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Power Structures and Agency in Rural Ethiopia

Development Lessons from Four Community Case Studies

**Paper Prepared for the Empowerment Team in the World
Bank Poverty Reduction Group**

Draft for final comment: please do not quote

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Executive summary

1. This paper is linked to a five-year academic programme of multi-country and multi-disciplinary research into well-being in developing countries.
2. There are potentially three rather different audiences for the paper: development policymakers, especially those concerned with Ethiopia, policy thinkers especially those associated with the World Bank empowerment agenda, and development researchers. Accordingly we have structured the paper to provide a number of ways to read it, which are described in the Introduction, and we are providing three conclusion sections in the Executive Summary. The first explains why the main research findings matter for policy; the second summarises the implications of the findings for donor empowerment strategies; and the third explains how the research framework might be taken forward to add a potentially useful perspective on development.
3. To set the scene for the three sets of conclusions we describe the purpose of the paper and report the main research findings.

The purpose of the research paper

4. The purpose of the paper is to show how iterative interactions through time between power structures and personal agents in rural communities in Ethiopia have had consequences for (1) the personal power¹ of community members of different social status, (2) the overall efficacy of the communities, and (3) the trajectories of the communities in terms of reproduction and change. The findings are used to draw some conclusions for development policy and practice.
5. The paper asks three research questions, which are answered using a theoretical framework (Section 2), applied to data made in case studies of four 'exemplar' rural communities in the Oromo and Amhara regions of Ethiopia between 1995 and 2005, to produce the evidence base (Appendix 2) which underpins the conclusions of the paper².
6. The four case communities were selected to enable comparisons, between Amhara and Oromo communities, food-surplus and food-deficit communities, communities more and less integrated into markets and government services, ethnically/religiously homogenous and mixed communities, and Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities.
7. The first question posed is: 'In these communities how do local power structures affect the embodied personal agency and degrees of power of rural people of different genders, ages, household wealth, ethnicity, and religion?'
8. Local power structures exist in four 'domains of power', or 'fields of action': livelihoods, human production and reproduction, community management, and the re/production and dissemination of ideas. Current personal agency profiles are the historical outcomes of past interactions between agency and structures.
9. People of different genders, ages, wealths and social origins face different opportunities and constraints in each of the fields of action, and bring to them different embodied personal agency profiles developed through their life experiences thus far. These profiles are a mix of internalised cultural values and norms, types and levels of in/competence, and psychological resources/liabilities.
10. The extent to which people exercise personal power in any situation depends on an interaction between personal agency and structures of opportunity and constraint, which are constituted by *institutions* (rules and norms), social *relationships* with other social actors in *material contexts*, and *ideas*. Such relationships involve five

¹ The ability to achieve chosen goals.

² The evidence in Appendix 2 also provides some access to the life-worlds of the people who live in the research communities, and gives the people themselves some voice in development discourses.

types of individual and collective power: *power to, power with, power over, power on behalf of and power against.*

11. *Symbolic* power is implicit in (1) the roles and institutions which prescribe different kinds of behaviour for people of different social statuses, and (2) ideas about what differences matter and why.
12. The second question is about community reproduction and potential change. How does the operation of each of these fields, separately and interactively, contribute to the achievements of the community systems as whole? What collective facilitative power and liabilities are associated with them?
13. The third question asks 'In what ways have the power structures in these community systems changed since the 1960s, and to what extent have these changes promoted reproduction or change in the community systems as a whole?' Are the communities trapped in 'low-level' equilibria? Are there internal or external 'drivers of change' which have led, or may lead, to changes of direction in the future? Are there different answers to these questions for different types of community?
14. These power structures and personal agency profiles are important for development policy and practice for three reasons. *First*, they act as 'filters' to all community interventions, since people with strong personal agency occupying powerful roles are able to make decisions and take actions which allow, promote, deflect, inhibit, or rule out the goals of the intervention, while people with weak personal agency and low social status may not be able to take advantage of the new opportunities which interventions create.
15. *Second*, power structures and personal agency may be targets of 'empowerment' interventions aimed at reducing inequalities in power relationships, changing norms, rules and ideas, strengthening personal agency or empowering sections, groups, categories or collectivities, including communities.
16. *Third*, development interventions with goals which are not related to empowerment may have the unintended consequence of over-empowering or disempowering particular people or groups requiring developing strategies for compensatory action.

