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The Effects of New Housing Developments on *Idir*, a Self-Help Association,

in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in African Studies

by

Woubzena Taddesse Jifar

2013

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Effects of New Housing Developments on *Idir*, a Self-Help Association,

in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

by

Woubzena Taddesse Jifar

Master of Arts in African Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Sondra Hale, Chair

There have been many studies conducted on the topic of *Idir* – a self-help traditional association in Ethiopia that supports families financially, materially and emotionally in a time of bereavement. The origins have been debated and how it will evolve in the coming decades has been speculated. Many researchers have discussed *Idir* juxtaposed to urban development. However, researchers in the past have focused on the invention of *Idir* as a result of urban development. This study focuses on the dissolution of *Idir* in the face of radical urban changes.

In Chapter One, I set the research in the framework of development studies because the project is constructed on the concept of building *Idir* into a grassroots development tool. In order to understand how this traditional association can become a cornerstone in development, in Chapter Two, I describe in detail how the association operates. This was done in an effort to demonstrate that *Idir* is no different from a western nonprofit. The more it can be constructed as an indigenous version of a western model, the easier it will be to incorporate it into future

development goals. After setting up the context of the study and the focus of the study – *Idir,* I then tackle the external factor that is forcing the changes to take place - urban development - in Chapter Three. Addis Ababa is a city that is going through radical changes. For this study, I am focusing on one aspect of this change, which is the Integrated Housing Development Programme. This is because this is the aspect of urban development that is affecting the members of community *Idirs* citywide. Finally, in Chapter Four, I incorporate interviews I have conducted with members of the dissolved *Idir, Hebreselam Idir,* to show the effects these housing developments are having on the membership of *Idir.*

The results of the study were that indeed these community associations have continued to support city dwellers even though these new housing developments have scattered the membership across the city. However, Addis Ababa inhabitants are continuing to gain support from such associations by joining a new *Idir* in their new neighborhood. Thus, the research proved it will be difficult to advance *Idir* into activities beyond bereavement support at the moment as the social cohesiveness that was built over time was lost instantaneously.

The thesis of Woubzena Taddesse Jifar is approved.

Andrew Apter

Edith Omwami

Sondra Hale, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father Taddesse Jifar who passed away in 2004 before I

could begin to appreciate everything he has done to make me who I am today. Even though he is

no longer with us, I carry him with me everyday. This research project was a result of years of

finding a way to grieve his loss.

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Acknowledgements

When I was considering coming to Graduate School one of the cons of graduate studies I was told about was isolation. Everyone who has had any kind of experience with graduate school told me that it would be lonely. Even during orientation one of the concerns were how to ensure that you do not go in to the black hole that is your thesis. This acknowledgement page means so much to me because I had so many people in my life to ensure I did not do just that. Because of all of you my research did not take a hold of me, rather I was in charge of it the entire time I was working on my studies.

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Outside of the UCLA family I was also humbled by the assistance I received from Addis Ababa University staff, participants of my study and various professionals in Addis Ababa who took the time to discuss my research project with me.

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Chapter One

Introduction

a) Context for the Study of Traditional Associations in Ethiopia in Their Relationship to Development

"Dir Biyabere, Anbesa Yasere"
(If there is enough web, even a lion can be restrained.)

For a very long time Ethiopians have been pulling their resources together in the form of traditional associations to overcome day-to-day difficulties. Traditional associations in Ethiopia have been ensuring the socioeconomic wellbeing of communities for centuries. Yet before exploring the significance and utility of these in the context of Ethiopian development, it will be worthwhile to discern the perimeters of development theory and determine where exactly these associations fit within that theoretical framework.

The end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s were the peak years for the independence of many African countries. As these new states were entering into the new economic stage, the developed world was in the process of completing its reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War. The success of the Marshal Plan in Europe brought about the idea that many African countries could also benefit from the economic support of the "West." However, unlike in Europe many theorized that Africans suffered from the hindrance of tradition that restricted their natural transition into industrialization. This brought about the birth of various forms of modernization theory.

W. W. Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth* describes modernization theory in terms of a rigid trajectory. Societies progress from point A to point B in a pre-determined march. First we have the traditional society, "whose structure is developed within limited production functions" (Rostow, 1991: 4). Then come several distinct stages: pre-take off,

take off and maturity, leading to the final stage of mass consumption where society moves from the idea of technological modern forms of production to developing welfare and security for the state. Rostow's argument for modernization theory was that different States are at different developmental levels. Modernization theory relied on teleology and it used countries in the West as those "developed" states that led the march into "Mass Consumption". Once all the states were categorized within this theory as being closer or farther away from the pre-determined destination, it was theorized that it became necessary for those who were ahead to help those who were lagging behind.

While theorists such as W.W Rostow argued that development should come about through modernization, which heavily depended on "developed" countries helping those that were not; the critics of modernization theory brought forth dependency theory, which rejected the assistance of the "West" as necessary. Arturo Escobar writes, "the nascent order of capitalism and modernity relied on the politics of poverty the aim of which was not only to create consumers but to transform society by turning the poor into objects of knowledge and management" (Escobar, 1995: 23). Theorists such as Arturo Escobar and Walter Rodney brought about the voice of what Immanuel Wallerstein defined as the "periphery" in his World Systems (Wallerstein, 1999). Walter Rodney argued that the continued "support" of Europe was further hindering the development of third world countries. "All of the countries named as 'underdeveloped' in the world are exploited by others; and the underdevelopment with which the world is now preoccupied is a product of capitalist, imperialist, and colonialist exploitation" (Rodney, 1973: 14). It was from this point on that the "periphery" seemed to become relevant and the idea of modernization theory started to be deconstructed.

The different positions within development theory continued to change and finally began to include women in their discussion. Supporters of Women in Development (WID)

theories claimed that women should be included in the previously established modernization theory. The flaw with WID, in simply adding women into the development efforts was that it did not analyze the needs of women within development separately. The critics of WID, even though appreciative of its contributions, insisted that the side effects of WID policies are greater. Naila Kabeer, one of the critics of WID theories, writes in *Reversed Realities* (Kabeer, 1994), about the three policy planning errors as omission, reinforcement and addition. Omission refers to the fact that WID theories failed to recognize the role of women in traditional societies; reinforcement refers to the fact that WID did not recognize the need to alleviate preexisting conditions that restricted women's potential and opportunities; and finally, addition refers to superimposing western values on top of the traditional ones. The gender discussion within development theory has enhanced the way policies are made. More importantly, it has given greater agency to those who are the subject of development.

As a result of the constant revisions of development theories, development theorists today have ceased to recommend blanket development solutions to the world at large. Instead, development now is studied on a case by case basis down to the particular neighborhood within a particular city. Theorists such as Paul Farmer, for example, suggest that concepts such as "structural violence" could be applied to many parts of the world. Moreover he states it is necessary to "… study both individual experience and the larger social matrix in which it is embedded in order to see how various large-scale social forces come to be translated into personal distress and disease" (Farmer, 1996: 261). The 'individual experience' necessitates case studies be done instead of attempting wholesale solutions. Therefore, in this era of development theories, "the task at hand […] is to identify the forces conspiring to promote suffering, with the understanding that these will be differentially weighted in different settings" (Farmer, 1996: 280). Following in the footsteps

of Paul Farmer, this research study attempts to focus on a traditional association, *Idir,* in a particular neighborhood in Addis Ababa, in order to examine the possibilities of expanding this indigenous concept into development activities for city dwellers in Addis Ababa.

b) Literature Review: Self- Help Associations

One of the early works on traditional self-help associations in Africa is by Kenneth Little. He discusses in his book, *West African Urbanization: A study of Voluntary Associations in Social Change* (1965), a variety of associations from tribal ones that are networked from the rural to the urban centers abroad to cultural associations that base their membership on the level of education. Little explains the purpose of the associations as follows "All of them [associations] gave assistance to members in sickness and bereavement and donated sums of money to the kinfolk of a deceased member … These societies were also in the habit of providing a lump sum to each member in rotation." (Little, 1965: 48) Similarly, there are a variety of welfare associations in different regions of Ethiopia amongst the different peoples. Depending on where one looks or the type of socioeconomic need that exists there will be a few traditional associations present. "*Debo*," "*Idir,*" (also spelt as "*Eder*") "*Equb*," (also spelt as "*Iquib*"), "*Mahiber*," "*Senbete,*" and "*Wonfel*" are some of the examples of these associations. These associations can be formed around ethnic groups, religious beliefs, or particularly in rural parts of Ethiopia, around occupation. In this thesis, I focus my discussion on *Idir*, which is organized around life's events, mainly funerals, in a particular neighborhood.

Tirfe Mammo states, "*Eder [Idir]*, is wider than any other local organization where regular fees are paid and all members are obliged to attend funeral ceremonies and must always be ready to help." (Mammo, 1999: 187) It can be looked at as a traditional insurance system. Death is certain so one might as well invest in future funeral arrangements. However,

this contribution goes beyond giving money to the association. It requires that members attend funerals and be involved in the community if they wish to receive the same treatment in the event they also lose loved ones. The economic need is a rationale for the association, but it is not the foundation for its success. This association thrives because of the close relationships individuals foster within the organization. It may start as attending a funeral, but it quickly grows into a genuine concern for those members one interacts with from one funeral to the next. It functions, then, as a social and economic network.

