

**APPLYING AN ASSET-BASED
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (ABCD)
APPROACH IN ETHIOPIA**



**MID-TERM EVALUATION
REPORT SUMMARY**

OCTOBER 2009

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Abstract

This document is a summary of a full evaluation report that presents the findings and lessons learned from a mid-term evaluation, focusing on 7 of the total 21 ABCD groups in Ethiopia (318 participants and three local NGOs that facilitated the approach) conducted between June - January 2008-09. The full report contains the objectives of the evaluation, the research design and four sections: Section 1 is a summary the overall results of focus group discussions and individual interviews with ABCD groups, local NGOs and government. Section 2 provides a brief introduction to the facilitating NGO and their partner ABCD groups followed by tables that break down the responses of each of the seven ABCD groups. Section 3 discusses common trends and key issues among all groups. An in-depth analysis of each ABCD group and facilitating NGO is provided in Section 4. For a copy of the full report, please contact Brianne Peters at bpeters@stfx.ca or Mengistu Gonsamo at mengoxcan@ethionet.et.

Introduction

Since 2003, Oxfam Canada, the Coady International Institute and three local NGOs (HUNDEE, Kembatta Women's Self Help Centre and Agri-Service Ethiopia) have been testing a process of Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) in 21 community groups in the Oromiya, Tigray and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNPR) regions of Ethiopia. These groups were different in terms of location (urban, peri-urban and rural); size (from 35-2000 members); asset levels (e.g. income and land quality and size); ethnicity (Kembatta, Oromo, Tigrayan); start dates (from 2003 to 2006) and the mandate of the local facilitating NGO (e.g. women's rights, agricultural improvement, civic education).

Despite these differences, in all sites, the principal objective of this work has been to see whether NGOs can stimulate community-driven development through activities at the community level that shift the emphasis away from needs and problems to community strengths, assets and opportunities. In turn, recognition of these assets and opportunities is the stimulus for the community to organize and mobilize their assets to reach realizable goals and objectives with minimal external assistance. In the longer term, assuming this shift in attitude and orientation results in successful community-led activity, community groups that have organized in this way can position themselves as solid investments for external assistance, whether by government, NGOs or the private sector. The ultimate goal is to set in motion community-driven development enabling communities to establish stronger and more sustainable linkages with the private sector and local government.

In brief, ABCD is a process that brings together men, women, elders and youth for a series of meetings held over several days.¹ The process in Ethiopia began with appreciative interviewing - structured questions about positive changes that have occurred in the past in the absence of external assistance. This exercise serves a number of purposes. First, it allows participants to verbalize and celebrate their successes, which builds confidence and gives people an opportunity to highlight their skills and talents. This can be particularly important for marginalized populations whose skills have often been overlooked or undervalued.

¹ In the Ethiopian cases, meetings were held over 5 days consecutively, but this is at the discretion of the NGO.

Second, it sets the tone for the rest of the training assets and opportunities as opposed to problems and needs. Third, it presents the facilitator as a genuine inquirer and listener, who is not there to prescribe solutions or answers. Finally, it helps participants to identify common factors that contribute to successful initiatives in their own particular context. Following the interviews, participants were asked to produce an asset inventory by identifying and mapping their geographic, human,



financial, social (e.g. associations) and institutional assets. This acts as a visual reminder or reinforcement of the range of resources that people have within their own community that can be combined to achieve a desired output. The group then listed its financial inflows and outflows as a way to identify economic opportunities that have the potential to increase incomes or reduce expenditures. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the translation of these assets into *action*. Based on the discussions of assets and opportunities, the group envisioned a desired change (e.g. potable water, improved land, small enterprise development) and prepared an action plan to achieve it using its own resources as primary inputs. Over time, the assumption is that this focus on assets, rather than needs, will lead people to see the glass as "half full" rather than "half empty" and community members will replicate this process to improve their communities in ways they consider important.

Background

The impetus behind introducing the ABCD approach in Ethiopia is two fold. First, Ethiopia has been *the* largest recipient of food aid in the world and one of the largest recipients of Official Development Assistance (ODA) for over two decades. One of the unintended results of this influx of assistance has been what some have coined a “dependency syndrome.” Interviews with frustrated agricultural extension officers reveal that continuous humanitarian food aid reduces incentives to adopt techniques to improve agricultural productivity and ensure a more sustainable food supply. In more development-related activities, it refers to agencies that continuously pay *per diems* in supposedly “community-driven” activities, which ultimately erodes or replaces traditional systems of self-help by instilling the belief that people should be paid for their participation and that external motivation is required. This situation has left many development agents eager to try a different approach to facilitate long-lasting change.

The second impetus comes from community groups and individuals who want to play a more central role in their own development priorities. Indeed, even a cursory survey of some of the accomplishments that community groups have achieved with little external assistance reveals that there is considerable untapped and overlooked potential that could be scaled up for wider impact. Given the perpetual nature of humanitarian crises in the country (and the relatively “top-down” approach this entails), this type of participation has not always been possible or viewed as a priority. In many places, this has resulted in a progressive disempowerment of the grassroots and a disconnect between community interests and NGO or donor priorities.

In sum then, the readiness of development actors, individuals and community groups to try a new approach that recognizes and builds on existing capacity and potential made Ethiopia a natural fit for this type of initiative. This report is a first glimpse into the changes that have occurred since the introduction of ABCD in 7 of the total 21 ABCD groups: Zato Shodera, Durame, Gebre Fendide (SNNPR); and Tebbo, Illu Aga Boricho and Salka (Oromiya Regional State). (See Appendix B).

