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**Understanding the Realities of Urban Poor
and
their Food Security Situations:
A Case Study at Berta Gibi
and
Gemachu Safar in Addis Ababa City, Ethiopia**

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Overview and background.....	1
1.2. The problem, intent and research questions.....	3
2. Concepts, theories and analytical framework	5
2.1. Poverty	5
2.2. Thought on poverty and some of its reduction strategies	5
2.3. Food security	8
2.4. Livelihood framework for understanding urban poverty and food insecurity	9
3. Setting of the study communities and methods	12
3.1. Location	12
3.2. Historical sketch and evolutions of the case study communities.....	12
3.3. Methods.....	16
4. Contexts and vulnerability situations at BG and GS	19
4.1. The environmental context.....	19
4.2. The social context	20
4.3. The economic context	21
4.4. The political context	21
5. Access to assets and urban amenities	23
5.1. House and housing related facilities	23
5.2. Access to human capital development services	27
5.3. Access to financial capitals	30
5.4. Situations of social capitals	32
6. Livelihood activities and sources of earnings	33
6.1. Permanent employment	33
6.2. Casual or non-permanent jobs	34
6.3. Engagement in informal activities	35
6.4. Major constraints of livelihood activities	39
7. Impoverishment and food insecurity as undesirable livelihood outcomes	42
7.1. Perception on being ‘urban poor’	42
7.2. Food security status and situations.....	44

7.3. Explanations of urban poverty and food insecurity.....	47
8. Coping and survival strategies of the urban poor	50
8.1. Coping mechanism against poverty and food shortage.....	50
8.2. Survival strategies of households.....	51
9. Summary, conclusions and policy implications.....	53
References	57

List of Table

Table 1: Different scenarios of food shortage among urban poor.....	47
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List of Figure

Figure 1: Analytical framework of the research	11
Figure 2: Location of the study <i>kebeles</i> in the Addis Ababa City Administration.....	15
Figure 3: Corridors between the dwelling units serve many purposes: as store, washing places, drying up clothes and food stuffs, etc.(BG).....	20
Figure 4: Relying on single kitchen (left) and one pit latrine (right) for 33 households has much bearing on health, time and moral setup of the inhabitants (BG).....	24
Figure 5: Overview of typical houses in GS – A roof being covered with plastics and fixed with stones or wood (right), and sub-standard houses in row (left)	25
Figure 6: Coffee straw must be dried up under the sunlight before using it as source of energy for <i>injera</i> backing (BG)	27
Figure 7: <i>Tella</i> brewing and attracting customers in such shelters are a difficult thing (GS)	36
Figure 8: Petty traders having their own <i>madab</i> (vending place) at the <i>gullit</i> of GS.....	38
Figure 9: Sharing kitchen with other neighbors for backing <i>injera</i> intended for market is a big challenge (GS).....	39
Figure 10: Individuals are compelled to vend along street when they cannot find appropriate place, and space around <i>gullit</i> (BG left and GS right).....	41

List of Box

Box 1: Unaffordability to buy teaching material for children put them in trouble.....	30
Box 2: Households whose income rely on <i>Tella</i> making and selling.....	36
Box 3: BG and GS inhabitants' definitions of poor.....	43

Abstract

The study was carried out at Berta Gibi and Gemechu Safar communities, which were purposely selected as representation of many pockets dominantly inhabited by the poor people. The central aim was to identify factors that impoverished households and exposed them to chronic food shortage they live with, and to assess the coping and survival strategies taken by the households. Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) was used to explore how context, shocks, assets, institutions, activities and strategies interplay in multiple ways to explain poor wellbeing status and food insecurity as the outcomes. The research is purely qualitative and participatory in nature. The specific methods employed include interview of elderly as key informants, two focus group discussions at each community (one with men and the other with women group), in-depth study of case households and direct observations.

Households at BG and GS are vulnerable to various environmental and economic shocks. Poor sanitation, unhygienic environments, and the over-crowded housing situations expose the inhabitants at both sites to various health risks. The major explanations included, tiny and congested dwelling units, lack of proper drainage and sewerage systems, lack of access to toilet, and insufficient and intermittent water supply. A number of actions of interventions could help improve the quality of life for the poor at the study sites. The housing situations at the two communities should be improved either by upgrading the existing structures or replacing them with low-costing houses. Much care should be taken not to evict or displace the poor, which will exacerbate urban poverty. The upgrading intervention should take into account parallel development of other sanitary facilities and spaces for kitchens.

Households at both study sites have limited access to financial capital, and are characterized by low human capitals. Due to limited access to the human capital development services, the educational and health status of the people are very poor. Parents are either illiterate or have low educational background, and the performance of children was found out not to be impressive. Curative health services at various levels are inadequate in the face of expanding population size and corresponding increase of demand for the services. A number of suggestions have been made to help address constraints related to human capital development.

Unemployment is a serious problem of the studied people, which is partly explained by poor human capital development, and other factors like large number of job seekers and static nature of new job creation. Those who work in either low pay jobs, casual work, wage labour or informal activities cannot generate sufficient income to meet household basic needs including food. The poor, therefore, live always under food shortage situations although the degree ranges between less shortage during 'normal year' and extremely severe

shortage during ‘very bad year’. Government and other development actors can contribute for improving the wellbeing and food security of the poor in a number of ways suggested in this paper.

Poor people have their own coping mechanisms and survival strategies against various constraints to their livelihoods. Some of them require deeper understanding and need to be built upon. Their own strategies are clear indications as to how actions/interventions work along those lines. It is found out the poor households diversify, their members migrate, and also try to save for building own assets. The suggestions made with regard to strategies involve strengthening rural-urban linkages, putting in place regular safety net program for urban poor, and devising mechanism of helping urban poor to make livelihood from urban agriculture.

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview and background

For the first time in history of urban development more than half of the world's population lives in the cities since 2007 (Martinez et al. 2008). According to the United Nation Commission for Human Settlement (UNCHS) (1996), the proportion of urban inhabitants will increase to two-third of the world population by 2025. It is also projected that the world's urban population will grow by more than 2 billion by 2030. About 94% of this increase would be in less developed regions (Garau et al. 2005). Higher birth rates and the migration of the poor people from rural areas to urban centers are the two principal explanations for rapid growth of urban population in developing regions. The scale of this process of urbanization is difficult to comprehend in respect of the numbers of houses, water connections, schools, clinics, hospital beds and jobs that will be required over the coming decades in the more impoverished countries of the world (Potter & Lloyd-Evans 1998: 3). Thus, urban poverty clearly manifests itself in multiple forms such as lack of access to standard shelter and basic amenities, unemployment and inability to meet basic needs, and vulnerability to economic, environmental and political shocks. This complex and multifaceted nature of urban poverty deserves deeper understanding for the purpose of both knowledge generation and for practices aimed at improving the living situations of the poor. Nonetheless, many writers (Maxwell 1999, Devas 2004, Garau et al. 2005) argue that urban poverty has been the neglected area of both research endeavor, and policies of poverty reduction.

Ethiopia, with only 16% people living in towns and cities, is among the least urbanized countries and yet one of the rapidly urbanizing nations of the Sub-Saharan Africa. The rate of urbanization for the country is estimated at 4.7% per annum (CSA 2006). However, the rural-urban exodus that accounts for the largest proportion of urban population increase puts a tremendous pressure upon physical, economic and social infrastructure and services of urban centers. Ethiopian towns of different sizes have not well developed to receive the ever-increasing rural-urban migrants. Economic activities in urban centers could not absorb illiterate migrants or with low educational background. Among the well noticed net results of unprecedented increase of urban population has been the expansion of urban poverty and food insecurity. About 35.3% of the urban population lives under poverty line ((MoFED 2006).

Addis Ababa city, with a population of about 3.5 million (<http://www.addisababacity.gov.et>), hosts a diversity of inhabitants in terms of ethnic background and culture, types of economic activities in which people involve, and the contrasting level of well-being. It is the home of people with the well-being status ranging from the affluent (very rich) to the very poor

(destitute). According to various sources (Abebe 2001, Tizita 2001, Meheret 2003, CRDA 2003), the majority of the inhabitants of Addis Ababa constitute the poor and the destitute. Official document indicates 70% of the population is living in slums (MoFED 2006). This clearly manifested in the precarious living conditions and severe food insecurity situations among the considerable size of the city dwellers.

Urban poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon. Like the poor in most developing countries cities, the Addis Ababa city poor are:

- Either homeless, or live in sub-standard dwellings lacking basic amenities such as water, energy, and proper latrine. Settlement sites with dominantly poor inhabitants are geographically located in unsafe parts of the city.
- Either unemployed or work in extremely low-pay jobs, which barely allow them to meet basic needs of the family members (food, clothing and health care).
- Lacking in sufficient food both in terms quantity and quality.
- Lacking in access to various social and economic services like health, education, information and favorable markets to purchase their means of subsistence.
- Those who have limited participation in formal institutions and hence given limited chances in decision-making.
- Vulnerable to various environment related risks, economic shocks and political changes.

While these being some of the underlying features of the urban poor people, they have, however, developed their own coping strategies against some livelihood challenges facing them. Among the survival strategies of the poor include living in slum and shanty area, engaging in various informal activities, scavenging around waste disposal sites and market places, and migrations. Nonetheless, some of the coping and adapting strategies of the poor appear to be inconsistent with formal rules and regulations of the city administration, and the country's law at large. As a result, their livelihood activities as well as their survival strategies are highly contested.

It has been recognized that many poverty and food security related researches in Ethiopia have overlooked the urban settings. This has been explained by a number of assumptions. One is the fact that the overwhelming majority of the country's population lives in rural areas. Thus, many social researchers have focused their investigation on rural poverty and food shortage. Of course, in Ethiopian context, we cannot look at urban poverty in isolation from rural poverty due to the reason that desperate rural poor often migrate to towns and cities. The other misconception stems from the thinking that urban physical and social amenities are, more or less, equally accessible to all segments of the population inhabiting the city. In reality, the urban poor are those who lack production, exchange and transfer entitlements (Sen 1981), and thus unable to meet their subsistence requirements. There has been a proposition that poverty and food shortage in this country are explained by

‘drought’, a phenomenon that is regarded to have an indirect explanation to urban food shortage. It is important to bear in mind that only when productions among rural societies are successful that the urban residents will be able to get access to grains at fairer prices and on sustainable basis. For instance, drought that caused the failure of *belg* (minor growing season between February and May) harvest and the collapse of livestock economy in some pastoral areas of the country are parts of explanations for drastic price rise of grain in 2008.

The argument here is that many social research undertakings on poverty and food security have been short-sited towards investigating the situations in urban centers. As a reader in the areas of food security and livelihoods for over a period of a decade, I have come across a few works focusing on the Ethiopian urban context. It is quite rare to find livelihood works that attempt to holistically examine poverty and food insecurity. This research in the two pockets of urban poor: Berta Gibi (BG hereafter) in Nifassilk Lafto sub-city and Gemachu Safar (GS hereafter) in Lidata sub-city was carried out in view of contributing a little to the knowledge gap. Having better understanding of urban poverty and the resultant food insecurity contributes to knowledge and method, as well as for practices aiming at improving the well-being of the inhabitants.

1.2. The problem, intent and research questions

Households at BG and GS are characterized by low human capital development, over-crowded and congested life, and have limited access to basic urban amenities. They draw livelihood earnings by engaging in a variety of low-pay employment jobs, casual work and wage labor, and diverse informal activities. Some of the informal activities by the poor people are regarded as ‘illegal’. The earnings such individuals and/or households make, in whatever ways, are very low to meet the basic needs of their members. Consequently, the inhabitants of the two communities are chronically food insecure. No regular safety net programs exist to build and protect the asset base of urban poor households.

This research focuses on identifying the causes and consequences of urban poverty. It aims at identifying the driving forces to urban poverty and the persisting food insecurity at household and community levels, and uncovering some of the survival strategies of the poor people.

The research queries that guided the investigation include:

- How are the accesses of urban poor people to different forms of assets/capitals?
- What are the major livelihood activities of the urban poor, and what are the constraints of the activities to allow households to meet their basic needs?
- How do the poor people perceive poverty and its causes?
- How do the poor households cope with lack of assets, unemployment and chronic food insecurity?

This piece of work would contribute to both knowledge and practice. In Ethiopia, urban studies that attempt to examine poverty and the resultant food insecurity at household level in a holistic way are found to be scarce. Hence, the output of the study adds to the pool of literature on urban issues and livelihoods. The insights that have been drawn from the investigation can be used in teaching and undertaking further research. With regard to practical endeavor of poverty reduction, the city policy makers and implementers (both GOs and NGOs) might be benefited from the outcome of such a research that drew first-hand data in direct consultation with the poorest segment of the population. Good urban poverty reduction strategies and policies should rely on better understanding of the realities of the poor. Reducing the number of urban poor will significantly contribute to attaining the Millennium Development Goal (MDG).

2. Concepts, theories and analytical framework

Under this section, attempt has been made to give the operational definitions for the key concepts of the study. A brief highlight of the theoretical underpinning through which the research questions are framed and contextualized, as well as the perspectives for analyzing the research output were provided. Key attributes and the way they are interrelated is depicted in the analytical framework (Figure 1).

2.1. Poverty

The definition of the concept of poverty has been refined, and the understanding of a variety of factors that explain it has expanded over time. The conventional definition of poverty makes distinction between ‘absolute poverty’ and ‘relative poverty’. ‘The former relates to those who do not have sufficient income to afford a minimum level of nutrition and basic needs, while the latter is concerned with position of the poor in relation to the rest of the society’ (Devas 2004: 16). According to the World Bank Development Report (2001), a household is regarded as poor as follows: when it is deprived of basic livelihood resources/assets for meeting basic needs (food, clothing, health, and shelter) by engaging in viable activities; when it has no capacity to withstand the shocks of various hazards and hence is highly vulnerable to life-threatening events; and when it has no power to make decisions on community-based issues, and has no say concerning the government actions. This is quite a comprehensive description of poverty at household level touching upon measurable and non-measurable component of household wellbeing. It also addresses the economic, social and political dimensions of poor wellbeing. In the context of urban setting, the poorest segment of a population is the most deprived of material wellbeing, the most vulnerable to diverse shocks, and the most marginalized and excluded. The poorest segment of a population are, therefore, the chronically food insecure and those who continually live under the threat of hunger.

