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# Change and transformation in 20 rural communities in Ethiopia

## Selected aspects and implications for policy

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## Change and transformation

Over the past two decades rural Ethiopia has undergone

- considerable change & significant transformation in the local economies, and
- important improvements in infrastructure, communications, and access to services.

Government interventions interacting with broader modernisation processes and context-specific local dynamics have been key drivers of these changes.

What does this transformation look like at local community level and what does it mean for different kinds of households and people? These are the questions that the research presented in this book addresses, documenting selected aspects of change and addressing potential policy implications of the findings.

## Ethiopia WIDE research in brief

Research approach: long-term, community-focused qualitative case-based complexity.

Research methods evolved over the three WIDE phases (1994 – 2013), notable changes being the involvement of female researchers from WIDE2 in 2003 and a greater focus on the role of development interventions in WIDE3.

The WIDE research focuses on 20 villages (see map on the last page) selected as exemplars of different types of rural communities, and presenting wide variations in a range of key parameters such as livelihood systems, remoteness or ease of access, cultural institutions, and religious and ethnic composition.

## Key findings and implications for policy

Research findings related to urbanisation, increasing differentiation and other social and economic transformation, and changes in education and health and for women and young people are explored in depth in the 12 chapters of this book. Overall, these show that in the course of two decades, the WIDE communities have changed almost beyond recognition and become much more open to the outside world – as have people living in them, with their wider aspirations reflecting this greater openness.

The authors offer some reflections on three cross-cutting themes emerging from these findings: 1) growth, poverty and inequalities; 2) the space and time dimensions of change; and 3) experiences of change of women and young people. The potential policy implications are briefly summarised below.

### Rural communities need to diversify to grow

WIDE research evidence

- supports the idea that agriculture remains a high policy priority and provides evidence for the importance of irrigation for growth.
- highlights the importance of urbanisation and of economic transformation in local economies, providing evidence of higher growth in better connected and market-integrated communities.
- suggests the need for greater attention to non-farm activities, notably expanding micro/small enterprise support initiatives to rural centres: to provide opportunities

for the growing numbers of young people with limited access to land; to support the increased participation of girls and women in economic activities; to open up the range of opportunities available to local entrepreneurs; and to enhance benefits of increased urbanisation of the communities.

## **Leaving no one behind: understanding the conditions of poor/vulnerable people, reducing remoteness**

The National Social Protection Policy adopted in 2014 commits to “leaving no one behind”. In this respect, the WIDE research points to the importance of a change in mind-set and approaches in interventions aimed to improve poor and vulnerable people’s situations, based on an understanding of their constraints and rationales and respect for their priorities and efforts. Findings also suggest the value of integrating external interventions with the activities of community institutions.

The WIDE research shows a clear link between remoteness and more limited access to government interventions and other aspects of modernisation. While ongoing government efforts to reduce rural remoteness are paying off, the research suggests the importance of

- further improving the road network, focusing especially on internal roads and paths in order to reduce within-community remoteness.
- developing and expanding off-grid electrification options to power smartphones, tablets and laptops so as to allow ICT-based access to services in various fields.

## **Continuing to improve the lives of women and young people**

The WIDE research documents progress towards gender equity, while also highlighting outstanding constraints. It shows how young people’s transitions to adulthood have become more complex, and longer. Findings suggest the importance of understanding women and young people (who make up more than half of the population) in a more nuanced way: as individuals with genderage-specific needs, potential and constraints and who take account of all aspects of their lives when they make decisions – which could be better appreciated by policymakers and implementers.

Reflecting on this the authors suggest that in order to accelerate progress towards gender equality:

- more and improved interventions are needed in education, reproductive health, agricultural extension, youth livelihood development etc.;
- it is important to pursue interventions that enhance broad modernisation forces, such as infrastructure development ‘opening up’ rural communities;
- interventions that actively seek to change social norms are particularly important. These need to recognise concerns that inevitably emerge when fundamental changes in men’s roles and in relationships between women and men occur, and actively to enlist support from a wide range of potentially progressive actors, including men and young men and opinion leaders in the community.

The research also suggests that ways to improve young people’s transitions to adulthood might include:

- rebalancing perspectives and recognising the reproductive role of young men and the productive role of young women more fully;

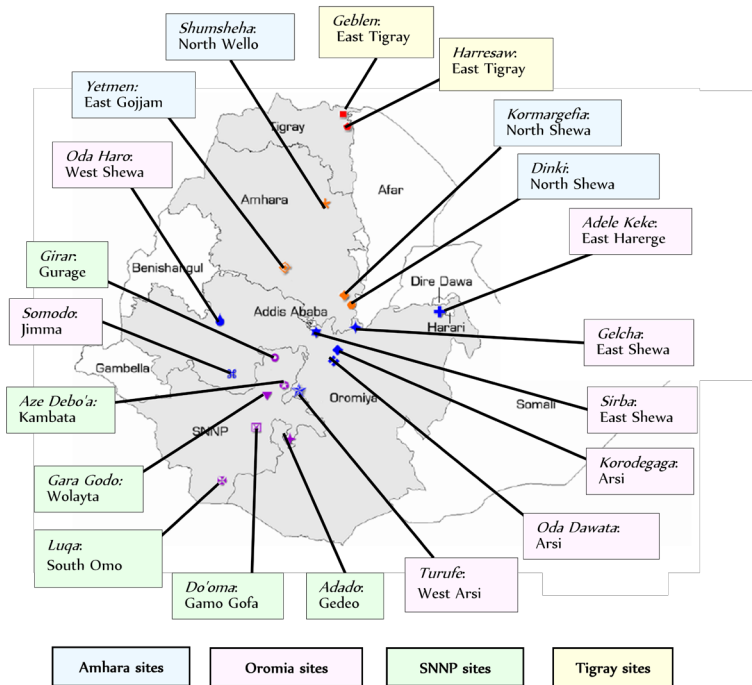
- expanding local livelihood opportunities for youth – including a focus on non-farm activities and micro/small enterprise development as suggested earlier;
- providing more effective support for young people seeking employment in towns, industry and abroad, for whom this may be an effective way to significantly contribute to their home community’s development.

## Adapting the approach to policy-making and implementation

WIDE provides ample evidence that a disciplined top-to-bottom rollout approach to policy-making and implementation has been vital in launching Ethiopia’s development transformation. However, the research also suggests that sustaining inclusive change calls for adaptation going forward. The book makes three suggestions:

- Adopting a holistic inter-sectoral approach
- Promoting flexible nuanced interventions that are responsive to local contexts
- Prioritising grassroots and collaborative learning and experimentation.

Location of the 20 sites under Ethiopia WIDE research



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