Power structures and patterns of personal agency in rural communities

Research Question 1: In these communities how do local power structures affect the embodied personal agency and degrees of power of rural people of different genders, ages, household wealth, ethnicity and religion?

17. Rural communities in Ethiopia are organised through hierarchies based on gender, age, household wealth, and locally salient status related to 'primordial' social origin, education and personal abilities. These hierarchies are associated with different personal agency profiles and structured opportunities and constraints in the four fields of action for people of differing social statuses.
18. *Structures in the livelihood field of action:* The vast majority of livelihoods in the integrated and remote sites are based on own account household farming; a very few households and individuals make livings out of agricultural labour, own-account off-farm work, and off-farm employment. A minority of households mix farming and off-farm activities, the latter usually as secondary activities. Opportunities for off-farm activity are small but greater for males than females, and greater for males in the integrated sites. There were more opportunities for women in the Amhara sites where dungcake-selling and spinning were established coping strategies.
19. Off-farm own-account activity falls into two categories: coping strategies for the poor and business strategies for the better-off with the former being more common. Off-farm employment is rare in the remote sites.

20. The farming division of labour is governed by gendered norms which are related to the gendered norms governing work in the human re/production field of action and associated with ideas about what males and females and children and adults are like.
21. There are marked internal inequalities in access to material productive resources with small proportions of households categorised (in terms defined by the communities) as very rich and rich in productive assets (together between 15-20% across the sites) a middle category of households doing fairly well or 'getting by' (40-47%), and a category of 'the poor' including poor, very poor and destitute, amounting to 33-40%.
22. Richer peasants relate to poor peasants in the livelihood field in a number of ways: they employ them as servants or daily labourers; they sharecrop their land; they develop personal patron-client relations in which they may help out with food or money at times in return for undefined services; they lend them money on the basis of different contracts, for example before the harvest to be repaid in grain with interest, or by taking their land and using it until the loan is repaid. The treatment a servant or borrower receives depends on the personal probity of the rich peasant.
23. Productive wealthholding is associated with, though not determined by, gender of household head, age of male household head and social origin. Females heading households in Amhara communities tend to be divorcees and considerably poorer in productive resources. Females heading households in the Arssi Oromo sites are mostly widows or wives whose husbands have taken a new wife.
24. *Structures in the human re/production field of action:* Women and girls are the main actors in the field of human production and reproduction although in male-headed households their activities are overseen by the male head. A little over 20% of households in each site are female-headed.
25. Many of the institutions and practices surrounding pregnancy, birth and the post-partum period produce risks for both mother and baby; mother and baby health services are not prioritised.
26. Raising and feeding a family requires a house, furniture, cooking utensils and other domestic assets, the provision of clothes, health services and education if it is valued, and the daily provision of (processed and cooked) food, local drinks, water, fuel for cooking, and time for child socialisation, informal education, and caring for sick, disabled and old relatives.
27. There are marked inequalities in access to material reproductive resources between sites and among household within sites. In the integrated sites there is access to electricity and piped water for richer households while markets and services are near for all, although poor people often cannot afford to use them. In the remote sites and among the poor in the integrated sites time is spent collecting fuel and water. Travelling to markets and services from the remote sites is also time-consuming. Within sites the quality of reproductive assets varies widely with at one extreme a few rich households with satellite TVs and at the other destitute households whose members live from hand to mouth.
28. Within households senior women have power over younger females and young boys and both gender and age hierarchies operate among children. A little over half of inhabitants in each of the four sites are under 20. As a rule starting from around the age of six children are expected to work for the household in gendered roles; from adolescence boys increasingly work for themselves and this is also now the case for some girls. Children from poor households may be sent to other households to work as servants. Most children who attend school also perform household work.
29. *Intra-household relationships and household facilitative power:* Male heads are engaged in unequal relationships of 'power over' females and younger males in their households, which may involve elements of exploitation, exclusion, domination and violation. However, they also use 'power on behalf of' different members of their household, and, from another perspective, these relationships underpin a household division of labour which creates the collective 'power with' which households use to

make a living and produce and re/produce its members. Levels of collective facilitative power are lower in households where heads do not have authority over the labour power and where time and energy are devoted to intra-household struggles and conflicts involving '*power against*'.

