Organization for Women in Self-Empowerment (WISE)

ABCD project study in Nefas silk Lafto Subcity Woreda 10 of Addis Ababa City Administration

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CONTENTS

OVERVIEW

The progress report explores the initial findings and learnings of the *ABCD Project Pilot Study in Nefas Silk Lafto Subcity Woreda 10 of Addis Ababa City Administration* (ABCD Project Pilot Study), conducted in 2022 as part of the ENGAGE project. The report is divided into four sections:

- Section 1 introduces the project's context and discusses the study's design.
- Section 2 provides an overview of the research conducted, including the site and participant selection process, and participants' introduction to and implementation of ABCD.
- Section 3 examines the initial findings of the study, detailing the assets identified and mapped by participants, and the resulted community projects they selected to pursue.
- Section 4 revisits the study's learning objectives and reflects on the learnings and outcomes thus far, the challenges faced in implementation, and suggestions for ways forward.

1. BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

This introductory section of the *ABCD Project Study in Nefas Silk Lafto Subcity Woreda 10 of Addis Ababa City Administration* (ABCD Project Pilot Study) progress report, begins with a short history of development in Ethiopia to set the context before providing an overview of ABCD as background to pilot project and the potential significance of this action research study. It then moves to the details of the study, beginning with its objectives, location, methodology, and data collection and analysis. This section ends by discussing the limitations of the study and ethical issues for consideration.

Short History of Development in Ethiopia

The arrival of both national and international NGOs in Ethiopia can be traced to around 1960, with the latter responding to the severe famines of the 70s and 80s in the country's north (Clark, 2000). Since then, Ethiopian development has been based on the prevailing needs, such as education, health and nutrition. Despite still being able to find humanitarian or development-oriented organizations present in any given woreda[1] for more than fifty years, the communities they serve continue to be seen as "needy", viewed as mere recipients without any consideration given to their inherent potential and opportunities. As a result, self-reliance, self-organization, and the exploration of opportunities were hampered for decades. The communities relied on external support and developed dependency on external aid, mostly in the form of financial resources and material goods.

Yet, there are also successful stories of change that demonstrate how community groups can accomplish much with little outside assistance, revealing the significant untapped and underutilized potential that could be drawn upon for broader impact. These community-based initiatives signal an asset-based approach that counters conventional needs-based development work.

Background to the Action Research Project in Ethiopia

Traditionally, community development has taken a needs-based approach, wherein external actors identify a community's problems or needs, and those external actors removed from the community-level, often deemed "experts" or authorities, determine appropriate interventions and provide external resources. This has been the dominant development approach across Africa, especially from the 1950s to the late 1970s (Nel, 2018). In this approach, community voice and experience is often overlooked or minimized, and community is seen as the passive recipient of "help". Conversely, an asset- or strengths-based approach starts with community, and interventions typically involve the facilitation of community members identifying these its

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[1] A woreda is the smallest administrative unit of local government. See "Local Government Governance Structure" for more details.

strengths, assets, resources, and capacities, finding solutions and responding to its challenges with little to no outside support. Both types of development approaches aim to improve the lives of community members. However, where ownership lies in this improvement is the difference (Nel, 2018, p. 35). As a result, externally led development approaches do not provide lasting outcomes for communities (Fuimaono, 2012).

Mathie and Cunningham (2008), building on Kretzmann & McKnight's (1993) work in asset-based community development (ABCD), explain the process has arisen in response to critiques of mainstream development practices that focus on deficits. ABCD shifts "the focus away from deficits and problems and on to people's assets and strengths. At the community level, this means recognizing what works, identifying how people have successfully organized… and the particular strengths and resources people can mobilize themselves to improve their quality of life" (Mathie and Cunningham, 2008, p. 2). ABCD has become a popular development approach in regions of Africa and seen as essential to its success (Nel, 2018).

According to Peters et al. (2009), the introduction of the ABCD approach in Ethiopia was driven by two major factors: 1) the country's dependency on external assistance, and 2) the desire on the part of community groups and individuals to determine, lead, and take part in their own communities' development. The authors explain that "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" (p. 5). Furthermore, community groups have stewarded development efforts with little external support, indicating the "considerable untapped and overlooked potential that could be scaled up for wider impact" (p. 5).

The Organization for Women in Self-Employment (WISE) was introduced to the ABCD approach through a training opportunity offered to its management staff by the Coady Institute in Canada. WISE stated ABCD as one of its key strategic objectives as reflected in its five-year strategic plan document (2020 – 2024), and has been encouraging the communities it supports to start with what they have. Thus, WISE is committed to implementing the pilot ABCD project along with the associated action research with financial support from Global Affairs Canada and technical assistance from the Coady Institute. This progress report is the result of the action research conducted in parallel with the pilot ABCD project.

The implementation of the pilot ABCD project in association with the action research was carried out since July 2021 in woreda 10 of the Nifas Silk Lafto sub-city of Addis Ababa administration. The process has involved the woreda administration sector offices, the communities of the six neighbourhoods called "ketenas", as well as representatives of the local associations. The action research associated with the pilot ABCD approach has been running in parallel with the project from its inception.

Significance of the Action Research Study

This study is important in a number of ways:

1. It helps uncover significant untapped and underutilized potential of the target communities in terms of individual, associational, institutional as well as physical and natural resources in the process of participating in ABCD training.

2. The findings of the study will serve as a source of evidence for researchers and practitioners, including WISE, who would like to implement the ABCD process in the urban context by learning from the project's drawbacks, challenges, and successes. It informs the process of design and preparation of other ABCD initiatives.

This exploratory action research investigated the potential of the selected community by identifying new resources (e.g., physical resources) and individual skills (e.g., leadership, technical skills) that can be used for the community projects. The pilot ABCD project was designed collaboratively, involving the following stakeholders and their associated roles:

- The implementing NGO, WISE, was responsible for facilitating the ABCD process and conducting the associated action research.
- The funding agency, administered by Coady Institute, provided WISE with technical support.
- The woreda administration (government partner), represented by staff from different local government line department offices, mobilized community members for different tasks.
- The local community members, represented by youth, women's associations, Idirs[2] and elders' associations, were directly involved in prioritizing the actions and came up with their community action plans.

