CONCEPTIONS AND APPROACHES OF DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF A LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION IN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the perception and practice of development. For this end, it studied a leading local Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) named Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA) in Ethiopia, Amhara National Regional State (ANRS). This qualitative case study used in-depth interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and document analysis and field observation for data collection. This case study reveals that the dominant conception and approach of development in ORDA is under the shade of the traditional modernization and dependency paradigms. ORDA's development approach is not human centered and holistic but reflects the assumptions of the old modernization and dependency theories. Much attention is given to the economic dimension of development at the cost of the basic ingredients of human development and unique demands of the situation of the Ethiopian locale, as well as such needs as participation, empowerment, equality, freedom and equity are absent in the development vocabularies of the local change agent i.e. ORDA. This affects the sustainability of development works in ORDA's intervention areas.

Keywords: Development Communication, Development, Participatory Development, Top-Down, Modernization and Dependency Paradigms

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Following the aftermath of World War II (WW II), international development has become a global agendum among academic, development and political arenas. At that early stage of the development efforts, modernization paradigm evolved and was considered as a solution and the only path for development. Such interest in development was stimulated by the success of the Marshal Plan to re-build Europe after the war; the stimulation also comes from the intensification of the Cold War and the need to find allies among the newly liberating or soon to be free colonial territories of the third world. The basic idea of modernization paradigm includes the transfer of technology and experts from the West to the third world countries. The main objective was to recreate or develop third world countries in the model of the West in terms of politics, economic, culture and technology. However, after decades of efforts to develop the third word, it was realized that the outcome was not as expected. Top down approach of development, absence of people's genuine participation, economic perception of development disregarding social dimensions of human development, failure to consider the impact of historical and broader socio-political issues of development and the overestimation of the power of mass media in development were the major flaws of the modernization paradigm that led to failure (Macphil, 2009; Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Mefalopulos, 2008; Servaes, 2008; Thomas, 2008; White, 2008).

Despite the optimistic expansion of the proposed development plans, insignificant progress of development has been observed in the third world countries. That is, poverty has been spreading, more people have become handicapped of underdevelopment, and life in general for many people has become miserable with starvation, lack of freedom and justice. The assumed sustainable development of third world countries could be materialized. Poverty and other socio-economic problems have been intergenerational inheritances of the third world countries. In brief, people in the third world countries are still trapped in the vicious circle of poverty and backwardness despite the development efforts driven by such international plans. Even in some instances, development efforts have left the people's life worse than before. For example, gender disparity, harmful traditional practices (HTP), corruption, lack of good governance, food insecurity, recurrent famine, drought, environmental degradation and weather change have become part of the daily phenomena in the under developed world. More than 2.8 billion people of the third world countries have been imprisoned by poverty and its effects such as malnutrition, poor-health condition, and poor quality of life and lack of opportunities to improve their lives (Narayan, Chambers, Shah & Petesch 2000: 2, Kotler & Lee, 2009:1-14).

As such modernization paradigm failed to develop the third world countries and narrow down the disparity between the developed and under developed countries; serious criticism was followed, and the dependency paradigm into the political, academic and development arenas was emerged. The main purpose of this paradigm was to improve the living conditions of citizens in the developing nations. Once again this alternative paradigm that characterizes underdevelopment as the result of past injustices and the unbalanced capitalist world order failed to achieve the desired change i.e. narrowing the socio-economic disparity between developed and underdeveloped worlds. All these dissatisfactions and critics pushed the quest for development into another stage; that is the birth of participatory paradigm for development. This relatively new participatory paradigm has been considered as a hopeful path in search of better solutions for third world countries' problems. However, this emerging paradigm has not been free from theoretical and practical flaws that affect its effectiveness for development and social change. Thus, understanding how development is

perceived and approached is vital in order to design and implement better development approaches. This research is an attempt to searching for better approach to development since sustainable development in third world countries is one the unfinished projects of the 21st century (Fraser, Estrada & Mazzei, 2006; Macphil, 2009, Mefalopulos, 2008; Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Rogers, 1976; Servaes, 2008; Thomas, 2008; Waisbord, 2002; White, 2008).

