Contextualizing Urban Poverty: The Case of Cheri Safar Arada Sub-city of Addis Ababa

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Abstract
This article attempted to explore urban poverty and its indicators in Arada sub-city of Addis Ababa particularly Cheri Safar. It is known that Addis Ababa is the ‘political capital’ of Africa. However, the city has numerous problems and I do not think there is a solid enough fit between its image and local reality. People are being sufferers from lack of basic infrastructures (houses, toilets, water supply and proper sanitations). Therefore, this paper is designed to show the concomitant livelihood deterioration in very specific Cheri Safar of Arada sub-city of Addis Ababa.

Keywords: poverty, household, basic infrastructure

Introduction

An Overview of the Study Area
The study was conducted in Woreda six (formerly kebele 11&12) of Arada sub city particularly in locality named Cheri Safar. The area was named Cheri Safar after the landlord Cheri who lived in the area during the Emperor regime. The specific relative position of Cheri Safar is located on the right side of the main asphalt road down to Menelik II hospital, between the Yared Music School and North Addis Ababa telecommunication main branch office.

Informants indicate that the present community’s dwelling area was originally owned by a single household family, Cheri. He built many rent houses by then for his household benefit. However, with the coming of the Derg régime (1974-1991) the extra land and urban houses were nationalized and brought under state ownership. As a result, Cheri was confiscated and evicted from his extra land and his houses were nationalized and transferred to the state. Then the Derg set the nationalized houses under kebele administration. Through time the kebele built additional rent houses around the area for people of low status and low living condition. Therefore, the historical evolution of the study community indicates that it evolved from single household family to the general community level. In the field duration I realized that almost all dwellings of the community are kebele houses. Out of the total 67 legally known households in the study area only 14 households are private dwellings whereas the remaining are kebele rent houses.

The ethnic composition of the area is so much diverse. As well experienced informants elaborated, over the last four decades many people immigrated in to the area pushed by relatives, friends and most importantly low cost of kebele houses. Some informants even elicited that the considerable explosion of population in the area are associated with the perception of the poor. Accordingly one informant expressed the attraction of poor people in the study community in the followings way: “የቸሪ ሰፈር በጦም አያሳድርም፤የጃንሜዳ አድባር ከዳቦ አያሳድርም”. This expression related with the noble background of the landlord in whose name the community is identified and the sacred plat land, Jan-Meda, where during epiphany the Arks of Orthodox church chairs there for a day duration. Whatever the reason may be, the place is the center where many urban poor are living. The inflow of the people from different corner to this specific locality ultimately produced diverse ethnic composition. Although it is difficult to know the exact figure of each ethnic composition within the brief field duration, data elicited from informants indicate that the majority of dwellers in the community are Oromo, Amhara and Guraghe whereas the rest are from the various ethnic backgrounds.

Objectives of the study
The general objective of this study is to know the nature and condition of urban poverty in woreda six (formerly kebele 11 &12) of Arada sub city particularly in Cheri Safar. Specifically, the research is designed to:-

- Explore the general living condition of the study community.
- Find out the concept of poverty in community’s perspective.
- Analyze the major indicators of poverty in the study area.
- Examine the livelihood mechanisms of the community people.

Methodology
This study is purely empirical in nature. It is aimed to see the livelihood of people on the ground than discussing theoretical approach and intensive literature review. In line with this, fieldwork is an exhaustive method of study in social arena of specific community. Regarding this, Ellen (1984: 64) says “field work is the source of knowledge; philosophical and theoretical elaboration comes later.” That is, it is a means via which construction,
generalization and patterns of relationships can be made possible. Thus, this study is based on short duration fieldwork. The fieldwork was conducted in woreda six of Arada sub city particularly in Cheri Safar from 7th-25th July 2012. Data used in this study is purely qualitative.

The study is mainly based on primary sources; however, secondary sources were also consulted to build up the concept of poverty in general and urban poverty in particular. The primary sources are collected by using various data collection techniques. First, I used interview method extensively to draw out information from the key informants and various households. Interview method is employed because it enabled me to uncover depth information of demographic, social, economic, infrastructure and welfare of the participants. I employed formal semi-structured interview. Before conducting the field study, I had prepared an interview guideline which enabled me to carry out an interview in a good manner. In general, I administered an interview with five key informants and various households. Second, I conducted focus group discussion with people from different occupation and background to draw the general picture of the community’s living condition.