A combination of capacity building trainings on the concept of ABCD and ABCD tools, followed by exercising and practicing the tools in the context of actual communities, action and reflection meetings followed by action planning, implementation and evaluation of the prioritized community project have been carried out.

Research Question

The overall research question is as follows:

To what extent does action research contribute to elucidating the role of an asset-based approach in enabling communities to address a variety of local development challenges, as described by the community, through a gender lens?

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[2] Local associations. Iddir is a spelling variation (Amsalu, et al., 2020).

The specific objectives of the pilot ABCD project supported by action research are the following:

a) To identify how an action research-supported pilot ABCD approach contributes to assessing community members' awareness of their assets and aids in mobilizing these assets to achieve identified development goals with minimal external assistance.
b) To explore how the ABCD approach contributes to examining community members' capacity to initiate or improve the process of organizing themselves in developing action plans, implementing, and following up using a gender lens.
c) To identify how ABCD can be adapted to review existing or new community group links in order for them to identify challenges, opportunities, and transform community assets into new or strengthened ones.

Location of Study

The pilot ABCD project implementation site was identified from a list of criteria, including:

- proximity to the WISE office,
- existence of former rapport and social capital, and
- interest from the woreda.

Woreda 10 of Nefas Silk Lafto sub-city in Addis Ababa was chosen due to the presence of former ABCD trainees who had taken part in the EMPOWER project in 2017, coupled with the existence of one of the oldest SACCOs[3] organized by WISE. The community of woreda 10 was well remembered to have creative ideas and interest in the ABCD approach. Thus, it was an ideal site for ongoing ABCD work and research.

The original plan was to carry out the project implementation and the associated action research in one of the six blocks/villages within woreda 10. However, through discussion with the stakeholders at woreda administration level, it was decided that the project implementation and the associated action research should be carried out in the woreda's six blocks. The selection of numbers of the participants from each block were made based on the proportion of the population in each ketena[4]. Accordingly, nine members were selected on a voluntary basis to help select participants from the six blocks or neighbourhoods. A total of 47 participants took part in the overall process of the ABCD approach from training to action planning and implementation.

Methodology

The action research study of the ABCD project is purely qualitative. Methods used included observations of processes and practices, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews.

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[3] In an effort to support informed and resilient women leaders through organization and institution building, WISE has reached more than 55,000 women and girls and supported the establishment of 98 Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs) in Addis Ababa.
[4] Woredas are divided into subunits called ketenas. See "Local Government Governance Structure" for more details.

The actions and reflections were analyzed in relation to the first two objectives and the third one was not addressed. A baseline context for the project area was established through assessment of the historical, political, cultural, and economic issues in relation to asset identification and utilization, and a document review was conducted on policies that enhance or limit asset building, especially for women.

The action research study followed the training on the ABCD process and further action conducted by the ABCD team, WISE staff, and the local government. The initial findings were shared with stakeholders at plenary meetings during and outside of training. This was followed by observation, discussion, and analysis at each stage.

Limitations

The ABCD project implementation and the action research study were carried out through an action-reflection cycle in one woreda of the 11 sub-cities of the Addis Ababa Administration. Thus, the findings of the action research can only be indicative of the impacts of the ABCD approach on community development in this woreda. While the results are not representative or generalizable, qualitative data captures the nuance of perspectives and opinions regarding participation in an ABCD project.

Ethical Issues

The team involved in the ABCD training and process was considered the research group. In every step, voluntary participation of the research group was enhanced; confidentiality of the responses was respected, and identities were kept anonymous. The 'do no harm' principle was exercised throughout the research process. Finally, the woreda administration provided a consent letter and expressed the interest for being a research partner in the collaborative process.

2. STUDY IMPLEMENTATION AND PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Community Engagement and Selection of Advisory Group Members

The initial stakeholders meeting with 22 participants was conducted in July 2021, comprising different government sector office representatives, elderly people, women's association members, woreda development committee members, and representatives from the Mekaleya SACCO. The goals of the meeting were to:

- provide an overview of an ABCD approach to community development,
- confirm interest in the pilot ABCD project and the action research,
- discuss and confirm the availability of favourable conditions in the woreda for implementing the pilot ABCD project and action research,
- determine the exact location for project implementation within the woreda, and
- select advisory group members who would then select the pilot ABCD project participants.

Overview of and Engagement with ABCD

After WISE trainers provided an overview of ABCD, they observed that most participants supported the concept of the ABCD approach to community development, agreeing that it is good to start from the strength of the community and build on that. They were highly aware of the downside of welfare dependence and had a good understanding of self-reliance, expressing that many in their communities are seeking ways to move away from depending on outside resources. Members associations, such as Idirs, have already been practicing the ABCD approach in drawing on their own assets in order to start businesses. Different examples of ways to support earnings were raised, such as initiating a daycare at an individual mother's home. Participants also advised working with the talents and strengths of both elderly and young to create an intergenerational approach to building community.

Stakeholders posed a number of questions regarding ABCD and the connection with the Safety Net program, how different assets in the community would be mobilized, the role of Idirs, and how to access land. Moreover, they reflected that there are community members that have lots of assets but are either unwilling or unsure of how to make a contribution of their assets for their community's development.

Confirmation of Interest in the Pilot

During the meeting, the woreda administration office expressed its support for the project, indicating that it would identify the sectors that should be involved in the pilot and engage them accordingly. The commitment of the woreda administration to support the ABCD project and the research was encouraging. However, the mandate to facilitate access to working areas for community projects was challenging. It was determined that the woreda administration would need to be part of the coordinating body for the project for it to be successful. Additionally, the

community members expressed willingness to participate and committed to taking the lead in the implementation of ABCD project and the research.

To facilitate the accountability and responsibility of the parties in the project, especially between WISE and the local administration, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was drafted at the time of the meeting and later signed by the parties. The MoU indicates the roles of WISE, the woreda administration, and the community in the implementation of the pilot ABCD project and the action research.