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

General Objective:

The main objective of this research is to explore the perceptions and approaches of development in Ethiopian context using the development work experience of ORDA.

Specific objectives:

The research has the following specific objectives:

1. Analyzing the development conception of ORDA
2. Identify the dominant development approach of ORDA
3. Analyzing and describing the practice of development in ORDA based on the participatory paradigm
4. Evaluating the perception of the local people about the development works and the process of social change

Research Questions:

1. How does ORDA conceptualize development?
2. What is the dominant approach of development in ORDA?
3. How do change agents practice development?
4. How do the local communities perceive development works of development agents and the process of social change?

Theoretical Framework

The birth of international development dates back to the post-World War II. In the aftermath of the war, the need for global development was fuelled by the decolonization of most of third world countries and the Cold War capitalist and socialist camps. At that early call for social change, development was envisioned as abandonment of long standing traditions of the third world countries and opening up for modernization. Such vision of global development was officially propagated following the 1949 inaugural speech made by President Truman. In his historical speech, Truman stated, "We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas" (cited in Esteva, 2010:1; Macphail, 2009:4; Mefalopulos, 2008: 43). It seems that the President promised narrowing down the socio-economic disparity between the developed and underdeveloped countries through scientific development and industrial growth. He emphasized the urgent need of the development of the third world countries through financial aids and technological support.

However, scholars like Sachs (2010: xvi-xviii) argue that Truman's idea is not simple altruistic, but this idea of development has also influenced the needs of the emerging Cold War agenda. Besides, Truman's idea of development was inspired by the success of the post world war Marshall Plan that restored the ruined European economy (Melkote & Steeves, 2001: 51).

Scholars developed theories or models that were inspired and driven by Truman's policy. That is Truman set policies that advocate his ideas, and lots of money was made available to do studies. This enabled the issues of global development to become one of the primary issues in the academic, political and development arenas. In short, development has become the language of the day, and it was made to define the relationship between the West and the third world countries.

Motivated by the renowned "magic bullet" or "hypodermic needle theory" of mass communication, the scholars were sympathetic about the power of media in leading the intended development process in the 1950s and 1960s (Melkote & Steeves, 2001:105-108). In the past six decades, international development in general and development communication in particular has been given different meanings and goals for different scholars, politicians, practitioners and organizations. Accordingly, three broad perspectives have shaped the scholarship and practice of development in general and development communication in particular. That is, most of the discussions about the theoretical and practical foundations of the field of development and development communication have been built on three paradigms that are widely known as the modernization, the dependency, and the participatory paradigms (Rogers, 1976; Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Mefalopulos, 2008; Servaes 2008; Mcphail, 2009).

The first or original perspective is known as the modernization paradigm, that was originated arose in response to Truman's post-war policy and rooted in the neo-classical economic theory. This paradigm promoted capitalist economic policy that focus on the economic aspect of development. This model was developed only after scholars reviewed or studied the historical development of the west. The modernization paradigm conceives that the Western model of economic growth is the right way to development which others should imitate. The dissemination of western modern technology, suggested by President Truman, was regarded as a solution for underdevelopment problems. Melkote & Steeves (2001:73) explain such issue that "third world countries were encouraged to invest in a program of industrialization such as hydroelectric projects, steel industries and a diversity of manufacturing units".

The second perspective the dependency paradigm is based on the Marxist thought that strongly criticizes the modernization approach as incapable of solving the problems of the third world countries. Development using the modernization theory did not bring about the expected results, and the criticisms revealed some kind of truth. The opponents considered the modernization theory as a way of western economic and cultural imperialism. They argued for a new world order that could reinforce restructuring of political and economic power to create equity among the world society. Contrary to the modernization paradigm, this perspective criticized the capitalist system for problems of underdevelopment and backwardness.

