore, defining empowerment opens the danger of being analytically ambiguous, contradicting and paradoxical to each other. Thus, a study like this one, the meaning of empowerment would typically have an assumed meaning (Development Backgrounder, 2006: 3).

Many definitions of empowerment focus on autonomy. It is, however, claimed that empowerment does not only imply the level of power that one needs to possess to exert over people and resources, but also the *exercise* of it (Rai, 2007: 2: Sadan, 2004: 15). Rai emphasises the merit of empowerment by contemplating its impact in dismantling the existing power relations. It is also equally important to consider that empowerment is embedded at all levels of relations in the social structure. From all definitions, it can be comprehend that empowerment

involves both individual conscientization (power within) as well as collective action' (ibid.). Likewise, the ability to make decision is both an individual and structural question; hence, interactive empowerment is essential. Moreover, Sadan claims that empowerment intends to bring both internal and external changes. On the one hand, individual level changes are contributing factors to understanding of own ability to make decisions under constraining situations. External changes, on the other hand, may include all external enabling conditions that contribute to the realization of individuals' ability to decide and act in their life courses.

World Bank (2007: viii) defines empowerment as "means to enhance the capacity of an individual or a group to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes." This definition of empowerment once again brings a reconciled understanding of the structure-agency debate. For instance, World Bank assumes capacity to be subject to two interrelated factors: agency and opportunity structure. Accordingly, agency is used to refer to actor's ability to make meaningful choices, whereas, opportunity structure means the overall enabling contexts in which the actors transform their choices into useful actions to transform their lives. Along with the definition of empowerment, World Bank also differentiates between: *the process of empowerment*, defined as "enhancing the capacity of an individual or group to make purposive decisions and to transform their choices into desired actions and outcomes*"; and the state of empower*ment referring to "an individual or a group having the capacity both to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes" (ibid: 6).

Despite the ambiguities, contradictions, and paradox between these definitions, many definitions focus on answering the question of power and control over it, access to resources and decision making, transforming the lives of the poor (ibid: 5). It is also relevant to not to confuse empowerment with other concepts such as decentralisation and participation or approaches like bottom-up and rights-based. Whereas all can be a means to an end, empowerment may or may not be their end (Development Backgrounder, 2006:5).

2.3 The Role of NGOs

Perhaps, we are at the period where discussions of international development cannot be imagined without citing the ever-increasing number and influence of non-governmental organizations (hereafter NGOs). Globalization and the spread of market-liberalizing reforms have favoured the growth spurt of NGOs across the globe and their active actors in "conflict resolution, democracy building, human right work, cultural preservation, environmental

15

activism, policy analysis, research, and information provision" (Lewis, 2010: 1057). Despite the growing importance of NGOs in development, several questions remain open about their nature and roles, approaches, and contributions to local development. This section highlights main points in relation to these questions as a contribution to the theoretical discussions framing this study. To begin with the definition, the term "NGO" has no precise definition. Ball & Dunn (2010: 18) suggest four elements that any definition NGOs should refer including voluntary, independent, not-for-profit, and not self-serving in aims and related values. Concerning to the typologies and roles of NGOs, it is marked as diverse. For instance, in terms of *structure*, they can be large or small, formal or informal, bureaucratic or flexible. In relation to the sources of their fund, some depend on mobilizing local resources while others rely on external sources. Membership is also another variation, some are community-based organizations, and others are people's organization. Regarding their motivation and values, they can either be a secular or faith-based (Lewis, 2010: 1058).

As is true for its definition and nature, NGOs play different roles in local development. Understanding the diverse functions of NGOs requires us to travel through the historical timeline in which NGOs underwent through significant changes in their practice of development (Korten 1987: 147). Korten describes three distinct generations of NGOs, showing their distinctive orientations towards development with their changing roles.

Generation 1 of NGOs, which consists of global NGOs such as 'Catholic Relief Services, CARE, and World Vision', were charitable organizations functioning around the world. They were primarily concerned with providing *relief and welfare services* to the poor people. The spatial scope of such organizations is individual or family who has a shortage of goods and services due to factors including, floods, famine, and war (ibid: 148). For instance, in Ethiopia, the 1973-74 and 1984-1985 famine paved the way for the first generation of NGOs. During these periods, many international and few local NGOs had played crucial roles in reducing the death toll in the country by mostly providing the people with the means to survival (Clark, 200: 4). *Generation 2 of NGOs:* is more concerned with *small-scale self-reliant local development.* It recognizes the inadequacies of relief and welfare intervention to bring about development. It also its strategy from individuals and family towards the community, neighbourhood or village (ibid.). *Generation 3 of NGOs* brings the question of sustainability of *NGOs'* intervention at the center of all development practices. According to Korten, this generation of NGOs, which represents the current segments of NGOs, more specifically target on changing the structural

and policy constraints of development. Their objective is long-term and spatially aims to address regional, national or international development issues (ibid: 148).

Along with changes in the nature and roles of NGOs, it is also imperative to understand, perhaps most relevant to this study, the conjectural shifts from the spatial focus on individual or family to regional or national changes. A similar transition has also taken place across the three generations of NGOs, their attention of development has been shifted from intervention at individual or family level to regional or national level. Their roles have also moved from mere actors/implementer to partners. Lastly, change has even occurred in their logic of achieving their development objectives. For instance, contrary to first and second generations of NGOs, the third generations moved its definitions of the human social problem beyond the shortage of resources and sought policy and institutional changes at the local, national and global level (Korten, 1990: 120).

2.4 Analytical Framework to Understand THP-E's Strategy to Participation and Empowerment

The assumption of NGOs as key promoters of alternative development approach sets the bottom line in framing our understanding of the works of THP-E in Meskan epicenter. Whereas the nexus between participation and empowerment provides an analytical framework to comprehend the strategy of THP-E to support the people for self-reliant development.

Regarding structure and agency debate towards a more practical battlefield, i.e., alternative development perspectives, this study sustains an analytical dualist perspective to the development debate. Where the underlying assumption is that mutual constitution between agency and structure is fundamental to social change, however, the existence of dialectical relationships between them should also be considered. It is the position of the researcher that any development initiatives must start from the understanding of this logical relationship between structures and agency, where failing to do so may presumably lead to the risk of lacking integrity in sustaining development.

Accordingly, people's capability to make a difference is liable to two interrelated elements: agency and opportunity structure. Agency, in this study, refers both the personal and collective capacity of Meskan community to make choices, set development priorities, mobilize resources, and solutions to their local development. There are also two ways in which this study understands the concept of structure. On the one hand, structures as opportunity include all favourable contexts that enable the actors to exercise their agencies such as job opportunity,

infrastructure, transformative leadership (Kristiansen, 2014:3). On the other hand, structures as directly influencing the agency of the people such as migration, gender roles, inequality, and perception, institutions, and regulations. The prominent actors represented in this study are the local people, the local government, and THP-E.

Along with its definition of empowerment, World Bank (2007: viii) differentiates between: *the process of empowerment*, defined as "enhancing the capacity of an individual or group to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes*"; and the state of empower*ment, when "an individual or a group [has] the capacity both to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes" (ibid: 6).

The following key concepts and debates are also strategically selected as means to understand the works of THP-E and their contribution to local development.

Participation-Empowerment Nexus: is used in this study to analytically examine the strategy of THP-E and its work at Meskan epicenter. Participation as an end is used to understand the effectiveness of THP-E community mobilization programme for a better project outcome. In this study, this concept is used to capture the general perception and participation of the epicenter community in THP-E empowerment program. Whereas participation as a means to empower the people at Meskan epicenter is used to conceive the contribution of THP-E to large-scale societal changes by unlocking their capacity for self-reliant development (Cleaver, 1999: 598). The Nexus may well be understood when the objective of participation is to involve people, especially the powerless, in the formulation of strategies and development goals and the selection of programmes, and in their monitoring and assessment, an appropriate environment for empowerment is created (Development Backgrounder, 2006: 5).

Self-reliance: By underlying on the goals of the epicenter strategy, i.e., to capacitate the people towards self-reliance by transforming their personal and structural conditions. By largely emphasizing on changes on "the existing development practice, the social relation, institutional practices, and capacity gaps", the researcher agrees with Hickey & Mohan (2004:13), that challenging the existing institutional and structural constraints of Meskan community must be put at heart of the THP-E's work. This informs us about the various structural and institutional constraints that the epicenter community must address to realize their self-reliance. Moreover, it helps us to analytical make sense to what extent has THP-E succeeded in participating and empowering the people to achieved *self-reliance,* secured, perpetuated and sustain it.

Summary

This chapter has drawn that the theoretical and analytical approach of the study, which is built on the underpinnings of alternative development approach. The ongoing structure and agency debate and nexus of participation and empowerment have been outlined as essential concepts in comprehending the aim of the study. Concerning the former, the chapter has discussed that the methodological subordination of both actor and structure viewpoints has limited them from unfolding the different level of interaction between 'people' and other micro-level social structures in the social system. As a result, structuration theories as a counter-ideological attempt advanced to balance that structure-agency conflation. Regarding the latter, the chapter has shown how the nexus can be used to understand the THP-E's strategy to participate and empower the people for a self-reliant development. In addition, it has discussed the theoretical concept of self-reliance to amount the long-term development achievements of the epicenter strategy.

3   Research Design and Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This section discusses the roadmap to data collection and analysis. It deliberates the link between epistemology, theory, and method of this study as Gray (2004: 16) described;

> *[…] the choice of methods will be influenced by the research methodology chosen. This methodology, in turn, will be influenced by the theoretical perspectives adopted, by the researcher, and, in turn, by the researcher's epistemological stance.*

The first chapter has presented the theoretical and conceptual background of this study. The next task will be extending this discourse through the discussion on the research methodology, along with the various steps, procedures, and strategies used in gathering and analysing relevant data. Both primary and secondary sources of data, including in-depth interviews, observation, documents analysis, were used to collect relevant data.

3.2   Qualitative Methodology

Based on the ontological dimension of this study, i.e., development, as a bottom-up process entailing changes both at the personal and structural levels, the researcher agrees that truth and meaning exist as "subject's [participant's] interaction with the world" (Vanderstoep & Johnston 2009: 165). This view is theoretically linked to interpretivism, which defines reality as "culturally derived and historically situated interpretation of the social life-world" (Gray, 2004: 20). The role of a researcher is to offer description and explanation of participant's behaviour and action in their natural settings, hence Qualitative Methodology.

Qualitative methodology in this study is preferred for at least three reasons. First, in a study of this kind, which is precisely interested in examining the works of a specific NGO, with a relatively small number of the target population and specified project objectives, qualitative methodology is by far a convenient approach. It gives two advantages for this study: (1) It saves the amount of time to be spent on the study process; and (2) It minimizes the risk of oversimplification as generalization will not undermine other significant portion of the population. Second, this study is about social processes and change, concept such as agencies and structures, participation and empowerment require a somewhat careful analysis of actions and behavioural patterns of people in their everyday politics. Therefore, qualitative methodology helps us to gain a first-hand access to the lifeworld of the study participants. Third, in analysing THP-E's epicenter development strategy, as a grassroots approach, it is crucial to go more in-depth beyond the structures and collect opinions, feelings, and practices from the

local people about the THP-E's activities. To this end, the qualitative methodology provides flexible data collection techniques that enable us to come up with "scientific explanations that are grounded in the meaning structure of those studied" (Asper, 2004: 1).

Qualitative data demand proper analysis, interpretation, and presentation. In this study, data analysis is also qualitatively guided. Analysis is understood as bringing order to voluminous data, organizing it into patterns, categories, and descriptive units, and establish a relationship between them. Interpretation refers to the way people attach meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining the patterns, categories, and relationships; and presentation means the writing up of the data into a written form (Brewer, 2000: 105).

3.2.1 Case Study Approach

According to John Gerring, a case study might mean a qualitative research technique that is holistic and utilizes a case, unit or individual based on a real-life context with multiple sources of evidence (2007:7). In an interpretive tradition as well, a case study is widely used in the social sciences. It is also referred to as a "*naturalistic"* design that provides an "in-depth" and multidimensional picture of a complex issue (Crowe et al., 2011: 1). Yin, in his widely-referred book '*Case Study Research,'* discussed that "how" and "why" type of research questions usually requires analytical data, which are plausible for generalizations, and can be extracted through case studies (1994:6). According to him, such questions require us to analytically deal with some operations that need to be looked at across time than simple "frequencies" and "*incidence*". In this sense, for example, to answer the question as to "how" the epicenter development strategy creates spaces for participation and empowers for the locals for self-reliant development, a case study would be an ideal approach.