Objectives of the Evaluation

As the ABCD process in each of the communities had different start dates, the evaluation findings provide a “check-in” at different stages of the process. The objectives were thus to:

1. Assess the progress of communities and community groups that had been exposed to ABCD training, and explore the “Most Significant Changes” (see Appendix A) that had occurred, as identified by community members themselves. Changes in organizational capacity and assets at community and household levels were of principal interest, but the specifics of these were not prescribed, and the study would not be limited to expected or predicted outcomes.
2. Anticipate longer term livelihood outcomes
3. Ensure that a minimal level of base-line information was collected for comparison purposes in 2011

The intended audiences for this study were several. On the part of the community, the interactive and consensus building nature of the inquiry was designed to contribute to their own reflection and decision-making, and act as affirmation of their progress to date. Rather than avoid influencing the process, the participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) activities were intended to strengthen and reinvigorate community activity. On the part of the participating local NGOs, the monitoring and evaluation of multiple communities would allow an exchange of learning about different applications of an ABCD process by different NGOs in very different local settings. Inviting extension staff from one NGO to participate in the PM&E activities in the communities of another NGO was one way this was achieved. In addition, this report is intended to prompt these NGOs to contribute to a larger discussion of the efficacy of this approach, and to fine tune their work accordingly. Similarly, Oxfam



Canada and the Coady International Institute have invested several years in attempting to “do development differently”. As such the lessons learned from the PM&E assist in their decision-making about how to work at the community level most effectively, how to work with local partners sensitively, and how to provide the appropriate level of stimulus for communities when they reach the limits of what they can do themselves with their own resources. Finally, the Comart Foundation, as a donor, has its own specific interests. Committed to supporting innovative strategies and solutions, it is interested in results -

positive and negative - that guide innovative practice towards sustainable solutions for development in Ethiopia as a whole, and globally.

Research Design

The evaluation was designed to offer maximum cross-checking and validation of findings:

1. The PM&E team was composed of multiple stakeholders: staff from Oxfam Canada, Coady International Institute, local NGOs, and another NGO applying ABCD in a different area.
2. Multiple methods were used to promote discussion and draw out information: village maps to show visible changes, a historical profile, a community economic analysis tool (“Leaky Bucket”), discussions with focus groups and with individual households and government officials. (See Appendix A).
3. Information-generating activities were conducted with different groups in the community in addition to general meetings: with women and with households of different income and asset levels.
4. With some activities (such as the “Most Significant Change” and the historical profile), every effort was made to build consensus or to note differences of opinion.

The responses of these interviews and focus group discussions were fully documented, reviewed and categorized into common themes by Oxfam Canada and Coady International Institute staff and shared with partners for validation.

Executive Summary of the Results

Three types of results emerged from a review of the data and these served as a category system for organizing the data. (Note that results were only considered credible if confirmed by three different sources):

1. Increased asset base (human, physical, natural, social and financial)
2. Increased capacity to organize and mobilize resources to achieve development goals
3. Attitudinal change

Insights into gender differences in the experience of change and challenges faced by ABCD groups as they attempted to bring about change will also be discussed in turn.



Seedling sales in Illu Aga, Oromia

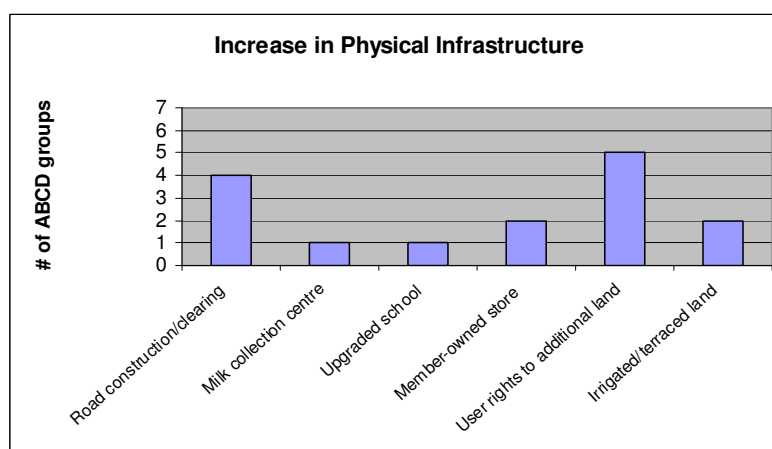
Increased Asset Base

All seven ABCD groups reported an increased asset base since the introduction of ABCD. The degree of this increase varied depending on the availability of local resources (e.g. land and money) as well as the group’s prior history or experience of collective action (as one might expect, the more, the better). This increase was achieved by diversifying and increasing

income sources, reducing expenditures, increasing savings, reinvesting these savings into productive activities and engaging in activities to restore or protect existing assets. The implementation of the group's action plan itself generated some of this increase through specific outputs such as income from fattened livestock or physical infrastructure such as the construction of a local school or communal shop. In addition, training provided by the facilitating local NGO strengthened the human capital necessary to implement these activities, increasing the knowledge and skill base of ABCD groups (e.g. composting, crossbreeding, business planning, proposal-writing). In most cases, ABCD groups commented that these initiatives mobilized and employed more of their assets than previous initiatives and that they were responsible for more of the activities from start to finish (prioritizing, planning, implementing, following up etc.).

The following table shows the specific types of tangible assets that have increased: 4 of 7 groups undertook road construction and clearing; 1 group established a milk collection centre and upgraded their school; 2 groups opened a communal shop to sell goods to their members for reduced prices; 5 groups acquired additional plots of land for crop production; and 2 groups improved existing plots of land through terracing and irrigation.

Table 1: Increase in Physical Infrastructure



When group members were asked how improvements could be attributed to the ABCD process, two responses were common. First, the pooling of individual assets for joint activities (cash, labour and other in-kind donations) allowed groups to undertake riskier and more profitable activities than they could have afforded at the household level. Second, the extensive asset mapping and community economic analysis tool (facilitated during the ABCD training) led to the emergence of new ideas for development. For example, the association and institution mapping exercise identified where and how additional resources could be leveraged and the economic analysis visually demonstrated ways that the group and their households could increase income sources and reduce expenditures in a simple and understandable way.

In addition to infrastructure development, supplementary or intensified income-generating activities (IGAs) were also reported since the ABCD start date. These activities were

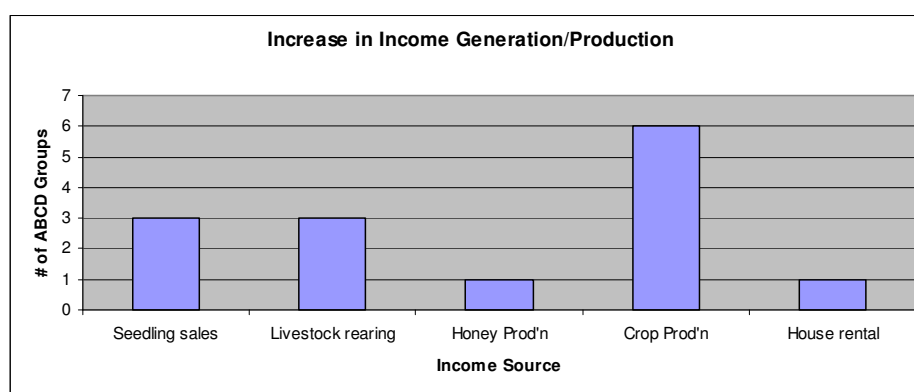
undertaken at both the group and household level, illustrating a sort of demonstration effect whereby skills that were acquired at the group level were replicated by individuals.



