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## **ADVERSITIES AND COPPING MECHANISMS OF SLUM AREA RESIDENTS IN GONDAR CITY; NORTH WEST ETHIOPIA**

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### **Abstract**

The expansion of slum areas have been one of the critical challenges manifested with the rapid urbanization of the global south countries. As one of the metropolitan cities in Ethiopia, Gondar city experienced this problem for long time. This study aimed at investigating the adversities related to physical environment, means of survival, health situation and social network of residents in Gojjo sefer slum area in Gondar city. Qualitative phenomenological research design was employed to understand the real life experience of slum dweller in the study area. A total of 35 participants were purposively recruited in the study area. Accordingly, data was collected by in-depth interview, key informant interview and field observation. The findings show that, congested and poorly constructed housing, inadequate infrastructure and poor social service provision characterize the area. Most of the dwellers are immigrants from rural area. They have being suffered from varieties of problems such as low income, lack of health care services and are exposed to frequent disease such as diarrhea, fever and chronic illnesses. As coping strategy, dwellers in this area are mainly engaged in petty economic activities-small and informal business, daily labor, street vending and paid domestic works. Thus, the local government and nongovernmental organization should intervene to the area with appropriate urban planning and sustainable livelihood strategies.

**Key words:** slum, phenomenology, adversities, residents

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### **Introduction**

Rapid urbanization comes with myriads of problems such as of squatter settlement and slum development in developing countries (World bank, 1993).The current existence and continued formation as well as expansion of slums at unprecedented rate are one of the challenges encountering cities in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries. Numbers of

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slum dwellers in developing countries had increased from 657 million (1990) to 767million (2000), and are estimated to be 828 million in 2011(World Bank, 2011). Although international, national, and local initiatives have made significant efforts to tackle the problem of the growth of slums, unfortunately, the rapid growth of urbanization and the actual trend of population growth in SSA have eclipsed their efforts(Berger, 2006).

Slum areas characterized by high rates of poverty, illiteracy and bad health status. Dwellers have low earning; they mostly do not have any formal education facilities, work in environment which is harmful to them. This fact forces them to work in informal sector (Alamgir, Jabbar et al. 2009). The situation of Ethiopia is not different from the rest of the world. The report of UN-HABITAT 2003 ,in Africa, shows that there are cities which have large number of people living in slum area, for Africa Addis Ababa ( the capital of Ethiopia), case, Kinshasa and Nairobi are the major ones. In Ethiopia slum area are expanding in many cities especially in the capital and big regional cites.

Gondar city is one these relatively big regional cities which is found northern part of Ethiopia, at Amhara regional state, and it is727 km far away from the capital city, Addis Ababa. Gondar is also a town in Ethiopia in which people are living with poor housing and low sanitary area. According to city administration report, 2009 in Gondar city administration more than 10 kebles (blocks, Now a days Gondar City is divided it to sub-cities (12 kifle ketemas) are affected significantly by different challenge from those who are affected by harmful pollutant and swages runs in open drains along the roads which providing a serious way for infectious disease. Because food, housing and drinking water are frequently contaminated, diarrhea is common especially among children and old persons (city Administration report, 2009, cited in Nayak 2013).

Even though researches have been conducted in the city, they focused on a single aspect or problem of urbanism like streetism (homelessness), crime, delinquency, unemployment, poverty, etc. As to the review of the researcher, they failed to consider the physical environment and livelihood of people in slums simultaneously.

Cognizant of this the study assessed the physical environmental, and livelihood strategies and health statuses of slum areas in Gondar city with a special reference to Arada Sub city slum area Gojjo Sefer. Moreover this study differ from others for it employed mainly quantitative research design and phenomenological approaches which enables to

investigate the real lived experience of slum dwellers. Accordingly, the study objectives are; to describe the physical environment of the study area, called Gojjo Sefer in Gondar City; to assess the means of livelihood of the residents; to examine the health situation and finally the social network of residents in Gojjo sefer slum area.

Research Method and Data Sources

### **Research Design**

In this research, qualitative research design was employed whereby households and key informants were selected purposely and are interviewed. In terms of time, a cross-sectional study design was employed to collect data and analyze at a point in time.

Research approach; Phenomenology

The concept phenomenology incorporates both philosophical ideology and numbers of research methods. When defined phenomenological research method (Creswell 2007pg 57 cited in Hermela 2018) "...a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences. Accordingly, this study investigated the lived experiences of slum-Gojjo Sefer dwellers to make sense from the respondents own perspective.

### **The study Area**

The study is conducted at Gondar City, strategically located in the northern part of Ethiopia, in Amhara National Regional State, 727 km, North from Addis Ababa and 150 km from Bahir Dar the regional capital. It is also 32 km north of Lake Tana, and nestles in the foothills of the Semien mountains at 2,200 meters above sea level and also it covers an area of 257 Sq.km. Gondar has some of Ethiopia's most important historical sites. The city is one of the oldest and largest cities in Ethiopia. However, the city cannot achieve its good standard due to certain problems among one of which is of slums in the city mainly, Arada sub city. Hence the geographical scope of the study was Arada sub city (Kifle Ketema) slum area called Gojjo sefer. Because this area is the place where there is extreme poverty and overcrowded, deteriorated housings.