Daniel Sahleyesus Telake (2005) discusses traditional associations in the context of the broader platform of non-governmental organizations (NGO) in Ethiopia. He asserts that *Idir* is expanding to take on more responsibilities in the community (somewhat similar to the role an NGO assumes) but cautions against this involvement because it may cause such indigenous organizations to lose perspective of their traditional roots and, as they become more institutionalized, their flexibility and adaptability. "Although *Idir* still continues to perform its primary role of taking care of funerals and comforting the bereaved, lately some units, especially those in urban areas, have begun to scale up their activities by adding other development oriented functions" (Telake, 2005: 81). He goes on to state some of the activities *Idir* has taken on recently as "running kindergartens, horticulture, cattle fattening, dairy farming, and income-generating activities such as carpentry, basketry, and metalwork" (Telake, 2005: 82). *Idir* is growing and having an incredible impact on the Ethiopian civil society. Researchers such as Telake are reluctant to support the expansion and transformation whole heartedly while others have written in an effort to scale-up *Idir* services.

In a working paper entitled, "Extending Insurance? Funeral Associations in Ethiopia and Tanzania," Dercon, Bold, De Weerdt and Pankhurst (2004) explore the history and characteristics of traditional associations and how they can be used as a blueprint for scaling-

up. "Typically, these indigenous arrangements are usually seen as informal, reciprocal systems of mutual support and question marks exist about whether they could survive any attempt to formalize these arrangements. However, if existing arrangements are formalized and based on well-organized groups, then the potential exists for effective scaling-up" (Dercon, Bold, De Weerdt & Pankhurst, 2004: 23). Some of the ways they recommend scaling up are through development activities in general or through insurance and finance related activities. There has already been some effort to apply *Idir* to development activities by pairing them up with NGOs. Though Dercon, Bold, De Weerdt and Pankhurst are more optimistic about the possibility of scaling up, they share some of the skepticism of Telake in that applying formal structure, in effect, rigidifying organizations that are based on flexibility and informality is a recipe for failure. Nevertheless, they recommend proceeding with caution versus dismissing the idea all together.

Yet another perspective on *Idir* and development is that it can succeed if only the government takes an active role in including it in policy changes. Desalegn Amsalu writes in his paper "Traditional Associations in Rural Ethiopia – The Case of Awi Community in Faggeta Lekoma Woreda" that *Idir* has a "deep-rooted" position in the community and this position can potentially be used for incorporating development goals. However, he concludes that this potential is being lost because *Idir* has not been given a prominent role in national policies. "[…] These associations have not been understood appropriately to be used for development schemes even in blend with the modern approach of development. This can be understood from the government policies of the past and the present where traditional associations have not been involved, but rather avoided for appropriate policy augmentation. (Amsalu, 2007: 66) Amsalu's argument places some of the flaws in *Idir's* progress into creating more development projects on the government's inability to see these associations

potential. However, the author's suggestion for more government involvement should be considered with skepticism. More government involvement could result in less participation from the people. The reason these associations continue to thrive is because a particular community for the needs of that community creates them; therefore, dispensing a national policy on what they should do and how they should operate will unravel the basis in which they are created.

These authors' discussion on *Idir* and development is where my research began. Clearly, there is this idea that *Idir* can be formalized to serve a greater purpose in development. There is evidence that some of the associations are starting to branch out and collaborate with NGOs, local and international, proving that *Idir* has the capacity to operate on a formalized platform. This research project was formulated to analyze exactly how this new form of operations in this traditional association will function in the process of urbanization. The progress of urban development in Addis Ababa forces the association to add another level of adjustment to continue its existence. How will *Idir* members cope? More importantly, would this budding relationship with development activities continue in light of the radical changes in city dwellers' lives?

Feleke Tadele, in "Moving People in Ethiopia: Development, Displacement and the State" discusses the role of traditional associations especially in time of displacement. "These associations were not officially recognized or encouraged to participate in the planning and implementation of the project [relocation]. However, they have remained the main informal forums for exchanging ideas and discussing problems caused by displacement" (Feleke, 2009: 113). Though this particular article was written about rural areas of Ethiopia where groups of people were moved for the purpose of development, this movement, more

accurately relocation of people has become an urban reality for the inhabitants of Addis Ababa.

A dissertation written by Gebre Yntiso Deko (Ph.D) on urban developments in Addis Ababa mainly focuses on the low-income housing structures that are being built. However, he dedicates a section to discussing *Idir* and the impact of relocation on the association and its members. "Informants explained how difficult it has been to maintain membership in the old *Idir* and/or join new ones. Those who moved to the new sites as a group maintained their neighborhood associations while those who were relocated as individuals and dispersed to different sites faced difficulties" (Deko, 2007: 50). Furthermore, he concludes that the focus of the housing developments being solely on the housing needs of Addis Ababa inhabitants to be housed will inevitably hurt the social well being of the communities the government is creating around these housing developments.

In this review of literature, the progression of *Idir* from an example of a traditional self-help association in Africa to a potential tool in development has been shown. The primary services of *Idir* continue to be helping individuals through their time of mourning by providing financial, material and emotional support. Next, authors that focused on development have shown that *Idir* has a great potential to provide services beyond support of bereavement. These authors however differ in the approaches as to how *Idir* should make this transition from a bereavement support group to a development tool. Finally, there is urban development that further complicates the advancement of this association. It can be concluded that the phenomena of city expansion in Addis Ababa, as it relates to new housing developments, presents an opportunity to examine *Idir* closely as its membership is dispersed to many parts of the city. More importantly, it is necessary to qualitatively document the effects of these changes on city dwellers in order to contribute to the evolution of *Idir*.

c) Statement of the Problem

The topic of traditional self-help associations in Ethiopia has been explored for many decades. In particular, many researchers, whether as a part of a larger project or as a research topic on its own, have explored the study of *Idir*. As shown in the literature review, a few have also began exploring the idea of development and where *Idir* would fit into development schemes. However, there has not been an investigation on how urban development is affecting the re-establishment of *Idir* in newly fashioned living arrangements.

In this study I examine the effects on the membership of a dissolved *Idir*, named *Hebreselam Idir*, in Lideta Sub-City, Woreda 9 in the commonly called *Sengatera* neighborhood. I chose this particular *Idir* because it was the one my family belonged to and I have an established connection with the members. I carried out some interviews of former members of the *Hebreselam Idir,* people who are currently living in condominiums that were built by the government in different parts of the city. I examine how the new living arrangements have affected former members.

d) Objective of the Study

The objective of this research study is two-folds: a general objective and four specific ones.

The general objective of the study is to identify and record the changes members of the *Idir* are experiencing as a result of housing developments and relocation and the structural changes of the *Idir*. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the effects new housing developments have on the operations of *Idir*.

2. To explicate the necessity of *Idir* in community building despite the disintegrating effects of new housing developments.

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3. To analyze the effects of *Hebreselam Idir's* dissolution on former members who have not joined a new *Idir*.

4. To recommend approaches learned from this research study to development activities.

e) Raison d'être of the Study

Idir is one of the most significant operative associations within Ethiopian society. This association helps nurture the networks that keep a community together. The relocation of people from an established neighborhood to a new one, to a completely new way of life threatens this cohesive network. However, even amid intense transformations i.e. city inhabitants being scattered to different parts of town kilometers away from their neighbors Ethiopians are keeping their membership in *Idir*. Some have had to join a new *Idir* in the neighborhood they have moved to while others maintain their old membership, if it has not been dissolved. While the history, operations and utility of *Idir* have been researched and written about in the past, the recent changes *Idir* is experiencing have yet to be investigated in-depth. This study strives to uncover the way *Idir* is continuing to support city dwellers through this new phase of urbanization in Addis Ababa.

f) Some Questions of Methodology and the Problems of Fieldwork

In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives for this study I set out to use a multifaceted methodology. This study is limited to *Hebreselam Idir* (whose name roughly translates into an *Idir* united for peace) and former members that have relocated. I maintain, however, that *Hebreselam Idir* is typical enough to extrapolate to other self-help associations and generalize about neighborhood organizations in Addis Ababa.

i. Library Research

The study began at Addis Ababa University and The National Library and Archives gathering literature on *Idir*. As shown in the literary review and as will be evident in

Chapter Two, research that has been conducted around this association was mostly done by students at Addis Ababa University, especially, the research that was completely based on the association. After reading many theses and dissertations for a month, it was evident that the sources were becoming redundant and it was time to move on to fieldwork to collect new data.

ii. Interviews

The interviews targeted three groups of individuals in relation to *Hebreselam Idir*:

a) Former Members of *Hebreselam Idir* who have relocated:

This group was created because the research mainly focuses on the new housing developments and its effects on the association. Two of the interviewees lived in condominium houses.

b) Former Members of *Hebreselam Idir* still residing in Woreda 9:

This group of interviewees was set up so there could be a contrast with those who have relocated. Unfortunately, only two former members were identified as still residing in the neighborhood. I interviewed one, but the other was unavailable because she currently suffers from a mental health problem.

c) Former officials of *Hebreselam Idir*:

The purpose of interviewing within this last group was to understand the inner workings of the association from the point-of-view of the leadership group. While I was able to interview the Judge, he was not able or willing to lead me to other former officials in the association.

Finally, although I had planned to conduct participant observations, I learned once I arrived that *Idir* meetings do not take place on a monthly basis unless there is a reason such as officer

elections to prompt the meeting. In addition to eliminating the meeting observation, there were several obstacles to my study I encountered as discussed in the next section.

g. Limitations of the Study

Initially, the purpose of the study was to have the interviews of former members of *Hebreselam Idir* serve as the primary source of the study. However, as the fieldwork progressed, it was clear that there were a number of obstacles that made a quantitative research project an unattainable goal in this case. Therefore, the research eventually had to become heavily dependent on secondary sources, bolstered by, a few insights from a few primary sources.

