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Gendered Empowerment?
A Case Study of iDE's Women's Economic Empowerment Model in
Gimbuchu, Oromia, Ethiopia

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Abstract

As empowerment retains its status as a buzzword among international development agencies, it has lost its essential element – power – intended to highlight the unequal structures and relations allowing disempowerment. Nonetheless, it has proliferated in the discourse and practice of women’s empowerment, as gender equity has become an important cross-cutting issue for many organizations and governments. However, the process of women’s empowerment is not well understood from the unique standpoint of women who experience it as part of NGOs’ project interventions. Utilizing a case study approach and qualitative methods, this thesis focuses on how women experience a women’s economic empowerment model implemented by an NGO in Ethiopia. Centering on Kabeer’s (1999) three dimensions of empowerment – resources, agency, and achievements – this study sheds light on the empowerment process, as women engage in it individually and collectively. Through discussions and participatory drawings, this thesis finds that the women engaged in the organization’s empowerment model utilized cognitive and relational resources to exercise an efficient form of agency. However, the gendered nature of the model limited women from transforming sufficient material resources into meaningful achievements.

Key words: women’s empowerment; gender equity; power relations; gender norms; feminism; Ethiopia

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Acronyms

EA	Extension agent
CARD	Climate Adaptation and Rural Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DA	Development agent
FST	Feminist Standpoint Theory
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GAD	Gender and Development
GOE	Government of Ethiopia
GTP	Growth Transformation Plan
iDE	International Development Enterprises
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IGA	Income generating activity
KPI	Key performance indicator
MFI	Micro-finance institution
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PALS	Participatory action learning for sustainability
SGBV	Sexual and gender based violence
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, sanitation, and hygiene
WEAI	Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WEG	Women Economic Group
WID	Women in Development

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Problem and Question

Over the past several decades, both the government of Ethiopia (GOE) and development organizations have tried to address the challenges facing Ethiopian women. With an agricultural based economy and a traditional, patriarchal society, Ethiopian women have often borne the brunt of agricultural production, contributing up to 75% of farm labor and 70% of household food production (USAID 2016). They are also responsible for most work within the home while carrying out their reproductive role. Thus, Ethiopian women tend to face a double or triple work burden, and therefore may work significantly more hours than their male counterparts. Despite this heavy burden, women have less access to important resources, such as agricultural extension, training, inputs, and credit, as well as less ownership, bargaining power, and control over income in their households (Mahdi 2014; Ogato et al. 2009). As such, women are disadvantaged and disempowered by the embedded power relations through which men tend to dictate resources, income, and decision-making.

The global rise in awareness about women's rights and gender-based inequalities has led both national governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to formulate gender policies, strategies, and project-level interventions and measurement indicators. In Ethiopia, these attempts are reflected in the GOE's subscription to international treaties, the creation of a Ministry for Women Affairs and a National Policy on Women, and changes in women's legal rights (UN Women 2014). At the same time, many international development organizations operating in Ethiopia have tried to integrate or mainstream gender in their projects, often with the claim of women's empowerment (Drucza & Abebe 2017).

Feminist scholars usually define empowerment as a process of social change in which individuals or groups identify and challenge unequal power relations, centering on the belief that empowerment is inherently political (Kabeer 1999; Rowlands 1997). However, development agencies have often delineated empowerment into three categories – economic, social, and political – and therefore make claims to certain types of empowerment (Kidder et al. 2017: 20, Luttrell &

Quiroz 2009: 1; Pettit 2012: 4).¹ For example, some organizations engage men and women to address gendered relations and norms in the communities with whom they work, which might be coined as social or political empowerment, while others employ a market-based approach to simultaneously address poverty and empower women. This economic focus, deriving from the rise of micro-finance institutions (MFIs) and other neoliberal development schemes,² permeates organizations' women's empowerment efforts (Batliwala 2007; Cornwall & Rivas 2016). Viewing women as individual market actors, women's economic empowerment (WEE) models utilize resource provision, access to finance, and other financial mechanisms to empower women. As donors are eager to prove their contribution to gender equality and see high "returns" on investment, WEE continues to gain traction within NGO programming (Ransom & Bain 2011). However, few organizations are solely focused on women's empowerment, making it a "crosscutting" issue instead of a main focus area.

One such organization, International Development Enterprises (iDE) Ethiopia, is representative of this trend, as it works in the areas of agriculture, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and finance, while also utilizing a model of WEE. iDE Ethiopia focuses women's *economic* empowerment, as the organization's mission is based upon a market-based approach to poverty, and one of its key performance indicators (KPIs) is increased household income. As such, iDE Ethiopia's projects regularly work with women by creating "women economic groups" (WEGs), which consist of 20-25 members who contribute money to collective savings on a monthly basis. The women also receive in-kind support from iDE in the form of two sheep, and training in how raise them. Both efforts are intended to help increase women's income and improve their wellbeing, but how it empowers women is not well understood. Thus, this thesis seeks to analyze how iDE implements its WEE model in a livelihoods-focused project, and how the women participants experience it. Kabeer's

¹ These references refer to Oxfam's Conceptual Framework of WEE, the Overseas Development Institute's working paper on empowerment, and an Institute of Development Studies research fellow's paper for a UN meeting, indicating that the categories of empowerment are suggested by both NGOs and development institutes, but not feminist scholars.

² Neoliberal development refers to the development paradigm that arose in the 1980s and 90s (after the Washington Census), which tries to address poverty through supporting people as individual market actors. It is frequently enacted through micro-financing, self-help groups, and loans, all of which view individuals as market participants (Peet & Hartwick 2015).

(1999) conceptual framework of empowerment, which focuses on resources, agency, and achievements, underpins the following research questions:

In what ways has iDE Ethiopia's economic empowerment model contributed to women's empowerment in Gimbuchu, Ethiopia?

- 1. What resources does iDE provide, and are these meaningful in the lives of the women?*
- 2. How does iDE enable women to exercise agency?*
- 3. To what extent do women achieve their desired goals through iDE's model?*

1.2 Purpose and Aim

The findings ultimately shed light on *how* women experience empowerment, rather than quantitatively measuring it or assuming a particular development intervention is empowering women. Through understanding women's individual and collective experiences, it also seeks to reveal potential discrepancies between local ideas about empowerment, and the organization's implementation of an empowerment intervention. This thesis does not directly engage with men, as iDE's women's empowerment intervention targets women separately from its other project interventions. Its main purpose, therefore, is to highlight women's voices and experiences while critically analyzing the ways in which iDE Ethiopia seeks to empower women participants.

1.3 Contribution to Literature

Moreover, this thesis contributes important qualitative findings to the existing literature on women's empowerment in Ethiopia, as most of the existing research employs quantitative methods or focuses on gender gaps rather than empowerment. Druzca and Peveri's (2015) literature review of studies on wheat production, gender, and livelihoods in Ethiopia, reveals the overwhelming quantitative nature of agricultural and/or gender-based research in Ethiopia. For example, Aguilar et al. (2014) measured gender differentials of agricultural productivity, while Mahdi (2014) measured how women access agricultural extension services. With greater focus on empowerment, iDE and other organizations have begun utilizing the Women's

Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), which was developed for USAID's Feed the Future initiative (Alkire et al. 2013).³

However, such quantitative studies tend to focus on empowerment as an outcome, rather than a process, thereby failing to elucidate how empowerment occurs. Moreover, quantitative analysis quickly reduces complex interactions and relations into numbers, instead of rich, context-specific findings. Even before the WEIA and other empowerment indicators were developed, Rowlands (1995) called for studies of empowerment that not only reflect empowerment as a process, but also include people in the identification of change. Qualitative methods that directly engage people in the realization of power relations and discussion of empowerment can therefore begin to reveal changes throughout the empowerment process.

In Ethiopia, few studies have employed qualitative methods to better understand how women experience empowerment. Geleta et al. (2018) analyzed a haricot beans-based gender intervention in southern Ethiopia, while Druzca and Abebe (2017) outlined the various gender transformative methodologies that NGOs have employed in projects across Ethiopia. Only one major qualitative study on women's empowerment interventions has been conducted in Ethiopia-- an evaluation of the UN Joint Program on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (UNJP-RWEE) in two districts of Ethiopia (Mulema 2018), part of a multi-country International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) study on women's empowerment in agriculture programs (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019). Nonetheless, such qualitative studies remain largely in-house to contribute to project reports, rather than add to academic literature. This thesis will therefore contribute valuable qualitative findings and analysis to the women's empowerment literature in Ethiopia.

2. Background

2.1 Ethiopia – A Gendered Agricultural Society

³ The WEAI measures gender parity and five dimensions of empowerment—decisions about agricultural production, access to and decision-making power over productive resources, control over use of income, leadership in the community, and time use. While the tool make it easy to compare results across regions or countries, such measurement tools have been criticized for quantifying and universalizing empowerment, stripping it of context-specific meanings (Ibrahim & Alkire 2007).

Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa, with 80% of the labor force employed in agriculture (UN Women 2014: 41). As the backbone of Ethiopia's economy, agriculture contributes 48% to the national GDP and provides 90% of the country's exports, mainly coffee, oil, khat, leather products, and livestock (Poulsen & Nelson 2016: 8). However, subsistence agriculture is most commonly practiced, which relies on rainfall and low inputs and outputs. Both women and men are involved in farming, and tend to undertake gender differentiated crops and activities, though these may vary by region and cultural norms. While men tend to be responsible for the production, marketing, and income of commercial crops, such as coffee and cereals, women are responsible for horticultural production. In addition, while men plough fields, operate machinery, and manage large livestock, women weed, harvest, manage home gardens, and procure water (Mahdi 2014: 12; UN Women 2014: 42).

A USAID paper (Poulsen & Nelson 2016) states that women do up to 75% of farm labor and contribute to 70% of household food production in Ethiopia. However, a number of studies reveal a gender gap in agricultural productivity (Aguilar et al. 2014; Mahdi 2014). Using Ethiopia's Rural Socioeconomic Survey, Aguilar et al. (2014: 3) found that Ethiopian women produce 23% less than their male counterparts. Various qualitative and quantitative studies point to a number of reasons for this gap, such as women's limited access to agricultural extension services, training, inputs, and credit (Mahdi 2014; Ogato et al. 2009). In addition to having less access to essential resources, women may also have less ownership, bargaining power, and control over income. These factors may lead not only to a gender gap in agricultural productivity, but also to less gains for development efforts in food security and malnutrition, which are often linked to women's development (FAO 2011; Meinzen-Dick et al. 2014; UN Women et al. 2015).

Such challenges and disparities persist in Ethiopia, despite multiple policies and reforms addressing gender equality, agricultural production, and economic development. For example, the government of Ethiopia's (GOE) National Policy on Women (1993) and Constitution (1995) ensure women have equal rights as men, and support affirmative action in favor women (UN Women 2014: 11). The GOE has also ratified international treaties on gender equality, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and it revised both its family law and penal code to address gender inequalities (Ibid). In addition,

the Joint Land Certification program, established in 1997, allows wives to jointly own property with their husbands, which has been shown to impact women's empowerment (Melesse et al. 2017; USAID 2016).

