

Community Capitals and Community Resilience in Rural Oromia, Ethiopia: The Case of East Hararghe

Gutema Imana^{1*} and Markus Schermer²

¹Haramaya University, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of Sociology

²University of Innsbruck, School of Political Science and Sociology, Department of Sociology

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Abstract: Community resilience, i.e., the ability of a community to utilize available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations, highly depends on the condition of community capitals. This paper examines the state of community capitals, considering the case of the rural community in East Hararghe. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. The findings show that the stocks of the various capitals of the community are too low to contribute to moderate resilience. The negative interplay of the capitals of the community has led to a spiralling-down effect on each capital and exposed the community to severe vulnerability in the face of frequent shocks and disturbances. To reverse this condition and improve the resilience of the community, the results indicate the importance of first dealing with the long-established experiences of the community which are locking up community capitals and hence blocking community resilience; before attempting any other intervention. “Training for Transformation” is, therefore, suggested to be given to the community to enable it to reflect critically on its current situation and the cognitive and cultural impediments to change. This is expected to assist the community to integrate outside interventions productively and to increase its capabilities in using its own resources in its local environment.

Keywords: Community Capitals; Farmers; Resilience; Rural; Smallholders; Vulnerability

1. Introduction

This study is about the relationship between community capitals and community resilience in Rural Oromia, Ethiopia, considering the case of the rural community in East Hararghe. Ethiopia is located in the Horn of Africa and is the second-most populous country in Sub-Saharan Africa with a population of 97 million (World Bank, 2014). Its economy is highly dependent on agriculture, which accounts for 46.6% of its gross domestic product (GDP) and 90% of exports. However, smallholder crop yields are below regional averages, market linkages are weak and the use of improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides remains limited. Only 6% of cultivated land was under irrigation in 2014 (Feed the Future, 2014).

Around 83% of the Ethiopian population lives in rural areas and agriculture makes up 85% of employment (Oxfam Canada, 2012). However, as farmers do not produce enough food to meet consumption requirements, the country is with the highest dependency on food aid and around 30% of the farmers live in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2014).

Smallholder farmers form the largest group of poor people in Ethiopia. More than half of these smallholder farmers cultivate plots of up to one hectare and struggle to produce food to sustain their households. A large number of poor households face a prolonged hunger season during the pre-harvest period (IFAD, 2015).

East Hararghe, the site of this study, is characterized by heavy population density, erratic rainfall, and high vulnerability to food insecurity (UNDP-EUE, 1999; Tesfaye and Seifu, 2016). It was selected for this study as it is among the parts of the country seriously affected by food insecurity.

In this work, community capitals are assessed in relation to the study community's vulnerability in the face of adverse situations particularly drastic food shortage and poverty. The empirical study was undertaken to assess the community capitals as the state of community capitals definitely influence a community's vulnerability or resilience status. Thus, the vulnerability or weak resilience of the community under study is analysed indirectly employing the community capitals framework. Consequently, the work suggests how to start improving the community capitals and through it community resilience in the face of chronic food insecurity and abject poverty.

The notions of resilience and vulnerability provide an important conceptual framework to understand how communities react and adapt to environmental and societal changes in space and time (Adger, 2006). Resilience has been generally defined as "the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks" (Forbes *et al.*, 2009, p. 22041).

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, ecosystems resilience attracted the attention of scholars (Folke, 2006), whereas in the next two decades, resilience research began to consider whether ecological resilience could also be applied to human systems within the frame of social-ecological resilience (Wilson, 2012b).

Recently a new approach to resilience that focuses on the resilience of human systems and communities, referred to as social resilience, emerged (Brand and Jax,

2007; Davidson, 2010). Social resilience is defined “as the ability of groups or communities to cope with external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political and environmental change” (Adger, 2000, p. 347). Research on social resilience is often deemed to follow a ‘bottom-up’ approach to discover human drivers and indicators of resilience at community level where human–environment interactions are not the only but form one of the many components. It is more concerned with the effects of ‘anthropogenic’ (human induced) processes on community resilience (Wilson, 2012b).

Social resilience is not only a process to recover after disturbances but also about pre-emptive change to prevent disturbances. Here, resilience is seen both as an outcome when considered in relation to improved adaptive capacity and as a process when evaluated in terms of the dynamic changes over time due to learning and willingness to take responsibility and control development pathways (Chaskin, 2008). While the ecological resilience is more about the ability of systems to return to function after a disturbance, social resilience is about how disturbances create an opportunity for change and development (Hopkins, 2010).

A community is said to have a positive quality when, as a human system, it has the ability to absorb impacts/disturbance and to re-organize into a fully functioning (but qualitatively different) system whereas a community is said to have a negative quality when, as a human system, it is unable to cope with disturbances and hence badly vulnerable to shocks (Adger, 2000).

The notions of resilience and vulnerability need to be safeguarded from ‘unilinear’ assumptions and should be expressed as a spectrum (Magis, 2010; Wilson, 2012a) where the extreme ends, good resilience and bad vulnerability, can be easily conceptualized (Oudenhoven *et al.*, 2010) while the conditions between the two extremes are subject to normative judgment measured in terms of human survival (Van Rheenen and Mengistu, 2009).

