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## THE ASSOCIATIONAL PATTERNS OF FARMING WOMEN AND MEN: A CASE STUDY FROM ETHIOPIA

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# **The Associational Patterns of Farming Women and Men: A case study from Ethiopia<sup>1</sup>**

*Despite acknowledgments that social capital has an unequal distribution more empiric evidence knowledge is needed on how sociability acts different for women and men. Given the established connection between sociability and wealth, differential access to social resources could enlighten the gender asset gap (Deere and Doss 2006) in access to resources. This article uses data from a formal survey undertaken in 2006 in rural Ethiopia, to study the gendered patterns of sociability covering a probability sample comprising 464 farming women and men residing in four different communities. Ethnography is further used to assist in the analysis. The empirical analysis focuses on women's and men's access to local forms of sociability, using descriptive statistics, and a specific analytical eye focuses on those women who head their own households. The results show that there are variations in associational patterns that can be attributed to gender, and that a significantly larger proportion of men than women are members in government organizations, productive organizations and NGO:s. Men are also both more organized and connected than women are, and significantly more often than women lead local organizations. Women who head their own households are least involved of all in local forms of sociability, contributing to the specific vulnerability of this group.*

By Åsa Torkelsson, PhD

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## **I. Introduction**

There exists an ‘asset gap’ between women and men in all countries of the world (Deere and Doss 2006). This gap is particularly stark in rural areas in developing countries where women receive less education than men; have less income, and have less access to land. Also, within a given households resources are not necessarily shared (cf. Guyer 1980). Social capital could be viewed as one important asset that the poor can access, as a positive link has been established between sociability (cf. Simmel 1949) and wealth in the general social capital literature.<sup>2</sup>

Social capital commonly refers to the observation that people’s access to opportunities and resources to a large extent depend on their social connections and other social resources. Based on this assumption, development programmes for example commonly assume that communities endowed with dense social networks are in a stronger position to confront poverty and vulnerability than those without such networks. Thus, efforts to trigger development have increasingly relied on building or strengthening local institutions and people’s participation. The outcome from results from research on the association between social capital to welfare and development in developing countries are however conflicting. In Tanzania (Narayan 1997) and India (Krishna 2002) families who were active in organizations were better off than families who were not. Also, while kin ties have been found to be strengthened in times of shared adversity (Bryceson 2002), poverty has been found to erode the fabric of social life in other places (Molyneux 2002; Pretty 2003; Sverrisson 2002; World Bank 2001).

There are also many different definitions of social capital salient in the literature. One stream of literature proposes a distinction between those social network ties that bond individuals together, such as the ties between close family members, neighbours and friends, and those that bridges and links relatively separate groups (Narayan 1999; Woolcock 2000). This is similar to the distinction made by Westermann et al. (2005) between relational and institutional social capital. Another distinctions salient in the literature are that made between inherited and acquired social capital (Bourdieu 1977) in which the owner of inherited social capital can transform “all circumstantial relationships into lasting connections” contrary to those who have to acquire them and who have more fluid relations. Or, to paraphrase Anirudh Krishna (2002) “to convert a stock of social capital into a flow of benefits, there is a need for

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<sup>2</sup> This excludes the so-called ‘bad social capital (Portes and Landolt 1996).

some form of ‘agency’”.<sup>3</sup> According to Ronald Burt (1998) while legitimate members of a population can build their own social capital, illegitimate members have to borrow it.

Thus, the literature seems to suggest that there different forms of sociability can have different value. To underline this point I make a distinction between social resources and social capital. I label social resources those bonded, relational, and informal social network ties that do not easily translate into productive use and that do not connect directly to the formal economy/society (“sociability with a low rate of return”). Social capital, on the other hand, relates to those elements of sociability that are institutional and bridged or linked to the formal economy or society (“sociability with a high rate of return”).

Despite acknowledgments that social capital is “position-dependent” (Sverrisson 2002: 285); “culture-dependent” (Krishna 2002: x); has a “hierarchical” (Coleman 1988) and “unequal” distribution (Bourdieu 1997: footnote 15) according to Maxine Molyneux (2002) the core of the social capital literature has been largely gender blind. To substantiate this with an example, while Pierre Bourdieu supposed that socializing, i.e. the process of producing social capital could be unequally distributed among social classes he did not develop or contextualize this using gender. However, according to Nan Lin (2001) differential access to social capital produces social inequalities.

Thus, to strengthen the empirical evidence regarding women’s and men’s access to local forms of sociability can represent a critical contribution to unravel in greater detail the well-established inequality in access to resources of women and men.

The gender dimensions involved in the production and distribution of social capital has to my knowledge not yet been empirically studied in rural Africa.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the existing literature reveals that gender could matter in accessing different forms of sociability in Africa, proposing that men would access the more valuable forms of sociability compared to women who would be able to access the less valuable forms of sociability. To explain the access of women and men to different forms of sociability I use a structural patriarchal model (Torkelsson 2007, 2008) that views men as the gate-keepers to the formal local economy where substantial economic values circulate. Women are connected to this economy via men, and can not easily access it independently. Indeed, women are uprooted from their social networks and acquire those of men in the act of marriage. While this creates social

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. also Ronald Burt’s (1998) concept of the “broker” who brings together otherwise disconnected people in the production of social capital.

