An Assessment of the Role of Local Institutions and Social Capital in Household Food Security: A Case Study at Two Rural Communities in Oromiya Zone, Amhara Region

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The paper discusses the role a number of local institutions and social capital play in contributing for accessing livelihood resources, which in turn help in augmenting household level food security. Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) underpins the conceptual background of the study. Qualitative social research methods of observations, Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews and case studies were employed to generate first-hand data among the inhabitants of two communities in Oromiya Zone.

1. Introduction

It has been argued that local institutions functioning at community level and social capital have their role in maintaining food security at individual and household levels (Degefa 2005). Institutions are the rules of games in a society (North 1990) that can enhance or constrain peoples’ livelihood activities and survival strategies. A number of local institutions such as *wedeja*, *fatimaye*, *telamma* and *abdoye* are practiced by the people at Erenssa and Garbi communities of Oromiya Zone mainly based on their belief through which they express their world outlooks and own wishes. The people also apply the rituals of those institutions as coping mechanisms against various disasters occurring due to either natural or human-induced factors. Other institutions like *kaya*, *kire*, *tassiga* and *hirppa* have economic context since they were set up as strategies for getting access to livelihood assets/resources. Understanding how local institutions function is of paramount significant for two reasons. First, having insights into the livelihoods of the people in isolation from their cultural practices is basically impossible. The rituals they practice inform about their daily life experiences. Second, the rituals can be seen as the risk management by which people survive the hard times. For instance, when their crop or livestock is hit hard by drought or epidemic, the event is understood as something *Allah’s* deed, and an attempt made by community members to look for explanation as to what went wrong, which might be ascribed to some undesirable acts or the failure to undertake the necessary ritual. Thus, some rituals are believed to minimize hopelessness and desperation.

Embedded within society, social capital constitutes one of the five forms of livelihood assets (along with natural, physical, financial, and human capitals) (Scoones 1998, Ellis 2000), which directly affect the level of food security at individual and household levels. According to Putnam (2000), social capital includes bonding capital and bridging capital. “Bonding occurs when you are socializing with people who are
like you; same age, same race, same religion and so on. Birding is what you do when you make friends with people who are not like you”.

Some segments of society who cannot directly engage in production activities rely on transfers for their basic means of survival. Eventually, assets and resources may transfer to people with poor well being from either relatively well-off counterpart members, from government or NGOs.

2. Intent and objectives
Rural researches that are preoccupied by the ‘modernity’ thinking have regarded ritual practices related to local informal institutions as traditional and ‘backward’. Hence, there has been little attention given to understand a variety of rituals performed by local people. It is, however, impossible to thoroughly understand rural livelihoods and food security situations without having insights into some of the local institutions and related rituals, which form some of the components of social capital. This paper discusses empirical research findings concerning how a number of local institutions and social capital contribute to households’ food security at Erenissa and Garbi communities of Oromiya Zone in Amhara Region. It has been drawn from a relatively bigger research project that looked at rural livelihood, poverty and food insecurity in the zone under consideration (Degefa 2005). Two research questions will be dealt with in this paper: first, what are the main institutions to which the local people involve, and why? Second, how far do social and public transfers contribute to food security of households?

The paper would contribute a little in redressing the prevailing thinking that people who draw their basic needs from transfers persistently live under the situation of chronic food insecurity. Future research on food security should profoundly look into how local institutions function and for what prime motives they were put in place, as well as trying to uncover the type of existing social capitals, and the linkage they have with peoples’ wellbeing status.

3. Theoretical underpinning
The argument in this article is underpinned on Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) to explore the interrelations between local institutions, social capital, and food security. Livelihood as a framework to understand food security emerged in the late 1990s, and at the beginning of 21st century, as initiated by many scholars (Scoones 1998, Carney 1998, Pretty 1998, Ellis 2000, Bebbington 1999, Rakodi 2002). The consensus among these authors has been that the framework enables to holistically examine livelihood and food insecurity. Cognizant of this, many studies were undertaken based on the livelihood framework in several countries, such as Mali, Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Uganda.

