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The Roles of Culture in Poverty Reduction Strategies

Using Local Knowledge for Development

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
HDR:	Human Development Report
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD:	Organizations for Economic Co-operation and Development
SPH :	Strategic Plan of Hundee
UNDP:	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO:	United Nation Education Science and Cultural Organization

Operational definition of terms

- Dabarsaa:* Oromo traditional supporting system
- Gadaa:* a democratic political organization of the Oromo people
- Handhuraa:* 'Initiation gift' since it's the right of passage
- Hundee* name of local NGO which is found in Oromia (Oromo Grass-roots Development Initiative)
- Jiga :* collective labor work of the Oromo community.
- Odaa:* a big tree which Oromo people have used as institution
- Safuu:* a moral category showing respect and distance
- Siiqqee:* is a weapon by which Oromo women fought for their rights
- Sustainable development: a development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs.
- Waaqa:* God, the creator

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The word culture is far from having a single meaning agreed upon by those who use it. Based on their disciplinary and interest areas of their research contents, different scholars have defined culture differently. For instance, Valentine, (1998:127-33) defined culture as the "entire way of life followed by a people." Aime Cesaire (1977:28) has also defined it as "the totality of material and spiritual values created by a society in the course of its history, culture is everything. Culture is the manner of dressing, of carrying one's head, of walking, it is the manner of tying one's tie-it is not just the fact of writing books, of building houses" Raymond cited in Ojo-Ade, (1998) viewed culture as that which includes the organization of production, the structure of the family, and the structure of the institution which expresses or govern social relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate.

To Ngugi, (1990:63) the well-known Kenyan writer, culture is "a way of life fashioned by a people in their collective endeavors to live and come to terms with their total environment. It is the sum of their art, their science and all their social institutions, including their system of beliefs and rituals." Matarasso, (2001) defined culture as the means by which we begin to understand our experience, our hopes, desires and fears and to see them in a context of society from family to nation and world. It is through culture that we build identity that essential component of humanity and community. It is also through culture that we communicate our ideas, feelings, insights, and our every self to others. Rao and Walton, (1996:57) define culture by listing elements that it includes. For them culture includes

"the social structures, norms, values and practices that underpin social identities and behaviors, creative activities and cultivation of imagination.

All the definition mentioned above are covers a different aspects of society and each stresses certain aspects as most important. Moreover, their definition of culture includes wide range of material and non-material products. In other words, sum of learned behavior that society shares and teaches its members through tradition, socialization process and education and not biological inherited. For the purpose of this study, culture is defined as "the predominating attitudes, values, norms, heritage, behaviors, proverbs and beliefs of human beings". Because, in this paper the material aspects of culture were not included.

Culture is a set of contested attributes that is constantly shaping and being shaped by social and economic aspects of human interaction. For a long period, two extreme views tend to dominate the concept of culture and development. Those who considered traditional culture as unsuited to market oriented development and those who view culture as system of control that creates and extends existing macro and micro inequalities. Today, culture has increasingly come to be seen as crucial to human development. Culture is intrinsic to sustainable human development because it is our cultural values, which determine our goals and our sense of fulfillment. Development process which fails to recognize this or which simplistically divides people's resources from their aspiration, is unable to produce lasting improvements in people's lives. In stead, we have to engage with development in the context and through the medium of human cultures (Matarasso 2001:7).

However, in developing countries like Ethiopia culture has been neglected in the study, planning and implementation of development interventions (Amare, 1998). Moreover, previous studies had equated development with economic growth (Parsons, 1960) but neglected cultural variables. Many countries might have shown economic growth as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) although the majority of their peoples might have been suffering from poverty and misery. The World Bank cited in Burkey, (1993:57) summarizes the multi-faceted contributions of culture for development by explaining that:

Culture provides new opportunities for poor communities to generate incomes from their own cultural knowledge; catalyze local level development through communities using their diverse social, cultural and economic resources; conserve and generate revenues from existing assets that is reviving city centers, conserving natural resources and generating sustainable tourism, revenues, strengthen social capital by providing marginalized groups as a basis to pursue activities that enhance their self-respect and efficacy and to strengthen respect for diversity and social inclusions, and diverse strategies of human development and capacity building for knowledge based dynamic societies.