30. *Structures in the community governance field of action:* The goals of community governance include the maintenance of social order through the control of deviant behaviour, resolution of disputes and handling of dissent and conflict, economic development, social protection, implementation of gender and family 'policies', the management of collective resources, and community survival and solidarity.
31. This field of action contains two interactive governance structures, one with its roots in the community and the other brought into the community by the government. These systems have different priorities and ways of going about things. They sometimes work independently, sometimes in collaboration, and sometimes confront each other. They are both organised along hierarchical lines and neither is immediately compatible with the individualistic and egalitarian principles implicit in donor and international NGO discourses.
32. Men who are powerful in the community governance structures are likely to belong to the dominant status group. Criteria for elite status include wealth, occupation of key community roles such as dispute settlement, leadership in local organisations, education, and religious office. Powerful men can mobilise collective '*power with*' in kin, neighbour, friendship, and clan and/or ethnic networks. Mobilised status groups may use '*power against*' other status groups in processes of exclusion which may lead to conflict.
33. Women, younger uneducated men, and poor men have little say in community affairs, although female relatives of powerful men may have informal influence and there are official positions for women in *kebele* structures and women who occupy these positions and take a lead in organising women for collective women's activities.
34. *Structures in the ideas field of action:* There is a considerable variety of opinion in these communities and in contexts where they feel safe people are willing to express themselves and argue about ideas. Within this field of action it is possible to identify structures and agents involved in the re/production and dissemination of five cultural repertoires of ideas: local traditional, local modern, new religious ideologies, government ideologies, and donor/NGO ideologies. There are also other current influences on local ideas which are more diffuse including 'imagined communities', networks of relations and interactions beyond the communities; opposition political parties; diasporas; and the national and international media.
35. In one homogenous site religious ideas about livelihoods and religious ceremonies preached by Orthodox priests conform with local traditional ideas and are in direct conflict with government policies and directives which are accepted in local modern repertoires and resonate with donor and NGO repertoires. In the other homogenous site religious Islamic ideas about livelihoods and religious ceremonies are modern in that they contradict local traditional repertoires. However, some of the ideas run counter to government repertoires and donor/NGO repertoires, for different reasons. In both sites religious repertoires are currently the most symbolically powerful.
36. In the heterogeneous sites people live with models of other ways of thinking, particularly in religious terms. There are contradictions at a number of levels in the ideas and narratives of the different religions: Orthodox Christianity, Islam, various versions of Protestantism, and Catholicism. The increasing influence of religious fundamentalists in all religions is making these logical contradictions more visible leading to a decline in religious tolerance. Religious differences are associated with ethnic differences and consequently affect and are affected by inter-ethnic competition for scarce material resources and local political influence.
37. People in the integrated sites have more frequent interactions with urban dwellers and greater access to the media which contributes a consumer dimension to local modern repertoires.

38. *Personal agency*: Personal agency profiles are laid down in childhood; as babies grow towards adulthood they develop physically and mentally and learn locally appropriate skills more or less well, they incorporate family values, norms, beliefs, and 'ways of doing things', and they develop psychological resources or liabilities. Adult competence, 'habitus', and autonomy, or ability to make and pursue choices, is profoundly influenced by childhood experiences.
39. There are key problems and challenges related to different moments in child development as babies become knee children, roaming children, working/learning children, adolescents, very young adults, and then adults. Sensitivity to these moments on the part of policy makers could lead to improved empowerment interventions.
40. *Personal power and degrees of empowerment*: The social category with the least personal power in the communities is 'the poor' who are a mix of males and females and people of different ages. Structures provide more constraints than opportunities for most poor people and many approach them with problematic personal agency profiles produced through lifetime experiences which may include incompetence related to illness, disability or old age, a habitus developed in a childhood of poverty, and/or psychological liabilities which for example may be that the person has 'become defeated'. Poor people with good personal agency profiles can make choices, but may not have the opportunity to pursue them, or even if they have may not achieve the final goal.
41. While females and young men on average have less personal power than males and older men, those who are not poor have more personal power than poor people. Empowerment strategies which would benefit females and young men may not reach those who are poor without special design for them. The category of 'the poor' is not homogenous; different kinds of poor people need different empowerment strategies.

Research Question 2: How does the operation of each of the four fields of action, separately and interactively, contribute to the achievements of the community systems as whole? What collective facilitative power and liabilities are associated with them?