The third perspective is the emerging alternative paradigm that rooted mainly from the liberation theology, and preached liberation and freedom of humanity from operation and domination as way to development. The supporters of the paradigm considered the emancipation of the poor as the basic solution for development since emancipation is as a way to empowerment and self reliance. The proponents advocate the importance of active participation of the local community for sustainable development. This paradigm change was prompted by the failure of designing effective approach that could bring about meaningful and sustainable development. As a result there have been proliferation new concepts about development like another development, 'post conflict' development, feminism, alternative development, post development, empowerment and multiplicity paradigm.

Generally, as already pointed out above, there are three widely known and broadly categorized theoretical development paradigms that have directed development communication at the theoretical and practical levels. These are the modernization paradigm, the dependency paradigm and the participatory paradigm.

Research Methodology

This study used qualitative research method that enabled us to understand the perceptions and practices of development. In the present study, the experiences and perceptions of change agents and the local community towards development communication works explored based on the qualitative research perspectives. Using the qualitative approach indeed enabled the study to have an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question i.e. perceptions and practices of development in Ethiopia.

ORDA as a Case of the Study

ORDA as a non-governmental and local development organization was founded in February 1984. It was originally established as Ethiopian Relief Organization (ERO). Combinations of economic, social and political crises that severely affected the region's people were pushing factors for the establishment of this indigenous organization. In other words, the establishment of the organization was a response to the socio-economic problems facing ANRS at that time (ORDA, 2014). ORDA has been working in Amhara region for three decades. The organization has carried out different development projects, and has been a long time partner of the people. The 1991 political change of the country is a turning point for ORDA to change itself into a local development organization. Then it was organized as a means for fighting against poverty via the development works.

Among the various development intervention areas the research is focused on three zones. These are Wag Hemra Zone (Sekota District), North Wollo Zone (Wadela District) and South Gonder Zone (Lay Gayint District).
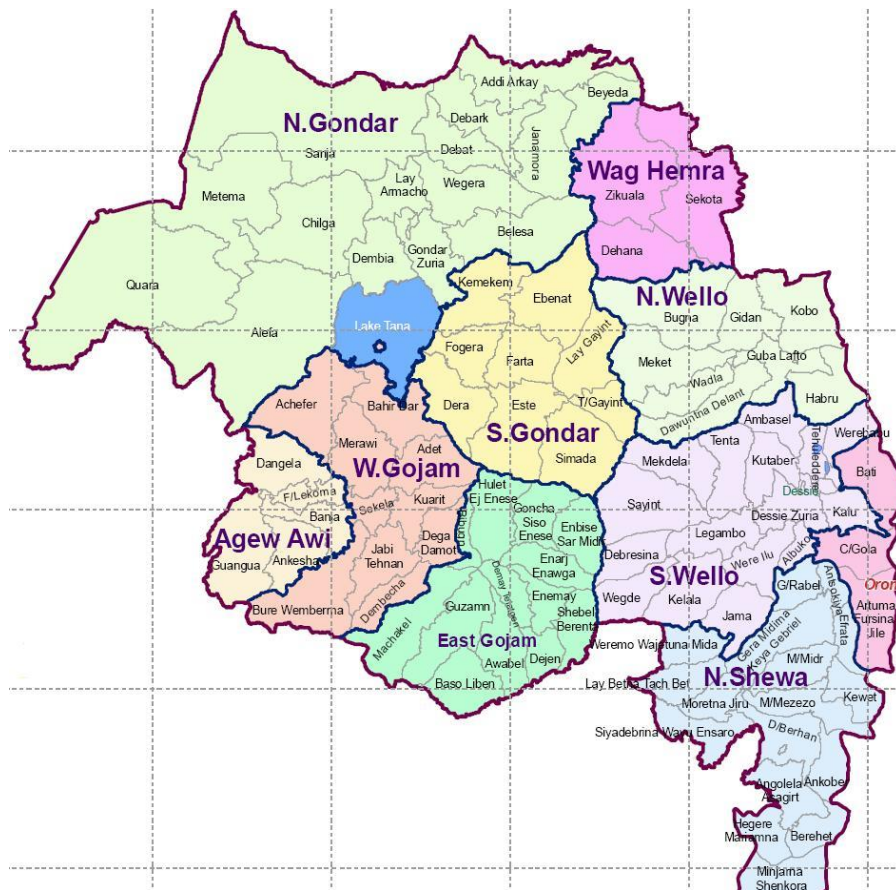
Picture 1.1: map of the Amhara region