2.2. Thoughts on poverty and some of its reduction strategies

Earlier social change theorists and development thinkers had viewed human miseries related to malnutrition and inadequacy of food as manifestations of backwardness and national poverty. They had, in fact, divergent opinions about what causes underdevelopment: some attributed it to internal factors, while others blamed external factors (Preston 1996, Martinussen 1997, Potter et al. 1999, Roberts & Hite 2000, Hodder 2000). Governments of developing regions with persistent chronic poverty and food crises, i.e. Africa, South and South East Asia, and Latin America, have based their development

strategies and policies on certain development theories during pre- and post-WWII. In fact, some development theories, particularly those that emerged in the post-WWII have largely blamed on poverty and underdevelopment as the prime cause of food shortage and hunger. Among the influential theories include modernization, radical Marxist (dependency), basic needs approach, empowerment approach and Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF).

Modernization theorists argue that the poorer nations of the world have remained poor because of certain internal predicaments, particularly lack of capital, backward technology and traditional social organization. Various writers view modernization differently, and equate it with different parameters: as economic growth (Rostow 1960), as change in people's mentality of the 'culture of poverty' (Lewis 2000), as the larger proportion of educated people and the overwhelming majority of people working in non-primary activities (Inkeles 2000), and the belief that an economic growth can bring about political stability (Huntington 2000). One common belief among most of these is that a nation can develop only if it transforms its economy through industrialization. Thus, most of the poorer nations in the South were advised to set development strategy policies that enable them to pass through Western European and North American ways of economic development.

Poverty reduction strategies that were based on a growth model in the 1950s and 1960s did not help much in overcoming the problem of poverty around the world, and the situations in the developing regions of the South became worse in the 1970s. The upward spiralling of the number of poor populations at the beginning of the 1970s testified well to the failure of the strategy. The failure of the strategies to alleviate poverty has been attributed to various factors. First, aggregate growth per capita income could be a reflection of significant growth for the high-income groups and at the same time a decline or stagnation for low income groups (Martinussen 1997). This means the growth model did not take into account income distribution among the members of a society. Second, modernization ignores the external causes of national poverty, and blames the poor themselves for reproducing poverty (Hodder 2000). Third, modernization is judged to have failed due both to its concentration on industrialization and to the neglect of agriculture. This is what termed as 'urban bias' development strategy (Lipton 1977). Fourth, the income-based model did not take into account other barriers to meeting human needs, such as lack of facilities, geographical isolation, racism, and corruption (Scott 2002).

Dependency theory is another development discourse that was formulated in response to the failure of modernization to address poverty and inequality. One thing that makes this different from other theories is the fact that it originated in underdeveloped regions at the initiative of social scientists and economists (such as Paul Baran, Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, and Dos Santos) from Latin America. Dependency theorists placed special emphasis on two important aspects: the problem of the exploitation of the poor nations by

their rich counterparts, and the extraction of surplus from the backward regions (Ghosh 2001).

Dependency theorists explain deep poverty and the resultant food insecurity and malnutrition facing the great majority of the people in South Asia, South East Asia, Latin America and Africa in relation to an exploitation of these poorer nations by their richer counterparts. However, these theories failed to identify appropriate remedies as they concentrated more on the divorce from capitalism and adopted the socialist ideology. Many countries of the world, notably those in Eastern Europe (former Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania), Russia, China, Mongolia, North Korea, Afghanistan, and Cuba from North, and also Angola, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Guyana, and Nicaragua from the South, have significantly experimented with socialism and centrally planned economies.

The 'basic needs approach' for dealing with poverty and inequality has emerged as an alternative to growth models. The International Labor Organization (ILO), who designated this approach as the central agenda for the World Employment Conference in 1976, has since taken the initiative in implementing it. The strategy deals with four major issues: i) the earning opportunities of the poor, ii) the public services that reach the poor, iii) the flow of goods and services to meet the needs of all members of a household, and iv) improvement in the participation of the poor in the way in which their needs are met (Streeten 1980). Thus, the approach seems to put people at the very core of the development strategies to increase aggregate demand level, increase supply of basic goods and services, and improve individuals' participation in the processes, through which their basic needs are actually identified and satisfied. This approach is criticized for the failure to deal with people decision making power and participation.

Empowerment as development discourse argues that poverty is not only a matter of economic and social deprivation but also poor people's lack of participation in matters that directly affect their own lives (Friedmann 1992, Lund 1993). Its central concern is how to improve the living conditions of the poor through social, political and psychological empowerment. This development approach, which is designed for poverty alleviation was initiated at 'invisible colleges' in the 1980s and has been well accepted recently by many mainstream institutions, such as the World Bank, UNDP, OECD, FAO, and IFAD. The range of issues that the empowerment approach covers has expanded considerably over time. Likewise, many international and local NGOs are operating in the poor regions of the world within the framework of empowerment. Some have brought about visible changes to the lives of the poor, while the others have not. Unlike other structural development theories, which were mainly economics in their approach, empowerment is human-centred and participatory. The bottom-up approach is central to empowerment.

Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) has become a popular framework, and being employed to holistically understand the livelihoods of poor people in both rural and

urban settings. The framework in the rural context was initially designed and synthesized by experts of DFID (Carney 1998, Pretty 1998), IDS (Scoones 1998) and the School of Development Studies in the University of East Anglia (Ellis 1998, 2000). Many studies were then carried out on the basis of SLF in several countries such as Mali, Bangladesh, India, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Uganda. The applications of SLF in the context of urban setting were again initiated by DFID (Rakodi and Lloyd-John 2002) and Care International under its various projects (Sanderson and Hedley 2002). The poverty and urban governance studies in ten cities of developing regions (Africa, South Asia and Latin America) also relied on SLF (Devas et al. 2004). A particular strength of SLF is the fact it recognizes human agency and examines the way in which households strategy are built (Hulme and Shepherd 2003). SLF is favored as a framework to understand the realities of poor due to a host of its salient features: holistic, people-centered, dynamic, micro-macro linkage and empowering and participatory (see sub-section 2.4).

2.3. Food security

The concept of food security was coined following the First World Food Conference in 1974 in Rome. Ever since, its definition has considerably changed which is recently cited to have reached more than 250. The recently coined and the relatively comprehensive one is put as: ‘All people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active, and healthy life’ (FAO 1996).

The core issues appear to be:

Sufficiency of food – the calories needed for an active and healthy life.

Access to food – refers to entitlement to produce, purchase, or exchange food or receives it as a gift.

Security – entails the balance between vulnerability, risk and insurance. Vulnerability by itself has two important dimensions: exposure to external shock, and the resultant stress, and risks; and lack of means to cope with crisis without damaging loss.

Time – refers to temporal situation of food insecurity whereby food insecurity can be chronic/permanent (always living under food shortage crisis), whereas transitory/seasonal (encountering food deficiency during certain season of a year).

There are, in fact, other issues which are equally important while analysing food security at various scales. Issues related to intra-household factor, the balance between food security and nutritional security, the interrelations between food and livelihood securities, the balance between sensitivity and resilience, people’s own perception and cultural values, efficiency and cost effectiveness, the right to food, and state obligations to meet citizens’ food security have become the important components to be looked at for having deeper

understanding on food security situations (Sen 1981, de Waal 1989, Maxwell & Frankenberger 1992, Devereux 1993, Blaikie et al. 1994, Davies 1996, Maxwell 1996).

The main concerns and subsequent theoretical shifts on food security can broadly be grouped into three (Maxwell & Frankenberger 1992, Maxwell 1996). One is the shift from ‘global and national’ concern to ‘household and individual’, which informs about the changes in scale of data aggregation and approach to assess the level of food security. Emphasis on food availability, which relates population size with the amount of food available from production, was highly criticized when the idea of food entitlement was advanced by Amartya Sen (1981). Sen proposed that food security is a matter of who has access to food, which means who can acquire food from own production or purchase on the market rather than availability of sufficient food in a region or a country. He substantiated his arguments on the basis of evidences from many famine catastrophes in Africa and Asia.

The second shift has been from ‘food first’ to ‘livelihood approach’ which entails the changes in scope and priority at household level, whether to emphasize on meeting immediate and current food consumption needs or sustaining household livelihood. The implication for method in this regard is clear since looking at the situation of household in a wider and holistic perspective has become so important. Hence, there is a need to look at household asset situations, local context, vulnerability and institutional setup, as well as how these diverse issues are interlinked. Understanding the complex situation of livelihood calls for food security research to be underpinned on ‘mixed research method’ design.

The third shift is from objective measurements to peoples’ perceptions suggesting a clear shift in types of data necessary to addressing the complex linkages among diverse factors affecting food and livelihood securities. The emphasis here is that in addition to quantitative data, there are other issues that need special attention such as local culture, food preferences (the issue of right and freedom of choice), and food safety. Insights about these characteristics can be found through qualitative investigations.

2.4. Livelihood framework for understanding urban poverty and food insecurity

Poverty and food insecurity are highly interwoven issues that reciprocally reinforce each other. Poverty is a driving force for household food insecurity, and food insecurity, in turn, impoverishes a household. As both poverty and food insecurity are multifaceted and complex phenomena, their thorough understanding should be possible by applying a framework involving all relevant explanatory variables that affect them. Adopting the ‘Sustainable Livelihood Framework’ can capture this. Livelihood framework allows exploring how under a given context and access to resources, government policies and various local institutions affect people’s livelihood activities and the survival strategies they follow.

The framework involves five interrelated components: capital assets, existing context, mediating processes, activities and strategies, and livelihood outcomes and indicators. Livelihood assets can be grouped under five types of capitals: natural capital (land and water), social capital (networks, membership of groups, relationships of trust, access to wider institutions of society), human capital (skills, knowledge, good health and ability to work), physical capital (production equipment, transport, shelter, water supply, energy and communication), and financial capital (savings, supplies of credit and regular remittances or pensions) (Scoones 1998, Ellis 2001, Rakodi and Lloyd-Jones 2002). In the endeavour to understand and construct the livelihoods and food security situations among urban poor households, it is important to look at how each household gets access to the diverse assets. Besides, there is also a need to examine the extent to which diverse capitals can be substitutable to one another in order to sustain the livelihoods of the poor. Human and social capitals are so critical for the urban destitute in making their subsistence and in order to access other forms of capitals/assets the poor should rely upon own labour.

The existing context refers to the trends, shocks and local cultural practices affecting livelihoods in different ways (Ellis 2000). Writers on urban livelihoods (Rakodi 2002, Meikle 2002) broadly categorize context into environmental, social, economic and political. It has been widely argued that the urban poor are continuously vulnerable to both natural shocks (flooding, freezing and blazing) and human related risks (unemployment, violence, lay off, rape, eviction and HIV/AIDS). In response, they developed the strategies allowing them to sustain in such 'difficult' and 'harsh' conditions. Participatory field studies among the poor may give an opportunity to deeply understand and document vulnerability at household level.

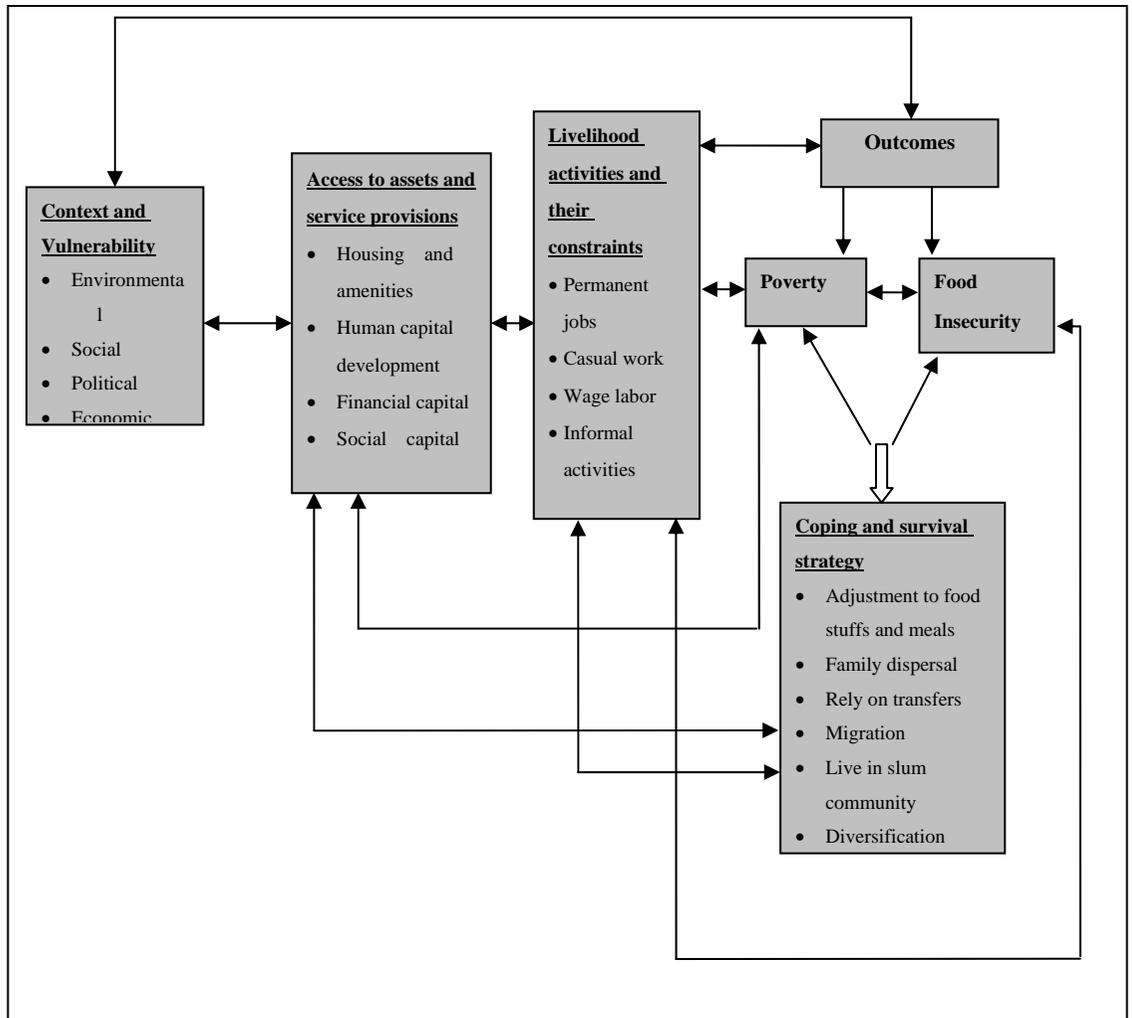
Mediating processes entail actions by organizations and institutions, which define peoples' livelihood options. These processes can enhance or constrain people's livelihood activities and strategies. The state-society interaction in the light of poverty and its reduction can be examined through the policies of the Ethiopian Federal Government and the Addis Ababa City Administration. Apart from this, there are many informal institutions at community level in which the local people actively participate in.