### **Study population and sampling**

The main target populations of the study are people who are living in slum area of Arada sub city, Gojjo Sefer, Kebele 9 in Gondar City. It includes both man and women dweller settled in the area. 35 respondents from the 83 residents were sampled using purposive sampling techniques.

## **Data Sources**

For the successful accomplishment of the study, both primary and secondary data have been used. While primary data was gathered from selected participants and different concerned bodies and secondary data was collected from both published and unpublished written materials which have great relevance for the study.

## **Method of data collection**

In this study, the researcher employed in-depth interview, key informant interview (unstructured interview), and observation checklists to collect the qualitative data. In-depth interview was held with selected households of the slum area to get detailed data on the livelihood and health status and social network dwellers to understand their lived experiences. In addition, the Sub City official and project manager of Yenege Tesfa Orfan and Street Children Organization (NGO) were interviewed to get insight about their role in the process of solving the problem of the dwellers in the slum area. Besides, the researcher undertook observation on physical, social and living arrangements of the study area to supplement the above methods.

## **Method of data analysis and Interpretation**

To facilitate the analysis, the collected data first translated and transcribed in to English. Then, the data was coded thematically, and analyzed and interpreted with respect to the actual situation and the available literatures.

## **Findings**

### **The physical environmental condition of the area**

The area under study is located at Arada Sub City /Kebele 9/ at the south of Kidame Gebeya(market place). The place which is mostly attributed as slum is sometimes named as (Gojjo Sefere or plastic housing) and has 83 households with average number of 4 family members. The researcher has observed that the area is the most congested and overcrowded and densely concentrated at the southern edge of the market place. As it is at the edge of the market place, the area is served as garbage of the wastes from the market.

The accessibility of different services such as water services, public toilet, health centers etc are very difficult. During field observation, the researcher has noticed that the area is exposed for open defecation. Moreover, there is no garbage box around and absence of commonplace for disposal of waste. Generally, the area is characterized by poor waste management system and serious sanitation problem that

affect the health of the dwellers. Here below the picture shows what the study area Gojjo Sefer (plastic housing ) looks like.



Figure 1: Sample photo of Gojjo Sefer  
Source: Photo taken during fieldwork

### **Livelihood of the dwellers**

According to finding obtained from interviewees, the livelihood of people in the area is depending on small and informal business. Men are involved in daily labors and very few in traditional handcraft like blacksmith, weaver, tailor and carpenter. Most of them are engaged in faire wood marketing-buying and reselling wood by cutting it into different sizes.

As to the response from the research participants, most women are engaged in petty trading such as Gulit Gebeya street vending and paid domestic works. Respondents explained that some are even engaged in commercial sex works. Those who are elderly, sick and who with HIV/AIDS have been engaged in bagging around the market and church. This makes their living worse and miserable for the small source of income is not enough to feed their family, and pay for health services. This in turn led them to engage in bagging.

A 57 years old dweller of the study area was explaining the economic situation as follows

*I have been living here since 1989. I come from rural area, because of lack of enough income to support my family. My family themselves come to Gondar and this place following my coming to the place. I am now getting old and tired. But still I have been striving to support my family by buying fire wood and reselling it for little profit. Sometimes Nongovernmental organizations provide us with plastic for our house, food and blanket during summer season. But, as the support is*

*occasional, we are not able to lead our life in a way that is*



*different from the past (livelihood narrative men 57).*

Figure 2: A man in the study area preparing wood for sell.

Source: Photo taken during fieldwork

### **The health status of the dwellers**

As to researcher's field observation, in Gojjo sefer, there is no adequate waste management system in the area. The households had no enough toilet facility and sanitations.

Similarly, the finding from key informant interview revealed that dwellers of Gojjo sefer have unhygienic latrines. As a result, they had to face any illness at least in two to three months and most frequent illness that they face is diarrhea and at seconds the fever. Among the family members, most victims of illness are children who are more vulnerable to pathogens of different diseases. Chronic diseases (like HIV/AIDS and hepatitis) are also common for women and elders.

Study participants were asking how what mechanism they had been using to tackle health problems. They explained that dwellers of this slum area have no adequate access to health except mini support by charity organization such as Yenege Tesfa Orphan and Street Children (YTOSCO). This organization has been supporting them by covering health service cost. YTOSCO has also been trying to provide training about sanitation, personal hygiene, HIV/AIDS and family planning through coffee ceremony

However, they stated that, unfortunately most of the dwellers do not wash their hands with soap because there is no enough hand washing soaps available. The other problem is that there is no adequate system



of latrine cleanliness in the area. Consequently, they have been facing different health problems such as diarrhea and at seconds the fever.