Today, there is a general agreement that a cultural impact of development action must be identified and evaluated before any action is implemented. This is because, failure to pay attention to group's culture adversely affects a policy intervention and careful attention to culturally conditioned-process leads to a highly successful project. However, to make matters simple, Chilcote, (2003) has envisaged development as operating in a multiple dimensions at the level of individual and society as a whole. Thus, political development would be associated with democracy in its various forms: economic development with planning for improving the standard of living; social development with people's basic needs such as food and

shelter, healthcare, education, and employment; and culture development with the fostering of collaboration, solidarity, selflessness, political consciousness, and social responsibility. Therefore, the development workers should consider the association of traditional culture with economic development of the community.

The United Nation (UN) defined community developments as a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation as cited in (Braden, 1999).

According to Lucius and Ding, (2000) cited in Matarasso, (2001) the majority of development projects are initiated by outsiders. In addition, development experts have played paternalistic roles throughout the project process. Often development experts dominate decision-making and manipulate, instead of facilitate development process. Development experts considered themselves as if they always know best and therefore, their prime function is to transfer knowledge to communities whom by definition 'knows less'. This may underrate and under value the culture of local people to make their own decisions as well as the determined own priorities.

"One of the biggest hindrances to economic development in sub-Saharan Africa is the poor performance of the public sector and chronic weakness in the local institutions " (Dia, 1994:15). He also argues, certain ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa argue that traditional development projects have erred by focusing unduly on technical prescriptions ignoring the need to adapt development assistance to the local cultural environment and ensure that Africans identify with such assistance efforts.

There is a need to examine this in case of Ethiopian context. Ethiopia was attacked by chronic drought, hunger and other natural disasters. The population is grappling with a range of challenges including widespread poverty, access to clean water, deforestation, and overuse of arable land, increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS, poor infrastructure for health and education. In order to solve these problems, the government has formulated cultural policies, which is the basic policy that is formulated to work and with this, the government started to put it into work. In addition to the government attempts, Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that are formed internationally and locally have attempted to build infrastructure, to increase community awareness to tackle the prevalence and impacts of HIV/AIDS pandemic low, to empower women economically, socially and politically, and to implement culturally sustainable economic development. Therefore culture is concerned with identity, so as a set of contested attributes it is constantly influx, both shaping and being shaped by social and economic aspects of human interaction. Now a day, it is widely accepted that culture play important role in social development, and to reduce poverty.

1.2 The Study Site

This study was conducted in Wolmera- Ejere district, which is located in West Shoa Zone Oromia region in the case of local NGO Hundee (Oromo Grassroots Development Initiative). Hundee was established in 1995 with the main objective of facilitating development of rural society and to empower and ensure the social, political, economic and cultural advancement of poor communities. It also works to empower women to enhance their social, economic and political status. Moreover, to earn an

income and increase their value within the structure of their communities. To implement these objectives, *Hundee* is based on the philosophy that poor rural communities should be responsible for their own development. In its attempt to achieve, its goal *Hundee* opted to use culture sensitive development strategy.

Programs of *Hundee* include promotion of community Cereal Banks, civic education with special focus on women's rights, environmental rehabilitation and protection, Human rights education, and indigenous support systems development with special focus on women's Economic support, Community based child support and older person Economic support scheme. The project has 24 professional staff with tertiary level education in Economics, Sociology, Management, Law, Agriculture and Accounting and 64 other staff members (SPH, 2005). Moreover, the project has its own vision and mission.

"Vision: To see that respect for human rights and dignity is ensured and prosperity is attained for all human beings. We envision development of a rural society in Ethiopia in which government and civil institutions at all levels take their responsibility to empower and ensure the social, political, economic and cultural advancement of resource poor communities based on values of:

- Human rights and dignity,
- Social, economic and cultural rights for all people,
- Equitable access to and control over resource and its sustainable use.