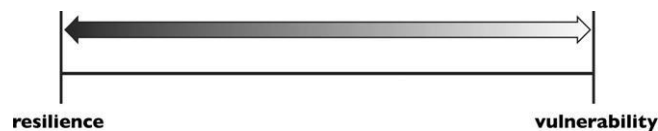


Figure 1: Resilience and vulnerability as opposite ends of a spectrum
Source: Wilson (2012a, p. 20).

This study follows the social resilience approach to assess how the manifestations of community capitals affect community resilience, employing the community capitals framework (Flora *et al.*, 2004, see figure 2 below). Communities that are successful in having better social wellbeing, healthy ecosystem, and vital economy are those that pay due attention to seven types of capital: natural, financial, built, cultural, human, social, and political. Beyond identifying the capitals and their role in community economic development, this approach focuses on the interaction among these seven capitals and how they build upon one another to lead to either community vulnerability or resilience.

According to Flora and Thiboumery (2005, p. 239), all communities have resources which can be “consumed, hoarded, or invested”. When resources are invested to create new resources over the long term, they are referred to as capital. Communities are poor when their stocks of various capitals are low. Obviously, these communities are also weakly resilient.

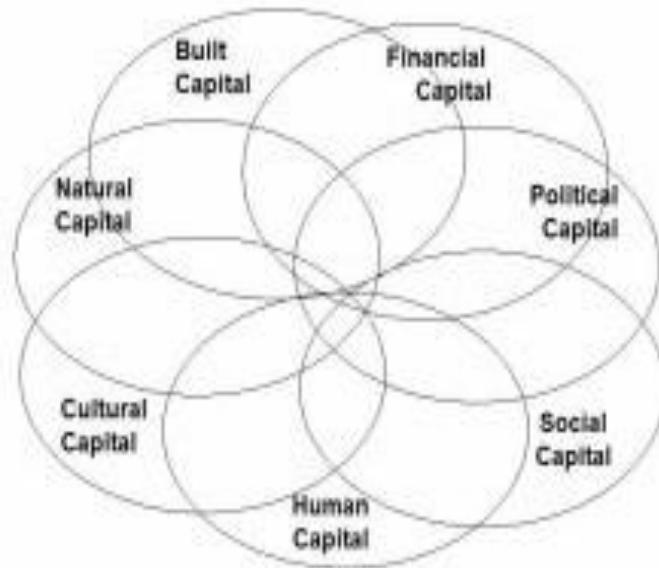


Figure 2: Community capitals framework
 Source: Flora *et al.* (2004); Flora and Thiboumery (2005)

Vibrant and viable communities exhibit an upward spiral of strong capitals interacting with each other, as they have balanced investments in all capitals. This creates public goods which increase individuals’ well-being and quality of life (Flora and Thiboumery, 2005; Emery and Flora, 2006).

To bring about community wellbeing, all community capitals should be considered holistically, as favouring any single capital can lead to the degradation of other capitals and negatively affect the general wellbeing of a community (Flora and Thiboumery, 2005).

As can be seen from figure 2 above, community capitals overlap and every capital has its own associated risks that can be alleviated by other capitals (Flora and Thiboumery, 2005).

As Emery and Flora (2006, pp. 20-23) indicated, the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) helps to analyse community and its economic development processes from a system’s perspective by considering “the assets in each capital (stock), the types of capital invested (flow), the interaction among the capitals, and the resulting impacts across capitals.” They used the concepts “spiralling-down” and “spiralling-up” to describe situations where a community declined and fared in all capitals respectively. “Spiralling-up” represents a process by which assets gained in

one capital propel assets increase in other capitals and hence reverses declines in assets throughout all capitals.

As the aim of this work is neither to examine the interrelationship among community capitals nor to identify the best entry point to “spiralling-up”, the community capitals framework is used here to evaluate the status of community capitals in the study area in relation to the community’s long-established experiences and weak adaptation to change, and to suggest a way forward to alleviate the problem in order to improve community capitals and hence community resilience.

The work entertains the view that rural communities in Ethiopia and other developing countries are not at ease with any change due to the unproductive long-established experiences and that such communities need to be disengaged from such experiences before any interventions are made to treat the community capitals for better resilience.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Description of the Study Area

The study area, East Hararghe, is located in the eastern part of Oromia National Regional State, Ethiopia. Its altitude ranges from 500 to 3,400 metres above sea level. It contains three agro-ecological zones, highlands (elevations above 2,300m), midlands (elevations between 1,500 and 2,300m), and lowlands (elevations below 1,500m). The lowlands occupy the largest area (62.2%), followed by midlands (26.4%) and highlands (11.4%) (Tolossa and Tafesse, 2008).

East Hararghe has 18 districts with a total population of 2,723,850, of whom 1,383,198 are men and 1,340,652 women. With an area of 17,935.40 square kilometres, East Hararghe has a population density of 151.87 per square kilometre. While the majority of the population, about 90%, depends on agriculture in the rural areas, 8.27% are urban inhabitants, and a further 1.11% are pastoralists (CSA, 2007).

2.2. Research Design

The logical structure of inquiry used in this research was explanatory case study. Within this research design, the community capitals of the community understudy was assessed in relation to the community’s state of resilience in the face of difficulties, mainly socio-economic ones, using a qualitative research method.

2.3. Data Sources

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews, and non-participatory observations. Secondary data were obtained through exhaustive review of relevant written sources. Above all, however, the research benefitted from the fieldworks that were undertaken in the study area where respondents actively participated in the interviews and FGD sessions by unreservedly sharing their life experiences as well as knowledge.