Observation is the other method I employed to conduct the study. In the influx of the first day, I explored the general setting of the community. During the field stay, I observed some public services, roads to the main asphalt, waste disposals, the settlement pattern, slum houses and the like. In addition while conducting the interview; I observed the congested living spaces, family size, access to sanitation and some ‘desperate retail trading’ by some participants. While observing, pictures of slum houses, congested settlement pattern have been taken to substantiate our study. I had used case study method also. In order to verify the nature of poverty in the study community, two household case studies were made.

Regarding ethical consideration, the informants were informed on the nature and purpose of the research and their consent was asked and secured. Informant’s confidentiality and privacy were also ensured. This is to mean, any information about the informants would never be cited in final report or document without their consent. Accordingly, we got their consent that they don’t bother whether I use their name and house’s photo. Although they didn’t worry whatever it is, I used false names in this study for the sake informant’s personal secrecy and anonymous.

As already been mentioned, the nature of data used in this research is purely qualitative. Therefore, its analysis also requires qualitative approach. Thus, I interpreted and analyzed the data I secured through interview, focus group discussion and observation methods qualitatively.

Poverty and Indicators of poverty
Defining Poverty
There is no universal word to define poverty. People define poverty from what they actually faced and their particular cases. That is to mean, what is poverty for Africans may not be poverty for Americans. What is poverty and who should define it? Most definitions associate poverty with a “lack” or “deficiency” of the necessities required for human survival and welfare. However, there is no consensus about what basic human needs are or how they can be identified (Wratten 1995:12). Nevertheless, let us see some defining concepts by some others.

Poverty is a global phenomenon which affects continents, nations and people differently. It affects people in various depth and levels at different times and phase of existence. Poverty is the condition that is said to exist when the people lack the means to satisfy their basic needs necessary for survival; the effect of poverty is harmful both to the individual and the environment. Poverty can be described as a state where an individual is not able to carter adequately for his or her basic needs of food clothing and shelter and is unable to meet social and economic obligation, lack gainful employment skills assets and self-esteem and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, portable water and sanitation and consequently has limited chance for his or her capabilities (Oduwaye et al 2011).

According to Akinyele (1994), poverty can be refers to as specific form and level of deprivation which impose major limitation on formal human functioning and existence. The urban poor are families or individuals living below the poverty line who are distinguished by characteristic such as unemployment, lack of or inadequate access to basic service such as water, electricity, health and education and lack of nutrition food, shelter, clothing and access to information and new technologies needed for their survival.

The Conceptualization of Poverty: Community’s perspective
The concept of poverty is viewed in different manner among people of the study community. According to some informants, poverty stands for lack of physical and health wellbeing. When people are healthy physically and mentally, the informants argue, they can overcome whatever problem they face. They have possibility to use every opportunity to improve their life. In contrast to this idea, the majority informants agree that poverty in the context of their community accounts for lack of access to basic facilities like proper sanitation, piped water, adequate housing, kitchen and the like. Therefore, their view of poverty associated with absent of direct access to basic facilities and infrastructure. Also on the other hand, some informant’s emphasized poverty as inability to
adequately feed one’s household due to low income. They associate the concept of poverty with unemployment and inadequate livelihood mechanism of the people.

When I analyze the living condition of the people, I am convinced that almost all accounts of poverty given by the informants are in one or another way characterize the general features of the community. Particularly, lack of access to basic social services or facilities underlines the situation of the community. Based on the view of the community and observation I made, in the following sections I will describe the basic indicators of poverty in the study community.

Indicators of Poverty in the Study Area
Indicators of urban poverty can be associated with various aspects. However, depending on the insiders view I identified three major areas which are considered to be basic indicators of poverty in the study area. These are lack of access to basic infrastructure, housing problem and inadequate livelihood conditions.

a) Lack of Access to Basic Infrastructure

i. Lack of access to proper Sanitation
Regarding basic infrastructure, informants indicate that lack of access to proper sanitation is a serious problem. In comparative to the crowded population in the area, there is no proper solid and liquid waste management. There is no public waste disposal service in the community. Perhaps the only inadequate service they get is from Waste Disposal Association organized Micro and Small Enterprise. Nevertheless, the community members claim that this institution does not deliver proper function. It gives function once in a week despite the community members are regularly paying bills for such service. I personally confirmed that there is poor waste management in the study area.