Activities and strategies are the other important dimensions of livelihood framework. Strategies consist of activities that generate the means of individual/household survival (Ellis 2000). Activities that household engage in for their survival depend on asset to various assets mediated by social factors, exogenous trends and shocks. As much as they can, the urban poor attempt to diversify the sources of income –as different members work in different types of works. It is a common practice among the poor to work in duties that formal institutions and organizations regard them as 'illegal'. In the current study, attempt has been made to identify the major livelihood activities of the people at the study sites, and examining the reasons why activities could not generate sufficient income that to meet the basic needs of households. The livelihood strategies were seen in the light of short-term

responses to crisis and the long-term survival strategies that are exercised by the poor people.

Depending on how the four components of livelihood described above interact, livelihood outcomes can be desirable or undesirable. Impoverishments and persisting food insecurity are among the undesirable livelihood outcomes (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Analytical framework of the research.



Source: author's construction.

3. Setting of the study communities and methods

3.1. Location

Addis Ababa city having a total area of about 540 km² lies roughly at the center of Ethiopia. Despite some contrasts, the average altitude of A.A is 2400 m.a.s.l. The city has a history of more than 120 years, being established by the Emperor Menelik II in 1887 and it served as a capital of the country ever since. According to the current administrative structure, A.A city¹ has 10 Sub-city administrations and 99 *kebele* administrations (<http://www.addisababacity.gov.et>).

The two case study sites have been selected from two sub-cities of A.A. Berta Gibi is located in *Kebele* 06/07/08² of the Nifassilk-Lafto Sub-city whereas Gemachu Safar lies in *Kebele* 02/03 of the Lidata Sub-City (Figure 2). The study *kebeles* consist of many pockets with better off people and poor wellbeing either interspersed or some how having distinct areas. Eventually, place and locality names are more pronounced references of identifications than the mere name or number of the *kebeles* among the city inhabitants. The two case study sites considered for the current research are clearly distinct from the surrounding communities and are known to be the inhabitants of people with the very low standard of living. Since the main intent of the study was to uncover and understand some realities of the urban poor, I purposively picked the two sites from among many communities of the two *kebeles* under considerations. Apart from their locations in different sub-cities of the city, the sites have their own historical, economic and social contexts with tremendous bearing on the livelihoods of the people in the communities.

3.2. Historical sketch and evolutions of the case study communities

3.2.1. Berta Gibi (BG)

Historically, Berta Gibi (BG) evolved over many decades from a space of one household compound to the inhabitant of 33 other households, who were found to live under over-crowded situations by the time of fieldwork for this study. The land was originally belonged to a land-lord by the name Berta Seid, who, in addition to own family residence, constructed a few small and sub-standard shelters and rented to some households. According to informants, the surrounding area was almost vacant and there were few landowners in the neighboring areas. With the coming of the Derg into power in 1974, it nationalized urban

¹ The relationship of different scales is that the city is divided into sub-cities and each sub-city comprises several *kebeles*.

² For administrative and other conveniences two or more *kebeles* have been merged in different sub-cities of A.A.

land and extra houses through proclamation No. 47, 1975 and eventually converted them into state property. As a result, the most part of his land and his extra houses were transferred into state property. The renters also started dealing with the *kebele* since the mandate of administering such small houses was given to the *kebele* administration. The community members who have gone through this process witnessed that the house rent rate for many households was reduced following the nationalization while no change was made to the others.

The transformation of tenure system from private to public has brought about certain changes to the BG. First, with the pretext of public ownership of land and the socialist motto of ‘equal access to public property by each individual’, the community in a few years time exhibited the construction of quite a large number of small houses. Besides, many rural-urban migrants and other homeless individuals being attracted by relatives or other friends overcrowded the community by building more sub-standard houses. All these contributed to the considerable increase in the population of the site. Second, nobody concerned about the plan and design of the houses that were newly built, which seems to stem from various factors (fear of legal measures, lack of knowhow, time constraint, etc) and no spaces were left for putting in place several additional facilities such as path-way between houses, spaces for kitchen, toilet, etc. As will be discussed in detail later, some of the current serious problems facing the inhabitants of BG are explained by the failures to take into account those pertinent issues. Individuals who made new houses in the community used to inform the *kebele* administrators whenever they wanted to legalize it, and accordingly intended to pay for house rents after they already stayed in the house for a long. Nobody claims the dwelling unit as private property although construction costs are fully covered by new house builders. It was possible to witness a new house under construction by the time of this study in such already crowded community.

3.2.2. Gemechu Safar (GS)

The land currently occupied by the Gemechu Safar (GS) belonged to two landlords: Ras³ Mesfin and Fitawari⁴ Shibashi. Key informant who has lived in GS since 1960 revealed that by then most land was covered by vegetation, mostly natural and, to certain extent, by eucalyptus trees. In addition, there were scattered houses owned by the tenants⁵ to the landlords. The tenants used to pay small tribute to the landlords every year and, in fact, their main task was to safeguard the land and other resources on it. The establishment of few factories such as, Nicola oil and soap factory, chip wood factory, and Augusta shirt factory,

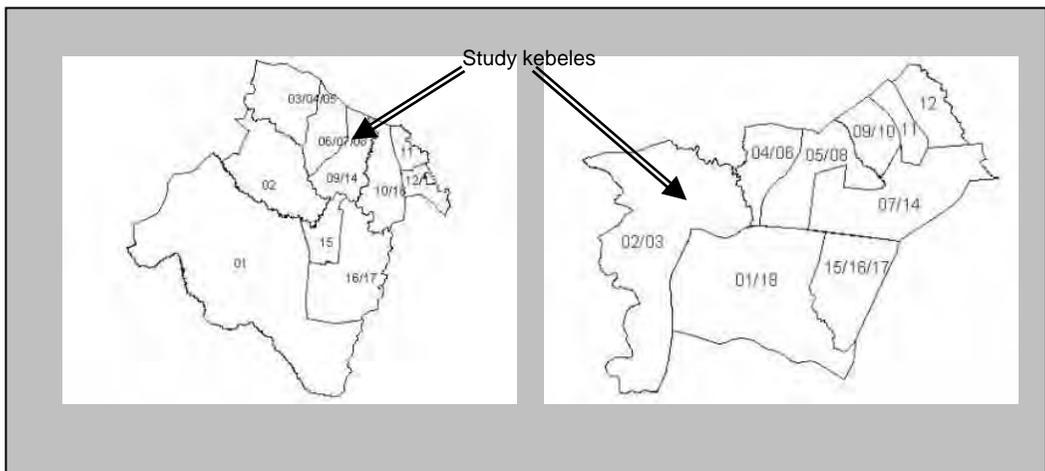
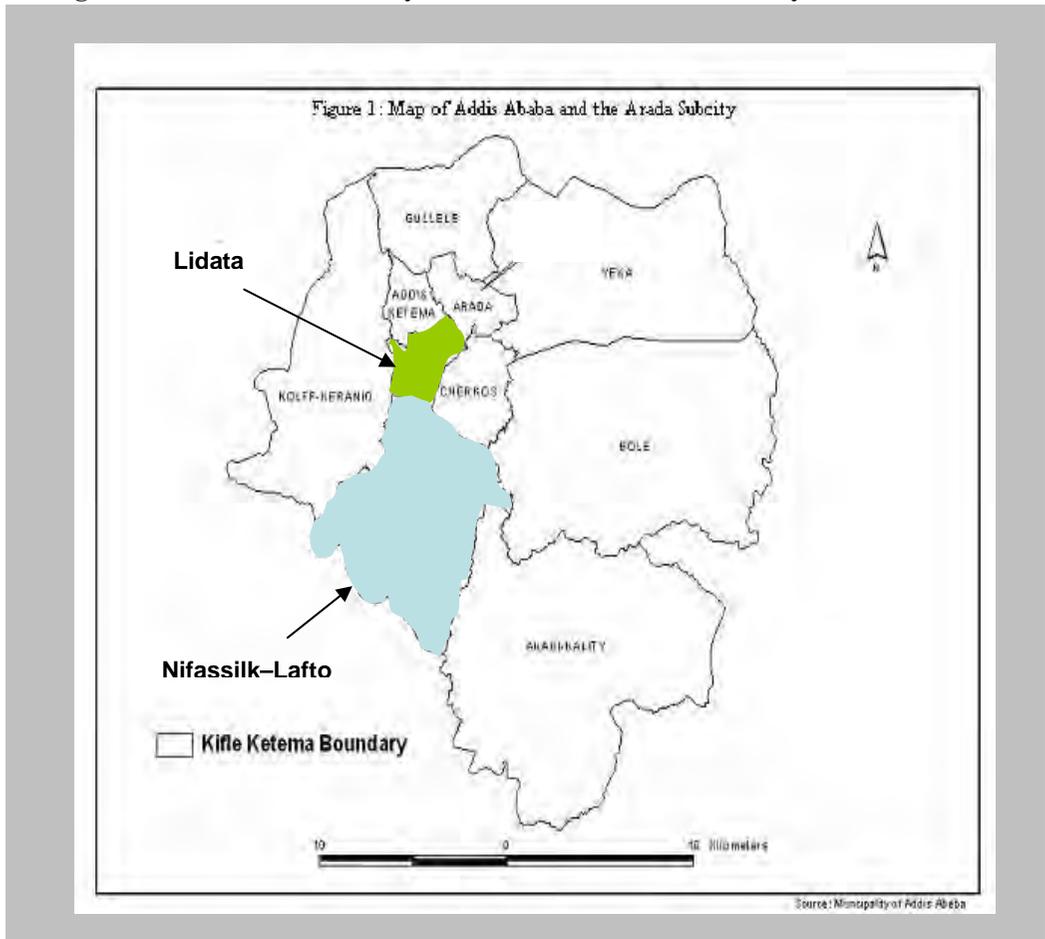
³ The highest title that was conferred upon a person during the Imperial period.

⁴ A title conferred upon individuals by the crown. It was below Dejazmach.

⁵ Gemachu, a person the community is named after, was one of the tenants who used to live in the area. He was very popular among the inhabitants in the area and in some official places like police stations and courts. Hence he was a good reference to the area.

as well as the launching of stone quarry in the nearby area attracted many industry laborers, who with the permission of the landlords and tenants started to make small shelters at GS for which, in a way, they had to pay nominal rents. At the same time, some tenants made extensions of their houses for the purpose of renting them out. All these contributed for the expansion of settlements at the expense of removing extensive vegetation cover. The nationalization of urban land and extra houses converted most of the houses in the area into the state property. Those households who used to pay rent to the tenants and the landlords started to deal with the *kebele* administrations. The tenants and their extended family occupied houses as own property. The development then was that both those who rented from *kebele*, and those who lived in own house started the making, remaking and expansions of houses, which resulted in the current unplanned and unstructured pattern of settlement in the area. So, it is very difficult to distinguish between planned and the unplanned houses in the Gemachu Safer.

Figure 2: Location of the study *kebeles* in the Addis Ababa City Administration.



Nifassilk –Lafto Sub-city

Lidata Sub-city

3.3. Methods

This work is purely qualitative study that relied on the knowledge, perspectives and views of the community inhabitants regarding poverty, and the processes and events behind impoverishments for the households living at the two case studies sites. The fieldwork was carried out in May and June 2008. The specific methods used for generating the first-hand information included key informant interview with the elderly, in-depth interview of case study heads of households, and focus group discussion with men and women groups. Repeated observations of the sites under different situations, and photographing of some artifacts are also the approaches to complement the other data. In what follows, I shall describe the methods in more detailed manner in view of telling the readers about what have actually been done in the field as research process.

3.3.1. Key Informant Interview (KII)

The well known and knowledgeable elderly, who lived in the communities for several decades⁶ were identified, informally talked with and interviewed. Those elderly were used not only as informants but also as entry points into the communities. They are well versed with the history of the area, situations of infrastructure, and the socio-economic characteristics of the people and the functioning of various formal and informal institutions in their respective communities. The checklist for the interview of elderly covers change and continuity of the environment, settlement and population, perceived changes in the access to various assets, basic economic and social amenities, trends in the livelihood of the community inhabitants, poverty and food security situations, peoples' coping and survival strategies, and state-people interaction and governance. The community elderly and other inhabitants were approached and used as facilitators for the research rather than relying on the formal *kebele* administrators for various reasons. Firstly, my time of fieldwork coincided with the transition period when power transfer from earlier administrators to the newly elected administrators was on going and hence I had the feeling that some delays at various levels can adversely affect my research schedule. Secondly, the central theme of the research was somehow sensitive (as it was about wellbeing and livelihood in the impoverished communities) and coming down through the *kebele* administrators can scare many individuals who have the fear that government may displace them in order to put planned structure in a place. Thirdly, it is unfortunate that the study was conducted when food and other consumables prices had already increased very much. Every body wants to exaggerate the problem so much in view of drawing the attentions of the government and other concerned bodies.