Below I indicate some of the methodology problems of following the initial aims of the research. These problems, however, gave me greater insights into the complex and variegated ways that city residents are changing and how flexible they can be.

a) Distance between new neighborhoods:

The title of this project - *The Effects of New Housing Developments on Idir, a Self-Help Association, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia* refers to the fact that the formation of new neighborhoods is a key part of the study. Unfortunately, what I failed to account for in this project was how devastating the relocations have been. The residents of the locale formerly known as Kebele 53 were scattered all over Addis Ababa. The neighborhood they lived in was demolished. This whole event took place within the span of twelve months. Those who could afford to make a down payment and go to condominium housing followed that route. Those who were unable to secure a down payment moved into other government housing in a different neighborhood. Still others became instantly homeless, fashioning plastic tarps into makeshift homes and staying among the rubble.

Originally I had planned to interview those who went to live in condominium buildings. However, the problem with this approach was that individuals were moved to different condominium developments depending on the lottery. While some neighborhoods like *Jemo* and *Gofa Mebrate Haile* are said to have absorbed most of the residents: finding former *Hebreselam Idir* members amongst them was another level of difficulty. Even when there were informants that were assisting with the research, it was difficult even for them to track down former members because the relocation was so recent and, therefore, residents were not known and established in their new settings. The informants were able to point me to friends and family who are closest to them, but some of them were not members of the association making their assistance fruitless for the purpose of the research project.

b) Association politics

I went knocking on strangers' doors in the hope of finding more individuals to interview at the *Lafto* sub − city condominium housing development. The woman I met on one expedition was from the old neighborhood but did not belong to *Hebreselam Idir*. However, she freely informed me that *Hebreselam Idir* officials had been investigated on charges of embezzlement. Her account of the situation was that former officials were trying to sell off association property without the knowledge of the membership. This was entirely new information to me and, under different circumstances might have opened up an entirely new area within my research topic. Having leant this information so late in the research, there was no time to track down police reports or follow more leads. However, during the interview with the Judge of the association, who has been in office for more than two decades (and will appear in Chapter Four), he indicated that there were some people who had accused him of embezzlement but that he had nothing to

do with it. He implied that an accountant might have committed fraud. Yet another informant, who asked that his/her name be withheld, expressed doubts that the money given to members at the time the association was dissolved was less than expected given the cash amount that was in the bank and the money acquired from all the property sold[1]. While I found this information to be fascinating, ultimately I was unable to incorporate it into my larger project, as there was no time to corroborate the information.

Furthermore, while none of these accounts add up to any discernible truth that officials were actually embezzling from the association their implications made members and officials suspicious of my research project, especially as I am a student from a foreign institution. While my relation to the association and the few individuals gave me leverage to interview them, my relationship could not and did not extend to other members -- perhaps because of this background of suspicions of fraud and embezzlement that was set long before I arrived on the scene.

c) Distrust of Interviewer's intentions

The last barrier to being able to conduct a large number of surveys and interviews in order to be able to quantify some aspects of the research was the distrust people had of what exactly the research was being used for. Even when the interviewee had gone through the interview questions and understood the purpose, they were still reluctant to involve other participants for fear (I can only speculate here) that they will be implicated in something more political than it seems on the surface. Although, I was warned of this reaction by colleagues and Ethiopians in the Diaspora before my departure for fieldwork,

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[1] Anonymous, interview by Woubzena Taddesse Jifar, in person, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, September 14, 2012.

I was naïve in thinking my personal connection with the association would alleviate this problem.

Chapter Two

Background of *Idir*

a) History of *Idir*

The origin of *Idir* has been debated since academics began to write about it. The earliest document written entitled "Self-Help in Ethiopia" by Richard Pankhurst and Endreas Eshete (1958) claims *Idir* originated in southern Ethiopia among the Gurage people; whereas others such as Makuria Bulcha (1973) have claimed the beginnings of *Idir* can be attributed to the conditions surrounding the Italian invasion. During the Italian occupation many Ethiopians found themselves going to Addis Ababa for work. Because there was increased movement of individuals, families and communities were disintegrated during the process. One of the reasons Bulcha gives for the invention of *Idir* is to fulfill community commitments during this time when community ties had broken down. These associations provided individuals with the opportunity to interact with others around them and recreate those lost relationships.

The debate continues about whether *Idir* came from one particular tribe and then spread to other groups in the metropolitan areas or formed in the city and spread to the rest of the country. Although, since 1958, several papers have been written on the issue none of them seem to have developed new evidence that strengthens one argument over the other. The goal of this thesis is not to continue the debate about the origins of *Idir* but to note that this debate exists. Currently, all the materials written on the association make a pointed effort to discuss the origin of *Idir*; because the subjects of these authors were still recent inhabitants of the city. The question of where the association began was important to these earlier authors because their goal in part was to determine whether those immigrating into the city

brought this culture with them or if the idea evolved from the common difficulties they experienced in their new habitat. Now, seventy or so years from the time *Idir* was said to be created, the origin is less of a contention for those researchers who are working on the subject.

Lastly, the discussion of the history of *Idir* undoubtedly needs to include the legalization of *Idir* and such associations. In the legal notice published on September 26, 1966 entitled "Regulations Issued Pursuant to the Control of Associations Provisions of Civil Code of 1960" Article 9 states, "Any person acting on behalf of or in the name of an association not so registered shall be jointly and severally liable with the association for any such acts." This notice established the law that legalized and registered all associations across the city. From this point forward the government was able to account for the associations in Ethiopia and more importantly to hold them accountable. Therefore, while *Idir* operates on the cooperation and good faith of its membership, it does, on some level, have a government oversight.

b) Types of *Idir*

Although all types of *Idir* share the goal of providing support to their members in a time of loss, the manner in which members choose to participate varies considerably. There are three distinct types of *Idir,* which cater to the different needs of members and have distinct membership requirements. The first is a community *Idir* organized around a particular neighborhood; this type of *Idir* will be the focus of my study. The second is a tribal *Idir* where membership is based on being a member of a particular tribe. These are more common in rural parts of Ethiopia. Finally, the third is an institutional *Idir* where membership is based on employment. In order to discuss the community *Idir* it is relevant to explore the different types of *Idir,* first to show that the type discussed here is only one of

many, second and more importantly to indicate why the community *Idir* is the most important while there are versions of it that are available to city dwellers. The tribal and institutional *Idirs* are restrictive in their membership while the community *Idir* engages the most number of Addis Ababa inhabitants. To provide further evidence of the differences among the types of *Idir* each will briefly be discussed as follows:

i. Community *Idir*

Urban life in cities such as Addis Ababa is often defined by the close-knit nature of the community. The proximity of houses to each other especially in low-income neighborhoods creates interdependence among inhabitants. This interdependence that may have developed from looking after a neighbor's child or visiting the sick easily turns into needing to support one another more substantially when an event that devastates one's life occurs. However, despite the desire to help most people who find themselves in such urban neighborhoods do not have the means to provide assistance singlehandedly. Consequently, most neighborhoods in Addis Ababa if not all of them have a community *Idir* that allows community members to not only provide moral support to their neighbors but also provide financial and material support during this time of bereavement.

A community *Idir* is initiated and maintained by the people in a particular neighborhood. Although a voluntary neighborhood, the community *Idir* has a leadership branch, a set of rules and regulations and monthly payments that finances the support it provides to its membership. In many ways a community *Idir* performs much like a nonprofit. Since the focus of this thesis is on a community *Idir* many aspects of it will be covered in later parts of this chapter. These aspects of the community *Idir* are discussed in-depth to give the reader an idea of how this association can easily be turned into a development organization. It has all the right components to serve the community while

being accountable to an external force whether that is the Ethiopian government or an international organization.

ii. Tribal *Idir*

Community *Idir* members are required to be part of neighborhood or locale in which that association is found. Similarly, in an institutional *Idir* members are required to be employees of said institution. Among urban dwellers it is more common to find community and institutional *Idir* because they are readily available. Therefore, it may be necessary to venture into the countryside to find an *Idir* that is tribal. This is because the ethnic groups define regions in Ethiopia. Naturally, communities in rural areas are from the same ethnic group; consequently, a community *Idir* simply produces a tribal one.

As mentioned before, researchers have theorized that one of the possible origins of *Idir* was among the Gurage people. Therefore it is appropriate to look to the Gurage people to find an example of a tribal *Idir*. "In the Gurage country, for example members of the *Idir* often tend the cattle of the deceased, work on his farm and bring food and firewood to his family sometimes for as long as two months after his demise." (Pankhurst and Eshete; 1958) Even though this *Idir* is based on tribal relations, it still seeks to support families who are grief stricken in spite of blood ties. Perhaps the only difference here is that the tribal relations make the commitment of members to each other stronger than those who might be obligated to help through work or community relations because individuals come from the same tribe.

iii. Institutional *Idir*

Idir is an association that is initiated during the time of need. In community and tribal *Idirs*, neighbors are usually the people who become incorporated into the social life

of grieving individuals and their families. However, in the case of institutional *Idir*, fellow employees are enlisted to provide assistance to the families of the deceased colleague. Even if a formal institutional *Idir* is unavailable, its customs still influence people's behavior. For instance, it is common courtesy for non-member coworkers to offer condolences to those who are grieving by visiting their homes during the time they are mourning. Employees at different work places have found in some cases either the insurance they are provided does not cover all the cost or that fellow employees do not belong to a community *Idir* to acquire the necessary assistance. This scenario necessitates that the employees raise money to compensate for the lack of support elsewhere. In order to prevent this unexpected expense employees come together to form an institutional *Idir*. In order to understand the way an institutional *Idir* functions further, the bylaws of one are explored in the following sections.