Meanwhile, the GOE has embarked on its second Growth Transformation Plan (GTP), centered on agricultural development through strengthening the production of smallholder farmers. These efforts have included elements of gender mainstreaming, such as delivering extension packages deemed "women's development packages," which are meant to support poultry husbandry, home gardens, household management, and nutrition (Poulsen & Nelson 2016). However, the agricultural extension system remains both hierarchical and gendered, with mostly male extension agents imparting knowledge and inputs to men, as only 12% of extension agents (EAs) are female (Ibid.) and wives have significantly less contact with EAs than males (Mahdi 2014: 42). These gender inequalities within agriculture extend to other sectors as well, and are reflected in recent national statistics: Ethiopian women had a 16% lower HDI than men in 2014 (Human Development Report 2015), and Ethiopia ranked 109 out of 144 countries in The Global Gender Gap Report in 2016.⁴

This reality has led the GOE and international NGOs to continue addressing the country's gender inequalities through gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment programs. Although these programs have gained popularity, it is important to note that the term 'empowerment' cannot be directly translated in Ethiopia's local languages, and is therefore not widely known in rural communities.⁵ If known, it is usually described by local development agents (DAs) or NGO field officers using other words, such as 'strong' or 'able' (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019). Thus, the term and its usage, originating from outside Ethiopia, are likely biased towards the values and goals of the institutions trying to operationalize it in their programs (see Methodology Chapter).

2.2 iDE Ethiopia and the CARD Project

As noted above, iDE Ethiopia is one of the many international organizations seeking to empower women through rural development projects. iDE is headquartered in the U.S. and has fourteen country offices around the world, all of which seek to achieve

⁴ These rankings are worse than Ethiopia's East African neighbors, Rwanda and Uganda (Druza & Abebe 2017).

⁵ Ethiopia has 84 languages, with Amharic and Afaan Oromo being the most commonly spoken.

its mission – to create income and livelihood opportunities for poor rural households.⁶ iDE has been active in Ethiopia since 2007, with a main office in the capital of Addis Ababa, and several regional project offices. The Ethiopia team works in each of iDE’s three focus areas – agriculture, WASH, and finance – and implements projects in five of Ethiopia’s nine regions.

While iDE is committed to gender equity and outlines its stance in a gender policy,⁷ it does not have a global gender strategy, allowing its country offices to formulate context specific approaches and targets. Consequently, iDE Ethiopia has been focusing on economic empowerment and using the WEG model described above since 2009.⁸ The model has been used in different projects over the last decade, and incorporates input provided by stakeholders during community consultations. Despite slight variations, the main intent of the model is to increase women’s incomes.

One of iDE’s current projects utilizing the WEG model, called Climate Adaptation and Rural Development (CARD), began in 2017 through funding from the Norwegian government. The project aims to reduce poverty and improve the livelihoods of 6,500 households in three woredas (districts) of Oromia region, mainly through activities geared towards smallholder farmers. While the project engages both men and women, it seems to target them through different interventions. It mainly works with men through seed multiplication, climate smart agricultural techniques, and market linkages, while it focuses on women through household irrigation technologies, nutrition training, and capital accumulation in the WEGs. Though selected by the local government as poor women in the community, the WEG members do not benefit from other interventions in the CARD project.⁹

2.3 Gimbichu, Oromia—Case Study Site

Though the CARD project works in three woredas in Oromia region, Gimbichu woreda was chosen as a feasible and appropriate case study site (see Methodology

⁶ Learn more about iDE at <https://www.ideglobal.org/>.

⁷ The gender policy was created in 2014, but is an internal document and cannot be cited with a link.

⁸ Other NGOs in Ethiopia also work with women through WEGs, but with some variations. For example, iDE’s model requires that women give their first offspring to another women, creating a revolving fund, but other NGOs do not require the women to give away the offspring.

⁹ A wealth ranking exercise done in the community before project implementation reveals that while the women are the poorest in the particular region, they are not as poor as other iDE beneficiaries in other projects. This was used to justify the women’s limited engagement in other interventions of the CARD project.

Chapter). Gimbuchu is located about 65km from the capital city, Addis Ababa, and includes a small town called Chefe Donsa. The surrounding kebeles (neighborhoods) in which the CARD project works, called Fincha, Kersa, Girmi, and Gurmama, are all farming communities. Their land is known to be fertile, and farmers mainly plant cereals, such as wheat, barley, and teff, and pulses, including lentils and chickpeas. Women interviewees shared that both men and women engage in farming of these crops, although men are typically responsible for plowing, harvesting, and selling in the market, while women sow, thresh, and weed.

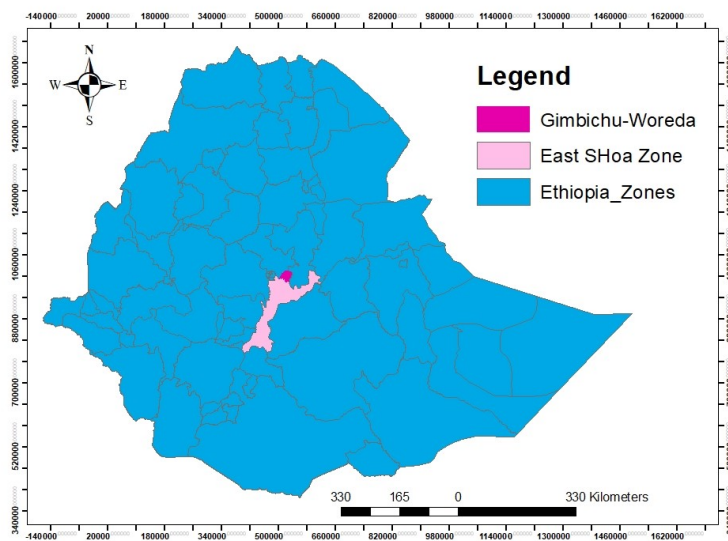


Figure 1: Map of Gimbuchu Woreda, Ethiopia (Mulugeta 2019)

The average income of a household in Gimbuchu varies with the amount of land owned, but on average families earn 11,000 birr (\$385 or 3,570SEK), which is considered moderately poor in comparison to adjacent woredas (Abdissa 2019). In addition, iDE field officers describe residents of Gimbuchu as hardworking, as they spend most of their time on farming activities and strive towards higher yields. However, unpredictable rainy and dry seasons, lack of access to improved seeds, and minimal water access mean that families regularly struggle to produce enough crops for home consumption and income generation (CARD Project Proposal 2017).

3. Empowerment: Feminist Debates, and towards an Analytical Framework

The following chapter reviews the history and theoretical debates surrounding empowerment, highlighting the main tenets outlined in empowerment literature. The chapter mainly focuses on the empowerment concepts suggested by Kabeer, upon which the analytical framework is based.

3.1 Women's Empowerment in Development

As many scholars have noted, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment continue to be buzzwords in the field of international development (Batliwala 2007; Cornwall 2003; Kabeer 1999). However, the roots of these buzzwords date back to the 1970s, when feminist activists and women's organizations first articulated women's struggle for justice and equality. At that time, the struggle focused on changing social, political and economic structures to radically transform unequal gender norms and relations (Mosedale 2005: 247). However, empowerment was not always associated with gender or women—according to Batliwala (2007), empowerment dates back to the protestant reformation, early capitalism, and the black power movement. These were mainly struggles to bring about social justice and change, and were achieved through collective action.

Around the same time that feminist empowerment efforts arose, development scholars began to acknowledge the importance of including women in development interventions, which became a movement known by its acronym – WID. Boserup's (1970) study on women engaged in agriculture first drew attention to the fact that development interventions were highly focused on men, and argued that women should also be included to address poverty, food security, etc. This approach was embraced by the UN, which made 1975 the International Year of the Women and 1975-1985 the Decade for Women. In the 80s, however, scholars critiqued the WID movement for being too universalist and ignoring unequal gendered power relations. Gender and Development (GAD) arose to not only adequately analyze gender relations, but also confront the unjust structures underlying female subordination (Ransom & Bain 2011; Rowlands 1997). Gender mainstreaming and gender sensitivity became popular, although the GAD approach was still rooted in western notions and assumptions about development (Rai et al. 2007: 10).

In the 1990s, critique of the WID and GAD movements led to increased attention to women's empowerment, evident at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (Batliwala 2007: 558; Chant & Sweetman 2012: 519). Various definitions and practices of empowerment proliferated without question, and rather than challenging structural inequalities and injustices, women's empowerment became synonymous with productivity, efficiency, and participation (Collins 2016; Mosedale 2005). This instrumentalist approach echoes the WID movement of the 70s and structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the 80s, both of which viewed women as efficient contributors to economic development (Chant & Sweetman 2012: 519). With the rise of women's empowerment in the 90s, the approach was commonly enacted through encouraging women as economic actors in the marketplace and increasing their access to microcredit. Around the same time, participatory development approaches also gained popularity, and development organizations began to conflate empowerment with participation (Batliwala 2007: 559; Rai 2007: 10). These changes in both the meaning and practice of women's empowerment are further articulated below through a summary of scholars' critiques of the term and the ways it has been operationalized.

3.1.1 Economic vs. Social & Individual vs. Collective Empowerment

As suggested above, empowerment efforts have tended towards economic empowerment with a focus on female income generation and women as market actors. In critiquing the MDGs, Cornwall and Rivas (2016: 406) clearly articulate their critique of the WEE discourse:

At the heart of this discourse is a belief that women's business success is enough to overcome all other barriers to equality. This version of 'women's empowerment' is more appealing to international donors and banks than traditional feminist concerns with the more nebulous inequality and oppression.

Similarly Batliwala (2007: 562) points out that development organizations believe they can achieve economic empowerment through self-help groups, suggesting women can help themselves in the market domain. More recently, a NY Times author bluntly criticized organizations for claiming to empower women simply through giving them chickens (Zakaria 2017). These critiques emphasize the lack of efforts

seeking to highlight and deconstruct the root causes of unequal gender relations. Feminist scholars suggest that real transformation with regard to gender equity cannot only address men and women as economic actors, but also as social beings with highly engrained norms, roles, and responsibilities. However, treating women as economic actors is highly embedded in the development practice of ‘smart economics,’ in which investment in women is seen as not only good for women, but for reducing poverty and achieving other development goals (Chant & Sweetman 2012: 520).

Meanwhile, scholars also critique definitions of empowerment and agency that are overly focused on the individual. Cornwall and Rivas (2015: 397) critique “today’s neoliberal ‘empowerment’ programmes aimed at the self-optimized individual,” while Batliwala (2007: 563) states that empowerment has become a verb focusing on individuals’ achievements and status. The critique of this shift towards individual empowerment aims to point out how individuals themselves cannot adequately address structural gendered inequalities in the way that collective mobilization and voice began to do so in the feminist movements of the 1970s. Both the discourse and practice surrounding power relations, rights, and justice have thus been lost as a radical approach to women’s empowerment.

3.1.2 Empowerment as Bestowed by Others

While most scholars believe empowerment cannot be “done” by an organization, Mosedale (2005) argues that empowerment may include *facilitation* because women have been participating in their own oppression. Unequal gender relations are often so embedded that women may not realize it, and therefore do not imagine an alternative to the status quo. Rowlands (1997) refers to a form of ‘power from within,’ which is expressed through self-respect, acceptance, and confidence. Kabeer and others claim that empowerment from within is integral to the empowerment process—through the interventions of facilitators, women may gain awareness of the social norms and practices which lead to their subordination. However, many development organizations fail to make the distinction between doing empowerment and facilitating empowerment, making claims to empowerment that still situate women as lacking power.