<sup>4</sup> But see a number of case studies and evaluations of development projects which have attempted to strengthen or build social capital (e.g. Jörgen Hagmann 2000; Deepa Narayan 1999; Helen Nyberg 2004).

vulnerability, there exist indications that women also maintain their “natal networks” (Mazzucato and Niemeijer 2002) and this social connection is instrumental in improving their livelihoods. It might also be critical for women to invest in these bonding resources as they represent a legitimate entry to the interaction with other women. This leads to a situation in which men’s relations with their families of birth remain intact, whereas women’s relations with their natal networks are interrupted.<sup>5</sup> The theoretical approach thus builds on the assumption that women would depend more on relational social capital than men do either because they are excluded from male-dominated formal networks and organized power structures where institutional social capital is built and exercised (Westermann et al. 2005) or because they have a preference for relational social capital over institutional social capital (El-Messiri et al. 1999).

There are many definitions of social capital salient in the voluminous literature and, consequently, just as many ways to measure social capital.<sup>6</sup> Given that formal organizations are often weak in developing countries, this paper departs from Anirudh Krishna’s (2002) position that social capital is culture-specific therefore defines social capital in accordance with context. The research defines social capital as the number of associations in which an individual is a member. This measure is combined with an analysis of local forms of sociability using a list of important agent-positions (Nan Lin 2001) as represented by the number of contacts with the local economy that a person have.

The rest of the paper is structured accordingly. The next Section II analyses the associational patterns of women and men, analysing both the organizations of women and men and their respective connectivity. Following this, the method is presented. Then, women’s and men’s propensity to be organized and connected is analysed in Section III. The last Section IV analyses the productivity of the different forms of sociability empirically using various measures, including women’s and men’s leadership in organizations, and the resources that they draw respectively from their forms of sociability. Section V concludes.

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, according to Rae Lesser Blumberg (2004: 285-6) such a residence system surrounds men with strategic male allies and a property-inheritance system that advantages men, both *de facto* and *de jure*.

<sup>6</sup> There is no single unanimously agreed measurement of social capital (see Nan Lin 2001: 26 ff. for a discussion on this).

## Method

The analysis is based on data from a community survey undertaken during March-May 2006 in Western Shewa in Ethiopia comprising 464 women and men randomly sampled from four farming communities. The majority of the people living in the area are Oromo<sup>7</sup> of the Tulama branch, and practically everybody is a farmer, using mixed farming (crop and livestock). As is common in rural households, there is a rigid gendered division of labour, confirming Boserups' (1970) observations regarding women's domestic responsibilities, and men's responsibilities on the outside, in the local economy and as household representatives in public life. Elsewhere (Torkelsson 2008) I have shown that this distinction structures access to rural resources as well. The units of analysis are farming women and men, but to analyze the assumed vulnerability of female-headed households a distinction is also made between those women who head their own households and those in households headed by men. Female-headed households constitute a diverse group however. Indeed, in this material, among the women who headed their households in a legal sense (i.e. they were registered as landholders with the Peasant Association), 51 percent were widowed; 26 percent divorced; 14 percent never married; and nine percent were married.

The research area is situated in the Ethiopian highlands, at an altitude that ranges from 2,000–2,800 meters above sea level, approximately 130 km from the capital, Addis Abeba. It displays features that are common in rural areas, with persistent poverty in developing countries,<sup>8</sup> which can be summarized in the words of one elderly male informant (elder; *Jaarsa*): *“We used to harvest much from a small plot of land and had no need to pay for fertilizer, and the land tax was small...we used to use natural fertilizer in the past...but the members of the population have increased and the land per individual is decreasing”* (Int 1/2006). Also, the area has remained relatively untouched from development initiatives and has never been the focus of this type of research before.

Qualitative research methodologies that primarily use key informant interviews and field observations have also been used both to formulate the questionnaires, and to analyze

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<sup>7</sup> *Afaan Oromo* is the second most widely spoken indigenous language in Africa (Kuwee Kumsa 1997: 116), and the Oromo occupy approximately 40 percent of Ethiopia (Gascon 1997: 365).

<sup>8</sup> The area is characterized by land degradation (Terefe Degefa 2001), and land is scarce and fragmented due to population pressure. Basic social infrastructure is weak, and economic services are limited and there is a shortage of agricultural inputs and services; most notably of fertilizers (Kelbessa 2001). The area is moreover frequently affected by shocks, such as climatic fluctuations, animal diseases, market failures, and human diseases (including HIV/AIDS) (Mekbib et al. 2003).

the results from the formal survey. The data represent one schedule from a broader survey which investigated on women's and men's resource access (see the results from the full survey in Torkelsson 2008). The survey was undertaken in Oromiffa, the local language by a team of enumerators fluent in Oromoffa and English.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 14.0, has been used to perform the analyses, using primarily descriptive statistics.