2.4. Sampling Techniques

Both in-depth interviews and FGDs were conducted in six rural peasant associations (*gandas*) of East Hararghe. These *gandas* are situated in the districts of Kersa, Fedis, and Babile. In each *ganda*, ten in-depth interviews and two FGDs were conducted. In addition, in each district, key informant interviews were undertaken with five experts working in government offices.

The three districts were purposively selected from different parts of East Hararghe in order to guarantee diversity in terms of agro-ecological setting, geographical location, food security condition, and farming system. The six *gandas*, two from each district, were randomly selected. In each of them, two FGDs, one with the community elders and one with other villagers were conducted. The number of participants in each FGD varied from six to ten. For in-depth interviews, interviewees were selected through snowball sampling technique. Respondents to key informant interviews were selected purposively from relevant government offices in the study area.

2.5. Data Analysis

FGD and interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and were analysed thematically after coding where similar and dissimilar concepts/variables were sorted out. Narrative and discourse analyses were used to gain deeper insights on community capitals

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the themes that emerged from the analysis of the collected data, the state of the community capitals of the community under study vis-à-vis its resilience and vulnerability is presented in the following sections.

3.1. The State of the Community's Capitals

The empirical results revealed that the state of the community capitals of the rural community under study is highly correlated with the community's resilience and vulnerability status.

3.1.1. Natural capital

Natural capital includes the environment – water, soil, altitude, latitude, climate, slope and other geographical configurations of a given community (Flora and Thiboumery, 2005).

The great majority of the community members covered in this study are smallholder farmers with limited land resources for both crop and livestock production. The increasing population limits further the availability of land and contributes to an increasing overutilization of natural resources and a degradation of the natural environment. Both in-depth interview respondents and focus group discussants unanimously rated the absence of perennial rivers and the erratic nature of rains as the most serious problems of the community in the study area. Besides, they stated that the ground water level is very deep and difficult to access. They also

vividly indicated that there has been a gradual loss of soil fertility over years due to intensive and continuous farming activities. As one of the key informants wisely stated, “The traditional shifting cultivation and fallow systems could not be continued as fast population growth has led to land fragmentation and scarcity. The rugged and undulating topography of the area further contributes to the lack of sufficient cultivable land, severe land degradation, exposure to erosion, and formation of gullies”.

Though some in-depth interview respondents from Babile district exclusively raised the problem of wild animals in destroying their crops at field due to the presence of a protected area for animals in the district, almost all other in-depth interview respondents indicated that many wild animals are becoming extinct and many species are no more present. They attributed this gradual extinction of wild animals to deforestation and the steady expansion of farming. One old and knowledgeable informant, for instance, stated that “in the old days, there were many bird and animal species around. We destroyed their homes and their foods and today we do not see many of these species around.”

Almost all in-depth interview respondents and focus group discussants were concerned about erratic rains and recurrent droughts that characterize their region. They argued that though they may take the blame for deforestation and failure to protect the environment, the occurrence of erratic rain and droughts cannot be their fault. According to them, erratic rain and dry land environment are just the natural conditions of the region.

However, as key informants indicated, though the community has had considerable experience in the traditional ways of protecting cultivated lands from erosion using terracing techniques, there has never been a comprehensive effort to conserve the environment, to recover the flora and fauna and to restore lost resources such as perennial rivers and ground water levels. Maybe it is this observation that has recently pushed the government in a nationwide effort to organize the community to conserve some barren and degraded hills and plateaus through terracing and planting of trees.

In short, the stock of the natural capital of the community of this study area is found to be very low and not on a level to make the community resilient to environmental hazards such as drought and to sustain a sufficient livelihood.

3.1.2. Financial capital

Financial capital refers to the available financial resources of a community that the community can invest in its capacity building, in financing the development of businesses, in supporting civic and social entrepreneurship, and in accumulating wealth for future community development (Lorenz, 1999; Emery and Flora, 2006).

The overall picture of the study area, however, is that there is no significant financial capital to invest in any of the aforementioned investment areas. As one of the key informants asserted, “the government allocates a lump sum budget for community issues every year, but this budget is insufficient, given the daunting problems of the community and the poor management of the money”.

Within the community, financial resources are found to be scarce and rarely used for investment. In-depth interview respondents and focus group discussion participants unanimously indicated that the community is practicing subsistence economy which leaves no room for capital accumulation. As one of the in-depth interview respondents clearly put it, “the usual prayer of the community is give us today our daily bread.” It is, therefore, not difficult to imagine that in the community’s precarious economic situation where the chance for pre-emptive action to avoid risk is almost absent, life is more a matter of chance than planned efforts.

According to in-depth interview respondents and focus group discussants, there are very few cases of credit services in the rural villages of the study area. In addition, credit services administrated by the government are not well organized and their coverage is negligible. This fact was also supported by key informants in the area of credit services. All respondents in fact appreciated the importance of a productive safety net program by the government, which has helped many farmers to get initial financial inputs in the form of credits and others. Due to this program, some managed to start and benefit from small entrepreneurship such as fattening animals for sale. However, accessing credits is not simple as it is scarce and designed only for the very poor.