Using qualitative case study as a research design, this research used in-depth interview, FGD, document analysis and observation as data gathering instrument. The individual interview and FGDs were conducted with development workers, experts and the local communities. Filed notes and different documents of ORDA have been used for analysis as a method of triangulating the data. Such triangulation is a means of achieving the validity and reliability of the data. After collection, and preparation, the data were analyzed using thematic approach and finally major conclusions were given using the participatory paradigm as theoretical lens.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Development Works in ORDA: Under the Shade of Traditional Approaches
The main purpose of this research article is to explore the perception and practice of development by a local development actor, ORDA and the local community. The data presentation and analysis provides both the organization and local community's perspectives. It starts with the organization and then proceeds to the local community living in the research sites. One of the senior managers of the organization defines development with the perspectives of ORDA as follows:

> Development in ORDA is defined from the economic perspective. It is about food security and material growth (MTT interview 2)

Similar views are stated by another member of management:

> When the safety net beneficiaries become food secured or when the local community members feed themselves, we call it development. When they become self reliance, it is development. (MMT interview 5)

> ORDA does not give much attention for development of the community's software [mind]. The majority of the community in his area are not literate and hence there should be lots of works to change the attitude and behaviour of the local people. ORDA performs major projects to improve the economic growth of the rural community (DW interview 2).

The above quotations could highlight us that ORDA as an organization perceives development as economic growth of the local community. That is, the economic conception of development outweighs the other dimensions of development. This is a perspective drawn on the modernization and the dependency paradigm despite their convection on the idea of participation. Many development workers share such economic notion of development: For instance, one development workers states:

> Development is growth; it is the economic growth of the community. For example, road construction is a development work since it increases market integration of the people. This in turn develops their economic capacity. (DW interview 1)

The above excerpts could indicate that ORDA conceives development as economic growth mainly focusing on food security. Such conception of development is also visible from vision and mission statements of the organization and its strategic plans. The vision of ORDA is given as: "the vision of ORDA is to see poverty free people of Amhara, Ethiopia" and its mission is presented: "the mission of ORDA is empowering poor community and their organizations in Amhara to achieve livelihoods and environmental security" (ORDA, 2012). These statements illustrate that ORDA is primarily established to working for the fulfillment of food security.

Moreover, understanding ORDA's conceptions of development, examining its four strategic plans was a must. Thus, the first strategic plan (1997-2003) defined ORDA's priority areas: natural resource protection, agricultural development, rural water supply and access, road construction and emergency food aid. The second strategic plan (2004-2008) further refined the areas of priorities and restructured the organization under four programs namely Environmental Rehabilitation and Agricultural Development, Forest Resources Development, Water Resources Development and Disaster and Relief Programs (ORDA second strategic plan, 2004; ORDA third strategic plan, 2009; and ORDA fourth strategic plan, 2014).

The priorities continued during the third (2009-2013) and the fourth strategic plans (2014-2018), with widening areas of coverage, doubling budget amount, and diversifying interventions from year after year. There is no significant variation among the priority areas of programs in ORDA for the last two decades. Generally, the main focus of ORDA's development efforts is on livelihood achievement under economic growth.

In other words, the common understanding is that bring about economic growth is the main objective of ORDA's development works. Therefore, the economic conception seems to be the dominant approach of development in ORDA. This implies that, the economic conception of ORDA shapes the development activities on the ground in which ORDA's various development projects have been designed primarily for their economic benefits of the local community. This economic conception of development could shape the development practices focusing on hard development issues. Even when I asked about the major development works ORDA performs, the common answers were the hard development works such as building health centers, developing spring water development, constructing hand dug well, constructing roads and irrigations, protecting environment using development workers and the local people. The actual field observations also demonstrated such attention given to the development activities mentioned.