Case study approach is mainly criticized for its incapability in providing generalizable facts. They are criticized for offering narrow and idiosyncratic theories that are most meaningful for a specific phenomenon, but impossible to transfer to other settings. However, this criticism has been thwarted by some scholars who argue that deep and rich description of a case is essential to supplement other research methods than to draw general conclusions (Bloor & Fiona, 2006: 27-30). This study recognizes the seriousness of such pitfalls and has taken the following measures to reduce the risk of shallow generalizations: (1) Maintaining transparency between the study participants and myself; (2) Being explicit about the potential influence that my position and personality might put on the data collection and analysis; and 3) maintaining

trustworthiness through opening doors for possible alternative explanations, criticisms, and feedbacks (Crowe et al., 2011: 7-8).

In this study, due to the existence of many NGOs and the deepness of the topic under investigation, a case study approach is used to strategically choose one NGO as a principal case, the geographic and thematic area to be covered, and the numbers and characteristics of participants. Thus THP-E has been selected for this study. In the interest of time and available resources, the geographic coverage of the case is narrowed to the Meskan epicenter.

3.2.1.1 Why THP-E/ Meskan Epicenter

The Hunger Project–Ethiopia (THP-E) is a family of the Global Hunger Project (THP), operating in different parts of the country since 2004. Currently, it has eight epicenters and works in partnership with community and other development stakeholders for self-reliant participatory development. Four reasons make THP-E as an ideal case for this study. Firstly, its simple organizational structure with relatively a small size of target groups makes the study undertakings manageable. Secondly, THP-E's theory of social change ontologically conforms to the principles of alternative development that promotes a unique bottom-up development approach. Thirdly, THP-E's participatory and empowerment strategy, which emphasis on changes both at the individuals and structures levels provides an excellent analytical standpoint to examine the dialectical relationship between individuals and their social structures. Lastly, its years of experience on development work in rural Ethiopia coupled with its programmatic partnerships with other local development stakeholders makes THP-E an ideal case to address the questions related to NGOs' and their contribution to development.

The Meskan epicenter is among the three epicenters located in the Gurage zone in SNNPR. The epicenter was established in 2006 and is currently in its last phase with its 252 members. It is chosen based on its recognition by the district government as the first legally recognized epicenter in Ethiopia. Upon its recognition, the epicenter has changed its name to Metebaber Epicenter Farmers Multi-purpose Cooperative and has already started to take over some its managerial tasks. The epicenter will be graduated to self-reliance by the beginning of 2018, and THP-E has already begun to withdraw its support to the epicenter (THP-E, 2013: 2).

3.2.2   In-depth Interviews

Qualitative research demands first-hand access to the living world of the people whom we study. The interview is one of the preferred methods to collect qualitative data. IT is not only a simple tool to extract information, says Schostak *(2006:1)*,

> *[but also] a place where views may clash, deceive, seduce, enchant. It is the interview. It is as much about seeing a world – mine, yours, ours, theirs – as about hearing accounts, opinions, arguments, reasons, declarations: words with views into different worlds.*

Crang & Cook state that interviews are of different kinds and may range from highly structured (akin to predetermined questions) to a relatively unstructured (informal) (2007: 60). According to them, in an informal interview, the role of the researcher is reduced as a 'detached scientific observer,' who collects relatively 'unbiased data' from the interview participants. An in-depth interview is called unstructured interview, and it creates a setting that enables the interviewee to talk freely and ask questions as much as possible. Moreover, such an interview is flexible and allows us to address emergent issues as the interview progresses (Dawson, 2007: 28).

Choosing in-depth interview in this study is based on the advantages it adds to the quality of the data it provides. In studying the success of THP-E's participation and empowerment program, it is essential to go far deep and study grassroots changes at the personal and collective levels. More importantly, understating social processes of change and related concepts such as inclusion, participation, empowerment, and self-reliance are best understood when individuals are used as units of analysis. To this effect, individual accounts, opinions, arguments, reasons, and declarations will help us to have a balanced understanding regarding the questions at hand.

The question of time shortage and the high risk of bias and uncertainties are pervasive when using in-depth interview. However, my prior contact both with THP-E's staffs and the epicenter communities allowed me to develop a good rapport and trustworthiness. Encouraging the informants to speak, and whenever necessary, probing on some issues have contributed to the quality of the data. Moreover, observation of changes at the personal and community level and face to face contact with the informants have added to the quality of interview data (Crang & Cook, 2007: 60).

A total of 14 individuals have been interviewed in this study. Based on their informed consent, I selected three staff members from THP-E, one government official, two animators, as well as eight general members of the epicenter. In all interviews, I started by first being explicit about

myself and the research objective. Before beginning the actual interview, all informants were asked if I could tape record the interview and mention their names in this study. The actual interview was initiated by asking a general question from the overarching research objectives (e.g., what do you think about the works of THP-E in your community? Or how does THP-E operationalize the epicenter development strategy?) And followed by further questioning and probing on vague responses.

Based on the consent of the informants, all names are kept anonymous, and only some of the interviews have been tape-recorded. Each interview lasted from 1-2 hours on average and included a visit to their houses, agricultural fields, epicenter compound and other places. Relevant literature suggests that tape-recording is better than other data capturing devices such as note-taking, which can be slow and open to changes of selective recording. It enables us to have a complete record of interviews for analysis, including what is said and the interaction between interviewer and interviewees. However, when not taped, interviews were accompanied by intensive note takings with a field notebook prepared for this purpose (Dawson, 2007: 7).

3.2.3 Observation

According to Schostak, "researchers are witnesses [to how] different individuals and groups give witness to their experiences and views" (2006: 135). It helps us to distinguish what people do from what they say they do (Bloor & Fiona, 2006: 52). One of the best advantages of observation is that it takes place in a natural setting (Marczyk et al., 2005: 150).

Observations took place throughout the study period. Data obtained from observation, include the general settings of the study area, i.e., the epicenter compound and its present status, how are the epicenter programme activities combined into meaningful outputs? How do the various committee leaders, the epicenter officers, members, government officials, and THP-E's experts interact with each other at the epicenter's compound and on the epicenter's general activities? And what are the roles of the local communities in the epicenter's overall operations, including leadership?

To properly record and manage observational data, I prepared an observational protocol. Separated pages have been used by dividing each page into two equal parts. The right side of the page used to describe portraits of the participants, descriptions of physical settings, practices and events; and, insightful notes written on the left side of the page including, assumptions, feelings, ideas, models, and field impressions. Hence, the result of observation was a detailed

qualitative data full of rounded descriptions of the physical settings as well as of the participants' physical and behavioural pictures (Foster, 2006: 82).

3.2.4 Document Review

Document analysis, in qualitative research, is another source of data relevant to the study. It refers to the various techniques involved in analysing and interpreting data obtained through the examination of the existing documents. Document analysis is mostly used to develop the theoretical groundwork for the study and during the elicitation process (Bowen, 2009: 27).

In addressing the first research question, regarding the epicenter strategy, various document materials were collected from both internal and external sources, created and kept in the account of events and/or providing evidence to the topic under investigation. Documents reviewed in this study include public census and national statistical reports, National Charities and Societies Proclamations and Policies, national NGOs profile and other materials. Internal documents obtained, include THP-E organizational mission statements, Strategic Plan, annual and quarterly reports, budgets, monitoring and evaluation indicators, internal memoranda, policy manuals, reports and presentations, and descriptions of program development and evaluation. They are particularly useful in understanding organizational characteristics, such as its backgrounds and performance, resources, values, processes, priorities, and strategies.

3.3 Researcher's Reflexivity: Validity, Position and Personality

3.3.1 Validity and Credibility

The question of credibility and validity covers the legitimacy and relevance of the theory and practically related to the analytical issues. In both cases, it involves the ability to reduce the possible occurrence of errors in our manner of presenting the study findings. To begin with theoretical issues, I initially agreed that truth and meaning exist as the research participant interact with their world. This limits my roles only to offering description and explanation of participant's behaviours and action within the research settings. However, the setting itself is partly influenced by my theoretical background and choice of data collection methods, which possibly raises a question to what extent has the research setting created a natural context for the participants to behave and interact. Theoretically, I have tried as much as possible to illustrate the theoretical foundation of the study that has guided the conceptualization and definition of key terms and concepts. Methodologically, I have explicitly shown the different data collection methods used along with their strengths and limitation. Moreover, methodological triangulation, which means the use of more than one way to collect data and

continuous verification of information would also contribute to the validity of the information presented in this study.

Practically, in relation to data analysis and conclusion, attempt has been made to link the findings of the study with other studies. This is what Crang & Cook (2007: 20) call it theoretical adequacy. The probability if someone would come up with similar findings is highly dependent on the overall study context that I described throughout this study.

3.3.2 Position and Personality

As a social scientist, with an inclination to qualitative research methodology, I quite well understand the potential influence my positional and personal background may put on this study. It is, therefore, necessary that I reflect on and examine both my field presence and relationship with the study participants (Finlay, 2003: 4). It is called critical reflexivity when a researcher becomes self-conscious about how his/her methodological decision making and epistemological background have dictated his/her behaviour in the field, perception about informants, selection of topics for discussions (Starfield, 2013: 1).

As the researcher, my anthropological background and personal interest in grassroots development in the global south might have influenced my conceptual and theoretical orientations toward the study, choice of methodology, topics, and cases to be addressed. My academic position and work experience might have also influenced the perceptions of the study participants. Finally, a combination of other factors including being a young, male, who belongs to a different ethnic group than the study participants might have created biases in the data collected.

My personality, as an active, sociable and appreciative individual, might have also affected the study. I also attempted to learn some local words, which helped me to quickly create an open friendship with my informants.

3.3.3 Ethical Consideration

Ethics is a keystone in the research endeavour. In this study too, the question of ethics was central from the first outset of the research problem to data collection, analysis and presentation. Ethics is necessary and is primarily to be "sensitive to the possible consequences of their work and should endeavour to guard against any harmful effects" (ASA, 1999: 2). I have, therefore, paid due attention that none of my participants would face any consequences in relation to their

participation in the study. Moreover, I have also shared the power in deciding on the focus of the research, data collection methods, places, and interview time.

First, in line with NTNU's requirement for research, I submitted a five-page thesis proposal to the department of *Globalization: Transnationalism and Culture* and got approval. Second, informants were kept autonomous by treating them with the utmost respect. I prepared informant consent and had read it in front of all participants and asked them if they want to participate in the study by signing the consent form. Third, since the first day, I have made the purpose of my presence clear both to the THP-E staff members and to the epicenter communities. I have made all participants clear about the objective and significance of this study. Forth, I have also shown acknowledgment and respect toward the discipline of social sciences, by the methods I used, the ways I behaved in the field, by my relationships with the study participants and the data I present.

Summary

This chapter has presented the methodological roadmap of the study by plainly showing the link between epistemology, theory, and data collection methods used in this study. By making clear that interpretive methodology, as used in this study, is dictated by the qualitative approach, the chapter has presented the main data collection methods used including case study approach, in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. In relation to each method, all preferable advantageous were outlined and the techniques used to disparage their possible shortcomings were also itemized. Along with the methods, the researcher's reflections on the possible effects of his positions and personality have also been narrated. Finally, the question of research ethics has been answered by discussing basic ethical issues addressed both in the fieldwork and data analysis stage.

4 The Epicenter Development Strategy: Implementation, Major Challenges and Limitations

After having discussed the theoretical and methodological road map of this study, this chapter starts with the presentation of key findings by attempting to answer the first two research questions about the epicenter development strategy, its implementation, and major challenges and limitations. Relevant data were collected from different sources; and mainly from THP-E's organizational and program manuals, quarterly and annual reports, strategic plan, various evaluation documents, and THP's online knowledge center. Further data were collected from interviews with THP-E's staffs and the epicenter communities, and *in-situ* observation.

4.1 Four Phases of Implementation

"Participation programmes can be effective tools for promoting empowerment […]. When the objective is to involve people, especially the powerless, in the formulation of strategies and development policies and the selection of programmes, and in their monitoring and assessment, an appropriate environment for empowerment is created."

- (Development Backgrounder, 2006: 5) -

In 2030 agenda for sustainable development, UN calls for a new approach to further the global effort far beyond the usual development priorities and to integrate a wide range of economic, social and environmental issues (UN, 2015). Besides, I have theoretically made myself clear that development promotes a *just* society whose individuals and groups voices are heard, basic needs and rights are fulfilled, and who have open access to the decision making (Brun & Blaikei, 2014: 3). In her recent study on gender perspective of household food security in Meskan district of the Gurage Zone, Kebede (2008: 28) revealed that high proportion of households who participated on her study were found to live under food insecurity, from which women-headed households accounted the larger portion. According to her, addressing this issue, particularly of those female-headed households, requires intensive and integrated planning and intervention at all levels (ibid: 43).