Milk collection centre, Illu Aga, Oromiya

Table 2 shows the number of groups that initiated new or intensified existing IGAs. Note that “livestock rearing” includes livestock byproducts (milk and eggs); the fattening of goats, sheep and cattle (yielding higher prices of sale); and rearing oxen for plowing. “Crop production” is either for group consumption (during periods of drought) or for sale.

Table 2: Increase in Income Generation/Production



ABCD groups also reported an **improved access to and use of services**, which helped them to build upon their asset base: credit (3 groups); hospital (4 groups); market (4 groups); and school (4 groups). This improvement occurred as a result of a number of factors and actors. Over the past decade, the government has placed considerable emphasis on meeting the Millennium Development Goals, resulting in the construction of more schools and clinics, particularly in rural areas. Infrastructure development has been high on the agenda, making roads one of the top expenditure sources across the country. Many NGOs are also working on these issues. In some places, the creation of rural towns (largely as a result of business interests) has facilitated the construction of infrastructure for its rising population.

The ABCD process also contributed to this trend. For example, in one community, the group prioritized road construction. Members explained that clearing the road made it physically easier for people to get to hospitals and markets. In another community, the ABCD group constructed a school in their town, reducing transportation time and costs and increasing attendance. The institution mapping was also useful because it uncovered services or programs that people either did not know existed or they did not know how to access until they were discussed in plenary. Finally, although it was to a limited degree, some ABCD groups made new linkages with external actors or strengthened old ones by soliciting service providers for technical or financial assistance to complete their action plans.

Finally, six ABCD groups also reported an **increase in savings - both financial and in-kind**. The economic analysis tool (“Leaky Bucket”) was reportedly the motivation behind this change. Group members consistently explained that the tool helped them to understand the value and importance of savings in a simple and practical way. Evidence of this occurred at the group and household level in the form of composting instead of buying chemical fertilizers; pooling financial assets into savings associations; opening bank accounts; and reducing “extravagant” spending on coffee, alcohol and festivities. As mentioned, these savings were both financial (money deposited at the bank), but more often, they were reinvested into other assets that they could either use to increase productivity (education or oxen) or that they could hold onto until they needed to sell them to cover the costs of an unforeseen occurrence such as illness (livestock or trees were common examples). Indeed, formal banks are not institutions that rural populations are accustomed to using in Ethiopia, and among some groups, they are viewed with some suspicion.



The “Leaky Bucket” is a practical community economic analysis tool to help people identify opportunities to increase and diversify economic inflows, decrease unproductive outflows and increase exchanges between economic actors in the community. This tool was introduced to each ABCD group during the initial training and also serves as a baseline to track changes in the income and expenditure patterns of the group. The arrows represent different income and expenditure sources and their thickness shows their relative volume and importance.

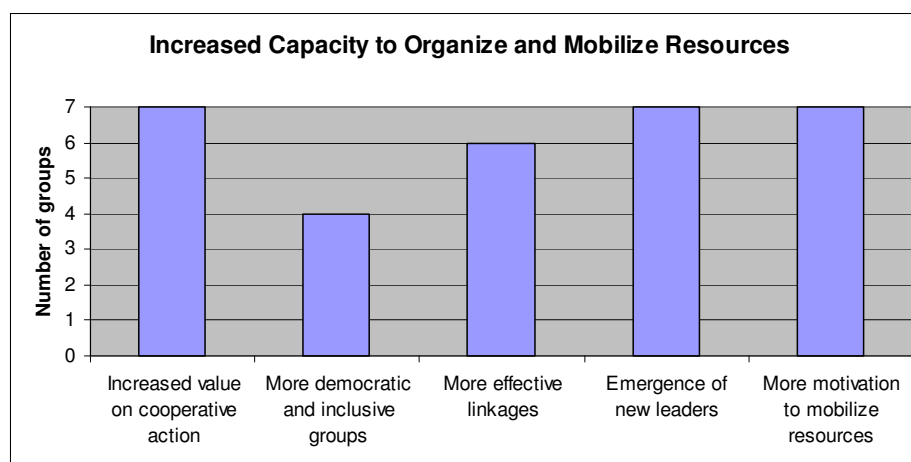
Despite the important economic benefits these tangible assets produced, when asked to rank, most groups considered improvements in organizational capacity and changes in attitudes to be more important and the precursor to any other change.

Increased capacity to organize and mobilize resources to achieve development goals

When asked to identify the “Most Significant Change” since the introduction of the ABCD process, 5 of 7 communities reported that it had to do with an increased capacity to organize

and mobilize resources. This was an interesting finding as organizing into informal associations is a centuries-old practice in Ethiopia. When asked, “why this change was significant,” a number of stories shed light on how the ABCD process added value to the way that people traditionally organized. Table 3 illustrates the most common responses:

Table 3: Increased Capacity to Organize and Mobilize Resources



Increased value on cooperative action. Successful group action plans and the appreciative nature of the ABCD approach reportedly increased the value that people placed on each other’s unnoticed capabilities and on cooperative action in general. This change



Participants ranking the relative importance of associations in their community, Durame, SNNPR

should not be taken lightly. Indeed, throughout Ethiopia, there is a widespread suspicion around organizing into formal groups as a result of the previous socialist Dergue Regime (1984-1991). During this period, people were forcibly organized into cooperatives, which are perceived in retrospect as being instruments of control. The effect of the renewed value for cooperative action is demonstrated by the creation of new associations. Since the ABCD training in Illu Aga, 5 new associations have emerged: Shene Legetafo Youth Association (30 members); Bora and Illu Irrigation Association (90 members); Kocha and Maru Irrigation Association (18 members); Abdi Gudina Dairy Association (192 members); and Cereal Bank Association (60 members). It can also be illustrated by the expansion in the role of existing associations. For example, the cooperative in Salka, which used to distribute fertilizer to members, now collects grain savings from members to sell during slack periods; and the cereal bank in Boricho added livestock fattening, vegetable gardening and savings and credit services to its regular activities. An expanded mandate also usually meant that more people became involved in community activities.