⁶ The elderly informant from Gemechu Safar lived in the area for 48 years, while an elderly from Berta Gibi has been there for 35 years.

3.3.2. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Two separate FGDs, one with men group and the other with women group were held at BG and GS. The participants were drawn from different age groups, different ethnic groups, individuals with different occupational characteristics (formal or informal) and also varied in terms of the durations of stay in the specific community. The discussion guide focused on access and utilizations of various forms of capitals, changes and continuities in the wellbeing status and living standards of households, food insecurity problem and how people cope with the constraint and their survival strategies. The issues of local governance and state –society interactions, government urban policies were also the points of discussions.

3.3.3. In-depth interview with case study households

An attempt was made to have deeper understanding of the livelihood situations of households. This exercise took place after I had a better insight regarding the characteristics of the community as a whole. Two households one headed by man the other by woman, were considered for in-depth interview from each site. Since the interview was a bit longer, schedules were set beforehand with the head in such a way that the interview should not affect other commitments of the family, including jobs. The interview covers quite a large number of issues such as household demography and life history, access to and ownership of livelihood capitals (financial, social, physical and human), government and NGO interventions and livelihood outcomes in the light of wellbeing status and food security. Interview with households took many hours, and since it has carried out at the home of the informants I had the chances to observe the housing situations, as well as other tangible assets that the households possess. The earlier interview with elderly and FGD sessions allowed me to cross-check and control exaggerations related to some information. The other issue that deserved caution and somehow control was the attempts from the informant side to relate every livelihood constraint and challenge with the food price rise in the city in the year the study was conducted. Since I have been the part of the circumstances that happened I had to make an effort to convince my participants not to use the ‘temporary crisis’ as point of reference and generalizations.

3.3.4. Observations and artifacts

Walking around the two communities and making informal conversations with the people as well as observations allowed me to generate various data related to housing, roads, sewerage system and waste management, and multiples of informal activities. Observations were helpful to corroborate the perceptions of informants under both individual interviews and group discussions. Some observations were documented through making pictures, a few of which are used as the means of illustrations in this paper (Figure 3 – 10).

3.3.5. Data analysis

With the consensus of the informants, tape-recording was applied while generating data in the field. All the tape-recorded individual interviews and group discussions were carefully transcribed and properly documented. Some transcriptions constitute verbatim while others have been rephrased in the light of context. The notes served as data base for grouping, classifying, analyzing and interpreting the observations in light of the objective of the study. As far as the data presentation is concerned, empirical data were integrated with the analysis. Some of them were also depicted as direct quotes and short boxes in view of illustrating findings and substantiating arguments.

3.3.6. Profiles of the informants

All in all, about 23 individuals (household heads), 12 from BG and 11 from GS (with a male and female proportion of 52% and 48% respectively) have directly involved in the study as informants in either in individual interview or group discussion. In fact, many informal talks were carried out with the individuals whom I met while they have been undertaking their usual duties in each community.

4. Contexts and vulnerability situations at BG and GS

The livelihoods of the poor are determined predominantly by the context in which they live and the constraints and opportunities this location presents (Meikle 2002:37). Context involves the environmental, social, economic and political milieus that operate in a given locality and beyond (regional, national or global) but having bearing on local issues. Context affects access to and the utilization of assets and services, livelihood activities and strategies to be taken by households. Sudden changes in the components of context: environment, social, economic and political aspects can make households vulnerable to the shocks and long term stresses. Writers on livelihood framework (Carney 1998, Ellis 2000, Rakodi 2002, Meikle 2002) underline that context and vulnerability are the two inseparable concepts to understand households' wellbeing and food security situations. Shocks can drastically change contexts, and resilient contexts can withstand shocks of any magnitude. In what follows, I will briefly present the environmental, social, economic and political contexts of BG and GS.

4.1. The environmental context

We can look at environmental context in relation to two pertinent dimensions. One is about physical disposition of a locality in relation to access to basic urban amenities such as housing, road, water, education, energy source, etc. What a place depicts in terms of physical structure is about its environment. The other dimension would be in relation to the sanitation of the locality, which is explained by some of the infrastructure indicated above. The drainage and sewerage systems in place and households access to water, toilets and waste management practices are among the factors that determine the sanitations of a locality. The later issue focuses on the health implication of the environment, whether it is really a healthy environment to live in, or otherwise.

Looking the situation at the BG and GS through the two lenses clearly reveals the disastrous pictures. Community level public amenities and services are very poor, and households have limited financial capacity to either install private amenities or to directly contribute for the improvements of the existing ones. Poor drainage system, poor waste management and lack of access to appropriate latrines are among the factors that debilitated the sanitations of the case communities. The sizes of the houses are so small and hence households live under crowded situations. The polluted environment coupled with congested slums at the two case study communities made the people vulnerable to various types of communicable diseases (Figure 3 & 5).

Figure 3: Corridors between the dwelling units serve many purposes: as store, washing places, drying up clothes and food stuffs, etc. (BG).



4.2. The social context

Basically, big cities like A.A host individuals with considerably diverse place of origin, as a result of which many attributes like sex, ethnicity, religion, occupation and behaviors of people are expected to vary significantly. The first generation (parents) migrated to the city from various regions, they are also affiliated to different religions (Christian and Muslim), and work in quite different situations. However, by virtue of living in the same locality the people knew each other well. Trust, reciprocity, respect, love, and having memberships in common informal associations such as *ider* (burial association) among the community members clearly contributed for strong social tie and eventually for the development and sustenance of social capital. In communities with limited access to various facilities and limited capacity to pay for some of them at single household level compel people to share many facilities with their neighbors. People at both BG and GS share water from same tap, energy (electricity meter reader), kitchen and latrine (see section 5.1). This would suggest that poverty can be one of the factors for the flourishing and sustainability of social capital. At the same time, they are crucial assets for the survival of the poor. Social capital that manifests itself in the form of reciprocity, support to one another and good understanding in sharing available facilities and resources are clearly evident in the communities under question.

4.3. The economic context

Many of the people who settled at both BG and GS are migrants who originated mostly from rural areas of the country. The motives behind their coming to A.A were to escape the hardship and poor rural life and to get employment opportunities in A.A. city. Since they were either illiterate or with low educational background when they arrived, getting employment in better pay jobs was not possible for most of them. Hence, some of them employed in low pay jobs like guard, factory wage laborers and as an army members. Similarly, many individuals have been working in various informal activities. Working under both formal and informal circumstances did not allow many inhabitants of the study sites to adequately meet their family's basic needs nor able to save for investment on housing, children's education, etc. Shortage of financial capitals and poorly developed human capitals are among the factors that kept many households in the poverty trap over many decades.

The current employment situations of households have not shown dynamic changes since the children who were not successful in their studies are still trying to do what the parents have been practicing. Unemployment and underemployment are the serious problems of many households. The pension fees that the retired parents earn by no means can cover household subsistence. Aged people who attempt to work in informal casual labors could not bring in meaningful earnings. This clearly suggests the vulnerability of households to various economic shocks. Households at both study sites are affected by seasonal or annual price fluctuations. For instance, the inhabitants are hit hard by the shocks of price increase on food and other consumable in 2007 and 2008. Income from permanent jobs could not buy food for households. Those who work in informal activities as casual construction workers, those who engage in local drink selling and petty traders in the local *gullit* have been affected very much (see section 6).

4.4. The political context

Unlike many slum areas that have appeared in the recent years, GS and BG have been there for over three decades. Hence, the inhabitants had the chance to experience the administrations and policies of three different regimes in Ethiopia: The Imperial period (1930 -1974), the Derg regime (1974 -1991) and the current EPRDF-led government (since 1991). This means the state-community interactions evolved over decades. Each government had its own urban policy and distinct way of looking at the poor people and the areas they occupy in the city. Accordingly, it seems that the city's masters plan still does not recognize the very complicated structures of dwellings that exist in the two communities under question. The main concern focuses on informality of the settlement and the informal activities that supports the overwhelming majority of the poor. The inhabitants on their part

express their discontent of exclusion, that is, they are among the forgotten segment of the city dwellers as no attempts were made to improve the physical structures of the sites as well as the poor wellbeing of the population. As a result, the inhabitants are suspicious about what could happen to them and somehow reluctant to participate in many political activities. They do not strictly follow what is going on, they hardly participate in elections and lack interest to be either representative of own community or to identify appropriate delegate who work on behalf of the community in the *kebele* administration.

The current government on its part claims that urban development is one of the core components of its five year development strategy – A Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) between 2005/6 and 2009/10. The government also admits that the former plan did give less attention to urban development. PASDEP aims to focus on four important issues of urban development: support for Micro and Small Enterprises (MSE), integrated housing development, improved access to land infrastructure and services, and promoting urban-rural and urban-urban linkages (MoFED 2006). The Addis Ababa City Administration with its two lower tiers (the sub-cities and *kebeles*), and its various bureaus is given the mandate of working in line with the four components put forward in the strategy document. This study attempted to look at how are the situations of accesses and provisions of various urban amenities around the case study communities and the perceptions of community inhabitants towards the services.

5. Access to assets and urban amenities

Livelihood assets constitute ‘a stock of capital ... stuff that augments incomes but is not totally consumed in use’ (Narayan and Prichet 1999 cited in Rakodi 2002: 10). As shown under the section on literature review, the mainstream SLF framework proponents group livelihood assets into five: human, social and political, physical, financial and natural capital. The assets can be stored, accumulated, exchanged or depleted and put to work to generate a flow of income or other benefits (Rakodi 2002). The relative importance of different forms of capital varies by the geographical setting. As for instance, natural capital which consists of land and land related resources – soil, vegetation, water, etc are the decisive factors to make livelihoods among rural populations. However, what become very crucial among the urban people are the human, financial and physical capitals. Another way of drawing distinction between the two settings is the way to get access to assets. Urban dwellers have to pay in terms of money in order to get access to various physical capitals e.g. water, energy, etc. Whereas in rural areas people may have the entitlement to directly extract from nature without paying for them. There is also difference in terms of access to human capital development services. Basically, urban dwellers have better physical access to educational and health facilities than their rural counterparts. In this study, attempt was made to assess households’ access to physical, human, financial and social capitals. The issue of natural capital was not totally disregarded, rather it is indirectly examined in connection with land tenure and housing situations of households at the communities studied.

5.1. House and housing related facilities

Housing and related amenities are probably among the physical capital that can depict the living standards of urban dwellers. Access and rights to land affect the type and quality of housing. As of February 1975, urban land in Ethiopia belongs to the government and what one can claim as ownership would be the property on land – house and other physical asset installed by the one who has a use right to land.

Slight difference was observed regarding the housing tenure system at the two case study communities. All households in BG are the house renters who live in dwelling units belonging to the state. They pay rent to the *kebele* administration on monthly basis. The maximum rent per house is 5 ETB. The houses are the *chika-bet* (sub-standard shelters with walls made of wood and mad), and roofs covered with corrugated iron sheets. The sizes are very narrow most of them are without compartments. The dwellings are mostly attached and walls are shared with neighbors. Not only the inside part of the houses are in a very bad conditions but also the surrounding areas are not neat and hygienic. The paths between the blocks are very narrow, unsanitary and muddy. In addition, each household has no separate kitchen as a cooking place. As a result, the 33 households rely on single kitchen that they are

Figure 4: Relying on single kitchen (left) and one pit latrine (right) for 33 households has much bearing on health, time and moral setup of the inhabitants (BG).



compelled to use in turn. The same is true for latrine, water tap and electric meter reader. The participants in the FGD of the men and women groups at BG indicated that the single latrine they share is very old built about 25 years ago and has a risk of collapse; located at inconvenient place in the village and practically impossible to clean it whenever it gets full; the source of conflict between the users and other neighbors next to BG due to frequent overflow and leaking; incurring unnecessary expenses for futile attempts to control the problem of leakages (Figure 4).

No proper drainage systems exist for the removal of liquid wastes from the community. The inhabitant should also walk long to drop solid wastes at the collection sites. Just by looking at the deprivations of those facilities one can easily judge regarding the poor standard of living among the inhabitants in BG.

Four types of house tenure systems were identified in GS: private house owners, renters from the government, renters from private house owners, and renters from *kebele* house holders (renters). According to the informants, more than 1000 households exist in GS locality. The availability of basic services also varies according to tenure system. Those who own private house have relatively better access to facilities like kitchen, water and electricity. Nonetheless, the proportion of such households is very small, and households who rent the house from owners are correspondingly negligible in terms of number. The overwhelming majority of the households are those who are sheltered in the *kebele* houses. Such households live in very small shelters that lack proper compartments, separate kitchen, toilet, water and electric meter reader (Figure 5). It is, therefore, common to rely on shared kitchens, latrines and use water from public fountain. Public water fountains are situated at three sites around GS, one of them was not functional during field work. It is very sad that

Figure 5: Overview of typical houses in GS – A roof being covered with plastics and fixed with stones or wood (right), and sub-standard houses in row (left).



many households in the village have no access even to common latrines. The existing option for such households is to use open fields or using plastic bags to be thrown into drainage canals. Similar findings were documented for some cities in developing regions, for instance, Ahmedabad and Bangalore (in India) and Cebu (Philippines) indicating that a significant proportion of population lack sanitation facilities and defecate in the open or into plastic bags (Nunan and Davas 2004:166). The community also lacks proper drainage and sewerage canals that are intended for the disposal of liquid wastes. I personally observed that sorts of open canals, which were made along the right and left sides of gravel roads that means just between individuals dwelling units and the road in front of them. This basically was aimed at pouring liquid wastes by every household in the community. One can clearly observe drainages being blocked because of misuse by disposing solid wastes into them. Serious health risks due to the unsanitary and polluted environment are obvious under such circumstances.