Mediating processes within livelihood framework comprises institutions, organizations and social relations. Institutions are ‘the rules of game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction’ (North 1990: 3). This includes laws, land and other resource tenure arrangements (property rights), and the ways markets function in practice. They are broadly categorized into formal and informal. Institutions reduce uncertainty by establishing a stable structure. Organizations refer to ‘groups of individuals bound by some common purpose to achieve objectives’ (ibid: 5). Government agencies, local governments, community administrators, NGOs, associations at different levels, and private companies constitute organizations. Social relations entail the social positioning of
individuals and households within the society (Ellis 2000). Among the indicators for the individual’s or household’s position in a society are gender, caste, class, age, ethnicity, and religion. These factors by and large determine a household’s access to productive resources. According to Ellis (2000), ‘institutions, organizations and social relations are critical mediating factors for livelihoods because they encompass the agencies that inhibit or facilitate the exercise of capabilities and choices of individuals or households’.

Social capital can be described as social resources involving networks, social claims, social relations, affiliations, and associations upon which people draw in pursuit of livelihoods. Reciprocity that may be based on kinship or neighbourhood among households is a widely cited feature of social capital. The role social capital plays in the survival of people has been the most overlooked issue in most studies dealing with food security. In this article, an attempt has been made to identify and discuss on the range of social capitals. I was able to document the living situation of many households that rely on social capital for their survival.

Livelihood outcome is the end-result of the interaction of various elements in a system. The outcome can be desirable or undesirable. The desirable outcome underlines the sustainability of livelihood and attaining food securities. Better access to assets enables households to offset other structural constraints to be able to cope with vulnerability. In the context of this work, food security is simply viewed as the situation whereby households are able to meet food requirements and other basic needs all year round either from own production, purchase on market, transfers or a combination of two or more (Degefa 2005).

4. The case study communities and research approaches

4.1. The communities
Two rural communities – Erenssa and Garbi - were purposely selected from Oromiya Zone of Amhara Region as case study sites. Erenssa is a community situated on the hill at about 12 Kms east of Kammissie Town (zone capital), whereas Garbi is 8 Kms north of the town along the main highway to Kombolcha. Erenssa with altitude of 2210 m a.s.l is characterized by weyna dega agro-climate while Garbi having 1400 m a.s.l is situated in kola zone. Erenssa has a rugged topographic feature, whereas Garbi is a part of the extensive plain of Borkena wetland.

People at Erenssa draw their means of livelihood from mixed farming of crop major and livestock minor system. Apart from a variety of grains such as barley, wheat, sorghum and teff, the peasants were able to integrate cash crops, in particular coffee and chat into their farming system. Likewise, sedentary farmers in Borkena wetland largely rely on crops (predominantly sorghum and maize), and supplement their income from livestock rearing. The wetland also hosts agro-pastoralists staying part of the time of the year there. In addition, a few farm investors have launched commercial undertakings in cash crop production. The sizable proportion of the population at both communities was found to be overwhelmingly depending on non-farm activities, and social and public transfers. The analysis in this article focuses on livelihood for the people relying on transfers – as mediated by local institutions and social capital.
4.2. Methods
As indicated earlier, this work is a part of a bigger research project that relied on mixed approach, making use of qualitative and quantitative methods. Nonetheless, the data inputs for this specific article are mostly from qualitative data gathered on the basis of ethnographic and participatory approaches. The specific methods employed are narrated as in the following:

- **Key informant interview** – many elderly informants and the leaders of various rituals were consulted in order to explore why various institutions are put in place and to uncover the processes involved into ritual practices.

- **Focus group discussions** – many local institutions contained groups made up of members varying in numbers. Hence, it was an opportunity to held group discussions concerning the purposes of the institutions, their principles and details of the practices of various institutions at each community under study.

- **Case studies** – some individuals and households were approached for in-depth studies in view of generating data through narration regarding their situations in relation to local institutions and relations with other members.

- **Participant observation** – A relatively longer period stay in the field has given me an opportunity to directly observe while local institutions were functioning and the real practices of the rituals were taking place. In fact, it was learnt that some of the practices were somehow sensitive for an ‘outsider’ to directly participate in. In this regard, much care was taken not to disturb the norm of the rituals.

- **Artifacts (photographing)** – Some rituals were documented through photographing as they were performed in real situations.