In relation to the UN's call for a practical approach to sustainable development, THP-E claims that it is possible to achieve this form of social transformation through its integrated rural development approach called the epicenter strategy. Across the world, THP-E advocates this strategy as an alternative path to 'sustainable' community-led development that puts participation and empowerment at its stake. Development Backgrounder (2006), on the other hand, sees the objectives of any participatory development initiatives as cynicism by highlighting the urgency to actively engage the people in all stages of development activities.

Conceivably, it challenges our simple receipt of weather all NGOs, as actors of development, could quickly create the required environment for inclusive development.

Based on the consciousness that empowering the people for self-reliant development needs time to occur, THP-E developed epicenter strategy. This time frame gives enough time for an epicenter community to build up its confidence and become an active leader in unlocking its local capacity for development. The strategy is implemented in four phases and THP-E puts innovation at the heart of its work. It also firmly believes that empowering women as key change agents is an essential element to self-reliance development. Meskan epicenter is presently in the last phase of project implementation.

4.1.1 Phase One: Community Mobilization

People's agency is the underlying principle that guides THP-E's work. They perceive people as extraordinary, creative, and hardworking with entrepreneurial spirit. This perception is apparently reflected in most of THP-E's activities, which is dedicated to mobilizing the local community and engaging them to participate in intensive Vision, Commitment and Action (VCA) workshops to plan their own version of a better future. During this workshop, the local community identifies its own development needs and priorities, resources, and solutions in such a way that the community exercises its power and decision making. For this reason, THP-E limits its support only to a minimal financial, expertise, and supervisory assistance, and all are designed to boost the community's own effort to fight against their problems.

During the first workshops, the epicenter's general assembly (made up of all community members, local government officials, and other civil society organizations) is formed. Various committee members are also elected by the community to oversee each programme component, as initiated by the people themselves, undertaken at the epicenter. Moreover, the epicenter's general committee, composed of six men and six women, will be elected to follow up the regular operation of the epicenter. Based on the number of projects, additional sub-committees will also be formed. THP-E also recruits the most committed and motivated people from the community to become volunteer leaders, called "animators." Throughout the rest of the workshops, new members of the community are engaged replacing the older ones, developmental visions and goals of the local community is further advanced, and new openings for action are identified. This process, apart from ensuring local ownership of development, builds solidarity beyond the traditional community borders and fosters open and transparent local leadership among the communities (THP, 2017).

4.1.2 Phase Two: 'Tipping Point'

The active participation of the people continues in the second phase, i.e., the physical construction of the epicenter building. During this time, all the epicenter committee members play key roles by mobilizing voluntary labours to pull together the materials (stones, sand), clear the ground, produce bricks and begin erecting the foundation. Whereas, THP-E hires an experienced local contractor to train the community members on how to construct the epicenter. The people instigate to work together across village lines, constructing the facilities, brick-by-brick. The building becomes a triumph of self- reliance, unity, and partnership.

Figure 2. A sketch of the L-shaped epicenter building

(Source: THP, 2017)

Apart from its everyday functions, some informants indicate that the epicenter has various social significances. *For instance,* Mr. Reda stated that an epicenter is a place where development harmonization takes place.

> *The epicenter serves as a place of harmonizing the community's development works, national development plans, and global agendas for sustainable development. It also serves as a place where indigenous knowledge and skills, resources, and capabilities are integrated into THP-E's resources, expertizes, and strategies towards a common end.*

"I see the epicenter as a sign of *unity,*" says Gashaw, a government representative from the Office of Meskan Woreda Farmers and Cooperative Association.

> *We all come together and act as one body towards development. I see the epicenter as a sign of unity. The active role of the people in the construction of the epicenter affirms a shared commitment and action at all levels.*

For Tsehay, a female animator, the epicenter represents a hope for local democracy and

freedom. She explains,

> *[…] we foster and practice participatory local democracy, in which we take direct action to meet our basic needs. It is a lesson for the local government that its decision-making should be moved as close to us as possible.*

Apart from its primary purposes, as has been indicated above, the epicenter serves different purposes and has valuable social significances that bind the local community together with a shared vision and commitments to their development. It serves as a place of social interactions where various groups of people come together to discuss, create and incubate sustainable options to local development. From its strategic approach to community mobilization, also from its programmatic contents, It can presumably be argued that THP-E has both the resources and required mind-set, on the parts of the local community, to the realization of its organizational objectives. Moreover, it is vivid from the field observation of both Meskan and Wurib epicenters, as has also been noted by Mr. Belay during the in-depth interview, that THP-E plays a canalizing role to empower the local people by inspiring, facilitating or contributing to improved thinking and action that leads to transformation. The part that most second-generation NGOs shoulder according to Lewis (2010: 1057).

4.1.3   Phase Three: Implementation and Progress on all Fronts

THP-E values the significance of community-initiated development projects. To this effect, during the first VCA workshops, participants will be asked to set their own development priorities and develop specific action plans to be achieved independently in a specified time with their own initiatives, skills, and resources. After the construction of epicenter, the community thoroughly commences on operating its own development programmes and viable progress at all fronts will start to occur. Based on the needs and priorities of the community members, THP-E organizes the epicenter's activities into specified programmatic areas (See Appendix 3).

4.1.4   Phase Four: Self Reliance

THP-E has a unique exit strategy. This is the last phase at which it starts to withdraw its financial and other support from the epicenter. But it continues to monitor the epicenter's progress for two additional years until they assure that the community is ready enough to own and run its own epicenter. For an epicenter to be graduated as a self-reliant, its leaders and the epicenter community must prove themselves as partner for development, that its internal revenue sustains its programme activities, and its leadership structures show a promise to future

growth. Moreover, THP-E has its own checklist of indicators to be verified when determining if an epicenter can progress to self-reliance.

THP-E's VCA worships, which is crucial in transmuting the culture of dependency, resignation, despair and discrimination against women, shows THP-E firm belief in the agency of the epicenter community. Its consideration of the people as *partners* rather than *objects* of their work underlines that people are storehouses of development knowledge and practices. VCA workshops create conducive platforms for joint planning where all stakeholders at the local level come to discuss their future fate. It can mainly serve as a tool for the epicenter community to make its voices heard, its basic needs met, and get access to the decision making. During a conversation with Mr. Belay, Development Expert in THP-E, regarding THP-E's approach to mobilization, he stated that THP-E is working to transform the existing society. What is significantly needed, according to him, is an approach that focuses on the existing resources and competencies to generate commitment and actions at the individual and community level. He further underlines the need for continuous VCA workshops throughout the four phases to guarantee successful mobilization of the local community for self-reliance. Mr. Reda, a field officer of THP-E, adds to this discussion that the most challenging aspect of THP-E's work is changing the prevailing mindset of the local community and pull their status out from expectants and dependents of aid works to being actors and partners of their own development. According to him, this is the reason why THP-E's community mobilization process is broad and often tiresome. It includes mobilizing a whole range of groups including the local people, religious and political leaders, partner NGOs and governmental organizations to a common end. Presently, the committee leaders of Meskan epincetr are preparing themselves to take over some of the managerial tasks from THP-E. By the beginnings of 2018, they will start to manage the entire activities of the epicenter. In the meantime, THP-E has already begun to withdraw its financial, material and human resource support out from the epicneter.

4.2 The Three Pillars of the Epicenter Strategy

THP-E claims that while the local community takes the full responsibility in setting up its own needs and priorities, resources and solutions based on their local challenges and opportunities, it is vital that all programmes tend to bring changes both at the individual and community level. Therefore, THP-E encourages the local community, through VCAs workshops, to openly discuss the causes of their social problems, both at the personal and institutional level, and to come up with a comprehensive solution to tackle those constraints. In this process, THP (2017)

believes that the community should be transformed into a state of self-sustainability and this can happen when the community is

> *organized, when individuals take responsibility for their own development, when women [and men] are equal participants in political, economic and social activities, and when local governments are accountable.*

To this effect, THP-E systematically cascades its three pillars to ensure fundamental social transformation and are described as follows.

4.2.1 Start by Empowering Women as Key Change Agents

THP greatly values people as "extraordinary" and believes that investing on them enhances their agencies for their own development (ibid.). THP-E does also recognize that most hungry people are "small-scale" food farmers living in remote rural areas, where women dominate much of the poor or vulnerable groups. These women lack access to sufficient nutritious food. They live in societies that are shaped by some general patriarchal structures, where they cannot access the full ranges of basic human needs, further leaving them in a state of resignation and powerlessness (ibid.). Without women, THP-E believes that society-wide change is unattainable. Therefore, ending hunger in all its dimensions also requires challenging the existing gender structure that leads to the subjugation of women. Despite the difference between societies, THP-E holds the assumption that women bear much of the household burdens for meeting the basic needs of their family. Despite their roles, they have less access to resources, information and freedom to fulfil their assignments. This makes them to be the first to suffer from different social problems, including malnutrition, illiteracy, HIV/AIDS and other.

When women are deprived of their rights, THP-E remarks, their family, especially children, and the society will be ill. And when they are supported and enabled, the whole society benefits (THP, 2017(a)). Therefore, they are empowered mainly through participatory local development initiatives, as key agents of development; it moves the community a step forward in achieving its self-reliance. THP-E reported that in the third quarter of the year 2016, it successfully trained 230 (148 women) members at Meskan epicenter. The training included on the main causes for the perseverance of gender disparity and the required actions needed to reduce inequality. THP-E's claims that the success of its empowerment scheme can be confirmed from the improved status of women both in their household and public sphere; resulting from their amplified participation in the leadership ladder of the epicenter, Income Generating Activities (IGAs), HIV/AIDS, and Gender Inequality Workshops, etc. Regarding

the relevance of THP-E's training and workshops, W/ro Tsehay, a female animator in Meskan epicenter, describes, by emphasizing on the significance of participation

> *Mostly, we prepare training and workshops in collaboration with government bodies. We strongly encourage women [also men] to attend these events since it creates an environment for them to openly discuss their problems and search for solutions together with government leaders.*

Teshale, a male animator in Meskan epicner, on the other hand, recalls the contents of the training they provide to the local community in collaboration with the local government officers. He said that during the training they discuss practical steps needed to reduce gender inequality and other constraints that hinder the people from achieving development. Thus far, he adds, they have been lobbying the local government to take appropriate measures such as creating opportunities and access for women by investing on public infrastructures, eliminating inequality in employment, increasing women's representation in government and community level associations, and reducing violence against women and girls.

4.2.2   Mobilizing People at the Grassroots Level to Build their Self-reliance

According to THP-E, the solution to a self-reliant development is found in the hands of every hungry person: given the right attention forwarded to them, each has the right and potentiality to be the author of their own development. Based on such assumption, the role of THP-E is, therefore, to catalyse development activities by emancipating the people to take actions to meet their own basic needs. In doing so, THP-E avoids the "B" word, i.e., beneficiaries, from its vocabulary of development; instead, it considers them as partners and agents of development. Having taken this idea into its consideration, THP-E has the confidence that social change can happen by empowering the rural communities to take charge of their own development in all frontiers.

THP-E also claims that individuals, households, and villages are the nucleus of change. A successful social change that takes place in these cores tends to diffuse to other areas. At the epicenter level, THP-E mobilizes the entire community for self-reliance activities. The objectives of these mobilization processes can be understood in three ways. First, to enhance the personal and collective agency of the local community. One of the possible ways is through intensive training sessions on various topics given under the VCA workshops. Speaking of the nature of the training that THP-E provides to the local community, Mr. Belay, Development Expert in THP-E, explains,

When we design training, we keep in mind that the local people have valuable knowledge, experience, skills, and tools. What we only do is just to show and guide them on how to put these knowledge, experience, skills, and tools together for a commonly defined development goals. In this sense, our role is only limited to catalyzing local development activities.

Second, at the heart of the epicenter strategy is also their ambitious objective of changing who the people think they are, both as an individual and as a community. This requires a great deal of effort to overcome the deep feelings of resignation that people in the epicenter. W/ro Nibret, a higher official of THP-E, explained to me during a personal conversation in her office, that once the people get out of such a feeling of dependency, this means that they will start look at their own capabilities and local resources to fight against their problems. Third, community mobilization is also the safest means to challenge some structural constraints that undermine people's self-reliance. For example, THP deems that some social conditions such as armed conflict, corruption, inequality, and the subjugation of women have their roots in the existing universal patriarchal mindset. This requires a fundamental transformation in how society is organized.

4.2.3 Fostering Effective Partnership and Engagement of the Local Government

In African countries, particularly in Ethiopia, NGOs and state relations are described as problematic (Campbell, 1996:1). Literature also reveals that attaining a significant social change was hardly possible in Africa due to maladministration. In the case of Ethiopia, Campbell states, there has been a blocked cooperation between NGOs and the state before the transition period, i.e., 1991. It was only after this time that the proliferation of operational NGOs took place. Although this period was hope for a new kind of NGOs-state relation, it was not possible to say that co-operation, in a real sense, took place. Instead, it was characterized by uncertainty and mutual suspicion.