As focus group discussants confirmed, on an individual level, some farmers, particularly those in khat (a mild stimulant plant whose leaves are chewed) producing areas, have relatively more money. However, these economically better off farmers rarely calculate in terms of investment to expand their economic engagements. They prefer mainly to keep their money at home and less often in banks and rarely use it for investment in any economic area that benefits the community.

Nonetheless, according to in-depth interview respondents, there has been a practice in the area whereby the relatively better families lend money and other resources to their relatives and neighbours particularly during times of economic hardships. However, many of the in-depth interview respondents argued that this practice is not a common means of survival for the community during periods of disasters.

It is the common view of all focus group discussion participants and in-depth interview respondents that for the great majority of the community members, it is difficult to rear large number of livestock even during normal weather conditions, due to the scarcity of land resources already mentioned. However, according to all respondents, the community under study rely on selling livestock to cope with food shortages during droughts and other disasters and rarely engage in other coping strategies. Goats and other small ruminants are said to have been sold mostly during drought years to access cash and/or grain, but in severe conditions, the large ruminants can also be sold. As small holders do not have a considerable surplus of livestock due to lack of grazing areas, they may sell out all their livestock during extended droughts. Also, both crop production and raising livestock have never gone beyond subsistence level for the majority of the farmers even during relatively good weather conditions.

On the other hand, according to key informants, for those who have agricultural products to sell, lack of adequate market access is a serious problem. As they stated,

a considerable number of small farmers of the area, who are known for fattening cattle for sale, are highly exploited by merchants who buy from them to sell in other places, mostly in the urban centres. The same is true for producers of khat, who again do not have a direct access to markets. Khat is transported by merchants to the different parts of the country and the neighbouring countries such as Djibouti and Somaliland where they get a lot of profit. Prices are mostly influenced by these merchants who benefit at the expense of the local producers.

An individual coping strategy for some poor farmers is to migrate to the nearby towns and cities during times of economic anomalies to sell their labour and get money. According to the results of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, two different patterns of migration have been taking place in the area under study. In the first one, male family heads migrate to the nearby urban centres for daily employment to earn income and subsidize their families. This type of migration is relatively common for the rural families to alleviate their food problems during normal as well as moderate drought years. The second type of migration is that some families abandon their homes and move to the urban centres due to their complete economic failure to survive in their rural villages. This type of migration happens particularly during extreme economic crises due to serious drought or other calamities. While the first type of migration is undertaken to access resources outside the rural setting to cope with rural problems, the latter one is undertaken to abandon the rural life, failing to cope with the problems there.

Selling firewood is another common practice to augment income. According to in-depth interview respondents, selling firewood is practiced during normal as well as bad harvest years though its intensity increases with food shortage crises. During normal years, it is an economic option left to the very poor while during widespread food crises, all household categories engage in it. According to key informants from public sector offices in the study area, the increasing number of firewood sellers over years indicates that food shortages have been occurring more often since recent years. Certainly, this practice contributes to the decrease in natural capital as it affects the natural environment.

In-depth interview respondents also indicated that petty trading is practiced during normal and problem years though its intensity increases with the intensity of economic problems. However, as these respondents further indicated, only a very small fraction of the total population engages in petty trading activities and it may not be considered as the basic means of income and coping strategy in the area.

As all respondents reported, khat and groundnut are the main cash crops traded in local markets and in the urban centres, though these items are not found equally distributed in the study area. Apart from these, respondents also indicated that fruits, sugarcane, onion, potato, tomato, and small ruminants are items of trade. However, it was the view of key informants and focus group discussion participants that the very poor rarely engage in petty trading activities during normal as well as drought years due to lack of initial capital. Petty trading or small business is largely performed by women, as they do not engage in the search for employment elsewhere unlike men.

As key informants and focus group discussion participants further indicated, there are few tourist attractions in the study area such as the elephant sanctuary in Babile district and Laga Oda ancient cave paintings near Dire Dawa city. However, according to key informants from relevant public offices in the area, the income from tourism is very small and its economic value is insignificant in the development of the community of the study area.

In short, the community is in a serious dearth of financial capital to bring about any reasonable economic development and become at least moderately resilient.

3.1.3. Built capital

Built capital is human-constructed physical infrastructure used as a tool for production of other capitals. It includes roads, water systems, schools, health institutions, etc. Built capital enhances other community capitals by linking local people, institutions and businesses to the outside (Flora and Thiboumery, 2005; Flora *et al.*, 2004).

The rural areas of the study area lack basic infrastructure. A minute fraction of rural inhabitants has access to electricity and potable water. All in-depth interview respondents and focus group discussants mentioned lack of elementary as well as high schools as one of their serious problems. They also indicated that almost all the existing schools, particularly high schools, are located in towns or in rural areas that are close to main roads and far away from remote areas, which creates serious inconveniences for the majority of the rural families to keep their children in schools.

As it is well known, the only main asphalted road passes through the study area to connect eastern Ethiopia with the interior and the capital. Apart from this, there are only very few poor gravel roads in the area and almost all the districts are not only interconnected by roads but also lack roads within their respective territory. Probably due to land shortage, farmers also encroach on roads to increase the size of their farmlands that has made almost all the few available rural roads of the area very narrow to accommodate even human traffic let alone vehicles.