5. Discussion of main observations
5.1. Various types of local institutions
Institutions provide the social context within which livelihoods are constructed and mediate access to the key resources that are central to people's livelihood (Carswell et al. 2000). Institutions can be broadly classified into two types: formal and informal. Government interventions and policies at macro level and the operations of the WVE Kammisse Area Development Program can be cited as examples of formal institutions. The paper focuses on the informal institutions, some of which seem to be related to the faith of people, while others are more economic in nature.

**Wedeja**
Wedeja, which in its broad meaning refers to prayer, is a common institution in the study area. It has multiple forms (Figure 1) that have different purposes, each with their own ritual ceremonies. Fatimaye is a form of wedeja to be undertaken for a woman approaching child delivery. This takes place in the home of the woman and roughly eight months after conception. The main purpose of fatimaye is to offer good luck prayers to Allah for the process of delivery, and good health for both the mother and the newborn child. Relatives and parents, mostly women from both the woman’s and husband’s sides, participate in the ritual. The men also take part in a separate room. Serving food and drinks, and kamma constitute part of the ceremony. The ritual of fatimaye can be seen from two perspectives. The first one is the mental preparation and confidence that a pregnant woman and her family members will develop following the ceremony. The other is that individuals who lead the ritual and the destitute community members take advantage of the situation in the form of food and drinks. It has been
learnt that the leaders of fatimaye are quite busy because of the requests from community members expecting a child. Apart from the meal they are being served the leaders of the ritual also get money in cash, which contributes to food supply of their households.

Making duayi refers to praying for an individual who is sick and is another type of wedeja. This may take place at the home of the ill persons or by taking them to the place of abaggar. Before taking a person to a modern health service, duayi is practiced as a first aid service given to a sick person. People strongly believe that duayi is equal to formal medical treatment. This provides an insight into understanding why someone fails to visit a modern health service the reason being not only for economic reasons or due to lack of access to the service but also as a reflection of intention to deal with illness through their own local practice. Leading duayi is the survival strategy of abaggar, as such individuals hardly engage in productive activities to make a livelihood earnings.

There are also three big seasonal wedejas held by gathering together all community members. The Autumn wedeja which normally takes place in September to wish for a good harvest to come. Every participant contributes food, chat, coffee, and money. The money is meant to buy a livestock to be slaughtered at a place of wedeja in the form of sacrifice. In addition, some community members may donate a gift to keep a vow that they had promised at the previous year’s ritual. The second community-based wedeja takes place in either December or January. This one basically aims at sharing joy after harvest and thanking Allah for giving them a good harvest. It also expresses their wish, so that the harvested products will last longer. The third is, the biggest wedeja, which normally takes place in April. It has many objectives: wishing for the success of the belg harvest through better rainfall distribution; it is also when land preparation for the main season is carried out and thus peasants jointly pray for good weather conditions during the whole growing period. Peasants also pray towards Allah to protect both belg and meher crops from diseases and pest infestation. There are certain distinguishing features of the April wedeja. First, people from many communities observe a ritual together at one site. Secondly the well-known kaddi are invited to lead the prayer ceremony. These major wedejas are not missed under any circumstances, except under situations of severe crisis where the feast parts may be reduced and the number of participant can be smaller.

Occasional village-or community-based wedejas are organized when there are signs of abnormality at the beginning or cessation of rain, when flooding happens, when human and livestock epidemics suddenly break out, and when crops fail. The return to normality is believed to be Allah’s blessing in response to the respective wedeja. Closer examination of some of the objectives of different forms of wedejas reveals that their purpose is to seek better livelihood situations. People attempt to relate their own traditions to their economic aspirations and expectations. Some are practiced in relation to human health, some to have a better crop harvest, some are for the betterment of livestock, some are for protection against natural calamities, and some are meant to create better community-based social relations. There are certain indications for the combining of traditional beliefs with the principles of Islamic religion. For instance, originally the Oromo society had its religion and people who believe in waqa (their creator God) and used to practice various rituals. These were gradually eroded when the society was compelled to accept Islamic and Christian religions. The important issue here is to explain how people attempt to minimize risks by practicing various rituals.
For the members of communities studied, fulfilment of their wishes in terms of either good harvests during both harvesting seasons, the occurrence of rain at needed period, absence of livestock and crop diseases are partly believed to be the result of proper practicing of *wedejas* at right time. Conversely, poor success in the main livelihood activities and strategies are attributed to the failure to carry out the rituals of *wedeja*.