### **Social Network of the dwellers**

The finding from the interview indicates that overall social conditions of the dwellers of Gojjo Sefer are very cohesive and strong. Since the number of dwellers is small and they are living in a very close neighboring, they know one another. They gather frequently in different groupings for coffee ceremonies festivals and other occasional events. By this, they share their sorrow and success, help each other during social crisis.

According to the key informant (sub city officer), social bond among these slum dwellers is different from the social bond of the theoretical slum dwellers. They have high social network and attributed by collectivity. The sub city administration has restricted the entry of new immigrants to the existing members in the area. This enables the old dwellers in the area to feel as a unique community and they cooperate one another. Even though, member of the family are found in different social economic and health situations, they share the difficulties one another. They sustain the general cultural value systems such as respecting and helping elders. A woman from participants explained the social network as follows:

*Most of us lived here for long period; we get together when we are given trainings and other meetings, therefore we know each other; we also gather during funerals if there is death in the community. In this way, we cooperate to support one another. Exm.. I am HIV positive. I have 3 children and my husband is died. As a result, I face difficulty to support my family properly. However, my neighbors help me by providing advice and sometime food while I am sick (Social network narrative, Female 35).*

### **Discussion**

The current study finding reveals that slum dwellers have been living with variety of challenges and they are using different coping mechanism. Previous study in Iran confirmed that dwellers in slum have diversity of livelihood assets and potentials, yet limited access to planned adaptation remains a main challenge. Many dwellers result to autonomous “supplementary occupations” to cope with the challenges of urbanization (Issaka & Raqib, 2015).

The finding in current study demonstrated that dweller could not afford living cost, as a result, they settled at open space near to the market locally called Kidame Gebeya. Since the area is not planed, it is characterized by the houses typically constructed by stone and plastic, marked by low road facilities, crude movement, poor sanitation and congestion.

A study by (Bagheri, 2012) also shows that slum households were economically deprived compared to other areas. They do not have adequate social economic and health services compared to other residents. Similar to this, the current finding indicates that, family members in the slum area at Gondar city could not afford adequate quantity or proper quality of regular hygienic and food. They have been consuming basic needs and nutritional food less frequently than the residents of the city have.

According to the study finding, Gojo Sefer dwellers are employing certain mechanism to cope the above economic, health and social problems. Men are engaged in daily labor, traditional handcraft, domestic work and some women commercial sex work and even some of them are engaged in bagging. In addition, dwellers at Gojo sefer have been coping the life challenges with strong social bonds and collectivities among the neighbors. As the respondents explained, since most of them lived together, they shared same socio economic statuses, same psychosocial traits. As a result, they have established very cohesive social networks. Thus, they help one another during socio economic events.

## **Conclusion**

Slum area is a marginalized area characterized by congested and poorly constructed housing, inadequate infrastructure and social service provision, place of petty commercial activities. Residents in the slum area are mostly emigrants from rural areas. The households have on average more than 4 family members in a flat room. They are found experiencing different hardships. They have been living in the area where there is no adequate social and health service provision. Because of these, people in the slum area of the city have being suffered from a variety of interrelated problems. Some of these are mal nutrition, frequent disease such as diarrhea, fever and chronic illnesses. To cope up these and other socio economic problems, people in the slum area at Gondar city have been using certain mechanism. They are engaged in petty commercial activities such as daily labor, traditional handcrafts, and women in domestic daily works, some even in

commercial sex work and bagging. The other potential coping strategy is also their strong social bond established among the residents. They have shared values, culture and norms that help them to live collectively, support one another in the time of crisis.

However, this does not mean that they have achieved their basic need as do other city dwellers. The area requires local governments attention and nongovernmental organization participation to plan and expand infrastructures, secure dwellers livelihood and suitability.

### **The way forward**

Based on the study findings, the researcher wants to forward some recommendations. The researcher observed that the city municipality tried to settle these slum dwellers by building houses with certain class made up of iron sheets wall and roof. This place is far from the area where dwellers had been living. The local government merely moved them from sulm-Gojjo sefer and settled at the new site where there is no transport access, no market or access to means of livelihood for elderly and the sick. This destructed social and economic integration of dwellers with their place. As a result, they returned and settled at their previous place Gojjo sefe. They preferred living in plastic housing and secure the old means of livelihood and social integration. Standing from this and other findings, the researcher put some recommendations. First of most, collaborative organization should be committed and able to fulfill the primary needs of the poor urban dwellers of the city. They should also educate dwellers how to improve their livelihood, health and how to keep clean their environment as far as they have to live collectively at same place. Moreover, as everlasting solution, the local government with NGOs should formulate and implement projects like slum upgrading in the area without destructing the social, cultural and economic integration of the dwellers. Finally, the government should control rural urban migration implementing rural by supporting rural, job opportunities for the old migrants

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