THP-E and its relationship with the state can be understood as a growing mutual desire between the Ethiopian government's political decentralization processes and the THP-E's urge to engage the local government in its strategy. When it comes to THP-E's theory of social change, it emphasizes that ending hunger is also as much about changing the existing top-down, authority-based leadership to the one that is closer to the needs of the people. This is also a step forward for the community to share the power to exercise and own their own local development processes. In the field of community mobilization and local development, THP-E longs for active collaboration of the local governmental bodies. The reason is to bring local governments

closer to the people. This refers transformative leadership or leadership 'with' people that recognize people's agency as co-actors of development. Udo claims that the active involvement of local governments in NGOs' work has a two-folded significance. First and for most, ensure the sustainability of the community's effort towards self-reliance; second, the government maintains its sovereignty by ensuring the "transparency and accountability" of all actors involved (Udo, 2008: 381-383).

At every stage of the epicenter activities, representatives of the local government are expected to take part in various aspects to ensure the success of the epicenter. According to Reda, a field officer of THP-E, one of the initial steps for the local government to show its will is through its participation in the first National Advisory Councils workshops (NAC), which takes place at the first phase of the epicenter. This workshop, apart from conducting community planning, is also aimed to further the alliance between the people and all other development stakeholders, including the local government. Based on needs and priorities of the community, each stakeholder shares different responsibilities for the success of the strategy. More practically as well, the local government starts by donating land for the construction of the epicenter. Moreover, based on the needs of the community, it also provides nurses, teachers and trainers, and supplies for the preschool and health clinic. THP-E also recognizes that its highest leverage actions can be realized through its flexible cooperation with the local government that helps them to assess their impacts within the dynamic social, political, economic and environmental settings.

4.3   Self-Reliance

As is true for all development initiatives undertaken by various development organizations, businesses, NGOs and governmental organization, the question of sustainability is also central to THP-E's interventions. It orients its works around sustainable development by reinforcing a unique culture of self-determination and economic viability, where the local resources, knowledge, and skills are mobilized in such a way that the community and local governments take charge of their own development processes. By fostering community-initiated local development programmes, THP-E promotes a self-reliant community. THP-E also notes that self-reliant community is not the one whose every single need is fulfilled, but who has enhanced abilities and willingness to fight against any development challenges and is ready to meet its own basic needs (THP, 2016).

From a sustainability perspective, self-reliance is promoted as an alternative way of perceiving

the achievements of community-initiated development as a "wholesome lifestyles in a happy social environment within a healthy environment" (ibid: 4). Kim & Isma'il stated that self-reliant development does not mean absolute *autarky* (2013: 586). Although it highly depends on 'internal' resources, as it promotes the people to transform their own lives by relying on their own capabilities, with minimal or no 'external' support (ibid.). THP-E claims that the question for sustainability is deeply integrated within its theory of social change as implicated in its epicenter strategy. The central assertion is that self-reliance is achieved when "community members are confident and have the capacity and skills to act as agents of their own development" (THP, 2017). Throughout its empowerment and mobilization programmes, THP-E strongly emphasizes on the agency of the people. In this sense, the last phase of the epicenter strategy ensures that the community and local government take charge of their own development processes, and can, therefore, perpetuate and sustain it" (ibid.).

4.4 Challenges and Limitations of the Epicenter Strategy

THP-E has the desire to promote its strategy to the rest of the country. Aside from what has been previously discussed in this chapter, some factors can be understood as imperative that may guarantee the probability of rolling-out the strategy to other places. For instance, its openness to systematically harness the power of innovations into its work positively contributes to the efficiency of traditional knowledge and practices of the people. Moreover, THP-E has its project goals shared among the global community. This has opened the door for THP-E to participate in high-level forums and multi-stakeholders dialogue, and gain support from donor agencies, government leaders, non-governmental organizations, and civil society (THP-E, 2015 Report). Moreover, its years of experience and accumulated resources add to its capacity to launch its highest leverage in other areas.

Despite the progressive prospects, the epicenter development strategy is not without limitations. Putting the three prominent development actors in the forefront of the epicenter strategy, including THP-E, the local people, and the local government, the following section discusses the possible and perceived challenges and limitations that undermine the adeptness of the epicenter strategy.

The 2009 Charities and Societies Legislation: Campbell (1996, 17) characterizes NGO-state co-operation in Ethiopia as blockages. Although the local government show the desire to decentralize its power and, to some extent, engage itself in THP-E's empowerment programm, its Charities and Societies Legislation remains as one of the most controversial NGO laws in

the world. The law affects the works of THP-E and all other NGOs in the country in two ways; first, it prohibited NGOs from engaging in human rights and advocacy activities. This has a devastating effect in narrowing the scope of THP-E's work as it is forced to ignore human right issues from its organizational mission. Moreover, the law exacerbates fear in the everyday activities of Meskan epicenter as most of the development issues such as equality of people, gender and religion are politicized in the country (Amnesty International, July 2012). Second, in its article 90 of the Charities and Societies Proclamation (No. 621/2009), the government determines that "any charity or society shall not allocate less than 70 per cent of the expenses in the budget year for the implementation of its purposes and an amount not exceeding 30 per cent for its administrative activities". Many NGOs have reported this enactment as a challenge to their works. In the same way, THP-E is also being challenged by this law since it makes it impossible to work in collaboration with the other NGOs as it raises the administrative cost.

Political Instability in the country: the political condition in Ethiopia is characterized as unstable. The government does likewise admit that interrelated factors such as mal-administration, rent-seeking, and failure of mega-projects have contributed to the worsening of the situation (G/tensae, 2016). It has now become very common in the country that people raise questions of political freedom and equality. However, the existing political landscape of the nation distinctively shows narrow space for citizen's participation. For instance, the ongoing protest by ethnic Oromo population in many towns and villages across Oromia is affecting THP-E's work in the region. The rally had greatly interrupted the THP-E activities at Jaldu Epicenter (is currently closed due to the protest) when individuals from the furious dissidents of the angry protesters broke into the epicenter and destructed facilities located in the compound. A similar situation has also taken place, without decimation of properties, in Amhara region at Matchakel Epicenter, which has even interrupted the epicenter's activities.

Poor Understanding of the Cultural Dynamics of the People: according to Cooke & Kothari, this is also one of the leading drawbacks of participatory approach (2001:13). THP-E commenced its work in the country with its perception that gender inequality and top-down decision making as the prominent developmental constraints. Its grassroots, women-centered strategy, as has been described in the above sections, indicate that THP-E methodologically overlooks another, rather crucial, factors in its discourse of development among the Gurage people. While the listing could be many, it is worth mentioning three factors, including migration trends, extreme sex-centered ritual cults, and the presence of voluntary self-help groups, whose potential impacts have been perceived throughout the works of the epicenter.

Starting from migration trends, the Gurage people are historically described as mobile and mainly migrate to main cities such as Addis Ababa (Nida, 2000: 48). According to Nida, an interplay of both internal and external structural factors, including the failure of agricultural productivity, shortage of arable land, and unemployment, have contributed to the wide-spread migration (ibid.). Along with '*Enset*' (false banana), mobility constitutes the central discourses of development among the Gurage people. For instance, Menuta (2014: 39), in his recent study of '*Discourses of Development in Gurage Proverbs*' indicated that there is a positive correlation between "being entrepreneur and mobile" amongst the Gurage community. The potential danger of ignoring the discourse of migration from THP-E's theory of social change might be predicted as it loses significant human resources during its programmatic implementation.

Second, according to the third faith of the Gurage people, the masculine and feminine ritual domains determine the character and roles of both sexes. Men are associated with Sky God with their role as custodians whereas women are Guardian Spirit with their corresponding roles (Shack 1966 in Legesse, 1966: 22). In relation to gender and power, Menuta (2014:39) revealed that the proverbs of Gurage people exhort that men are "powerful and have upper hand in economic and social affairs." THP-E misses this meta-level worldview, which creates a sharp division of gender roles, power, and status among the people. Instead, its work is driven by its perceptions of universal patriarchal structures as the primary cause that left women to be vulnerable groups. It might also limit THP-E from addressing the structural causes of gender disparity among the people beyond the issues of access to resources, information, and freedom.

Lastly, in none of the epicenter's activities, has THP-E shown its interest to work with voluntary self-help groups among Meskan community. Nor does it demonstrate any knowledge of the relevance of the agency of voluntary self-help groups for the success of its strategic implementation. For instance, a study in relation to the informal and semi-formal financial and social associations in Ethiopia indicates that *iqqub*, *iddir*, *debo*, and savings and credit co-operatives are efficient, yet hidden, components of Ethiopian economy (Aredo, 1993: 59). For generations, such self-help groups and networks have been playing crucial roles by providing the means for an individual or collective self-reliance (Clark, 2000:7). Among the Gurage people too, self-help groups and networks are widespread, and history indicates that the first practice of iqqub in Ethiopia was introduced by a clergyman from the Gurage ethnic group (Aredo, 1993: 17). *Iddir* development is also believed to spread to the neighbouring towns by Gurage migrants in the 20th century (Léonard, 2013: 7). The potentials of self-help groups for

THP-E's work can be understood as, according to some observers, a logical starting point for its work or as its counterparts (Clark, 2000: 7).

Other Vulnerabilities: the epicenter development strategy, as Mr. Belay, Development Expert in THP-E, remarked during the in-depth interview, functions in complementarity with the existing rural livelihoods. According to DFID, all livelihoods function within a broader vulnerability contexts such as scarcity of resources, natural or economic shocks, and seasonality of prices or employment opportunities (DFID, 1999). Ethiopia is classified as one of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa most vulnerable to a rising trend of natural disasters (Bhavnani, 2008: 1). The Gurage zone is not also an exception. For instance, the recent crisis associated with flood emergency and landslides in Wurib epicenter, one of the three epicenters located in the Gurage zone, have interrupted the epicenter's activities. Besides, THP-E has been compelled to redirect its programme costs to relief interventions and disaster response, which also undermined its work in Meskan epicenter.

Summary

This chapter started its presentation with the UN's general call for a new approach to sustainably end global hunger and with THP's firm position that its epicenter development strategy could lead to such development. The chapter has attempted to answer the first two research questions and found that THP-E has a unique means of empowering the people for self-reliance. Its philosophy of social change starts from its belief that all people are inherently extraordinary and, if supported through a well-designed empowerment programm, can attain self-reliant development. Its empowerment programme is described as extensive and is implemented in four phases. THP-E considers the local community, women, and the government as fundamental pillars of its work. In relation to the sustainability of THP-E's work, the chapter has shown THP-E's notion of self-reliance as a measure of its long-term development outcome in the lives of the local people. Lastly, the chapter has revealed the main challenges and limitations of the epicenter strategy.

5 Participation and Empowerment of People at Meskan Epicenter

Empowerment, in this study, implies both the level of power that one needs to *possess* to exert over people and resources, and the *exercise* of it (Rai, 2007: 2). The enabling structural context, within the milieu of local development, is also considered relevant for exercising power to the realization of personal and collective transformation. Thus, the study claims that the success of an empowerment programme is predictable from its contribution to enhancing the individual and collective agencies of the people to make choices and turn them into useful actions for long-term societal changes. If we also differentiate empowerment as a '*process'* and 'a *state of being,'* following World Bank's footsteps (2007: viii), the previous chapter was dedicated to describing THP-E's processes of empowerment. This chapter extends the discussion and attempts to examine the extent to which THP-E's has succeeded in participating and empowering the people for self-reliant development?

5.1 Agency of the People in THP-E's Work

This ideology of participation seems coherent with THP-E's theory of social change and development approach, as it calls for a new kind of leadership that awakens the people to their own power. This represents participation as, an approach, ideology, or a specific ethos for community development. But as a method or a set of guidelines and practices, like the epicenter strategy, it involves transforming the existing individual and institutional constraints for self-reliant development (Buchy & Hoverman, 2000: 10). Its locus of transformation must also go beyond the local and involve multiscale strategies that encompass regional and national features (Hichey et al., 2004: 12).

Measuring the success of participatory programmes is hardly possible, to a lesser extent, our judgment depends on our designation of what "success" must entail and the drive for initiating participatory programmes at the beginning (Kulözü, 2016: 88). When it comes to the ultimate objective of the epicenter strategy, THP-E states, is "to awaken the people to their own power," and is to be implied by the capabilities of the local people to initiate and take charge of self-reliant actions to improve their own personal and collective lives.