Access to safe drinking water is one issue of concern at the study communities. All households at BG rely on single public piped tap. The community members themselves are in charge of managing and settling the bills for it. The big complaint here was the unavailability of water on regular basis and the long queue by the time water comes. Waiting for and fetching water consumes considerable time of the villagers. Sharing bills is another problem because of unequal utilization of water among households.

In GS the sources of water are both private and public taps. Purchasing water from private taps became an expensive for the great majority of the households. The big problem of water supply has been the intermittent availability in the pipe. It mostly does not come when the water tap managers are around. An informant at the GS community narrates the problem as:

The public fountains caretakers come and then go because water normally comes in the evening hours when they are not expected to be there. We have to suffer carrying our buckets, queuing in front of a few individuals house in the midnight or after. It is even a lucky household that can have access to buy water from private taps in the neighboring areas.

Eventually, individuals are not allowed to sell water from the taps they installed for the purpose of own consumption. Many inhabitants from GS rely on Akaki River for cloth washing, swimming and bathing purposes. Recent research in ten cities of developing regions revealed about similar practices (Grant 2004). The poor have no access or cannot afford for piped tap water. The health risk of this source is quite considerable as rivers in the city are mostly the destinations of drainage and sewerage canals, and factories wastes.

Access to transport services was another issue of infrastructural capital situations examined in this study. The informant at both sites synonymously expressed that most inhabitants cannot afford taxi transportation. The options available are walking for short distances and taking public transport buses. It is unfortunate that for more than two years now the BG people were not able to take their usual 'Bus Number 2' that used to pass through the community. The reconstruction of the road for upgrading purpose temporarily deterred the public transport. Similar complaint was forwarded by the GS people. Due to the barrier of the main ring road, the people have to walk a longer distances to reach at bus stations. One has to walk up to either Ketena Hullet (about 2 kms from the community) or Total bus station (about 3 kms from the site). What does this indicate? Do urban developments plans take into account the situations and interests of poor people? This is an issue that deserves other investigation.

Access to energy for cooking and as sources of light makes one component of physical capital. Sources of energy at the poor communities are different from middle or well off areas mostly not in terms of types. The difference is with regard to magnitude of use from different sources, and what form of energy for which activities. Electricity, kerosene and firewood are used in A.A everywhere. Electricity is used exclusively for lighting and for radios or TV purposes at both sites. Quite a large number of households share electric meter reader. Kerosene utilization is limited to few minor cooking activities at home. Bread and *injera* (pan cake) backings must rely on firewood in its different forms, wood, *kital* (leaves of tree), and *tirag* (litter under trees) among GS. The price for such traditional sources of energy increased to the level that most households cannot afford.

A unique source of energy was observed among the BG inhabitants. They rely on straw of coffee that they access from Kera (the main slaughterhouse in the city) that is located in the same *kebele*. The way coffee straw is transported to A.A and for what purpose is amazing. Straws are used as shock absorber by putting under the legs of livestock while transporting them from regions to A.A by tracks. Then it has to be disposed. According to the informants, they shifted to this option of fuel due to the fact that they are unable to pay

Figure 6: Coffee straw must be dried up under the sunlight before using it as source of energy for *injera* backing (BG).



for normal firewood. Straw that a household buys for 5 ETB can be used for about 15 days (Figure 6).

5.2. Access to human capital development services

Education (formal or informal) and health services are the important input to improve the status of human capital. Education enhances knowledge and skills, which are crucial for getting access to better job opportunity and thereby generate modest income. Good physical and mental health status are needed for production, reproduction, learning, participation and citizenship (Harpham & Grant 2002:165). Healthy individuals can actively engage in production activities and contribute to sustainability of own households livelihood. In view of this, information was solicited regarding the physical access, performances and constraints of utilizing education and health services among the people of BG and GS.

5.2.1. Health

Like in other communities in the city, people at BG and GS have access to free medical services at the nearby public health stations. Higher 23 Health Station is where the BG people visit for treatment. Likewise, the inhabitants of GS get health service from *Wereda* 24 Health Station. In principle, the payment the users have to make is quite nominal,

2 ETB, for registration alone. For serious health problems people can get referral to bigger public hospitals, which are also extremely crowded. The common diseases affecting people at both communities are generally induced by poverty because they are infectious diseases and malnutrition. This includes asthma, typhoid, typhus, diarrhea, eye diseases, common cold, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS⁷, etc.

However, the individual and group discussions revealed a problem of obtaining appropriate treatment whenever needed. They attributed it to many factors including:

- Physical distance between the community and health station is a big barrier for the BG people.
- Since the services are meant for the people who have limited capacity to pay at private health services, the health stations are extremely overcrowded with patients. The numbers of people who seek service and the capacities the health stations have in terms of manpower and equipments seem incompatible. This is an issue what I personally witnessed.
- For free treatment refers to be visited by health personnel (a nurse or doctor) and to get some medicines from the drug store of health station. However, for most prescribed medicines you are advised to buy from other sources either private or public pharmacies. Here is where a big problem lies for many households who cannot afford to pay for. An informant at BG narrates his experience: ‘My son was 9 years old by the time he got sick and I had taken him to health station. After examination the doctor prescribed to him very expensive medicine, which I found it to be beyond my financial capacity. The option I had was just to take him home and fortunately he cured and survived without taking the medicine’.
- In order to get free treatment at public hospital you need to own certificate from your residence *kebele* which proves that you are poor and cannot afford health expenditure, which is very time-consuming⁸ and is impossible to produce especially for emergency purposes.

The environments of both communities are highly polluted and contaminated as a result of which large number of people is getting ill quite often. This clearly tells that the health problem lies not only on constraints related to the curative services at health institutions but also the failures on the preventive sides as well. Informal health and hygiene education and orientation by the concerned bodies such as the *kebele* health committee and the health stations are expected to play considerable roles in this regard. Inadequate food intake in both quantity and quality also adversely affect the health of people with poor wellbeing. Malnutrition and undernutrition are the clear evidences for food shortage.

⁷ Because of stigma people are not transparent about it. But it is quite obvious that some of the desperate women from the communities work as prostitutes in order to make survival by going to other localities.

⁸ One has to be a registered *kebele* member owning ID card and has to go to *kebele* with three witnesses who can confirm about your wellbeing status.

5.2.2. Education

Education is free and public schools are open for every citizen in A.A, and the country at large. Many improvements have been made with regard to access because many public schools were opened near the communities under study. Of course, distance was and is not a constraint for the BG people, and it has improved for GS inhabitants as well. There are, however, other factors which contributed to poor performance in studies and drop out of children from schools at both sites. Like anybody, children are initially placed at schools. But it was difficult for the informants to witness children who persistently proceeded with their education at least up to end of secondary schools. It has been a big surprise and exciting for the BG inhabitants in history of the community to see 3 children who have recently joined university training. Evidence at GS has shown that nobody went beyond training at Teachers Training Institute (TTI) - 10 plus three – except one individual⁹ who recently graduated. Among the many factors that caused poor performance and high rates of dropout from schools include:

- Low educational background of the parents who also attach low values to formal education.
- Living environments and housing are not comfortable for studying, doing home-works, etc. Children have also no access to proper play grounds and hence compelled to play in unsafe circumstances e.g. along streets for car, dirty corners, etc with implications not only for studies and wellbeing but for the overall behavior of the children.
- Poor wellbeing status of the family also contributed to poor performance and drop out of children from schools. Some households have no capacity to pay for educational materials (books, note books, pen, etc) and school uniforms (Box 1). This observation is consistent with the finding by Grant (2004) in Kumasi, Ghana.
- Considering children as additional bread winner of households. Among some households children are expected to contribute to the income of households. Many children in both community were found out to work as shoe shiners, casual goods pickers from taxi and bus stops, assistant to the taxi drivers (*weyella*), mid-servant (for girls), and as assistant in construction works.
- Lack of role model in the community is another factor. Children do not see someone with much appreciated record in education and they observe most of their counterparts drop out after few years in schools. It is one of the discouraging factors for the children to properly peruse their education.
- Informants also stressed about poor quality of public school facilities and teaching when compared with many private schools. In public schools, a child is expected to

⁹ Caution must be taken regarding this data because there may be few individuals with more educational background who live in GS by renting houses from individuals. The data here refers to the children who were born and grown up here in BG.

attend lessons with other 100 or more children in a single room. It also became a reality that most of students who graduate from private schools join universities while small proportion from public schools will have the chance to do so. The reason is that those in public schools achieve low marks in their school leaving examinations.

Box 1

Unaffordability to buy teaching material for children put them in trouble

Household 'A' from BG is headed by a 47 years old woman. The family size of a household is 8, 4 male and the rest female. Both the head and husband have no permanent job and rely on casual wage labour for the household subsistence. The head narrated how shortage of money to buy note-book deprived her son's education as follows:

One of my sons once asked me to buy for him an exercise book. It was by chance when I was without any money at hand. As a result, I told to him that I have no money now to buy for you and just have patience for while. He just kept quite and simply went to school and used the tactic of leaving the class for the subject for which he had finished the note book. He did this repeatedly. Lastly, the subject teacher discovered and she asked him to bring parents to school. I then went to school and being informed about what happened. It is very difficult to give the verdict about whose mistake was that: my self or my son. I blamed being poor, which deprived my son the necessary learning materials that, in turn, compelled him to misbehave'.

Given the high competitions of job market in the city, individuals with low educations have limited chances of getting employment in better jobs. Thus, workings in low pay job and involving in informal sectors have become the only existing opportunity for some (section 6). This is among the constraints that keep individuals and households in poverty trap.

5.3. Access to financial capitals

Financial capitals refer to assets in terms of cash that can be drawn from employment, savings, pensions, remittances and credit. In the urban context, they are very much affected by access to other forms of capitals, specifically to physical, human and social capitals. The kind of employment that one can secure, by and large, depends on his educational background. Likewise, to engage in sound and meaningful informal job nearby own residence area or somewhere else requires better access to physical infrastructure. For instance, in order to start a small wood workshop the location needs to be accessible to roads,

sustainable energy and markets. Since the employment situations among the people of BG and GS will be discussed in detail later (see section 6), my focus here would be to narrate regarding the other forms of financial capitals: remittance, pensions, savings, and credit.

It was very interesting to find many households who get substantial support from their children abroad, specifically from daughters or grand daughters who migrated to the Middle East to serve as mid servants. Many household heads retired from factory job or army for which they get the monthly pension fee. However, since they were previously in low pay jobs the rates are very low to meet the current household needs.

As far as the saving is concerned, all individuals in either individual interview or group discussions indicated that they do not have any cash saving since their income did not allow them. They contested that to think about saving was impossible in place where your income can hardly cover or cannot the daily subsistence needs.

Two possibilities of getting loan among the people at the study communities were identified. One is informal that involves small amount of money among the community members themselves. This one is a short-term that can be used for some extra-ordinary and urgent matters. The second one is the possibility to get loan from formal micro finance institutions. Addis micro finance is active in this regard. Nonetheless, the experience at both study sites is not encouraging. Nobody took loan at BG. It seems that the poor people have the fear of falling into debt. Let us see the experience of one individual from GS who borrowed money from micro-finance institute:

With the micro finance loan of 2000 ETB, I started to produce some wood products opening a workshop here. But the attempt was not successful for different reasons. I could not get market for the products that might be attributed to the location of the enterprise. The site was not accessible to be seen by potential customers. I was about to frustrate, for one thing, I could not generate the income to meet my household's needs; secondly I was in stress of falling in debt. An individual who work in similar job helped me in buying all materials I bought for the workshop just with the same price and indeed secured me from crisis. Then, I returned the money back to the institute and restarted my usual and casual carpentry work.

Certain issues can be drawn from the stories of this informant. Firstly, beginning an enterprise requires not only money but also critical considerations of many other factors. Source of raw materials, location that could attract market and artistic knowhow that can excel other similar businesses need to be taken into account. Secondly, it is also important to think about risks related to many factors. What he attempted to do was just assembling his conventional skill from carpentry with money borrowed from micro-finance institute, which did not work.

5.4. Situations of social capitals

The situation of social capital is probably what makes the community of poor people unique. The availability of better networks manifest themselves in stronger tie in terms of kinship, sharing some of the livelihood facilities, neighborhood relations, help during hardship (when a member get sick or die) and participation in CBOs such as *iqub* (among members rotating saving association) and *ider*. To the knowledge of the writer of this paper, these networks are getting weaker and weaker among middle class and well off areas of A.A city.

It has been practically observed how the BG and GS people cooperate and help each other with respect to sharing scarce facilities such as kitchen, toilet, water and electricity. Local level institutions as rules and regulations are respected well by every body. In relation to sharing kitchen at BG, an informant has to say:

If someone is in urgent need of backing injera or getting some from those who already did it to be returned latter, it is well accepted by every body in the queue. In similar fashion, we have the power to fin someone who acts against the well established rules.

People who make livelihood from informal activities at GS also involve in *equb* of small size during normal years. Informant says ‘it is impossible to continue the functioning of *equb* in bad years ‘.

Well established *iders* for both male and female function around both study communities. Interestingly, *ider* brings together the poor and the well off households although when it comes to practical things one can still see clear differentiation. The poor households involve in *ider* in real sense – meeting all requirements like monthly contribution and actively participate in duties related to death and funeral. However, the well to do people undertakes everything financially. This is to mean that they pay for contributions and hire someone who takes part in necessary activities which is also a payment in terms of cash. According to informant at GS, the people are fed up of this type of arrangement, which does not go with the core idea of *ider*.