As all respondents of the study clearly reported, only rural households close to all weather roads have access to transportation services, but the majority is living in remote areas and has to travel long distances on foot and to use pack animals to bring farm products to markets, which has negative consequences on their economic performance and progress. As one in-depth interview respondent rightly argued, “when people think of Hararghe what comes to their mind is probably that it is a better part of the country. This thinking is influenced maybe by the existence of the two relatively modern cities, Dire Dawa and Harar, in the region. Nonetheless, Hararghe in general and its rural areas in particular is among the backward and poverty stricken parts of the country”.

A further element limiting the increase of agricultural production, according to key informants, is that the rural extension services are very weak and their coverage is limited. Again, as key informants indicated, the beneficiaries of extension services are villages or households that are accessible and not remotely located. The chance of

the majority of rural households that are far away from one of the existing few roads to get access to extension services has been very limited.

As key informants further reported, the government provides chemical fertilizers for sale but farmers are reluctant to use them as they do not afford to buy them and as they mistrust new technologies and practices.

As almost all respondents of the study indicated, the community is also in a serious lack of health institutions. Hospitals are very few in number and health centres are also scant. The existing hospitals are again located in the urban centres that are very far from the majority of the rural population. The limited access to health services is said to be the major reason for high infant and maternal mortalities and for early and premature deaths. In-depth interview respondents also indicated that access to health services is not only restricted by remoteness but also by the unaffordable costs of treatment and medicine.

A considerable number of in-depth interview respondents also vividly reported that the zone has little or no veterinary establishments to get veterinary services and as a result, livestock is prone to various livestock diseases which affect the economic position of farmers.

All the aforementioned conditions of the study area indicate that infrastructure and services are at their lowest ebb and the community is in critical dearth of these services and facilities to be at least fairly resilient to shocks or calamities.

3.1.4. Cultural capital

Cultural capital is created over generations and includes the way a certain community or group sees the world, acts in it, defines a problem, and values life (Flora and Thiboumery, 2005). It influences the way people understand themselves and the way they interpret circumstances. It also determines how creativity, innovation, and influence emerge and are nurtured (Emery and Flora, 2006). It is a human construction that in part arises from responses to natural capital (Netting, 1968).

Religion is understood in the context of Ethiopia as the basis for cultural capital of the rural community. Christianity, Islam, and different varieties of indigenous beliefs are practiced in the country. The great majority of the population of the study area follows Islam. Religion is decisive for the philosophical, psychological, and moral standpoints of the people of the country including those of this study area. According to Imana (2011), the local interpretations of the three aforementioned religions do not provide constructive outlooks about the world in general and about work ethic in particular.

Consequently, the community of the study area conditions its members to be passive about the future. Each day is entertained as it comes with little or no interest about what is to come next. This frustrates the enthusiasm for work and the way to handle work itself. In other words, the outlook of the community, limiting its people's anxiety about the future, aborts the culture of rigor and relentless hard work to conquer the future. The dynamic quest for producing institutions which are geared towards change and the minimization of risk is absent. Rather than thinking in terms

of changing their fates by sheer hard work, individuals are governed by a religious fatalistic ethos and attribute everything to either the domain of nature or its creator.

In line with this, during focus group discussions, participants argued on the question why the countries of the world have different success stories, and while some pointed out that even fingers are not equal and for that God has his own reasons, others asserted that it is natural for opposites to be together; where there is the rich there must be also the poor. Still others argued that it is a matter of fate or destiny and no one can question it. There were also others who argued that their country has never got good leaders or governments and consequently the country has remained in abject poverty.

Focus group discussants equivocally asserted that their future is in the hands of God and the government. They claimed that it is the responsibility of the government to bring development, to solve their social and economic problems once and for all and until then to support them by drawing food aid to their localities during periods of food shortage. They also added that above all what they need is to pray to God to give them rain and spare them from livestock and plant diseases. Although they claimed not to appreciate their life situation, they saw no other option than to live in the countryside as farmers just because they have to do it to survive. Regarding the community's efforts to improve its situation, focus group discussion participants pointed out that the community can do nothing beyond the existing practices given the fragile and complicated ecosystems.

Creativity and innovation seem to be almost lacking in the community. The material and non-material culture of the community are those that have been there since time immemorial. The community's culture seems to be more or less static and it seems that there is no frugality to bring dynamic changes and to adapt to changes ingeniously.

The traditional gendered division of labour leaves during the dry season men almost idle while women are overloaded with different routine activities almost throughout the year, even though for them as well agricultural activities are seasonal. During the rainy season, farmers engage in usual agricultural activities such as preparing the land, sowing, weeding, and harvesting but due to small land size, even then men are not occupied fully. However, men do not share women's activities at home though women engage in many agricultural activities with their men counterparts.

Focus group discussion participants stated almost uniformly that men do not engage in women's work because women are women and they are created for it and it is their share. There is no doubt that this outlook towards labour and women, which is embedded in the community's religious and philosophical views, negatively influences the social and economic progress of the community.

All the preceding points suggest that the stock of the cultural capital of the community under study is very low for the community to be at least moderately resilient.

3.1.5. Human capital

Human capital refers to the skills and abilities of people to tap internal and external resources and bodies of knowledge in order to increase understanding and identify promising practices to boost community development (Flora *et al.*, 2004; Emery and Flora, 2006). Human capital can also be seen as the native intelligence, skills, abilities, education, self-esteem and health of individuals within a community (Flora and Thiboumery, 2005). Hence, human capital maybe measured through assessment of indigenous knowledge, educational status, access to health, and demographic characteristics of a community.