The bylaws of a private institution's *Idir* states the reasons for having such an institution as follows: "During the time employees work in an institution together, there might be some time when there will be sadness or happiness the employee or the employee's family will experience, at which point a moral and financial support is necessary. Furthermore, when there is an organized body within the institution that deals with such emergencies, there will not be unscheduled expenses on the part of employees." (Statutes of a Hotel Institutional *Idir*[2]) It continues to state the obligations of each member as well as their rights. In this particular institutional *Idir* employees are entitled to financial support when death occurs in their family, their first marriage, when they incur medical bills not covered by the company's insurance policy and when they

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[2] One of the members of a Hotel provided me with the Hotel's Institutional *Idir* Statutes but asked that the name of the *Idir* not be used. Personally, I do not believe it is necessary to keep it anonymous but promised I will keep it that way.

retire having been part of the *Idir* for longer than ten years. Furthermore, members are highly encouraged to pay their respects during the seven days immediately following a coworker's or their loved ones' death. Finally, the bylaws cover the organization of the association including the election process and time of service. Below is a chart of a sample organization.

General Body

Department Head Committee

Chair person/Judge

Vice Chair person

Secretary   Money Collector   Auditor
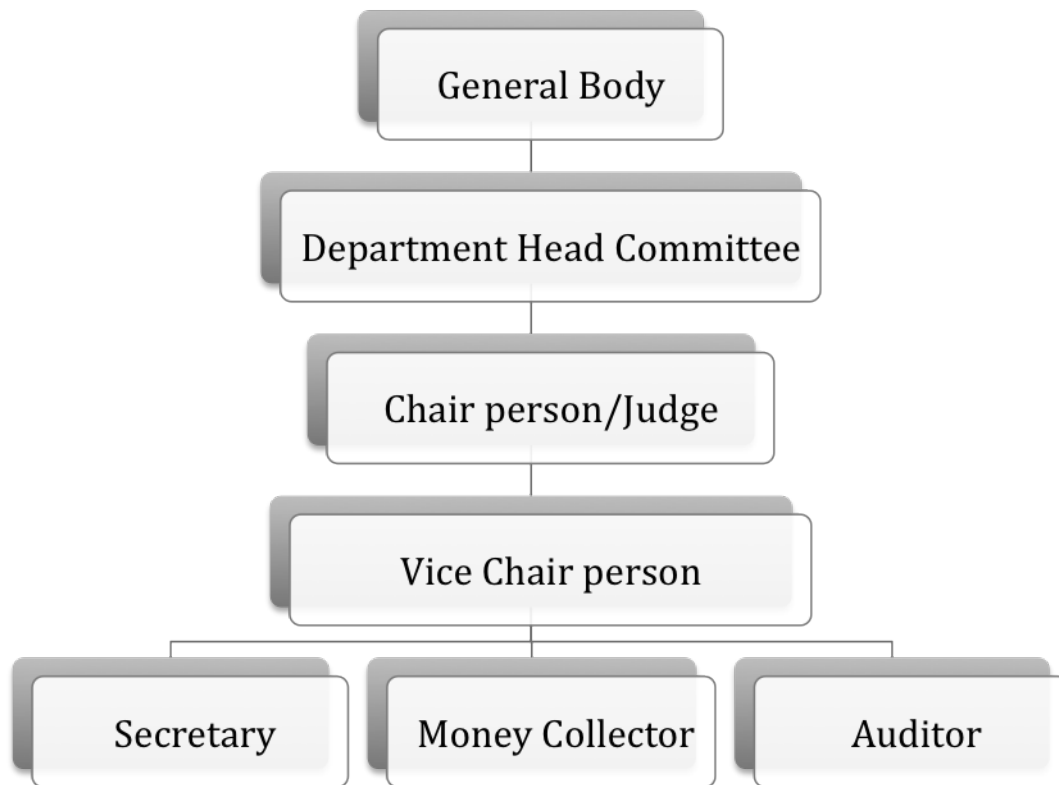
Chart 1: A sample organizational chart of an institutional *Idir*

In this chart, the general body actually heads the organization. Although the chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary and money collector meet often and carry-out most of the day-to-day duties, the general body has the power to elect and relieve these individuals from their duties. Any decision that results in changing the rules and regulations of the association needs to be reviewed and approved by the general body. Finally, even though

the auditor's position in the chart is under the vice chairperson, this individual reports and responds directly to the general body and periodically inspects the work of other elected officials to ensure the proper handling of the association's finances.

This section has explored the different types of *Idir* that is available to Addis Ababa residents. Undoubtedly, the institutional and tribal *Idirs* are more restrictive than the community *Idir*. Addis Ababa residents tend to gravitate towards community *Idirs* because they are more readily available to individuals by the virtue of their residence in their community. This research study focused on community *Idirs* because it was the type of *Idir* that was most inclusive. This factor in addition to the aspect of urban development that is especially targeting housing provided the most compelling reason for examining community *Idirs*.

c) Rules and Regulations of *Idir*[3]

When contemplating the idea of *Idir* as a development tool it is important to first answer the question, what are some of the operations and functions that *Idir* already has that can be translated into development goals? One of the main ideas in this paper as can be seen from the contextual section in the introduction is that development does not have to mean modernization. In order to build on this notion of collaborative work without imposing modernizing tools to a "traditional" association it is absolutely pertinent to describe this association in its entirety. This section on rules and regulations is thorough and perhaps at times tedious, but this step is necessary in understanding the whole essence of the association before recommending changes that can be made to it.

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[3] Information on the operations of a Community *Idir* is taken from the Statutes of *Kela and its Surrounding area Community Idir.*

Idir is a voluntary association created by the people who belong to it, its members have a lot to say in how it runs and direct access to the resources it offers; however, *Idirs* maintain their membership through a set of rules and regulations by which all members must abide. When individuals are accepted as members, they receive an identification card/book that makes available certain personal and family information to the organization. To be more specific members will list their living parents, spouses and children. If the association covers siblings, they can also list their living siblings. This is also the place where the money collector records monthly payments. Below Picture 1 and 2 show a sample identification card/book.
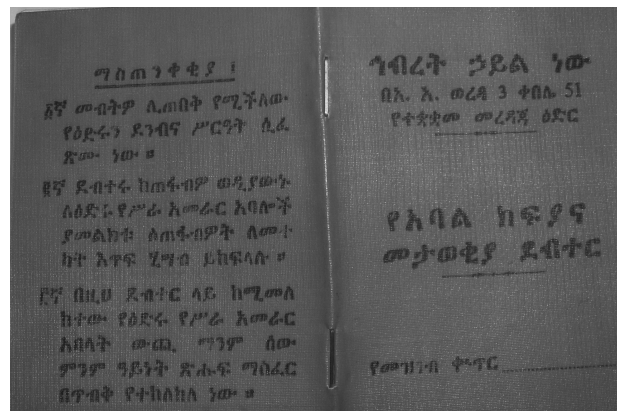
Picture 1: Sample *Idir* membership Card/book cover, it indicates the name of the *Idir* and gives notice that all members should follow all the rules, report any lost membership cards and not to mark the pages except for the designated purpose.

Picture 2: The inside of a sample *Idir* membership card. It indicates the year, months and payments made verified by the money collector.

Inside of the identification book the months, year and monthly dues are inscribed along with the accountant's signature. There is also a column designated for recording penalties. Penalties in the form of money can be incurred for a number of reasons.

1) When a member misses a monthly payment. In some cases members may incur a fine after having missed three consecutive payments.

2) When a member disturbs a general body meeting repeatedly.

3) When a member misses a fellow member's funeral. In Ethiopian culture, not attending someone's funeral is considered a great disrespect. There is a saying in Amharic, "kebari atasataign" which means, "may God not deny me someone to bury me." One rarely sees an Ethiopian funeral with a few people in attendance. Thus different cultural pressures, including monetary penalties, are powerful incentives for attending funerals.

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4) When a member destroys *Idir* property. While the usual wear and tear of *Idir* property that is borrowed by members is acceptable; members will incur a fine for new noticeable damages to the property.

While the monetary amounts for penalties in an *Idir* vary the offenses that cause them are uniform across the board.

The other aspect, if not the main aspect of an *Idir* is of course the benefits an individual gets from their membership. As described repeatedly in this chapter, the main support members receive is the moral support of their community. However, people also benefit monetarily from their membership. Contingent upon the size of the *Idir*, the monthly payments and the number of years the association has been in existence determine the different amounts people receive. In order to give a sense of what the payments look like, I offer examples of payments from a community *Idir* below:

1) When the member or his spouse passes away the family receives a payment of 1000 Birr.

2) When children who are dependents are deceased the member will receive 250 Birr.

3) When parents who are living with the member are deceased the member will receive 150 Birr.

4) When siblings who are living with the member are deceased the member will receive 120 Birr.

The rules and regulations of an *Idir* discuss in depth the rules of membership, the benefits and the penalties and finally the process in which they elect their officers and members' obligations.

While the findings from my fieldwork will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, I must make a note here that it was interesting to find that the members I interviewed were not in possession of these rules and regulations. Yet all of them were aware of their general benefits and understood what actions can cause them to incur fines. This is because even though the association uses these rules and regulations as a reference, people are aware of their rights and responsibilities through word of mouth. One is more likely to find out that they will receive a payment of 1000 Birr when a spouse passes not because they refer to the bylaws but because they know their neighbor received that amount when they had a similar incident. Therefore, while it is important to look at the ways an *Idir* is set to operate on paper, it is far more important to analyze the ways it functions in the community. This idea will be further analyzed in Chapter Four.

d) The Roles of Officers in *Idir*

Idir like any association has a leadership branch that ensures the organization operates properly for the purposes of serving the membership appropriately and maintaining accountability to the government as a financial organization. Officials are elected by the general membership and often serve out a two-year term. Because of the nature of voluntary associations, the *Idir* leaders are often given multiple opportunities to serve consecutively or otherwise. For example, the judge for *Hebreselam Idir* came into his position when the former judge died and continued to serve the association for several terms until the *Idir* was dissolved. His role as a judge lasted over two decades.