42. The hierarchies described above are key mechanisms in the production and reproduction of community '*facilitative power*', which depends on the material contexts, social relationships, institutions and ideas involved in the four fields of action, and the ways in which the fields interact. Households and kin networks form the core of the livelihood, human re/production, and social protection fields which provide most of the security people achieve, apart from the donor/NGO/government food aid provision in drought-prone sites. The majority of Ethiopians are involved in such 'informal security regimes'.
43. The main causes of insecurity in these regimes are scarce collective resources, life processes, local competition for scarce resources and structured inequality. The main solutions are kin-based social exchanges and 'opportunity-hoarding' on the basis of claims to superior social identity, and patchy government services, although the 'welfare mix' involves a potentially larger set of players and institutions some of which are international.
44. Such regimes can be found across the rural and small-town areas of the four 'established' regions: Oromia, Amhara, Tigray and SNNP, in parts of the four 'emergent' regions of Afar, Somali, Gambella and Beneshangul Gumuz, and in the informal sectors of larger towns. They vary in ethnic and religious composition and the extent to which they are connected to government.
45. Farming is the key activity in all sites and there are no local signs of the 'industrialisation' which the agricultural-development strategy was designed to underpin. No outside opportunities have been provided and dominant local habituses in which farming is the only desirable and respectable occupation apart from government employment mean that those with the entrepreneurial 'animal spirits'

that exist everywhere do not have the inclination or the competence to invest in small-enterprise production rather than services.

46. In recent years government penetration of these communities has increased and there are signs of development achievements. However, communities resist changes that seem to threaten the local community governance structures which are vital to the survival and reproduction of the informal security regimes, without which the inhabitants would not survive.
47. The communities host at least five types of competing cultural repertoire each with a logically compatible set of values, goals and beliefs (ideas). 'Traditional' community repertoires adhered to mainly by older people are being challenged by 'modern' community repertoires introduced by rich merchants, educated adults and youth, and the infiltration of global cultures.
48. Three ideological repertoires are being actively promulgated within the communities, each with the intent of changing the preferences of inhabitants. Increasingly fundamentalist religious repertoires strive to change or reinforce religious values and related practices. The government repertoire is used to try to get inhabitants to conform to practices based on hierarchical socialism, while donor and NGO repertoires have introduced some liberal and egalitarian ideas. People draw on these repertoires in ways that are unsystematic and seemingly contradictory.
49. There are differences in the collective facilitative power of different types of community. Community facilitative power is greater in communities which produce a crop surplus and are more integrated into markets and services. Communities with a mix of ethnic groups and religions can observe different ways of doing things but they also waste energy and time competing in a variety of ways. In the homogenous communities everyone can potentially be mobilised to work together for the whole community. However, it is more difficult to be a nonconformist especially at a time when religious leaders are powerful. In the two homogenous sites Orthodox Christian and Muslim leaders are not using their power in ways which are particularly conducive to development goals.

Research Question 3: In what ways have the power structures in these community systems changed since the 1960s, and to what extent have these changes promoted reproduction or change in the community systems as a whole?

50. While the 1975 land reform abolished the Amhara/Tigrayan landlord class wealth and occupational distinctions with their status connotations have persisted to some extent. There is also a legacy of memories of exploitation, exclusion, domination and violation.
51. Farming technologies have moved on to the extent that the modern inputs of improved seeds, fertilisers and pesticides are increasingly used, while the use of small motorised irrigation pumps is spreading in appropriate places. However, soil is prepared using an oxplough technology that goes back centuries and there are few other signs of modernity in the rural fields. Few off-farm own-account activities are new or use new technologies exceptions being the electric grain mill and the Usuzu trucks used by grain traders.
52. Creeping land reform has increased the security of tenure of landholders and relaxation in the law with regard to land-leasing has commodified the share-cropping 'market' to an extent. The PASDEP³ goal of commercialisation of agriculture could produce revolutionary change in the livelihoods of the farmers of Korodegaga should the site be included in a large commercial irrigation scheme using the Awash. PASDEP also proposes the promotion of much more rapid non-farm private sector growth, though it is not clear that this will focus on the small/medium enterprises and local economic development that could raise the general living standards of people in these communities.