## II. The Associational Patterns of Women and Men

### *Women's and Men's Organizations*

To establish a list of the existing locally relevant organizations I used ethnographic material generated during the early phases of field research and documented in Torkelsson (1997) which identified a list of thirteen associations. The list was then validated with colleagues from the Ambo College of Agriculture / Jimma University and the enumeration team. The associations could then be classified into six broad groups comprising *government organizations* which included the Peasant Association and the Got; *productive organizations*, comprising marketing networks, labour exchange networks, irrigation association, and the Grain Bank; membership in projects organized by *Non-Governmental Organizations* (NGO:s); *savings and credit organizations* which included savings (unspecified), *iqqub*<sup>9</sup>, and Eshet (a micro financing scheme provided by a local NGO); *religious organizations*, comprising *mahabär*, and *eddir*<sup>10</sup>. To investigate empirically the associational patterns of women and men, respondents were asked whether they were members (Yes/No) of each of the identified associations. The results of the analysis of the membership of women and men in local organizations are shown in the table below.

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<sup>9</sup> The *iqqub* is a rotational informal savings scheme gathering a group of people who save small amounts on a regular basis. Here weekly or monthly payments of a fixed sum are exchanged for the privilege of receiving a large sum at some point in the life of the group.

<sup>10</sup> *Eddir* is a social welfare institution that assists primarily in funerals. *Eddir* build on the principle of rotational reciprocity similar to that of *iqqub* as members of a given *eddir* contribute money and food or drinks to the funeral of a member, or relative-of-another-*eddir*-member, and will in their turn receive support upon the death of themselves, or someone in their family (Dercon et al. 2004).

**Table 1 The Associational patterns of women and men**

	Proportion of all <b>men</b> belonging to a given organization (n=213)	Proportion of all <b>women</b> belonging to a given organization (n=245)	Test of significance of difference (Pearson's $\chi^2$ )	Proportion of all <b>women in male-headed households</b> belonging to a given organization (n=174)	Proportion of all <b>female household heads</b> belonging to a given organization (n=73)	Test of significance of difference (Pearson's $\chi^2$ )
<b>Religious organizations</b>						
<i>Eddir</i>	94.0	93.0	Ns	94.0	90.0	Ns
Religious org. (unspec.)	26.0	20.0	Ns	21.0	16.0	Ns
<i>Mahabär</i>	19.0	26.0	Ns	30.0	15.0	**
<b>Government organizations</b>						
Peasant Association	37.0	31.0	Ns	32.0	32.0	Ns
<i>Got</i>	54.0	42.0	**	44.0	38.0	Ns
<b>Productive organizations</b>						
Cereal Bank	8.0	2.0	**	2.0	3.0	Ns
Irrigation association	24.0	16.0	*	19.0	8.0	*
Marketing networks	5.0	1.0	*	1.0	1.0	Ns
Labour exchange networks	18.0	13.0	Ns	14.0	8.0	Ns
<b>Savings associations</b>						
Savings associations (unspec.)	12.0	12.0	Ns	13.0	8.0	Ns
<i>Iqqub</i>	5.0	16.0	***	14.0	19.0	Ns
<i>Eshet</i>	19.9	9.0	**	9.0	10.0	Ns
<b>NGO:s</b>	8.0	2.0	**	2.0	3.0	Ns

Source: Torkelsson 2006 field data (CS)

Key: \*\*\*= difference significant at the <.001 level; \*\*= difference significant at the <.01 level; \*= difference significant at the <.05 level; ns = variation not significant

Painting the social texture in the research area with a broad brush, the *eddir*, religious organizations and the government organizations colour the background of local sociability. This is not surprising, as they represent both the traditional regulatory mechanisms of life, as well as a form of insurance of self and family. By contrast, the productive and savings organizations can be said to challenge traditional structures, representing forms of socialbility that are required to move beyond tradition. Whereas the former set of organizations can be viewed as social resources, the latter set of resources trigger and enhance the actual process in which resource capitalization takes place. The table also shows that gender appears to play a role across the board of local organizations, and therefore it is an adequate observation that there are women's organizations and men's organizations. However, even if statistical tests



confirm that the variations are highly significant, the differences in membership that can be attributed to gender are less striking than expected and hence deserve a fuller analysis.

Being a member of a Government Organizations is a necessary prerequisite for membership to possess land, and thus, being a member is catalytic to access also other forms of rural resources (such as extension advice, credit et c). The fact that a larger proportion of men than women are members in Government Organizations thus appears to confirm the research hypothesis, yet the variations were not significant, what is equally puzzling, as the population was sampled on the basis of household lists comprising heads of households. A curious finding was that a substantial proportion of female household heads were actually not members, although they were also sampled from the same lists suggesting that membership is actually not mutually possessed but is lost upon the dissolution of marriage. A particularly high percentage of the divorced women were not members of any government organization (71 percent), which may indicate that they had a poor divorce outcome, and thus had lost their access to land, and hence their right to membership. This corroborates the view that men's social capital is inherited, whereas women's is acquired and --having been acquired-- can be lost as well.