One of the methods of assessing the effectiveness of an organization is by examining the leadership. Due diligence has become the cornerstone for many who are in the business of nonprofit work. One of the areas in conducting due diligence is evaluating the human resources. In this research study, the due diligence is for *Idir* as an association,

therefore I need to describe and present the different leadership positions available within the association. The manner in which each position is carried out provides the reader a complete picture of how this association can evolve. Below are descriptions of the different leadership roles as found in a community *Idir*.

i. Chairperson/Judge

The association gives the most power in the organization to the chairperson, including the ability to sign on official documents as the main representative of the *Idir*. The chairperson/judge opens and manages a bank account on the *Idir's* behalf along with the accountant. He/she has the authority to inquire about the income and expenses of the association at any point during his/her term. When a death occurs, he/she initiates the processes for making payment to the family as well as ensuring the membership receives and acts on the news. Whenever there is a general body meeting he/she not only leads the meeting but also has the final say on the agenda. He/she also presents any suggestions to changes in the bylaws by first bringing it forth to the leadership committee and then the general body for approval. The chairperson is also responsible for regulating members' conduct according to the bylaws. Consequently, the chairperson secures the rights of all members but also imposes penalties on those who disregard the rules and regulations of the association.

Most *Idirs* also have a vice chairperson who conducts meetings in the absence of the chairperson. This individual is also responsible for co-signing on documents and checks involving the chairperson.

ii. Secretary

The secretary is responsible for keeping minutes and storing all the documents for the association. The documentation process extends to dealings with new members and producing new identification books and recording their membership. Furthermore, the secretary is also entrusted with updating the records when family members are deceased, in contrast to the chairperson and the accountant who are responsible for ensuring the proper payments have been made. Whenever there are complaints submitted to the association that need to be presented to the chairperson the secretary will receive these complaints and schedule members accordingly to meet with the chairperson. In some *Idirs* the secretary also serves as the property manager keeping track of the association's property. These may include but are not limited to tents, chairs, pots, pans, cups, plates etc.

For large *Idirs* an assistant secretary position will be created to help the secretary with some of the tasks. Furthermore, in the absence of the secretary the assistant secretary can fulfill the duties of the secretary.

iii. Money Collector/ Accountant

The accountant receives monthly dues from members at a designated location. In *Idir* there are no regular monthly meetings; instead members arrive at the designated time and place and have the accountant record their payments in their identification books, which serves as a kind of receipt. (Please refer again to Pictures 1 and 2 to see the identification book.) In addition to receiving the monthly payments, the accountant is responsible for ensuring that all the association's finances are properly and ethically conducted. He/she will keep track of members who have not paid their dues and assess penalties as necessary. If a member continues to neglect his or her dues, the accountant

will report the member to the chairperson for the appropriate action. The accountant is also responsible for giving members the appropriate payouts after confirming a death with the chairperson and verifying with the bylaws.

iv. Property Manager

The duties of the secretary or the accountant often include serving as a property manager. Some *Idirs* lump the secretary and property manager roles together because the latter involves keeping meticulous records of the items members borrow from and return to the association. Other *Idirs* have the accountant absorb the duties of property manager, because the latter deals with the exchange of goods and bookkeeping. Still others put the property manager in a separate category because of his/her ultimate responsibility for the storage facility and for all the materials that are taken from one place to another, which is seen as a full time job.

At times the property manager might be a member who owns a sizable compound that is located in a central location. He or she will be required to lend out property after receiving an official letter from the *Idir* giving the grieving parties permission to access the property.

v. Auditor

The auditor answers directly to the general body and is given the responsibility of overseeing the finances of the association. He/she verifies that the amount collected at a monthly meeting was the amount deposited to the bank account. Periodically, he/she inspects the income and expenses of the association to verify there are no discrepancies and reports to the general body. The auditor can call an emergency meeting with the chairperson and the secretary if he/she finds there is property or money missing during

their investigation. If the discrepancy cannot be explained or rectified during this emergency meeting, the auditor will present his/her findings to the general body. In this case, the general body removes offending members or officials and even press criminal charges depending on the seriousness of the issue.

One of the specific objectives for this study is to recommend approaches learned from this research study to development activities. The idea behind describing these different roles of officers was to understand who is responsible for the operations of the association. For example, one of the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has set for 2015 is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Hypothetically, if the UNDP were to engage a community *Idir* to assist with this development goal how would the organization go about accomplishing this? The chairperson as the head will call a general meeting to assess the needs of the community, the membership as a group will agree on a plan, the accountant will ensure the proper amount of money was utilized for this plan, the secretary will record the processes to report back to UNDP and the auditor will ensure all of the individuals were accountable. The reason behind expressing the different roles these officers have is to show the feasibility of *Idir* as an association that can operate in a larger context.

e) The Role of Women in *Idir*

During the course of this research informants often referred to *Hebreselam Idir* as the men's *Idir*. It is common to refer to the main *Idir* as men's *Idir* because in recent history there is also a subgroup of women who formulate their own *Idir* within the main association. This is called a women's *Idir.* This subgroup is formed to provide further assistance to the family in need.

The main *Idir* often provides direct assistance for the three days starting on the day of burial. Assistance ranges from providing money to providing materials to cater to all the people who come to pay their condolences. Often members pitch a tent and the grieving family borrows chairs from the property manager during those initial three days. However, after the three days the tent is dismantled and all property belonging to the *Idir* is returned. While the number of people who visit the family to express their condolences decreases significantly at this point, there is still a sizable amount of people (friends and family) who visit with and attend to the deceased's family for at least seven days after burial. A women's *Idir* provides services during this time. Namely, the women are required to pitch in by preparing food, bringing groceries and entertaining the guests during this time.

Chapter Three

Urban Development in Addis Ababa

In order to address the *Idir* and development issues it is absolutely pertinent for this research study exploring the effects of new housing developments on *Idir* to examine the city expansion process that is taking place in Addis Ababa. In Chapter One I indicated that the exploration of the new development frontier at this moment is relevant because of the new changes the city is experiencing. In Chapter Two I discussed the general framework of the association somewhat separately from the membership. In this chapter I engage in an in-depth discussion of how Addis Ababa came to be the capital city and why and how current changes are taking place. This discussion on urban development begins to uncover the socioeconomic effects urban development is imposing on city dwellers. In the next chapter I reveal the effects former affiliates of *Hebreselam* Idir are experiencing due to these changes.

a) A Summary History of Addis Ababa as It Relates to Development and Modernization

Ethiopia existed as a nation, even though it did not enjoy centralized government until the mid-19th century, and was instead under the loose, undefined political power of various, geographically distant nobles. "Until 1855, when Kassa Haylu became Emperor Tewodros II and restored the power and prestige of the imperial throne, the successive emperors were little more than puppets in the hands of the forceful nobility." (Zewde, 2001: 31) Emperor Tewodros II is known for his forward thinking and generally thought of as a ruler beyond his time. He initiated the modernizing process in Ethiopia. He unsuccessfully attempted to collaborate with the British to acquire technologically advanced skills for his people. This "failure" ultimately led to the dissolution of the external imperial authority in Ethiopia and to the foundation of more refined, self – sufficient ideas about centralized

governance. Even though it was Tewodros that began constructing the ideas of centralized government, it was Emperor Menilek II who finally accomplished this mission, undoubtedly due to the external circumstances present in Africa at the time, namely colonization.

After the victory at the Battle of Adwa in 1896 over the Italian imperialists Emperor Menilek II realized that defining the boarders of Ethiopia was a necessity, fueling his mission to continue to incorporate all parts of Ethiopia under a centralized government. Consequently, he continued his expansion to the South, West and East of the country. Initially Emperor Menilek II had different campsites from which he ruled the country. As time passed however and his territory began to look like present day Ethiopia a more centralized location became more inviting. He first moved to Entotto a mountain range North of Addis Ababa, which was logical from a strategic point of view. Being on a mountain range significantly decreases the successful attack of opposing surrounding forces. However, Empress Taytu started frequenting the hot springs (Fel Weha), which were said to have curative value, down on the Southern Plains. Once Emperor Menilek II had successfully controlled the people around the plains as his subjects the need to live on the mountain range diminished and the appreciation of the plains with their hot springs became greater. After four years of living in Entotto, Menilek II ushered the relocation of his government down to the plains. "Although Addis Ababa came into existence in 1886, it did not become the capital of Menilek's empire until about 1892." (Zewde, 2001: 69) As the emperor and his contingent made the move from Entoto to Addis Ababa, there was no city plan defined ahead of time. The Emperor built his palace and everyone else acquired land around it. "The construction of the palace (called the *gebbi*) on an elevated site gave the growing settlement its primary nucleus." (Zewde, 2001:69) Neighborhoods emerged haphazardly around noble settlements and therefore the city lacked a plan from the very beginning.

Addis Ababa was first described as a settlement. Because various nobles had their compounds surrounded by their followers and dependents, the entire city was a combination of several settlements. This pattern of settlement was called, "safar". "The settlements of the palace servants, generally located on the slopes, gave rise to such occupational areas as Saratagna Safar (the workers' Quarters), Zabagna Safar (the Guards' Quarters) and Weha Senqu Safar (the Quarters of 'The Unprovisioned', an Imperial Army Unit, said to be supplied only with water)." (Zewde, 2001: 69 – 71) This particular quote is very pertinent to this research as the association studied was located in Weha Senqu Safar. In fact before the association changed its name officially in the 1970s, it was known as the *Workers' Idir in Weha Senqu Safar*.

This *Weha Senqu Safar* was one of the first settlements to emerge when the capital city was born. It is important to take note of this fact for two reasons. First, because the neighborhood is as old as Addis Ababa, it also has social networks that go back to the earliest generations of urban settlers. Secondly, and unfortunately, the neighborhood's ancient status has made it a contemporary target for dismantling and reconstruction because it no longer fits with the modern landscape of the city.

In Picture 3 below, the booming construction in the city is evident from the half finished buildings visible on the edges. The bottom right picture shows the type of building that used to occupy the neighborhood.