During a discussion with Mr. Belay, Development Expert in THP-E, regarding the success of THP-E's community mobilization programmes, he stated that THP-E has been able to mobilize more than 20, 000 people across four sub-villages, under Meskan epicenter, including Dobi, Meqicho, Degagogot and Goyban. According to him, the various VCA workshops, often continuous and periodic throughout the four phases, have been crucial tools in motivating the

local people to participate them in the programme. Mr. Reda, a filed officer in THP-E, also explains how the local people's previous attitudes towards NGOs, had left them to be aid expectant. This, according to him, has made THP-E's mobilization programmes as a painstaking process.

All factors included on both excerpts, by Mr. Belay and Mr. Reda, could be considered as indicators of the effectiveness of THP-E's participatory programme when participating the local people in its epicenter's programme is taken as an end. But understanding the epicenter development strategy to community empowerment for self-reliant development, as is also stated in THP-E's mission statement, needs an attempt to establish causal relationships between THP-E's empowerment works with actual changes in the lives of the local people. In doing so, this study identifies three themes of responses from in-depth interviews with participants. I will first start by presenting the attitude the people towards THP-E and its works. It is followed by a brief discussion on their perception about the need to participate in THP-E's empowerment programmes; and lastly, a discussion on the role of community action planning in empowering the people will be presented.

5.1.1 Attitudes of the People towards THP-E

During the in-depth interviews, all participants from Meskan epicenter members expressed positive attitudes toward THP-E and its work in their village. According to some informants, it was only after the arrival of THP-E that they started to realize their own potentials to fight poverty in their localities with their own local resources. For instance, Kidane, a male farmer in-depth interview participant, memorizes his excitement after he came to know about THP-E during the first VCA workshops. He explains it,

> *When Tadewos [a fellow member of the epicenter] first told me about the meeting [VCA workshop], I did not give it my attention. He just envied me to go and attend with him. After the meeting, I cannot tell you how happy I was. I asked myself, for how long I must continue living this life? I then decided to be a member of the epicent.*

W/ro Almaz, a female in-depth interview participant, on the other hand, describes how the active participation of her friends, during the construction of the epicenter building motivated her to participate. She says,

> *During the construction of the epicenter, we have shown our unity and commitments. After I saw everyone joining during the construction, by preparing brick and clearing the ground for the construction, it motivated me*

to participate. I then partook by fetching water and making food for my friends (who were working on the construction).

5.1.2   Perceptions of the People on the Need to Participate in THP-E's Programmes

A successful participatory approach is not only about changing the mindset of the local people although it is one of the main, yet challenging, starting point for success. Naraya-Parker stated that empowerment might involve two results: i.e., empowerment for inclusion and empowerment to enhance the capabilities of the people to self-reliance (2002: 15). To this effect, the epicenter strategy is expected to create an inclusive environment for the local community to mobilize their own resources, knowledge, and skills, and take charge of their own development processes. For instance, Development Backgrounders highlighted that a successful participatory approach must foster an appropriate environment for the people to participate "in the formulation of strategies and development policies and the selection of programmes, and in their monitoring and assessment" (2006: 5). In this regard, the various VCA workshops and training that THP-E provides to the people are also expected to serve as platforms for community-led strategic planning where all development stakeholders come together to discuss their future fate. It is mainly a tool designed for them to ensure that their voices are heard, their basic needs are met, and access to the decision making is granted.

During the in-depth interviews with participants, all informants expressed a positive view on the need to participate in the THP-E's work. However, a considerable number of the informants also mentioned that they do not regularly engage in every activity at the epicenter. Each of these informants explained different reasons for not being able to continually participate in all epicneter activities. For instance, Ato Kidane and Ato Assefa, both farmers and members of Meskan epicenter, said that they usually undertake their farming activities in the morning time and they are unable to avail themselves during that time for any workshops or events at the epicenter compound. W/ro Shewa, a mother of four, also explains her reasons,

> *Although I want to participate like everyone, my household responsibilities won't allow me to frequently come to the epicenter. What am I supposed to do with my children? But God bless the animators; they usually come to my house to give me different life skill training. Whenever there is a meeting for the general assembly or special training, I will come.*

During an in-depth interview with one of the male participants, Ato Teshale, who is an Income Generating Scheme animator, in Meskan epicenter expressed his feelings about the need to participate in the epicenter's programmes. He noted that many people in his village lack

appropriate training on how to diversify their income sources. Participating in the epicenter's programmes, according to him, would have many benefits for the people. In addition to the personal reasons, he goes on to remark that most of the epicenter members are reluctant to come to the epicenter to attend the training. This situation forces them to prepare home based training on issues such as "gender and decision making", "harmful traditional practices", and "property ownership of women". Tsehay, a female animator, on the other hand, explains her opinion regarding the intention of some of the epicenter members in attending on training and workshops. She says,

> *When experts from the head office [referring, trainers sent by THP-E's head office] come to give training, many members come to attend. Do you know why? The organization pays 25 Ethiopian birr (approximately USD1) for participating. You know, it is difficult for our job. Whenever we prepare training, only a few of them come. It is also the reason why we should visit members at their houses.*

The role of animators (local volunteers), is crucial in changing the attitude of the people and motivating them to participate in the epicenter's activities. Women are highly encouraged to become animators. At Meskan epicenter alone, there are 34 (22 women) animators who are trained on different issues. Each epicenter programme has 3 (2 women) animators. In addition, the epicenter has 12 (8 women) general animators who assist the overall epicenter activities. Each year, THP-E invests lots of its resources in capacitating animators in different areas of life. All training is specifically designed for animators to facilitate regular activities in the respective epicenter programmes. Apart from facilitating training, animators also serve as links between members, especially for those members who are unable to participate in the regular activities of the epicenter, and decision making at the epicenter (THP-E, 2016: 2).

5.1.3 Community Action Planning and Empowerment

During the first VCA workshops, the community and all other relevant development actors were brought together for community action planning. During these workshops, the community was encouraged to set forth its development priorities. With its provision of financial and expertise support to the community, THP-E claims that it has achieved transformations both at the individual and community level.

Despite what THP-E claims, Jemal, a male in-depth interview participant from the epicenter community, stresses the infrastructural challenges that the people in his village continue to live through. He explained to me that during the first initiation of the epicenter project at his village,

THP-E promised them that it would provide them with electricity and help them to construct a road that links their village with Butajira. However, he remarked that they had not yet gotten any of them. He goes on to explain that even though they continue to live with the same challenges, the local government doesn't seem to give attention to it. He says,

> *I do not want to be disloyal to what THP-E has done for us so far. But, at the beginning of the project, we stated that our village lacks infrastructures such as road and electricity. During the community action planning, they told us that together they would help us with that. We were expecting the government to do something about it, but we have not still received any answers.*

Tsehay, a female animator, describes how the absence of roads between each kebeles has made her job very tedious,

> *Each day, I must travel between four Kebeles to meet the people. I, however, spend much of my time by walking long distances between each neighbourhood. Therefore, it is difficult for us to address all epicenter communities through the training and programmes.*

Despite the high effort that THP-E claims put forward to change the lives of the people at Meskan epicenter, it was also common to hear from the local people that migrating to main cities within and out of the country, and mostly to Middle Eastern countries, is another option to change their lives. THP-E has also reported that among the epicenters located in southern Ethiopia, large-scale migration of women to Middle Eastern countries has been a common challenge for their work (THP-E, 2013:2).

Yasin, a young in-depth interview participant, a college graduate who made several failed attempts to fly out from the country to the Middle East, describes the experiences of young people in his community. According to him, all his friends and the young people in his community aspire to migrate to the cities or Middle Eastern countries to make a living. He further explains by highlighting poverty and unemployment as main driving factors that push them to leave their villages. He keeps explaining,

> *Even if you finish your college studies, it is less likely for you to find a job here. I spent two years as jobless. Unless you have got a farmland from your family to plant chat, there is no way for you to make a living. [...] Migrating to Addis Abeba (the country's capital) or one of the Arab countries will be the only option that you should do.*

Concerning the epicenter's work, Yasin expressed his future hope, as an educated young epicenter member, to get a job at THP-E's head office. In a study on migration in southern

Ethiopia, Regassa & Yusufe (2008:132) revealed that majority of the young people, who migrate to other urban areas and out of the country, are driven by high level of employment. Moreover, they described the gender differentials of migration by showing that more women migrate than their men counterparts. Aysha, a female in-depth interview participant, who was once a member of Meskan epicenter for three years before she left the country in 2011 and returned after four years of stay to get married to a man from her village. Upon her return in 2015, she re-joined the epicenter membership.

> *I was only 19 when I decided to go to Saudi Arabia. My family was poor. After I finished my elementary school, they could not afford to send me to a high school. It was the only option I had. I then contacted my cousin who lives[ed] in Addis Ababa and talked to her that I wanted to go to Saudi Arabia. Together with her, I processed my visa and travel.*

Ato Assefa, a farmer and member of Meskan epicenter, is thankful of the THP-E's expertise support in improving his agricultural practices. According to him, integrating the advice and training given by THP-E's field officers and the epicenter animators has raised his agricultural production. W/ro Fate, a mother of four, in-depth interview participant, on the other hand, points out the different benefits she gained from the epicenter's 'Water, Sanitation and Hygiene' (WASH) programme. According to her, the programme has changed her family's health status and access to safe drinking water. She explains,

> *After we discussed our problems in relation to access to safe drinking water, THP-E helped us to build a water point near the epicenter compound, which is also near to my house. I am now thankful that I do not have to travel too far to fetch water. During the training, I have also acquired skills on how to keep water sanitized for drinking, personal hygiene and keeping child environment clean and safe, and it has dramatically reduced the prevalence of water-related diseases in my family.*

In its Second Quarter Performance Report of Meskan Epicenter (THP, 2016: 2), THP-E reported that it provided continuous training for farmers to improve their farming practices. During that period, THP-E provided training for 200 farmers from Meskan epicenter. The training included basic techniques and skills on banana suckers planting and management, also covered issues such as climatic requirements, size of the hole, the age and size of suckers appropriate for planting, spacing, weed management, and composting. At the end of the training, each farmer was provided with suckers to plant them in their farmlands (ibid: 3).

For the same year, THP-E had been expecting the epicenter community to stock 556 kg of grain in the epicenter's food bank. Field observation also proved that the food bank was instead filled with agricultural fertilizer to be distributed to the people. According to Mr. Reda, the main reasons were inadequate communal land in the epicenter to grow crops. Moreover, he adds that enough attention has not been given to Meskan epicenter due to the occurrence of the unexpected flood at Wurib epicenter which forced THP-E to divert all its attention to emergency relief works for the people attacked by the floods (ibid.).

In an attempt to understand the local community's view concerning the significance of community action planning, most of my informants were less open and hardly give a direct response during the interview. This increases my doubt to come up with a clear account regarding the role of Community Action Planning in transforming their lives. However, it is observable from the excerpts of the informants that irrespective of the programmes being implemented under the epicenter, the community continues to live under straining economic and infrastructural conditions. Whenever this does not imply disbelief in the effectiveness of community action planning, it certainly shows the mounting demand of the people for external support.

5.2 Representation of Women within the Epicenter Community

THP-E fundamentally puts issues of gender inequality as one of the cross-cutting issues throughout its empowerment programmes. With the following statement, THP discloses the situations of poor women by stating that

> (t)wo-thirds of the world's illiterate population are female. Of the millions of school-age children not in school, the majority are girls. And today, HIV/AIDS is rapidly becoming a woman's disease. Women comprise nearly 60 per cent of all people living with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa (THP (a), 2017).

THP-E thinks that reducing gender inequality by supporting and empowering women, contributes to significantly drop the number of people who live in absolute poverty. It also claims that empowering women creates a resilient community situation where families are healthier, and children go to school, agricultural productivity is improved and family incomes increase (THP, 2017).

Ato Reda, a field officer of THP-E, noted, many also agree, that there is an observable gender difference among the Meskan communities. It was also the main reason why THP-E created VCA workshops as a platform to encourage women to take part in the community action

planning sessions actively. According to W/ro Nibret, a higher official of THP-E, VCA platforms create an ideal space for all development stakeholders, particularly for women, to actively participate in the social, political, economic and cultural sphere of their lives. The community action planning sessions serve as main tools for women to discuss both on personal and cultural-institutional restraints that left them chained from actively participating in all matter that affects their lives.

At the epicenter level, women are highly represented in the leadership ladder. For instance, of all 34 epicenter animators, 22 are women. Of the 252 members of Metebaber Epicenter Farmers Multi-purpose Cooperative, 156 are women. Metebaber Farmers' Cooperative is a rural saving and credit cooperative (RUSACCo), established by the epicenter community. It primarily gives services such as loan disbursement, the collection of repayments and savings for its members. Currently, it has 222 members and is solely lead by women.