However the differences in membership were significant when men were compared to women, and NGO:s what supports the assumption of men's access of the social capital where important capital circulates. Membership in an NGO and productive organization indeed represents important sources of complementary resources. For example, in rural areas NGO:s have been observed to often fill the void in service delivery (Anandajayasekaram and Torkelsson 1999). The results also demonstrate that women who head their own households have the smallest propensity of all to be members of productive organizations, what points to their greater exclusion from the productive elements of sociability which I attribute to their missing male connection, and illustrated the constraint they faced to engage productively in farming on their own behalf. For example, only eight percent of the women who headed their own households were members of irrigation associations, compared to 24 percent of the men.

Interestingly, a comparably sized proportion of women and men are members in savings associations what appears to contrast the research assumption that women access fewer productive social resources than men do. However, a closer analysis of the various organizations contained within this broad category validated salient gender variations that confirmed men's connection to the more valuable forms of sociability, and women's to the less valuable ones. Indeed, a significantly larger proportion of men than women save in the micro-financing schemes connected to the local NGO:s. To complement this, official data

shows that there are clear gender dimensions in terms of accessing credit through formal credit associations as in 2001, out of those who accessed credit through formal sources 92 percent were men, five percent wives to male borrowers, and three percent both husband and wife together (Assefa Gebre et al. 2002). Women on the other hand, more so than men, saved in the informal rotational savings schemes that collect very small amounts of money (*iqqub*) and the variation between women and men is statistically significant.<sup>11</sup> Analyzing the material further, it emerged that 43 percent of the divorcees were members of *iqqub*, compared to 14 percent of women in male-headed households. This suggests divorcees in particular were obliged to seek out, and invest in, productive avenues that could bring them onto the local economy on an independent basis.

To interpret these findings, I propose that women saved small amounts of cash because they were structurally barred from the capitalization of their resources, being impeded to enter the local economy on their own merit, and they were therefore forced to use the (*iqqub*) alternative (very) slow form of capital accumulation. Also, saving small amounts of money continuously may be one of the few options to generate some independent resources since the amount saved in *iqqub* may not need to be shared with husbands, as men take over ‘big resources’ while women may control ‘small resources’, as proposed theoretically. Indeed, it was proposed earlier that women generated ‘pocket-money’ that need not be shared in households and that they could control and that slowly, over time, could sediment and become a more substantial resource, it could become capital. This resulting capital, in turn, could over time empower women to challenge the division of responsibilities and resources in households and to take charge over their own lives. In my analysis saving using microfinance was one of the few options available for women to capitalize on their resources, but it was not a very effective route. A valuable resource spilling over from the *iqqub*-membership was however that it provided an opportunity to strengthen women’s network ties, which may be particularly acute for women, and among them, especially women who headed their own households. In my interpretation, women’s involvement in *iqqub* again demonstrated that women need to take detours, whereas men can take shortcuts, in their attempts to capitalize on their resources.

There are no large variations in men’s and women’s associational patterns regarding *eddir* and religious organizations (the social resources) but they attract women and men the

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<sup>11</sup> The modality of rotational savings organization, such as that practiced in *iqqub*, is very common throughout developing countries and has inspired the development initiatives that aim to build micro-financing institutions (cf. the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh).

like. However, compared to women in households headed by men a significantly smaller proportion of women household heads are members in mahabär. Singling out divorcees in this group the results show that they are particularly little associated with *mahabärs* (only 13 percent of all divorcees are members in a religious organization compared to almost 30 percent of women in households headed by men). This may be attributed to the fact that they have challenged community norms which are anchored in religiously-based expectations that prescribe for men and women to be married, and may therefore on the one hand feel stigmatized in religious organizations, or may not feel welcome to be a member of these.

### *Women's and Men's Connectivity*

There are other forms of productive sociability that may determine whether an individual is able to plug into the formal economy or not. As mentioned earlier, these are for example the existence of 'bridges' and 'links' (Narayan 1999) and contacts with resourceful outside agents (Krishna 1999). To inquire on this, the ethnographic material generated in earlier phases of the field research (cf. Torkelsson 1997) was used to develop a list of eight agent-positions that could be considered to represent important important bridges to the local economy and that it could be reasonable to assume that the respondent could have had some contact with. These were government representatives (such as Got leaders, leaders of the Peasant Association and the Wereda-administration); informal local leaders (*Jaarsa*); productive agents (middlemen or merchants, and extension agents); and the 'outside' (Addis Ababa and other countries). Respondents were asked whether s/he was "a friend of..." ("*hiriyaa*" in *Afaan Oromoo*) the various identified agents (*Yes/No*).<sup>12</sup> The results are shown in the table below.