More democratic and inclusive groups. Four ABCD groups reported that their groups were more independent, democratic and inclusive than had been the case previously. This finding refers to one of two things. Either a more *diverse* population participated

(women, men, elderly and youth in the same group - this was reported among 3 groups) or a broader segment of the population participated, and this participation was perceived to be more meaningful (1 group). Group members from this community reported that they were given more responsibility for the design and ownership of action plans - which had usually been the responsibility of NGOs, government, traditional or pre-established leadership. This had the added benefit of pooling an increased number and variety of financial or in-kind assets to be used towards the ABCD action plan.

One group, however, faced considerable challenges working together. This site was relatively urban and a higher degree of diversity existed. Given the different income and education levels of the group, aspirations and abilities to contribute financially were dependent on socioeconomic status. The group's strict adherence to the bylaws (inability to contribute on a monthly basis = removal from the group) meant that those who were dependent on the land for income (as opposed to steady government salaries, for example) could only pay after they had sold their harvest and so they often voluntarily or involuntarily left the group.

More effective linkages. Throughout the implementation of action plans, most groups reported that they had accessed services as well as financial resources and technology from institutions identified during the ABCD mapping process. Examples include road surveying by a private company; artificial insemination services from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development; and a request for electricity initiated by the ABCD group on behalf of their community from the District and Zonal government (the wires have since been laid). Linking community groups with external actors has, however, been a considerable challenge and in most cases, has required an intermediary (usually the facilitating NGO, but occasionally a leader from the community).

It is worth mentioning, however, that the positive results of some ABCD groups have attracted the attention of external actors to share their expertise or make financial or in-kind contributions. For example, in Boricho, a Development Agent from the Ministry of Agriculture explained:

The key thing is the motivation of the community - which is something that ABCD has contributed to. We support what the people plan. Marketing is a problem for Boricho so they have decided to start dairy production and have formed a cooperative. They have already approached Land O Lakes Dairy and have been provided with forage seeds.

This comment about motivation is worth flagging because while the ABCD process has demonstrably strengthened human capacity or assets, in some instances, the capacity was already there, but the *motivation* was not. For example, in one community, road construction was identified as the most important priority. Group members reported:

By coming together and having open discussions among community members, we are able to solve problems without any direction from outside. For example, we all contributed 50 Ethiopian Birr (10 ETB=\$1 CDN) per household for road construction. If this were ordered by the kebele (village) administration, it would have never been practical. Now, we have solved problems on our own.

This example demonstrates that people may be more willing to contribute, or see the importance of contributing, to activities they have identified as priorities themselves, as opposed to those introduced relatively arbitrarily by outside actors. It may also have something to do with people's confidence in their ability to improve their own situations. Indeed, all groups reported that once they had achieved something small together, it seemed to trigger individual or group motivation to act on their own behalf (consistently expressed as "little by little, egg becomes leg"). Perhaps this confidence was the missing ingredient to translating their capacity into action or existing assets into productive assets.

More motivation to mobilize resources. Pooling material and financial resources was an immediate action taken following the preparation of action plans and the election of committees among all 7 groups. Most started with member contributions ranging from 30ETB - 2000ETB/person. There are some groups where initiatives were started with a loan from associations within the community (e.g. the Savings and Credit Association in Boricho). The positive results of this first step usually motivated members to contribute additional resources to take on new initiatives.

The degree of resource mobilization varied based on the potential of the area (land in particular), the level of solidarity and trust among the group, the strength of existing leadership, previous experience in resource mobilization and the ambitiousness of the action plan. One of the most encouraging stories comes out of Salka. This community has a long history of implementing projects using its own resources. Indeed, when we examined the group's spending patterns, contributions for development activities ranked among the highest, demonstrating their considerable commitment to improving their community and the viability of cost-sharing initiatives in some parts of Ethiopia. For example, in the past, members of the community contributed 500 000ETB for electricity, 47 000ETB for school construction and 30 000ETB for fencing a dam. The group explained that they had experienced a lull in this type of activity in recent years, but designing their ABCD action plan seemed to reignite leadership in this regard, and the group raised 157 000ETB for road construction and accessed a 25 000ETB "backstopping" fund from the facilitating NGO (small funds to support a portion of the action plan). The road is currently under construction.

Strengthened leadership. In all communities, the ABCD process either facilitated the emergence of new leaders or strengthened the capacity of existing leaders - or both. Since pre-existing cooperatives, community-based institutions or *Iddirs* (traditional burial societies) were often used as the entry point for ABCD training, it meant that ABCD principles (self-reliance, inclusion) and action plans changed the mandate or operational philosophy of the institution or association to either include more responsibilities (usually necessitating the creation of another committee) or led to the creation of new associations altogether which catered to the strengths and interests of individual members. In either case, joint visions were developed, which required the design of specific action plans along with defined roles, responsibilities and strategies, strengthening the capacity of group leaders.

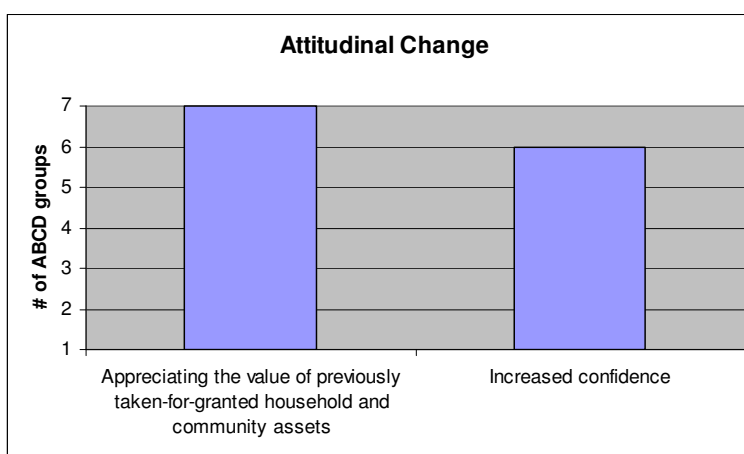
Overall then, it appears that the ABCD process seems to promote some of the necessary underpinnings or "software" for development that is more genuinely community-owned and driven: strengthening leadership, participation, confidence levels and relationships both within and outside the community. These changes in organizational capacity inherently have

a lot to do with individual attitudes, which is another theme that emerged loud and clear throughout this evaluation exercise and will be discussed more fully in the following section.