The support that the people at GS and BG offers to one another upon death of relatives go beyond the scope that *ider* requires. The neighbors accompany the households whose relative is deceased for many evenings and during weekends in view of relaxing and morally supporting the household members under mourning.

6. Livelihood activities and sources of earnings

Livelihoods activities are occupations in which one or more members of a household engage in so as to generate earnings for making livelihood. Some literature use livelihood activities and strategies interchangeably. Basically, strategy goes beyond economic activities for it includes various kinds of actions that the poor people undertake either to improve livelihoods or just to survive. Thus, for the purpose of this paper I treat them separately. The types of activities undertaken by the inhabitants of BG and GS can broadly be grouped into three: permanent salary employment, casual jobs and wage labours, and informal activities. It is important to bear in mind that single household members can engage in portfolio of activities for diversifying sources of income. A household breadwinner may work in low pay permanent job, a housewife in some informal activities, and children may involve in wage labour. Poor people know very well that depending on single source of income is insufficient as well as risky.

6.1. Permanent employment

Because of low level of human capitals, in particular low level of education and unskilled labor the type of permanent employment in which the inhabitants of BG and GS work are low pay occupations. According to individual and group discussions, the GS household breadwinners work as guards in various organizations, as factory manual workers, as drivers, and as members of army during the *derg* regime. Some of those heads are either still working in the same job or retired from the activities. Those who were the army member of the *derg* were demobilized following the government change in 1991. When asked about whether the income from such low pay occupations can meet their household subsistence needs – they replied ‘yes’ when the cost of living was cheaper. One informant who worked as employee of chip wood factory, and then transferred to Augusta shirt factory, and lastly worked as a driver in other government organization mentioned ‘with my salary I had no the worry of buying food and other needs for my family members. But now with low income from pension coupled with increasing price of consumer goods, I cannot feed my family’. Another individual from the same community who is a guard at quarry in nearby area indicated: ‘although our salary is not so high we used to meet the subsistence needs of our households until few years ago. These days we are in problem due to low purchasing power of money and large family size’. The realities from the two cases demonstrate about the big gaps between salary for low pay jobs and the living costs.

As far as the situation at BG is concerned, the permanent occupations of the people here are mostly related to construction sectors and employees of textile factory which is locally known by the name ‘*Cottony*’ among the people in the nearby areas. Of course, I

found individuals who work in other jobs such as driver in government organization, as police man, and as a cleaner in a small local NGO. Nonetheless, because of some factors like Structural Adjustment Program in early 1990s and aging of the employees the majority of the household heads have retired from their permanent jobs. Those elderly still try to practice their skills whenever they get chances. Looking into the difference between the two generations – the elderly and the youth – it is very difficult to witness much changes and dynamics with regard to permanent jobs. The unemployment problem is still pervasive among the youth segment of the population partly because of high supply of human power on one hand, and limited job opportunities on the other. Qualification and skill constraints are the main bottlenecks of getting permanent employment.

6.2. Casual or non-permanent jobs

Casual jobs are quite multiple in types. Construction related activities and wage labour offer relatively wider chances for the people who could not secure permanent jobs. Conventional construction works like carpentry and masonry require skills that an individual can learn just by practicing as an assistant even without taking special trainings. Probably except one elderly who worked with the Ethiopian Building Construction for many years, all others who mentioned to work as carpentry, masonry and the builders of *chicka bet* (houses with wood and mud walls) were able to develop the skills when they had been working as assistants. The other factor that makes this sector as a potential casual job area for many people is the extensive construction and reconstructions of the city of A.A. The government on its part is aggressively working on the construction of roads and condominium buildings in different parts of the city. The sector attracted not only those who have certain skills but also wage laborers who can assist at construction sites, and also work in loading and unloading materials. The contribution of the private sector that involves construction for businesses and as residential quarters is also quite immense in this regard. Over the last couples of years, the city of A.A was able to develop many new residential areas, the construction of which created wider casual employment opportunities for many people.

Nonetheless, the sad thing about working in these casual jobs is risks related to the sustainability problem. According to the experiences of some respondents, one can be laid off due to various reasons including discontent with the site contractor or the owner of the project, conflict between owners and contractors, shortage of construction materials because of price increases, and health problem (as you do not get sick leave while working in such activities). Since some of the elderly took the option of working as casual workers they quite often face health problems.

The common wage labour among the women of BG and GS include washing clothes, backing *injera*, assisting individuals on occasions of fest, and as daily basis mid servants (returnee mid-servants).

6.3. Engagement in informal activities

Whenever there are no chances of making earnings from employment jobs, people have to revert to look for how they can make their own subsistence. Self-created jobs that are termed as informal activities is one of the ways out. The reason why they are termed as informal among the others include legality (no registration, no official tax pay, etc), standards of product, and places of undertaking (can be at home, along street, at the sites of the religious institutions, etc). Despite these, evidences show that in many developing regions a considerable proportion of city dwellers live on informal sectors. Informal sectors make 75% of jobs in South Asia (Tipple 2005: 611), 85% of new jobs in the cities of Latin America (Brown and Lloyd-Jones 2002), 60% of urban labour force in Africa and 90% of all new urban jobs in Africa in 2000 (ESCAP 2001 cited in Tipple 2005:612).

The common informal activities of the A.A city include petty trading, venderring food and drink related staffs, crafts of various types, collecting and bartering of second-hand items, etc. The situations around the two case study sites are not unique in this regard. However, I shall focus on few of them for which evidences are collected.

Tella Bet (local drink brewing and selling) – this informal sector is common among the households in GS whose breadwinners are women. The two case studies narrated in Box 2 will demonstrate some characteristics of this informal sector.

Certain points can be drawn from the situations of households who rely on *tella* making. First, irrespective of the temporary price rise on many of their inputs on which the heads of the case emphasized, the activity has been the means of survival for the poor households. Second, unlike other informal activities, the venture is characterized by relatively longer process that depends on the relations at markets of ingredients, relations with neighbors, and with customers (Figure 7). This would clearly imply that the venture involves financial, physical and social capitals.

Box 2
Households whose income rely on *Tella* making and selling

Case household B – The head who is 57 years old, and migrated to GS from Gojjam 33 years ago. The husband was an army member who passed away at war front in Northern part of Ethiopia many years ago. The family size is 5, 2 male and 3 female. *Tella* making and selling is the main source of earning for the household. The head of household explains about the livelihood situations thusly: “I have been working on this activity for over 30 years now. When I began the job the price per single *tassa* (about 1 liter) was 10 cents. Although the job is quite demanding in terms of labor, patience, accessing main ingredient materials, it was not a problem to generate income that could meet the subsistence needs of households in the past. But now, relying on income from *tella* selling alone is unthinkable. I am getting older and the prices of materials are soaring. We complement our earnings by the remittance that my daughter sends to us from the Middle East (Arab countries)”.

Case household C – This case household is headed by the women of 55 years old, who came to A.A from Wollo 30 years back. The household has 5 members. *Tella* making and selling is the sole source of income for household. The housing situation where the business runs is in a very bad shape. It is not attractive to the customers. The head narrates some aspect of the *tella* making activity as: “*Tella* making is a business process that needs sufficient space for preparing the ingredients, for brewing (actual making), and where to serve your customers. My situation is, indeed, unfavorable in all respects. I have to share kitchen with many of my neighbors. My house is very small and old. Under this situation practically it became difficult to draw sufficient income for subsistence. In the former days, we could survive on it as the activity allowed us to make small earnings. Currently, things have changed as the input prices soared (grain - barley and maize - is about 6 ETB per kg), and our customers do not visit us regularly since their purchasing capacity has fallen. Now we are in the dilemma of continuing or totally abandoning the activity. Given our situation, how should we survive if we cease this activity?”

Figure 7: *Tella* brewing and attracting customers in such shelters are a difficult thing (GS).



Gullit (petty trading center) at GS – There is a small mini-market site at the center of GS which supports the livelihoods of many households (Figure 8). Basically, people do not visit big market places such as Merkato or Zenebework for purchasing minor things. They rather depend on *gullit* in nearby area.

The benefits of such informal markets places are quite immense for both who involve in trading and for the nearby community. Those who work as petty traders are beneficiary in the following ways.

- *Gullit* trading creates job opportunity for quite a large number of people.
- If some commodities remain long before getting sold at a stock of trader, the petty traders give out at lower prices and credit (with little profit or no profit) to their neighbors, which is a sort of social insurance against loss for the traders.
- Working in own community would not incur much transport costs. Depending on nature of the items of trading, they may go to the retail traders or sources once in a week or twice a week.
- According to the petty traders, you can at least spare something from what you trade for your household consumption. ‘Whatever the situation at market can be you normally do not go home bare hand’.

Likewise, the customers in the neighboring surrounding areas take the advantage of *gullit* in the manners hereunder:

- Many people who have no permanent job do not carry out the purchase of consumables on regular basis, and the amount that such people can buy at a time may not be large enough to sustain them over long days. This means *gullit* are the important and immediate source of some commodities whenever people earn money from casual jobs.
- Unlike big stores or market places, measurements are quite traditional and based on estimates and hence one can buy with small amount of money at hand. You may not, for instance, be able to buy edible oil for 50 cents in Merkato nor in big store, which is possible at *gullit*.
- The social networks and the moral economy functions very well here. If someone has no cash at hand right now he will have better chance to take some items on credit basis.

Figure 8: Petty traders having their own *madab* (vending place) at the *gullit* of GS.



***Injera* making and selling** - Many household at both sites also rely on generating income by involving in this activity (Figure 9). The major ingredients for this venture include grain (*teff*), energy (mainly firewood and in rare cases electric *mitad* (stove)), proper space (kitchen), water and labor. Few of them who were interviewed indicated that the sky rocketing of the price of *teff* as well as firewood make the venture unprofitable. As a result, they are just struggling to survive, and not to expose household members to destitution and hunger. Lack of appropriate and separate space that can be used as kitchen was found as one major bottleneck discouraging women to engage in *injera* making. Under the situation of kitchen sharing, they need to stand for hours overnights when the other neighbors are not using the stoves. Generally, there are three market channels of *injera* from both sites: sell out from home, sell at *gullit* and supply to small hotels and restaurants. The challenge facing individuals drawing livelihood from this activity is the slight differences in the quality of *injera* demanded by three forms of customers. The hotel and restaurant owners always ask for the good quality *injera* whereas those who buy at home do not bother very much about quality.

Figure 9: Sharing kitchen with other neighbors for backing injera intended for market is a big challenge (GS).



Tailoring - Poor people rely on used/second-hand clothes (*selvag*). After purchasing clothes customers visit the tailors in order to make adjustments of size. There are few individuals who work as tailors around GS. One of the household head who has been working in this activity for the last 25 years mentions:

Our customers are mostly people who come to us with salvages intending to get the service of adjusting size. Some also visit us for repairing the old torn clothes. Rarely, in the occasions of holyday celebrations and before the launching of schools in New Year we can also get the chance of sewing new clothes. My net average daily income is about 5 ETB.

In addition to the informal activities that were briefly described above, activities like, shoe repair, mini - shops, tea houses, etc also operate around GS.

6.4. Major constraints of livelihood activities

6.4.1. Challenges to permanent employment

Due to much demand for jobs on one hand, and the low education and skills on the other, getting permanent job has become a very difficult matter for many individuals at both sites. Thus, unemployment is a serious problem. Expansion of secondary and/ or tertiary activities could not keep in pace with the increase of the number of job seekers in the city. A household member who had a skill of plumber indicated that he works casually since getting permanent job was not possible to him. It has also been indicated that employment procedures are not fair enough among private enterprises for people seem to get job not on the basis of their merit but through family or kinship ties. ‘Various organizations advertize job, you apply for but no chances of job’ as one informant from BG commented. These

situations compel individuals to work in wage labour, which, in a way, is both unemployment and underemployment.

6.4.2. Challenges of casual works

Works related to construction activities, which by chance are the livelihood activities of the heads of many households at both sites under question are casual in nature. One has to enter an agreement to make a house which depending on size and type may take a couple of months and then unless other arrangements are made in the meantime you have to wait for other months or weeks before securing other chances. Above all, the informants complained very much regarding the significant increase of the prices on construction materials. As a result, enterprise or individuals have to carry out activities intermittently. The implication for the workers' income is immense. The job demand in this sector is also extremely high. Network and recommendation from someone who knows you and your skill are also important. Large supply of manpower in the area has also a bearing on payment rate. Sometimes for the interest of meeting households' basic needs and subsistence, working at low wage rate becomes mandatory.

6.4.3. Constraints to informal sectors

Working in this sector has many problems, both general and specific to activities observed under the current study. The following are some of the problems:

- Limited or lack of starting capital is the big hindrance for launching anew or expanding the started ones.
- Redundancy of similar activities at the same location makes the activities discouraging to continue with.
- Increase in input for some activities like *tella* and *injera* making and selling caused low or no profit out of the work. Attempt to correspondingly increase prices on commodity repels customers with limited purchasing capacity.
- The sanitary problem around the *gullit* act as a barrier for some customers to come to the market place. Individuals trade just next to open drainage canal (Figure 10).
- Since nobody has legal access right on land around *gullit*, there is fierce competition among individuals who want to start petty trading.
- There is lack of space to carry out informal activities around BG, which compelles individuals just to make temporary shelter along street (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Individuals are compelled to vend along street when they cannot find appropriate place, and space around *gullit* (BG left and GS right).