³ Ethiopia's second PRSP

53. A recent change in the field of human production is the growing acceptance of contraception to reduce family sizes, although there were reports of opposition from Muslim religious leaders in Turufe Kecheme. There has been little change in the lack of respect in local cultures for the burdens of pregnancy, childbirth and the post-partum period and this is matched by relative neglect in government provision of maternal and infant health services.
54. Parents still train their children into gendered habituses emphasising the need for males to learn aggression and females submission. However, there is increasing acceptance of education for girls and the severity of the violence involved in disciplining children has diminished. Young children are still often cared for by slightly older children.
55. While religious education is losing popularity among Orthodox Christians it is becoming increasingly popular for Muslims. It has been brought into the communities by teachers reportedly trained in Nazreth using resources contributed by Saudi Arabian Muslims, who also contributed funds for the building of three mosques in Korodegaga. There is growing enthusiasm for formal education in all sites, although there are also opponents, particularly in Dinki.
56. There has been little change in the domestic work burden. Women and girls work very long hours.
57. The statement that 'trust and interest in formal market and state institutions remains low' (Kurey, 2005) is misleading. People are not committed to customary ways of doing things because they are 'informal' but because they work. People engage with 'formal' market institutions when access to them is of benefit and would probably prefer that they were more formal in the sense of being policed to prevent cheating and that there were more of them. The 2005 elections were a source of huge interest in all sites although subsequent events did reduce trust in state institutions. Also people are increasingly organising internally to develop new (civil society) institutions and organisations to reduce insecurity with constitutions and rules. While these are not 'formal' in the way the word is usually used in development discourses, they do have elements of formality about them.
58. In terms of gendered 'power over' there is an ongoing process of change which began during the Derg era and has continued since 1991. The power of patriarchal men over women and younger men and within the community more generally has been reducing, although there are still institutionalised elements of exclusion, exploitation, domination and violation to be found in these relationships. Parents are able to exert considerable power over working/learning children (roughly 6 to adolescence), particularly girls.
59. In the 1960s there were wealthy landlords who no longer exist and tenants of different wealths. During the Derg *kebele* leaders and those who joined the Producer Co-operatives had opportunities for greater wealth in the community. Today there are big differences in productive and reproductive wealth in all communities with signs of increasing inequality and 'class formation' as the numbers of landless people increase. Richer households who employ servants are in a powerful position in relation to their employees as if they refuse to honour the contracts the servants often have no redress. Richer households who sharecrop land in are also powerful compared with the poor landholders who are often elderly or women heading households.
60. The ethnic hierarchy of imperial times has been challenged ideologically and through the ethnic federal structure. However, historic experiences of exploitation, exclusion, domination and violation are part of individual and collective memories, while it is always difficult for a group that was once superior to view others as equals and to give up aspirations for a return to the old status quo. Pressure on land and the paucity of other economic opportunities apart from those associated with office in the *kebele* has contributed to the local politicisation of ethnicity in Dinki and Turufe Kecheme.

61. While there is a correlation between ethnicity and religion it is not a perfect one. In many rural Ethiopian communities Orthodox Christians and Muslims have lived together tolerantly for many years. However, just as there is a potential for feelings of injustice related to historic relations between ethnic groups the same is true for historic relations between different religious groups. During Imperial times the status of Muslims was low compared with that of the Orthodox Christians.
62. There are a number of continuities in the stories of these four communities, chief of which is that there have been no changes in the structures of the local economies since their reconstruction after the fall of the Derg which look likely to set them off on new trajectories. This economic reproduction parallels the reproduction of the informal security regimes described above. From one perspective it is possible to argue that in much of rural Ethiopia the configuration of community fields is currently geared to reproduce communities with low levels of facilitative power and that community systems are trapped in low-level equilibria.
63. However, it is possible to identify a number of 'drivers of change':
- Existing land shortages combined with the large youth population will push many of them off the land
 - An increasingly educated population with access to global cultures will not respond well to overly-authoritarian governance structures
 - If homegrown organisations such as *iddir* are allowed to develop independently a local civil society might emerge to assist in promotion of the development agenda
 - Government activities supported by donors are promoting human development and providing social protection in the drought-prone sites; the longer-term consequences of this are unclear
 - There are great dangers in the current politicisation of ethnicity (see Somalia) and religion (see the Sudan) which cannot be ignored by external development actors.