Attitudinal Changes

Attitudinal changes were expressed consistently in two ways. First, there was an increased appreciation for the value of previously taken-for-granted household and community assets: an individual who was previously considered “landless” is now backyard gardening, reducing the amount they spend at the market; or a person who previously called themselves “unemployed” now express pride in their skills, and use them to generate more income (e.g. handicrafts). Second, once individuals or the group were successful in improving their livelihood assets, they were usually motivated to undertake additional activities using the same process. Over time, this led people who previously had considered themselves “poor,” “destitute” and “dependent” to have an improved perception of themselves. Table 4 shows the prevalence of these attitudinal changes.

Table 4: Attitudinal Change



During the PM&E exercise, many participants expressed that attitudinal changes should be considered the most important change since the introduction of ABCD, as all other changes seemed to take root from here. For example, had people not changed their perception of cooperative action, their organizational capacity would not have increased, nor would they have pooled their resources together to build a road.

The community map exercise (see Appendix A) with the ABCD group in Boricho provides good evidence of this effect. After drawing all the changes in infrastructure that had occurred since the ABCD training, participants were asked to circle which changes could be attributed to ABCD. They proceeded to circle a tree nursery, vegetable gardens and their fattened livestock. After a period of reflection, one member got up and circled the entire map and said:



Yes, these changes are important and are a result of our ABCD action plans, but none of this would have happened had we not changed the way we think. All changes stem from here.

This quotation demonstrates that the ABCD process seemed to change the way that people perceived their own tangible and intangible assets. Interestingly, this process also appeared to generate appreciation of other peoples' assets as well (e.g. skills), which resulted in improved relationships, particularly between women and men.

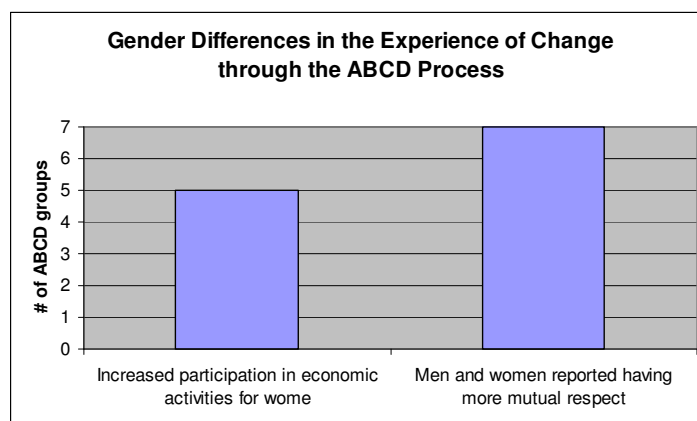
Gender differences in the experience of change through the ABCD process

During the ABCD process, efforts were made by facilitating NGOs to highlight the skills and assets of both men and women so that initiatives and action could, as much as possible, be jointly designed in a consultative manner. After ABCD action plans were implemented jointly and successfully, it was interesting to hear testimonies about how men had not considered the way that women divided their time to complete so many different tasks or that they could generate income without their help. Women also commented on the work burden of their husbands, not realizing how hard they actually worked in the fields.



Women also reported an increase in their participation in economic activities since the ABCD training, suggesting that the ABCD process added an economic impetus for increasing opportunities for women. Indeed, there were powerful stories about how husbands were now encouraging their wives to partake in activities outside the home after observing how beneficial it was in the execution of group action plans or in women replicating the skills they had learned at the group level within their respective households. Table 5 shows where these changes were reported:

Table 5: Gender Differences in the Experience of Change Through ABCD Process

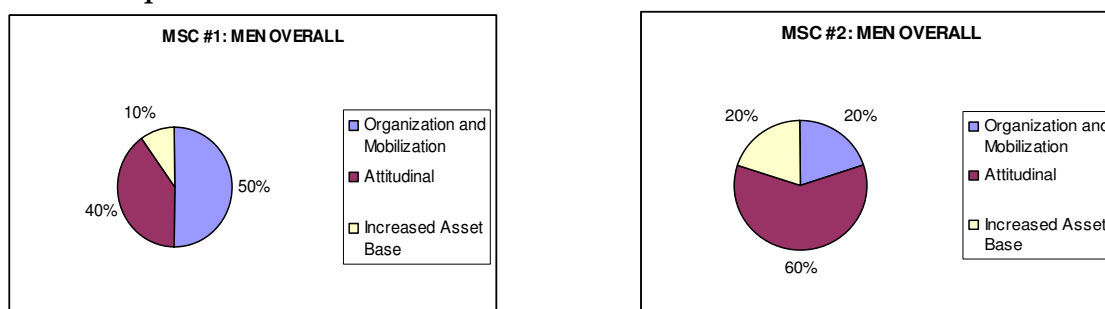


Given the number of other actors working on gender issues (government, NGOs), further investigation is required, but at the very least, the ABCD process built on the programs and policies of other actors.

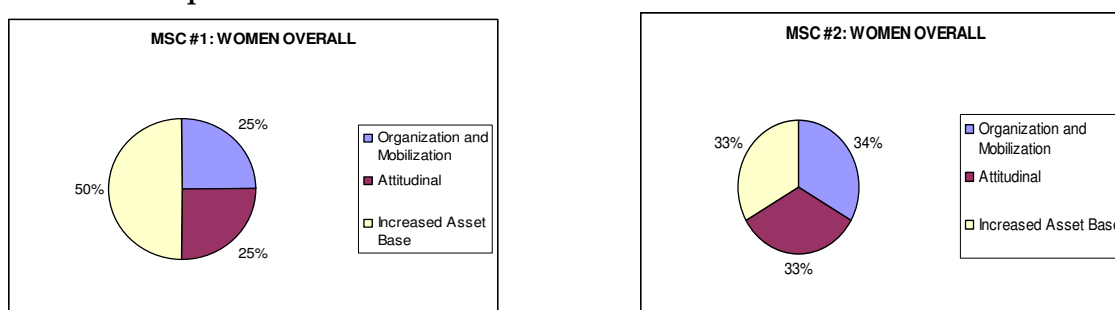
Does the ABCD process impact women and men in different ways? The “Most Significant Change” exercise was conducted by dividing men and women into separate groups initially and then they were brought together to discuss. When we look at their segregated responses, women placed much more emphasis on tangible assets (road, milk collection centre) and men focused more on changes related to organizational capacity and attitude. Table 6 shows the “Most Significant Changes” ranked first and second by men’s and women’s groups respectively among all seven groups (called “MSC #1” and MSC #2).