7. Impoverishment and food insecurity as undesirable livelihood outcomes

One of the purposes of this study is to understand the way poverty is perceived and explained by the poor people themselves. Thus, poverty and food insecurity issues were analyzed in two complementary approaches. The first approach is to present the respondents own perceptions and meanings of poverty and what does it mean by being food insecure. The other approach is to see poverty and food insecurity through vulnerability lens of SLF. Poor well-being and food insecurity are viewed as vulnerable/undesirable outcome of the interactions of change in context (shocks and stress), lack of access to sufficient assets, and inability to work in activities that generate sufficient income on sustainable basis. The forgoing sections present the salient features of each component (context (section 4) assets (section 5), and activities (section 6) in detailed manner. Here, attempt will be made to synthesize how interactions among factors in multiple ways explain poverty and food insecurity at household and community level.

7.1. Perception on being ‘urban poor’

The core questions posed in the individual interviews and group discussions include: How you define being poor or poverty? What causes poverty? What happened to the wellbeing status of the populations of your community over years? What explained the changes (either improvements or deteriorations)? Addressing such questions with the poor people has been both a challenge and an opportunity. It is a challenge for two main reasons. In the first place, the informants redirect the query to you saying: why do you ask us about what you know well and what you practically observe. They feel that their community situations, their housing, their occupations and their personalities are self-explanatory for the wellbeing status and no need of telling much about it. The way out of this problem was to negotiate with them telling that what one superficially observe are things which do not give the full picture of the situation by revealing many non-tangible things such as personal feeling, idea, perspective, knowledge, etc. In this regard, it is important to show the informants that they are not just the ‘objects of research’ but the ‘subject of research’ who are knowledgeable and have the power as equal as to the researcher himself, and they participate in view of sharing knowledge and experiences. The second challenge relates to the objectivity of the information to be drawn. It is not uncommon that the poor people exaggerate their economic problems and constraints when it comes to such direct questions. Who you are and the degree of rapport that you develop affect very much about the information they share with you. It is always good to introduce your informants who you are and what the purpose of your work is. Pure academic purpose endeavor and the exercises by

NGO like base line survey or impact assessment to redesign projects would come up with different data. So, before rushing into the data generation I had to informally talk with the people get introduced and convinced them about the purpose of my work, and the reasons why I specifically interested to understand their situations.

On the other hand, in-depth talk and discussion with poor people about their livelihood situation is an opportunity for various reasons. First, probing into certain issues allow you to have deeper understanding of processes and events. Second, dealing with one specific issue will open the chances to come up with many other research questions. Discussing about one issue today will allow you to refine and develop points of probing for the next day discussion with other individual and/or group. It has been under this context that the perceptions documented here were drawn from the community inhabitants.

Box 3 depicts how poverty is seen by the poor people from quite many dimensions. It is possible to broadly subsume the factors under constraints related to lack of various forms of assets namely financial, human, political and physical capitals (see section 5). The direct views of poor people toward poverty rightly corroborate the other qualitative evidences drawn at household and community levels.

Box 3
BG and GS inhabitants' definitions of poor

- A person¹⁰ who has no permanent job to draw income from
- A person who lacks access to necessary livelihood assets
- A sick person who cannot afford for medical treatment, and unable to work
- A person who has no private house
- A person who lives in narrow and over-crowded shelter
- A person whose income cannot buy sufficient food for household
- A person who retired from low pay salary jobs and hence have no savings, and pension rate is too low to meet basic needs
- A person who laid off or demobilized from job
- A person who has no power to influence decisions and policies
- An illiterate person
- A person with no or limited skills of working in certain livelihood activity

Source: Individual interview and FGDs (May – June 2008).

It is also interesting to have the issue that directly points to lack of power and participation in decisions that directly affect the life of the poor people. According to the informants, lack of direct involvement through their representative in local formal administrations of either the *kebele*, the sub-city or city-wide level has been one of the

¹⁰ A person in this context refers to head or breadwinner of a household that can be a man or women.

reasons why their community's socio-economic and infrastructural problems did not receive attentions. One informant at GS states:

We have many evidences of poor communities in the city of A.A who benefited a lot from NGOs interventions in development activities such as upgrading the quality of houses, constructing latrines, installing new water taps and opening up better paths (routes) within the community. I personally believe the role of kebele administration is quite decisive in bringing NGOs toward poor people communities'.

Further discussions with the study participants at both sites about why they failed to participate in local administration indicated two important issues. First, they underlined that the local people have limited awareness and understanding about formal administration and political participation. Second, it was found out that the inhabitants at the two sites are mostly the people who lead subsistence life, and they have to struggle on each and every day. Their own livelihood situations do not give them the chance to think about involvement in election and to voice about the demand of their community to the concerned bodies. It was learnt that no individuals have shown the interest to represent own localities in the *kebele* administration. When the inhabitants are called to register and make election, most of them go to pool sites and make random elections without knowing who is who among the candidates.

For the inquiry regarding what happened to the wellbeing status of the population over many years, the response in all individual interviews and group discussions synonymously revealed the downward spiral and deterioration for most households. The reasons for the impoverishment will be discussed in the section 7.3 that treats the causes of poverty and food insecurity.

7.2. Food security status and situations

In this research, qualitative aspects of food security have been assessed. No quantifications of neither consumption or magnitude of shortages were carried out. Among the issues examined include staple grains and common meals (under 'good' and 'bad' years), capacity of households to meet household food requirements, and coping mechanisms that households take against food shortages.

The contexts of food security are different in urban and rural areas. Among rural societies, food security is dominantly about whether a household can produce sufficient food at home or not. Farmers draw their household food from own farm and, in fact, they can also sell off livestock and purchase grain. Whereas among urban population the main concern is the ability to secure sufficient income to be able to afford food and other basic necessities, which in turn is contingent on wages and prices. Other factors such as the effect of

overcrowded and unhygienic environment and the lack of functioning safety nets also affect the food security status of the urban people (Maxwell 1999: 1941).

Staple grains and common meals

The staple grains used by the people at the two communities are not quite different from other inhabitants in the city of A.A. Teff and wheat are among cereals, and various types of pulses, are the common staples. However, under shortage situations fully relying on teff is practically impossible for poor households. Teff is mixed with other grains such as sorghum, wheat and maize. The informant stressed that by the time of fieldwork for this study most of the household already stopped using teff for *injera* and instead rely on *injera* made of wheat, or mostly rely on *debbo* and *kitta* (Ethiopian home-made bread mostly from wheat flour in its various form).

Injera with *wat* (stew) is the usual meal among households. *Debbo* is used mostly during breakfast. What very much matters for the poor is the ingredient for making *wat*. Poor quality *shiro* which is locally termed as ‘*delacha shiro*’ (that lacks many accessories) is often prepared at the home of poor people. *Wat* from livestock products such as butter, chicken, beef, mutton and lamb are unaffordable even during good years by the great majority of households. It is only on the occasion of the holydays that most households get access to such food staffs. According to an elderly at GS, the villagers used to slaughter an ox in group when the price was quite reasonable. He remembers of dozen of years back when they bought a big ox for 40 ETB (1 USD is about 9 ETB) for the same purpose. That may cost now 5000 ETB per the estimate of the same informant.

It is learnt that even during ‘good years’ nobody from the two villagers can sufficiently cover the all year round food requirements of households. The poor households always survive with shortages and deficiencies. An informant indicated that for urban dwellers, food shortage means when earnings cannot buy the necessary food. The implication is that chronic food insecurity is the way of life for the urban poor.

Size of income and price situations is the important factors in affecting the purchasing power of households. Change in income for those who work in permanent jobs is not something that occurs frequently. It is rather the price that fluctuates seasonally or annually in response to differences in supply or any other shocks that can affect food availability. In Ethiopia, crop harvest seasons in rural areas are normally the time when the prices for food grains are relatively low, and hence the urban food supply is also getting better. Some urban poor household also have the opportunity of getting grain donations from their relatives in rural areas. But still the income of poor people does not allow them to store some grains for the use when the price is going up in summer months.

This anomaly of lower grain prices during harvest may not happen in all years. For instance, in Ethiopia the harvest season for 2007/2008 year was not the time for lower grain prices. This adversely affected urban food supply, and the situation among the poorest

segment of the population has become precarious. Severe shortages of food among households in the two case study communities were witnessed. A case study household head at BG tells:

My wife's pension fee (110 ETB) used to buy at least 30 kg of teff that can sustain the household food need, in fact, with other supplementary inputs. This is unthinkable per the current pricing conditions of the city in particular, and the country at large. With the same amount of money you can buy only 10 kg or less teff.

Due to prices rises households with permanent jobs, those who work in casual jobs, and those who survive on informal activities were not able to buy food grains for household consumption. In fact, the degree of shortage varied from group to group and among households with similar types of sources of livelihood. The situation of the year when this study was conducted cannot be used as a reference of generalization. An important issue that the food shortage demonstrates is how the poor are the most vulnerable to shocks of drastic price increase.

The field research and intensive discussions allowed me to reconstruct three scenarios of livelihood and food security situations among the urban poor people. The main issues to characterize a year include relative magnitude of food shortage, acceptance situation as a 'normative life' and the households coping mechanisms to the circumstances they encounter.

The three scenarios depicted in the Table 1 should be interpreted with cautions. First, since there is heterogeneity among poor households in the same community it does not mean that all community members perceive one year similarly. Second, remaining in the trap of poverty or escaping out of it depends on previous experiences with regard to food shortage. Households who are no more in poverty may not sense any of the scenarios. Likewise, it is very difficult to recover for poor households that experienced the food shortage of 'very bad year'. This is because seeking external support for household consumption means its asset base is fully eroded and depleted, and existing strategies are exhausted, as well.

Accordingly, the year when this study was conducted is characterized as 'very bad' since the problem of food shortage went beyond the financial capacity of most households even to survive under deficiency. Cognizant of this reality, the Ethiopian government had put a safety net program in view of stabilizing grain prices and to help the urban poor be able to get access to grain at fair prices. The program has been implemented by the Ethiopian Grain Trade Enterprise (EGTE) who has been selling grains mainly wheat, and teff, to certain extent, to the city dwellers. The main targets are the poorest segment of the population who cannot buy under normal competition of free market prices. This distribution has carried out in each *kebele*, and the inhabitants of the two study sites are among the beneficiaries of the safety net program.

Table 1: Different scenarios of food shortage among urban poor.

Scenario I - Good Year (‘Normal’)	Scenario II - Bad Year (‘Abnormal’)	Scenario III - Very Bad Year (‘Mad’)
- Food shortage of lesser extent	- Shortage is severe	- Shortage is extremely severe
- Households could survive on livelihood activities and strategies	- Survive on shortage by applying various strategies	- Beyond control of households
- Sustainability is also a concern rather than simply focus on immediate consumption	- Consumption is the main concern	- Consumption is a matter of life and death
- An accepted (normative) way of life among the poor	- Fairly accepted	- Unacceptable
- Poor people seek development – improvement in services and provisions	- Safety net could protect households from falling into destitution	- Cannot survive without external support like safety net program intervention.
		- Social instability can happen

Although the quota set for each household (25 kg of wheat per households per month) is not sufficient especially for households with large family size, the intervention contributed a lot in overcoming social instability in the city. This is, however, a life saving action, which contribute little in bringing about sustainable livelihood among urban poor. Development that directly addresses some of the challenges of urban poor can help in pulling people out of poverty trap.

7.3. Explanations of urban poverty and food insecurity

There is a reciprocal relationship between poverty and food insecurity. The poor are the most vulnerable to food shortages and hunger, and food shortage crisis that cyclically face households can gradually erode and deplete their asset base and push them into destitution (Degefa 2005).

The causes of poverty and food insecurity are numerous and yet interrelated to one another. In the context of qualitative analysis, looking one factor in isolation from others is eventually difficult. However, it is possible to put the explanations/causes under three headings: asset related factors, vulnerability related factors, and livelihood activities (employment/income) related factors.

7.3.1. Lack of access and poor asset base

The whole BG inhabitants and the overwhelming majority of the households at GS do not have their own dwelling units and thus subsist in the rented houses. They have no

legal use right over the land. As a result, they always live with the feeling of insecurity of tenure. The fact that the city master plan does not recognize most of the structures at the sites intensifies the fear of being displaced. These *kebele* administered public houses are too narrow, lacking separate sanitary facilities such as water, toilet and proper cooking places. The deprivations of these assets clearly affect the quality of life, and eventually the wellbeing and food security of the people.

The two communities also seem to be adversely affected by the development of road network (expansions and reconstructions) in the city of Addis Ababa. The main ring road of the city considerably increased the walking distances for the GS villagers, and the reconstruction of the road along the route for 'Bus Number 2' fully stopped the affordable transport service for the BG people. The increase of fuel price and the other traditional sources of energy also made the life of the poor people precarious.

Poor human capital development is another explanation of poor wellbeing and food shortage at household level. Most of the breadwinner of the households in the study communities are either illiterate or with low educational status, which is partly reflected in the education of other members of households, as well. Poor performance and high rates of dropout are the salient features among the children. The family's economic situation is also the factor for dropout and reluctance to properly attend schools. Moreover, the working skills among many peoples have been developed through working experiences rather than by attending formal training.

The preventive sides of the community health care are extremely poor due to poor housing situation, unhygienic living environment and inability to have sufficient food (in both quantity and quality). Despite access to free medical services for primary and higher level treatment for the poor people, there exists wide gap between facilities and capacities on one side, and demand for services, on the other.

Households in the study communities are in serious shortage of financial capital (cash). The income from whatever sources (permanent job, casual job, informal activities and pensions) do not allow them to meet household basic needs. One interesting thing that by itself deserves deeper understanding is the remittance that few households get from their children who migrated to the Middle East. Evidences also reveal that although there is the possibility of getting credit from micro finance institutions, those involved did not perform well nor other people are willing to involve in. Activities like awareness creation, skill development training, entrepreneurship training are the necessary inputs. CBOs, specifically *ider* aim at serving as insurance upon death of member or other relatives. It is important to widen its scope by involving in other safety net activities like assisting the *ider* members through giving out loans upon any family related problems and economic shocks.