Summary for policy makers

64. Government policy makers and donor policy advisers working with different governance models should discuss this openly. They should both recognise the value of local community governance models to rural residents and find out more about how they work with a view to encouraging bottom-up changes.
65. Development policy makers should be aware of the potential for politics at country, regional and local levels to undermine or support development activities.
66. Local community power structures act as filters to all planned interventions which should be designed with this in mind. Interventions inject new resources, ideas, institutions and relationships with the potential to empower some and disempower others. It is very difficult to reach 'the poor' who are not a group but a category of power-weak but diverse kinds of people.
67. While empowerment interventions are usually aimed at improving personal agency profiles, sometimes through supporting collective action, there is scope for considering interventions to empower communities by assisting them to break out of 'low-level equilibria traps' . There are potential lessons from other countries experimenting with Local Economic Development (LED).
68. Empowerment interventions to increase the personal power of disadvantaged categories may be designed to change structures of opportunity and constraint, to change ideas, or to improve personal agency profiles.
69. *Changing structures of opportunity and constraint*: ways of introducing new livelihood opportunities to people based in rural communities, especially the young and landless, need to be explored at local, regional and national levels.
70. The MDG goal of reduction of maternal mortality needs to be treated with the same seriousness as the primary education goal. Improved utilities and infrastructure

empower women, as does micro-credit linked with new breeds and training for cash-producing farming activities which fit well with other time demands.

71. Local community and government governance structures could work more efficiently together.
72. *Changing ideas*: there is a battle of ideas going on in rural communities which needs to be understood and monitored.
73. *Changing personal agency profiles*: childhood is a time of great importance; this is the time when personal agency profiles including the in/competences, habituses and autonomy which underpin choices and achievements in adult life are developed. Interventions to invest in children are important both for a view of development as a long-term process and a view of development as wellbeing improvement.
74. Competence: few children get nutritionally-balanced diets, while those in drought situations and in poor households often starve for shorter or longer periods. Most start farm or domestic work at around the age of six, as they are taught the skills important for farming and domesticity while making increasingly important contributions to the household economy. Children from poor families may be hired out as servants from very young ages. An increasing proportion of children go to school with most mixing work and schooling.
75. Habitus: children in rural areas grow up in households organised on the basis of gendered hierarchies in which domination and violence by 'superiors' to 'inferiors' is common, although less severe than it was in the past. Boys are encouraged to be aggressive, which is linked with the idea of family protection against enemies, while girls are taught to be quiet and submissive, linked with the idea of them becoming homemakers. During education children learn new ways of thinking, although gendered hierarchies and violence are also found in schools.
76. A choice of four livelihood goals was mentioned by richer young men approaching adulthood in the integrated sites: farming, larger-scale trading, government employment and international migration, with America the favoured destination. By comparison manual work is of low status, with the historic stigma attached to 'craftworkers' such as blacksmiths, potters, tanners, and to a lesser extent weavers, carried into the field of 'industry'. Many poor boys start life as agricultural servants/herders. There is a need to raise the status of industrial work.
77. The main livelihood goals for richer young women were marriage requiring domestic skills, government employment requiring education, and international migration for domestic work. Low status activities for which poor girls are prepared include dungcake and firewood selling and the making and selling of local alcoholic drinks.
78. Autonomy: there is considerable evidence of personal autonomy, or the ability to make and pursue choices, among both males and females, particularly evident in the way in which many adolescents and young adults of both genders in three of the sites are now working for cash to enable them to go to school, many starting Grade 1 at relatively late ages.
79. Government investment in the education of these adult 'personal agents' of the future has expanded in all sites in the last few years, and been met with enthusiasm by many parents and young people. Barriers to the attendance of poor children include costs and the household need for their labour. Attempts to abolish the shift system caused problems for children who had to travel far, and for those whose work was vital to the household. Absenteeism was related to clashes between school calendars and seasonal or market day work demands. Poor children would benefit from 'informal education' initiatives while calendars to suit local conditions and provide more flexibility during peak agricultural periods would reduce absenteeism and dropout rates.
80. Policy action to improve personal agency profiles requires a *Child Policy* covering nutrition and health, child work including child 'trafficking', the timing, structure, content and quality of education, child protection from violence and abuse, and attention to gendered child-rearing practices. Poor children need special assistance which could be provided were the NGO sector to expand.