On the women's side, W/ro Shewa and W/ro Fate, both are members of Meskan epicenter, are the perfect representatives of the situation of women among Meskan epicenter communities. W/ro Tsehay, a female animator in Meskan epicenter, best describes the state of most women as, "despite their wish, most of them are unable to participate in the epicenter's activities actively. The primary factor that hinders the full participation of women on the epicenter's activities is, as is depicted from the experience of W/ro Shewa and W/ro Fate, family responsibilities that women shoulder at home.

During my first field visit to the Meskan epicenter, on a training event, I happened to observe that most women participants arrive at a reasonable time later after their male counterparts. It was very common in such occasions to see that women come to the epicenter carrying their babies on their back, especially underage children. On the contrary, male members of the epicenter seem to enjoy the freedom to avail themselves of the event before the actual training time. It is also well observed that they carry *chat* inside their pockets, which they call it "*ye Jebena*" to chew during the training sessions or share it with other fellow epicenter members. During an informal conversation with one of the chat chewing group in the epicenter compound, just before the training started, one of them told me that they usually start chewing chat in the morning after they are done with their activities in the farm, and it often takes between 2-3 hours. They spend the remaining part of their day by some leisure time activities, most favourably by chewing chat.

Fate, a mother of four, describes the nature of gender roles in her community by differentiating her household responsibilities between herself and her husband. According to her, women should take care of the household activities while their husbands go out to the farmland. She explains,

> *In my community, a wise woman is the one who can take a good care of her household responsibilities. In the morning, when her husband works on the farm, she cleans the house, prepares coffee and breakfast. He will be happy. […] She also feeds her babies, fetches water. In the afternoon, she also takes care of the cattle by feeding them and cleaning barns.*

Gender inequality is widespread among the Gurage communities. For instance, in a recent study on the role of gender in livestock production in the Gurage Zone, Abeza et al. (2016: 26) indicated that there is a distinct gender division of activities related to livestock management. They confirmed that

> *tasks of breeding, marketing of animals, medication and barn construction are mainly performed by men. Women are typically engaged with activities related to their household activities and the safety and wellbeing of the livestock such as collecting dung, hygiene, caring calves, milking, processing, storing, marketing products and adding valves for livestock products which performed around [the] homestead.*

Although women are supported through different empowerment programmes and are given the opportunity to participate in the epicenter's leadership and other activities, it is impossible to say that full participation has been achieved. Their multiple household responsibilities limit their active engagement in the epicenter's community development activities. Even the case of Aysha's, and of other younger people in the southern Ethiopia, poverty and unemployment forces the young women to search for other means to support their families. Instead of investing their time with THP-E's initiatives, apart from having positive feelings, they search for a quick means of earning income, hence migrating to the Middle Eastern countries. Many studies, in relation to the working condition of women who migrate to Middle Eastern countries, indicate that Ethiopian immigrants in these countries mainly work as housemaids with minimum payments, which is proved to be not enough to change their financial situations.

5.3 Role of Local Government and Other Stakeholders

Asked to explain the roles and significances of the epicenter, both as a physical building and approach to community development, most of my informants replied that Meskan epicenter

creates favourable settings for the participation of all development actors in the area. For instance, Mr. Reda, a field officer of THP-E, replied that

> *The epicenter serves as a place of harmonization between community's development works, the national development plans, and the global development agendas for sustainable development. […] It also serves as a place where indigenous knowledge and skills, local resources and capabilities are integrated into THP-E's resources, staffs and expertizes, and strategies towards a common end.*

The epicenter is considered as, as the government representative from the Office of Meskan Woreda Farmers and Cooperative Association claimed, a sign of unity among all stakeholders at Meskan epicenter on their struggle against poverty, including the local governments. On top of this, W/ro Nibret, a higher official of THP-E, noted that THP-E recognizes the importance of partnership with all types of organizations and alliances. Throughout its works, THP-E has developed and maintained good collaboration with the government and different non-governmental organizations both at local and national level. Moreover, the VCA platforms at Meskan epicenter create and fosters an ideal space for all development stakeholders to come and discuss on the economic, political, social and cultural challenges that the community live in and to launch the highest leverage actions required to thwart those obstacles.

At Meskan *Woreda*, THP-E has accomplished various public awareness advocacies and empowerment programmes in collaboration with various active NGOs including Kinderpostzegels and Bioeconomy Africa (THP-E, 2015: 7). For instance, during THP-E's effort to fight against the prevalence of early marriage and harmful traditional practices among Meskan communities, Kinderpostzegels has been among the key implementing partners. Besides, THP-E has worked in collaboration with Bioeconomy Africa to introduce the epicenter community with Intensive BioSystem (IBS) components including vertical agriculture, square foot gardening, sack gardening, compost preparation, greenhouse and drip irrigation. It is conclusive from THP-E's experience that NGOs' cooperation in community development frontiers has the potential to contribute to the success of empowerment programmes and to avoid redundancy and fragmentation of development efforts.

It is argued in the literature that there are twofold benefits for government's collaboration with NGOs in development frontiers. First, partnership ensures the sustainability of development efforts, and second, it helps the government to secure its sovereign power by ensuring the "transparency and accountability" within and between all actors involved (Udo, 2008: 381-

383). This study has also proved that the local government bodies participate on various aspects for the success of THP-E's work at Meskan epicenter. They include Offices of Finance and Economic Development, Agriculture and Rural Development, Women and children's' Affairs and Water Resource Development. In relation to the kinds of supports that the local government offers to the epicenter's, this study addresses the question from two standpoints: (1) the contribution of the local government in enhancing the community's and THP-E's capabilities for the success of the project; and (2) investment in broadening the opportunity structure within the community (World Bank, 2007: viii).

An officer from the office of Meskan Woreda Farmers and Cooperative Association opens the discussion by highlighting the logic behind the strong desire on the parts of local governments to enhance the participation of the local communities and other stakeholders to attain sustainable development. He says,

> *we a have a strong desire to work closely with the community and other stakeholders at the grassroots level. Therefore, our decentralized power structures encourage active participation of the local communities to their own development. To this effect, we collaborate with organizations such as THP-E which works to empower the local people for their own development.*

During an interview with Mr. Reda, a field officer of THP-E, regarding the will and determination of the local government to collaborate with THP-E, he remarked that their commitment had been confirmed by their active presence during the National Advisory Councils (NACs) workshops and the subsequent VCA worships. THP-E has organized NACs both at the national and epicenter level. NAC is composed of representatives from different stakeholders who have years of experience in the development field including government officials, local communities, NGOs leaders, religious leaders, youth associations, investors, and others. During the VCA workshops, these stakeholders are brought together with local communities to openly discuss on the developmental issues of the local people and set forth all the possible solutions. During the community action planning, the stakeholders firmly encourage the local communities to initiate and set forth possible solutions to their problems; each stakeholder also assumes their respective responsibilities for the success of the project. The government claims that it to take the highest responsibility to assist the people with the needs and priorities set forth within the epicneter framework.

The Local government supports the people in a wide range of issues and include both material and non-material resources. W/ro Tsehay throwbacks her memories and describes the various

supports THP-E obtained from local government offices throughout its epicenter's work. According to her, these supports were necessary to broaden both the individual capabilities of epicenter communities and the physical assets of the epicenter.

> *The government donated us a plot of land to construct the epicenter buildings. During the third phase, we requested for more land for the epicenter's agricultural activities; we also got it. Whenever we needed help from experts, they have always been with us to organize training. Together, we were even able to undertake different community mobilization works.*

Apart from what W/ro Tsehay mentioned, the local government has also been providing both material and human resource for Meskan epicenter. Until recently, services at the epicenter's clinic were being given by nurses hired by a local government. Moreover, teachers who are still working at epicenter's nursery school are hired by Meskan Woreda Women and Children's Affairs. I had also the opportunity to co-facilitate a one-day training with an officer sent from Meskan Woreda Office of Farmers and Cooperative Association. The training was prepared on basic saving and credit issues for members of Metebaber Farmers' Cooperative at Meskan epicenter.

According to Yasin, a young in-depth interview participant, the government had to do something about the persisting poverty and unemployment which forces the young people to migrate to Middle Eastern countries.

> *You know, we are in a difficult life situation. We have no job, no income. That is why we go to other places. Our parents do whatsoever they could to send us to schools. Even if you finish your college studies, it is less likely for you to find a job here. Migrating to Addis Abeba [the country's capital] or one of the Arab countries will be the only option that you should do.*

Aysha also empathizes with Yasin by disclosing about her future. Before she got married, Aysha was forced by her family's poor living conditions to migrate to Sauda Arabia. After having been working there for four years' and helping her family, she returned home and got married. Aysha, is yet uncertain about what her future life situation will be with her newlywed husband. Leaving her membership to the Meskan epicenter aside and irrespective of the poor working conditions in the Middle Eastern countries, Aysha aspires to return to Saudi Arabia soon. On top of these problems, Jemal underlies that neither THP-E nor the local governments could provide them with basic infrastructural services including road and electricity. According to him, road and electricity are the two priorities that the community is currently longing for. He explains,

Among the long existing challenges of our community, the absence of roads and electricity service are the main. For years, we have been doing everything we could to put pressure on the responsible bodies, but nothing has been changed so far. When THP-E came here, we hoped that many things would be changed, but not yet! [...] We were expecting the government would do something about it, but they were still unable to give us any answers.

One of the essential lessons taken from this discussion, over the importance of engaging local governments, was that local governments' assistance to epicenter community was necessary to enhance the capacities THP-E to succeed in its project. This can be understood through what Clark referred "institutional capacity building" (2000: 9). As has been outlined in the above discussions, different governmental sectors have been actively engaged capacitating the communities at Meskan epicenter. Their support ranges from training and technical assistance to human and material resources. Institutional capacity includes "skills, knowledge, and authority," adding to them is also physical and human resources, of the epicenter to realize it's commonly defined developmental goals (ibid.).

Summary

This chapter looked at participation and empowerment of the people at the Meskan epicenter and attempted to establish a causal relationship between THP-E's empowerment programme and actual changes in the lives of the people. Concurrently, it has addressed the research question to what extent has THP-E's succeeded in participating and empowering the people for self-reliant development. Alongside, the chapter has looked at issues including the level of community's participation in the epicenter's programme, the status of women, and the role of the local government. Findings show that despite the efforts put together by THP-E, the epicenter community continues to live under straining personal and structural conditions, which undermine their power and agency and leave them far from being a self-reliant community. Moreover, findings also implied that the mounting demand of the people for external support has made the local government to take a decisive position in determining the fate of the epicenter.

6 Conclusion
6.1 The Epicenter Strategy: Implementation, Challenges and Limitations

The epicenter development strategy is a gender-focused, community-led approach to integrated rural development. It is designed to envisage both individual and structural changes. THP-E's work could best be understood through its firm promotion that the people must be responsible for setting up their own needs and priorities, resources and solutions based on their local challenges and opportunities, and bring a lasting change both at the individual and collective level. This unique philosophy to social change rests on its assumption that all people are inherently extraordinary and, if supported through its epicenter strategy, can transform themselves to a self-reliant community. This is the driving principle behind THP-E empowerment work in the country, and as has been described in chapter four it is extensive and is implemented in four phases. THP-E claims that empowering the local people, especially women, and engaging government bodies are fundamental pillars for its work. Its effort to create a sense of ownership, on the part of the local people and the government, and the various social significances of the epienter has the potential to glue all engaged development stakeholders together for achieving its organizational mission.

Speaking of structural changes, THP-E is way behind transforming the existing structural bottlenecks that undermined local development among the Meskan people. The study revealed some of the structural constraints that weakened both the individual and collective agency of the people and the methodological efficiency of the THP-E. Accordingly, it may be concluded that the epicenter development strategy shows lack of a deep understanding of the local context. Its blind perception of a universal patriarchal social structure, as the main cause for underdevelopment, has left its strategy to be challenged by the 2009 Charities and Societies Legislation of the country, the ongoing political instability, the cultural dynamics of the people, and additional vulnerabilities contexts. Despite these limitations, some of its institutional setups such as the animators, the VCA workshops, and the national advisory councils are playing crucial roles in creating an alternative space for the community's participation in matters affecting their lives. For instance, its notion of self-reliance development, through which THP-E promotes people's local resources, knowledge, and experiences show a better option to long-term development outcome. Moreover, the epicenter strategy's contribution in creating synergy among all local development actors is a plus to the quality of the strategy and shows its potential in guaranteeing inclusive development.