The ORDA's economic focused conception of development seems to become different from the definition of participatory development which focuses on holistic development including the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of a given society. The emphasis on economic issues usually marginalises the dimension of human development in which participatory development and communication is all about. Moreover, the emphasis on economy as a single criterion for defining development entails that the development approach is top down and participatory development communication becomes a missing link.

In addition, ORDA perceives poverty as a shortage of basic needs or materials. The research participants' responses show that they perceived poverty as lack of resources to satisfy basic needs. One interviewee (DW interview 3) states "poverty is lack of basic needs. It is something that is associated with food insecurity". Here, some more examples are mentioned:

> Mainly the perception of poverty is related to economic issues. Low level of agricultural production which is insufficient for the consumption of the local community is evidence to what extent the people live under the poverty line. People living in our project area are categorized into absolutely poor people and poor people. (MMT interview 2)

Hence, the conceptions of development and poverty in ORDA may be drawn on the economic perspective of development. That is, the stated conceptions of development and poverty in ORDA could shape and dictate the type and practice of development works. The perception of development by the local community is also related to avoiding poverty. For the local community, poverty is conceived as the result of lack of basic needs. The poor are those who cannot feed themselves, who wear ragged clothes/dresses. The poor are those who receive the food aids from aid agencies. The following excerpts, which were taken from the local community show how they perceive poverty and the poor.

> Poverty is when somebody lives in a state of hopelessness. It is a state when he lives with the support of others. Poverty is when one is not engaged in a work that cannot help him feed his family or it is the absence of work for some of us. Poverty is the lack of cattle. If a person does not have a cow, an ox, or goats, he is called poor. The poor are landless too. By any means if a person is under food aid program, he is poor. (FGD 1)

> If a person has an ox, he is rich, so he is not poor. If a person has a corrugated iron house and an ox, he is not poor. (FGD1)

The local community also perceives development as economic growth that focuses on building terracing, soil fertility and environment protection to increase productivity. The following verbatim expressions mirror the conception of development by the local community.

> Development is protecting the environment from soil erosion. We have been working this under the development program of ORDA and the government. ORDA has been working road, terracing, water and soil protection, seeds distribution as development works. Development is building terrace. (FGD 4)

The local community members commonly define development as "terracing for soil and water conservation". This conception could be the result of local community's involvement in the stated development works for their material and labor contributions. As mentioned above, the power holders (benefactors) define poverty as shortage of materials or basic needs. They refer development as material fulfillment and food security, and the local community (beneficiaries) takeover such conceptions. In other words, the economic dimension of development activities in their area (by governmental and nongovernmental organizations) shapes the conceptions of development and poverty by the local community. Such economic led conception tends to affect development practices. Especially the human development component is missing or marginalized in the development process of ORDA. As a result, the non material aspects of development and poverty are overlooked from the development process both at the perceptual and practical levels.

The top down approach focuses on economic growth, and considers the local community as passive receivers of project benefits. Development projects are designed by the elites and development organizations which hardly consider local needs and concerns. Decision making powers and resources are controlled by outsider change agents. On the other hand, horizontal or bottom up development approaches consider the local community as active agents of their own development and actively involve them in the development process. Local needs and concerns are prioritized in this approach. The bottom up approach seeks the empowerment of the local community and enables them to determine their destiny. Unlike the top down approaches which the decision making power and resources are controlled by the local community. Now let us go on to the discussion on the development approach of ORDA.