81. Land shortages have led to the rise of a class of young men who are either landless or have very small plots from their parents, and, while increasing numbers are becoming educated, there are few local off-farm opportunities and little urban migration.
82. To improve local livelihood opportunity structures for young men and women a *Youth Enterprise /Employment Policy* should be included in *wereda* and regional 'Local Economic Development' plans for small towns.
83. A number of adult respondents said they would appreciate a literacy programme.
84. The current government has been committed to empowering women since its inception and policies for women have made some impact on women's rights to land, and provided a space for discussions of 'harmful traditional practices' which are the first step in their reduction. Women in the integrated sites increasingly practice family planning and young people in the remote sites expressed support for it. Government policies in this area are gradually bearing fruit but the pressure must be maintained.
85. Until recently there has been little development activity aimed at women in the sites; an NGO savings and credit scheme associated with access to hybrid hens in Korodegaga provided a small group of women with income from eggs and hens and improved diets for their families. In two sites towards the end of the research women's groups were beginning to access Government credit. Schemes should be designed which fit in with the other demands on women's time.
86. There was little evidence in the sites of government or NGO activities in pursuit of the MDG to reduce maternal mortality. Government and donor action in the area of women's reproductive health in these sites was limited to contraception. Women's needs during the pregnancy-birth-infancy cycle are largely ignored inside local communities, by government, and by donors. Maternal ill/health affects the personal agency of the next generation as well as reducing the mother's personal agency. Women's policies should be three-pronged: to support mothers, to improve gender relations, to support economic development.
87. Customarily old people were respected and feared as a result of their ability to bless and curse. Their cultural and political power began to decline during the Derg and currently only wealthy or elite old men have retained respect. Some young people insult the old for their out-of-date ideas.
88. In the remote communities the institutions and relationships in kin-based informal security regimes theoretically provide support for old people no longer able to work and for those without relatives material resources and care should be provided by neighbours other community members. We do not have information on how well these mechanisms work in practice.
89. These mechanisms are also found in the more integrated communities, but they do not cover everyone. Old people with no relatives and immigrant old people are at risk of sliding into destitution and relying on begging to stay alive.
90. The disempowerment of old people should be recognised and a *Policy for the Aged* considered; this is another area where expansion of the NGO sector could contribute.
91. The most extreme form of disempowerment is death but not much is known about its incidence in rural communities except that it is frequent. In mid-2004 in 12% of households across the communities someone had died in the previous year; five people from one household died. Consideration should be given to the introduction of local registers of births and deaths.

Summary for policy thinkers

92. No development intervention is a-political and this is particularly true of empowerment interventions. Power is not an individual attribute but a quality of relationships; improving the 'power to' of individuals or categories of person impinges on the 'power to' of others. For example, the move to increase education for girls in Ethiopia in order to empower them had consequences for other members of local communities including forced demands for contributions from rich and poor of labour

and cash to build extra classrooms and pay extra teachers, and increased workloads for mothers due to the loss of daughters' labour time.

93. There are other theoretical issues which need to be taken into account. Empowerment in the context of controlling power relations (exploitation, exclusion, domination, violation) requires the disempowerment of dominant parties which is politically complex and sensitive. The empowering of collectivities (power with) can enable them to use it in competition or conflict with other collectivities (power against).
94. The empowering of communities through improving techniques of production and discipline requires institutional designs which can connect efficiently with existing institutions, rather than trying to impose external and alien priorities. In this connection the discourse distinctions between 'formal' and 'informal' and 'modern' and 'traditional' or 'customary', both associated with the idea that development can only occur through the 'formal' and the 'modern', are not helpful in contexts where formal markets are 'missing' (although real markets are not), where the state is still in the process of being 'built' and local grass-root organisations are not allowed to qualify as 'civil society'.
95. It is not easy to change structures of opportunity and constraint since norms and ideas are embodied in social actors; the changing of rules or techno-material contexts will not be effective without matching changes in norms and ideas contradictory to the proposed change. For example, the prime obligations that people owe to others are to kin and involve social exchanges over long periods of time. When new resources are introduced to a community the moral obligation to reciprocate past assistance or to care for weaker kin members may over-ride rules forbidding 'corruption'.
96. Despite these caveats the empowerment agenda is potentially very important for disadvantaged power-weak people in informal security regimes⁴ in rural areas in poor countries such as Ethiopia, particularly children, poor other people, and other females. However, it needs to be employed with sensitivity and recognition of potential pitfalls in the way it is justified. The empowerment discourse suggests people may be empowered by improvements to embodied competence and access to resources (agency), by changes in institutions (rules and norms), or by changes in the way the two interact. The goal is ostensibly to ensure that choices are achieved. However, if institutions are changed through interventions but people's preferences or habituses have not changed, then the goal is not to ensure that choices are achieved but to change the choices. This should be acknowledged.
97. For example, female circumcision is widely supported by males and females throughout rural Ethiopia; uncircumcised girls/women (depending on cultural context) bring shame on their families, cannot get married, and cannot be buried in churchyards. The government has banned the practice but people are making the choice, exercising their personal power, to take the risk of behaving illegally. In this situation neither government nor donors like the choice.
98. In considering interventions to empower through improving personal agency profiles there is a need to address together the three constituents: habitus or preferences; in/competences; and autonomy/heteronomy as a psychological resource/liability. For example, if young people are formally educated (competent) and potentially autonomous but lack an entrepreneurial habitus in the context of few job opportunities their personal power in the livelihood field will not be increased.