It was observed during the fieldwork for this study that educational facilities are not only scarce but also unevenly distributed in the study area. According to in-depth interview respondents, education is at its lowest ebb and many farmers, particularly the relatively aged ones, are illiterate. Those who are literate also could not go beyond reading and writing with difficulties and their education is simple alphanumeric, which could not equip them for better economic engagements. The young generation is relatively better as many of them were in a position to attend education up to elementary and some even to high school level. However, schools simply provide only general education with little or no basic technical skills and knowledge that can be applied to agriculture. During one of the focus group discussions, one participant strongly asserted that the relatively educated young people in his village are not better than him, who is uneducated, as far as agricultural practices are concerned and many of them are learning from his experiences to try to succeed in agriculture. Thus, this type of education is not contributing to local economic progress.

In-depth interview respondents and focus group discussants did not hide the fact that in the past education was associated with the ruling class that dominated and oppressed the people of the area. The difference in ethnicity and religion between the people and the ruling class of the time is said to have aggravated the hatred for both the ruling group and education that was associated with it. This seems to have had long lasting negative effect on the community, as many parents are reluctant to send their children to school even when having the capacity to do so. Students' dropout rate is also reported as very high probably due to this long established contempt for education.

On the other hand, many in-depth interview respondents raised the issue of lack of educated people in rural areas, as the relatively better-educated people from the community would remain in urban centres after completing their higher education and above. They also added that even the less educated and uneducated young people prefer to abandon the countryside and live in urban centres engaging in all types of activities including menial jobs. They are no more interested in agriculture and rural life and always ready to leave using whatever opportunities.

There seems to be a low cultural awareness about health and factors contributing to health, which maybe culturally rooted to some extent. People are of the opinion that a person is healthy until he or she is seriously sick finding himself/herself on bed. This limits preventive efforts to remain healthy. The community is not in a position to

recognize that physical and mental deterioration due to malnutrition and lack of balanced diet is also a health problem.

It was observed that the quantity and quality of food consumed by a household, is extremely below standard. The community does not know or care about the amount and type of food it consumes and the calorie intake is obviously less than the scientifically acceptable standard. There is no fixed time as such for a meal particularly for a lunch regardless of the economic capacity to afford it. Even the relatively well to do, despite their economic status, suffer from poor food culture. The impact of malnutrition is very recognizable among not only children but also adults as can be easily observed from the physical makeup of the people.

Furthermore, according to information obtained from in-depth interview respondents and focus group discussants, the community of the study area practices a marriage that gives chance to inbreeding. Though the consequences of inbreeding is not yet studied as far as the community of the study area is concerned, there are studies which establish that inbreeding has grave side effects on health (for instance, Nabulsi *et al.*, 2003; Jiménez *et al.*, 1994). In addition to its contribution to physical defects, inbreeding may challenge a community's biological dynamism to develop progressively a natural state of fitness in the changing environment to remain healthy.

Human capital refers also to the quantitative aspect of available labour force. In the case of the study area, however, it was observed that the growing population number is becoming more of a curse than blessing. Even though there is a relatively huge working age population, it is not engaged productively as the existing resources and agricultural practices do not support the increasingly growing population. Consequently, population number has become a burden as the scarcity of resources and stiff competition for them has created a room for protracted conflict among farmers and endangered community level social and economic capitals.

Therefore, when seen from human capital perspective, the community of the study area is in a serious lack of human capital to be effectively resilient.

3.1.6 Social capital

According to Flora and Thiboumery (2005, p. 246), social capital includes "mutual trust, reciprocity, collective identity, working together and a sense of a shared future." It also represents the connections among people and organizations, which make things, happen either positively or negatively (Emery and Flora, 2006).

Basically, there are two types of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital refers to close ties among members of a community that build its solidarity, while bridging social capital refers to loose ties that connect a community with other external organizations (Emery and Flora, 2006).

For a community to function properly and positively, both bonding and bridging social capital should be moderately high. In such a community people share a collective vision of the future and mobilize resources both internally and externally to move toward that future. On the contrary, when both bonding and bridging social capital are low, a community faces serious disorganization and lacks mechanisms of

social support. The possibility for collective decision making to bring cumulative outcomes is lacking (Flora and Thiboumery, 2005).

According to interview and observation results of this study, there are no strong institutions to forge unity among members of the community of the study area. There are cases of cooperation among members of the community during agricultural activities, particularly during labour demand peaks at cropping and harvesting seasons. House construction is also an activity which frequently demands the cooperation of villagers. During marriages and other festivities, villagers help each other in organizing and facilitating them. According to in-depth interview respondents and focus group discussants, *afosha* (a traditional institution of the community to support one another mainly during times of member's death) is common in the area, but this institution supports family of the deceased only for a few days upon the death of its member. It is not within the domain of *afosha* to cover problems other than loss of life through natural death and accidents. The existing *afoshas* are also said to have been financially too weak to go beyond the limits of assisting burial expenses.

As key informants reported, orphan children who lost either father or mother or both due to death do not have any institutional support from the community. Their fate is to suffer poverty under single parenthood or under the patronage of close relatives or to be forced to join other rural families to serve and live with them. This would also force parentless children to leave the countryside and move to the towns to live as street children or as beggars.