Table 6: Most Significant Change Rankings by Gender

Men’s Responses



Women’s Responses



As mentioned, this was an unanticipated change and tools to better understand the reasons behind this effect will be incorporated into the final evaluation in 2011.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Changing Mindsets

Interviews with facilitating NGOs revealed that there was (and continues to be) a difficulty of shifting responsibilities to communities and changing the mindset of people who are accustomed to being treated as clients and recipients as opposed to designers, contributors and implementers. This is quite understandable given the level of chronic natural disasters in

the country, the relief aid this has been required from external actors and the ongoing needs-based and problem-focused mandates of other NGOs. The importance of ensuring that the first group activity is achievable with minimal external assistance is of utmost importance to changing mindsets as it increases the confidence and motivation of the group to take control and initiative to organize subsequent activities.

Shifting the role of NGOs from implementers to facilitators has also taken time. While their role has been quite necessary and helpful, it has also been controversial at times, because while ABCD action plans often require outside expertise and resources to scale up, sometimes the approach taken by these actors falls in line with more service-delivery types of practice rather than the citizen-driven principles of ABCD. This causes confusion and introduces a number of inconsistencies. For example, in one area, the NGO felt some pressure or obligation to construct a veterinary clinic from people outside the ABCD group (e.g. government and other community groups). Although the clinic will be useful, the job was rushed, imposed on the group and not really in line with their pace and desired outputs.

In another area, the provision and expectation of continuous *per diems* was problematic. *Per diems* are daily stipends paid for attending trainings or meetings, whether they are located in one's home community or elsewhere. A practice once restricted to government or NGO fieldworkers to cover field-based expenses, in the last decade it has become common for NGO programs to compensate community members for the opportunity costs of attending meetings. As such, it is highly controversial and warrants further debate and discussion, especially given the obvious consequences for community-initiated (rather than NGO-led) development.

Defining the appropriate role for facilitating NGOs is a work in progress, but if we are to start answering our original research question—can external actors facilitate community-driven development?—it is necessary to reflect on what their role has been so far. Interviews with ABCD committee members and local NGOs revealed the following activities:

Table 7: The Role of the Facilitating NGO

The Role of the Facilitating NGO
ABCD Training (7 groups)
Sensitization of the broader community on ABCD including <i>kebele</i> , <i>Iddir</i> , family and neighbourhood meetings (1 group)
Training on “harmful traditional practices” (1 group)
Reviewed challenges, progress, implementation, monitoring and ABCD concepts (4 groups)
Provision of <i>per diems</i> (2 groups)
Assisted in securing legal entity from government (1 group)
Organized experience sharing visits (3 groups)
Training on financial management, proposal writing and designing a plan (3 groups)
Motivation (2 groups)
Revisited ABCD principles and the purpose of the initiative (1 group)
Provided inputs to assist with action plan (seedlings, legal vouchers, farm tools, backstopping fund) (7 groups)

From this angle, we can see that NGOs have in some ways played a relatively hands off, one-step-removed type of role (e.g. accompaniment). At the same time, we can identify some relatively interventionist practices. This is not to say that NGOs cannot and should not help ABCD groups; only that it has to be done carefully and strategically so as not to corrupt the process by inadvertently taking power away from the group (e.g. doing for them what they can do for themselves). There still remains a tendency to try to direct the process and inject resources when it is not entirely appropriate despite the best of intentions. Experience to date shows that external facilitation or involvement requires a balanced combination of push and pull: push to catch people's attention and get ABCD groups thinking and driving the process; and pull to motivate and leverage people's knowledge and creativity to carry the change over. This means exerting less control and a willingness to lead coupled with a willingness to follow.

Making Linkages with External Actors

Regardless of the groups' motivation and capacity, each one has at some point required additional resources from outside the community and the facilitating NGO. This puts external actors in a bit of a conundrum. How do outsiders determine how much, what type and when assistance should be provided? This is a difficult question because the role played by external actors, particularly government, has so far been minimal. If the action plan is not in line with government priorities or it requires significant resources, requests for assistance have been turned down, which understandably slows the momentum and motivation of the group. In response, stakeholders are now experimenting with a number of models to help these groups scale up. (These will be discussed below.)

To determine the role of outsiders beyond the facilitating NGO, it is again, helpful to review the linkages or relationships that have been made to date:

Table 8: The Role of External Actors

The Role of External Actors

Kebele (village) Administration (requested land, electricity, teachers) (3 groups)
Woreda (district) Administration (requested electricity, technical assistance for road construction) (2 groups)
 Office of Agriculture (training and inputs) (3 groups)
 Omo Microfinance (deposited group savings) (1 group)
 Health Post (training) (1 group)
Iddirs (burial societies) (money and labour) (2 groups)
Woreda Rural Road Desk (technical assistance) (1 group)
 Private construction company (bulldozer rental) (1 group)
 The broader community (2 groups)
 Holeta Research Centre (milk and hygiene training) (1 group)
 Farmer's Training Centre Development Agents (agricultural training and inputs, participated in ABCD training and PM&E) (5 groups)
 Oxfam Canada (backstopping) (1 group)

The realization that outside assistance is required in an ABCD process has led to a number of initiatives and investigations about how best to help ABCD groups scale up and out in a way that is consistent with ABCD principles. These include the establishment of a revolving

“Community Leverage Fund,” through which ABCD groups can apply for funding on a competitive basis and pay back for the benefit of other groups; investigations into a savings-led and member-owned microfinance model; and inviting potential investors into the community to showcase what ABCD groups have achieved. Some facilitating NGOs have also suggested taking an inventory of different government ministry priorities to determine the types of action plans governments would be willing to support and the types of assets that could be leveraged if requested.