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<sup>12</sup> This is similar to the position-generator methodology used by Nan Lin (2001: 90-92) that asks if respondents knows someone in an identified position on a first-name basis.

**Table 2. Women's and men's bridges to the local economy**

	Proportion befriended with <i>Jaarsa</i> (n=344)	Proportion befriended with <i>PA leader</i> (n=189)	Proportion befriended with <i>Got leader</i> (n=185)	Proportion befriended with <i>Woreda officers</i> (n=59)	Proportion befriended with <i>extension worker</i> (n=135)	Proportion befriended with <i>middlemen</i> (n=94)	Proportion with friends in <i>Addis Ababa</i> (n=141)	Proportion with friends <i>abroad</i> (n=28)
<i>Community Survey</i>	75.8	41.6	40.9	12.3	29.7	20.7	30.8	6.2
All men (n=210-213)	82.0	45.5	44.3	18.3	38.2	21.7	27.7	5.2
All women (n=241-245)	70.2	38.3	38.0	8.3	22.3	19.9	33.5	6.9
$\chi^2$	**	Ns	Ns	**	***	Ns	Ns	Ns
Women in households headed by men (n=172-3)	72.0	37.0	38.0	7.0	23.0	19.0	32.0	8.0
Women household-heads (n=69-72)	65.7	40.8	39.1	11.3	20.8	21.7	37.5	4.2
$\chi^2$	Ns	Ns	Ns	Ns	Ns	Ns	Ns	Ns

Source: Torkelsson 2006 field data (CS)

Key: \*\*\*= significant at the <.001 level; \*\*= significant at the <.01 level; ns= not significant

Note. The means were compared using t-tests for independent samples.

The table shows that individuals are overall fairly well connected, women as well as men but that there are significant variations in relation to connectivity that can be attributed to gender. Indeed, men are more connected to tradition leaders who define local *doxa* and to the various government representatives. Men's connection is pronounced for the productive agents, such as the Woreda administrators (higher-level government representatives) and extension gents. This is in line with my previous argument elsewhere that women's representation in decision-making bodies 'dilutes' when power is added to a decision-making body (Torkelsson 2007). Indeed, women may be members in local-level organizations in numbers that are equal to those of men, but they have been found to rarely career to decision-making positions in the more formal bodies. Slightly larger proportions of women as compared to men are connected to the 'outside' what may be a sign of the fact that their natal networks (or possibly even husbands) may reside elsewhere.

Being separated from one's father's house, and becoming dependent on one's husband's family, as women are in the act of marriage, creates social vulnerability and weaken women's bargaining power by affecting their 'fall-back position' (Agarwal 1997). Indeed, this interrupts women's natural ties and bonds with men, and perhaps makes women

reluctant to opt for divorce. However, the *natal networks* (Mazzucato and Niemeijer 2000) that women maintain with their families-of-birth remain important sources of social capital in the research area. Whereas male kin-related sociability follows patrilocal rules and includes the access to important rural resources, such as the house and land, women nevertheless cultivate their own ‘intra-local matriarchy’ receiving support from their mothers and mothers employ the relative wealth in their mobility to assist their daughters who are relatively mobility-poor hence allowing their daughter to engage in productive activities, such as trading. A further analysis shows that women household heads receive more support (including money and labour) than do other women from their natal networks, underlining the importance of natal networks for those women who are otherwise socially disconnected from the local economy. In addition, possessing this social resource may be the necessary prerequisite required to have the courage to step out of a bad relationship, and may compensate the missing links to the local economy that result from a separation.

### **III. Propensity to Organize and to be Connected**

The number of organizations of which an individual was a member could be a marker of wealth in sociability. Indeed, the more organizations an individual was a member of, the more deeply embedded he or she could be expected to be in the communities. To inquire on the propensity of women and men to be organized I developed four organizational types from the field data comprising those individuals who were *not organized* at all (not members in any organization); those who were members in *one organization*; the *organized* ones (members in two to four organizations); and the *very organized* individuals (with membership in more than five organizations). The results from the analysis are shown in the table below.

**Table 3 The rate of sociability of women and men**

	Proportion of respondents who were <b>not organized</b>	Proportion of respondents who belonged to <b>one organization</b>	Proportion of respondents who were <b>organized</b>	Proportion of respondents who were <b>very organized</b>
<i>Community Survey (n=461)</i>	5.4	20.7	55.8	18.1
All men (n=214)	3.7	16.8	58.9	20.6
All women (n=247)	5.3	24.7	53.8	16.2
$\chi^2$	Ns	***	*	*
Women in households headed by men (n=175)	4.6	23.4	53.7	18.3
Female headed households (n=72)	6.9	27.8	54.2	11.1
$\chi^2$	Ns	Ns	Ns	Ns

Source: Torkelsson 2006 field data (CS and MS)

Key: \*\*\*= variation significant at the <.001 level; \*\*= variation significant at the <.01 level; \*= variation significant at the <.05 level; ns = variation not significant

Note. The proportions were compared using Pearson Chi Square.