Summary for development researchers

99. In the academic field development-related research takes place largely within development economics, 'development studies', 'area studies', geography, social

⁴ In this paper we have not addressed the problems of trying to empower people in the insecurity regimes to be found in the pastoral peripheries of Ethiopia.

anthropology, and in small pockets in the disciplines of political science, sociology and increasingly psychology. Most empirical research that informs policy, particularly country policies, is produced by economists and dependent on survey data gathered from household heads, enterprise owners, and service providers. Participatory research used as a form of 'market research' has also been used to inform policy.

100. The development economics 'paradigm', now institutionalised as best practice for data collection in poor countries, produces very valuable information for the description and analysis of livelihoods and human resources, markets and economic growth, household poverty and larger macroeconomic issues. However, it does not meet the growing demand for information, analyses, explanations and policies relating to issues which are increasingly seen as relevant to development such as intra-country conflict, state-building and national governance, community-level governance, social protection and, at the individual level, personal wellbeing including personal security, empowerment and subjective quality of life.
101. Its methods are also ill-adapted to addressing important sensitive issues, such as sexuality, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, illegal or banned activities, which require developing trust and more time with respondents. Also the survey approach has difficulties in assessing activities or mobile or migrating populations, and the poorest who may not live in households or have residences that can be sampled may fall through the net. The question of people strategies, and decision making can usually only be inferred by the outcomes.
102. Development researchers in disciplines and fields other than economics have research perspectives and skills with much to contribute to improved understandings of issues which have recently made it on to the development agenda. For example, if, as Stern *et al* (2005) argue, development for poor countries by definition involves endogenous and/or engineered changes in preferences, there is a need for research into the diverse local cultures which constitute the 'nation'. And if, as they also argue, changes in the investment climate and empowerment are 'inherently political' so that extreme political and economic differences can generate violent conflict, there is a need for country-level research into the dynamics of power at national and lower levels, and the linkages and networks between levels.
103. Research into culture and power requires knowledge about 'qualities' as well as 'quantities' and is best conducted using theoretically-sophisticated conceptual frameworks in conjunction with mixed methods; a Q-Integrated rather than a Q-Squared approach. Advances in computer technology mean that 'qualitative data' about community, household and individual 'cases' can be easily entered, stored and organised to allow for rapid comparative qualitative and quantitative analyses of small-N and large-N cases, where the connection between the statistics and the cases is not lost as it is in variable-based research.
104. The 'poverty traps' which are of growing interest to economists are constructed and reconstructed in community-level social systems by people who pursue goals according to their culturally-learned values and beliefs and follow established practices which contribute to the survival but often also the entrenchment of the systems. Integrated multi-method research focused on competing cultural repertoires and power dynamics would raise levels of understanding about the ways in which differential 'informal' practices impact on attempts by states and civil society organisations to introduce formal markets and new technologies which would lead to more appropriately designed interventions.
105. A similar research approach in government bureaucracies would lead to a greater understanding of the informal dynamics which often undermine civil service reforms, public financial management, and service delivery and could assist policy makers to design interventions which realistically start from current ways of doing things and provide a clearer understanding of obstacles to change.
106. The WeD Ethiopia research was undertaken in exploratory mode and has produced a considerable multi-level database of quantitative and qualitative data

made in four rural communities and two urban spaces. The model could be adapted for the efficient generation of panel Q-integrated data about communities purposively selected as exemplars of different livelihood systems, local cultures and cultural mixes. Data generated through such an approach could be used by local governments, as well as national government and donors concerned to map what is happening in different parts of the country. In particular it could illuminate contrasts between different types of community, for example integrated and remote villages, surplus producing and deficit food aid dependent sites, and improve understandings of differential impacts of regional policies