Furthermore, feminist scholars warn against importing Western notions of feminism to guide women’s empowerment in the South. Though empowerment is not

strictly a Western concept, organizations “doing” development and feminists supporting empowerment may impose their own ideals (Mohanty 1984). Mosedale (2005: 245) also points out the problem of universalizing or averaging ‘third world women,’ assuming they are oppressed and that they share the same characteristics and values. As such, Kabeer (1999) and others emphasize the importance of considering cultural context when facilitating women’s empowerment, as different choices and opportunities have different meaning and value in women’s lives.

3.1.3 Power in Empowerment

Despite the numerous debates surrounding empowerment, most feminist scholars agree that empowerment has been stripped of its essential component – power – depoliticizing it as a term intended to be highly politicized (Batliwala 2007; Cornwall 2003; Kabeer 1999; Rai 2007). Though suggesting slightly different definitions of empowerment, these scholars claim that empowerment is ultimately about challenging unequal power relations embedded at multiple levels of society – the individual, household, community, and institutional structures – which maintain injustices and inequalities. In making their case, such scholars focus on power not as a zero sum game in which power is possessed, but as a process (Kabeer 1999: 436; Mosedale 2005: 251). This stems from Foucault’s understanding of power as fluid and relational, expressed in every day interactions between people and institutions (Rai et al. 2007: 5). As such, empowerment is also a process, and not an end goal or outcome, as many development organizations have tried to measure (See Introduction). Moreover, Kabeer (1999: 437) argues that empowerment implies changing the previous status quo of disempowerment, which necessitates transforming unequal power relations.

With regard to women’s empowerment, power relations refer to the ways in which men and women assume roles and responsibilities that tend to oppress women. These roles and responsibilities have often become so embedded in society and culture that they are part of institutional structures as well as everyday interactions. To that extent, unequal gender relations are highly internalized and embedded, making them unrecognizable or unquestioned. Feminist scholars often explain this internalization through Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of ‘doxa,’ defined as beliefs and traditions that exist without contestation. Kabeer (1999: 441) explains that, “the passage from ‘doxa’ to discourse, a more critical consciousness, only becomes

possible when competing ways of ‘being and doing’ become available as material and cultural possibilities.” As Freire (1970) suggests, critical consciousness can be gained through education, as it sheds light on inequalities and injustices. By uncovering and recognizing such embedded power structures, unequal gender relations can be redressed, restoring ‘power’ to its place in empowerment.

3.1.4 From Critique to the Study of Empowerment

As the scholarship on empowerment often critiques feminist discourse and neoliberal development interventions, it is difficult to find recent and useful theoretical frameworks for women’s empowerment studies. Cornwall (2016), and Cornwall and Rivas (2016) have sought to reclaim empowerment from its theoretical debates in order to engage with it in practice. Though Kabeer’s concepts of empowerment were mainly developed in the early 2000s, they are still relevant, practical and accessible. Though founded on her studies of women groups targeted by NGOs in Bangladesh, her conceptual framework is applicable to this case study in Ethiopia for a number of reasons. First, the gender norms and power structures in rural Bangladesh are similar to those of rural Ethiopia, as both have a patriarchal society in which men are considered the head of the household, and women depend on their husbands for land and other material resources. In addition, both societies are collective in nature, meaning that people tend to derive their identity from familial ties and other community associations, rather than individualistic traits (Baker & Campbell 2013). Moreover, Kabeer’s study focused on four Bangladeshi organizations and the strategies they employed to empower women, capturing the women’s group and NGO dynamic that this case study also seeks to understand.

Although Kabeer notes that the Bangladeshi women mainly exercised agency within the household or community domains, her empowerment framework is also relevant to analyzing market-based interventions given her in-depth attention to the operationalization of resources and agency. This application is evident in Friedson-Ridenour et al.’s (2019) study of market-based approaches to empowerment in Ghana, which utilized Kabeer’s concepts of empowerment to understand the experiences of Ghanaian women farmers engaged in USAID’s Feed the Future program. Kabeer’s empowerment framework is therefore a “travelling conceptual framework,” which has been able to account for economic empowerment models in the African context, while

remaining practical to the extent that it can be operationalized outside of feminist critiques of WEE.

3.2 Kabeer's Empowerment Framework

Kabeer defines empowerment as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied them," highlighting an emphasis on both choice and (in)justice (1999: 437). Strategic choices, also called first order choices, are considered choices that are very important for people to live the life they desire, whereas second order choices are less consequential. While her definition focuses on exercising choice, it is important to note the main principles upon which her overarching theory of empowerment is founded. First is the idea that empowerment is highly relational, and that one's identity is continuously constructed through social interactions and associations with others (Kabeer 2011: 503).

Secondly, empowerment is an ongoing process in which power is constantly present and reenacted, directly and indirectly (Kabeer 1999: 436). And third, Kabeer and other scholars contend that empowerment cannot be "done" by others-- it is an internal process and can therefore only be facilitated by a third party. With these principles in mind, the following section outlines the three main inter-related dimensions of the empowerment process—resources, agency, and achievements.

3.2.1 Resources

According to Kabeer, resources are not only material or physical, but can also include knowledge, relationships, and future claims and expectations. In the summary of her study in Bangladesh, Kabeer differentiates between material, cognitive, and relational resources. Cognitive resources entail interactions with others that increase awareness and facilitate reflection in ways that instigate individuals or groups to realize alternative opportunities in life. Such resources can be gained through informal discussion with others, group meetings, trainings, and education (Kabeer 2011: 511). In the women groups in Bangladesh, women discussed gaining awareness about husband and wife roles, understanding the value of their contributions to the household, and knowing their rights (Ibid: 512). Meanwhile, relational resources are developed over time, as individuals meet through various forums and interactions. Again in Bangladesh, the women groups described how the relationships formed were a source of strength as they struggled for justice in the political domain.

Of course, resources are often unequally distributed within institutions and relationships, but the ability to make intentional choices regarding such resources begins to challenge existing power relations and structures (Kabeer 2005: 15). Thus, resources are “at one remove from choice, a measure of potential rather than actualized choice” (Kabeer 1999: 443). For this reason, Kabeer describes resources as “pre-conditions” for agency, as they are the medium through which agency is exercised (2005: 15).

3.2.2 Agency

Resources become meaningful when they are actualized through agency, defined as “the ability to define one’s goals and act on them” (Kabeer 2011: 438). In this sense, people set goals, and then negotiate access to, control over, or ownership of resources in order to meet those goals. This often takes place in the form of decision-making, as individuals, partners, or groups decide how to best utilize their resources. Besides decision-making, agency can also occur through bargaining, negotiation, and manipulation. As agency takes many forms, there may not always be an obvious agent who is exercising power. Social and gender norms may be so engrained that the power relations and structures at work are seemingly invisible and/or passive, unable to be changed (Kabeer 1999). Kabeer (2005: 15) describes this as passive agency, as there may seem to be little or no choice exercised, in comparison to intentional behaviors and choices. For example, women may choose not to choose, consenting to the status quo. In this case, women are passive agents, but they are still making a choice according to their preferences (Kabeer 1999: 440).

Similarly, women may exercise a form of efficient or adaptive agency, in which they make choices and utilize resources in such a way that allows them to carry out typical gender roles and responsibilities with greater efficiency (Kabeer 2005: 16). An example of this could be using a fuel saving stove, reducing the amount of firewood women need to collect for cooking, which is usually a woman’s job. Thus, despite being active agents, women exercising adaptive agency remain confined to limited choices, as such choices do not extend beyond gendered expectations.

In contrast, transformative agency requires negotiating resources in a way that actively challenges the existing gender norms that inhibit women from utilizing resources in new or significant ways. This might entail a husband and wife discussing and negotiating responsibilities, resulting in the husband doing some tasks typically

reserved for women so that her work burden is reduced. Thus, transformative agency is most radical in that it requires both women and men to intentionally change the ways they act upon resources and relate to one another. It is therefore important to recognize the significance of women's decisions in their lives and whether they act as passive, efficient, or transformative agents.

Finally, Kabeer differentiates between individual and collective agency. This difference is important and relevant in the context of Ethiopia, which Baker and Campbell (2013: 5) describe as a highly collectivist culture, meaning it focuses on relationships, group or community expectations, and interpersonal harmony. Situating Ethiopia within this context allows for greater understanding of how people may value and experience individual and collective agency. Moreover, Kabeer claims that while individual agency may redress inequalities at the household level, collective agency is needed for institutional change, and therefore needs to be exercised in more formal and public spheres (2005: 16). In a collective society like Ethiopia, this is important for instigating what Kabeer calls a "sense of agency" (1999: 438). This sense can be expressed through hope, motivation, and purpose, especially in relation to making plans and envisioning the future. The analysis therefore incorporates these various aspects of agency, acknowledging sense of agency while also paying attention to the distinctions between passive, efficient, and transformative agency, and individual and collective agency.

3.2.3 Achievements

Finally, achievements are the outcomes of exercising agency. Achievements can be survival related, including food security, good health, etc., or more specific to one's context and goals in life. The concept of achievements within empowerment literature is not straightforward, however, as Kabeer and other scholars note the difficulty of measuring empowerment-related achievements. This is mainly due to the challenge of attributing achievements to certain variables – what really led a woman to achieve food security for her family? And to what extent does this indicate empowerment? For example, Kabeer (1999: 451) discusses using two survival related indicators of empowerment – child survival and immunization – which can be considered universally valued achievements. She argues that while such outcomes can be achieved through women being more effective agents, the achievements do not

necessarily mean a change in power relations. She explicitly states that, “apart from the extent to which outcomes require women to go against the grain of established custom, achievements also have to be assessed for their transformatory implications in relation to the gender inequalities frequently embedded in these customs” (Ibid.). This requires understanding the value or meaningfulness of women’s achievements in their lives, as well as the extent to which they challenged entrenched gender norms in the given culture. Such an endeavor is quite difficult, resulting in numerous quantitative and qualitative efforts to measure empowerment.¹⁰ Despite the ongoing debate about how to value and measure empowerment, this thesis focuses on what the women have identified as valuable achievements, rather than imposing the researcher’s or another scholar’s set of achievements.¹¹ Moreover, it seeks to understand how iDE’s intervention has contributed to the women’s realization of their achievements, recognizing that the timeframe of a project and outside influences also impact how women define and value empowerment.

3.4 Analytical Framework: Resources, Agency, and Achievements

The analytical framework for this thesis is based off of these three concepts outlined by Kabeer, and visualized in the graphic below. As described above, resources are the pre-conditions for agency, while agency is the process through which resources are utilized and outcomes are achieved. Thus, Kabeer (1999) describes resources, agency, and achievements as “inter-related dimensions,” through which the empowerment process occurs. Along this process, resources, agency, and achievements are utilized individually or collectively, as decisions and actions may be taken by a single person or a group. However, the integral relational aspect of empowerment implies that all three dimensions in this framework are affected by gendered power relations and norms.

The analysis focuses on identifying and describing how the women in the case study articulate and experience each of the three dimensions. It begins with a focus on resources, given iDE’s WEE model and its emphasis on resource provision. It then elaborates upon agency and achievements, while examining the links between each dimension.

¹⁰ See O’Hare and Clement’s (2018) recent review of empowerment measurement methodologies and their critiques.

¹¹ See Kabeer’s (1999: 456) discussion of etic and emic values and how these inform measurements of empowerment.