Favourable Conditions for Implementation

One of the participants indicated that there were 1327 members in the Safety Net program, of whom 727 (55%) are women who were trained in the ABCD approach and would be able to create employment opportunities after completion. It was also revealed that Idirs have strong social capital and will contribute to

> During nomination, it was found that some nominees are overstretched, despite having the potential to support the group well. It was also observed that for some people being elected for a number of different committees raised their status even though they were not productive members. These individuals were rejected by community members. All the necessary efforts were made to maintain one to one proportion between the male and female members of the advisory group. However, this was unattainable as women accounted for only 30%.

the development of the community. For example, they mobilized resources such as tents, chairs, tables, among others, to support the national election in 2021. Residents of the community have also planted seedlings, and many have been involved in small urban agriculture working groups.

The decision on the number of participants was based on a proportion of the population in each ketena. As a result, it was agreed to have 60 potential trainees for ABCD with a gendered balance. Other selection criteria included being residents of the villages, time commitment, discipline, having the acceptance of the community, being free from corruption, and being willing to participate. The meeting's participants were asked to share an overview of the ABCD process and discuss outcomes with co-workers and staff in their respective sectors with the support of the woreda administration.

Selection of Advisory Group Members

At a meeting conducted by the project team from WISE and the woreda administration, it was recommended that the advisory group would comprise nine members, with ketenas 2, 3, 5, and 6 represented by one member each and ketenas 1 and 4 represented by two people due to their villages' population sizes, plus the woreda administrator. The nomination of the members to the advisory group was done through suggestions collected from the initial community meeting participants, from different formal association leaders (women, youth, elderly) and informal associations such as Idirs, from ketena representatives, and relevant government sector offices. The criteria set included:

- a resident of the area for more than five years,
- respected and well accepted in the neighbourhood,
- known for having values of contributing to the community and vocation for volunteerism, and
- able to mobilize others for community action.

An additional criterion for screening nominees for the advisory team was their commitment to striving for community change. Anyone sitting on the advisory group had to fulfill all the criteria. Gender balance of the advisory group was also given high consideration.

Accordingly, in November 2021, three to five candidates from each ketena were nominated. The ketena chairpersons were identified as nominees due to their visibility and invisible authority (due to age, recognition, capacity to exert positive influence), as they are closer to the community. As previously discussed, among the nominated individuals, only one person per ketena was selected to be included in the advisory group, except in the case of ketenas 1 and 4, which had two each. A total of nine individuals (three female & six male) were chosen for the advisory group by the representatives of the community and the woreda administration. The elected advisory group members were given a mandate to select projects for the pilot that represented the goals of their communities. Volunteerism of the community members is a reliable asset for an ABCD project.

Selection of Project Participants & Orientation to ABCD

As agreed upon during the first meeting of the project stakeholders, the maximum number of participants for the pilot ABCD project would be 60. The number of trainees from each of the six ketenas in the woreda would be proportional to the population size as indicated in the table below.

Ketena 1	Ketena 2	Ketena 3	Ketena 4	Ketena 5	Ketena 6	Total
16	6	5	21	6	6	60

Ketena 1 and 4 residents account for 70% of the population in woreda 10 while ketena 3 is a commercial site where the number of people living in it is very small in comparison to others.

The project participants' selection process included the following steps:

1. Project coordinators developed a personal information form that included potential participants' name, age, sex, level of education, marital status, occupation, and unique skills.
2. An orientation on the pilot ABCD project and action research was given to the project advisory group members. This meeting included developing project participant selection criteria.
3. Criteria were identified and included:
    a. having gender parity,

b. having a range of ages represented,
c. having a good relationship with other community members,
d. knowledgeable about the ketene,
e. having a commitment to voluntary service and a willingness to contribute time and knowledge,
f. being a role model,
g. being a good relationship builder,
h. being trusted by the community,
i. having a special talent, and
j. currently belonging to no or few committees.

Despite these criteria, more than 90% of those nominated in the first round were women, almost all of whom were housewives and unemployed individuals. There was also a hidden agenda behind this selection and this necessitated another selection process.

The half-day orientation was conducted to provide information on the overall ABCD process and the nature of the project, to create space to elicit commitment from nominees to the training and implementation of the project, and to facilitate informed decision-making among the participants.

During the orientation, WISE staff explained that the project does not have any funding for individuals or groups, but emphasized the significance of the training to participants' community work and personal life. They explained how focus was placed on drawing on community assets and liaising with local stakeholders in order to access community assets for tackling development concerns. Participants' alignment with this approach was then vetted through interviews.

During the interviews, individuals were assessed on a number of personal and community issues. Questions explored personal interests and motivations for involvement, interest in an income-generation activity, willingness to contribute to community development, and long-term commitment to a project. The team probed on the adaptability of the individual to draw on others for support in order to dedicate time to the project. Thus, the project participants were screened based on the findings from the interviews, which reduced the total nominees for the program from 60 to 47.

The makeup of the group of participants was diverse. More than half of the 47 participants were women (27 female and 20 male). Youth accounted for 29.8% and the elderly accounted for 10.6% of the total. With respect to marital status, single and married participants each accounted for 42.5% of the total while widowed participants accounted for 15%. Few participants were employed, about half were self-employed and over a third were unemployed. The diversity in marital status, gender, age, and employment influenced time commitment and types of projects they identified as key.

The ABCD Project

For the initial ABCD training sessions held in January and February 2022, participants were sub-divided into two groups of fewer than 25 people so the sessions could be more participatory. Participants from ketenas 1, 2, and 6 formed one group while those from 3, 4, and 5 formed another group. Each training ran for five days and was facilitated by the same training facilitator at WISE. Sessions were conducted in Amharic and all training materials, including a PowerPoint as a guide for the participatory process, case stories, exercises, and notes for the trainees, were also developed and provided in Amharic.

The only costs covered for participants were lunch and transportation. Attendance was overall consistent and controlled by a monetary penalty that was collected and kept in the charity box of WISE by the group leaders to support bed-ridden SACCO members.

Sessions began with the deliberation on topics of the ABCD approach and its principles. The participants were encouraged to be engaged and actively participate through posing questions and sharing their knowledge about the ABCD approach using their local language.