The table shows that men are on average more organized than women are. Indeed, a significantly larger proportion of men than women belong to the ‘very organized’ category, whereas a significantly larger proportion of women are members of ‘one’ and ‘no organization’. Treating the number of organizations in which an individual is a member as a continuous variable, the results show that on average each individual is a member of 3.03 organizations. The results also show that men are members of an average of 3.28 organizations while women are members in 2.81 organizations on average, and this variation was highly significant ( $p < .01$ ). Women who head their own households are members of notably fewer organizations, 2.50 organizations.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, women’s participation in organizations may be slowed down by social mechanisms inhibiting the use of their time and limiting their movement. Measuring women’s and men’s degree of connectivity, the results show that on average men has 2.82 connections compared to women who have 2.34. A further analysis shows that a significantly greater proportion of women compared to men are not connected at all. With regards to women who head their own households, two opposite trends emerge: on the one hand one group appears more likely to be not connected at all when compared to other groups, but they are also likely to be very connected.

<sup>13</sup> Men’s membership ranged from 1-10 organizations (median 3); and women, the median was 3, ranging from 1-9 organizations; the median of women who headed their households was 2, in the range 1-7.

Women who head their own households are members of notably fewer organizations than are others, but not significantly so when compared to women in households headed by men. Out of those who are not members of any organization women who head their own households are overrepresented, and this variation is statistically significant when compared to male household heads, further supporting the observation of the specific vulnerability of this group. Indeed, one elderly widow explained why she was not a member in an association with the following words:

Currently I am not a member [of any organization]...because I don't have anything, and I am afraid of the gossip of the people in our area... If I could be a member I would like to be a member in one of those organizations that have saving, but those are only for persons who have land and can buy cattle, so it is difficult for me (Int 9/2006).

The group with fewest contacts is women who head their own households who have on average 2.28 of the specified contacts. Indeed, these figures validate the assumption of the lesser connectivity of women who head their own households. Women's relatively lesser membership is perhaps not attributed to a *de jure* exclusion but rather reflects their *de facto* constraints, such as their relative time- and resource-poverty, widely noted (Jackson and Palmer-Jones 1998). However, as rural households are construed around complementary roles and responsibilities, women's time poverty therefore enables men's time wealth and women may actually prefer to sacrifice their own membership in favour of men's as investing in men's connections and authority can indirectly benefit women as well.

#### **IV. The Productivity of Sociability**

The theoretical expectation that women would be predominantly members in organizations or have social resources of the bonded or relational type, whereas men would have relatively more access to the forms of social capital which relate to the local economy and society can not be falsified in this material. However, the exceptions are that both men and women are engaged in traditional local organizations that are considered to be of the bonding type (*eddirs* and religious associations) and in savings associations, but they may be so for different reasons. For example, men's roles in religious organizations may be different to

those of women as, for men, as these organizations may represent loci in which they exercise their role in community decision-making and as implementers of local norms. Another example is based on the fact that local organizations channel support from its members to other members in need via rotating responsibilities among members<sup>14</sup> and women's and men's contributions are aligned to their respective responsibilities in rural households; grossly, women supply food and men supply the agricultural work. This shows that the division of responsibilities of women and men is the 'fuel' that gets local forms of sociability going, and that local organizations can be viewed as the 'gold standard' through which responsibilities are exchanged via their conversion into a uniform currency, the currency of sociability. There were indeed qualitative indications that organizations performed different functions to women and men. For men, organizations represented an opportunity to create and implement local *doxa*, while women's sociability served the twin-objective to bond and liaise with other women, and strengthen their fall-back position (cf. Agarwal 1994, 1997; Kabeer 1999) in case of future need.

To inquire further on the self-reported productivity of organizations those who had confirmed to be members of a given organization were asked to specify whether they obtained any of the following resources from the organization: *market information*; *material and financial support to set up trade*; *inputs* (such as credit and tools, etc); and *teaching* about improved products. The results show that the resources channelled via organizations are actually rather modest and predominantly immaterial. Indeed, the majority of those who are members in organizations do not mention that they receive material benefits from their membership. Surprisingly however, those organizations that were assumed to be productive actually were not reported to be particularly productive. For example, although it was expected that respondents would benefit materially from productive and government organizations this was not reported to be the case. Instead, organizations such as *eddir* and savings associations come out as the most important sources of material resources (including money) and inputs.

There are no striking variations that can be attributed to gender regarding the benefits that women and men reported to draw from the local organizations. However women, more so than men, specified to draw material benefits from *eddir* and savings organizations. For

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<sup>14</sup> For example, in labour-sharing organizations, the labour of members is rotated providing assistance in heavy works, such as ploughing. In *iqqub*, financial resources are rotated as members make small but consistent contributions to the group, and then may draw the pot according to the pre-set schedule, and in *mahabär* responsibilities for food preparation rotate among members.