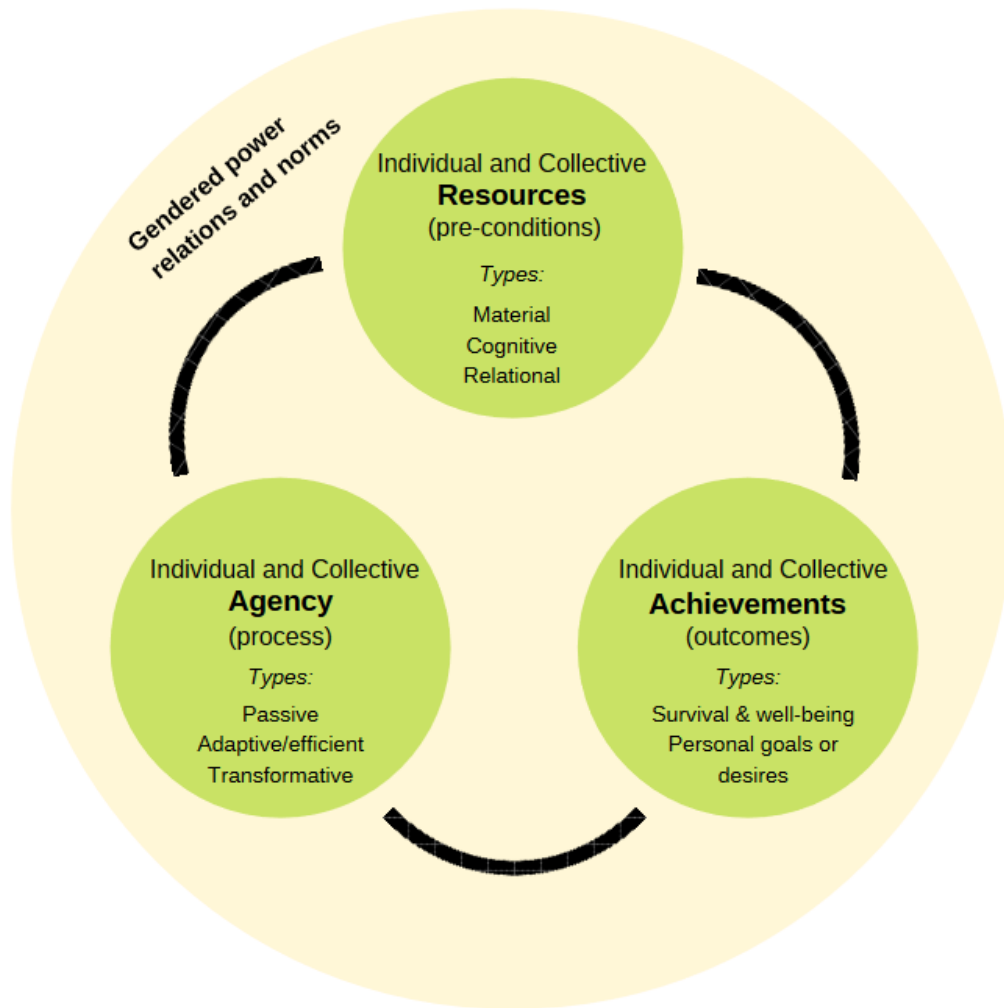


Figure 2: Empowerment Framework, created by the author and based upon Kabeer's (1999) concepts

4. Methodology

4.1 Overview & Justification

As the research question pertains to women's lived experiences, the methodology is qualitative in nature and is based on individual interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and a participatory drawing activity. While quantitative methods have objectively measured dimensions of empowerment in Ethiopia and other countries, Debevec et al. (2017) and Kaaria (2017) suggest that quantitative research on empowerment fails to capture its intangible and intrinsic elements, such as one's sense of agency (See Introduction). In addition, while few qualitative studies exist in

Ethiopia, even fewer have employed participatory methods to facilitate empowerment through the research process. Thus, this study balances the practical aim of understanding a women's empowerment model with the academic rigor of qualitative research methods.

4.1.2 Feminist Standpoint Theory

The epistemological foundation for this thesis is grounded in feminist standpoint theory (FST), which arose in the 1970s and underscores women's realities within their specific environment and circumstances (Harding 2004, Hesse-Biber & Yaiser 2004). FST is appropriate for this thesis since the research question emphasizes women's experiences, necessitating the co-production of knowledge with women. Such co-production of knowledge places value on the human and social experience, expressed through women's articulations of their everyday practices and relations (McCarthy & Muthuri 2017). Moreover, in the same vein as weak social constructivism, it situates women as agents within their context, who "cannot be adequately understood without looking at the social, historical, and cultural context within which they are embedded" (Kitzinger 2000: 451). This implies that even the context in which the researcher and researched engage is underpinned by beliefs and norms, influencing the knowledge co-produced. Thus, this thesis employs FST to highlight women's lived experiences while recognizing both the experiences and discussion around them are highly situated (Rose 1997; Sultana 2007).

4.2 Research Design

4.2.1 Case Study

This research employs a case study approach, as it focuses on communities in a single district who are engaged in iDE's CARD project. Case study research is used for intensive investigation of a particular community, event, organization, or other unique unit, and is therefore appropriate for gaining in-depth understanding of a particular economic empowerment model. As Bryman (2012: 71) and Yin (2009) note, case studies are not meant to be generalized, but instead serve to either generate theory or test whether the case fits in to existing theory. In this research, the case study approach is meant to employ Kabeer's framework of empowerment to understand women's experiences of a particular economic empowerment model. Though the

findings cannot be generalized to all projects that include WEGs, the case study still generates valuable evidence pertaining to a major region in which iDE works.

4.2.2 Site Sampling

Although iDE Ethiopia has several projects that work with women, the CARD project and Gimbichu woreda were chosen for several reasons. First, it was chosen given its intentional focus on women's empowerment, a main interest of the researcher.

Secondly, the CARD project works directly with women through WEGs, a clear unit for analysis. From a practical standpoint, the project is located within easy driving distance from Addis Ababa, making it more accessible to the researcher. In addition, previous visits to the project site allowed me to meet the field officers working in the three different woredas of the project, as well as clients engaged in different interventions, so I had some background knowledge of the site, people, and project. Moreover, Gimbichu is considered a moderately poor agricultural region with little to no exposure to a previous development project, so the women's understandings and experiences of empowerment were mostly influenced by iDE and the local government.¹² This allowed the study to focus solely on communities engaged with iDE, so as to better understand the influence of iDE's WEE model apart from other interventions or projects.

4.2.3 Sampling and Gatekeepers

Both of iDE's field officers in Gimbichu demonstrated understanding of my research questions, ease in translation, and most importantly, good rapport with the local communities. Before selecting them as gatekeepers and translators, however, I considered the numerous pros and cons of conducting research through an NGO and with men. Scheyvens and Leslie (2000) and Desai and Potter (2018) explore the power dynamics of the researcher and researched, and question, "who speaks for whom?" They warn against imposing Western feminist ideals and making assumptions about who is most appropriate to research women. In particular, Scheyvens and Leslie (2000: 122) ask whether men can or should conduct research with women, especially given their position of power. In this case, for example, the

¹² Only one kebele within Gimbichu woreda had partaken in another project, which provided livestock to very few women, among other interventions (Gurmama taskforce).

field officers are college-educated middle-class men working for an international NGO. These characteristics indicate a degree of privilege and power, which inherently creates a power imbalance between them and the poor women subsistence farmers we were researching. Moreover, in cultures in which gender norms are strictly adhered to, women may not openly express their opinions in the presence of men, especially if they are deviant, and men may not interpret them authentically (Ibid.) Though this may have been the case to a certain extent, the field officers' numerous years of living and interacting with locals in the community was evident in the way women readily invited us into their homes and made more eye contact with the male field officers than myself. While a female field officer might have invited more openness, this was not an option since iDE does not have any women field officers, which is indicative of the gendered roles within the organization.

Nonetheless, working with two field officers with extensive expertise allowed me to learn in depth information about the history of the region and the agricultural-based livelihoods of the people. They also ensured my safety and mode of transport, as I stayed next to their homes in the local town, and rode with them to research sites. Though practical, these elements are also critical to conducting research, especially in a remote environment (Scheyvens 2014).

With these considerations in mind, I began by interviewing the field officers to learn more about their daily work within the project, how they relate to the women clients in the project, and how they understand empowerment. We then discussed my research questions, objectives, and potential methods so they could ask questions and provide input. This allowed for the formation of an appropriate and feasible plan, as well as clarification of expectations and goals. The field officers offered thoughtful suggestions, such as speaking with women in the morning when they were less busy, engaging in informal conversation over a drink before or after the interview, and providing soft drinks during the FGDs.

4.2.4 Sampling of Participants

The field officers purposively selected three WEG members in each of the four kebeles of Gimbichu in order to have a diverse range of viewpoints in the individual

interviews (Bryman 2012: 422).¹³ Of these twelve women, five were chairwomen of a WEG, three were cashiers or secretaries, and four were members. The women also ranged in age from 22-60, and ranged in education levels from no formal education to completion of 10th grade. In addition, all women were married, except one who was divorced and one who was widowed. All of the women had children, with an average of three children per family. All women were engaged in agricultural activities, while seven were also involved in petty trade.

Though these women had different characteristics, the sample size was small, and time availability and willingness to be interviewed also likely played a role in the officers' selection process. However, it was made clear that this research was for academic purposes and not for the future benefit of the project, so that the field officers would not intentionally choose women who were greatly benefitting from the project. It is also important to note that the WEG members engaged in the project were initially selected through a process involving the local government, called the kebele taskforce. This entailed a screening process in which women were chosen through a number of selection criteria, though in general, they were chosen as the poorest women in the community.

The FGD participants were selected through field officers' invitation of WEG members in each kebele, but not all members chose to attend. Thus, the participants were random, as specific members were not chosen. All FGDs consisted of 8-10 women who were members of WEGs in the kebele but not necessarily members of the same WEGs.¹⁴ Some of the women attending the FGD had also been individually interviewed, so there was some overlap. Overall, about thirty women participated in the interviews and FGDs.

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Individual Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with twelve WEG members, three project staff, and eight kebele taskforce members (See Annex 1 for full list of interviewees).¹⁵

¹³ Lists of WEG members did not indicate women's positions or other characteristics, which would have made it difficult for me to intentionally select diverse participants.

¹⁴ Some kebeles are large and have multiple WEGs. Since all WEG members were invited to the FGDs, the groups included members from different WEGs.

¹⁵ Members of two kebele taskforces were interviewed in a group, but these only occurred due to the members being present at their office around the same time as the FGDs were conducted. Opportunistic

All interviewees provided verbal consent to being interviewed, recorded, and photographed. I conducted all interviews in person, in each of the woman's homes or nearby, so that it was most convenient and comfortable for them. The interviews were conducted with the iDE field officers, who facilitated introductions and translated. The local language of the region is Afaan Oromo, so interview questions and responses were translated 'live' from English to Oromo and back to English, all of which was recorded. This allowed me to listen to respondents' answers and reformulate questions that were misunderstood or ask appropriate follow up questions. This method often revealed misunderstandings by the translators and respondents, so clarification ensured that important research questions were sufficiently addressed. Moreover, new or in depth lines of questioning allowed participants to explore questions that were most important or relevant to them, which allowed for more unique responses.

The interviews with the WEG members focused on their understanding of what it means to be an empowered woman, and how the WEG activities and CARD project have contributed to that vision or not. The interviews also explored what it means to live a happy and good life, and what women aspire to in the future. The interviews with project staff mainly focused on how they understand women's empowerment and how they facilitate the activities with WEGs.