ORDA's development work is predominantly top down. It means development projects are designed without the active involvement of the local community and local needs and concerns are rarely prioritized. The donor driven development approach observed in the findings opens room for having influences of international donors and the regional government on the development approach of ORDA. That is, the dollar driven development approach could force ORDA to prioritise the needs of these development partners. This in turn closes the opportunity for prioritising the needs of the local community. One of the development workers states such strong influence of the donors in the design of the projects as follows:

> We cannot conduct need assessments for the donor driven projects. What we do is we go to the community with decided projects such as water, road, health centre, etc., and orient them and seek their contribution. You see the projects are already pre-determined. What we do is convincing the community for their contribution. Then we implement the project, and hand it over when we leave the place. (DW interview 5)

Such types of economically driven projects are predetermined, and they make the development approach top down. This makes localizing development and empowerment become difficult. From the data it could be possible to infer that projects funded by donor organizations such as USAID and FHI are top down. They are powerful in deciding the type,

the nature and place of the projects. This process marginalizes the local community from actively participating in all the phases of the development works. The development approach makes them mere beneficiaries, not active participants in their own development process. Broadly seen this reflects how the development assistance given by the international development partners determine the development approach and marginalize the involvement of the local community from the start of the project. This is in line with Quarles van Ufford's (as cited in Sonderling, 1997:39) argument about such problems of the development industry as follows:

> The availability of large funds means that the local peoples have limited if any control over spending and that their views on planning are mediated through 'local organization' in the form of an institutional representative structure set up by the developee's national government.

The above problem also demonstrates that the development assistances of the international donors show a move towards donors tend to create donors funding government programs rather than local development projects and programs by a local NGO or the community. A good example that illustrates this move is that the PSNP project in Amhara region, which is a huge government project mainly funded by the international donors. ORDA has become the implementer of this project mainly in the food insecure districts of Amhara region since 2005.

The move towards the international donors to sponsor government projects such as the PSNP give chances to government policy priorities which in turn disregarding localizing development works and views of the local community. Therefore, such move enables the government to have absolute power to decide the type and place of PSNP projects and limit ORDA's role as implementer. This also clearly mirrors ORDA is working in line with government priorities.

Therefore, the aforementioned discussion indicates that ORDA usually goes to the community with the already approved projects. This could make development works supply driven, other than demand driven. That is, ORDA has been looking for funds from donor organizations for filling gaps of the government by implementing the government sponsored projects. Such approach of development projects is primarily focusing on meeting the requirements of donors and the government rather than addressing the needs of the local people who could develop mistrust and frustration on the projects.

However, because of the severe and multi-faceted problems since the local communities are facing; ORDA rarely face strong resistance from the communities against the already approved projects. In other words, regardless of the type and nature of projects, the community usually needs benefits out of the projects including road, and clean water, jobs, food, seeds, and financial credit. Consequently, it could be argued that the high level of poverty and inadequate infrastructures silenced the people while the implementation of projects that are planned without their involvement. Thus, it has become common for ORDA's development experts meet the local people for giving orientation about the projects decided without the involvement of the local community. The main goal of the orientation is to inform about the projects, their uses and benefits and ask them for contributions. The contributions are usually labor and materials though a few people are participating in the committee works such as water committee, irrigation committee and road committee. For some of the committee members who are living in absolute poverty, the organization pays food for labor contributions.

As a result, the economic conception of development and the use of top down approach hinder ORDA to realize sustainable development since sustainable development happens with communicative experiences and process, not in a top down fashion. The absence of such critical engagement closed the eyes of the local community not to see the root causes of poverty related with the social, economic, political and cultural world of the community. They rather see the root cause of poverty and their low quality of life as the result of the intervention of super natural power, bestowed by their God. This is similar with Rogers's argument about the mentality or subculture of peasants that affect the development process in third world countries (Rogers cited in Waisbord, 2002). For example, in Wadela where drought and chilly weather are recurrent problems affecting the life of the local community, one of the group discussants from the local community utters such belief as follows:

> Our poverty is a result of God's maltreatment. God does not give us what we deserve. What can we do if the rain does not come at the right time, if the snow damages what we sow on the land? We are working but God does not help us. We ploughed, we worked hard but God damaged everything that we did. This vicious circle complicated our life. Poverty is from the Heaven, it is God's order. When the crop reaches to maturity the snow damages it. This is beyond our control. It is from the above (by observing on the sky). Man is not poor at birth but God does not help us. We are poor, not because we are lazy rather God does not help us to get the fruit of our effort. For example, this year we had a very good seedling of barely. We thought we can feed our family by getting good production. We were very eager to feed ourselves. However, suddenly the chilly damaged it. It cut our throat. It is like killing us. Because of this, poverty is with us. If God does not help us what can we do? We have no choice. (FGD 3)