*eddir* this can possibly be attributed to the fact that the contributions to *eddir* are within the realm of women's responsibilities, such as the provision of food and drinks for social gatherings and funerals, and thus benefit women more than men. These results may however also suggest that traditional informal organizations may currently be more highly valued than are formal organizations (see also Dercon et al. 2004 on this). Indeed, organizations of the bonding type may actually perform a greater role in determining people's access to economic resources than has hitherto been established, whereas the government and productive organizations may currently play a minor role.

Not only do organizations rely on individual contributions, but membership in organizations may also be vehicles to access valuable resources and thus connects to other forms of local capital, an observation that is clearly in line with established theories of social capital. Indeed, there exists a positive correlation between the number of connections and the number of cattle owned, a prominent wealth-marker in the Oromo economy (Bevan and Joirmann 1997; Dercon and Krishnan 1996; Fafchamps and Quisumbing 2002; Hussein 2004; Tadesse 2003). Being much connected is also strongly associated with having many cattle as those who are much connected have on average 4.34 cattle, compared to 2.3 of those who are not, and a t-test confirms that the difference in mean cattle ownership is highly significant ( $p < .000$ ). The association between the number of cattle and number of connections is more pronounced for men than for women. Reversing the coin, the average number of cattle possessed in the group of those not connected is 1.44 (compared to 2.89 of others), and this variation is also highly significant ( $p < .000$ ). This association is actually stronger for women who head their households than for other groups, and particularly strong among divorcees suggesting that, in spite of the difficulties to access local forms of sociability, it is a particularly rational strategy for this group to invest in local forms of sociability. This can be explained by the fact that having been intimately woven into the web of local sociability this group was able to achieve a favourable divorce outcome and that engaging in productive activities and to strive for independent wealth accumulation is a necessary survival strategy upon divorce.

To inquire further on the benefits drawn from organizations I inquire on the propensity of women and men to lead organizations drawing on Nan Lin (1982, 2001) who argues that there is a general tendency for the macrostructure of resources to have a pyramidal shape in terms of position distribution: the higher the level in the command chain, the fewer the number of positions and occupants. As a consequence, authority is concentrated in a few positions and occupants: "at the very top", he notes, "only a few positions not only command

the largest absolute and relative amounts of valued resources, but also have the most comprehensive information on the location of resources in the structure” (2001: 36). I would thus assume that someone in (Nan Lin’s) “organizational top” might have access to the more valuable forms of social capital, as a leader comes into contact with other organizations and has entry points to other networks. To inquire on the propensity of women and men to be leaders in local organizations, respondents were asked whether they had any leadership function in the organization in which they were members (*Yes/No*). The results from the analyses are shown in the table below.

**Table 4. The leadership of women and men in local organizations**

	Total proportion of leaders among <b>all members</b>	Proportion leaders among all <b>male members</b>	Proportion leaders among all <b>female members</b>	Proportion leaders among all <b>women in male-headed households members</b>	Proportion leaders among all <b>female household heads members</b>
<i>Eddir</i>	14.2	16.8	10.2	9.0	12.7
Religious organizations	8.7	11.8	4.9	6.7	0
<i>Mahabär</i>	4.0	4.8	3.3	4.1	1.4
Peasant Association	7.8	14.1	1.3	1.9	4.3
<i>Got</i>	15.2	23.2	6.1	6.9	3.6
Cereal Bank	29.2	37.5	12.5	16.7	0
Irrigation association	14.1	17.6	8.8	10.3	0
Marketing networks	15.4	20.0	0	-	0
Labour exchange networks	5.8	7.7	3.3	4.2	0
Savings associations	11.5	7.7	15.4	15.0	16.7
<i>Iqqub</i>	11.1	20.0	8.6	-	23.1
<i>Eshet</i>	8.2	9.8	5.0	-	14.3
NGO:s	4.8	6.3	-	-	0

Source: Torkelsson 2006 field data (CS)

The results show that gender is an important marker of leadership in local organizations, as overall, a notably larger proportion of men than women are leaders of local organizations. This confirms trends in the Oromo organizational pattern established by others (Hussein 2004; Kelbassa 2001; Kumsa 1997) who argue that representation of the household in public affairs is a man's responsibility as parts of his role as head of household. In line with the gendered organizational patterns, women’s leadership is primarily concentrated in religious

organizations.<sup>15</sup> There is also a noticeable presence of women leaders in savings associations and the women who head their own households are particularly represented among these. The proportion of women who are leaders in NGO:s and productive organizations is not flagrantly low, but it has to be remembered that it is based on the proportion of actual members and that the actual number of women members departs from small numbers.