As already mentioned, during times of extreme hardship, there are practices where villagers lend money and other resources to one another. Nonetheless, according to focus group discussants, these practices of cooperation are neither mandatory nor uniform. They are not common across villages and households, and households do not have equal connections and networks. Some households have many connections and networks with other households through marriage relationships. Particularly, those with many children, both males and females, have a high chance to access many connections here and there, as their children could form these connections through marriages. However, these connections are family or household-based and it cannot be considered as community level ties as they do not encompass the great majority of the rural community.

The social capital of the rural community under study is found to be illusive in the sense that the existence of customary institutions of support gives the impression of an organized system of cooperation though in reality these institutions are very weak and powerless. They were not even designed in a way to create bonds in the entire rural community. The most important unit in the rural community is, therefore, the family unit, which, for good or bad, attempts to stand on its own with little or no support from neighbours and even close relatives.

All these indicate that the community members' interdependence is indeed very weak indicating the fact that the community's bonding social capital is extremely low.

The situation is not better with the bridging social capital. The community's connections to outside organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, are disappointingly weak. The community has never worked out a strategy of forging relations with external bodies in order to alleviate its internal problems. Both government and non-government organizations are approaching the community on their own with little or no pull factors from the community side. This has prevented developing equal level relations of mutual trust and reciprocal exchange between the community and external institutions or organizations.

However, the community has always been in dire need of external support, particularly in the form of food aid. Yet, food aid seems to have further negatively affected the extremely weak but still existing bonding social capital within the community. This seems to be one major contributing factor for the steady decline of collective efforts to alleviate food problems through self-reliant efforts. The common saying "let it rain in Canada", which means that it is more important to receive food aid than to produce one's own food, is very illustrative in this respect. In-depth interview respondents and focus group discussion participants indicated that many people of the study area are just surviving on food aid which has already become a common way of livelihood for many.

Some focus group discussants further raised the issue that government should give them the chance to be resettled in the western part of Oromia, as the land there is fertile and rain is sufficient. They said that the government is always promising them to take them away to the west, but no step has been taken so far. This idea of moving to western Oromia emerged before some years ago when the regional government, through its resettlement policy, transferred many farmers from East Hararghe there. These settlers are considered successful in their new environment and many more, who could afford the cost of transportation and other logistic expenses, are said to have moved to this fertile area on their own. This undoubtedly signifies that the feelings of land of origin, local identity, and concern for fellow neighbours and relatives have been fading away as the community has been challenged by frequent shocks and unable to develop feasible coping and adaptation strategies.

Moreover, according to in-depth interview respondents, serious resource conflicts among rural households, including relatives, are growing over time in connection with the gradually diminishing land holdings due to fast population increase. As respondents further reported, it is not uncommon for brothers and neighbours to fight one another on resource issues, particularly due to farmland boundary dispute, which results in physical damage and human loss as well as damage to properties.

To sum up, it suffices here to state that the community in the study area seems to have low stocks of both, bonding and bridging social capital, which is apparently one further reason for its weak resilience and high vulnerability.

3.1.7. Political capital

Political capital refers to a community's circumstance regarding the ability to influence the distribution of local resources (Flora and Thiboumery, 2005). Political capital is also about a community's position in accessing power, organizations, and

having connection to resources and power brokers (Flora *et al.*, 2004). It is also about the ability of a community to determine its own fate and engage in actions that contribute to its wellbeing (Aigner *et al.*, 2001).

As it is very well known, in the history of Ethiopia, political decisions and policies have followed top down approaches and the subjects, particularly rural communities, have never had the chance to say anything on short as well as long-term policies and decisions of the subsequent governments. The different governments of the country have claimed that all policies they made had obtained the blessings of the mass though the actual fact on the ground has been refuting their claims. The condition of the study area also affirms the fact that policies and decisions have been following a top down approach with little or no influence from below.

The focus group discussants of all sessions discussed on this issue with great enthusiasm recalling the past and considering the present and the outcomes of the discussions vividly indicated that the relationship between the community and the subsequent governments have always been highly hierarchical or top down.

This situation has not allowed rights based approach to development, as the relationship between rights holders and the duty bearers does not follow a participatory approach where each stakeholder has its specified rights and responsibilities not to encroach on the rights and responsibilities of the other stakeholder. Maybe this is one reason for the community's passiveness and indifference to many of the attempts to implement the transfer of technologies/skills and provide extension services. Focus group discussants and in-depth interview respondents revealed that the rural community has already developed a profound lack of interest for the different packages coming down to them at different times, less because of their nature than because of the way they are planned and implemented with the assumption that the local community is no more than a helpless recipient.

Moreover, the community's power to influence the ownership and distribution of local resources is also minimal. Land, the basic resource in the rural area, is under the custody of government and the general public and farmers have only user rights. Land cannot be sold and exchanged but farmers can distribute their holdings among their children for use purpose only. This means that farmers do not have full autonomy to decide on what to do with local resources.

In short, the results indicate that the stock of political capital of the community under study is seriously low and cannot guarantee community resilience. Nonetheless, the community's passive resistance to some decisions imposed on it from outside (for instance, ill-considered technology and skills transfer) somehow indicates the existence of rudimentary and unsophisticated political capital by which the community has survived long years of unnecessary and unrewarding pressures from outside. However, this political capital has never been adequate to contribute significantly to the community's resilience. Hence, the community has been exposed to many shocks and calamities and in many of the cases it was through external intervention, particularly in the form of food aid, that extreme crises have been averted.