![People observing mini-wedeja (at Garbi)](image)

**Figure 1.** People observing mini-*wedeja* (at Garbi) – coffee boiling and *chat kamma* are parts of the ritual

*Abdoye* and *Yeawure* prayers
The agro-pastoralists who stay during some months of a year and thus included in this study also practice two unique types of *wedejas* in relation to their livelihood. *Abdoye* (Wednesday Prayer) takes place at the home of the eldest person in the village. The ritual comprises of a number of elements: praying by *abaggar*, songs, *kamma*, and serving participants with meal, coffee and milk. The milk to be served at the ceremony must be collected from each household in such a way that the milk from all cows is included. The intention is that the blessing following the prayers should reach each cow from which the milk came (Figure 2). The central objective of *abdoye* is praying for *saa*: wishing for good health, wishing for impregnation (reproduction) at the appropriate time, aspiring for good weather conditions that would enable for better growth of pasture, and wishing for avoidance of all evil which acts against *saa*. A similar kind of *wedeja* takes place every Sunday evening, known as *yeawure*, which means prayer against wildlife attack on *saa* (livestock) during the night and day. According to an elderly inhabitant, these rituals have a long history and have been practiced by many generations.
Fig. 2. *Urrane* community members observing *abdoye* ritual: the participants holding the milk collected from all cows (left), and the ritual leader with other participants offer prayers (right).
Kire institution

*Kire* is a sort of semi-formal social institution for community members in order to get material help and psychological support upon the death of relatives. Evidently, the *kires* at the study communities are weak when compared with similar institutions in the same zone or other areas in the country. The *Kires* at Garbi and Erenssa become active only upon the death of a member or their relatives. The *kires* lack reserve money and other materials such as tents, and utensils for cooking, drinking and eating, which are essential at the time and place of mourning. These materials are sometimes the source of income for the institution when they are rented out to individuals celebrating other occasions, particularly weddings. Members contribute money when someone dies, in addition to labour. Neither of the *Kires* at the study sites have the capacity to support members, when they are accidentally confronted with various types of crises, such as shortage of money for treatment under severe illness and food shortage. However, there is potential to extend their scope beyond purely serving activities related to burial. For instance, *ider* institutions in some rural communities of Arssi have become the ‘bank’ for both cash and grain, where a member can lend and borrow during seasons of shortage and at times when facing accidental problems (Degefa 1996). Likewise, SOS Sahel has been attempting to introduce seed and food banking in certain communities of North Wello Zone. Under situations such as this, the *kire* can play a versatile role in risk management.

Tassiga

*Tassiga* is a kind of feeding institution in which unmarried young boys participate. Many *tassiga* groups exist in each community. The ritual is observed once in a year, usually in October when the participants are free from any type of farming operations. Basically, it is organized by contributing money for buying an ox or a bull for slaughter. The site for holding the ritual must be away from the homestead of the participant, so that the involved persons should not meet with the rest of community members in the course of participating in *tassiga*. In addition, *injera* (pancakes) and other accessories are prepared for the festival in turn. The feeding might take a minimum of a week and extends until the meat is finished. The main objective of the ritual is to physically maintain the youths who become weak by working in cultivation and weeding in summer months, and to prepare them for the hard work they will engage in during crop harvesting, transporting and threshing in the following months. A young boy who has not participated in the yearly *tassiga* regards himself as weak and incapable of properly performing his duties. A parent who economically cannot let a boy participate in *tassiga* feeding ceremony cannot blame their son for his failure in agricultural operations. Moreover, the inability to pay the contribution of *tassiga* is regarded as shameful. However, the community members know who is unable to pay, and hence one of the participants is allowed to subsidize a boy who belongs to a poor household for one or more of meals served during the ritual feeding. When families are unable to pay for more than one son, there is also a possibility of sharing the feeding with other brothers on a shift basis. Although the ritual is meant for unmarried youths, a father can also take the place of his son(s) at a couple of meals. A few individuals with wives and also other family members may sometimes take part when they feel that their weak bodies could benefit by participating in the *tassiga* feeding institution.