Picture 3: Images of the *Sengatera* neighborhood in present day [4]

The images shown in Picture 3 allow me to explore concepts such as "structural violence" discussed in the introduction. Inhabitants of this neighborhood were removed presumably with the promise of better living conditions. From my visits to condominium buildings I would note the physical infrastructure former *Sengatera* residents have moved to is visibly better. But the purpose of this study is to investigate the effects this movement has had on the social fiber of the community as seen through the self-help association, *Idir,* and this is where the "structural violence" discussion becomes relevant. In Chapter Four, there is a more in-depth analysis of how members are coping with the relocation but I would like to make a note here that these pictures of the demolished neighborhood are also representative

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[4] Pictures taken by Woubzena Taddesse Jifar Summer 2012

of the destroyed social network. The buildings on the edges represent the modernization process city dwellers are forced to accept. By joining *Idirs* in the new buildings they are residing in, they are continuing to hold on to the familiar and by extension the traditional. Yet as seen in Chapter Four, it becomes clear that the modernization process has already altered *Idir* more than the members are willing to accept.

b) The Integrated Housing Development Programme (IHDP)

Juxtaposed to the conversation on demolished neighborhoods is the construction of new ones. In this case the highlighted project is the Grand Integrated Housing Development Program that was launched in 2004 by the former Mayor Arkebe Oqubay. In initiated this project one of the main concerns was eradicating the slums that were in Addis Ababa. While upgrading these areas was a consideration at first it was deemed impossible after assessing the infrastructure they were based on. The housing development project began with a 700-housing unit in a location that was on the outskirts of the city. Once this was realized and the demand for more similar housing was established it was time to tackle one of the inner city areas by relocating residents and building condominium blocks on it. "It was estimated that about 300,000 new/additional homes were needed to meaningfully address the [housing] problem, which we have confronted head-on by implementing our Grand Integrated Housing Development Program (GIHDP)." (Oqubay, 2005) The former mayor's plan to tackle the housing problem failed to consider the social networks that are in place in every community. Because there was no consideration given to keeping communities together, city dwellers were faced with dismantling their community *Idirs* as they relocated to their new neighborhood.

The Former Mayor went on to discuss how the Integrated Housing Development Program will contribute to the decrease of unemployment rate. "The program has created job

opportunities for more than 40,000 in 2005 alone. About 1,000 small enterprises have been established and are now actively participating in various works of the projects." (Oqubay, 2005) Since this interview the UN Habitat has published a report entitled "Condominium Housing in Ethiopia: The Integrated Housing Development Programme" assessing the five years this program has been operating. What can be learnt from it? What can be changed? The goal of the IHDP was to provide 400, 000 housing units and create 200, 000 jobs from 2006 – 2010. According to the UN Habitat report "As of mid – 2010, the government had built a total of 80,257 housing units in Addis Ababa." (UN Habitat, 2011: 13) Despite best efforts to provide city residents with acceptable housing arrangements the process is still lagging. Below is a picture of condominium blocks in one of the locations where I conducted an interview.

Picture 4: Condominium buildings in *Nefas Silk - Lafto* sub-city[5]

Both the former Mayor and the UN Habitat report do a thorough job of explaining how the Integrated Housing Development Programme was developed and implemented. There is special care given to relocate individuals into neighborhoods where they will have access to similar amenities such as a market, school, and places of worship. However, there

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[5] Pictures taken by Woubzena Taddesse Jifar Summer 2012

is no conversation on the necessity of an association such as *Idir* or what the consequences would be socially in eradicating a network that was strengthened over generations. For example the former Mayor discusses "pursuing a mixed settlement approach" meaning that both poor and wealthy people will be able to move into condominium housing depending on what they can afford. This is because inhabitants of Addis Ababa have always been in mixed settlements and this is in keeping with the tradition. However this plan still fails to consider the fact that any given mixed settlement is different from the next one. Meaning the government should make more active attempts to relocate one mixed settlement already in place, as is to another location instead of creating a new mixed settlement. The connections that are lost in the reshuffling of neighborhoods are irreparable.

c) Life of the City Dweller from One Sub-City to Another

Another aspect of the urban re-designing process that is relevant to this research is the changes that have been made to city administration through the implementation of sub-cities. See Map. 1 below. While the restructuring of Addis Ababa has many different parts, this study is particularly concerned with the housing relocations as they affect the association *Idir*. Members of *Hebereselam Idir* were located in a central location in Lideta sub-city as shown on Map 1. The sub-city is found on 11 sq. km. Participants of this study were interviewed in *Kolfe-Keranio* and *Nifas Silk-Lafto* sub-cities where they were relocated. These sub-cities are found on 63.25 sq. km and 58.51 sq. km respectively. While my interviewees have been moved into a larger sub-city the population is comparable to that of *Lideta* sub-city. The population in *Lideta* sub-city was larger at 296,073 compared to *Kolfe-Keranio* sub-city which stands at 261, 235 while *Lideta* sub-city is slightly less than *Nefas Silk – Lafto* sub-city population which is 321, 000. Moreover, because residents of these new sub-cities are moved into condominium housing they are actually not far from their

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neighbors as one might assume in a larger sub-city. However, these numbers become important when thinking about the distance that is now put between someone who is moved from *Lideta* sub-city to *Akaki- Kaliti* sub-city and someone that has been relocated to *Gullele* sub-city.

Map 1: Sub-cities of Addis Ababa[6]

To illustrate the difficulty that individuals have to face to get from one sub-city to another, whether for business, social or religious purposes, I shall describe my own journey from *Lideta* sub-city to *Kolfe – Keranyo.*

From *Lideta* sub-city to *Kolfe – Keranyo* sub – city

Before I explain this trip to *Gerare*, which is a neighborhood within *Kolfe – Keranyo* sub-city I should explain how I ended up going on this trip. My informant, who I introduce in chapter four, Tiruye Negatu is a family friend. As such it was my duty (as an

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[6] www.addisallaround.com

Ethiopian) to go see her in her home at least once before I complete my visit to Ethiopia. During my stay, she had come to our house several times so I had seen her but when I planned to interview her I decided to go visit her in her home so I have a more complete picture of her well-being.

Since she made this move recently and I had not been in the country for the last three years I had to plan with another person in my family to help me find where she lives. So we took a taxi from our house to what is known as Mexico Square for 1.35 Birr each. When we got there my travel partner insisted we take a bus since the taxi would be too expensive. Even though the taxi is affordable (for me) I followed her lead for the sake of the complete experience. We waited at the bus stop for over an hour with no indication of when the bus would arrive. Finally, we consulted with some people at the station and boarded another bus, which would not take us all the way to *Gerare* but at least will get us closer. We paid 2.50 Birr each for the bus. At the end of its line, we got off and boarded a mini-bus taxi, which charged 2.70 Birr each. Once we got into the neighborhood we had to take a motorcycle rickshaw (referred to as Bajaj in Ethiopia) on a dirt road and up a hill for 2 Birr each. For the two of us to get there one – way it cost us a total of 17.10 Birr. While this converts to a little less than a dollar and may seem it strains the household of individuals that are being led by retirees. Not to mention the amount of time one has to dedicate to make such a trip.

During my fieldwork I was privy to such circumstances that continue to burden the city dweller. In describing the different sub-cities with their sizes and populations the reader is not able to understand what relocation means to city dwellers that spent the majority of their lives living in the hub of the city. Therefore I added this piece on

traveling through the city to contribute to the complete understanding of what is lost through inner city relocation.

In this chapter, I attempted to analyze the friction between the city's plan for urban development and the social life of the city dweller. In an effort to provide the residents of Addis Ababa with better living conditions the government has unintentionally (although this is open to discussion) robbed them of the communities they have spent decades structuring in the relocation process. From the description of the city's inception it is clear that changes were necessary to the infrastructure. However, no effort was made to safeguard against the social repercussions that would be taking place in the process. *Idir* is one of these social structures that will be dismantled through this process. Although Chapter Two informs the reader that *Idir* has survived three regime changes and reconstructed itself as necessary, this new wave of urban development perhaps is one it will not manage to overcome. The outlook is bleak because of the findings that will be revealed in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four

Case Study: *Hebreselam Idir*

In this chapter I present a number of interviews carried out with people who were either formerly members of one particular *Idir,* and a former official of *Idir.* I selected *Hebreselam Idir* for three reasons. First, I chose *Hebreselam Idir* because it is the association my family belonged to since I was a little girl. Second, this connection I had with the association provided me with previously established connections with former members of the association that I can build on. Lastly, *Hebreselam Idir* was based in a neighborhood that dates back to the years the capital city, Addis Ababa, was founded. Because the reason for the dissolution of the association is intertwined with urban development, this historical fact draws out the conceptual arguments in this thesis that traditional associations are in constant battle with the modernization process. Yet, self-help associations such as *Idir* adjust according to the urban environment and persist. However, even when the association persists, it does not follow that the membership continues to thrive as it used to in the previous environment. Consequently, I was especially interested in asking these former affiliates how they were coping with the urbanization process. In effect recognizing that even though *Idir,* as we know it has continued to exist in these new housing developments, it is not without repercussions to the former membership. I have presented their responses below and contextualized their stories as it relates to my research project.