4.3.2 FGDs & Participatory Drawing

FGDs were carried out in conjunction with a participatory method called 'Soulmate Visioning,' which was developed by Linda Mayoux (2017) as part of the Gender Action Learning for Sustainability (GALS) methodology.¹⁶ This activity was done with FGD participants and facilitated by the researcher and field officers. Soulmate Visioning entails women individually drawing a picture of an empowered woman, and the people, resources, and activities that contribute to this vision. After drawing their own picture, women then compared their drawings with others, and discussed

sampling was employed to take advantage of additional data sources that may inform the research questions (Bryman 2012: 419), but the interview content was not used in the findings.

¹⁶ The GALS methodology stems from Participatory Action Learning for Sustainability (PALS), and has been used in previous studies, such as McCarthy and Muthuri's (2018) study of women in the cocoa value chain in Ghana, and Dehondt et al.'s (2018) study of women farmers in Ethiopia. GALS utilizes numerous visual participatory research methods, rooted in group action research and participatory development approaches, to collaboratively research gender and power dynamics (see Mayoux's website: <http://www.galsatscale.net/>).

similarities and differences.¹⁷ Further discussion addressed the content of the drawings, as well as elements that could not be easily drawn, such as livelihood activities, husband and wife relations, etc. Finally, one or two women were chosen by the other participants to help draw one large picture representing the elements women thought were most important for an empowered woman. At the end of the activity, I photographed their drawings so they could keep their vision of an empowered woman.

This combination of drawing and discussion was intentionally chosen to capture both the material and nonmaterial aspects of empowerment, which Darkwah and Tsikata (2014) highlighted as a methodological challenge in their empowerment study. While the drawings revealed the meaningful resources of an empowered women, group discussion explored women's relations, decision-making processes, and desired achievements, which also captured similarities and differences in women's responses. The drawing activity, a form of visual participatory research (VPR), was not only meant to be a fun group activity, but also an empowering one, as some women had never drawn before and were happily surprised at their ability to do so (Mayoux & De Smet 2017). In calling for more innovative ways of generating data with participants, McCarthy and Muthuri (2018: 134) suggest that VPR methods can encourage more meaningful participation, elevate participants' voices, and even challenge the power relations between the researcher and participants. The drawing exercise was one way of confronting the latter, as the field officers claimed the women were illiterate and couldn't draw, and were therefore humbled when the women excitedly shared their pictures. This led to increased collective consciousness, not only among the women participants, but of the researchers as well (Cornwall & Sardenburg 2014: 74). Moreover, the women gained a tangible visual of their reflections, in contrast to the often extractive nature of research (Scheyvens & Leslie 2000). When asked about the drawing activity, one participant shared, "it is very important because if you put your ideas on the notebook, because the paper is speaking to us...if we keep our ideas in mind, we maybe forget, if you put it there in such a way, we won't forget."

¹⁷ The researcher made slight adaptations to the drawing activity so that it would fit with the research questions and decrease the time of the FGD.



Figure 3: Girmi FGD participants drawing Figure 4: Karsa FGD participants drawing

4.4 Data Analysis

4.4.1 Transcribing & Coding

Since the interviews were conducted in both English and Afan Oromo, they were transcribed in English and checked by a third party for accuracy and additional interpretation. Before coding the interviews with NVivo software, I read through the transcripts twice, familiarizing myself with the participants and the conversations. I began identifying codes, categories, and larger themes. The first coding process included about 70 codes, some of which were combined or deleted in subsequent reads. Some themes emerged with coincided with the analytical framework, so codes and categories were later reorganized for the writing and analysis process.

4.4.2 Photo Analysis

The individually and collectively drawn photos were also analyzed-- elements were categorized and coded similarly to the verbal content. For example, resources were coded according to who had control or ownership over them, and whether women accessed these resources in the home or public domain. This method of visual analysis follows the approach of McCarthy and Muthuri (2018: 145), who analyzed gender trees (another GALS method) drawn by Ghanaian men and women.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

While considering the position of the gatekeepers, I was also cognizant of my own identity and positionality as a white, female Masters student from North America. I was careful to not impose any notions of Western feminism that derive from a place of privilege or from a completely different cultural context. However, scholars also highlight the potential value in conducting research with those who are different from ourselves, as cross cultural sharing can be an informative and sometimes empowering experience (Scheyvens & Leslie 2000; Sultana 2007).

I was also careful about taking women's time for interviews, as women already face a double or triple work burden. The field officers and I tried to conduct the interviews in an efficient manner, aware of the time and when women needed to wrap up and begin other tasks, such as preparing lunch. We also practiced flexibility and patience, as some of the women were petty traders and needed to take short breaks during the interview to attend to clients.

A final yet major ethical concern was how to respect the local culture, especially while asking questions that may come across as challenging or judgmental. As men and women are often not consciously aware of accepted gender norms, they may not easily speak about them in a reflective or critical manner. I was aware that such research can be sensitive if it counters the status quo and reveals challenges, disadvantages, etc., and tried to be respectful and sensitive throughout the process while still remaining true to the research intent (Ibid.).

In light of these ethical concerns and the sensitive nature of feminist research, all participants have been anonymized through the use of pseudonyms. A short summary of the findings has already been shared with iDE, but I also intend to plan an appropriate way to share them with the women participants, which is highly encouraged in feminist research (Desai & Potter 2006: 8).

4.6 Limitations

A major limitation was the language barrier and misunderstandings during translation. There is not a direct equivalent of "empowerment" in the local language, a common challenge for empowerment studies in countries where English is not the primary language (Friedson-Ridenour et al. 2019; Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019; Tsikata & Darkwah 2014). Therefore, the field officers used the Afaan Oromo phrase

dubartoota cimtuu, which means a “strong woman.” Given varying levels of familiarity with the concept of empowerment, it is possible that respondents interpreted and responded to questions differently, even if questions were consistently asked using the same terminology and phrases. Obvious misinterpretations or misunderstandings, both by the translators and respondents, were addressed through rearticulating questions in more simple terms, creating appropriate hypothetical scenarios, and repeatedly asking the translator whether the respondent used such words. Another limitation was time, as I was not able to spend a long time in the community to more deeply understand and observe the lives of the women. As a result, the geographic area and number of interviews is small in scope, allowing for a small but in-depth case study.

5. Findings & Analysis

The following section presents and analyzes the data, and is organized according to the chosen analytical framework. As such, the women participants’ ideas about empowerment and the ways that iDE’s WEG model has sought to economically empower women are addressed using Kabeer’s concepts of resources, agency, and achievements.

5.1 Material Resources

Material resources are a critical component of economic empowerment, as one cannot exercise agency without resources to access, control, or own. During individual interviews and FGDs, women identified resources that are important for being an empowered woman. Resources ranged from nice clothes and hair, indicating the importance of appearance, to sufficient land for farming, indicating their main source of livelihood and identity. Thus, women’s material needs reflected their multiple roles and responsibilities as mothers, wives, farmers, and businesswomen.

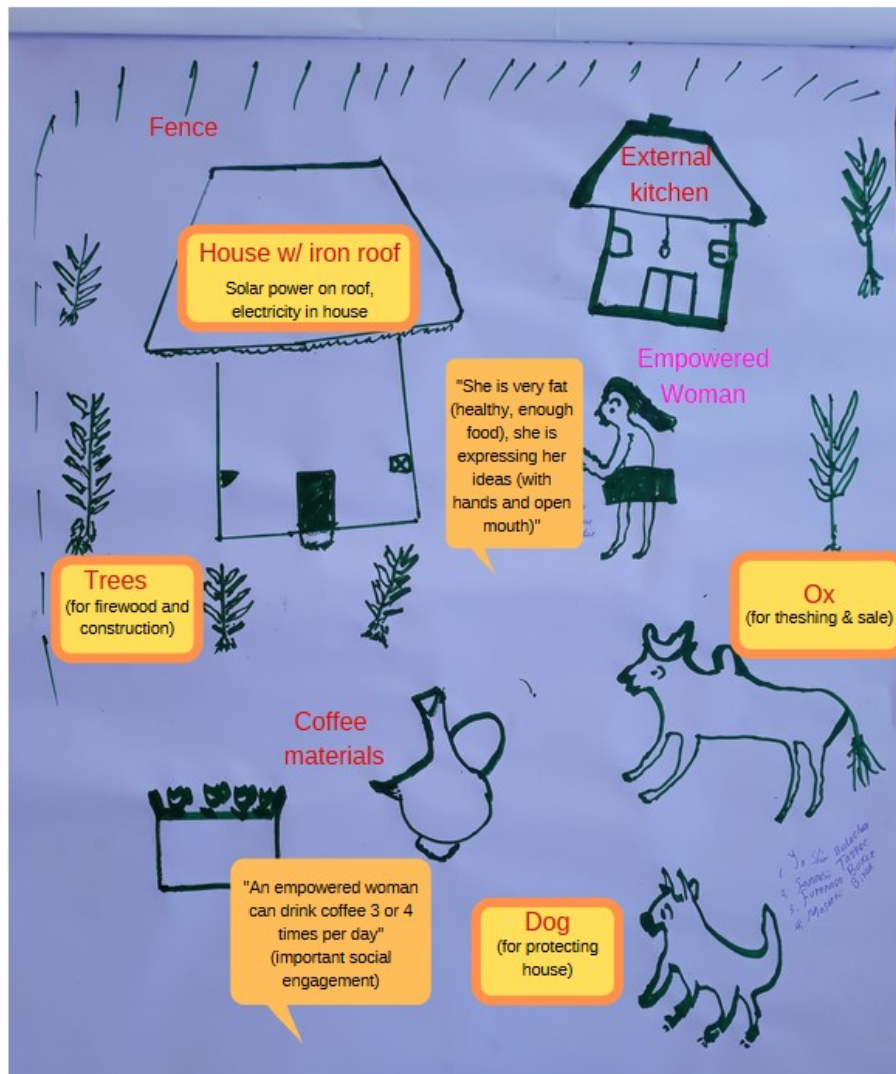


Figure 5: Fincha WEG members' vision of an empowered woman

The drawings readily highlight the resources that an empowered woman has inside or outside the home. As seen above in one of the FGD's collective drawings, an empowered woman has a nice home with a corrugated iron roof and windows, surrounded by a fence. Within the compound are trees and animals, including oxen, horses, donkeys, sheep, and chickens. Inside the house, she has a variety of furniture, including cabinets, a bed, chairs, a stove and kettle, and dishes. She also has a coffee pot (called a jebena) with cups, and a basket for injera (bread), both of which are essential in Ethiopian culture. Noticeably, the resources are mostly related to a women's home, except for the scythe used in nearby fields, reflecting the embedded nature of women's domain in the household (see drawings below).