> The main objective of the initial training session is to encourage people to recognize the village's strengths, assets, and capacity to drive its own development. This leads to analysis of the village's achievements, which act as points of references when collaborating with villagers to design further action.

When evaluating the experience in the community at the end of the training, compared to the findings from the baseline study in the same community, there was a clear shift in perspective from the glass half-empty to half-full, i.e., from a needs-based to an asset-based approach in community development. The study indicated that "mutual assistance was the most important and significant feature of the Ethiopian community. The community had a culture of solving its own problems and even though it has faced challenges; it doesn't mean that it is completely gone." The baseline also explained that there was an expectation that "it is the government's responsibility to solve the community's problem", that "we assume government as father and us the community as children". According to one focus group participant from the baseline study, it is assumed that in any household, it is the parents' responsibility, not the children's, to manage the household and solve the household's problems. Thus, as the government is the administrator of the community, it also has the mandate of solving the problems and challenges. This participant's reflection illustrates the tendency to focus on deficiencies and to expect the government to address gaps. However, introducing a focus on strengths for solving problems, explained through the analogy of the glass half full instead of half-empty, impressed the participants and shifted their perspectives from need-based to asset-based approach to bring about their communities' development. Upon hearing previous success stories, there were repeated "Ahas!" voiced by the participants. They showed their determination in using assets for

their communities' benefit. Additionally, the power walk exercise helped participants understand how divided their communities are and existence of distorted gender dimensions.

"The capacity or power to participate in asset based and community-driven development can be influenced by gender, class, levels of education, wealth, ethnicity, political affiliations, and the constraints of time and place. Not everyone feels capable of engaging in the process. The (Power Walk) exercise will lead to discussions about how these power differences that exclude some members of the community can be modified, challenged, or even transformed by the process of ABCD (Peters, 2018, p. 28).

Implementing ABCD in the Community

After the training sessions, participants were divided into groups based on their ketena, and asked to identify their ketena's assets, including skills, associations, institutions, and natural and physical resources. The groups were ketena-based because people living in close proximity are able to identify their assets much better than those living far away from each other. Women and men were asked to list the community assets, including community success stories, separately in classrooms and further expanded the list during a field visit made to the respective ketenas. The identified assets of a village were discussed upon returning to their classrooms in order to determine a final list. The next section of this report details the identified assets and the project's initial findings.

Successful community stories revealed the skills and knowledge of participants as well as their creativity. Appreciating the achievements and strengths of the villagers is an important aspect of relationship building. The success of an asset-based approach to development depends on sustaining people's motivation to participate.

3. FINDINGS

Identifying Assets

The success of an asset-based approach to development depends on sustaining people's motivation to participate, which relies on relationship building, appreciating the achievements and strengths of community members, and celebrating their successes. Through the experience of identifying community assets and gathering stories, participants demonstrated their skills, creativity, and knowledge and were encouraged to share the success stories as a source of energy and inspiration for the group. Community members involved in the success stories were thanked for their work.

> *We are proud of your work and the contributions you made to the community, and we are really lucky to learn from your experiences. Would you tell us about how you were involved in this success?*
> ~Participant prompts for community members

In seeking out community success stories, the participants used appreciative inquiry methods[5] to learn from community leaders still living in the ketenas. The appreciative inquiries included questions on the following topics:
- the name of the project,
- the project's duration,
- the interviewee's role in the project,
- who generated the activities and how,
- who the leaders were (along with gender make up),
- which resources were used and how they were mobilized,
- whether any external support was received, and
- what led to success.

The results of the appreciative interviews revealed that the communities have had previous experience with community development programs, falling into three types:
- those facilitated by legally organized groups like male idders (e.g., Beheretsege iddir, Heberetena selam idir, among others),
- those facilitated by an individual, and
- those facilitated by a dedicated volunteer such as retired government employees.

Image Description

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[5] Appreciative inquiry is an asset-based approach to engage community members in identifying strengths.

Examples of projects included construction of:
- infrastructure works, such as internal roads and bridges to connect isolated villages,
- schools (Rute by Abiyot fana iddir),
- health facilities,
- child daycare centre (Hibret Besera iddir),
- meeting halls,
- rental properties (Bheretsege iddir), and
- shops and showers (hibret Selam iddir).

Other projects focused on service provision, such as:
- establishing a school feeding program (Edget Besera iddir in Abiyot Fana school in 2009 EC prior to the start of the government in 2011 EC), and
- a child night and day care centre run by volunteer women for children of commercial sex workers.

Among these initiatives, iddirs have a remarkable role. While women play a considerable role in both individual and group activities, men dominate in community development initiatives supported by iddirs.

Learnings from appreciative inquiry included:
- All work began as a result of contributions from the community.
- Leaders have social capital in the community and are trusted.
- Social capital and connections among like-minded people are a necessity to use assets for the common good of the community.
- Individuals' motivation and dedication (time, money, and ideas, among others) made them exemplary to others. "I am showing my effort first for people to join me and not ask people to come and start the work."
- Ability to bring and draw on every available human asset to the advantage of the community. Depending on the kind of community plan, inhabitants with diverse knowledge and experience are mobilized (engineers, planners, architectures, doctors, carpenters, food item producers, administrators, finance workers, wood and metal workers, among others) free of charge. Professionals and others contributed both skill and labour.
- Some individual leaders shared the project vision with their colleagues, who then joined.
- Ability to attract private entrepreneurs and institutions for support.
- Community project leaders are from among a relatively well-educated sector of the community.
- Leaders have social capital in the community and are trusted.
- Creativity and patience were observed of the organizers of the day care centre for children of commercial sex workers.
- Elderly people can still contribute much to community development if it aligns with their interests and concerns.
- All work began as a result of contributions from the community.
- There are instances where the woreda administration provided land.

- In the past, government has had a motivation scheme for those who volunteered to sacrifice their time.
- Recording the income and expenditure and auditing the whole process and reporting is a necessity to be transparent to the community.
- Social capital and connections among like-minded people are a necessity to use assets for the common good of the community.