Regarding access to toilet, almost all inhabitants of the community have no private toilet except few households who have their own dwellings. Absence of private toilet is associated with overcrowdings and lack of space. Until very recently the community used open-spaces (around Jan-Meda) for toilet purpose. Even in these days as some informants assert, many people use the same strategy for removing their waste. I was astonished when some of the informants told that due to absence of private toilet in their dwelling, during occasions of stomach discomfort, they are compelled to excrete their waste at home in popo (often night). Then they sent out the wastes in the small canals of the community before the day break. Such condition is potential factor for pollution of community. In order to solve the problem, local nongovernmental organization, Plan International Ethiopia, has built two small communal toilets for the community. Nevertheless due to population increase in the area the two toilets are inadequate for the community. Generally, the community witness poor management of wastes. Absence of access to sewerage is basic factor for environmental pollution and health predicament in the study area.

ii. Absence of Adequate Water Supply
Lack of access to adequate water service is another major indicator of poverty in the study area. It is general truth that access to purified water supply is one of the essential elements for wellbeing of the individual and communities. Nevertheless, in the case of Cheri Safar, absence of direct access to piped water is the major factor that determines the status of their living. According to the informants with exception of few households (14 households have their own piped water in their dwelling compound), the majority of the people have no direct connection to piped water to their home. The people are using water from public stand pipe built by Plan International Ethiopia. Nevertheless they do not get water proper at their need. Informants argued that the public stand pipe functioning only at morning and evening. Apart from these two sessions, it is difficult for people to access water. They move long distance to buy water. Shortage of water supply facilitates problems related to health i.e. unable to wash cloth, household utensils and the like.

iii. Lack of private kitchen
Other problem the community identified as major indicator of their poorness is shared use of kitchen. In my field duration, I did not see even a single household owns kitchen. Even due to crowdedness of the settlement some kitchens built by Plan International Ethiopia turned to dwellings. I observed a kitchen turned to dwelling of more than five family members. Lack of kitchen forced some community members to prepare their food within their dwellings.

b) Housing Problems
As we all know, housing is one of the fundamental necessities for human survival. However, it remains as a principal problem of the most cities of developing countries including Addis Ababa. The housing condition of Chari Safar is also definitely inadequate in quantity and quality conditions to meet the need of the residents. Addis Ababa has two forms of housing tenure i.e. government and private.

With regard to physical condition of the Chari Safar house, it is characterized by low level of quality. And most of the units is in need of replacement because the majority of the housing stocks are built up of mud and wattle, corrugated roof and as well as served for a long period of time. As a result, they are in a poor physical condition and in a need of complete destroy and replacement.
Therefore, all dwellings in the community are very old and outdated, constructed of local materials like wood and clay. In addition to formally known and registered houses, there are many slums and shanty houses that people use to live as adaptive strategy to cope up with their harsh living condition. The pattern of the settlement is very crowded and congested. House construction and buildings are not designed. Lack of limited land access in the area created over crowdedness. The space between buildings and corridor between units of the houses are very small. There is no proper path within the center of the community. Thus, informants claim that lack of proper path within the community creates challenge for movement especially during occurrence of death and marriage ceremony.

c) Inadequate livelihood mechanisms
Data gathered from the informants show that people in the study community are engaged in various activities to cope up with their poor living condition. However, the major occupations people involved are informal works and low-pay daily jobs. There are only few people who are working in government offices. The livelihood earning of each families are almost derived from the income of household heads. The majority women are unemployed but they are head of households. They are only working in the domestic affair. Data gathered from women and children affair office of woreda six show that no attempt is taken to improve the livelihood condition of the women in the study area. Generally, the major livelihood strategies in the community are selling local drink (alcohol), Injera selling, petty trade, painting, making Injera and washing clothes and the like. The amount of income earned from such activity is not affordable to their household expenditure. The subsistence nature of livelihood condition forced many community members to live as poor for years as informants claim.

Case study
Case 1

Yeshiwork Mokennen is living in Cheri Safar. She has been living there for almost ten years. She is 45 years old and she is feeding four children. She is illiterate though she is striving for teaching her four daughters. Before her coming to the area, she has been living in Buta Jira and Dire Dawa.

Yeshiwork was born and grew up in Addis Ababa but she begun itinerant living to beat life. While she was in Dire Dawa, she married and started shared living with her husband though not lasted long. Because of disagreement between her and her husband, she decided to see him off and returned back to Addis Ababa to rise up her four children. She divorced him and began to take sole responsibility of her children. Due to the disbandment of the marriage, the burden of feeding her children was vested up on her shoulder.