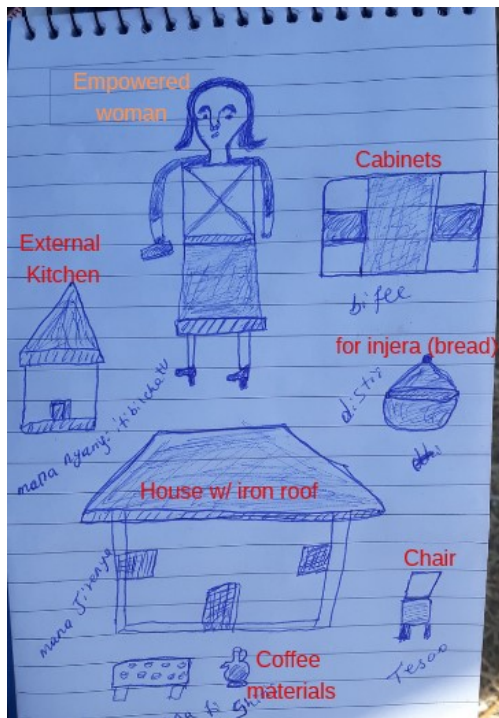


Figure 6: Individual drawing

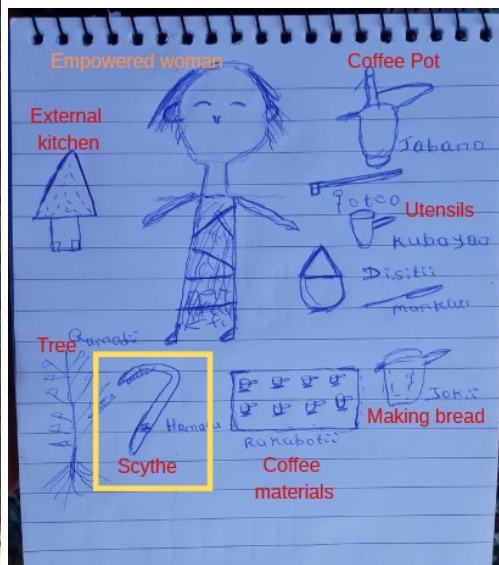


Figure 7: Individual drawing

5.1.1 Land Means Life

Some women spoke about certain resources in relation to living a good and happy life. For example, Belaynesh stated that, “A good life for me is if I have farming land, and if I have livestock. For example, if I have livestock I am not traveling to find cow dung in the fields. I can make it near my home.”¹⁸ Though she speaks about the importance of livestock, her statement also alludes to the importance of being near the home and managing time. Women always discussed land in reference to crop production, as farming is the main livelihood for families in this area. As a woman in Girmi kebele bluntly stated, “if there is no land, no crop, no crop, no money.” Several women (five out of twelve) shared that they had very little land or none at all, and therefore either rent land for farming or work as a daily laborer on someone else’s farm. Moreover, women explained that the reason they are landless is due to poverty and not being able to afford the cost of rent, or due to the land system, in which women usually acquire land through marriage. Thus, women described the incredible difficulty of generating enough income without sufficient land for farming.

¹⁸ Cow dung is often used as a building material and as a fuel, making it a valuable resource.

5.1.2 Livestock

As described (See Introduction), iDE's WEG model in the CARD project entails identifying the most poor women in each kebele, organizing them into a WEG, and providing in-kind support of two sheep per woman. The women, government members, and iDE field officers have all described this process, including the final step, when the selected women and their husbands meet with field officers in the local market to purchase and bring home their sheep. Thus, the most obvious material resource that iDE provides is livestock, which women frequently identified as being important to an empowered woman. In fact, most of the individual and groups drawings included at least one type of livestock, pictured below.

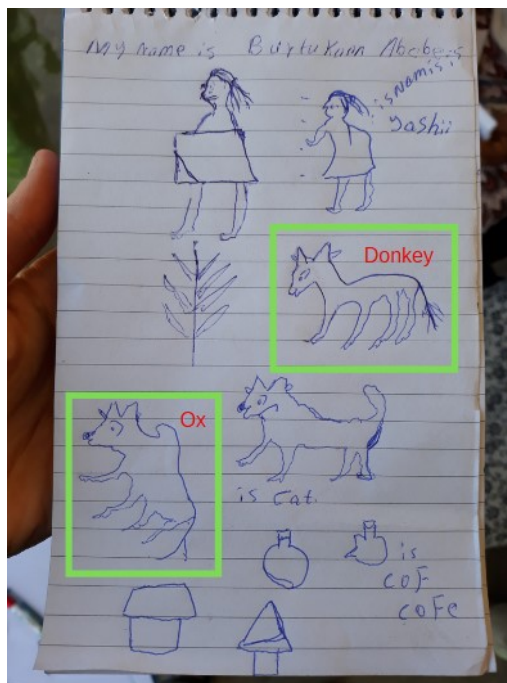


Figure 8: Individual drawing

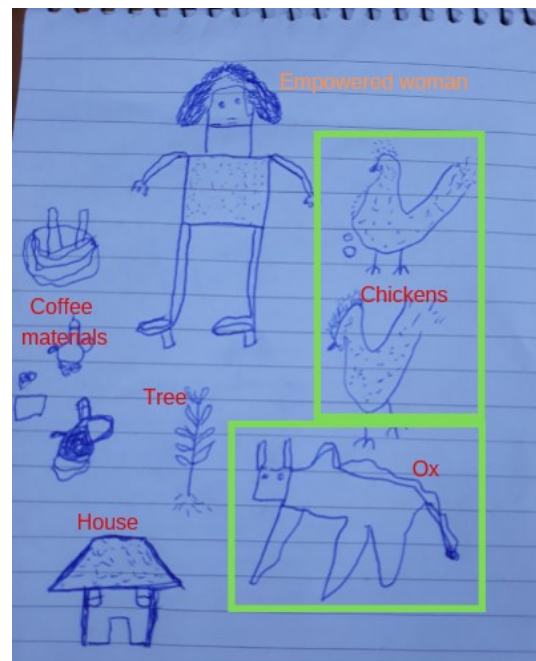


Figure 9: Individual drawing

However, when later asked about the benefit of being in a WEG, most women admitted that they had not seen any economic benefit from raising sheep. They explained that this is due to a variety of reasons, ranging from the longer time needed to raise sheep and pass on the offspring, to the threat of disease and predators. Some women had only been WEG members for a year or less, and therefore they were still in the process of waiting for an offspring, giving it to another woman, and again waiting for another offspring they could finally sell for a profit. Meanwhile, in Karsa kebele, of the 50 sheep initially purchased for one WEG, 18 had died. This was mainly due to a bad disease that affected the region that season. However, several women

admitted that their sheep died because of overeating grain, generally due to the owner's lack of oversight. And one woman, Konjit, lost all her sheep to hyenas, twice. In fact, women explicitly expressed the lack of benefit from the sheep: Genet stated, "two sheep is nothing, it is an initial support, if they provide offspring." Only one woman, Belaynesh, shared that she sold one of her sheep for 800 birr (\$28 USD or 261 SEK), allowing her to purchase food for her family.

The WEG members' views about the sheep were contradictory, however, despite the overall lack of short term economic benefit. They expressed anticipation of future payoff from the sheep, evident in statements such as, "I'm going to get an offspring, after offspring I'm going to buy different things," and, "If I'm going to sell one sheep, I can purchase fertilizer, and (with) one quintile (of a cereal), I can cover the cost of expenditure for other purposes." While expressing such hope, women in all kebeles admitted that they would prefer an improved heifer (cow breed) over sheep, given the additional benefits, decreased vulnerability to disease, and higher value investment:

If iDE provided hybrid heifer...the disease is not as much compared to sheep...so if we get heifer, improved heifer, we are going to get many things. The heifer can give birth to ox, we can get milk, cheese, and butter. So it's better to get a heifer. (Girmi FGD)

Because of the unfavorable condition of the climate and the grass for sheep, most of the sheep are dying. If in a position, we need to have an improved breed of heifer. If we get one heifer, we are going to get more milk, offspring. (Karsa FGD)

If I take a loan, as soon as I received money, I expend it for my children like this and this. But if I get a heifer, I am not going to sell it. That's why we prefer heifer rather than money in the form of loan. (Gurmama FGD)

Thus, while livestock is important for being an empowered women, it seems that most women have not been economically empowered through one or two years of trying to raise sheep. Moreover, sheep are considered appropriate livestock for women to take care of, meaning that iDE's provision of sheep, though identified by the community as important to their livelihood, is gendered in nature. While this is not wrong, per se, it doesn't empower women to challenge gendered responsibilities, which Batliwala (2007: 560) suggests is important for deconstructing the norms upholding disempowerment.

5.1.3 Capital & Money

Women often described an empowered woman as having 'enough' money, which is usually earned through the woman engaging in additional income generating activities

(IGAs). For example, in addition to participating in farming activities with their husbands, some women earn additional money through petty trade. During several interviews with women, the conversation was interrupted for a few minutes while she served alcohol to local customers. The brewing and selling of alcohols, particularly tela and arake, seemed to be the most common form of petty trade, but some women also sold grain or made baskets to earn income (none of these activities are part of CARD project). Although such petty trade may only generate a little extra income, women appeared happy to be able to engage in business. Additionally, several women talked about managing their capital through having a bank account and saving money. Earning and using a profit is associated with efficiency – “an empowered woman has a little resource, and through saving a little resource, has an income activity” (Genet). It is also associated with independence and hard work— “a woman who is simply sitting and waiting (for) money from her husband is not empowered. She should have to work other activities to support the income of the household” (Konjit). Such statements reflect not only the value of capital in an empowered woman’s life, but also the expectation for earning income within the status quo of gendered roles and responsibilities, in which women are expected to participate in farming and engage in additional IGAs acceptable for women.

iDE’s role in supporting women to earn capital is through the provision of sheep and the facilitation of saving money in the WEGs. When the women first came together in groups, iDE field officers facilitated training on savings and bookkeeping, and also provided a savings box and calculator. Group members then decided to meet on a monthly basis to contribute five birr per person (equivalent to \$0.17 USD or 1.6 SEK). Although groups have been saving for the past one or two years, members explained that they had not yet benefited from the savings, mainly due to the small monthly contribution. Women in Fincha kebele stated, “But now we have nothing because the capital is not much...without capital there is no loan to provide each other. We simply take a sheep...nothing changed except coming together.” Similarly, women in Girmi admitted that, “the money we contribute is for the sake of iDE organizing us, in order to provide sheep. The contribution per month is very few, it’s 5 birr, which is nothing if you deposit it even for a year.”

Despite not gaining any benefit from the savings thus far, women still expressed belief in the importance of saving money for future benefit. In fact, most

women are members of other savings groups in the community, such as Idir¹⁹ and Ekub,²⁰ and recognized the advantage of being in such groups. For example, Rahel had recently lost two oxen to disease – a high value loss, as oxen can be sold for 20,000 birr (\$700 USD or 6,535 SEK). As a member of Ekub, however, she was given 10,000 birr through the members’ contribution, and could repurchase two calves. Similarly, I witnessed a women’s meeting in Fincha kebele (not a WEG or a part of CARD project, but another group), in which the women contribute 50 birr per month (10 times more than the WEG members’ contribution). After six months of meeting together, the women had already started to provide loans to one another. These alternative forms of saving seem to indicate that it is both possible and more beneficial to save and loan larger sums of money. However, when asked whether they could contribute more than five birr month, only one group shared that they had chosen to increase the monthly contribution from five to ten birr, while the rest of the WEG members reiterated that they were the poorest community members and could not contribute more. Thus, the WEG model of saving continues to operate but has not yet led to members taking loans or investing in activities with higher income generating value, which is the project’s hope.