4. Conclusion

The objectives of this study were to examine the situation of community capitals in relation to rural community resilience/vulnerability and to suggest the way forward to improve community resilience. The results revealed that a process of spiralling-down of community capitals is responsible for the community's failure to become at least fairly resilient. Taken together, the results show that the downward spiral of decreasing assets within the community has an accumulative effect. Increasing overutilization and misuse of natural resources have led to environmental degradation and poor soil fertility. Erratic rains, and recurrent droughts, propelled by the on-going climate change, have further reduced productivity and employment, which in turn have resulted in decreased income, and food insecurity. In addition to contributing to the lack of basic infrastructure and services, this condition has led to increased poverty and the likelihood of health problems, ultimately destroying human and social capitals within the community and leading to a feeling of hopelessness.

In short, as community capitals are interlocked, the degradation or limitation of one capital influenced the other and brought about a spiralling down effect on all capitals leading to the community's low stocks of all capitals and consequently to an extremely weak resilience. This has left the community in a state of inability to mobilize internal collective efforts for common good and to respond actively to any external interventions. Community members were, therefore, forced to resort individually as livelihood strategies to reliance on food aid, remittances from migrant family members, and ultimately own migration.

5. Recommendations

Development interventions commonly start by support measures for improving infrastructure, market access, and agricultural productivity to increase the financial capital. Thus, they focus on tangible forms of capital (Svensden and Soerensen, 2007). In contrast to this, Emery and Flora (2006) suggest that the starting point for spiralling up should be found in increasing social and human capital.

However, in cases like the one presented here it seems futile to build on existing social and human capitals to bring about improvements throughout the capitals. Where a community has an extremely low collective and individual resilience and in a context of growing vulnerability, it seems that interventions to alleviate poverty and to foster community resilience need to be geared first towards stopping the spiralling-down process and prepare the ground for a spiralling-up process. Only then technical interventions can be put in place successfully.

Of all the identified problems of the community under study, the most fundamental seems to be an unconstructive and fatalistic disposition. This makes the community resistant to change and intervention which in turn prevents it from stopping the downward spiral of its capitals. The first step to bring about community resilience is thus to overcome the community's resistance to change. Darnhofer (2014) distinguishes three capacities of resilience: the buffer capacity, the adaptive capacity, and the transformative capacity. As already indicated above, the buffer capacity of the rural community under study, which is a function of the status of community

capitals, is very low while the adaptive and transformative capacities are virtually absent. This indicates that the community's long-established experience has not left any room for manoeuvre to bring change and transformation in the course of time.

Adaptive and transformative capacities of a community are built on learning cycles. However, the community in the study area has not experienced so far that individual or collective efforts can result in social change and social mobility for the better due to the rigid hierarchical structure of the society in which the community is found. This has created in the community feelings of helplessness, apathy, and total dependence on nature and external support. It has also created the tragedy of externalizing all problems as if all were stemming from outside and could only be alleviated from outside. Hence, liberating the community from the view "let it rain in Canada" or "let the government do it" and bring it to the view "let us do it ourselves" or "we can decide our fate by ourselves" indeed demands a radical intervention that is different from the customary ones. Similarly, erasing the community's belief that the domain of nature cannot be interfered and the creator is always responsible for everything and substitute it by the belief that nature could be tamed somehow and the creator helps those who help themselves demand an exceptional intervention. The downward spiral of community capitals would not be reversed with whatever intervention until the community's negative outlook towards itself and the world around it changes for the better.

Thus, in contrast to Emery and Flora (2006), who in their analysis of communities in the USA conclude that a spiralling-up process may build on mobilizing existing assets, under the conditions of our case in Ethiopia a more fundamental approach seems to be needed. Before mobilizing human and social capital as motors for further economic development, the potential endogenous assets need to be unlocked first. This builds on the capacity for critical reflection of the present situation and maybe gradually extended by introducing experiences of self-reliant improvements.

As one promising tool to introduce such development, reference is made here to training for transformation (Hope and Timmel, 1995). The training integrates the pedagogical ideas of Paulo Freire with a basic needs concept and a structural analysis of different roles in society. Moreover, it offers a practical application of these theoretical foundations. It has been successfully applied since the 1980s in various African countries. This training for transformation is reflective and action oriented. The community needs to develop confidence in its capacity to bring change on its own through exposure to practical exercises that prove this. The training is expected to enable the community to understand that it has the means to meet its needs based on its own local resources and capacities. It is also expected to bring change of outlook through tangible lessons to be taken in the course of linking theoretical knowledge and practice. It is only when the collective outlook of such a community is transformed through such training that the spiralling down of community capitals maybe reversed and external interventions integrated into the system of the community successfully.

People need to be enabled to "read their reality and write their own history" (Hope and Timmel, 1995) and to develop more in-depth analysis and skills for greater self-

sufficiency. This is expected to lead to a transformation of organizational capacity to build and/or use more effective interventions locally to meet local needs. The training programmes focus on mainstreaming gender equality and community development in the fields of mitigating conflicts, sustainable food security, livelihoods, environmental issues or participation in government structures, including practical positive impact with simple tools for building unity, planning and implementing local initiatives to tackle poverty in the community.

In short, such training is expected to possibly pave the ground for the creation of a dynamic community that is receptive of new ideas and change. This is seen as a necessary precondition for a spiralling-up process to start and to make use of any interventions to boost community capitals.

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