7.3.2. Vulnerability as explanation of poverty and food shortage

The poor people are those who hit harder than any other segment of the population by any form of shock as related to environment, social, economic and political factors. This is due to their susceptibility and lack of endurance with regard to wellbeing to withstand crisis. The poor have no savings or cash at hand to compensate losses. Among the major sources of shocks against the poor of the study area include: congested and unsanitary settlements (affecting the health of people considerably), erratic nature of some provisions like water and electricity, sharing some services with neighbors due to scarcity (with much implication for health and time for engagement in productive activities), and retirement and lay off from jobs and recurrent price rising for food and other consumables. These shocks result in downward spiral of the assets and living situations of the poor households. Households who attempt to escape from poverty are kept in the trap by the above mentioned shocks.

7.3.3. Livelihood activities related constraints

The financial and human capital development situations of households have direct implications for the type of economic activities to engage in. It has been shown that permanent employment, casual jobs and wage labour and informal activities are the major sources of earnings for the people at the study sites. Despite involvement in one or combination of some, the income people draw can neither meet the basic needs nor to save some amount out of those jobs. Inability to meet basic household needs means a very serious issue which implies members should sometime go to bed hungry or a child should stop from school in lack of learning materials. Getting the chance to work in each kind of activity and drawing sufficient income has its own bottleneck. Unfit to better pay jobs, inability to find job (unemployment) and unfair employment procedures among private enterprises are among hurdles to poor households in getting permanent jobs. Erratic and intermittent nature, construction materials price increase, and too many job seekers made casual works unattractive area of making livelihoods. Working in informal activities has also its own limitations the principal of which include shortage of capital, competition, price increase of commodities, lack of space, and sanitary problems around marketing areas that discourages many customers to visit *gullit*. The interactions among most of these constraints make the poor people to generate very low earnings and hence keep them in vicious circle of poverty and under chronic food insecurity.

8. Coping mechanisms and survival strategies of the urban poor

It is important to explain the similarities and differences between coping mechanism (responses) and survival (adapting) strategies. According to Davies (1996:59), ‘coping strategies are the bundle of producer responses to declining food availability and entitlements in abnormal seasons or years, while adapting strategies involve a permanent change in the mix of ways in which food is acquired, irrespective of the year in question’. Although this is constructed in the context of food security, there are certain points that can be drawn between the two. First, time dimension is an issue because coping entails short-term and immediate response that an individual or household takes against changes of context due to various shocks, whereas survival strategies refer to long-term adjustments. The good example for survival strategy is the change from pure pastoralist (livelihood that purely relies on livestock raising) to agro-pastoralist (that mixes livestock raising and crop production) (Degefa 2008). Second, survival strategy is more of an accepted way of life for household while coping mechanisms may or may not be accepted since the crisis is the driving force for decision making as a response. Desperate sale of land and other asset and leaving own village is, for instance, a coping mechanism that rural households undertake when they are hit hard by drought and the resultant hunger. It is important to underline that there can be some actions that are at the borderline of coping and survival strategies and trying to make hard boundaries between the two may not be necessary. With this brief note on conceptual issues attempt will be made in this sub-section to describe some of the coping and survival strategies of the BG and GS poor for poor wellbeing and food shortage.

8.1. Coping mechanism against poverty and food shortage

The households at both BG and GS attempt to cope with the financial constraints for meeting basic needs of households and food shortage during ‘bad’ and ‘very bad’ years.

Changes made to food stuffs and meals – People cope with food shortage by making different adjustments as related to the types of staple crops and specific meal. This includes:

- Change in staple grain from more expensive (*teff*) to others such as wheat, sorghum and maize.
- Rely during the rainy seasons on some staffs like *yebokolo eshet* (green maize), potato, cabbage and others which are relatively cheaper during this season.
- Reducing number of meals per day from three to two or from two to one depending on household’s situation.
- Reducing quantity of food per meal and relying on simple staffs like *kitta* (bread),

kollo (toasted grains), *ashuki* (toasted and boiled beans) rather than conventional meals.

- Relying on purchasing simple cooked foods rather than cooking at home.
- Giving priority to children and husband, and the women to get served towards the end.

Request support from relatives and family in the region/countryside – Whenever the urban poor are facing severe food shortage, they visit back to own original places and draw donations of grains or food in other forms or cash from own relatives.

Temporary family dispersal – Some households send their children to own relatives in the other region until the shortage period will over. Such case households, who already sent part of family somewhere else, in response to food shortage of 2008 were found out at both study sites.

Start working in unusual job – The aged people and other members are compelled to work in activities that they do not carry out under normal circumstances. Wage labor and other informal activities are common. Children start to work as shoe shiners, goods pickers from stations and as *weyela*.

Reliance on safety net schemes – The intervention of government in the form of selling out grain at lower prices is quite important in protecting urban poor from hunger. This coping mechanism was witnessed during data generation.

8.2. Survival strategies of households

Households live on mix of strategies to sustain their livelihoods. Of course, some activities may not contribute to improvements in livelihood because of their nature and social acceptance at community level.

Migration

Most households' breadwinners who have originated from other areas are the first generations to the community they live in. It was through migration that they ended up in both communities. They migrated to A.A and to their respective communities in order to improve their own livelihoods. Likewise, the wave of the migration of the youth (the second generation) is also on going, which is out of the communities. Many households have sent their daughters to the Middle East Region to serve as mid-servants. Remittances that households secure from those migrants are quite significant in sustaining the life at home.

Living in slum community

Living in poor or slum community per se is a survival strategy of the poor people. Getting access to urban land is expensive and unaffordable for the poor. The house rents are relatively low, and many households share some facilities with other neighbors in slum areas. Given their unemployment and low pay activities, the poor cannot afford to install some services privately. Of course, it is at the expense of the quality of life, which may not be the immediate interest of the poor people and they rather make decision to survive under all difficulties of slum and shanty sites.

Diversification of livelihood activities

Poor households are well aware regarding the fact that they cannot survive on the job of head or the breadwinner alone. Thus diversification is must among the households. It was evident that some households mix earnings from breadwinner (low-pay job), housewife (informal activity), children (shoe shining, mid-servant), and income from pension. The strategy in use is that irrespective of age and sex everybody capable should bring in some earnings although the way is not straight forward.

Renting out of houses

Regardless of the term of the tenure system under which the house is held and size of houses, many households in GS try to supplement their income by renting out house to somebody else. This is, in fact, a survival strategy for both parties: who rented out and who rented in. Individuals who come for renting house in this community are those who cannot basically afford to pay for more expensive houses in the other locality of the city.

Involvement in some ‘undesirable activities’

There are some activities which seem ‘desirable’ for those who live on them, and yet ‘undesirable’ for the other segments of the society. These are commercial sex, theft, begging, etc. Although it was not possible to directly communicate with the individuals who survive on such activities from both sites, it was learnt that there are individuals who make livelihood by engaging in the activities.

9. Summary, conclusions and policy implications

The study looks at the livelihoods of the poor people inhabiting the neighborhoods of BG and GS in the A.A city. The aim has been to identify factors that impoverished households and exposed them to chronic food shortage they live with, and to assess the coping and survival strategies taken by the households. Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) was used to explore how context, shocks, assets, institutions, activities and strategies interplay in multiple ways to explain poor wellbeing status and food insecurity as the outcomes. SLF allows not only to account on constraints of poor households but also to assess what the poor possess, and the strategy they take against livelihood constraints. The study is purely qualitative and participatory in nature for the data generation involved interview of elderly as key informants, discussion with two groups (men and women), in-depth study of case households headed by men and women, and direct observations. Under this section, I highlight the major findings of the research and make some suggestions on the ways to address the constraints of the poor. Poor people always strive to escape out of poverty trap, and any poverty reduction strategy needs to focus on assets that the poor lack, and to build upon what the poor actually have.

Households at BG and GS are vulnerable to various environmental and economic shocks. Poor sanitation, unhygienic environments, and the over-crowded housing situations expose the inhabitants at both sites to various health risks. The major explanations included, tiny and congested dwelling units, lack of proper drainage and sewerage systems, lack of access to toilet, and insufficient and intermittent water supply. A number of actions of interventions could help improve the quality of life for the poor at the study sites. The housing situations at the two communities should be improved either by upgrading the existing structures or replacing them with low-costing houses. Much care should be taken not to evict or displace the poor, which will exacerbate urban poverty. Given the large size of households at GS, the upgrading of existing structure seems sound and convincing as the short-term solution. The upgrading intervention should take into account other sanitary facilities and the kitchens. Household level and adequate number of public toilets need to be put in place; and appropriate drainage and sewerage canals need to be introduced for the communities. The water supply has to be sufficient to meet the demand of the population of the area and be available on regular basis. Apart from improving the physical infrastructure and services, much effort should be made to change people's awareness regarding personal, household and community levels hygiene. The whole inhabitants should be mobilized and encouraged so that every member is concerned and responsible for the sanitation of own environment. Those who misbehave and adversely affect the sanitation of the communities have to be punished according to the community's set regulations.

Households at both study sites have limited access to financial capital, and are characterized by low human capitals. Due to limited access to the human capital development services, the educational and health status of the people are very poor. Parents are either illiterate or have low educational background, and the performance of children was found out not to be impressive. Health services at various levels are inadequate in the face of expanding population size and corresponding increase of demand for the services. My recommendations in relation to human capital development for poverty reductions include:

- There is a need to create clear awareness among the first generation (parents) regarding the critical importance of education for the children's mental development as well as preparing them for better economic wellbeing.
- Mechanisms should be devised not to use children labour for generating earnings at the expense of sending them to school.
- Attitude of the children towards education should also be changed, and they have to be motivated by demonstrating to them the realities of the most successful children in terms of their studies.
- There is a need to expand services at existing health stations and opening up additional health stations. It is necessary to establish health post at community level, which can play decisive role in terms of preventive and curative health services. Priority could be given to communities with an overwhelming majority of the population is poor.
- People need to have their permanent ID card which certifies that they have to get free health services rather than trying to produce certificate when problem arises.

Unemployment is a serious problem of the studied people, which is partly explained by poor human capital development, and other factors like large number of job seekers and static nature of new job creation. Those who work in either low pay jobs, casual work, wage labour or informal activities cannot generate sufficient income to meet household basic needs including food. The poor, therefore, live always under food shortage situations although the degree ranges between less shortage (during 'normal year') and extremely severe shortage (during 'very bad year'). Government and other development actors can contribute for improving the wellbeing and food security of the poor in a number of ways.

- It is important to create more jobs at city level by opening labour intensive jobs and put in place an affirmative action to benefit the members of the poorest segment of the population.
- There is a need to strengthen interventions in the area of Micro and Small scale Enterprises (MSE) in a package form that involves training, availing space of work and credit provisions. Quite a large number of such activities have already begun in the city. However, given the magnitude of unemployment in a city, meeting demands requires further aggressive work.
- Much has to be done in the area of micro-finance institutions, which should also be in the style of package whereby training in the work skills and entrepreneurship skills

has to be the core components of credit provisions. Demonstrating the practical experiences from successful stories of other people would help to minimize or avoid fear of get involve in credit.

- People who work in diverse informal activities should be encouraged and their bottlenecks have to be addressed. As for instance, people who make livelihood from *injera* making can form own cooperative and should be given adequate spaces for storage and production.
- Pension rates for the retired people from low pay jobs need to be reconsidered by the governments. NGOs can also intervene in supporting such individuals by compensating the gaps in income to meet basic needs.
- Employment procedures of civil servants at public institutions have to be introduced among some private enterprises so as to make employment transparent and fair for all job seekers.

Poor people have their own coping mechanisms and survival strategies against various constraints to their livelihoods. Some of them require deeper understanding and need to be built upon. Their own strategies are clear indications as to how actions/interventions work along those lines. It is found out the poor households diversify, their members migrate, and also try to save for building own assets without advising them to do so. With regard to strategies I would like to make certain points. First, there should be regular safety net program for urban poor, as well. Evidences show that the productive Safety Net program (PSNP) under implementations among rural households in Ethiopia over the last three years helped household asset protections and building. Second, the urban-rural linkages need to be strengthened for the benefit of both rural and urban people. There should be mechanisms by which the urban poor can work in rural activities, and migration should not only rural-urban but also urban-rural. One work by Potts (1995) entitled ‘Shall we go home – increasing urban poverty in African cities and migration processes’, on the basis of evidences from Zambia, Uganda and Tanzania indicated that when life in urban areas becomes difficult some people decide to go back home through ‘reverse migration’. Another issue of attention could be work in the areas of urban agriculture which can contribute in supporting urban poor.

SLF allowed to assess multiple of factors and the interplay among them to cause urban impoverishment and persisting food insecurity. Households were found to be poor due to factors related to vulnerability, lack of access to livelihood assets, and inability to work in viable livelihood activities. The application of SLF to urban poverty study allowed drawing distinction between two settings: rural and urban. For the urban poor the critical assets are financial unlike the case among rural households where natural capital becomes very decisive. Likewise, the major sources of risks and vulnerability are different for urban and rural poor since the factors that adversely affect the purchasing power of the urban poor such as price increase lay off and unemployment, etc are among the main sources of risk.

Whereas risks that affect land and land related resources e.g. drought, soil erosion, flooding becomes very important among rural people. Coping mechanisms also differ accordingly. Social capital and network is interestingly very important among urban poor community members, which manifests itself in various forms such as kinship, sharing some of the livelihood facilities, neighborhood relations, help during hardship and participation in Community Based Organizations (CBOs). Survival is impossible without sharing some of the amenities of slum community for which understanding and networking among the inhabitants are quite important.

As a final word, similar studies should be carried out in other poor communities of A.A city. It is also important to generate some quantifiable data to complement the observations in this research on the basis of household survey.

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LIST OF MAJOR WORKS

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