A bicycle salesman in what is currently commonly known as *Sengatera* neighborhood suddenly died. When his death was announced, the community was instantly faced with the task of arranging his funeral and mourning his death, as he had no surviving relatives. In that moment the community recognized that they were his family. It was up to

them to see that he received a proper send-off. In order to accomplish this, everyone contributed 25 cents. This was the birth of *Hebreselam Idir* in the 1960s. After the newfound members successfully mourned the bicycle salesman's death, they wanted to guarantee that they would be better prepared for future incidents. Instead of collecting money after someone had died, they started collecting it on a monthly basis in small deposits that eventually became a communal fund from which people could draw when a loved one died. Initially, the *Idir* was called *Yeserategnoche Idir* meaning worker's *Idir*. This was because the people who were in the area were mostly workers, shopkeepers and skilled laborers. Even today small shops that sell spare parts for cars, house appliances etc. predominate the area. It was not until the 1970s, when the *Idir* registered with the government, that *Yeserategnoche Idir* changed its name. The name changed because "Serategnoche" for the Derg[7] implied those who are laborers and these were not laborers. In order to remove the name of the *Idir* from the ideologies of a Marxist government, the officials changed the name with a neutral name. *Hebreselam Idir,* which roughly translates into an *Idir* that is united for peace.

The first interview was with *Hebreselam Idir's* judge, who has been in this position for over two decades. This interview provides an insight into the inception and maintenance of the association. Furthermore, it will also address the effects urban relocation has had on the judge as a member of the previous association. The second interview was with a member of the association who has been a dedicated member for over twenty-years. Her situation is unique because she was the only member to have relocated to a new neighborhood, *Gerare,* where she does not have easy access to anyone from her old neighborhood. The third interview is with a family member who has not moved to a new

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[7] The *Derg* was the military government that was established in Ethiopia after a coup deposed Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974.

location but has lost contact with many people who have since relocated. She has no association at the moment since the last one was dissolved. Finally, the fourth interview was with a woman who resided in the *Sengatera* neighborhood, but was not a member of the *Hebreselam Idir*. This interview was included because she provided an insight into the *women's Idir* that was in the neighborhood but was not part of *Hebreselam Idir*.

a) A Former Official of *Hebreselam Idir*[8]

In order to understand the full operations of the association, it was pertinent to have a conversation with the head of the association since 1990. Judge Shemelese began his interview by recalling how he came into his position. He served first as a secretary and then vice-chairperson before he came into the role of chairperson. He stepped into the role of chairperson when the previous judge passed away and maintained this position until the association was dissolved.

When he joined *Hebreselam Idir* he only paid 22 Birr and his monthly due was one Birr. While the amounts seem abysmal he reminded me that in those days the currency had a lot more weight and one could do a lot more with those amounts. As he became more involved with the association and the price of living increased, he took it upon himself to convince the chairperson at the time that they should not only raise the dues but also the payouts given to families. So dues went from 1 Birr to 1.25 Birr by the time he became the chairperson in 1990. Yet when he was still serving as vice chairperson the association also did not have any statute on paper. Members contributed what they were told and the officials determined what they thought was appropriate to give to families that had suffered the loss of

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[8] Shemelese Gessese, interview by Woubzena Taddesse Jifar, in person, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Septermber 26, 2012

a loved one. While this worked for the early days of the association, officials recognized more years and more membership meant a more defined bylaws.

Judge Shemelese then introduced the first rules and regulations to the association stating dues, benefits, governance and penalties. Although the judge no longer possessed a physical copy of the statutes, he recited them from memory. He told me the dues were fixed at 10 Birr by the time the association dissolved. A member can join the association for 500 Birr. He was adamant even though people wanted to raise the joining rate; he argued that even 500 Birr was too expensive for the given population. Because of the increased monthly dues a family can receive 1000 Birr for a deceased spouse and 600 Birr for a deceased child. Lastly, the penalties for unpaid monthly dues were 3 Birr after a member missed three consecutive payments. He also stated that there would be payments for people who receive news that their family member died even though they are not living with them. Also the association will help if someone comes to visit a family and dies during that visit. In Chapter Two, a more extensive version of an association's rules and regulations has been given to show that the bylaws are much more detailed than what is given here. However, given that none of the members interviewed had the rules and regulations on paper, the judge's description gave a good though potentially biased, picture of how *Hebreselam Idir* operated.

One of the reasons for interviewing the judge was to investigate if there were any benefits members of *Hebreselam Idir* would have received if the association had remained operative in the old neighborhood. For instance, in the late 1990s a few of the members gathered and appointed some of the women in the association to form a committee. The committee was to receive some money from the general body to help children who had lost both their parents to AIDS. Unfortunately, this plan disbanded immediately when the association dissolved according to the judge. The relocations took place within the span of a

year, which did not give the members or officials much time to devise alternative ways to continue support for these children or for other members. The officials liquidated the *Idir's* property and divided the profits equally among the membership. Each member received 380 Birr.

The main lesson that was learned from this interview for the purpose of this study was that the association was beginning to branch out into other services for the community. Here was a welfare association branching out into a type of development activity the researchers in the literature review had indicated. Helping children who have lost their parents to AIDS is not in the statute of the association however; these ideas were coming to fruition because of the community-building component *Idir* as an organization implements. By definition these children are no longer members of the association after they are given the proper assistance to bury and mourn their parents. Yet *Idir* members feel responsible for these children because of the fellowship they had developed with their parents. This is the essence of *Idir* that is lost when individuals are scattered to different parts of the city. When a new association is created in a new neighborhood, it loses the human factor. The services of the *Idir are* diminished to the services the bylaws afford the membership.

On a personal level the judge informed me that he was no longer part of an association. I asked him if that was because there were no associations to join in his neighborhood. He explained there were associations to join but the joining fee, 1500 Birr was something he cannot afford. This reality is common for many people who suddenly find themselves having to pay mortgage payments for their new condominium housing and do not have money to spare to join an association. Furthermore, unlike the orphaned children *Hebreselam Idir* members were collaborating to help these former members now find

themselves in a neighborhood surrounded by complete strangers who do not know enough about them to help them join the association or help them in the event death occurs.

b) A Former Member in a New Location[9]

Tiruye Negatu had been a member of *Hebreselam Idir* for over twenty years before the association disbanded. As a dedicated and exemplary member, she never missed meetings, never incurred fines and always attended funerals. She lived and worked in the neighborhood before she was relocated to the condominiums in *Gerare*. The condominium housing is given to people as a choice when they are forced to relocate. Those who can afford the down payment are then entered into a lottery to determine in which neighborhood they will be placed. When she drew for her condominium she got the last unit that was left in *Gerare* and was thus the only person from the neighborhood that moved there. Before relocation, Tiruye worked at the neighborhood school as a cleaning lady. So when she moved she not only lost her community but also lost her job.

Picture 5: Woubzena Taddesse Jifar (left) and Tiruye Negatu (right) in *Gerare*

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[9] Tiruye Negatu, interview by Woubzena Taddesse Jifar, in Person, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, October 4, 2012.

The purpose of this interview was to address what happens to former members of *Hebreselam Idir* who now find themselves among new neighbors with already established community associations. When Tiruye moved to *Gerare*, there was already a bustling *Idir* in place. While it should have been easy for her to join this association, there were a couple of significant barriers to her participation.

First of all, Tiruye's expenses have significantly increased since she moved to the new housing. For this condominium, which she will eventually be able to own, she pays 800 Birr per month for the mortgage. Because she now lives in the outskirts of town, she has to pay 10 to 15 Birr a day for transport to go to the church in her old neighborhood or visit friends. Furthermore, because she moved into a neighborhood that is already established she was unable to acquire a similar job. Secondly, in order for her to join a new *Idir* she will be asked to pay a one time joining fee of 700 Birr. Given her financial situation, it is a great deterrent from joining any association.

During the interview, I asked Tiruye, why joining an *Idir* was important to her. She stated that she would have people who would be obligated to visit her when she was sick, or bury her when she dies. Though she had some neighbors with whom she was cordial, her informal relationship with them did not qualify her to receive the level of support that an association member would receive. She lacked the same comfort and security (especially in the event of her death) that one gets from belonging to an association. The strength of her relationship with the previous association's membership is evident through her continued dedication to the membership. Even after *Hebreselam Idir* has dissolved Tiruye still makes an effort to visit her former community members when they are sick and does not miss a funeral. This shows that the social network that was created through *Hebreselam Idir* persists through this urban relocation.

One of the specific objectives for the study is to explicate the necessity of *Idir* in community building despite the disintegrating effects of new housing developments. Through Tiruye's predicament I learnt that those who were able to afford the entrance fee to the association were allowed to join the community building process while community members such as Tiruye were left out. Part of the reason I chose to study a community *Idir* is because of its inclusive nature as an association without the socioeconomic evaluation of individuals. This particular wave of urban development, however, is forcing this association to make this distinction as the process imposes a new financial burden on individuals, as they are given the opportunity to own their own home.

c) A Former Member in the Same Location[10]

This interview was conducted in my childhood home with my sister who continues to reside there even after most of the neighborhood has been demolished and inhabitants have been relocated. Our home is located within the district of the old neighborhood but is set apart from the other houses and the main roads. It has eluded demolition thus far because our home is surrounded by one of the main telecommunications office, a radio station, television transmission office and the office for the *Lideta* sub-city. These important public agencies have delayed my sister's relocation.

Mezegebua Taddesse joined *Hebreselam Idir* as a child when she moved into the neighborhood with her family. The registered member of the association is Tirufat Gebreyes Keurfia who is our mother. Mezegebua has been fulfilling our mother's membership duties in proxy for the last eleven years while our mother has been residing in the United States. Mezegebua's relationship with the association was different from that of the other members

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[10] Mezegebua Taddesse, interview by Woubzena Taddesse Jifar, in person, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, September 25, 2012.

interviewed because she was still finding a place for herself in the association. This was because of the unique relationship our mother had with the community.