The main elements of iDE’s economic empowerment model—livestock and financial savings—are therefore insufficient to help women increase their incomes. Given that income is one of iDE’s KPIs, this reality undermines the goals of the WEG model in this project and reveals how women are not empowered to attain meaningful material resources, at least within the project’s short timeframe. Kabeer’s (1999) conceptualization of resources suggests that while the resources provided by iDE may be insufficient, they might also reflect gendered norms and practices. This is evident in the provision of sheep, rather than heifers, and the organization of women’s only savings groups, which limits the actualization of resources to Kabeer’s form of efficient agency (see section 5.4.1).

¹⁹ Idir is a group that saves money to contribute to a deceased person’s burial. There are male and female Eider groups in each Kebele.

²⁰ Ekub is a savings group of about 10 members, who each contribute 1,000 birr per month. The monthly amount, 10,000, is usually given to a member facing significant challenges.

5.2 Cognitive Resources

Cognitive resources encompass the processes that contribute to self-reflection, increased awareness, and consideration of alternative opportunities in life. WEG members in Gimbichu regularly referred to these processes and their importance for becoming more empowered women.

5.2.1 Aware and Informed, towards Critical Consciousness

Women who considered themselves empowered often attributed it to the fact that they were educated, even if only through primary school. Those who were not formally educated still emphasized the importance of being aware or informed through attendance of public meetings, either in the local community or nearby town. While often referring to formal education or simply being aware, women also stressed that knowing about gender equality, empowerment, and women's rights is integral to being empowered. For example, women mentioned knowing or having rights throughout the interviews and even when drawing an empowered woman. Most women stated that they knew about gender equality and their rights through trainings with staff of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which iDE field officers arrange for WEG members. These trainings address women's rights, resource control, and sexual and gender based violence (SGBV).

Besides engaging in trainings, however, women are also able to reflect on the status, roles, and responsibilities of women. While younger women reflected on recent changes, older women were especially cognizant of the changes since the change in government regime:

20-25 years back, women were in the room, only cooking. Even male and female could not eat together on a table. I'm empowered because I was a grade 5 student...that little education made my life bright...better to think compared to others. The other women have a natural fear to talk in meetings, or even with their husbands. So no one can block them except the lack of skill and awareness. (Meseret)

During the previous time, women were very neglected. After marriage, she was forced to work in a dark place, in the room, for cooking and for childcare, and agricultural activities. Nowadays we learned what is our right, what is our obligation, so there is a great improvement in our life. (Betlehem)

Such statements highlight the significance of education and knowledge, and the government's increased attention towards women's rights. Most importantly, however, they underscore women's ability to recognize and value the changes in women's status, shedding light on how previously embedded doxa can be uprooted.

Recognition of such change reflects Kabeer's (1999: 437) definition of empowerment which implies previous disempowerment, while also highlighting women's increasing critical consciousness.

This critical consciousness may be further stimulated in WEG meetings through women's discussions about how to manage savings or how to address various challenges. These types of interactions increase one's consciousness of self, relations, and environment, while also stimulating a vision for a potentially better life, which was not previously imagined. As Kabeer (2011: 503) clearly states:

Such 'chosen' communities may embody their own forms of inequality but if they expand women's knowledge, information and interactions with others, they can allow a critical re-assessment of what was hitherto accepted as the natural order of things and open up the possibility of alternative ways of living that were hitherto inconceivable.

While women never directly stated that they made changes in their lives due to information from a training or interactions with WEG members, it is possible that learning and sharing different experiences may lead women to consider alternative life choices. Recognizing alternative life choices, especially those which are most meaningful to an individual, is an important pre-cursor to agency, when one begins to choose and act upon goals (Kabeer 1999: 437). Thus, iDE's formation of WEGs, accompanied by trainings from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, may stimulate further awareness of gender norms and alternative life choices.

5.3 Relational Resources

5.3.1 WEG Relations

Describing women's groups in Bangladesh, Kabeer (2011) notes that relationships within the groups were built over time and through multiple types of interactions, such as attending trainings together, meeting to contribute savings, etc. Similarly, the formation of WEGs has generated numerous relational resources, from connections to community leaders to trust and respect among WEG leaders and their members. This is evident in the ways women articulated the benefit of their membership in the WEG:

Before this WEG, we didn't know each other, because we are scattered. So we were not coming together, discussing, even no greeting. Now we have developed this social gathering, we discuss, we contribute money, and when we come at the road we are strongly greeting each other. So it's a big difference in social issues (relationships). (Chaltu)

There is a good relationship among my members. They respect me, and me also I respect (them). So the social linkage, the relationship between me and my members is really improved. Even we started to provide a loan from our monthly savings to members. (Meaza)

Such examples reveal the huge potential for a collective empowerment process given the way that women have expanded their networks beyond their household and into their communities. Moreover, it is clear that in some cases WEG members have become friends and highly value their new relationships beyond the meeting purpose of saving money, paralleling the sentiments of women's groups in Bangladesh: "Material incentives may have provided the initial impetus that brought these groups together but it was sharing life experiences and seeking solutions to common problems that kept them together and built them into the communities of practice" (Kabeer 2011: 513). Such relations can therefore bridge individual material resources to collective empowerment, encompassing the individual and collective forms of empowerment that Batliwala (2007) and Rowlands (1997) also emphasize.

5.3.2 Leadership

In addition to bringing women together, the WEGs also create a space for leadership, as each WEG has an elected chairwoman, secretary, and treasurer. When chairwomen were asked why they thought they were elected to lead the WEG, several women claimed it was due to their level of education and hardworking nature, while others claimed they are already leaders of other community groups and are naturally clever and able to speak confidently in front of others. This revealed a generational difference, in which older chairwomen were less educated but claimed to be a natural leader, while exhibiting confidence through eye contact and comfortable conversation. Younger chairwomen, while more educated, appeared shy and less comfortable speaking. Despite these differences, however, the regular WEG meetings allow for women, especially those in leadership positions, to take on responsibilities, attend trainings, and lead meetings. Though confidence and self-esteem takes time to develop, some of the women expressed greater ease in discussing with each other and communicating with their families, suggesting a positive impact of assuming leadership positions.

Moreover, chairwomen spoke about respect and accountability amongst WEG members. During one conversation, several women discussed how to address a member who had not taken care of her sheep properly, causing it to die. Normally, the group uses its collected "insurance" money to help a woman purchase a new sheep, but in this case, the group members questioned whether they should use their money

to help an irresponsible member. This conversation revealed the importance of maintaining intra group relations and accountability.

In addition to exercising accountability, group leaders also expressed independence through their commitment to motivating the group without outside support. For example, Betelhem stated, “without intervention of iDE or other person, I am going to hold my WEG members, through awareness creations, savings, and different activities. I will continue myself.” Of course, women also expressed their ideas for more support from iDE, but maintained their stance of being capable through working together in a group. This suggests trust and confidence in the group model, making the WEG a strong foundation for relational resources, even if iDE didn’t intend for it to have such a great social impact.

5.3.3 Household Relations

Beyond the relationships created among WEG members, WEG membership seems to have also impacted household relations. Both Betelhem and Chaltu shared how they were now communicating more with their children and husbands, particularly through open discussion of different issues. This potentially alludes to increasing assertiveness and leadership within the household. Moreover, women described that being an empowered woman entails maintaining good relationships with family members, and especially the husband. Some women also described how their husbands supported them to be empowered, mainly through allowing or encouraging them to attend meetings, and sharing work responsibilities:

My husband, if I have a child, he is washing the clothes of the child, arranging the home furniture. If I am travelling to the market, since I have a shop here, he is going to sell the shop commodities. (Karsa FGD)

My husband helps me in different ways. His major activity is agricultural activity from sowing to post harvest. When he comes home he also helps me in few activities, such as providing water to the animals, bringing water from water point to home. Mostly he is doing labor based activity, which is agriculture. (Karsa FGD)

The extent to which women really appreciated their husband’s support was unclear, as they often spoke ambivalently. However, it was clear that a husband’s level of support varied from house to house, as some women said their husband helps them with cooking, while others stated it’s impossible for a man to cook, due to culturally engrained gender norms. The following conversation between me and Meron reveals the latter belief:

Interviewer: Does he (your husband) help you in home care activities?
Meron: (laughing) He is not supporting home care activity because he is a man. A male cannot cook injera and wot.
Interviewer: Why not?
(she is laughing again)
Meron: Because he is illiterate...we have no culture to work homecare activities. The external work is given to men, and the internal activity is given to women.
Interviewer: So is it not possible to change that (culture)?
Meron: For example if I'm sick, I'm using my children to cook wot and make injera. There is no culture, it is bad for men.
Interviewer: So what would happen if he cooked for you when you're sick?
Meron: No no, I'm requesting my neighbor women (to cook) if I'm sick. It is bad for men to cook.

As such, while some women have created what they believe to be a supportive “workshare” system with their husbands, other women believe that existing gendered roles and responsibilities cannot be altered. Given that iDE has chosen to work with women and men through separate interventions in the CARD project, the relations between male and female are not explicitly addressed in such a way that challenges gendered norms. It is therefore difficult for women to leverage support from their husbands, as they still believe that culture dictates who does what inside and outside the home. Women’s access to resources may “reflect the rules and norms which govern distribution and exchange,” though the cognitive and relational resources gained through WEG membership may begin to unveil such norms (Kabeer 1999: 437). Thus, women’s pre-conditions for agency can grow and evolve over time, as the WEGs will ideally remain active after the CARD project ends.

5.4 Individual Agency

5.4.1 Joint Decision-Making

Most of the WEG members in Gimbuchu exercise individual agency to the extent that they can vocalize a plan for the future, as illustrated in statements such as, “If I get capital, I can do animal fattening. After selling and getting a profit, (I can) improve my children’s life status” (Rahel).

However, despite having some material, cognitive, and relational resources, women struggle to transform their plans for the future into achievements due to unequal decision-making power with their husbands. As these communities are mainly engaged in farming, most decision-making revolves around agricultural resources and home needs. While women often shared that they discuss and make decisions together, they also describe how their husbands decide over more valuable resources:

I have no right, for example if I am going to Chefe (the nearby town) for big market, if I'm taking my money from this petty trade and daily labor, I have no right to buy shoes or clothes or nothing. Except discussing with my husband. He doesn't say why are you purchasing this and this, but we are discussing together before any payments. (Belaynesh)

We have a discussion when we sell a large size of grains. But for petty cases, for example 25, 50 kg, I can take to market to purchase salt, oil, and other commodities by myself. (Konjit)

These statements reveal that, for the most part, women can sell or purchase less valuable resources, such as small amounts of grain. However, there is clearly discrepancy over whether a woman can purchase items from the market, and whether she needs permission from her husband to do so. In a conversation with Esther about selling her sheep, she clearly stated that women cannot sell sheep, as men are the head of the home and only men can sell livestock at the market. However, she can receive the profit to buy household goods. These different cases reveal that women have less control over important resources, such as grain and livestock, and some control over the profit, but mainly limited to household purchases. This suggests that the women are not able to make first-order choices, which are meaningful and significant in one's life (Kabeer 1999: 437). Even though most of the women described their decision-making and resource control as a joint process between husband and wife, the women mainly exercise agency through less consequential, second-order choices (Ibid.).

Given that iDE doesn't directly address the potential relational resources of a husband and wife partnership, women's individual agency is still curtailed by decision-making processes favoring men. She may have plans for the future or appear to have "voice" during discussion about resources, but the decision still lies in the hands of the husband, who may or may not heed her opinion. As Cornwall (2003: 1329) points out, having voice or being listened to do not necessarily translate into influence, or in this case, decision-making power regarding resources. This is especially important as iDE is encouraging women's "voice" in WEGs and providing material resources in the form of sheep, but women may not exercise control over its sale and profit. Such reality means that women may not translate resources into desired outcomes, as they are exercising agency passively or inefficiently, rather than in the more transformative manner Kabeer calls for. Transformative agency would require women to not only negotiate the use and profit of the sheep with their husbands, but also go against social norms, as women are not supposed to sell sheep in the market.