*Tassiga* feeding has a number of implications for a household’s food security. Among the two pronounced advantages of *tassiga* feeding are developing the habit of
saving money; and encouraging youths to work hard on-farm and as wage labourers in slack seasons. The other important positive aspect of it is the moral issue, i.e. giving a chance for the family members of very poor households to take part in feeding for free, or by contributing a little through labour inputs during the preparation process.

However, when it comes to intra-household resource distribution, the practice of *tassiga* seems unfair for two reasons. Firstly, the feeding excludes girls, whose workload is much higher than the boys because the former are expected to work on various domestic chores at home as well as in some farm activities. Secondly, the expenses a household has to meet to ensure a boy’s participating in *tassiga* affects the overall budget that is to be used for making food accessible to other household members. As noted above, the community perception towards parents who do not allow their children to participate in the ceremony compels them to pay for these children. In this regard, having cash to hand when *tassiga* feeding takes place is not a necessity for every participant since the relatively well off can cover the costs, to be repaid back upon harvest. This, in itself, becomes a challenge in a situation of crop failure or poor harvests.

**Telamma**

An interesting observation was made in relation to the agricultural calendar at the study sites. Land preparation, which forms a crucial stage of the farm season calendar starts only after the community members jointly observe a *wedeja* known as *jahara*. While participation may not be a necessity for each household, they must make contributions in the form of money. A selected elderly community member organizes a *wedeja* at the home of a *dacchi telammi* – a person who undertakes the first cultivation in a season. The person (male) is a well-respected elderly in a community who has inherited the responsibility from his father. No one is allowed to cultivate before a *telammi* announces that land cultivation in a given season has officially started. There is a belief that crops grown on farm land cultivated before *telamma* will fail, and the owner will also experience something bad, apart from the punishment he will face from community council of village elderly. The decision taken to begin cultivation seems to be made by individuals. However, in reality, a *telammi* waits for *jahara* to be held before he undertakes his task the following day.

Although *telamma* has a social value for the people, it may have a number of practical drawbacks with regards to land-use dynamics and the cropping calendar: It limits individual creativity and differences; confines peasants to the context of rain-fed situations; it does not leave room for converting one’s land from food crops to cash crops; negates the micro-ecological, economic, and agronomic variations, such as soil difference, microclimate, relief, individual endowment of draft power, and differences in land preparation for a variety of crops, and the expenses that the community members have to contribute may be problematic for the poor people.

**Kaya**

The sedentary peasants and the agro-pastoralists somewhat complement one another. One of the ways by which sedentary peasants benefit from the agro-pastoralists is by receiving milk cows on the basis of *kaya*. One out of ten households studied at Garbi had received cows from the agro-pastoralists community through *kaya*. Two households at Erenssa also had the opportunity of getting milk cows through *kaya*. *Kaya* is of mutual benefit, because for the agro-pastoralists it is a way of dispersing livestock to
overcome the problem of grazing land, while for a poor peasant it is a way to collect milk and milk products in exchange for labour and pasture. Labour service offered by the side of sedentary peasants is keeping and feeding cows and their offspring during the whole period of agreement between the two parties. It is also a common practice among agro-pastoralists to offer a bull to the sedentary peasants, for the purpose of taming it for ploughing. This is of much help for households facing constraints in terms of draft power.

Peasants assist each other financially upon the sudden death of milk cows or farm oxen. When a peasant encounters a sudden death of a farm ox during land preparation, he receives support in different ways. When such an event happens in a ‘good year’, people immediately contribute a sizeable amount of money and buy to him a replacement ox. This community–based safety net is known as hirppa. However, when the money contributed is not sufficient to buy an ox in one season, people having their own farm oxen will assist the victim in cultivating land.

Zekka and other forms of reciprocity
Some reciprocal relations exist among neighbours, the most notable being coffee drinking and kamma (chewing chat in groups). These are practiced on daily basis, but according to many informants at both sites, they are on the decrease as a result of the deepening poverty at household level. Apart from these activities, people also meet at occasional ceremonies such as weddings, holiday celebrations and deaths (mourning). The reciprocal institutions have much significance beyond having meal and drinks together. They function as opportunities to discuss what is going on in the localities regarding some aspects of livelihood, and also for community members to share experiences. They are the mini-meetings through which some village-based problems will be discussed and resolved.