Tirufat Gebreyes worked as a TV personality for a children's show for many years. Before she joined this television program she also worked on the only radio station at the time as a narrator for many shows. In addition, she was a stage actress at the National Theatre. Needless to say, many people knew her as a public figure. Due to her well-known status in the community, many people asked to use her social influence to help orphaned children in the neighborhood among other community problems. As a result of these requests, Tirufat had a deeper relationship with community members before establishing herself as a *Hebreselam Idir* member. Therefore, she never felt the need to attend monthly meetings but rather had Tiruye Negatu, the previous informant, stand in proxy for her for most of the monthly meetings. After my mother's immigration to the U.S, Tiruye continued to be the proxy, collecting money from my family and paying monthly dues. In the absence of Tirufat, Mezegebua did not attend any meetings because she had the help of Tiruye, but still participated in the event that there was a funeral.

Even though Mezegebua did not have insight into the mundane operations of the *Idir* she unfortunately found herself a beneficiary of their services in 2004 when our father passed away. Our family received 1000 Birr to help with the funeral arrangements, members of the *Idir* pitched a tent to accommodate people who came to pay their respects, and brought chairs, plates, cups etc. Additionally, several women members helped with the food preparation. When discussing *Idir* with Mezegebua, the most vivid information she shared is the assistance our family received in our time of need.

Currently, Mezegebua is not a member of any *Idir* or other community association, so one of the main concerns she faces is how to deal with the death of a loved

one in the future. Though she expressed this concern, she also observed that she feels less pressure to join a new association, as most of her family members are not residing with her. In addition, unlike the other informants who are over 60 years old and closer to retirement, Mezegebua is in her early thirties with a comfortable job at the U.S Embassy. Her status as a well to do city resident affords her the time to contemplate her next course of action. She told me she wanted to explore joining an association in the next neighborhood or contemplate joining an *Idir* further away but has previous *Hebreselam Idir* members.

Mezegebua's situation is not an isolated one. There are individuals all over the city who no longer belong to an association due to urban relocation. This phenomena puts forth opportunities where *Idir* can evolve to include individuals like her. The reason community *Idirs* are so popular is because individuals join them by virtue of living in the neighborhood. The question now then becomes can a community *Idir* construct itself to include those that do not reside in the same neighborhood. Should there be exceptions made for those people like Tiruye and Mezegebua who find themselves removed from their *Idir* but are still connected to the membership by their communal history?

Finally, when I asked Mezegebua if there is anything she would like to add to our conversation she expressed her beliefs in the continued existence of these associations.

> My personal opinion is that Idir is a very good thing. Not only as a social tool that is extremely useful, but also as a community organization that allows people who do not have a lot of money to overcome a financially debilitating situation whether that is a funeral or a wedding. The help they receive financially or through manpower supports them tremendously. The support Idir provides is not only financial or material but also emotional. Just to know that you are not alone is a great moral support. So Idir is something that should continue in the new neighborhoods.

Even though Mezegebua has financial security to take care of funeral arrangements should death occur in her family her statements show that she still prefers the

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support of these associations. Beyond the material and financial support they will provide her, it is the emotional support that she finds most appealing.

d) A Former Women's *Idir* Member[11]

As mentioned before, female members of the *Idir* assisted my family during my father's funeral by preparing food for the mourners. However, at the time it was unclear whether these women were a subgroup of the larger association or just neighborhood women who wanted to help or their own organization. The judge confirmed that *Hebreselam Idir* did not have a subgroup of women organized for these events. However, the interview with Tiruye revealed that some of the women in the neighborhood had gathered to start a women's *Idir* indeed. Following this lead from Tiruye, I met with Etanesh Erko who was the founding member of the *women's Idir*.

She informed me that eight women who wanted to help each other when there are funerals, weddings, christenings, and big celebrations in general, started the *women's Idir*. The more women in the neighborhood found out about it the more women joined. At some point there were 33 women involved, although at the end the number had decreased to 28 women. The main motivation for the *women's Idir's* creation was to help the families in *Sengatera* area during the time of mourning. The men's *Idir* such as *Hebreselam Idir* provides members with the financial assistance necessary to bury their loved ones, and material assistance to accommodate all their guests for the following three days after burial. After the three days families have to return the items they borrowed. However, families still have guests coming to their homes for seven to twelve days after burial. The *women's Idir* was created to fill this gap between the *men's Idir* and families returning to their normal way

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[11] Etanesh Erko, interview by Woubzena Taddesse Jifar, in person, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, October 10, 2012.

of life. In order to facilitate this transition the women contribute 3 Birr each month so they can purchase groceries for the families, bring additional pots, pans, plates and cups and help with the preparation of food during this time.

In an Ethiopian household the burden of catering to guests and preparing food often falls on the women. In a time of bereavement then this duty becomes even more burdensome as she will be grieving and yet expected to tend to her guests. *Women's Idirs* are becoming more and more popular all over the city because women have recognized the cultural responsibility given to them and have started tackling this responsibility as a group. This affirmative action by women to see the burden placed on them by society as a responsibility to not only accept but also thrive in it is exactly the type of ideas Kabeer was exploring in *Reversed Realities*. "One of the major limitations of the development NGO as a vehicle for women's empowerment is that it tends to be accountable upwards to governments or donors. Consequently, there is a constant pressure to manage its activities around acceptable and predefined agendas." (Kabeer, 1994: 262) Here the *women's Idir* shows that women can be empowered without the involvement of an NGO, government or any external force for that matter. The goal of this interview was to work within Kabeer's ideas of women's empowerment. While it is unequivocally obvious that *Idir* is an organization that serves the community well, it was also an association that was not equally supportive of all its membership. Women within the association have recognized this flaw and corrected in a manner that serves them best. These are the lessons we can learn from this grassroots organization.

These four interviews were conducted to assist in the exploration of the changes that the self-help association – *Idir* is experiencing because of urbanization. The first interview gave insight into the operations of *Idir* as expressed by the previous judge. This

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interview helped in examining the lost potential during the relocation process. It not only showed the possibilities lost to *Idir* as an association but also the burdens that are now placed on the membership as they are forced to face social difficulties alone. The best example of this stripping of self-empowerment can shine through the judge's interview. A man who was a pillar of the neighborhood now contemplates the prospect of not even receiving a proper funeral.

Similarly, Tiruye's future holds a bleak outcome as she struggles to make a place in a completely new community. During the interview it was clear that she spent a significant part of her life building a community for herself in the old neighborhood. She attended funerals, looked after the sick and participated in the joyous celebrations of her neighbors. All this social history was taken from her in a matter of twelve months to be left isolated in the outskirts of Addis Ababa, isolated from everyone else. Although there is a new *Idir* in her neighborhood, the financial barriers deny her the opportunity to participate in their community building process. Therefore, *Idir* continues to exist but unfortunately has re-defined itself to become somewhat an exclusive club.

Thirdly, the interview with Mezegebua continued this theme of isolation but under different circumstances. Her predicament attempted to answer the question of what happens to those who are left behind. In her case, there is not even a possibility of an *Idir* in her neighborhood once her previous one was disbanded. This starts to reach into the bigger question of how does society cope when the glue that holds it together is removed. These members reveal the confusion that exists in the community on the heels of these recent changes. On the surface it seems that the effects of urbanization on *Idir* is minimal as there are reports of city inhabitants joining new associations wherever they relocate. But the

purpose of this thesis is look at the margins, as many development studies do, to find who and what is missed in the bigger picture.

Finally, the last specific objective of the study was to consider these findings to start recommending approaches for other development activities. To this end considering the *women's Idir* more closely is a great starting point. This is where I found the best example of a group that is marginalized within the association taking charge of the circumstances. These women have found a way to collaborate and overcome the obstacles that are specific to them within the context of their daily lives. If there is continued involvement of women in such collaborations there is no doubt that their group will eventually start discussing issues that continue to affect them within the home as well as in their communities beyond the bereavement context.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research study began by exploring the idea of whether or not grassroots associations in Ethiopia can be implemented as models for development projects. In the past many development projects have been proposed by external forces only to fail or be rejected by those they are attempting to help. Then a logical step in the process of development should be to take a moment to consider the suggestions that are proposed by those needing assistance. My purpose was to enhance the knowledge that already exists in Ethiopia into a viable option for development. The best way to investigate the possibilities of the transmission of local knowledge was to consider the recent changes to *Idir* in the midst of urbanization. I aimed to examine the radical changes that are happening to city infrastructure in Addis Ababa in the form of new housing developments and how these changes have affected and will continue to affect the indigenous association I have used as a case study. By investigating how these changes are affecting *Idirs* I will add more complexity to future projects concerned with development in Addis Ababa.

The effects of new housing developments on *Idir* can be analyzed in two ways. The first is the effects on how *Idir* continues to operate and the second is the effects on its membership. In Chapter Two, there was an extensive discussion on the operations of *Idir,* and from what was learnt from fieldwork many of these operations have continued in the new housing *Idirs.* The more devastating effects were recorded in Chapter Four where interviews with previous members of *Hebreselam Idir* have shown that the urban changes have indeed stripped many communities of their social network. The idea of involving *Idir* in development discussions was appealing because of this network that already existed

fashioned as a structured welfare association. While the structure continues to exist, the knowledge, meaning the driving force for achieving development goals has been dismantled. Therefore, even though individuals continue to join *Idirs* in the new neighborhoods, it has undoubtedly lost the foundation that was in place to launch into larger development projects.

While there is still much to be learned from the association as a whole, trying to learn from it in this particular period of time was not successful. This is because as shown in Chapter Three, the urban development in Addis Ababa is constantly redefining the way city dwellers conduct their lives. The effects of the housing developments are that, they have set back the development of the association about thirty years. Instead of building on the relationship members have for generations it is now back to finding new members and providing basic services to them. Furthermore, this change in location is forcing the association to restructure itself where it is actively excluding members of the community. The effect this exclusion has on the community can be examined thoroughly as more time passes.

In conclusion, this research project to analyze the effects of new housing developments on *Idir,* a self-help association in Addis Ababa has found that members of these associations are negatively impacted by urban development. This negative impact then hinders the possibilities of advancing *Idir* into development projects.

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