In spite of the differences that can be attributed to gender in organizational leadership, the results show that women actually *do* take on leadership roles, and therefore the results are in vivid conflict for example with Workineh Kelbessa's (2001:73) observations that women in most of Oromiya are not allowed to participate in politics or work outside home, or Kuwee Kumsa's (1997: 142) observation that decision-making would be taboo for women. Or, these results may suggest that the Oromo society is actually undergoing a transformation towards more equitable representation of women in decision-making capacities in local organizations and that the established empiric evidence regarding the invisibility of Oromo women in decision-making processes may need to be revised and amended. Interestingly, women's presence as leaders was particularly low in those organizations that could be assumed to be regulated by law and where official targets could have been set (such as government organizations) and were relatively more pronounced in productive- and traditional organizations, what suggests that the situation may have been achieved without any input or exogenous conditionality, but that the society may be transforming from within. It may well be that women have achieved autonomously greater agency than was hitherto thought.

The results further show convincingly that leaders –both men and women-- have privileged access to the benefits accruing from the various organizations. The likelihood increases conspicuously of receiving benefits for leaders compared to being a member only from each organization. Indeed, the chances almost double that an individual receives training if he or she is a leader of the organization through which the training is offered. The association between leadership and resources is comparable between women and men, but it has to be kept in mind that a smaller number of women are actually leaders of organizations. Indeed, this supports Nan Lin's proposition that few positions command the largest amounts of valued resources in organizational tops (Lin 2001: 36).

There are some salient general characteristics that the "leader" features that are similar for both women and men suggesting that leaders display the characteristics of the

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<sup>15</sup> This corroborates the findings of Eleonora Lvova (1997) who noted that in Ethiopia, women are the most reliable organizers at funerals and the most skilful weepers, and, in her view, the funeral provides "one of the few opportunities in female life to express themselves" (p. 583).

‘average respondent’ in the random sample. Indeed, the utmost majority of leaders are born in the area in which they now live; they are in their reproductive ages; their main occupation is farming and they have an average length of education; most are married, and they are never divorced. Indeed, divorcees only feature as leaders in savings associations, and appear to be stigmatized as leaders in other organizations possibly, as suggested earlier, due to the fact that they have challenged community norms. This corroborates Naila Kabeer’s proposition (1999: 457) that women are likely to get greater respect in their communities for conforming to its norms, and be penalized if they are not, than men.

## V. Conclusion

This paper studied empirically the assumption that women and men would have differential access to social resources and social capital. The notion of formal and informal networks and associations were contextualized within the Ethiopian landscape and thus offered a deeper and richer understanding of the variations not only of women's and men's sociability, but also of the ways that social capital has been defined and analyzed in the broader literature.

The results confirmed that there are variations in membership to various local organizations that can be attributed to gender, and that a significantly larger proportion of men than women are members in government organizations, productive organizations and NGO:s while membership patterns in bonding religious organizations and *eddir* are gender-neutral, or slightly dominated by women. The findings thus do not falsify the hypotheses regarding men’s relatively easier access to productive forms of social capital, and women to those that are bonded. Women’s equally strong involvement in savings associations is also noted, with some surprise, given the theoretical propositions that women would access less productive social resources than men. A closer analysis however revealed however that women are dominant in petty-saving while men are dominant in more formal savings associations where larger amounts of money circulate. Women have more access to relational forms of social capital because they are relatively excluded from structures of institutional power, both *de jure*, as they do not own land which is a prerequisite to organizational membership, but also *de facto*, due to their time- and relative resource poverty and their social network ties are less constant than men’s. For women, and among them especially women who head their households, accessing one’s natal network was another important social resource that gave them the confidence to exercise their agency, both within households, in the communities, and in markets.

In addition, men are both “more organized” and “more connected” than are women and thus are generally wealthier in sociability. The paper also shows that the degree of sociability and the propensity to be organized of individuals are strong determinants of wealth in the material, and provides qualitative indications that they are catalytic and strategic resources required to obtain other resources as well. The results also show that a significantly larger proportion of men than women lead local organizations, and that being a leader of one organization appears to enable leadership in another. In addition, for men, there are overall very strong correlations between leadership and resource-access from a given organization, supporting the proposition that leaders have privileges. The degree of connectivity and sociability is also strongly associated with local wealth markers, thus validating the social capital theorem. Also, the ‘Matthew effect’ is found to be at work, i.e., being organized and a member in one organization enhances membership in another, and the number of organizations in which one is a member is also positively associated with accessing other rural resources. However, the Matthew effect operates more effectively among men than women, what is attributed to men’s differential resource endowments and quicker resource capitalization, and accelerate the dynamics involved in producing inequalities in resource access of women and men.

The inequality in access to social resources of women and men thus inhibits the process of resource capitalization of women, and as such slows down their capacities to move out of poverty. In order to identify new institutional forms to bring women into the public domain on a more equal footing and enable them to take up leadership roles, recognition should be paid to the various forms of sociability that women and men have, and the differential productivity of these. It is proposed that women’s sociability can most easily convert into economic capital if and when associated with men and their social networks. Singling out female household heads in the analysis, and comparing them with women who live in households headed by men, as this paper does, is a novel contribution to the empirical body of current knowledge about gender and social capital in Africa.

Finally, the study suggests that sociability is not a collective resource but it shall be viewed through the lens of opportunities and constraints of various agents to transform it into resources and capital.

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