The necessity of external assistance also highlights the importance of identifying connectors or “gappers” - key individuals who can straddle the gap between institutions and communities and turn the existing levels of bonding social capital to bridging social capital. These people are usually located in research or technology institutions, who know and have credibility with the players in government, research and technology institutions, while their heart remains in supporting community-driven development. As more linkages are made, it will also be important to see how groups maintain control of their activities and to determine the right balance or division of responsibility between community groups and outside actors.

Exclusivity of Groups

Some ABCD groups had open membership, which translated into more than 2000 members, while others were smaller (35 members) and more exclusive. In the latter, groups that were originally trained - or the facilitating NGO itself - did not consult the wider community to expand the group’s membership base or to share what had been learned. Sometimes, the size of the group was decided by the facilitating NGO as it was perceived to be the most ideal in terms of cost (staff time, facilitation, follow up and input provision). These cases tended to be located in areas where there was an expectation of *per diems* and the asset base (particularly land) was relatively low. Here, participation was limited only to those community members who participated in the ABCD training, which meant that there were relatively fewer assets from which to draw upon.

Local and Global Contextual Issues

Local and global contextual issues will always impose structural constraints on the improvement of livelihoods regardless of community initiative. This includes issues like drought, land scarcity and rising food and fertilizer costs. In the face of these constraints, attention must be paid on how ABCD can be used not only to build assets but also to reduce the risk of their depletion. This has occurred to some degree already. In one community, for example, action plans were designed to minimize reliance on expensive chemical fertilizers and pesticides through the introduction of compost, which also improved the fertility of the land and increased financial savings. Other groups engaged in terracing and irrigation schemes, which had the same effect. Another group predicted the rains would fail and decided to plant early-maturing haricot beans instead, making their crop one of the only successful crops in the community that season. The extent to which the ABCD process reduces vulnerability or builds resilience must be further examined.

Evaluating the Unknown

Since ABCD was introduced as a test, the outcomes of the initiative could only be hypothesized at the outset. Trying to find the appropriate tools to measure the range of tangible, intangible, predicted and unpredicted changes has been a work in progress. The methodology will be refined in the next round of evaluations in 2011 to include more views

from external actors to determine if this group is perceived to be unique from others; more consultation of secondary sources, including agronomists and economists, for example, to get a better grasp of the overall context and trends (e.g. livelihood diversification, market orientation etc.); and some tools that may better quantify the more tangible outputs of the ABCD process. In addition, although the tools did capture different viewpoints (e.g. with some, it is possible to disaggregate responses by gender and age), more deliberate tools and analyses that capture the differences that occur as a result of ethnicity, culture, age, existing asset levels and the overall influence of the NGO (and its mandate) will also be incorporated. It will also be important to look at how or if the ABCD approach changes the organizational culture of the NGOs that are applying it.

Conclusion

The evaluation exercise has revealed a number of changes that have occurred since the introduction of ABCD. These include an increased capacity to organize and mobilize resources, which has fostered an increased value placed on cooperative action and the contributions of the previously overlooked skills of marginalized populations. Increases in the mandate and membership base of associations are evidence of this effect. It has also led to groups that are more self-reliant by virtue of looking to their own assets first and contributing them towards the completion of an action plan designed and managed by the ABCD group itself. In the process, the leadership capacity of existing and new leaders elected to coordinate different pieces of the action plan has been strengthened.

The success of these action plans has led to attitudinal changes, which facilitated the identification and utilization of previously unnoticed household assets and a change in self perception: from people who considered themselves “poor” and “destitute” to those who had acquired the confidence to undertake subsequent actions to improve their own livelihoods with less external motivation. This included undertaking new income-generating activities; creating new associations that catered to participants’ own personal strengths; and approaching external actors for more assistance resulting in an increased access to services. While there have certainly been challenges and lessons learned throughout this process, these changes in organizational capacity and attitude were manifested in very real and concrete tangible improvements within households, the group and the broader community: a milk collection centre; communal shops to sell food at reduced prices to members; a 7km road; a school; improved land; and tree nurseries.

At this point, nearly all of these groups are at a point where they are ready to scale up, which brings everyone involved - community groups, facilitating NGOs, researchers and donors - to an important step in community-driven development that will contribute to our collective understanding of how each of us can contribute effectively and appropriately to a deeper and long-lasting process of change. The evaluation in 2011 will help to identify the strategies that community groups and facilitating NGOs have at their disposal and are able to employ to have broader reach and impact. We are starting to see signs of this type of thinking already: informal associations registering formally with government (and therefore gaining access to more services); experimenting with community-based revolving funding mechanisms; broadening the mandate of social associations to include more infrastructure and income-generating types of activities that will benefit more people; more fully

understanding the policies and programs of government to determine if there is partnership potential; and using key individuals (“gappers”) who can bridge the gap and build relationships between government and communities. Equally interesting will be to see how governments and other actors respond to communities who are taking this type of self-directed initiative.

Appendix A: Monitoring and Evaluation Methodology

Data were generated through a variety of tools, some of which are able to capture changes that have occurred since the ABCD start date and others that primarily act as a baseline upon which to measure changes when the final evaluation is undertaken in 2011. These tools include:

- **Historical Profile:** In a group, ABCD members were asked to map the ABCD process from the start date to the present, highlighting the role of community-based and external institutions and their achievements, challenges and lessons learned.
- **“Most Significant Change” (MSC):** Men and women, youth and elderly were divided into separate groups and asked to identify the “Most Significant Change” that had occurred since the ABCD start date, why this change is significant, and to demonstrate this change with a story. These changes were then presented in plenary and ranked in order of importance.
- **Household (HH) Asset Wheel:** 3-6 individuals were selected by the facilitating NGO for interviews and asked to identify:
 - family size
 - livelihood sources (wages, crops and livestock sales etc.)
 - education levels
 - access to school and water
 - type of house (thatched roof or corrugated iron)
 - the changes they have experienced since the ABCD start date

Aside from the reported changes, which either substantiate or refute general trends, their responses will be used as a baseline upon which to measure household changes when the final evaluation is undertaken in 2011.