In order to overcome the challenges of life, Yeshiwork began to work petty daily work such as washing clothes for riches and backing injera by moving from house to house. The income she earns from these petty works doesn’t fulfill even her daily consumptions. She lived in such mess condition for almost ten years. The income she earns from such work is no more than 20 Ethiopian birr which is unaffordable to her daily expenditures.

Yeshiwork is living in slum and crowded house with her four children. I say simply house but it is difficult to say house as standard in the capital city. It is only circled by corrugated iron and found at the back of Addis Ababa University Yared Musical School. It has constructed by the generous help of the around community. However, some of the kebele officials deconstructed the house supposing that is constructed illegally and not on a right track of the city plan. Through the continuous adorning of the officials by the community and Yeshiwork herself that she has four children who all are below eighteen and that she has no husband to help her to feed those children as well as the difficultness and immorality of living verandah with these children, the kebele later allowed her to live temporarily there due to impossibility of such construction as per city’s plan. Housing is a key determinant of quality of life that can be measured at individual, household, and community levels.

Moreover, Yeshiwork’s problem is not only housing problem but also infrastructural problems. She and her families have no access to piped water, toilet, cooking room, and bath room and sewage tube. They have no private toilet and piped water. Very regretfully to say, they use popo instead of toilet at their room and throw it to sewage tube often at the mid night which is little bit far from the area. Due to the absence of sewage tube around, the liquid and solid wastes damped and made slum the area near to the house.

Yeshiwork has no property of her own and she is not employed. She is living hand to mouth life. She told us that she has to teach her children hopefully that tomorrow will revenge today’s undermined life. Recently, her first daughter went Dubai for better work and somewhat she is helping her family. She and her families’ daily life are depended on what I preferred to say ‘desperate retail trading’.

Case 2

Genet Kebede is a fifty years old women living in the area under study. She has two children and a husband. All of them are unemployed. All responsibility of the house is vested in the hands of Genet. She is uneducated and unemployed. She explained her grievances towards government that she didn’t get any support from kebele to
cope up with her existing harmful living situations. Furthermore, she said, “I don’t know government” because the government body didn’t inclusively consider the low income earners of the community.

Having challenged life, Genet began to work insignificant daily work such as washing clothes for riches and backing injera for others as well as a petty work for her. The income she earns from these petty works doesn’t fulfill even her daily consumptions. She lived in such untidiness condition since 1997 EC. The income she earns from such work is no more than 20 to 25 Ethiopian birr which is unaffordable to her daily expenditures. Genet’s family is headed by her daily income which is difficult to feed all family. As she informed me, until 1997 EC election, her husband had monthly salary by which her family was depended. He had been working as laboratory technician under supervision of Ministry of National Defense. However, he was suspected as the supporter and member of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD, also known as Kinijit) and expelled from his job without receiving clearance and certificate of his job which today inhibited him to work in other institutions. Due to this, he is unemployed and depended on his wife to survive. Moreover, Genet’s family lives subsistence and hand to mouth life as Yeshiwork’s family.

Concluding remarks
This study is basically empirical finding of urban poverty particularly in woreda six of Arada sub city in the locality called Cheri Safar. From etic perspective, poverty is associated with lack of physical and health wellbeing, lack of access to basic and essential facilities and inadequate housing. Depending on the community’s perspective poverty associated with basic infrastructure includes poor waste management, lack of access to proper sanitation, inadequate water supply, lack of private kitchen. Also, housing is the most serious problem related to poverty. The livelihood strategy occupied by community members also remarks the major manifestation of poverty in the study area. Lack of education is also highly interrelated with poverty. Education level is an important influence on employment status and this also associated with poverty. Most of my informants are illiterate and poor. Thus, education is a major factor that can help people out of poverty. The livelihood condition of the study community characterizes subsistence nature i.e. hand to mouth living. Moreover, the major causes of poverty in Cheri Safar include: unemployment and underemployment, income insufficiency, and homelessness, lack of health care and sanitation services, and failure of municipalities to deliver social services and limited access to water.

Recommendation
Currently the government of Ethiopia is adopting urban development and construction to different urban centers by setting policies and strategies that encourage sustainable development of urban areas. However, it is important to note before adapting and implementing such project at a wider scale to analyze the contextual, cultural, socio economic and environmental characteristics of the area to be developed. The inner part of Addis Ababa is limited to accommodate the housing and other redevelopment activities especially with regard to the housing backlog and highly increasing population. It is too difficult to speak precisely about the futurity of land and house in the city. To this end and to solve the chronic problems of the city, the government, planners and all the stakeholders have to give attention to plan ahead as much as possible.

References