The destitute and other poor people also get support from relatively better-off peasants. Zekka (the one-tenth share given to the poor) is a common practice. There are many households who are able to feed themselves through maguguat (begging) from peasants during harvest seasons. Many peasants at Garbi mentioned that they are no longer offering zekka nowadays since what they produce cannot cover their own households’ demand. The other forms of social support to the poor people include offering cooked food or grains, assisting some in cultivating their lands freely, taking their lands in a sharecropping arrangement, and giving opportunities for wage labour to those who are able to work. There is also a social obligation to assist kins or persons with whom one has a lineage. A few households get their means of subsistence from their relatives. For instance, Hawa Nura is an elderly destitute who never purchases grain from market. Instead, she supplements a small harvest from her farm with the grain she obtains from two of her younger brothers, who live in another community nearby.

5.2. Social and public transfers for enhancing household food security
Households/individuals that rely on transfers for their livelihoods are those that are neither able to be directly engaged in production activities (agricultural and non-agricultural) or able to exchange their own endowments for other assets. Many factors explain the inability to generate their own income: lack of access to productive labour (due to illness, disability, old age, and, in the case of female-headed households, lack of capable male labour, lack of access to draft power and landlessness). One or a
combination of these factors could be a constraint to generating a viable means of livelihood. Under these circumstances, people’s incomes should be based on transfers from different sources, such as community-based social transfers, transfers from kins or lineage (remittance), and transfers from formal institutions, particularly the state and NGOs. The livelihood of households that survive on transfers is significantly different from others who depend on production-based livelihoods, as the former are not certain of obtaining income, either in cash or in kind.

Community-based transfers
Transfer of means of survival from community members to the needy people has many forms. The major ones include:

i) assistance in terms of labour for households who lack labour, but owing other assets in activities such as crop harvesting and house construction;

ii) assistance in the form of lending farm oxen or cultivating the lands of people with no farm oxen under the jimmat temmada institution (Figure 3);

iii) giving out zekka (in principle, about one-tenth) of own harvest for the needy people; and

iv) assistance in the form of providing cooked food and drinks during various special occasions and ceremonies.

Transfers from kin
Several households depend on remittances for their survival, which might originate from within the same community or from somewhere else, including remittances sent from abroad. The cases of two households shown in Box 1 serve to illustrate how such livelihoods depend on transfers from relatives.

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<th>Cases of households that survive on remittances</th>
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| 1. **Hawa Hassen** is 65-year-old woman living alone in the village of Erenssa. She mostly lives on support in the form of grains she receives from her two brothers who live in the neighbouring kebele. Hawa receives relief grain support in the years when it is given out in the community. She very much likes the village of Erenssa and was not willing to be hosted at the house of one of her brothers. She describes her attachment to the village thus: ‘Erenssa is my birth place, where I got married and have lived my whole life. It is also where I lost all my children. It is a place where I experienced a lot of sorrow and also pleasant events. So, how can I leave this beloved community? I have decided that it is my body after death that has to be moved away from this place’.

2. **Zewude Yimam** is a widow and also an inhabitant of Erenssa. She has three children: two daughters (one married and living in the same village while the other has migrated to Djibouti) and one son who was employed as a soldier many years ago. Her land was partly sold off and the remaining was taken away from her by her brother-in-law. Zewude is totally dependent on the remittances from her two children, the daughter in Djibouti and the soldier. The brother-in-law also provides a limited amount of grain each year.
Fig. 3. Neighbour peasants cultivating the land for a household not having farm oxen of his own.

Transfers from state and NGOs
Government transfers are mainly through food provisions in the form of food-for-work or free delivery in response to the early warning and food appeals, when some of the community members need external food assistance. Although such interventions are undertaken during years of severe food shortage, there were households in the two study communities who reported that recently they have been receiving food assistance each year. The survey indicated that a c.10% of the households in each community receive free food handout every year during food-deficit months. The WVE, an NGO working at both study kebeles, also transfers income to poor households in several ways. During the early years of intervention, this NGO used to provide financial support and food directly, as part of the households’ rehabilitation from the famine crises in the mid-1980s. Among the principal direct provisions was money for the children of the targeted poor households, and the provisions of a school uniform for every child in school as well as all necessary stationery items. The provisions in connection with school had two objectives. First, most households had not fully recovered from the famine crisis to be able to afford the materials for sending their children to school. The second objective was to make schools attractive to both the parents and their children. With the exception of the financial support for a few children, all provisions were stopped recently. The WVE claims to ‘shift from relief and rehabilitation interventions to development activities aiming at enhancing household livelihoods’. The government actors argue that the direct provision should be minimized or fully stopped since it has adverse implications in terms of developing the feeling of dependency among the beneficiaries. The community members on their part acknowledge the past and present interventions by the WVE in many ways and have shown their interest in the continuance of direct material support.
6. Concluding remarks