6.2   Empowerment and Participation without Dismantling the Existing Power Structures?

If the goal of the epicenter strategy is to transform "the existing development practices, social relations, institutional setups and capacity gaps", to enable them to the people to meet their own basic needs, as Hickey & Mohan (2004:13) claimed, it is then expected go beyond the individuals and the local to involve multiscalar strategies that encompass institutional and structural changes. A self-reliant community is, therefore, the one that has reached this state of transformation, whereas sustainability is used to refer to the capability of a self-reliant community to maintain, perpetuate and sustain the changes. Self-reliance is a broad concept and it encompasses a lot of discussions within its discourse. However, in this discussion, its themes have been limited to the three intended outcomes of the epicenter strategy. These are; boosting the commitments and determination of the local people to meet their present needs, upgrade the roles and status of women within and outside of the epicenter community, and minimizing the need for external support by relying on its own local resources.

Starting from self-reliance, as commitment and determination of the people to meet its needs, this study has revealed that THP-E's has been successful in terms of mobilizing the local people to secure their participation, with a fair number of members across the four sub-villages, to initiate local development. Otherwise, it could have been impossible to achieve without THP-E's intensive community mobilization processes that positively changed the community's outlook towards development. The commitment of the people has been implied through their membership to the epicenter, by participating in the epicenter's leadership ladder and contributing their local resources to the success of the epicenter. The other dimension of findings also shows that the full participation of the local people was hampered by both personal and structural factors including tedious household responsibilities, the absence of necessary infrastructures, poverty, and unemployment.

This study argues that participation of the people at the epicenter level does not automatically guarantee a change in the agency and structures of the people. No matter how the people understand its own local agency, this study also contends that the absence of enabling external conditions might have disabled them from transforming their agency into self-reliant development. According to Sen et al. (2007:12), gender has a decisive power in people's relationship, in creating social stratifying norms, behaviour, and practice. At the individual level, gender also influences people's functioning and capabilities. In the case of Gurage's people, extremely sex-centered ritual cults that determine both gender relation and roles has

still left women to be treated as objects of development. In THP-E's work as well, although THP-E could improve, to some extent, the status of some women in its epicenter; and mostly of animators and those who actively participate in the epicenter's leadership ladder, many still live as second-class citizens.

Moreover, by its very nature that women's household responsibilities among the Meskan community are "repetitive, tedious and cumbersome activities," they inevitably invest their considerable amount of time on it. This study once again complies with what Kes & Swaminathan (2006: 13) found out in their study of time use, gender, and poverty in Sub Saharan Africa. Their study showed the differences in time use between men and women and argued that women, in general, are more time-poor than their male counterparts. This also leads us to the conclusion that although women among Meskan epicenter have shown interest and willingness to participate in the epicenter's activities, they live in 'time poverty' and are unable to participate fully in the epicenter's overall activities. Kes & Swaminathan define time poverty as people's "inability to make unconstrained choices on how they allocate their time, leading, in many instances, to increased work intensity and trade-offs among various tasks." They also noted that cultural values with a sharp division of gender roles are the main cause (ibid: 16-17).

Kim & Isma'il stated that whenever self-reliant development does not mean absolute autarky, it does mean reducing the amount of external support by highly depending on 'internal' resources. It promotes the people to transform their lives by relying on their own capabilities, with minimal or no 'external' support (2013: 586). Concerning self-reliance and external support at Meskan epicenter, this study proved that the epicenter community is far from sustainably meeting its essential needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health, and education, as UNHCR described (2005: 1) without the external support. Although a high level of government support was envisaged during the four phases of project implementation, it continues to be decisive in determining the fate of the epicenter community. Thus, the presence of the government in the epicenter strategy with its rigid charities and societies legislation may well be understood as the simplest way to ensure its sovereignty and to continue its inspection of the activities of the THP-E in the country.

Under the government's inability to provide the people with access to necessary infrastructures including public roads and electricity, referring to Jemal's remark, a male informant, as top priorities of the people, the epicenter community remains with its basic needs unfulfilled. Moreover, limited efforts on the part of both local government and THP-E to create and broaden

opportunity structures for young members of the epicenter, such as Yasin and Aysha, would also continue to risk the loss of human power as they may be tempted to peruse their success through other means. Among the Meskan people, migration to urban areas or the Middle Eastern countries is a preferable solution, as some of the study participants explicated. Ashley Crossman on her discussion of the concept of opportunity structure stated that people's cultural expectation of success is shaped by their society or institution. These are rules to be adhered to achieve success. "When traditional and legitimate opportunity structures fail to allow for success, people may pursue their success via untraditional and illegitimate ones" (Crossman, 2017).

Finally, this study has made clear that development is about enhancing the individual and collective agency of the people while also dismantling the restraining power structures among the people. Likewise, findings confirm that self-reliant development requires both consciousness about the personal and collective capabilities (internal change) and the enabling environment for the people to use their capabilities in bargaining for their basic needs (external change). Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that even though the epicenter community is aware of its capabilities, basic needs, and priorities, the existing institutional practices and capacity gaps lock their power in negotiating with the local government to meet its own basic needs. It is also implied that empowerment involves the dismantling of the constraining power relations, according to Rai (2007: 2), and restructuring the social relations (Hickey & Mohan 2004:13). Based on the existing status of the local community, and especially of women, this study suggests that the epicenter community needs a continued empowerment work to realize its self-reliant development. Moreover, the study once again conforms to what (Cooke & Kothari, 2001) suggested that institutional and structural transformation should be placed at the center of all efforts with the intention to create an enabling environment for the people to reinforcing their agency for self-reliant development. It can be achieved through: more investment more on their needs and priorities, reforming institutional practices and narrow the power gap, and broadening the local opportunity structures for sustainable development.

References

Abeza, A, Hailu, T. & Beyero, N. 2016. The Role of Gender in Livestock Production in Gurage Zone, Edga District, SNNPRS, Ethiopia. In: *Food Science and Quality Management* Vol.53 (22-27).

Adimassu, Z., Kessler, A., Yirga, C. & Stroosnijder, L., 2010. Mismatches between farmers and experts on Eucalyptus in Meskan woreda, Ethiopia. In: *Eucalyptus Species Management, History, Status and Trends in Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: ETH-CANA*, pp.146-159.

Amnesty International. 2012. Ethiopia: The 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation as a serious obstacle to the promotion and protection of human rights in Ethiopia. *Written statement to the 20th Session of the UN Human Rights Council* (18 June – 6 July 2012)

Aredo, D., 1993. *The Informal and Semiformal Financial Sectors in Ethiopia: A Study of the Iqqub, Iddir and Savings and Credit Co-operatives* ', AERC, Research Paper 21, Nairobi: African Economic.

ASA. 1999. *The Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice were Adopted by the Association at its Annual Business Meeting* in March 1999.

Aspers, P., 2009. Empirical phenomenology: A Qualitative Research Approach (The Cologne Seminars). In: *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, *9*(2), pp.1-12.

Ball, C. and Dunn, L.L., 1995. *Non-Governmental Organisations: Guidelines for Good Policy and Practice*. Commonwealth Foundation.

Bauwens, M., 2014. *Perspectives: Alternative Development.* Http://Www.Resilience.Org/Stories/2014-02-28/P2p-Perspectives-Alternative-Development/ (Accessed May 11, 2017).

Belshaw, D. & Coyle, E., 2001. *Poverty Reduction in Ethiopia and the rRole of NGOs: Qualitative Studies of Selected Projects*. London: Overseas Development Institute. (on behalf of the Christian Relief and Development Association).

Berhane, Y. & Byass, P., 2002. Butajira DSS Ethiopia. In: *Population and health in developing countries*, *1*(Part III).

Bhavnani, R., Vordzorgbe, S., Owor, M. & Bousquet, F., 2008. Report on the status of disaster risk reduction in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. In: *Commission of the African Union, World Bank, UNISDR, Nairobi*.

Bloor, M. & Fiona W., 2006. *Key Words in Qualitative Methods: A vocabulary of Research Concepts. London.* Thousand Oaks. New Delhi: SAGE Publication.

Bowen, G. A,. 2009. Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. In: *Qualitative Research Rournal,* 9(2), pp, 27-40.

Brewer, J., 2000. *Ethnography*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Brun, C. & Blaikie, P., 2016. *Alternative Development: Unravelling Marginalization, Voicing Change*. Routledge.

Buchy, M. & Hoverman, S., 1999. *Understanding Public Participation in Forest Planning in Australia: How Can We Learn from Each Other?* Australian National University, Department of Forestry.

Campbell, W., 1996. *The Potential for Donor Mediation in NGO-state Relations: An Ethiopian Case Study,* IDS working paper 33, Brighton: IDS.

Chambers, R., 1994. The Origins and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal. *World development*, *22*(7), pp.953-969.

Clark, J., 2000. *Civil society NGOs and Development in Ethiopia. A Snapshot View*. Washington, D.C: The World Bank unit.

Cleaver, F., 1999. Paradoxes of Participation: Questioning Participatory Approaches to Development. In: *Journal of International Development*, *11*(4), p.597-612.

Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. eds., 2001. *Participation: The New Tyranny?* Zed books.

Cornwall, A., 2004. Introduction. *In: New Democratic Spaces? The Politics and Dynamics of Institutionalised Participation. IDS bulletin*, *35*(2), pp.1-10.

Crang, M. & Cook, I., 2007. *Doing Ethnographies*. Sage.

Crossman, A., 2017. *Definition of Opportunity Structure: An Overview and Discussion of the Concept*. https://www.thoughtco.com/opportunity-structure-theory-3026435 (Accessed November 18, 2017).

Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A., Huby, G., Avery, A. & Sheikh, A., 2011. The case study approach. *BMC medical research methodology*, *11*(1), p.100.

Dawson, C., 2007. *Practical Research Method: A User-friendly Guide to Mastering Research Techniques and Projects, Oxford, Magdalen Road*: How To Books Ltd.

Development Backgrounders. 2006. *Empowerment*. http://fride.org/download/BGR_Empowerment_ENG_may06.pdf (Accessed August 04, 2017)

DFID, U. K. 1999. *Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets.* London: DFID.

ESRI 2015. *Ethio-ArcGIS Desktop*: Release 10. SNNPR, A.A: Ethiopian Mapping Agency

FAO. 2015. *Hunger Map*. http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/ (Accessed December 10, 2016).

Finlay, L., 2003. The Reflexive Journey: Mapping Multiple Routes. In: *Reflexivity: A Practical Guide for Researchers in Health and Social Sciences*, pp.3-20.

Foster, P., 2006 (1996). Observational Research. In: *Data Collection and Analysis, Sapsford*, Roger Sapsford and Victor Jupp (eds.), London, Thousand Oaks.

G/tensae, T., 2016. *A Road Map to Resolving Ethiopia's Political Crisis*. http://hornaffairs.com/en/2016/08/04/ethiopian-political-crisis-recommendations/ (Accessed September 11, 2016).

Gaventa, J. & Barrett, G., 2012. Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement. In: *World Development*, *40*(12), pp.2399-2410.

Gerring, J., 2006. *Case study research: Principles and practices*. Cambridge University Press.

Giddens, A. 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Polity Press Combridge.

Gray, D. E., 2004. *Doing Research in the Real World*. London, California, and New Delhi:

Sage Publications Ltd.

Hickey, S. & Mohan, G., 2004. *Participation--from Tyranny to Transformation?: Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development*. Zed books.

Kebede, M., 2009. The Gender Perspective of Household Food Security in Meskan District of the Gurage Zone, Southern Ethiopia. In: *African Research Review*, *3*(4).

Kes, A. & Swaminathan, H., 2006. Gender and time poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. In: *Gender, time use, and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa*, pp.13-38.

Kim, I. & Isma'il, M., 2013. Self-reliance: Key to Sustainable Rural Development in Nigeria. *ARPN Journal of Science and Technology*, *3*(6), pp.585-591.

Korten, D.C., 1987. Third Generation NGO Strategies: A key to People-centered Development. In: *World development*, *15*, pp.145-159.

Korten, D.C., 1990 (1987). *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda*. Kumarian Press.

Kristiansen, M.H., 2014. *Agency as an Empirical Concept. An Assessment of Theory and Operationalization* (No. 2014/9). NIDI working paper.

Kulözü, N., 2016. Participation as a Means to an End or as an End in Itself: The Success Evaluations of Participants. In: *Turkish Public Administration Annual,* Vol. 41-42, 2015-2016, p. 83-102.

Legesse, A. 1966. Review of the Gurage; *a People of the Ensete Cultre*. William A. S., (1966), in: published for the International African Institute, 1966. Xii, 22 pp., London, New York, Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

Lenders, R., 2007. *The East Asian Miracle and the Developmental State Model, and Its Desirable to Replicate the Developmental State Model*? Source; http//www. home.medewerker.uva.nl/r.e.c.leenders. (Accessed September 13, 2017).

Léonard, T., 2013. *Ethiopian Iddirs Mechanisms. Case Study in Pastoral Communities in Kembata and Wolaita.* Inter Aide, www. interaide. org/pratiques/sites/default. (Accessed November 115, 2017).