All the group members nodded their head in agreement with this discussant. This is a sense of fatalism. There was sadness on the faces of the group discussants. Such strong held belief discloses the absence of basic constructs of participatory communication such as dialogue, critical thinking, problematization and action and reflection as means of empowerment (Cadiz, 2005; Freire, 2005; Mefalopulos, 2005 & 2008; Servaes, 2008). If, for instance, Freire's style of dialogical communication had been employed, it could have enabled the local community to open their eyes and critically analyze the root causes of their poverty, i.e. questioning the social world they are living in. That is, rather than challenging the development approaches and policies, the power inequality, the absence of equity in their social environment, and examining flaws in their cultural world, the discussants pointed their figures towards the remote sky. Instead of questioning the status quo they live in, the history they passed in, the socio economic and political world they live in, they wanted solutions beyond the horizon. This is inconsistent with Freire's (2005) model of dialogical communication that has been claimed to enable the poor to become critically aware of and reflect about their status in society that in turn motivates them to liberation from cultural, social, economic and political injustices. Or as he argues that dialogue is a gateway to understand one's reality and the world.

This could reveal that there is a gap in the development approach of ORDA. The local community is not guided to open their eyes to critically examine the root causes of poverty and search the solutions of the environment. In contrast to Freire's notions, the local community could not understand their reality and the world around them. The paradox is that while observing the vicious circle of poverty in the region, ORDA and its development partners have chosen to distribute food aid for three decades rather than searching long standing solutions. This could affect sustainable development or any future development efforts. In the long run no one benefits from such negligence of addressing the root causes of poverty.

For its short term benefit, the sustainability of food distribution seems that the development industry has jobs to do and get paid for it. What is disheartening is that this is done at the cost of developing dependency syndrome by the local community. This in turn has become one of the challenges of the development industry.

In a nut shell, it seems possible to argue that the development industry will be in a war created by itself i.e. dependency syndrome. This battle will cost its energy, money and time in a way that sustains, if not, creates further poverty.

As mentioned above, ORDA has been heavily investing its time, energy, capital and money on physical projects such as irrigation, road, water and environmental protection. By focusing on these physical projects, ORDA does not give attention to change the traditional practices that affect development works. This focus on physical projects enables ORDA and the funding agencies to keep control over projects. In Amhara region in general and in the research sites in particular, there are lots of traditional practices that impede the development works. For example, several of religious holidays forbid physical works and lots of celebrations or religious feasts crate the scare resources in the area. Such things are serious problems. That is, religious holidays and celebrations affect the rural life since the majority could not perform the agricultural practices. For example, in Sekota, Wadela, and Nefas Mewcha there are several off days for religious worships and feasts by Orthodox Christians as stated by the development workers below. One of the research participants from Sekota narrates such experience as follows:

> As farmers are guided by their religions, they have too many religious holidays in the area on which they spent their days without agricultural work for the sake of religion. Members of the local community are dominantly Orthodox Christians. Normally, the Orthodox Church identified every Saturday and Sunday as Sabbaths. And also the monthly 5th, 7th, 12th, 16th, 21st, 27th and 29th days are holidays in the local area. Agricultural works in these days are prohibited by the religious followers. In addition, there are additional holidays that have been assigned as time for worship and rest by the local community which in turn significantly reduces the time that has to be used for productive works. For example, one week following the fasting of the month of June (*sene tsom*), one week following the fasting of the month of August (*fisleta*) and one week following Easter holiday in every year are worship and rest days, and agricultural works are not performed in our area. These days are additional off days to the yearly national Christian holidays namely Easter, Epiphany and Finding the Cross. (DW interview 2)

Too many religious holidays that affect the agricultural practices is in line with the claim of Andrew and Dennis (2008), which states the powerful influence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church on the daily life. Alemayehu (cited Andrew and Dennis 2008, 57-58) also calculated the religious holidays in North Gonder, and conclude that "only fourteen days were left for work in average month".