From the lessons learned and the participants' reflections, the ABCD approach is well aligned with traditional self-help association principles, and can be easily rooted in the community's experience and perspective.

Many human assets were identified in the communities, outlined in the following table.

Professions	Additional Human Assets	Additional Skills	Civic Associations
Engineers	Women working in the informal sector	Management	Women's associations and leagues
Weavers	Elders on pensions contributing diverse skills and experience	Leadership	Ethiopian Red Cross association, which has space in the woreda, materials, and human resources
Artists & Artisans	Mothers caring for children and young people		Seniors' associations
Tailors	Unemployed people who can be mobilized for voluntary activities		Ethnic-based associations
Carpenters			Political associations
Builders			Youth associations and leagues
Lawyers			Consumer associations
Health workers			
Educators			

One of the formal associations examined in ketena 2 is a seniors' association, which has a total of 387 members, out of whom 200 are women. It was established and legally registered in September 2004. Even though the elderly are mostly pensioners, some of them are energetic and capable of working. In terms of human resource capacity, this group contains experts in a number of professions, including builders, pilots, mechanics, lawyers, and carpenters.

There are many informal associations in the ketenas organized by the goodwill of the community, and participants listed the available associations in their respective ketenas. These

include local self-help groups, such as male and female Idirs, religious based associations (e.g., Senbete, Mahiber), and economic groupings known as "equb".

There are 75 Idirs in the woreda, and some of the larger Idirs are being granted legal status and are supported by the government. All Idirs have substantial financial and human resources, and some have their own plots of land and rental buildings which are rented out to businesses such as hotels, clinics, and schools. Though such Idirs generate income from the assets and are accessible to their members, they provide a remarkable amount of money to the national development agenda, such as for the construction of the Ethiopian dam.

Participants also identified the assets held by Senbete groups, which are established by the followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. For example, some of them have meeting halls in church yards (e.g., Bihretsge Mariam). Non-members can rent the halls and the income generated is used to strengthen their Senbete group. The Senbete halls are among the underutilized assets in the community, as they are built around graveyards in the premises of the church and many people believe that spending time around graveyards can be spiritually unsafe. Therefore, using Senbete halls for other than religious matters is mostly unacceptable by the community.

Trainees also identified many underutilized resources within the ketenas. For example, the resources (physical and financial assets) within some informal associations are only accessible to the members of the associations due to their rules and bylaws. Additionally, the degree to which formal and informal associations are networked and the influences they can exert for community development are significantly underestimated. The consumer associations play a key role in stabilizing the market and Idirs contribute to community development due to their close proximity to the communities and their roles as development agents in some areas. Yet, a lack of cooperation between male and female Idirs was noted in some ketenas, indicating a missed opportunity for collaboration and mutual support.

> Even though these associations have ample assets that can serve both the association and the communities, they are hampered by the lack of flexible and timely decision-making due to the firm by-laws that state that the general assembly of the iddirs is the final decision-making body.

In terms of institutions, participants identified government[6] and private organizations. Examples of institutions in the woreda include the woreda administration office, religious institutions, training centres, numerous private companies, banks, garages, hotels, health facilities, and shoe and garment factories. These institutions present both opportunities and challenges in being mobilized as assets. For example, while the wide variety of private organizations in the woreda offer great potential for employment, youth expressed being unhappy to work in those industries

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[6] Non-government organizations are not present in the woreda.

due to minimum salary amount they set. Additionally, some government institutions have warehouses that they have not utilized for a long time and kept closed and in some cases, the ownership of underutilized warehouses is unknown. For example, there are four warehouses in the woreda that have large compounds with open spaces and were once used as storage and coffee processing facilities. However, the ownership of these warehouses is unclear to the community, making it difficult to mobilize this asset.

Natural resources in the woreda include two rivers and forest patches on the periphery of the rivers. The riverbanks are potential areas for urban agriculture, community vegetable gardening, and car washing spaces. Youth could be organized to set up income-generating activities in these locations. The physical assets that serve the community include the ring road that passes through the woreda, asphalt and cobble stone feeder roads, and buildings.

One of the largest natural assets in the woreda is Behere Tsige Park, which covers a large portion of the woreda land area. The participants noted that previous attempts by the woreda to use the park for different purposes had failed despite the fact that it does not offer enough services to the woreda or the general community. While the park was initially privately owned, the current status of ownership is unclear. There are also spaces which are illegally owned and for which the community has been proposing an alternative use.

> During the natural and physical asset mapping exercises, male participants were more active than their female counterparts due to their mobility. Men were more aware of and familiar with their woreda assets. Women mostly referred to financial assets and did not consider the knowledge, skill and experience available in the community as assets. However, during the asset identification exercise, a number of assets were discovered. Institutions, associations, physical and natural assets, and the human assets within the woreda were acknowledged. However, managing these assets, particularly land and underutilized warehouses, was difficult as they fell outside the authority of the woreda.

Gender and ABCD

A half-day training session on specific gender-related issues and their relevance to ABCD was facilitated with the participants at the end of the ABCD training. The training and discussion covered how the ABCD approach could be combined with fundamental gender concepts and topics, such as traditional division of labour over a 24-hour period, and gender and ownership of assets. This was developed as a new area and was not included in the existing ABCD manual.

The participants in the discussion acknowledged that women in society have a heavy workload compared to male counterparts, while there have been periods of progress when the workload on women has decreased. They also recognized the disparity in asset ownership and that asset transfer has been improved as a result of the revised family law of the Ethiopian civil code. In

any case, entitlement certification is often made in the names of husbands. Some women complained about the lack of access to spaces due to fees or other administrative challenges.

Asset Mapping

After listing the available resources, each group developed their respective community maps that showed the locations of the identified resources, visualizing the findings in each ketena. A field visit was organized to confirm the existence of the identified resources on the ground. At the end,

a consolidated asset map of the woreda was developed, posted in a public space in the woreda, and feedback was collected from other community participants who saw the map at the office where it was posted. Additional natural and physical assets were incorporated on the map, and a final consolidation of the assets on the map was drawn by the trainees with drawing skills.