5.4.2 Public Participation & Sharing of Ideas

Nonetheless, women have begun to exercise individual agency by expanding their mobility and participating in various groups and meetings. Participation in meetings was considered an important activity of an empowered woman, and was mentioned many times in relation to WEG gatherings or community political meetings.

Meanwhile, talking freely and sharing ideas in these public forums was mentioned at least twenty times, revealing both the characteristics of an empowered woman and the benefit of meetings:

When we participate, or when we work with community and when we engage in politics, we share our idea for the community, and we also experience from them different issues and different activities, or different knowledge. So engaging with community or politics is better, to grow. (Alemitu)

Previously we were not as such strong, we had no meetings, no groups. Nowadays we are in intervention...

I am also a powerful woman, because I am attending meetings, I am attending monthly savings contributions, and I am also participating in the government meetings. (Tigist)

It is also clear that women highly value gaining and sharing information from meetings, as those who attend are expected to share what they learned with others:

When she (an empowered woman) returns (from a meeting) she briefs what she got from there. And she announces and collects us through a meeting, like Idir and WEG. She is mobilizing us and (sharing) what she gained from those meetings. On behalf of her, she didn't get anything except empowerment, and if there is any per diem payment, she may get money. Rather, she works for us. (Gurmama FGD)

While such participation and sharing of information reflects further accumulation of cognitive resources, it also reflects confidence, a desire to be heard, and in some cases, additional negotiation between partners and community members. Though women may have already been participating in meetings before the WEGs were formed, it seems that membership and leadership in WEGs inspires increased confidence, as women start to speak up in community meetings with men. Once again, participating and speaking up doesn't necessarily translate into bargaining or decision-making power, but it situates women as more than just passive agents. Sharing one's voice may include the articulation of a women's desires or goals, which is the beginning of moving from agency to achievements. Thus, iDE's focus on women's participation in WEGs may facilitate empowerment in the form of women confidently vocalizing their goals. Acting on their goals remains limited to efficient or adaptive agency, however, since iDE does not intentionally encourage women to more

fully engage or communicate with men. As Cornwall (2003: 1335) notes, “participatory processes are as gender sensitive as those who facilitate them,” meaning that the more iDE is gender sensitive in its approach, the more women might be able to exercise transformative agency and change the “rules of the game” (Ibrahim & Alkire 2007: 13).

5.5 Collective Agency

5.5.1 Hope and Plans for the Future

As WEGs have become a valuable participatory forum, women have come together to share ideas and create plans for furthering their resources. They seem to have the “sense of agency” that Kabeer (1999:438) describes, evident in hope for the future, motivation, and purpose. Alemitu stated that “in the future, we have a hope and a plan to see the advantage of organizing into WEGs,” while Genet said, “I am not an empowerment woman, I am medium, but I have a plan and a hope to be an empowered woman in the future.” Similar statements were made in individual interviews and FGDs, as women referred to themselves and WEGs when discussing future plans. However, the intangible sense of agency was most obvious in group discussions, as women seemed to agree with one another or feed off each other’s ideas and energy.

WEG members described collective plans for the future, such as creating a small shop to sell commodities, buying a heifer or ox, or running a flour mill. Such ambitious plans show how the members have clearly discussed how they would like to use their growing capital if it becomes enough to invest in more valuable resources or businesses. Despite having such plans and the hope to achieve them, mainly founded on the cognitive and relational resources of the group, miniscule material resources prevent the WEGs from exercising collective agency. This could be attributed to lack of time, as the livestock and savings have not accumulated much over a period of 1-2 years, indicating iDE’s model may only be economically empowering over a longer period, or only to a limited extent. It may also be that the savings model is impractical, given the small monthly contribution, or that the women are reluctant to take loans from institutions that might allow further steps in the action plan. These factors were not discussed in detail, as WEG members simply mentioned that they are still waiting to accumulate capital to implement their plan.

Thus, women have tried to engage in meaningful collective agency through formulating their own future plans, but have not been able to act upon them. It is worth returning to feminist notions of collective empowerment-- Kabeer (1999: 457) points out the importance of collective solidarity, since it is difficult for individuals to go against cultural norms. Although WEG members have formulated and verbalized their plans, perhaps they are overly dependent upon iDE's limited and gendered provision of resources. By relying on iDE's inherently gendered WEE model, the WEGs engage in efficient agency, rather than fortifying their collective agency to act upon their goals.

5.6 Achievements

When describing what it means to be an empowered woman, many WEG members mentioned their end goals or outcomes, denoted by Kabeer's "achievements." Most women state they want to have enough food, indicating the importance of food security, nutrition, and health. They also want their children to be educated and have a good life. Some articulated a dream of their children completing school and getting a salaried job. Though women are able to easily define these achievements, iDE's economic empowerment model does not seem to be contributing to them in a significant way. Only one woman mentioned using income from the sale of a sheep to purchase food, which seemed to be more out of survival than a matter of utilizing 'additional' income. In fact, no one mentioned gaining and utilizing income in relation to iDE's provision of sheep, training, or the savings model. It seems that women are still striving to attain food security and educate their children, but mainly through selling crops and petty commodities, rather than raising livestock or obtaining loans.

As a result, the women are mainly focusing on survival related achievements, or what Kabeer describes as universally valued achievements, instead of more personally meaningful achievements. This was further revealed when, towards the end of completing their collective drawing of an empowered woman, the FGD participants admitted they could have drawn more lofty desires or achievements, but that they were simply drawing the basics to which most women aspire. Consequently, the women presented their realistic view, reluctant to touch upon more significant achievements. In addition, the achievements they are articulated align with women's expected roles and responsibilities, such as children's health and schooling. Those

who described having their own business still stayed within the realm of what is acceptable for women entrepreneurs, as no one suggested doing a job or running a business considered a man's role. As iDE's CARD project can be considered short-term, it is perhaps unfair to expect more radical achievements to be reached. However, as the project engages the poorest women in local communities, it is important to strive for survival-related achievements while also recognizing that women may desire new or alternative achievements challenging the status quo. The inability to attain survival achievements and personally desired achievements indicates a breakdown in Kabeer's linkages of resources, agency, and achievements. This doesn't necessarily indicate a fault in Kabeer's framework of empowerment, but rather a number of weaknesses in iDE's empowerment model, as it operates in the CARD project in Gimbuchu.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

Through discussion and drawings, women described the resources that are most meaningful to being an empowered women. Some of the material resources they mentioned, such as livestock and capital, are the main focus of iDE's WEE model. However, these material resources have not contributed towards economic empowerment of the women, as the sheep have not yet been sold for additional profit, and the savings have not yet accumulated enough to make larger investments or loan to WEG members. Nonetheless, iDE's organization of WEGs has led to increased confidence and knowledge among its individual members, as well as increased solidarity and support within the group, highlighting generation of both individual and collective resources. Meanwhile, iDE has not aimed for social empowerment of women, but has helped lay a basis of cognitive and relational resources increasing women's consciousness of gendered norms and practices that may be disempowering them. Promoting resources associated with women or limited to women's only groups, however, restricts the potential for men and women to utilize resources in a less gendered way. Women's resources, or pre-conditions for agency, as Kabeer describes, are therefore lacking to the extent that they are gendered.

Though women participants claim individual agency through engaging in decision-making with their husbands, their ability to make choices is limited to

second-order choices, as they mostly access or control less valuable resources. The choices that women make, such as selling some grain or local alcohols, are considered acceptable for women in the region's cultural context. Meanwhile, even though iDE has provided some resources for women to actualize through agency, it has not empowered women to challenge embedded gender norms and practices. This limits women to being efficient or adaptive agents, as they care for and utilize the resources they have, but do not exercise transformative agency in the marketplace. Nonetheless, the women enthusiastically talked about their participation and communication in WEGs and community meetings, suggesting that these are important for being an empowered women. Their increased physical and vocal engagement in such meetings suggests that iDE's promotion of WEG membership has empowered women through their ability to confidently express themselves and define goals, other aspects of individual agency. Furthermore, as the WEGs continue to meet, members expressed a collective sense of agency, defined by their motivation, purpose, and future plans. However, their collective solidarity and agency has not led to implementation of such plans, as their resources are still insufficient.

With little resources and some practice in efficient agency, the women have not yet reached their desired achievements. Moreover, their achievements remain survival-related and gendered, indicating that the WEE model has not yet inspired or facilitated goals that might actually challenge the status quo of unequal gender norms. It is likely that the women's achievements will take longer to achieve, beyond the timeframe of the CARD project, especially given that empowerment is a lengthy and internal process.

Finally, it is difficult to ascertain whether the resources women gained or the forms of agency they exercised can be attributed to iDE's WEE model. The local government seems to have played a role in raising awareness about gender equality years before iDE began working in the region, although iDE's continued partnership with the government has furthered women's knowledge and critical consciousness. Nonetheless, this thesis has sought to highlight the voices and experiences of the CARD project members, who indicated multiple ways in which iDE has mobilized cognitive and relational resources, and facilitated women's increased engagement in their households and communities. The women's empowerment process is still gendered and economic-focused, however, as iDE's WEE model supports women as economic actors within their existing power-laden relationships and gender norms.

With recent intentions to consider the integrated nature of social and economic empowerment, though, iDE Ethiopia may revise its model of women's empowerment, influencing future empowerment of Ethiopian women.

6.2 Moving Forward

Although this research sought to understand how women experience a model of WEE, further research should not simply focus on finding the silver bullet of transformative women's empowerment methodologies. Ethiopia is such a large and diverse country that experiences of empowerment in one region may be different in another region. Further qualitative research, particularly studies that employ participatory methods, is needed to situate women's knowledge as they articulate different yet meaningful forms of resources, agency, and achievements. Allowing women to define and articulate these dimensions will lead towards a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the empowerment process, rather than a narrow or universal one with pre-chosen indicators. It is also important for studies of longer duration to be conducted, as empowerment occurs slowly and incrementally, long after NGO projects are complete. In addition, there is significant room for further research including men, as women's empowerment and gender equity necessitates increased discussion and contestation of relationships inscribed by gender norms.

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Annex

1. List of Interviewees

Key Informants:

Kristie Druzca	Gender Consultant and CIMMYT researcher
Sarah de Smet	Gender Coordinator, SNV Ethiopia
Tinebeb Berhane	Country Director, ActionAid Ethiopia
Feteh Demmelash	Gender Advisor, CARE Ethiopia
Emily Springer	Gender Consultant & PhD researcher

iDE Ethiopia staff members:

Abdissa	CARD Agriculture and NRM Facilitator
Gezaw	CARD Agriculture and NRM Facilitator
Binyam	CARD Deputy Team Leader
Olani	Deputy Country Director

(facilitators are referred to as field officers in this thesis)

Individual Interviewees:

Fincha Kebele
Alemitu
Meaza
Tigist
Girmi Kebele
Belaynesh
Betelhem
Chaltu
Kersa Kebele
Genet
Hiwot
Konjit
Gurmama Kebele
Meseret
Meron
Rahel

(all names are pseudonyms)