The paper demonstrated the importance of looking at informal local institutions in order to have a deeper understanding on livelihood and food security situation of people. Eventually, the institutions covered in the study had two pertinent contexts, that is, faith (belief) and economic. Among those institutions associated with people under study world outlook include wedeja, fatimaye, telamma and abdoye. Wedeja having multiple forms entails prayer for best wishes in relation to own family, community and wider society, and health for livestock. They are carried out in best wishes of human life in all respects. Abdoye and yeawure are prayers for saa (livestock) by the agro-pastoralists wishing for good health of stock, impregnation at appropriate time, good weather conditions and wishing for avoidance of all evil things. Good situations of saa means better living conditions for agro-pastoralists.

Institutions such as kaya, kire, tassiga, zekka and hirppa were found to be more of economic in essence. For instance, households become a member of kire as insurance in view of getting material and psychological supports upon death of relatives. Tassiga is a youth institution that aims at making them physically strong and efficient in the forthcoming crop harvesting season. Hence, it has paramount importance both psychologically and economically. Kaya is a mutual trust between sedentary peasants and agro-pastoralists to off-set asset constraints from both parties. Generally, whatever the case may be the people are convinced that involvement in one or more of institutions contribute to their satisfaction as well as to the improvement of their living conditions and food security status.

The paper also documents a multiple form of transfers that help much in the livelihood and food security of the poor people. People, who for certain reasons, are unable to involve in production activities get assistance from other community members, from relatives somewhere else in the form of remittance, from government and NGOs. The contribution of this paper to debate on food security issue is that it shows the possibility to attain food security at household level depending on social and public transfer. The observation challenges the thinking that those who are unable to engage in production activities subsist under chronic food insecurity. The core observation from this paper is consistent with the work of Bebbington (1999) in Latin America that social capital is an asset through which people are able to widen their access to resources and other actors.

References


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Glossary

Abdoye - Prayers ritual held by agro-pastoralists every Wednesday for the betterment of their livelihood
Allah - God
Chat - Cata edulis, a narcotic cash crop
Chitta - Grasses or pasture
Dega - Highland agro-climate
Duayi - Muslim prayers ritual for someone’s success, or for an individual/ or group in a difficult situation
Fatimaye - A ritual of prayers undertaken for a pregnant women
Hirppa - Financial donation from the community members to someone whose farm oxen has died
Injera - Traditional Ethiopian pancake or bread
Jahara - Wedeja ritual to be held before the start up of cultivation in a season
Jemmat temeda - Cultivation on Friday aimed at assisting individuals without farm oxen or those unable to undertake their own land cultivation
Kaddi/abaggar - A religious leader
Kamma - Chat chewing individually or in a group
Kaya - Give/receive livestock, mostly milk cows in trust
Kire - Community-based burial association
Kola - Lowland agro-climate
Saa - Livestock, mostly referring to cattle
Sollati - Regular prayers of Muslim people
Tassiga - Feeding institution organized by unmarried young men annually during autumn
Telamma - Ritual-based start up of land cultivation in a season
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<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Urrane</strong></td>
<td>Agro-pastoralists staying in Borkena wetland during dry season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Waqa</strong></td>
<td>God of Oromo people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wedeja</strong></td>
<td>Prayers ritual meant for different purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weyna Dega</strong></td>
<td>Midland agro-climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yeawure</strong></td>
<td>Prayers ritual held by agro-pastoralists on Sundays for protecting their <em>saa</em> from wildlife attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zekka</strong></td>
<td>Donation of about one-tenth of own crop harvests to the needy and poor people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>