Economic Analysis

Participants determined primary sources of income and primary reasons for expenditures in each ketena using the leaky bucket exercise[7]. The primary expenditures identified were for household consumption and transportation. The major sources of income for households came from small trading activities and wages from informal and formal employment.

The leaky bucket exercise revealed that parents in some of the ketenas are sending children to far away areas for school and that there is potential for closer sources of education.

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[7] The Leaky Bucket tool is available on the Coady website: https://coady.stfx.ca/digital-leaky-bucket/

Reflections from Participants

The participants were given the opportunity to reflect on the overall insights from the ABCD training. They indicated that they became aware of the community assets that they could use for addressing the development challenges.

The participants were able to compare what has been acquired from the training with that of the actual practice in their community. They stated that the usual trend in the woreda was organizing people for pre-identified projects without reaching consensus among them on the feasibility of a project. Also, for conventional projects, the assets of the individuals and the community were not considered. As a result, the project might not be in the best interest of the community.

Based on the above experiences, the participants appreciated that the ABCD approach was grounded in community and helped identify assets to address community challenges. As witnessed by the participants, the benefits of the ABCD approach could be seen beginning in the recruitment stage, which gathered people living in close proximity together. This process helped assess members of the community for their aptitudes in team building and sourcing support.

> *Quotes from Participants*
>
> *The sessions helped to have a shift in mind-set; to regulate the mirror about community development and say, AHA, I have an asset!*
>
> *Personal leaky bucket has brought a headache to me as it shows my expenditure clearly.*
>
> *It is necessary to work changing the perception of the government authorities that focus only at the front (needs-based approach)*
>
> *I was leaving earlier and going late to monitor my person IGA. I realized time is an important asset we used to waste.*
>
> *Let us explore ourselves and ask why projects started by the government and we are part of it failed.*

Community Projects

The community members designed projects based on identified gaps. While the concern to address an issue may be strong and the community can accomplish the project, it might not get approved by the local government from either a technical or legal perspective, or both.

While participants noted that the community prefers to be involved in government initiatives that are already supported legally, this type of situation often causes community members to hide their initiatives and proceed even if illegal. Government support was required for the ABCD projects.

In the process of community action planning, the participants were encouraged to suggest two or more project ideas after identifying their resources. More importantly, it was recommended that the projects fit the following criteria:

- engage and empower women,
- sensitive to children and elderly people,
- create jobs,
- could be implemented within the means of community resources and capacity, and
- have the government's attention and policy support.

Accordingly, the participants identified individual, team/group and woreda-level projects from the six ketenas. Four of the elderly members became hesitant to be directly involved in any of the projects and preferred to play an advisory and reconciliatory role for team members in case of any dispute that arose.

Among the individual projects, establishing a rental building, expanding the business of a hair salon owner, and diversifying existing income generating projects were selected using the individual human asset identified during the training. Group projects identified by participants included:

- the establishment of a daycare centre,
- provision of latrines and shower services,
- baking and distribution,
- kids' clothing shops,
- a shower and car wash service, and
- a vegetable and fruit shop.

While the identified projects encountered barriers to implementation, the skills developed by community members will be used into the future.

The participants perceived that bigger community projects would elicit government cooperation and acceptance from the wider community. One of the proposed projects selected was the establishment of daycare centres, as they were lacking in some ketenas. Low-income dwellers, especially single mothers, are most affected since they are unable to afford the payment to send their children far away. There is a tendency for adult mothers in the community to care for their neighbours' children at home at a fair price. This project would draw on the experience of these mothers and would incorporate them into the daycare centres. However, when the group tried to lease a space to start work, it became expensive and required a three-month advance payment.

In addition to the daycare centre, another major project that became a priority for the ABCD team was the establishment of a recreation area for the elderly. There are well-known elderly people available in the area who come from all walks of life, have good educational backgrounds, and can contribute their knowledge and experience. However, many are confined to their homes and feel isolated, as they do not have established meeting spaces.

The community groups were told to identify available plots of land for the projects in the woreda. The groups found unoccupied plots of land that were not reserved for a known purpose, which they then reported to the woreda administration. The daycare project was rejected since it would neighbour a school and was deemed inappropriate. Even though the groups received letters of support for the projects to be presented at the woreda and sub-city authorities, these entities indicated a lack of resources and spaces for the projects. The land policy, which was meant to maintain equity and protect security of a community asset (land), resulted in the land being inaccessible[8].

WISE Staff Observations

- Provision of free handouts to communities at previous times resulted in members having expectations of financial benefits.

- Jobless members hoped for income arising from the projects.

- Elderly participants were frustrated with repeated efforts to access space without success.

- The groups depended on WISE staff to facilitate every step of the process and this was became time consuming for the project manager without adequate staff support.

A meeting was held jointly with the two ABCD group members interested in the projects and the following concerns were identified:

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[8] See Annex for more on the land policy in Ethiopia.

- To access land, authorization is required. Even if the team goes to the City administration, the probability of access will raise the concern of registration as the group is not a legal entity.
- To establish a daycare centre, trained members were needed and the group did not have any.
- Fundraising is of high concern. The projects are for the common good of the community. Community representatives, government authorities, the private sector, among others will be invited to make investments.

Given the concerns and the frustration of community members, the projects have not been implemented. However, the learning was documented.

4. LEARNINGS & REFLECTIONS

The project, *Action Research on a Pilot Asset-based Community Driven Development (ABCD) approach in Nefas silk Lafto Subcity Woreda 10 of Addis Ababa*, is based on a new concept for both the urban community and WISE. While there have been experiences with the ABCD process initiated a decade ago in various rural areas in Ethiopia, knowledge and experience with its implementation in an urban context is lacking. International experience also shows that projects using an ABCD approach were designed around a thematic area, such as ABCD for climate adaptation, rather than engaging communities to identify an issue to address. Therefore, this was a process of learning by doing.

Learning Objective 1: Awareness & Mobilization

To understand how the action research-supported ABCD approach contributes to assessing community members' awareness of their assets and to mobilizing these assets to achieve development goals with minimal external assistance.