Lewis, D. & Madon, S., 2004. Information Systems and Nongovernmental Development Organizations: Advocacy, Organizational Learning, and Accountability. In: *The Information Society*, *20*(2), pp.117-126.

Lewis, D., & Kanji, N. 2009. *Non-Governmental Organizations and Development.* Routledge.

Lewis, D., 2010. Nongovernmental Organizations, Definition and History. In: *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society* (pp. 1056-1062). Springer US.

Marczyk, G, David D, & David F., 2005. *Essentials of Research Design and Methodology*. Canada: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Menuta, F., 2014. Discourses of Development in Gurage Proverbs. In: *stud*, *1*(1). https://www.ju.edu.et/cssljournal/sites/default/files/Discourse%20Gurage%20Dev-Lang%20print.pdf (Accessed November 22, 2017).

Moon, Y.B., 2017. Simulation Modelling for Sustainability: a Review of the Literature. In: *International Journal of Sustainable Engineering*, *10*(1), pp.2-19.

Mulgan, G. & Blears, H., 2005. *People & Participation*: *How to Put Citizens At The Heart Of Decision-Making.* London: Involve.

Narayan-Parker, D. ed., 2002. *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A sourcebook*. World Bank Publications.

Nida, W., 2000. Fanonet: Ethnohistorical Notes on the Gurage Urban Migration in Ethiopia. *Ufahamu: In: Journal of African Studies*, *28*(2-3).

Ozdemir, A.M., 2011. The Concept of Structure in Social Sciences. In; *Amme Idaresi Dergisi*, *44*(2), pp.1-28.

Palmisano, A.L., 2016. Politics, Religion and Space. About Places of Mediation and Sacred Space among the Gurage of Ethiopia. In: *DADA Rivista di Antropologia post-globale*, *6*(2), pp.7-30.

Parpart, J.L., Rai, S.M. & Staudt, K.A. eds., 2003. *Rethinking Empowerment: Gender and Development in a Global/local World*. Routledge.

Pieterse, J.N., 1998. My paradigm or yours? Alternative Development, Post-development, Reflexive Bevelopment. In: *Development and Change*, *29*(2), pp.343-373.

Pillay, T., 2010. Critical Perspectives on NGOs and Educational Policy Development in Ethiopia. *In: Chairperson of the Foreign Language*, *1*, p.90.

Porpora, D.V., 2013. Morphogenesis and Social Change. In: *Social Morphogenesis* (pp. 25-37). Springer: Netherlands.

Prayas, 2005. *Alternative Development Perspective: Concept and Strategy: Learning from Enviro-Development Debate*, Resources and Livelihoods Group, Pune.

Rai, S.M., 2007. Defining Empowerment, Measuring Survival. Paper Prepared for 'Workshop on Empowerment: Obstacles, Flaws, Achievements'. 3–5th May, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

Regassa, N. & Yusufe, A., 2009. Gender Differentials in Migration Impacts in Southern Ethiopia. In; *Anthropologist*, *11*(2), pp.129-37.

Sadan, E., 2004. *Empowerment and community planning.* Richard Flantz (Tras.). Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishers [in Hebrew].

Schostak, J., 2006. *Interviewing and Representation in Qualitative Research*. Harry Torrance (Ed.). New York: Open University Press.

Sen, G., Piroska, Ö. & Asha, G., 2007. *Unequal, Unfair, Ineffective and Inefficient. Gender Inequity in Health: Why it Exists and How we Can Change it*. Final Report to the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health. Stockholm, Sweden. *World Health Organization & Karolinska Institutet.*

Shilling, C., 1999. *Towards an Embodied Understanding of the Structure/Agency Relationship*. British Journal of Sociology 50:543–62.

Simon, S.J., 2005. *Economy and Society in Marx, Durkheim, and Weber*. Artigo disponível em http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~simon/documents/Economy%20and%20Society.pdf (Accessed August 28, 2017).

Starfield, S., 2013. Researcher reflexivity. In: *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*. Elsevier.

Tan, S., 2011. Understanding the "Structure" and the "Agency" Debate in the Social Sciences. In: *Moderator's Note*, p.37.

The 2017 Global NGO Online Technology Report. 2017. http://techreport.ngo/previous/2017/facts-and-stats-about-ngos-worldwide.html (Accessed August 20, 2017).

THP-E. 2013. *Ethiopia Country Report to the Global Board*.

THP-E. 2015. *Mesqan Epicenter Yearly Performance Report* (Meskan Epicenter).

THP-E. 2016. *Mesqan Epicenter Yearly Performance Report* (Meskan Epicenter).

THP-E. 2017 (c): *Output Grid and Summary Indicators*.

THP. 2017 (a). *Start with Women*. http://www.thp.org/our-work/our-approach/start-with-women/. (Accessed December 1, 2017).

THP. 2017. *Theory of Social Change*. http://www.thp.org/our-work/measuring-our-work/theory-change/ (Accessed August 28, 2017).

Udo, C.H., 2008. *Nongovernmental Organizations and African Governments: Seeking an Effective International Legal Framework in a New Era of Health and Development Aid*. BC Int'l & Comp. L. Rev., *31*, p.371.

UNHCR. 2005. *Handbook for Self-reliance*. UNHCR, Geneva

Unit-Ethiopia, E.N.C., 2013. *Emergency Nutrition Quarterly Bulletin, Second Quarter. Ethiopia: Emergency Nutrition Coordination Unit*.

United Nation. 2015. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. https://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/08/120815_outcome-document-of-Summit-for-adoption-of-the-post-2015-development-agenda.pdf (Accessed December 12, 2016).

United Nation. 2015. *World Drug Report*. United Nations publication: New York.

Vanderstoep, S.W. & Johnston, D.D., 2009. Research Methods for Everyday Life. In: *Matching Numerals with Corresponding Number of Objects (number value). Yes/No*.

World Bank. 2007. Empowerment in Practice: Analysis and Implementation. A World Bank Learning Module. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/WBI/Resources/EmpowermentLearningModulebody.pdf (Accessed September 21, 2017).

Yin, R.K., 1994. Case Study Research: Design and Methods Second Edition. In: *Applied Social Research Methods Series*, *5*. https://scholar.google.no/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=Case+study+research%3A+Design+and+methods+second+edition.+YIN&btnG= (Accessed August 12, 2017).

Zenawi, M., 2012. States and Markets: Neoliberal Limitations and the Case for a Developmental State. Good Growth and Governance in Africa: In: *Rethinking Development Strategies. 140-174.*

Appendices
Appendix 1: Background Information of In-depth Interview Participants
   1. **Participants from The Epicenter General Members**

Almaz Damtew
Age: 42
Sex: Female
Educational Status: no education
Position/Responsibility: housewife and a mother of three

Ato Assefa Tekle
Age: 51
Sex: Male
Educational Status: no education
Position/Responsibility: farmer

Kidane W/senbet
Age: 58
Sex: Male
Educational Status: no education
Position/Responsibility: Farmer

Jemal Mohammed
Age: 46
Sex: Male
Educational Status: no education
Position/Responsibility: Merchant

Aysha Yusuf
Age:24
Sex: Female
Educational Status: highschool
Position/Responsibility: newly married bride

Yasin Mohammed
Age: 26
Sex: Male
Educational Status: College/Diploma
Position/Responsibility: unemployed

Fate Negid
Age: 38
Sex: Female
Educational Status: No education
Position/Responsibility: Housewife and a mother of four

Shewa Giza
Age: 39
Sex: Female
Educational Status: no education
Position/Responsibility: Housewife and a mother of four

   2. **Participants from the Epicenter Animators**

Tsehay Ayenew
Age: 31
Sex: Female
Educational Status: High school
Position/Responsibility: Animator

Teshale yihune
Age: 38
Sex: Male
Educational Status: High school
Position/Responsibility: Animator

   3. **Participants from the THP-E Staff Members**

Reda
Age: 33
Sex: Male
Educational Status: University Degree
Position/Responsibility: Field Officer in THP-E

Belay
Age: 41
Sex: Male
Educational Status: Masters
Position/Responsibility: Development Officer in THP-E
Nibret
Age: 49
Sex: Female
Educational Status: Masters
Position/Responsibility: A Higher Official of THP-E

4. **Participants from the Local Government Office**

Gashaw
Age: 42
Sex: Male
Educational Status: University Degree
Position/Responsibility: Officer

Appendix 2: In-depth Interview Guide

A. For Representatives of THP-E
1. Would you please start by explaining the overall mission of THP-E in the country and Meskan epicenter?
2. What is the epicenter development strategy and how is it operated?
3. What are the central components of the epiecenter strategy?
4. How THP-E does understands development and what is its theory of social change?
5. How THP-E does chose its places for its epicenter interventions?
6. What was the experience of THP-E at the beginning of your project at Meskan epicenter? And how did the people respond to it?
7. Since the start of your project, how do you see the development status of the people at Meskan epicenter? And how do you see the commitments and participations of the people for the success of the epicenter strategy?
8. How does the epicenter strategy engage the local government and other stakeholders in the area?
9. What are the overall challenges that threat the success of the epicenter strategy? And how does THP-E manage to control them?

B. For Members of the Epicenter
1. Would you please start by reminding your first experience about when THP-E initiated its project in your village?
2. How do you see THP-E and its works in your community?
3. What is your view of the need to participate in the epicenter programme? If so, in what ways do you participate in the programme? What are the main reason to not to fully participate?
4. What was your role during the construction of the epicenter? How often do you visit the epicenter?
5. Based on your experience, how do you understand the significance of the epiencenter in your community?
6. By comparing with your previous life condition, how do you see the contribution of THP-E in your life? Your family or your community in general?
7. Do you think that there is any other thing left that you expect THP-E or other bodies to do in the future?

C. For the Government Representative
1. Could you please briefly explain the overall development status of Meskan zone?
2. How do you explain the relationship between the government and THP-E in your woreda?
3. How do you see the role of NGOs in contributing to the local development in your administrative woreda?
4. Could you please explain to me your perception of THP-E and its work in your woreda?
5. In what ways does the government involve in the works of THP-E? And how do you think your support would continue in the future?
6. Do you think that the epicenter strategy is successful?

D. For Animators of the Epicenter
1. Could you please start by explaining when and why you became an animator?
2. What are your main responsibilities as an animator?
3. Could you please share with me your experience as an animator?
4. How do you see the contribution of your work and THP-E in improving the lives of the people?
5. What are the benefits and challenges of being an animator?

Appendix 3: THP-E's Programmatic Areas at Meskan Epicenter

1. Mobilized rural communities that continuously set and achieve their own development goals;
   (1) Increase capacity and performance of local leadership
   (2) Increase community's participation in civil society and government
   (3) Improve community's collaboration with local governments and other development stakeholders
   (4) Create financially autonomous epicenters
   (5) Promote an environment in which individuals feel empowered to address their own and the community's needs
2. Empowered women and girls in rural communities;
   (1) Increase women's leadership and agency at the local level
   (2) Expand economic opportunities for rural households, especially women
   (3) Improve health outcomes for women and girls
   (4) Foster environment for female leadership & agency
   (5) Improve gender parity in education
3. Improved access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities in rural communities;
   (1) Reduce incidence of waterborne illnesses
   (2) Increase access to and use of improved water sources
   (3) Increase access to and use of improved sanitation facilities
   (4) Increase awareness of the importance of hygiene and improved
4. Improved literacy and education in rural communities;
   (1) Improve literacy rates in epicenter communities
   (2) Increase primary and secondary enrolment of school-aged children
   (3) Improve gender parity ratio in primary and secondary schools
5. Reduced prevalence of hunger and malnutrition in rural communities, especially for women and children;
   (1) Improve nutrition security for households
   (2) Reduce prevalence of household hunger
   (3) Increase awareness of good health and nutrition behaviours
6. Improved access to and use of health resources in rural communities;
   (1) Increase access to health clinics and health services, especially for mothers and children
   (2) Improve adoption of good health-seeking behaviours
   (3) Increase capacity of local health systems to deliver quality services
   (4) Increase community's awareness of transmission, prevention,
   And treatment of HIV/AIDs, malaria, and other diseases
7. Reduced incidence of poverty in rural communities
   (1) Decrease poverty among rural households
   (2) Create and incubate sustainable, local sources of revenue for epicenter-driven community development
   (3) Expand economic opportunities for rural households, especially women
   (4) Promote access to sustainable local financial services
8. Improved land productivity and climate resilience of smallholder farmers.
   (1) Build capacity of local farmers to use improved agricultural practices, access greater markets, and grow more food
   (2) Increase adoption of land-use practices that mitigate climate change and diminish its effects on households
   (3) Increase the community's use of resources that reduce the impact of climate change on households

(Source: THP-E, 2017 (c): Output Grid and Summary Indicators)