- **Physical Map:** The physical map was used as a tool in the initial ABCD training. Group members mapped the physical and natural assets of their community to help them to identify assets that can be used for income generating activities. This map was reintroduced during this evaluation and group members were asked to add any changes that had occurred since it was initially drawn. They were then asked to identify which of the changes could be attributed to ABCD. This map will be saved and the same exercise will be undertaken in 2011.
- **“Leaky Bucket”:** The “Leaky Bucket” is a practical community economic analysis tool to help people identify opportunities to increase and diversify economic inflows, decrease unproductive outflows and increase exchanges between economic actors in the community. This tool was introduced to each ABCD group during the initial training and also serves as a baseline to track changes in the income and expenditure patterns of the group and which of these changes can be attributed to ABCD action plans or training.

- **Association Mapping:** During the initial ABCD training, ABCD groups were asked to list the associations in their community, their roles and relative importance. This was undertaken to pinpoint where contributions or collaboration could occur in the execution of action plans and to establish a baseline by which to measure whether communities have increased their capacity to organize. If there are more associations, expanded mandates or increased membership in existing associations, it suggests that this capacity has improved. Although there is evidence to suggest that this has occurred already, this tool acts as more of a baseline at this point.
- **Institution Mapping:** A baseline mapping of local institutions was undertaken by ABCD groups during the initial training to identify where groups could leverage additional resources or technical assistance for the completion of their action plans. It also serves as an indication of the group's capacity to make linkages with external bodies. If more relationships have been built with government, NGOs, private industry or members of the Diaspora presumably this capacity has increased. It also helps evaluators to determine the roles of various actors in the area and to be more precise about what can be attributed to the ABCD process and what has occurred as a result of other actors. There is evidence to suggest that relationships have been facilitated or strengthened with external institutions, but this tool is used as more of a baseline at this point.
- **Interviews with NGOs:** Informal interviews were conducted with facilitating NGOs in all communities to review the ABCD group's progress and challenges and the appropriate role of the NGO.
- **Interviews with Local Government:** When possible, interviews were conducted with local government officials to discuss their views of the ABCD group to determine if they are perceived to be different than other groups in the area.
- **Action Plan and Actual Output Comparisons:** During the initial ABCD training, ABCD groups designed action plans with specific outputs and divisions of responsibilities. Upon review of what was achieved since the ABCD start date, action plans were consulted to determine the extent to which action plans guided the steps taken by the group.

Appendix B: Evaluation Participants

The PM&E exercise involved three local facilitating NGOs, seven ABCD groups, and staff from Oxfam Canada and the Coady International Institute.

Table 1: ABCD Groups

Group	ABCD Training Date	Number of Members	ABCD Action Plan
Zato Shodera, Southern Nation's and Nationalities People's Region (SNNPR)	August 2005	21 men 14 women	Crop cultivation Oxen Sales Communal Shop
Durame, SNNPR	January 2007	14 men 21 women	Purchase and sale of teff Communal shop
Gerba Fendide, SNNPR	January 2006	18 men 17 women	Purchase improved wheat seed and sold to government for higher price in return for improved seeds Purchased and fattened 5 sheep Profits deposited at microfinance institutions and provided to members on loan
Tebbo, Oromiya Regional State	October 2006	2100	Road construction Reduction of "Harmful Traditional Practices"
Illu Aga, Oromiya Regional State	December 2005		Compost Irrigation Terracing Dairy collection centre constructed Veterinary Clinic constructed
Boricho, Oromiya Regional State	November 2007	37 women, 50 men	Teff contributed and provided on loan Vegetable gardening Livestock fattening Tree and vegetable nursery Dairy committee established
Salka, Oromiya Regional State	November 2006		Road Maintenance School Construction Water

Table 2: Facilitating NGOs

NGO	Partner ABCD Groups	Description
KMG, SNNPR	Zato Shodera, Durame, Gerba Fendide	<i>KMG is an Ethiopian Women's Self-Help Center that provides innovative health, vocational, and environmental programs to a</i>

		<i>diverse region of nearly one million from its center in the township of Durame. Over the centuries, our ancient peoples have developed many positive local traditions, including a basic principle we call self-help, or gezzima. But, harmful traditional customs have been handed down as well in ignorance (e.g. female genital mutilation). At KMG, we are building on our positive traditions like gezzima to eliminate those that harm our people, especially our women.</i>
HUNDEE Grassroots Development Initiatives, Oromiya Regional State	Illu Aga, Boricho, Salka	<i>HUNDEE programs focus on food security through the establishment of village level cereal banks; micro-credit schemes for women and youth, and civic education with a focus on women's issues. HUNDEE works within community culture and places great importance on the creation and promotion of cereal banks as autonomous community associations and the role they play in serving as focal points where communities deliberate and decide upon their local development priorities. Moreover, the organization feels that the banks provide permanent forums for informed citizens to make a positive shift from their current realities to a future they imagine and construct.</i>
Agri-Service Ethiopia (ASE), Oromiya Regional State	Tebbo	<i>ASE is a local NGO that has been engaged in rural development for the last 36 years. Although community training remains a spearhead component of all programs, its core development approaches include Distance Education (1969-1978); Face to Face Training (1979-1986); Action Oriented Training (1987-2000); Integrated Rural Development (1987-2000) and Integrated Food Security (2001 to date). As part of its effort to provide basic development needs, ASE is in the process of making a strategic shift from absolute service delivery to capacity building.</i>

Table 3: Other Partners

Oxfam Canada Ethiopia (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)		<i>Oxfam Canada builds lasting solutions to global poverty and injustice and works with allies in Canada and around the world to change the practices that perpetuate human</i>
Oxfam Canada Head		

Quarters (Ottawa, Ontario, Canada)		<i>suffering. Oxfam Canada believes that people together can create a fair world, free of poverty and injustice. A fair world builds the capacity of all human beings to: earn a decent living to support themselves and their families; enjoy basic education and healthcare; get help in life-threatening disasters; have a voice; and be treated as equal.</i>
Coady International Institute (Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada)		<i>Established by St. Francis Xavier University in 1959, and named for Rev. Dr. Moses Coady, the Coady International Institute works with innovative people and organizations to create effective, practical and sustainable solutions to reduce global poverty and injustice. Coady accomplishes this through leadership education, action partnerships, and research. The Institute also engages in initiatives to help young Canadians become active global citizens.</i>
Comart Foundation		<i>David Martin is a board member of the COMART Foundation and has been involved in the ABCD initiative every step of the way since 2003. The family foundation was named after David's parents (the name being a mix of Cox and Martin) and is inspired by a spiritual vision of duty to one's neighbour as well as helping communities and individuals with passion for local innovation.</i>