Learnings & Outcomes
Awareness of Assets
- ➢ Individual and group exercises enabled participants to map assets and validate this mapping through field visits and community feedback.
- ➢ Participants were initially challenged to identify human assets such as skills and experience, relying on their experience of focusing on financial, natural, and physical assets. During the training, participants shared professional abilities and non-professional skills, regardless of their gender or age.
- ➢ Physical and natural assets in the woreda including infrastructure, unutilized and underutilized buildings, vacant spaces, rivers, and forest patches were also mapped.
- ➢ Various associations and organizations were identified. However, their bureaucracies provided a challenge to collaboration.

Mobilization of Assets
- ➢ The community easily identified what they could do with the resources available with respect to concerns in the community.
- ➢ Participant groups developed action plans on issues such as the healthy development of children whose mothers were struggling to work and provide care.
- ➢ Groups also sought to address the need for shower houses and latrines.
- ➢ Participants planned to establish recreational centres for seniors where young people could interact with them.
- ➢ A fruit and vegetable market was also proposed by the participants.

Findings
- ➢ It has been challenging for groups to access space for the projects. There was lack of clarity on how to access spaces that were available in the community, as ownership of spaces is unavailable or not transparent. Furthermore, since groups were not legal

entities, it remained unclear whether they could register use of the spaces. Groups became frustrated with the levels of bureaucracy faced while advocating for space and, as a result, halted their efforts. Participants expected WISE to resolve this issue for them since it had provided the training.
- ➢ Some members had received support from the government previously and this meant that they could not receive it again unless they paid it back or could show they were unable to make progress after receiving the funds.
- ➢ Some projects faced challenges in terms of credentialing, participants in the groups did not have certification to work in a daycare centre.
- ➢ There are challenges and concerns regarding sourcing funds for the projects.

Learning Objective 2: Capacity

To understand to what extent and in what ways using the ABCD approach contributes to examining community members' capacity to initiate or improve the process of self-organizing to develop action plans and implement a project with a gendered lens.

Learnings
- ➢ Geographic proximity among community members matters when organizing for collective action and a shared vision. There is greater awareness of human assets and it is easier to build relationships and trust.
- ➢ Community cohesion among members was more important than the awareness or understanding of ABCD.
- ➢ It takes more than using an ABCD approach to organize group members and implement a project. Members need to assess strengths as well as any limitations to participation. Groups also need norms for communication and actions need to be documented.

Learning Objective 3: Linkages

To understand how the ABCD approach can be adapted for use in reviewing existing or new community group links, identifying links with internal and external actors, identifying challenges and opportunities, and transforming community assets into new or strengthened ones.

Learnings
WISE set an ambitious plan related to this research question. In the project area, there are strong existing associations and informal groups like Idir and Senbete groups. Studying such groups and understanding the possibility of linkages with internal and external actors is complex and require independent research efforts. Thus, it has not been addressed in this research study.

Implementation Challenges

The timing of the project along with international and national issues affected implementation. These included civil unrest due to internal conflict and the COVID-19 which limited free

movement of individuals for earning. There was a locust invasion in different parts of the country and a high inflation rate that aggravated the living conditions of many people. The war between Russia and Ukraine resulted in an increased fuel cost and rising prices of commodities. Thus, it was natural for low-income people to expect support as a program was developed as they had increased need for income.

The views of the community and the local government of an NGO also hindered the implementation of the project. Even though WISE chose the ABCD approach which focuses on assisting the community to solve its own problems using its own resources, the community has a deeply entrenched perception that humanitarian organizations mostly come to provide aid in the form of cash or material resources. Even the government authorities asked how the project will support the needy. Efforts were made to change this perspective, but a high turnover of the officials undermined these efforts. Although the nominees for the ABCD project had received comprehensive training and passed through a screening process, they still anticipated financial support from the project. Additionally, project participants expect assistance or a loan from the ABCD project as a result of WISE's experience with Savings and Credit Co-operative Societies (SACCOs).

The woreda level authorities are accustomed to a top-down approach where project plans and budgets are designed at a higher level and communities are asked to organize themselves to execute the plan and, in some cases, mobilize resources. Thus, the local government prioritizes projects planned at the higher level and accompanied by resources.

The search for vacant spaces for project implementation was complex and frustrating because the project was implemented in an area of the inner city where there is a scarcity of natural resources, such as land. Thus, the group members were discouraged due to the woreda's limited support and lack of a decision-making mandate on land issues. Most project participants have already obtained land, loans, and workspace, and it is unclear how the ABCD group will function as a legal entity moving forward. Due to shortage of resources, the government will not assist residents who have previously received assistance unless they pay it back or can show that they failed to make progress while receiving it. Unfortunately, this situation was not assessed during the screening process.

Suggested Way Forward

In a complex urban context, strong leadership is required for implementation of community-level projects. Working with a strong government body that might influence others, supported by active community dwellers and a team of experts with very good documentation for evidence might result in the buy in of policy makers. However, it might also be time consuming to achieve.

At this stage, it will be useful to explore the impact of the ABCD process on the leadership abilities of the women at the household level that focuses on self, family, and business. Exploring the leadership level they attained in the community or in any new group and within community will provide another insight on how the impacts of the ABCD pilot project on the community.

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ANNEX: COMMUNITY AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

At the start of the project, WISE assessed the local context, including historical, political, cultural, and economic conditions. The socio-economic situation showed the prevalence of insecurity due to internal conflict, and very strong external political pressure on the country was associated with the internal conflict and the construction and filling of the Great Renaissance Dam (GERD) of Ethiopia. Internal resource mobilization was intense to support the government in its effort to maintain peace and security of the country, and to respond to the emergency needs of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) amidst the Covid 19 pandemic. Furthermore, the high rate of inflation, particularly of consumables, has been affecting the whole population. The market situation was aggravated by a currency devaluation and the lifting of the fuel cost subsidy by the government.

Repeated reshuffling and reorganizing of the local government structure impacted the implementation of the ABCD project as this implied repeated orientation and / or awareness raising sessions regarding the pilot ABCD project. This resulted in increased time and monetary costs.