Moreover, other traditional practices such as funerals, memorials of dead persons by relatives and wedding ceremonies impede the development process. The local peoples extravagantly invest their scare resources for such traditional celebrations. Celebrations are marked after celebrations in the local rural Amhara.

> There are lots of celebrations in our area. But development does not come by marking lots of celebrations. Celebration demands expenditure. There are still lots of celebrations and feasts on funeral, memorial and weddings in our area. (DW interview 1)

The presence of these traditional practices in the research areas discloses two main points. On one hand, that little attention has been given to the soft development issues in the research area and on the other, there is a gap in the development conception and approach of the organization. That is, lack of conceiving and approaching development holistically marginalize the soft development issues and hence the development approach fails to address the root causes of poverty and backwardness in the region.

In addition, there is no guideline or policy that encourages the use of local knowledge in the development works by the organization. Lack of formal and organized practice to use local knowledge for sustainable and participatory development by itself would mean that ORDA uses the non participatory nature of the development approach. That is, using local knowledge for participatory and sustainable development is the missed opportunity in ORDA's development effort. This is in line with what Rogeres, (1976) and Huesca (2008) state that the acknowledgement of local cultures, values and knowledge for development is devalued in the traditional approach.

Generally, the above discussion illuminates that both at the perceptual and practical levels, ORDA's development work is under the shade of the traditional approach. That is, the dominant economic conception and top down approach of development reveal that the local organization fails to localize the development works. This is in line with Sengupta's (2007: 239) observation of the mainstream development works which is contrary to the advocacy of participatory development at the theoretical levels. The author explains that contrary to the promotion and intention of human development at the theoretical level, the practice is dominated by the modernization approach of development. This leads to closing the room for active involvement of the local community in their own development process and affect the sustainability of development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This case study reveals that the dominant conception and approach of development in ORDA is under the shade of the traditional modernization and dependency approaches. The economic perspective of development and its top down approach illuminates the persistence of traditional modernization approach in the development practice of local development agents. ORDA's development approach is not human centered and holistic but reflects the assumptions of the old dependency theory. Much attention is given to the economic dimension of development at the cost of the basic ingredients of human development, and unique demands of the situation of the Ethiopian locale, as well as such needs as participation, empowerment, equality, freedom and equity are absent in the development vocabularies of the local change agent i.e. ORDA. This affects sustainable development in the ORDA.

Therefore, this research concludes that by investing its resources, time and energy on hard development issues, ORDA seems to miss the chance of working on soft development issues. The marginalization of the soft development issues is like building a house without establishing its appropriate foundation. If a person could not build a strong foundation, the house could not have the required strength and durability. Similarly, the economic led development works could not achieve human development by itself. Thus, it is argues that the economic conception of development and its top down approach do not enable ORDA to tackle poverty and achieve sustainable development.

Besides, the presence of cultural practices that affect development works revealed that the development approach has given little attention to local issues and concerns. In turn this mirrors that participatory paradigm is not practiced. However, it is possible to argue that the practice of genuine participation could help to curb the cultural practices and hence facilitate even economic development.

Recommendations

The research findings could confirm that the traditional development approach was the dominant trend in the local development agent's work despite their claim for promoting participation. The local development agents also fail to localize the development works. To avert such trends, this research recommends the following major shifts in the development works of the local development agent in particular and other similar development organizations in general.

- There should be a shift in the conception and approach of development from the traditional top-down to human-centered approach. This might need a brain wash of the development actors.

- Human centered development approach should be implemented. That is, development should be approached holistically which needs multidimensional interventions. Projects for economic growth should be implemented by integrating with other components of holistic development. Especially the human dimension of development should get due attention in a way that empowers the local people to determine their future. By doing this ORDA could balance the development works of hard and soft development issues.

- Active participation of the local people at all level of the development projects should not be overlooked for sustainable development. And using participatory model of development could enable ORDA to achieve sustainable development.

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