Mission: Guided by our commitment for human dignity and prosperity and unique orientation of rights-based economic and social development, *Hundee* shall:

- Conscientize rural communities (men and women) on rights to development, and build their capacities to advocate for themselves,
- Enable small farmers, women, older person, youth and other marginalized groups to get organized around common issues of concerned for sustainable livelihoods,
- Appreciate indigenous knowledge of the community and revitalize proven community-based traditional support systems as critical inputs towards their development,
- Enable small farm households, including women headed households to create and protect productive assets,
- Enable target communities to raise concern for ecological imbalances and rehabilitate their degraded land for sustainable use collectively and/or individual,
- Empower to attain economic and social rights, and eradicate all forms of violence and discrimination against them, and promote child right to food, shelter, clothing, education, health and psychosocial development" (SPH, 2005:2).

It has five branch offices in the region.

Table 1: Hundee's branch offices and its work force

Area office	No of districts covered under the area office	Distance form A.A In K.M	No. of Staff members
Sululta-Mulo	4 (Sululta, Mulo, Wuchale and Kuyyu of North Shoa).	46 km North	16
Walmera-Ejere	2 (Walmera Ejere and Chilia of West Shoa).	44 km. West	16
Lume-Ada'a	4 (Lume, Ada'a, Liban and Arsi Negelle of East Shoal.	69 km. East	12

Dendi-Jeldu	2 (Dendi and Jeldu of West Shoa).	90 km. West	14
Bale-Robe	5 (Sinana, Dinsho, Goba, Gasera and Agarfa).	425 km. South	12
Head Office A.A			18
Total	18 districts		88

(Strategic Plan of *Hundee*, 2000)

The *Wolmera-Ejere Hundee* project office is located at *Holeta* town. *Holeta* is located in West Shoa, Oromia region 44km west of Addis Ababa. Most of the population who inhabited *Wolmera-Ejere* is Oromo. However, according to the source of Central Statistics Authority, (2007), some ethnic groups also live in *Wolmera-Ejere* district. The Oromos constitute 97% of the total population. The people have their own culture, folklore, history, social and traditional values and so on. The majority of the population are rural whose economy is mixed agriculture i.e. crop production and livestock rearing. Agriculture is at subsistence level and annual crop production is not sufficient to cover the expenses of this people. Though the people were affected by socio-economic problems, women, elders, and children are more vulnerable to poverty (CSA, 2007)

The district is bounded by three adjacent districts and with Addis Ababa. In other words, Addis Ababa in the East, Addis *Alem district* in West, *Mulo* district in the North and *Alemgena district* in the South. The total area of *Wolmera – Ejere district* is about 1887 km²; the total population is estimated to be 297, 213; in terms of economic activities 87% of the population depends on agriculture practicing mixed farming system. Climatically, the district is classified into two relief agro-climate Zones: *Deaga* and *Wina-deaga* (HARC, 2003).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Nyang,(1994) argues that the role and place of culture in development was not paid much attention to by economists and other social scientists because they viewed development as a universal, uni-linear history in which people move from agrarian to industrialization economies. He also, further explains that African policymakers succeeded or failed in their implementation programs depending on the way they handled culture. So long as donors' development scholars, policymakers and the larger society deny or ignore the relevance of the cultural factors, homegrown development deeply rooted in the history, culture and psychology of African peoples will be stymied.

There is an issue, which surprises me, that, when I taught 4th year students the course Introduction to Multiculturalism in 2008; one of my students, who came from East Hararge, Muhamedkema Usman told me in our informal conversation that:

One of the NGO's was trying to solve the problem of potable water by undertaking drilling projects to solve the water problem that they face. After the development workers finished their work, the societies did not use water Wall. Because, the place where the water was drilled was the funeral ground of their grandfather's, from the point of views of that societies culture, it is not allowed to drink water which is drilled from such places.

One African scholar, Serageldin, (1994:8), said, "We are too familiar with development projects that have failed because they were superimposed on a cultural environment that was not conducive and therefore could not enlist the support of the people concerned." In addition, he argues, we should consider culture when discussing development. What is not known is how to consider culture, both scientifically and practically. Although