Project Location Details

The pilot ABCD project is being implemented in Nifas Silk Lafto (NSL) sub-city, which is one of the eleven sub-cities of the Addis Ababa City administration, the capital city of Ethiopia. The project is taking place in woreda 10, one of the 13 woredas of the sub-city. As shown in the map below, the sub-city is located in the southwestern suburb (8°58'32.6"N 38°43'37.6"E) of the city of Addis Ababa. It borders with the sub-cities of Kolfee Keranio, Lideta, Kirkos Bole, and Akaki Kaliti. The total land area of NSL sub-city is 5876.02 ha., while the land area size of woreda 10 is 189.3 ha, representing about 3% of sub-city's land size (WISE Baseline study, 2021).

As of 2011, the total population of the sub-city is 335,740 people and that of woreda 10 is 40,224 (12% of the sub-city population). From the unpublished study of Urban Community Health Information System referred to in the baseline survey of WISE (2021), 58% or 23,200 of the residents are female. There are approximately 12,600 households, indicating an average family size of 3 people per household. Among these households, about 49% are categorized as very low or low-income households. Of the total population in the woreda, 70% are engaged in either formal or informal trade, while the remaining 30% are employees of the public and/or the private sector or unemployed.

Local Government Governance Structure

The structure of the administrative governance is dynamic and the system that is serving at the moment is pictured below. The woreda is the smallest administrative unit which is further divided in to ketenas. The ketena is divided into blocks that are further divided into menders in order to reach every individual living in the area. This project was implemented in the six ketenas of woreda 10 of Nefasilk Lafto subcity.

Mender → Block → Ketena → Woreda → Sub-city → City Administration

Background to the Organization for Women in Self Employment (WISE)

The Organization for Women in Self Employment (WISE) is an Ethiopian residents' non-profit organization established in 1997. WISE envisions a nation where absolute poverty is eradicated, where women play an active part in development, and live and work in a safe environment. WISE exists to work with low-income women and girls in their efforts to become economically empowered, improve the quality of their lives, develop resilient families, enjoy equal rights, and become active players in the development of Ethiopia. The geographical operation area of WISE is the sub cities in the Addis Ababa administration region, the Arsi zone of the Oromia region and in the Wolayita zone of the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region.

In an effort to support informed and resilient women leaders through organization and institution building, more than 55,000 women and girls have been reached and 98 Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs) have been established in Addis Ababa. As clearly stated in its five-year strategic plan (2021 – 2024), WISE has placed a key focus on using an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach as a strategy.

Land Policy of Ethiopia

This policy is of key relevance given the types of project resources mapped to enable space use for such facilities as childcare and elderly members' meetings. The land policy arises as a challenge in the ABCD project.

The land policy of the country is a constitutional issue which only provides use right. According to the 1995 constitution, all urban and rural land is the property of the state and the Ethiopian people. "The usufruct rights exclude the right to sell or mortgage the land. This, the government asserted, was to protect the rural peasants from selling off their land to wealthy individuals leaving them landless and without source of livelihoods" (Crewett, et al. 2008, p. 1). The land laws enacted henceforth are only the derivatives of the constitution to facilitate the development

policies and strategies that the government strives to achieve, based on the 1995 constitution (W/Gebriel and Belachew, 2008).

> The power to enact laws for the utilization and conservation of land and other natural resources in the country is exclusively given to the Federal Government (Art. 51(5) of the Constitution). Regional governments have the duty to administer land and other natural resources according to federal laws (Art. 52(2)(d)) of the Constitution). The first law of this nature was enacted in July 1997 and was titled "Rural Land Administration Proclamation, No. 89/1997." This law has, however, been repealed and replaced by the more recent Proclamation No. 456/2005, otherwise known as "Rural Land Administration and Land Use Proclamation." Likewise, based on such Federal Rural Land Use Proclamations Regional states (Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, and SNNPR) ensue to adopt similar rural land laws. (p. 65)

Land Policy and Community Projects

Land has been identified as a key natural asset that is required for community projects. Land has been provided to projects based on government priorities in the woreda for micro and small enterprises in an aim to tackle unemployment. Land is being provided for individual projects in exceptional cases and for associations on an allotment basis with a use right only. This means that if that land is required by the government, it can be expropriated by paying non-negotiable compensation of the property on the land which is sometimes below the market price. Land is also provided in a lease arrangement for a defined period of use.

Additionally, it was discovered that rights to land use provided by the government to community projects is for a temporary period, regardless of purpose. For micro and small business purposes, it is only for five years. Government respondents also stressed that at the woreda level, they are not mandated to provide land since provision of land is the mandate of the sub-city and higher government levels. The woreda can only pass the request for land on to the sub-city authorities. When the government has programs to be implemented, the woreda is given instructions to provide land either from the woreda land bank or it is instructed to search for the needed land size in their woreda that is not occupied for any purpose or through land expropriation.

Land Policy in Relation to Gender Equality

The provisions of the constitution with regard to gender equality was reviewed. There is an historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in Ethiopia, and in order to remedy this legacy, women are entitled to affirmative measures. Relevant provisions and rights, as outlined in the constitution, are as follows:

- Article 25 of the constitution states that, all persons are equal before the law without any discrimination whatsoever.

- Article 35 on Rights of Women declares that women shall enjoy the full rights and protections provided for by this constitution, have equal right with men.
- Women have equal rights with men in marriage.
- The constitution has provisions regarding gender resource use or rights. It states that:
    - Women have the right to acquire, administer, control, use, and transfer property.
    - Women have equal rights with men with respect to use, transfer, administration, and control of land.
    - Women shall enjoy equal treatment in the inheritance of property.
    - Women shall have a right to equality in employment, promotion, pay, and the transfer of pension entitlements.

Despite these provisions, discrimination persists through customary norms, particularly in rural areas, undermining women's access, inheritance, and control of land. Exercising rights is also a challenge, "limited access to courts and lack of resources, an effective implementation of the provisions of the law protecting women's right to land requires taking series of measures to bridge the gap between the law and practice" (Dibaba, 2020, p. 42).

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